

CHAPTER 41

INTRODUCTION TO ISAIAH 41

This chapter contains a summons to the enemies of Christ to come and try the cause between God and them before him; words of comfort to true believers, promising them help, protection, and provision; full conviction of idolaters, and their practices; and is closed with a promise of some great person, and what he will do unto them, and for the people of God. The summons is in (^{<2340>}Isaiah 41:1), expressed according to the forms used in courts of judicature. The issue of the controversy is put upon this foot, the raising up a certain person from the east, who it was that did it, which appearing to be the work of the Lord, proves the point contended about, (^{<2341>}Isaiah 41:2-4), the obstinate persistence of idolaters in their idolatry, notwithstanding this is observed, (^{<2342>}Isaiah 41:5-7), the people of God, under the names of Jacob and Israel, the objects of God's choice and affection, (^{<2343>}Isaiah 41:8,9) are encouraged against the fear of men, with promises of help and strength from the Lord, (^{<2344>}Isaiah 41:10,13,14) of confusion to their enemies, and victory over them, (^{<2345>}Isaiah 41:11,12,15,16), and of spiritual provisions, and great prosperity in their wilderness state, in which they should manifestly see the hand of the Lord, (^{<2346>}Isaiah 41:17-20) when the idolatrous nations are challenged to produce their strong reasons for their idolatry, and are put upon proving that their idols can foretell things to come, or do good or evil to men, or own they are nothing but an abomination, (^{<2347>}Isaiah 41:21-24,26) and then one is spoken of that should come as a mighty warrior, and tread down the Pagan princes, and a set of Gospel ministers should be sent, bringing good tidings to Zion, to the silencing of idolaters, and the cessation of idolatrous worship, (^{<2348>}Isaiah 41:25,27,28).

Ver. 1. *Keep silence before me, O islands, &c.*] The great controversy in the world after the coming of Christ, which is expressly spoken of in the preceding chapter, was, as Cocceius observes, whether he was a divine Person; this was first objected to by the Jews, and afterwards by many that bore the Christian name; some, in the times of the apostles, especially the Apostle John; and others in later ages; some affirmed that he was a mere

man, as Ebion and Cerinthus; others that he was a created God, as Arius; and others a God by office, as Socinus and his followers; now these are called upon, wherever they were, whether on the continent, or in the isles of the sea; and especially all such places which were separated from Judea by the sea, or which they went to by sea, were called islands, perhaps the European nations and isles are more particularly intended; and now, as when the judge is on the bench, and the court is set, and a cause just going to be tried, silence is proclaimed; so here, Jehovah himself being on the throne, and a cause depending between him and men being about to be tried, they are commanded silence; (see ^{<3213>}Zechariah 2:13):

and let the people renew their strength; muster up all their force, collect the most powerful arguments they had, and produce their strong reasons in favour of their sentiments:

let them come near, then let them speak; let them come into open court, and at the bar plead their cause, and speak out freely and fully all they have to say; and let them not pretend that they were deterred from speaking, and not suffered to make their defence, or were condemned without hearing:

let us come near together in judgment: and fairly try the cause; the issue of which is put upon this single point that follows.

Ver. 2. *Who raised up the righteous man from the east,* &c.] The Targum interprets this of Abraham; and so the Talmud^{f784}; and this way go most Jewish and Christian commentators, and to him the characters agree; he was a righteous man, believed in Christ for righteousness, had the righteousness of faith when circumcised, did justice, and wrought righteousness himself, and required his children and servants to do the same, (^{<0156>}Genesis 15:6 18:19 ^{<4011>}Romans 4:11), he was raised up out of an idolatrous family, from Ur of the Chaldees, on the other side the river Euphrates, which lay east of Judea; he was called by the Lord to his foot, as it follows, and was obedient to him; he went forth at his command, not knowing whither he went, (^{<38108>}Hebrews 11:8). God gave him by promise the land of Canaan, possessed by several “nations”, and which his seed afterwards inherited; yea, he made him, in a spiritual sense, “the father of many nations”, even of all believers, in all nations of the world, (^{<0158>}Genesis 15:18-21 17:4-6 ^{<4011>}Romans 4:11,12,16), he made him a conqueror “over” the “kings” that had vanquished the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, and plundered their cities; who were no more able to stand before him, though he had no more than three hundred and eighteen servants of his household,

than “dust and stubble” can resist the force of a mighty wind; he “pursued them” in an unknown tract, got an entire victory over them, without being hurt or losing a man; which was so extraordinary an affair, that Melchizedek, priest of the most high God, and a type of Christ, went forth to meet him, and blessed him, (^{<0144>}Genesis 14:14,15,18-20), and who but the mighty God could or did raise up this man, and make him what he was, and do the things he did? some, as Aben Ezra, and several Christian writers also, think that Cyrus is meant, spoken of as raised up already, though to come, in the manner of prophetic language, called the ravenous bird from the east, (^{<241>}Isaiah 46:11), who came from Persia, which lay east of Judea;

whom God called to his foot, and who performed his pleasure, and executed his counsel, and so said to be a “righteous man” in that respect; and is expressly said to be “raised up in righteousness”; before whom the Lord subdued “nations”, and loosed the loins of “kings”; (see ^{<248>}Isaiah 44:28 45:1,13 46:10,11), some understand it of him as a type of Christ, who is the righteous One, or “righteousness” itself, as the word properly signifies, the Lord our righteousness; whose name is “Oriens”, or the east, the rising sun in the east, (^{<388>}Zechariah 3:8), the angel ascending from the east, (^{<600>}Revelation 7:2), born in the eastern part of the world; called to be the servant of the Lord, and was; to whom he has given the Heathen for his inheritance, and made him his firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth, and whom he will overcome and slay with his twoedged sword: but since rather Christ is the person speaking, and concerning whom the controversy is, therefore some person distinct from him must be meant; and I am inclined to think, with Coecejus, that the Apostle Paul is intended, that wonderful man; though this sense is rejected by Vitranga: he was a “righteous” one, made so by the righteousness of Christ; he believed in it, and was a preacher of it, and lived a holy and righteous life and conversation; whom the Lord raised up for uncommon service and usefulness, and to whom he appeared personally to make him a minister, and send him out to do his work; he was raised up in the eastern part of the world, in Judea, being a Hebrew of the Hebrews, and from thence sent forth into various parts; (see ^{<406>}Acts 26:16-18):

called him to his foot; and though he was like a furious lion, raging against his saints, breathing out slaughter and threatenings against them, and in the height of his rage and fury; yet was at once, at the call of Christ, made as tame as a lamb, and said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” he was willing to do anything and everything he pleased, (^{<400>}Acts 9:1,6) and when

he signified it as his will that he should preach his Gospel, he was not disobedient, he did not confer with flesh and blood, but at once set about it with the greatest zeal and readiness:

gave the nations before him; made him an apostle of the Gentiles, or of the nations, and made those Gentiles or nations obedient by word and deed; he triumphed in Christ everywhere, and diffused the savour of his knowledge in every place, (^{<5113>}Romans 11:13 15:18 ^{<4724>}2 Corinthians 2:14):

and made him rule over kings? governors, princes, potentates, and kings of the earth; he had power over their spirits, being an instrument either of converting them, as Sergius Paulus the Roman deputy, from whence some think he had his name; or to make them to tremble at his discourses, as Felix the Roman governor; and of bringing them at least to own there was something in the Christian religion, as Agrippa, a crowned head, who was obliged to confess he had almost persuaded him to be a Christian, (^{<4137>}Acts 13:7,12 24:25 26:28), and of bringing their kingdoms, and the inhabitants of them, into subjection to Christ:

he gave them as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow; whose weapons were not carnal, but spiritual, and mighty through God; his sword was the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; his bow and arrows were the Gospel, and the truths of it, in whose ministry Christ went forth conquering, and to conquer: and this being attended with the power of God, men could no more stand against them than dust and stubble before the wind.

Ver. 3. *He pursued them, and passed safely.* &c.] Went on in his work, pursued his great design in subduing the souls of men, and bringing them to the obedience of Christ; and though he had so many enemies, he “passed on safely”; God did not suffer them to set upon him, to do him any harm, even though he was exposed to perils by sea and land, by thieves and robbers, by his own countrymen and Heathens, in city and country, and even by false brethren; (see ^{<4180>}Acts 18:10 ^{<4713>}2 Corinthians 11:26), it is in the future tense, “he shall pursue them, he shall pass safely”^{f785}; or in peace:

even by the way that he had not gone with his feet; travelling in foreign parts, in distant countries, in tracks of land unknown unto him; where he had never been before, even from Jerusalem round about to Illyricum, fully preaching the Gospel of Christ, (^{<519>}Romans 15:19).

Ver. 4. *Who hath wrought and done it*, &c.] Contrived and effected it, formed the scheme, and brought it to pass; namely, raising up the righteous man from the east, and succeeding him in the manner described:

calling the generations from the beginning? or rather here begins the answer to the above question, which may be rendered,

*he that calleth the generations from the beginning*¹⁷⁸⁶; he has wrought and done this; and to this agree the Syriac and Arabic versions; even he that knew them from all eternity, before they were, and all the men that would be in them, and could call them by their names; and who calls things that are not, as though they were; and who calls them into being at the appointed time, and continues a succession of them, one after another; who calls by his grace all that are called in successive generations, and rules over them by his power, providence, and grace:

I the Lord, the first, and with the last; I am he; the immutable Jehovah, the everlasting I AM, the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending, the first and the last; all which is said of Christ, and is the person here speaking, (~~1786~~ Revelation 1:8,17 22:13), phrases expressive of his eternity and deity; he is the first and the last in God's thoughts, purposes, and decrees; in the covenant of grace; in the creation of all things; in the salvation, justification, sanctification, adoption, and glorification of his people; and in the church, above and below:

and with the last, may be understood either of the last generations God is with, and calls as well as the first, as Deuteronomy Dieu; or of all believers, with whom he shall be and they with him to all eternity, so Gussetius¹⁷⁸⁷. Now the conversion of the Apostle Paul, his commission to preach the Gospel, the extraordinary qualifications he was endowed with, the wonderful things done by him, in the conversion of sinners, and planting of churches in the Gentile world, and towards the abolition of Paganism in it, are incontestable proofs of the deity of Christ; no mere creature could ever have raised up, such a man, and accomplished him in such a manner, or wrought such things by him.

Ver. 5. *The isles saw it, and feared*, &c.] Not the victory which Abraham got over the kings; nor Cyrus's expedition against Babylon, and other nations, and his deliverance of the Jews; but the progress of the Gospel, through the ministry of the Apostle Paul: the idolatrous inhabitants of the Gentile nations saw great multitudes embracing and professing the Gospel;

they saw their idols neglected, and their temples abandoned; they feared what would be the consequence of all this, that their old religion their fathers retained, and they were brought up in, would be abolished; and especially a panic seized the priests on this account, whose livelihood depended upon it:

the ends of the earth were afraid; for the sound of the Gospel by him, and other apostles, went into all the earth, and their words to the end of the world, (^{<50>}Romans 10:18) meaning the inhabitants that dwelt in the furthest parts of the earth, where ignorance and idolatry wholly reigned: they drew near, and came: not to God, nor to Abraham, or Cyrus; rather to their gods, to exert themselves in the defence of their religion; or, which is best, they got together to consult what was proper to be done on such an emergency.

Ver. 6. *They helped everyone his neighbour*, &c.] By advice and counsel, by the best arguments they could make use of, to withstand the new religion, and defend the old one; to prevent the embracing the one, and relinquishing the other:

and everyone said to his brother, be of good courage: or, “be strong”^{f788}; they strengthened one another’s hands in their idolatrous worship, encouraged each other to oppose the prevailing doctrine; urging, that the craft of some was in danger, and the religion of them all at stake, and their gods like to fall into contempt. An instance of this may be seen in Demetrius the craftsman at Ephesus, when the Gospel mightily prevailed there, who stirred up the workmen of the same craft with himself and the like, suggesting the loss of their business, and the dishonour reflected on their goddess Diana, should the apostle go on as he did; by which we may judge how it was, more or less, in other parts of the world; (see ^{<41>}Acts 19:20,23-28).

Ver. 7. *So the carpenter encouraged the goldsmith*, &c.] The carpenter, when he had made a wooden image, encouraged and hastened the goldsmith, or the “finer”, as some render it, to do his part, in covering it with plates of gold or silver:

and he that smootheth with the hammer him that smote the anvil; he that beat out thin plates of gold and silver with the hammer, in order to decorate the wooden god, encouraged the smith at the forge, that smote on

the anvil, there making nails for the fastening it to a pillar or wall, to hasten his work:

saying, it is ready for the sodering; for the several joints to be put together, by sodering them:

and he fastened it with nails, that it should not be moved; either the goldsmith and finer fastened the plates of gold and silver with nails, that they might be kept fast and close to it; or the smith that smote on the anvil, and made the nails, he fastened the image with them at some proper place, that so it might not fall, or be taken away. All which, as it represents the hurry and solicitude idolaters were in to keep up their craft and religion, so it exposes them to ridicule and contempt.

Ver. 8. *But thou, Israel, art my servant,* &c.] As the great spread and success of the Gospel could not fail of drawing the resentment of the idolatrous Heathens on those who embraced and professed it, and by whom they were grievously persecuted under the Roman emperors; wherefore, to support them under these trials, the Lord speaks these and the following comfortable words unto them; for not carnal, but spiritual Israel are here meant; such who by the power of divine grace were turned from idols to serve the living God, who were made willing to become his servants, and whose honour it was to be so called and accounted; and being so, they might be assured their Lord and Master would protect and defend them, bless and reward them:

Jacob whom I have chosen; Israelites indeed, Jacob like, plain hearted men, wrestling and prevailing ones in prayer with God, whom he chose to be his people, and peculiar treasure; who, though disallowed of men, were like their Lord and Saviour, chosen of God, and precious:

the seed of Abraham my friend: the spiritual seed of Abraham, being believers in Christ, and friends of his, as Abraham was; and whom he uses and shows to be such, by disclosing his secrets to them, (~~615~~ John 15:15).

Ver. 9. *Thou whom I have taken from the ends of the earth,* &c.] Meaning not Abraham, nor his natural seed; but such who believed in Christ, who dwelt in the furthest parts of the earth, to whom the Gospel came, and by which they were laid hold upon, and apprehended by Christ as his own:

and called thee from the chief men thereof; from among the great men of the earth, out of their families, courts, and palaces: or rather called them by

grace, when such personages were passed by and left; not many noble, not many mighty, being called in those times, (⁴⁰¹⁵1 Corinthians 1:26):

and said unto thee, thou art my servant; and not only called them by the name, but made them such in reality: adding,

I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away; nor does the Lord cast away any whom he has chosen and foreknown; and therefore being thus dear to God, as all the above titles and acts of grace show, and being secured by him from perishing or being eternally lost, this should encourage them to suffer persecution patiently for his name's sake, and not be afraid of any of their enemies, as follows.

Ver. 10. *Fear thou not, for I am with thee,* &c.] Not merely by his essence or power, who is every where; or by his providence supporting, preserving, observing, ordering, and overruling all things; but in a way of special grace, to guard and protect his people, support and supply them, comfort and strengthen their hearts; wherefore they need not fear any of their enemies, nor whatsoever they may be called to suffer for his name's sake, even though they pass through fire and water, and the valley of the shadow of death:

be not dismayed, I am thy God; through Christ, in a covenant way, as appeared by the effectual calling of them; and therefore might depend on his love, be sure of his power, expect all needful supplies, and to be comfortably carried through every service and trial they were called unto; and need fear no enemies, or be dismayed at anything that should befall them; or become weak as water, and their hearts melt like wax within them, as the Jewish commentators generally interpret the word^{f789}. The Targum is,

“be not broken;”

in spirit. The word signifies to look about, as persons in distress, and amazed:

I will strengthen thee; with strength in their souls, to perform duties, exercise grace, withstand corruptions, resist temptations, bear afflictions, suffer persecutions, and do their generation work, according to the will of God; and if God is the strength of his people, they need not be afraid of any persons or things, (⁴²⁷⁰Psalms 27:1-3):

yea, I will help thee; help them out of all their afflictions and temptations, and out of the hands of all their enemies; help them in the discharge of duty, in the exercise of grace, in bearing the cross, in fighting the Lord's battles, and in their journey to another world; help them to every mercy, temporal and spiritual, to all needful supplies of grace, and at last to glory; whose help is suitable and seasonable, and may be expected, since he is able to help, either with or without means; has promised to help his people, as here, and he is faithful that has promised; he has laid help on one that is mighty, and set up a throne of grace to come to for help in time of need; and seeing he is their helper, they need not fear what men or devils can do unto them, (³⁸¹⁵Hebrews 13:5,6)

I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness; either by his almighty power, or by his Son, the man of his right hand, made strong for himself, and the author of righteousness to his people: this is expressive of his sustentation of them, not merely in a providential way, but in a way of special grace; and of his powerful protection and preservation of them, so as that they shall stand in the grace of God, go on in his ways, and not fall finally and totally, but persevere to the end, though their trials and temptations may be great and many.

Ver. 11. *Behold, all they that were incensed against thee*, &c.] For rejecting their idols, and idol worship; for receiving the Gospel, and professing it:

shall be ashamed and confounded; their idols not being able to help them, nor they to defend the worship of them: the same is said with respect to Christ, (²³⁵³Isaiah 45:24):

they shall be as nothing, and they that strive with thee shall perish; or, "the men of thy strife"⁷⁹⁰; all shall come to nothing, and utterly perish, as to their persons, substance, power, and dignity; as did the Roman emperors, the persecutors of God's people.

Ver. 12 *Thou shalt seek them, and shalt not find them*, &c.] They not existing, or being fled into holes and corners, to rocks and mountains, to hide themselves from the wrath of the Lamb, (⁴¹⁸⁵Revelation 6:15-17):

even them that contended with thee; or, "the men of thy contention"⁷⁹¹; who contended with them, not by words and arguments, but by severe persecutions, striving thereby to hinder the progress of the Gospel, and to root Christianity out of the world:

they that war against thee shall be as nothing, and as a thing of nought: or, “the men of thy war”^{f792}; that proclaimed and carried on war against the Christians, in order to destroy them utterly; yet they, and all their efforts, came to nothing, the Gospel prevailed, and Paganism was utterly abolished; which came to pass in Constantine’s time, at the opening of the sixth seal, (^{f612}Revelation 6:12-14) which is a proper comment on this text.

Ver. 13. *For I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand,* &c.] Take hold of it, join in league and alliance with his people as it were, go hand in hand with them; and having such an one with them, and on their side, they need fear no enemy: or it is expressive of great freedom, familiarity, and friendship, which may assure believers of the strong affection of God towards them; and they may conclude themselves safe, being held by him as a child in the hand of its parents, which is then not afraid of anything. The Lord holds the right hand of his people, teaching them to walk by faith, leading them into his presence, and to communion with himself, and keeps them from falling: or, he “will strengthen their right hand”^{f793}; to do his work and service, and oppose their enemies; or he will relieve their wants, and fill their hands with his good things, which is sometimes the sense of the phrase, (³¹⁶⁵Ezekiel 16:45):

saying unto thee, fear not, I will help thee; as one friend takes another by the hand in distress, and bids him be of good cheer, promising him all needful assistance and supply. (See Gill on “²³¹⁰Isaiah 41:10”).

Ver. 14. *Fear not, thou worm Jacob,* &c.] Being like a worm, exposed to danger, and liable to be trampled upon and crushed, mean and despicable in their own eyes, and in the esteem of others; and it may be Jacob, or the true Israelites, are so called, because of their impurity in themselves, of which they are sensible; and chiefly because of their weakness and impotence to defend themselves, and resist their enemies. It is an observation of Jarchi, Kimchi, and Ben Melech, that the strength of a worm lies in its mouth, which, though tender, can strike the strongest cedar, and penetrate into it; and the latter observes, that the strength of Israel lies in their prayers, as Jacob’s did, when, wrestling with the angel, and making supplication, he had power with God, and prevailed. Now, though the saints are such poor, weak, and contemptible things, yet the Lord bids them not fear any of their enemies, he would take their part, and protect them:

and ye men of Israel; the Vulgate Latin version renders it, “ye dead men of Israel”^{f794}; such as were accounted as dead men, and had no more respect shown them than the dead, that are remembered no more; or were exposed to death daily, for the sake of Christ and his Gospel; or that reckoned themselves dead to sin, and did die daily to it, and lived unto righteousness: or, “ye few men of Israel”, as others^{f795} render it; Christ’s flock is a little flock, his church is a little city, and few men in it, in comparison of the men of the world:

I will help thee, saith, the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; which is repeated for the confirmation of it, and is the more strongly assured by these characters of a Redeemer of his people out of the hands of all their enemies, and the holy and just God, and sanctifier of them, which he here takes to himself, and makes himself known by.

Ver. 15. *Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument, having teeth, &c.*] The Vulgate Latin version renders it, “as a new threshing cart, having teeth like saws”; and the Septuagint and Arabic versions, “as the new threshing wheels of a cart, in the manner of saws”; for corn with the Jews was threshed out by drawing a cart with wheels over it, which wheels were stuck with teeth or spikes of iron; (see ^{<3307>}Isaiah 28:27,28), or by a cart or sledge filled with stones to press it down, and at the bottom with iron teeth, which being drawn to and fro by oxen over the sheaves, separated the grain from the husk. Beckius has given a figure of this instrument^{f796}, and some such like instrument is still made use of in the eastern countries, as Monsieur Thevenot^{f797} relates;

“at Damascus (he says), and almost all Turkey over, they thresh not the corn, but after it is cut down they put it up in heaps, and round the heaps they spread some of it four or five feet broad, and two feet thick; this being done, they have a kind of sled, made of four pieces of timber in square, two of which serve for an axle tree to two great rollers, whose ends enter into these two pieces of timber, so as that they easily turn in them: round each of these rollers, there are three iron pinions, about half a foot thick, and a foot in diameter, whose pinions are full of teeth, like so many saws: there is a seat placed upon the two chief pieces of the timber, where a man sits, and drives the horses, that draw the machine, round about the lay of corn that is two foot thick; and that cutting the straw very small, makes the corn come out of the ears without breaking

it, for it slides betwixt the teeth of the iron: when the straw is well cut, they put in more, and then separate the corn from that bashed straw, by tossing all up together in the air with a wooden shovel; for the wind blows the straw a little aside, and the corn alone falls straight down--in some places that machine is different, as I have seen (adds he), in Mesopotamia; where, instead of those pinions round the rollers, they have many pegs of iron, about six inches long, and three broad, almost in the shape of wedges, but somewhat broader below than above, fastened without any order into the rollers, some straight, and others crossways; and this engine is covered with boards over the irons, whereon he that drives the horse sits--they take the same course in Persia."

Some apply this to the apostles of Christ, compared to oxen that tread out the corn; and who not only ploughed and sowed, but threshed in hope, and were instruments of bringing down every "high thing", comparable to mountains and hills, "that exalted itself against the knowledge of God", and of reducing it "to the obedience of Christ"; (see ~~410~~ 1 Corinthians 9:9,10 ~~4704~~ 2 Corinthians 10:4,5), but it seems rather to refer to Constantine, a Christian emperor, brought forth and brought up in the church; the same with the man child the woman brought forth, caught up into heaven, raised to the Roman empire, and who ruled the nations, the Pagan ones, with a rod of iron, (~~6626~~ Revelation 12:5) and then the church, who before was but as a worm, weak and contemptible, now became powerful and formidable; and therefore compared to a new threshing instrument, heavy, sharp, and cutting:

thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff; which metaphorically design kingdoms and states; so the Targum,

"thou shalt slay the people, and consume kingdoms"; so Jarchi and Kimchi interpret it of kings and princes; and Aben Ezra particularly of the Babylonians; but these were not destroyed by the people of God, but by the Persians: it is better therefore to understand it of the Roman emperors, and of the Roman empire conquered by Constantine, and destroyed as Pagan, and when every mountain and island were moved out of their places, (~~6626~~ Revelation 12:7,8 6:14,15), and the prophecy may have a further accomplishment in the destruction of Rome Papal, and all the antichristian states, when the kingdom and interest of Christ, signified by a

stone cut out without hands, shall break in pieces, and consume all other kingdoms: which shall become like the chaff of summer threshing floors, and the wind shall carry them away, and no place be found for them, as follows; (see ^{<2723>}Daniel 2:34,35,44), this threshing of the nations is ascribed to the church, though only as an instrument, the work is the Lord's, as in (^{<2341>}Isaiah 41:20 ^{<3043>}Micah 4:13 ^{<3512>}Habakkuk 3:12).

Ver. 16. *Thou shalt fan them, and the wind shall carry them away, and the whirlwind shall scatter them,* &c.] In illusion to the custom of the Jews, who had their threshingfloors on the tops of hills and mountains, where they took the opportunity and advantage of the wind in winnowing their corn, which fanned it, and carried away the chaff, and scattered it abroad; in like manner, it is suggested, the enemies of the church and people of God should be dealt with, which are like the chaff the wind driveth away, and is found no more, (^{<1905>}Psalm 1:5), and so Rome Pagan was no more as such when subdued by Constantine, nor will the Papal antichristian states, (^{<2725>}Daniel 2:35). Compare with this what is said of literal Babylon, which will have its accomplishment in mystical Babylon, (^{<2513>}Jeremiah 51:33):

and thou shalt rejoice in the Lord: the Targum is,

“in the word of the Lord;”

and so it paraphrases the preceding clause,

“his word shall scatter them as the whirlwind chaff;”

and therefore in him the saints shall rejoice, because it is he that destroys their enemies; so when Rome Pagan was abolished, and the devil and his angels, or the Heathen emperors, were drove out of it and destroyed, there was great joy among the people of God, saying, “now is come salvation and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ”, (^{<6820>}Revelation 12:10 19:1,2) there will be great rejoicing in the Lord likewise when Rome Papal falls, and the saints have got the victory over the beast, (^{<6812>}Revelation 15:2,3 18:20 19:1,2)

and shalt glory in the Holy One of Israel; whose arm alone has done the above things, and to whom the glory is to be given: it is the true character of believers to rejoice in Christ, in his person, offices, and grace, and to glory in his being made unto them wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. (^{<5013>}Philippians 3:3 ^{<4013>}1 Corinthians 1:30,31).

Ver. 17. *When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, &c.]* This is to be understood not literally, but spiritually; not of their outward circumstances, though the people of God are for the most part the poor of the world, and in need of the good things of it, hungry and thirsty, and naked; but of their spiritual estate: as in Christ they need nothing; but in themselves, and at different times, and in different frames, want many things; as larger discoveries of the love of God, fresh supplies of grace from Christ, more spiritual light and liveliness, fresh strength and comfort, fresh views of pardon and righteousness, fresh food for faith, and more grace of every sort to help them in their time of need; and which they seek for at the throne of grace, and in public ordinances, and sometimes they can find none, or it is a long time ere they obtain any: they thirst after doctrine, as the Targum, after the word and ordinances, and sometimes their circumstances are such, they cannot come at them; after communion with God, and spiritual comfort, and cannot enjoy it, being in a place where is no water; and after the blessings of grace, and can have no application of them; (see ^{<940>}Psalm 42:1,2) (^{<950>}Psalm 53:1,2 84:2), this may represent in a great measure the state of the church under the ten persecutions of the Heathen emperors, or when obliged to fly into the wilderness from the wrath of the dragon, (^{<6116>}Revelation 12:6,14):

I the Lord will hear them; their cries and prayers, and answer them, and supply their wants, who is the Lord God Almighty, and can help them, the Lord that changes not, and therefore they shall not be consumed:

I the God of Israel will not forsake them; neither their persons, nor his work of grace upon them, but will support them, and provide for them, and carry on his work in them; of which they may be assured, because he is the God of Israel, their covenant God and Father.

Ver. 18. *I will open rivers in high places, &c.]* Which is not usual; but God will change the course of nature, and work miracles, rather than his people shall want what is necessary for them; thus he opens to them his everlasting and unchangeable love, and makes it manifest, and shows it to them, and their interest in it, which is a broad river, that cannot be passed over; this is in high places, it flows from the throne of God, and of the Lamb; and of this river of pleasure he makes his people to drink, the streams whereof make glad the city of our God; likewise the fulness of grace in his Son, whose grace is as rivers of water in a dry land, exceeding abundant, and very refreshing; also the graces of his Spirit, which he gives

in great abundance, and are those rivers of water he causes to flow forth from them that believe in Christ, in the comfortable exercise of them; (see ^{<490>}Psalm 36:8 46:4 ^{<621>}Revelation 22:1 ^{<233D>}Isaiah 32:2 ^{<473>}John 7:37,38),

and fountains in the midst of the valleys; God himself is the fountain of life, and of living waters; Christ is the fountain of gardens, and in him are wells of salvation; the grace of the Spirit is a well of living water, springing up unto eternal life; and of these, humble souls, comparable to the lowly valleys, are partakers, (^{<490>}Psalm 36:9 ^{<2045>}Song of Solomon 4:15 ^{<231B>}Isaiah 12:3 ^{<3006>}James 4:6):

I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water; respecting either the Gentile world, which was like a wilderness and dry land before the Gospel came into it, but by that was watered and made fruitful; or the state and case of the people of God being in a wilderness condition, when the Lord takes notice of them, and supplies them with everything necessary, so that they are like a watered garden, whose springs fail not, (^{<624>}Revelation 12:14). This passage is applied by the Jews to the times of the Messiah ^{f798}.

Ver. 19. *I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, &c.]*

Where such trees had not used to grow, but in Lebanon, and such like places. The “shittah tree” is thought to be a kind of cedar; it is the same of which is the “shittim wood” mentioned in (^{<1275>}Exodus 25:5 35:7,24) and is so called by the Targum here:

and the myrtle, and the oil tree; about the former there is no difficulty, and one would think there should be none about the latter, and that the olive tree is meant; but Kimchi thinks that is not certain, and supposes the pine tree is meant; and observes that the olive tree is distinguished from this oil tree in (^{<4685>}Nehemiah 8:15), as indeed it is; and is by our translators there rendered the pine tree, which they take to be meant by another word in the next clause:

I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together; what we here render the “pine” the Targum interprets it of the “elm”, and so the Vulgate Latin version: now by all these are figuratively meant converted persons in the Gentile world, in whom as great a change was wrought, as if, instead of briars and thorns, came up such trees as these; and who, by the grace of God, were made as goodly and beautiful as some of these trees were; as odorous and of as sweet a scent in their graces and

duties as others; and as profitable and fruitful in grace and good works like others of them; and comparable to them, as being some of them evergreen, durable, and incorruptible; because of their perseverance in grace and holiness.

Ver. 20. *That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together,* &c.] Not the nations of the world, as Kimchi; but rather, as Aben Ezra, the poor and needy; who in all this, by subduing kingdoms and states, their enemies, supplying their wants when in the greatest distress, and in a marvellous manner, and converting sinners, might easily perceive, and so frankly own and acknowledge, as well as lay it to heart, and lay it up in their minds, and get understanding from it:

that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it; for the things before said to be done carry in them plain marks of the hand of the Lord, and are as clear proofs of his almighty power, as what was done in the creation of all things; such as a worm to be made a threshing instrument, to beat down mountains and hills, kingdoms and states, and make them as chaff; rivers to be opened in high places, and all manner of excellent trees to be planted in a wilderness; and indeed the work of conversion is a creation work; men are by it made new creatures, and are manifestly the workmanship of the hand of God.

Ver. 21. *Produce your cause, saith the Lord,* &c.] The Lord having comforted his people under their afflictions and persecutions from their enemies in the first times of Christianity, returns to the controversy between him and the idolatrous Heathens, and challenges them to bring their cause into open court, and let it be publicly tried, that it may be seen on what side truth lies:

bring forth your strong reasons, saith the King of Jacob; or King of saints, the true Israel of God, who acknowledge the Lord as their King and their God, and whom he rules over, protects and defends; and this title is assumed for the comfort of them, that though he is King over all the nations of the world, yet in an eminent and peculiar sense their King; and he does not style himself the God of Jacob, though he was, because this was the thing in controversy, and the cause to be decided, whether he was the true God, or the gods of the Gentiles; and therefore their votaries are challenged to bring forth the strongest reasons and arguments they could muster together, in proof of the divinity of their idols; their “bony”

arguments, as the word^{f799} signifies; for what bones are to the body, that strong arguments are to a cause, the support and stability of it.

Ver. 22. *Let them bring them forth*, &c.] Not their reasons, as before, but their gods; let them cause them to come nigh, let them appear in court, and speak for themselves, when their worshippers have said all they can in defence of their deity:

and show us what shall happen: what shall come to pass hereafter; and by that prove their divinity; for none but God can foretell things to come with certainty; for everything else but what comes from God, by his prophets, is all conjecture, ambiguous, uncertain, mere juggle, trick, and deception, as were the oracles of the Heathens; but what is clearly and plainly foretold, and agreeably to the prediction comes to pass, is a proof of deity, and as such is here challenged. The “us” here, and the “we” in the following clauses, either design God, and the Christians, the true worshippers of him; or rather the three divine Persons in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, the one true God, in opposition to the gods of the Heathens. The Targum renders it,

“what shall happen to us:”

let them show the former things what they be: either what were before the creation of the world, as Jarchi; what were purposed, decreed, and determined so early to be done; or let them write, or inspire their prophets to write, a history of the creation, and of the transactions of former times, as Moses did, under the inspiration of God; or let them show what things before predicted by them have come to pass, agreeably to their predictions; or rather “the first things, which may be, show”^{f800}; what will first or presently come to pass, that show unto us if you can:

that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or, “and we will set our hearts upon them”^{f801}; weigh them well in our minds, and diligently and attentively consider them, how and in what manner it is foretold they shall come to pass, and take notice and observe the issue of them, and whether the event answers to the prediction: or “declare us things for to come”; which are at a great distance; tell us not only what shall be done in the present age, but onward to the end of the world.

Ver. 23. *Show the things that are to come hereafter*, &c.] From henceforward to the consummation of all things: so the Targum,

“show what shall come to the end;”

or at the end, the end of all things; or show wonderful things, which shall be hereafter; so Jarchi interprets the word; a word like this having the signification of signs and wonders:

that we may know that ye are gods; as ye are said to be; that we may own and acknowledge you to be such, there being this clear proof of it, if it can be made out, foretelling things to come, both near and far off. The Targum is,

“that we may know whether ye worship idols, in whom there is any profit;”

as if the words were spoken not to the idols, but to the worshippers of them: “yea, do good, or do evil”; not in a moral, but in a civil sense; do good to your friends, to your worshippers; bestow favours upon them, as I do on mine; or inflict punishment on your enemies, such as despise your deity, and will not worship you, as I do on those that despise me, and will not regard my service and worship:

that we may be dismayed, and behold it together: that when we see your deity, and are convinced of it by the above proofs, we may be amazed and astonished, as not expecting such proof, and be confounded, and have no more to object unto it. The Targum is,

“that we may consider and reason together;”

and bring the matter in controversy to an issue, as it is in the next verse.

Ver. 24. *Behold, ye are of nothing*, &c.] Not as to the matter of them, for they were made of gold, silver, brass, &c. but as to the divinity of them: there was none in them, they were of no worth and value; they could do nothing, either good or evil, either help their friends, or hurt their enemies; yea, they were less than nothing; for the words may be rendered by way of comparison, “behold, ye are less than nothing”;^{f802}. (See Gill on “~~23017~~ Isaiah 40:17”);

and your work of nought; the workmanship bestowed on them, in casting or carving them, was all to no purpose, and answered no end; or the work they did, or pretended to do, their feigned oracles, and false predictions: or, “worse than nothing”: some render it, “worse than a viper”;^{f803}; a word

like this is used for one, (²³⁰⁵Isaiah 49:5) and so denotes the poisonous and pernicious effects of idolatry:

an abomination is he that chooseth you; as the object of his worship; he is not only abominable, but an abomination itself to God, and to all men of sense and religion; for the choice he makes of an idol to be his god shows him to be a man void of common sense and reason, and destitute of all true religion and godliness, and must be a stupid sottish creature. The Targum is,

“an abomination is that which ye have chosen for yourselves, or in which ye delight;”

meaning their idols. This is the final issue of the controversy, and the judgment passed both upon the idols and their worshippers.

Ver. 25. *I have raised up one from the north*, &c.] Either one people, or one person; a mighty king, as the Targum; meaning either Cyrus, who might be said to come from the north, and from the rising of the sun, or the east, as in the next clause; since he was by birth a Medo-Persian, hence called a mule; by his mother a Mede, and the country of Media lay rather to the north of Babylon; and by his father a Persian, and Persia lay to the east of it; and the forces he brought with him against it were partly Medes, and partly Persians; though some, as Jarchi observes, think two persons are meant in this and the next clause; in this Nebuchadnezzar, who came from Babylon, which lay north of Judea, to invade it; and in the other Cyrus, who came from the east, and proclaimed the name of the Lord, and liberty to the captive Jews. Kimchi and his father both interpret it of the King Messiah, as do also more ancient Jewish writers^{f804}, of whom Cyrus was a type; but to me it seems best of all, as most agreeable to the scope and tenure of the prophecy, to understand it of Constantine, who, as reported, was born in Britain, in the northern part of the world; but, when called to the empire, was in the eastern parts of it; and so with great propriety it is expressed here, and in the following clause:

and from the rising of the sun he shall call upon my name; which those that apply the prophecy to Cyrus explain by (⁴⁵⁰⁰⁵Ezra 1:1-3), but is much more applicable to Constantine, who was a worshipper of the true God, which invocation of his name is expressive of; and who openly professed the name of Christ, and encouraged those that did, and spread his name and fame, his Gospel and his glory, throughout the empire, east and west:

and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar, and as the potter treadeth clay; that is, he shall come upon them with his army, and conquer them, and tread them down, and trample upon them, as mortar is trodden upon, or mire in the streets; or as the clay is trodden by the potter, who does with it as he pleases; which those who interpret it of Cyrus understand of Astyages, Croesus, Belshazzar, and others; (see ^{<2340>}Isaiah 14:1), and is as true of Constantine, who subdued the emperors of Rome, trod them under his feet, as Maximius, Maxentius, Licinius, &c.; moreover, the word “saganin”, here used, is a word used by Jewish writers for priests, for such who were the deputies of the high priest; and it may design here the Pagan priests, and the destruction of them, and of Paganism in the Roman empire by Constantine.

Ver. 26. *Who hath declared from the beginning, that we may know?* &c.] Who of the idols, or of their priests, that have declared things future before they came to pass, or ever predicted such an event as this before mentioned; which, if understood of Cyrus, was an hundred and fifty years before it came to pass; and if of Constantine, near a thousand years:

and before time, that we may say, he is righteous? that is, who hath declared things before the time of the accomplishment of them, and they have come to pass, as they have been declared? by which it may be known that they are gods, or the priests of such that are so, by their having prescience of future events, or the spirit of prophecy; and so it may be said of them, that they are just in their pretensions, and have a rightful claim to deity, or are true prophets; so the Targum,

“that we may say it is true”

yea, there is none that showeth, yea, there is none that declareth; that shows and declares things to come, or such as the true God shows and declares:

yea, there is none that heareth your words; none of your worshippers that ever heard you speak a word, who, when they have prayed to you, could never have an answer; and therefore you have no just claim to deity; or ever heard any of your prophets say such a thing should come to pass, and it did.

Ver. 27. *The first shall say to Zion, behold, behold them,* &c.] Or, “I the first say to Zion”; I who am the first and the last, (^{<2340>}Isaiah 41:4) which some ancient Jewish writers ^{f805} observe is the name of the Messiah, and

apply the passage to him; or, I am the “first” that say these things to Zion¹⁸⁰⁶,

behold, behold them; behold such and such things shall come to pass, and accordingly they have come to pass; or, “behold”, the promised Messiah, whom I have long spoken of, behold, he is come; (see ²³⁴¹Isaiah 42:1), and behold them, his apostles and ministers, publishing the good tidings of salvation, as follows. The Targum is,

“the words of consolation which the prophets prophesied from the beginning concerning Sion, behold they come;”

they come to pass; which is such a proof of deity the idols and their worshippers cannot give:

and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings; which some interpret of Isaiah; others of Cyrus; others of Christ; and others of John the Baptist. I suppose the singular put for the plural, “one that bringeth good tidings”, or, “an evangelist for evangelists”; and may be understood of Gospel teachers, whom the Lord gave to his church and people, and by means of whom he spread his Gospel, not only in Judea, but in the Gentile world, to the overthrow of Paganism.

Ver. 28. *For I beheld, and there was no man*, &c.] Among all the Pagan priests and prophets, that could foretell things to come; or could prove that their idols did or could say anything in favour of them:

even amongst them, and there was no counsellor: none that could be advocates for these idols, and plead their cause; or could give any good advice and counsel to persons that needed it, and who applied to them or their idols for it:

that, when I asked of them, could answer a word; when asked what they had to say on behalf of their gods they worshipped, were dumb and speechless; moreover, all this may be said of the idols themselves, that there was none among them that could foretell a future event, or give any wholesome counsel to their worshippers, or could say anything in their own defence; and therefore, to close the controversy, the following sentence is pronounced.

Ver. 29. *Behold, they are all vanity*, &c.] Both the idols and the worshippers of them; in vain they claim the title of deity, to which they

have no right; and in vain do men worship them, since they receive no benefit by them:

their works are nothing; they can do nothing, neither good nor evil; nothing is to be hoped or feared from them, and the worship given them is of no avail; nothing is got by it; it is all useless and insignificant, yea, pernicious and harmful:

their molten images are wind and confusion: though they are made of cast metal, yet setting aside the costly matter of which they are made, they are of no more solidity, efficacy, and use, than the wind; and are like the chaos of the first earth, mere “tohu” and “bohu”, one of which words is here used, without form and void, having no form of deity on them; and therefore men are directed to turn themselves from them, and behold a most glorious Person, worthy of worship and praise, described in the beginning of the next chapter, “behold my servant”, &c.