

CHAPTER 4

In this chapter we have,

- I. A threatening of the paucity and scarceness of man (v. 1), which might fitly enough have been added to the close of the foregoing chapter, to which it has a plain reference.
- II. A promise of the restoration of Jerusalem's peace and purity, righteousness and safety, in the days of the Messiah (v. 2-6). Thus, in wrath, mercy is remembered, and gospel grace is a sovereign relief, in reference to the terrors of the law and the desolations made by sin.

ISAIAH 4:1

HUMILIATION OF THE DAUGHTERS OF ZION

It was threatened (~~2085~~ Isaiah 3:25) that *the mighty men should fall by the sword in war*, and it was threatened as a punishment to the women that affected gaiety and a loose sort of conversation. Now here we have the effect and consequence of that great slaughter of men,

1. That though Providence has so wisely ordered that, *communibus annis* — *on an average of years*, there is nearly an equal number of males and females born into the world, yet, through the devastations made by war, there should scarcely be one man in seven left alive. As there are deaths attending the bringing forth of children, which are peculiar to the woman, who was first in transgression, so, to balance that, there are deaths peculiar to men, those by the sword in the high places of the field, which perhaps devour more than child-bed does. Here it is foretold that such multitudes of men should be cut off that there should be *seven women to one man*.
2. That by reason of the scarcity of men, though marriage should be kept up for the raising of recruits and the preserving of the race of mankind upon earth, yet the usual method of it should be quite altered, — that, whereas men ordinarily make their court to the women, the women should now take hold of the men, foolishly fearing (as Lot's daughters did, when they saw the ruin of Sodom and perhaps thought it reached further than it

did) that in a little time there would be none left (~~415B~~Genesis 19:31), — that whereas women naturally hate to come in sharers with others, seven should now, by consent, become the wives of one man, — and that whereas by the law the husband was obliged to provide food and raiment for his wife (~~421D~~Exodus 21:10), which with many would be the most powerful argument against multiplying wives, these women will be bound to support themselves; they will *eat bread of their own earning, and wear apparel of their own working*, and the man they court shall be at no expense upon them, only they desire to be called his wives, to *take away the reproach* of a single life. They are willing to be wives upon any terms, though ever so unreasonable; and perhaps the rather because in these troublesome times it would be a kindness to them to have a husband for their protector. Paul, on the contrary, thinks the single state preferable in a time of distress, ~~447B~~1 Corinthians 7:26. It were well if this were not introduced here partly as a reflection upon the daughters of Zion, that, notwithstanding the humbling providences they were under (~~247B~~Isaiah 3:18), they remained unhumiliated, and, instead of repenting of their pride and vanity, when God was contending with them for them, all their care was to get husbands — that modesty, which is the greatest beauty of the fair sex, was forgotten, and with them the reproach of vice was nothing to the reproach of virginity, a sad symptom of the irrecoverable desolations of virtue.

~~234D~~ ISAIAH 4:2-6

THE FUTURE GLORY OF ZION

By the foregoing threatenings Jerusalem is brought into a very deplorable condition: every thing looks melancholy. But here the sun breaks out from behind the cloud. Many exceedingly great and precious promises we have in these verses, giving assurance of comfort which may be discerned through the troubles, and of happy days which shall come after them, and these certainly point at the kingdom of the Messiah, and the great redemption to be wrought out by him, under the figure and type of the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem by the reforming reign of Hezekiah after Ahaz and the return out of their captivity in Babylon; to both these events the passage may have some reference, but chiefly to Christ. It is here promised, as the issue of all these troubles,

I. That God will raise up a righteous branch, which shall produce fruits of righteousness (v. 2): *In that day*, that same day, at that very time, when Jerusalem shall be destroyed and the Jewish nation extirpated and dispersed, the kingdom of the Messiah shall be set up; and then shall be the reviving of the church, when every one shall fear the utter ruin of it.

1. Christ himself shall be exalted. He is the *branch of the Lord*, the man the branch; it is one of prophetic names, *my servant the branch* (³⁸⁸Zechariah 3:8; 6:12), the *branch of righteousness* (²³⁵Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15), a *rod out of the stem of Jesse and a branch out of his roots* (²¹¹Isaiah 11:1), and this, as some think, is alluded to when he is called a *Nazarene*, ⁴²³Matthew 2:23. Here he is called *the branch of the Lord*, because planted by his power and flourishing to his praise. The ancient Chaldee paraphrase here reads it, *The Christ, or Messiah, of the Lord*. He shall be the beauty, and glory, and joy.

(1.) He shall himself be advanced to the joy set before him and the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. He that was a reproach of men, whose visage was marred more than any man's, is now, in the upper world, beautiful and glorious, as the sun in his strength, admired and adored by angels.

(2.) He shall be beautiful and glorious in the esteem of all believers, shall gain an interest in the world, and a name among men above every name. To those that believe he is precious, he is an honour (⁴¹⁷1 Peter 2:7), the *fairest of ten thousand* (²⁵⁰Song of Solomon 5:10), and altogether glorious. Let us rejoice that he is so, and let him be so to us.

2. His gospel shall be embraced. The success of the gospel is the fruit of the branch of the Lord; all the graces and comforts of the gospel spring from Christ. But it is called *the fruit of the earth* because it sprang up in this world and was calculated for the present state. And Christ compares himself to a *grain of wheat*, that *falls into the ground and dies, and so brings forth much fruit*, ⁸²⁴John 12:24. The success of the gospel is represented by *the earth's yielding her increase* (⁵⁰⁶Psalms 67:6), and the planting of the Christian church is God's *sowing it to himself in the earth*, ³²³Hosea 2:23. We may understand it of both the persons and the things that are the products of the gospel: they shall be excellent and comely, shall appear very agreeable and be very acceptable to those that have escaped of Israel, to that remnant of the Jews which was saved from

perishing with the rest in unbelief, ^{<5115>}Romans 11:5. Note, If Christ be precious to us, his gospel will be so and all its truths and promises — his church will be so, and all that belong to it. These are the good fruit of the earth, in comparison with which all other things are but weeds. It will be a good evidence to us that we are of the chosen remnant, distinguished from the rest that are called *Israel*, and marked for salvation, if we are brought to see a transcendent beauty in Christ, and in holiness, and in the saints, the excellent ones of the earth. As a type of this blessed day, Jerusalem, after Sennacherib's invasion and after the captivity in Babylon, should again flourish as a branch, and be blessed with the fruits of the earth. Compare ^{<2373>}Isaiah 37:31, 32. *The remnant shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward.* And if by the fruit of the earth here we understand the good things of this life, we may observe that these have peculiar sweetness in them to the chosen remnant, who, having a covenant-right to them, have the most comfortable use of them. If the branch of the Lord be beautiful and glorious in our eyes, even the fruit of the earth also will be excellent and comely, because then we may take it as the fruit of the promise, ^{<1876>}Psalm 37:16; ^{<5018>}1 Timothy 4:8.

II. That God will reserve to himself a holy seed, v. 3. When the generality of those that have a place and a name in Zion and in Jerusalem shall be cut off as withered branches, by their own unbelief, yet some shall be left. Some shall remain, some shall still cleave to the church, when its property is altered and it has become Christian; for God will not quite *cast off his people*, ^{<5111>}Romans 11:1. There is here and there one that is left. Now,

1. This is a remnant *according to the election of grace* (as the apostle speaks, ^{<5115>}Romans 11:5), such as are written among the living, marked in the counsel and fore-knowledge of God for life and salvation, *written to life* (so the word is), designed and determined for it unalterably; for “*what I have written I have written.*” Those that are kept alive in killing dying times were written for life in the book of divine Providence; and shall we not suppose those who are rescued from a greater death to be such as were *written in the Lamb's book of life?* ^{<6138>}Revelation 13:8. As many as were *ordained unto eternal life believed to the salvation of the soul*, ^{<4138>}Acts 13:48. Note, All that were *written among the living* shall be found among the living, every one; for of all that were given to Christ he will lose none.

2. It is a remnant *under the dominion of grace*; for every one that is *written among the living*, and is accordingly left, shall be called *holy*, shall

be holy, and shall be accepted of God accordingly. Those only that are holy shall be left when the *Son of man shall gather out of his kingdom every thing that offends*; and all that are chosen to salvation are chosen to sanctification. See ^{<303>}2 Thessalonians 2:13; ^{<400>}Ephesians 1:4.

III. That God will reform his church and will rectify and amend whatever is amiss in it, v. 4. Then the remnant shall be *called holy, when the Lord shall have washed away their filth*, washed it from among them by cutting off the wicked persons, washed it from within them by purging out the wicked thing. They shall not be called so till they are in some measure made so. Gospel times are times of reformation (^{<300>}Hebrews 9:10), typified by the reformation in the days of Hezekiah and that after captivity, to which this promise refers. Observe,

1. The places and persons to be reformed. Jerusalem, though the holy city, needed reformation; and, being the holy city, the reformation of that would have a good influence upon the whole kingdom. The daughters of Zion also must be reformed, the women in a particular manner, whom he had reproved, ^{<306>}Isaiah 3:16. When they were decked in their ornaments they thought themselves wondrously clean; but, being proud of them, the prophet call them their *filth*, for no sin is more abominable to God than pride. Or by the daughters of Zion may be meant the country towns and villages, which were related to Jerusalem as the mother-city, and which needed reformation.

2. The reformation itself. The filth shall be washed away; for wickedness is filthiness, particularly blood-shed, for which Jerusalem was infamous (^{<216>}2 Kings 21:16), and which defiles the land more than any other sin. Note, The reforming of a city is the cleansing of it. When vicious customs and fashions are suppressed, and the open practice of wickedness is restrained, the place is made clean and sweet which before was a dunghill; and this is not only for its credit and reputation among strangers, but for the comfort and health of the inhabitants themselves.

3. The author of the reformation: *The Lord shall do it*. Reformation-work is God's work; if any thing be done to purpose in it, it is his doing. But how? By the judgment of his providence the sinners were destroyed and consumed; but it is by the Spirit of his grace that they are reformed and converted. This is the work that is done, not by might, nor by power, but by the *Spirit of the Lord of hosts* (^{<306>}Zechariah 4:6), working both upon

the sinners themselves that are to be reformed and upon magistrates, ministers, and others that are to be employed as instruments of reformation. The Spirit herein acts,

(1.) As a spirit of judgment, enlightening the mind, convincing the conscience, — as a spirit of wisdom, guiding us to deal prudently, (^{<2303>}Isaiah 52:13), — as a discerning, distinguishing, Spirit, separating between the precious and the vile.

(2.) As a Spirit of burning, quickening and invigorating the affections, and making men zealously affected in a good work. The Spirit works as fire, (^{<4181>}Matthew 3:11. An ardent love to Christ and souls, and a flaming zeal against sin, will carry men on with resolution in their endeavours to *turn away ungodliness from Jacob*. See (^{<2305>}Isaiah 32:15, 16.

IV. That God will protect his church, and all that belong to it (v. 5, 6); when they are purified and reformed they shall no longer lie exposed, but God will take a particular care of them. Those that are sanctified are well fortified; for God will be to them a guide and a guard.

1. Their tabernacles shall be defended, v. 5.

(1.) This writ of protection refers to,

[1.] Their dwelling places, the tabernacles of their rest, their own houses, where they worship God alone, and with their families. That blessing which is upon the *habitation of the just* shall be a protection to it, (^{<4183>}Proverbs 3:33. In the *tabernacles of the righteous* shall the *voice of rejoicing and salvation be*, (^{<4185>}Psalms 118:15. Note, God takes particular cognizance and care of the dwelling-places of his people, of every one of them, the poorest cottage as well as the statliest palace. When iniquity is *put far from the tabernacle* the Almighty shall be its defence, (^{<820>}Job 23:23, 26.

[2.] Their assemblies or tabernacles of meeting for religious worship. No mention is made of the temple, for the promise points at a time when not one stone of that shall be left upon another; but all the congregations of Christians, though but two or three met together in Christ's name, shall be taken under the special protection of heaven; they shall be no more scattered, no more disturbed, nor shall *any weapon formed against them prosper*. Note, we ought to reckon it a great mercy if we have liberty to

worship God in public, free from the alarms of the sword of war or persecution.

(2.) This writ of protection is drawn up,

[1.] In a similitude taken from the safety of the camp of Israel when they marched through the wilderness. God will give to the Christian church as real proofs, though not so sensible, of his care of them, as he then gave to Israel. The Lord will again *create a cloud and smoke by day*, to screen them from the scorching heat of the sun, and the *shining of a flaming fire by night*, to enlighten and warm the air, which in the night is cold and dark. See ^{<173>}Exodus 13:21; ^{<169>}Nehemiah 9:19. This pillar of cloud and fire interposed between the Israelites and the Egyptians, ^{<140>}Exodus 14:20. Note, Though miracles have ceased, yet God is the same to the New-Testament church that he was to Israel of old; the very same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.

[2.] In a similitude taken from the outside cover of rams' skins and badgers' skins that was upon the curtains of the tabernacle, as if every dwelling place of Mount Zion and every assembly were as dear to God as that tabernacle was: *Upon all the glory shall be a defence*, to save it from wind and weather. Note, The church on earth has its glory. Gospel truths and ordinances, the scriptures and the ministry, are the church's glory; and upon all this glory there is a defence, and ever shall be, for the *gates of hell shall not prevail against the church*. If God himself be the glory in the midst of it, he will himself be a wall of fire around about it, impenetrable and impregnable. Grace in the soul is the glory of it, and those that have it are *kept by the power of God* as in a strong-hold, ^{<105>}1 Peter 1:5.

2. Their tabernacle shall be a defence to them, v. 6. God's tabernacle was a pavilion to the saints (^{<175>}Psalm 27:5); but, when that is taken down, they shall not want a covert: the divine power and goodness shall be a tabernacle to all the saints. God himself will be their hiding-place (^{<137>}Psalm 32:7); they shall be at home in him, ^{<199>}Psalm 91:9. He will himself be to them as the *shadow of a great rock* (ch. 32:2) and *his name a strong tower*, ^{<180>}Proverbs 18:10. He will be not only a shadow from the heat in the daytime, but a covert from storm and rain. Note, In this world we must expect change of weather and all the inconveniences that attend it; we shall meet with storm and rain in this lower region, and at other times the heat of the day no less burdensome; but God is a refuge to his people in all weathers.