

Isaiah 49:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth.

Analysis

Lift up thine eyes round about, and behold: all these gather themselves together, and come to thee. As I live, saith the LORD, thou shalt surely clothe thee with them all, as with an ornament, and bind them on thee, as a bride doeth. The command to "lift up thine eyes" (identical phrasing in Genesis 13:14) calls for faith-vision beyond present circumstances to see God's promised future. The gathering of dispersed people becomes Zion's adornment, transforming children from a source of grief into joy and beauty. The imagery shifts from maternal bereavement to bridal preparation.

The divine oath "As I live, saith the LORD" (chai-ani, חַי־אֲנִי) represents the strongest possible guarantee. Since God's life is eternal and unchangeable, swearing by His own life makes the promise absolutely certain (Hebrews 6:13-18). The metaphor of clothing (labash, לָבַשׁ) and binding as ornaments ('adi, אָדִי) suggests that returned exiles become Zion's crown jewels, her glory and beauty.

From a Reformed perspective, this finds fulfillment in the church adorned with redeemed saints from every nation. Revelation 21:2 portrays the church as a bride "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." The ornaments are not material wealth but redeemed people, reflecting God's values—people, not possessions, constitute the church's beauty. This verse grounds assurance in divine oath, demonstrating that God's promises rest on His unchanging character.

Historical Context

The bridal imagery reflects ancient Near Eastern wedding customs where brides adorned themselves with jewelry and fine garments. Archaeological findings from ancient Israel include various ornaments—bangles, earrings, nose rings, and necklaces—that constituted a bride's treasured possessions. The comparison would resonate powerfully with Isaiah's audience.

The promise of gathered children addressed the demographic crisis of exile. Babylonian deportations removed the educated elite, skilled workers, and political leaders, leaving only the poor. The return and multiplication of population would reverse this devastation. Nehemiah 7 records nearly 50,000 returnees initially, with continued growth thereafter. Yet the prophecy transcends historical return—the church's explosive growth from 120 disciples (Acts 1:15) to countless multitudes (Revelation 7:9) demonstrates ultimate fulfillment.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does viewing other believers as the church's "ornaments" change your appreciation for Christian community?
2. What prevents you from lifting your eyes to see God's promised future rather than present difficulties?
3. How does God's oath strengthen your faith when circumstances seem contrary to His promises?

Interlinear Text

שָׂאִי	סָבִיב	עֵינֵי יְיָ	וּרְאֵי	כָּל־	
Lift up	round about	thine eyes	and behold	H3605	
H5375	H5439	H5869	H7200		
	וְקָבְצוּ	בָּאוּ	לְךָ	חִי	אֵלֵי נְאֻם
	all these gather themselves together	and come	H0	to thee As I live	H589 saith
	H6908	H935		H2416	H5002
יְהוָה	כִּי	כָּל־	כְּעֹדִי		
the LORD	H3588	H3605	thee with them all as with an ornament		
H3068			H5716		
	תִּלְבָּשִׁי	וְתִקְשְׁרִי	בְּכֶלֶה:		
	thou shalt surely clothe	and bind	them on thee as a bride		
	H3847	H7194	H3618		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 61:10 (References Lord): I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.

Isaiah 54:9 (Parallel theme): For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee.

Isaiah 66:20 (References Lord): And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD.

Isaiah 54:7 (Parallel theme): For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee.

Isaiah 49:12 (Parallel theme): Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.

Revelation 22:15 (Parallel theme): For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Revelation 21:2 (Parallel theme): And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Isaiah 52:1 (Parallel theme): Awake, awake; put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean.

Isaiah 45:23 (Parallel theme): I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.

Isaiah 49:22 (References Lord): Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders.