

## Isaiah Chapter 14, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

**A Song for Fallen Tyrants of Babylon,  
Sung by Jews Returned from Babylonian Captivity,  
Who Now Enslave the Babylonians--  
Plus Oracles of Disaster for Assyria and Philistia,  
But Hope for Zion, a Place of Refuge for the Afflicted**

14:1<sup>1</sup> כִּי יִרְחֹם יְהוָה אֶת־עַקְבֹּב

---

<sup>1</sup>There are seven end-notes to **chapter 14**: (1) “Hell; in the King James Bible”; (2) “Gehenna / Hell”; (3) “Ghosts”; (4) “Mount Zaphon, in the Far Reaches of the North”; (5) “Darnell’s Sermon Applying Isaiah 13-14 to Saddam Hussein”; (6) “Jews as the ‘Chosen People’”; and (7) “Flying Snakes.”

Slotki comments on **verses 1-23**: “In this section, the pronouncement over Babylon is continued, consisting of an introduction, ode and epilogue. The ode has been described as ‘one of the most spirited of all Hebrew poems.’”

He comments on **verses 1-4**: “Introduction serving as a link between the preceding oracle against Babylon and the following ode on Israel’s triumph over the proud aggressor.”

He comments on **verse 1**: “The fall of Babylon is followed by the deliverance of Israel. The allusion is probably to the reign of Cyrus, though some commentators regard it as referring to the Messianic age.” (P. 67)

Alexander comments on **chapter 14**: “The destruction of Babylon is again foretold, and more explicitly connected with the deliverance of Israel from bondage. After a general assurance of God’s favor to His people, and of an exchange of conditions between them and their oppressors, they are represented as joining in a song of triumph over their fallen enemy. In this song, which is universally admitted to possess the highest literary merit, they describe the earth as again reposing from its agitation and affliction, and then breaking forth into a shout of exultation, in which the very trees of the forest join (**verses 1-8**)...”

“By a still bolder figure, the unseen world [sheol, the grave] is represented as perturbed at the approach of the fallen tyrant, who is met, as he enters, by the kings already there, amazed to find him sunk as low as themselves, and from a still greater height of actual elevation and of impious pretensions, which are strongly contrasted with his present condition, as deprived not only of regal honors but of decent burial (**verses 9-20**)...”

“The threatening is then extended to the whole race, and the prophecy closes as before with a prediction of the total desolation of Babylon (**verses 21-23**)...”

(continued...)

---

<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

“**Verses 24-27** are regarded by the latest writers as a distinct prophecy, unconnected with what goes before, and misplaced in the arrangement of the **book**...

“**Verses 28-32** are regarded by a still greater number of writers as a distinct prophecy against Philistia...The true state of the case may be, that the prophet, having reverted from the downfall of Babylon to that of Assyria, now closes with a warning apostrophe [breaking off from addressing one party, to address another] to the Philistines who had also suffered from the latter power, and were disposed to exult unduly in its overthrow.” (Pp. 285-86)

Watts states concerning **13:22b-14:7** that “The passage is set off by the change in mood and content on both sides. It consists of three parts: The first, **13:22b-14:2**, contrasts Babylon’s fate with Israel’s hope. The contrast is balanced...with **14:20b-21** which stresses the hopeless future for the Babylonian ruler’s family. The second part is **14:3-4b**, which announce the מִשָּׁל, **mashal**, ‘poem’ which heightens the contrast still further. The third part includes **verses 4b-7**. It precedes the **mashal** and says nothing specifically about the King of Babylon. It is an extended exclamation of joy and relief that ‘Yahweh has shattered...the rod of rulers.’ This is the center of the chiasmus [‘words, grammatical constructions, or concepts repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form’]. The subject of the poem is Yahweh, as in most of the units comprising the two-chapter scene.” (Pp. 201-02)

He comments on **13:22b-14:1** that “The statements concerning Babylon’s fate and Israel’s hope are related by the two words קָרוֹב ‘near’ and עוֹד ‘yet.’ Her time and her days refer to the events of the end of Babylon just predicted. The **Old Testament** teaches that everything has its own time (**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**)...Babylon’s fate cannot be rushed. One must wait for it...Babylon’s time, like the Day of Yahweh (**Isaiah 13:6**), is near...

“Israel’s hope is contrasted to Babylon’s hopelessness...Israel, or what is left of it, is warned not to follow Babylon’s example, but to wait for Yahweh’s redemption...

“The speech reiterates the major elements of Israel’s ancient faith and hope. It was Yahweh’s...‘compassion’ on Jacob that motivated the exodus...The statement draws upon other instances when God declares His continued compassion—even in moments when Israel is apostate, such as after the Golden Calf incident (**Exodus 34:6**). It is appropriate as a restatement of God’s commitment even after the edict of ‘total destruction’ (**Isaiah 10:23**).

“The speech is developed further with an assurance that Yahweh will choose or elect Israel again. The עוֹד ‘again’ is needed in the context where such election has been set aside to allow judgment to do its work (**Isaiah chapter 10**)...

(continued...)

---

<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

“The speech foresees such economic prosperity and earned esteem that wandering peoples will volunteer to serve them.” (Pp. 202-03)

Gray entitles **14:1-4a** “The restoration of Israel.”

He summarizes their content: “Babylon must fall (**chapter 13**), and that immediately (**13:22b**); *for* (**14:1**) it is Yahweh’s gracious purpose to set free the Jews from their present captivity, and to re-establish them in Canaan (**verses 1-2**). Restored to Canaan, the Jews will sing a paean [a song of praise or triumph] (**14:4b, 21**) over the fall of the king of Babylon. These verses are probably an editorial link.” (P. 244)

Kaiser, who holds that **chapter 14** is the work of a late post-exilic editor of the **Book of Isaiah**, comments that “[the post-exilic editor’s] words, drawn from his study of scripture, were meant to assure those who heard them when the **Book** was read in public worship that the sufferings of Israel in the past and the present were leading on to a glorious future, in which it could sing its song of mockery at the fallen world power.” (P. 24)

Alexander comments on **verse 1**: “This verse declares God’s purpose in destroying the Babylonian power. For Jehovah will pity (or have mercy upon) Jacob, and will again (or still) choose Israel and cause them to rest on their (own) land—and the stranger shall be joined to them—and they (the strangers) shall be attached to the house of Jacob. Jacob and Israel are here used for the whole race...By God’s *still choosing* Israel we are to understand His continuing to treat them as His chosen people. Or we may render עֹד *again*, in which case the idea will be, that having for a time or in appearance cast them off and given up to *other lords*, He would now take them to Himself again...”

“Umbreit correctly understands this [verse] not as a mere promise of temporal deliverance and increase to Israel as a nation, but as an assurance that the preservation of the chosen people was a necessary means for the fulfilment of God’s purposes of mercy to mankind in general.” (Pp. 286-87)

Motyer states that “No translation can reproduce the sweep and surge of this truly magnificent poem [in **chapter 14**]. It is the work of a master. Among known **Bible** writers, none but Isaiah could be its author.” He refers to Erlandsson who says “83% of the words in this ‘song of the fallen king’ are found in the agreed work of Isaiah. Of the remaining 23 words, 17 are agreed to be pre-exilic and the remaining 5 words, alleged to be late, are found on examination not to be so.” (P. 143)

Motyer entitles **14:1-2** “The security and future of the Lord’s people.”

He comments that “In this work of *compassion* [**verse 1**] we see a contrasting universal purpose; there is the same blending of human and Divine agency as in the

(continued...)

---

<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

work of wrath, for both *the Lord...will settle them in their own land (verse 1)* and *Nations will take them to their own place (verse 2)*...

“The return from Babylon fulfilled very little of all this. Cyrus’ recognition of Israel and its God (**Ezra 1:2-4**) was tongue-in-cheek [the tongue-in-cheek figure of speech is used to imply that a statement or other production is humorously or otherwise not seriously intended, and it should not be taken at face value. The facial expression typically indicates that one is joking or making a mental effort]. There was no popular acclaim, no influx of converts, no reversal of the captive-captor roles. But we are not to look on the fall of Babylon and say that the day of the Lord did not come...The return foreshadowed some beneficent aspects of the day and provided an ‘earnest’ that the full promise would yet be kept.” (P. 141)

But we ask, how does Motyer know this? Does he have some way of seeing Cyrus’ facial expressions that indicated he was only joking when he issued the decree allowing captives to return home? Was not that decree seriously meant? Were not the Jews who desired to do so permitted to return home to Judah / Jerusalem, with Persian funding to rebuild their place of worship? We think Motyer is mistaken in this claim, which is contrary to the historical fact. But Motyer is right is observing that there was “no popular acclaim, no influx of converts, no reversal of the captive-captor roles.”

We add that no highway through the Arabian desert was built, with trees and sources of water lining the way. The predictions of a glorious return made here and in **Isaiah 40-55** did not turn out to be so glorious!

So how does Motyer explain this? He turns the predictions into eschatological predictions of the final consummation of history, with what happened under Cyrus only providing ‘mini-illustrations,’ “foreshadowings” of the final Day of the Lord, and the gathering of God’s people to Himself in the heavenly Zion, when “the full promise would yet be kept.”

In our view, Motyer is expecting far too much from biblical prophecy—making it into a clear-eyed vision of the future which must be fulfilled to the letter, or understood as symbolical, or understood as not yet fulfilled, but eventually to be fulfilled in the eschaton. But **Numbers 12:6-9** teaches that the prophetic vision and dream given by YHWH is “enigmatic,” “puzzling.” The apostle Paul in **1 Corinthians 13:8-12** states the same thing concerning his own prophesying, confessing that he knew only partially and saw “through a mirror darkly”—or “enigmatically” (using the language of **Numbers 12**), not claiming that his vision was clear-sighted and complete.

But far too often Christians claim that Paul saw the future exactly and clearly, knowing what the future would bring for Christian believers (**1 Corinthians 15; 1 Thessalonians 4**, etc.) and for the Nation of Israel (**Romans 9-11**). We should view those passages as Divinely given expressions of devout hope, but not as precise

(continued...)

---

<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

road-maps to the future. And we insist that the same thing is true of Isaiah's prophecies. Isaiah is convinced through faith that YHWH is working out a glorious future for His people, and so is Paul—but their visions and dreams of what that future is going to be like must not be taken for more than that—visions and dreams that are “enigmatic,” puzzling, imparting hope for the future, but not enabling the believer to draw up exact time-tables or give exact details, as is so often attempted!

Oswalt entitles **14:1-23** “Downfall of the king of Babylon.”

He comments that “In this second part of the burden of Babylon [**chapters 13-14**], the major element is the taunt-song, **verses 4b-21**, rejoicing over the downfall of the haughty monarch of the city. As such it is a powerful particularization of the more general statements of **chapter 13**. No particular person is named, nor is it clear any is intended...but the poem makes the destruction of human pride and arrogance much more graphic by personifying it in this way...

“It is God Who rises up against Babylon (**verses 22, 23**), and He does so not merely because the creature cannot exalt itself against its Creator, but because in its arrogance the world power holds captive the people whom God has promised to redeem...and through whom He intends to bless the world...

“The vision presented in **verses 1-4a** is one of hope. The result of Babylon's overthrow will be the promised deliverance...As Delitzsch comments, these few verses contain the message of **chapters 40-66** in a nutshell. (Because of these similarities to **chapters 40-66**, as well as to **Zechariah 1:17; 2:13-16<sup>Heb</sup> / 9-12<sup>Eng</sup>**) it has become customary to date these verses to postexilic, or later, times...Even if one accepts the Deutero-Isaianic theory, there is no reason why a paragraph such as this from the earlier Isaiah could not have provided the framework for the later writer's view.” (Pp. 311-12)

Oswalt comments on **verses 1-2** that “These verses form a sort of epilogue [afterword, postscript] to **chapter 13** as the opening **וְכִי** [Because], ‘for,’ shows. Babylon—the oppressor—will be destroyed because of the Lord's compassion for His people. The prophet's vision is not limited to Judah. God will remember His entire people, as the parallel use of Jacob and Israel indicates (this usage is especially prominent in **chapters 40-49**, but compare also **10:20; 27:6**). The analogy with the exodus is very clear throughout these verses. As God chose Israel once before in Egypt, He will chose her again in Mesopotamia (**Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:6, 7; Psalm 135:4**)...Here the prophet reminds his hearers, both present and future, that whatever punishment may come, it need not mean abandonment. God will once again choose...

“The result of the choosing will be that Israel will be put down on her own soil again...Now instead of Israel being joined to aliens, the aliens will be added to Israel. In

(continued...)

וּבִתְרָ עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל  
וְהִנִּיחַם עַל-אֲדָמָתָם

---

<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

fact, then, the tables will be turned. Israel will not be dependent upon the nations; the nations will be dependent upon Israel (2:3; 60:1-3; 61:5-7)...

“The language in which this reversal is stated has been troublesome to many Christian commentators. They have seen the idea of reducing Gentiles to slaves as being an unworthy sentiment. Thus, older commentators (but also Young) have tended to spiritualize the passage, saying that it referred to the Church and its dominion over all the earth. More recent scholars generally dismiss it as an unfortunate expression of late Jewish nationalism...

“But it is not necessary to take either position. This language can be taken as a figurative expression of the prophet’s inspired conviction that the present relationship between Israel and the nations would not always obtain. The nations’ pride was passing, but the glory of Israel’s God was unending, and the day would come when the temporal would bow to the eternal. Surely this has happened. Marduk and Baal and Chemosh are dead, but Yahweh lives on. So too, Assyria and Babylon have long since walked off the pages of history, but the people of Israel live on.” (Pp. 312-13)

What do you think? Is Oswalt’s explanation convincing to you? Not to us! Depicting the nations as slaves to the Jews is hardly a way of predicting the temporal bowing to the eternal!

Kaiser comments on **verse 1**: “The beginning, with the ‘for’ of explanation, shows that **verses 1** and **2** were understood as the continuation and climax of the preceding prophecy of the day of Yahweh and the destruction of Babylon for ever, which would then take place. From the first, the purpose of the judgment of Yahweh’s anger upon the world, and upon the great capital city as the symbol of world power, lies in the turning point in the destiny of Israel, the house of Jacob...

“The gathering together of the scattered Israelites is paralleled by the increase of the people of God through the proselytes. But the *ger*, the alien, does not refer merely to the Canaanites who lived among the Israelites. It can also refer at least to the non-Israelites who in the diaspora felt themselves drawn to Judaism.” (Pp. 24-25)

With these differing interpretations of Isaiah’s language, it becomes increasingly clear that the prophetic message was indeed enigmatic, puzzling—leading to such differences! What do you think? Do you think Isaiah’s vision was clear, unambiguous? Or was it, in Paul’s words, “through a mirror darkly”? And if it was indeed clear, unambiguous, why then the many differing interpretations?

וְנִלְוָה הַגֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם

וְנִסְפַּחוּ עַל-בֵּית יַעֲקֹב:

Because YHWH will have compassion<sup>2</sup> to / on Jacob,  
and He will choose Israel again.<sup>3</sup>

And He will cause them to rest upon their land / ground,<sup>4</sup>

And the temporary resident<sup>5</sup> will join them,<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Motyer states that “*compassion* (compare ‘mercy’ in **verse 18**) is the highly-charged devotion of a mother.” (P. 141) But the piel imperfect verb here, **יִרְחֵם**, is 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular—why not say “the highly-charged devotion of a Father”?

<sup>3</sup>Slotki comments that “Israel’s sins, which had incurred God’s rejection, will be expiated through the suffering inflicted by the Babylonians, and the Divine favor will be restored.” (P. 67) We think Slotki’s comment here has been based on, or influenced by, **Isaiah 40:1-2**,

- 1 Comfort! Comfort My people,  
says your (plural) God!
- 2 Speak to Jerusalem’s heart,  
and cry out to her,,  
that her warfare is complete,  
that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,  
that she received from YHWH’s hand double (punishment)  
for all her sins!

Gray comments that “the first choice was at the beginning of the nation’s history. See **Deuteronomy 7:6-7** and **Ezekiel 20:5-6**. Yahweh’s choice of Israel is a favorite idea of Deutero-Isaiah. See **Isaiah 41:8-9; 43:10; 44:1-2**.” (P. 245)

<sup>4</sup>Gray comments that the verb in this line, **יִנְיֶהוּ**, normally meaning “to lay down, set, deposit,” “is generally used of placing a person in a particular place after his removal from another; compare **Isaiah 46:7; Genesis 19:16; Joshua 7:23; Leviticus 24:12** and **Numbers 15:34**.” (P. 245)

<sup>5</sup>Slotki’s translation of the noun **גֵּר** is “stranger,” and he comments that “The text uses the term **הַגֵּר**, **hagger**, which in biblical Hebrew signifies a non-Israelite [we say, a ‘temporary resident,’ an ‘immigrant’], although some authorities detect here the

(continued...)

---

<sup>5</sup>(...continued)

meaning of 'proselyte' [convert] which it acquired in later Hebrew [specifically, in Aramaic]." (P. 67)

Interestingly, the Greek translation (**Rahfs**) has καὶ ὁ γιώρας προστεθήσεται πρὸς αὐτοὺς, "and the *gioras* will be added to them." *Gioras* is not a Greek word at all, but is a transliteration of the Aramaic גִּוְרָא, "temporary resident / sojourner."

Motyer likewise states that "The **ger** ('alien') was the political or other refugee who came as a 'temporary resident.' In Israel such people had a specially protected status (compare **Deuteronomy 14:21, 29; 16:11**) arising partly from Israel's experience in Egypt (**Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 10:19**) but ultimately from the example of the Lord (**Deuteronomy 10:18; compare Leviticus 25:23**)." (P. 141)

With this statement that the non-Israelite, the foreigner who is living temporarily in Israel, is to be joined to Israel, we are reminded of the under-lying conflict between the program set forth by Ezra and Nehemiah--demanding the exclusion of half-breed Jews and foreigners, segregating the Israelites from the "people of the land" upon the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity--and the program set forth by Second Isaiah (**Isaiah 40-55**) calling for the acceptance of the very people excluded by Ezra and Nehemiah, and compassionate self-giving ministry to all others, the very opposite of segregation and exclusion--in essence, the same battle that Jesus fought with the High Priests and Pharisees of his day.

Gray is one of those mentioned by Slotki as "detecting the meaning of "proselyte" or "convert." He states that the term גֵּר, the **ger** "originally denoted a person not of the same tribe or people as those among whom he lived, but enjoying at their hands certain conceded (as distinct from inherited) rights and privileges...Yet as late as the Deuteronomic code the *ger* was no full member of the holy nation...In the [priestly materials] the term has become purely religious; persons not Israelite by descent may by accepting the rite of circumcision become as full members of the community as those born Jews, and subject to the same rights and duties...[Still later,] the *ger* is any person not of Jewish descent who becomes a convert to the Jewish religion, a *proselyte*."

"...In this passage [**Isaiah 14:1**] the term...is very nearly equal to *convert* or *proselyte*. The restored Jewish community will be enlarged by the inclusion of [people] of other nations, who, seeing what Yahweh has done for His people...will seek to be united with them. Foreigners who do not become converts will pass into the possession of the restored people, as slaves and slave-girls. The writer contemplates for the world at large two alternatives--conversion to Judaism, or enslavement to the Jews." (Pp. 245-46) That is certainly not the viewpoint of Second Isaiah (**chapters 40-55**)!

(continued...)



and they will be attached to<sup>7</sup> Jacob's house.

14:2<sup>8</sup> וְלִקְחוּם עִמָּיִם

---

<sup>5</sup>(...continued)

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) is ὁ γιῶρας, an attempt to transliterate the Hebrew *ger* based on the Aramaic גִּיּוֹרָא, *ghiora*, “temporary resident,” “sojourner.”

<sup>6</sup>Gray translates by “join himself,” and refers to such passages as **Genesis 29:34; Numbers 18:2; Isaiah 56:3, 6; Jeremiah 50:5**, and especially **Zechariah 2:15a<sup>Heb</sup> / 11a<sup>Eng</sup>**, which states:

And many nations will join (themselves to) YHWH on that day,  
and they will be to Me for a people... (P. 246)

<sup>7</sup>Gray translates by “will become members of.” (P. 246) Translations vary from “shall cleave to,” to “attach themselves to,” to “unite with,” to προστεθήσεται, “he will be added to.”

Motyer states that “The doubling of *join* and *unite* [our ‘be attached to’] emphasizes the idea of a real and true union.” (P. 141)

<sup>8</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 2**: “*And nations shall take them and bring them to their place—and the house of Israel shall take possession of them on Jehovah's land for male and female servants [not to say ‘slaves’!]-and (thus) they (the Israelites) shall be the captors of their captors, and rule over their oppressors...*”

“The simple meaning of this promise seems to be that the Church, or chosen people, and the other nations should change places, the oppressed becoming the oppressor, and the slave the master...In a lower sense, and on a smaller scale, it was accomplished in the restoration of the Jews from exile; but its full accomplishment is yet to come, not with respect to the Jews as a people, for their pre-eminence has ceased for ever, but with respect to the Church, including Jews and Gentiles, which has succeeded to the rights and privileges, promises and actual possessions, of God's ancient people...

“The true principle of exposition is adopted even by the Rabbins. Jarchi [Rashi] refers the promise to the future...to the period of complete redemption. Kimchi [Radak] more explicitly declares that its fulfilment is to be sought partly in the restoration from Babylon, and partly in the days of the Messiah.” (Pp. 287-88)

What do you think? Do you think the Church as understood in the life and teaching of Jesus is to make servants / slaves of those who once oppressed them, and become their oppressors—rather than forgiving their enemies, and becoming “suffering servants” to them?

(continued...)

וְהִבְיָאוּם אֶל-מְקוֹמָם  
וְהִתְנַחֲלוּם בֵּית-יִשְׂרָאֵל  
עַל אֲדָמַת יְהוָה  
לְעִבְדִּים וּלְשִׁפְחוֹת  
וְהָיוּ שָׂבִים לְשִׁבְיָהֶם

---

<sup>8</sup>(...continued)

Here the difficulties confronting those who take biblical predictions as clear-sighted, exact descriptions of the future becomes apparent. Is this what the future holds for Israel / the Church? Is that future to be one in which the people of God become oppressors of those who once oppressed them, returning evil for evil? Undoubtedly there are passages in the **Bible** that reflect this conviction, but we ask, is this really the Divine plan for the future? We say, “No!”

Motyer sees the difficulty, and comments that here, in **verse 2**, “Isaiah depicts the future as being like when the Philistine overlords became servants [not to say ‘slaves’!] after the Lord gave the victory (**1 Samuel 17:8-9**). Here the new and voluntary relationship of **verse 1** becomes one of glad service on the part of the nations / peoples [where does the text say anything about ‘glad service’? It does not!] and Israel ‘will possess them for themselves.’ They will enter into the wealth of the nations (as in **Exodus 12:33-36**) and exercise dominion domestically (*menservants and maidservants* [not to say male and female slaves!], militarily (*make captives*) and politically (*rule over / ‘dominate’*), i.e. they will hold total sway. The reality of all this, however, is the spreading of the kingdom of peace (**9:7<sup>Heb</sup> / 6<sup>Eng</sup>**) into which the convert presses gladly and by choice (**verse 1**) and takes the servant’s [not to say ‘slave’s’] place within the community of grace.” (P. 142)

So, for Motyer, the text doesn’t really mean what it says—it is only using the language of slavery and captivity to depict a far different reality—that of a “kingdom of peace.” Strange way, we say, to describe such a kingdom! This may be what Motyer wants the text to mean, but it is not what the text says! Why should the interpreter be afraid to admit this?

Kaiser comments on **verse 2** that it “gives an extravagant answer, drawn from **Isaiah 49:22ff.; 60:4ff.; 61:5** and **66:18ff.** to the question of how the return of the scattered Israelites is to take place: the people in whose midst they are forced to live will bring them back themselves into their ancestral home...Those who return home are to transform their helpers into servants and handmaids whom they possess as slaves... Those who held Israel captive will then be taken captive by Israel, and the oppressors will be ruled by Israel.” (Pp. 25-26) We think this is a much more realistic answer than that of Motyer!

וְרָדוּ בְּנַגְשֵׁיהֶם:

And peoples will take them,

and they will bring them<sup>9</sup> to their place;<sup>10</sup>

and they will cause them to inherit Israel's house,

upon YHWH's land / ground--<sup>11</sup>

for the male slaves / servants<sup>12</sup> and for female slaves / maid-servants;<sup>13</sup>

and they will be taking captive those who took them captive,

and they will rule over their oppressors!<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup>Compare **Isaiah 49:22**,

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

Look—I will lift up My hand to (the) nations,

and to peoples I will raise My signal;

and they will bring your sons in (their) embrace,

and your daughters they will carry upon (their) shoulder.

<sup>10</sup>Slotki states that this is “a prediction of the help given by Cyrus to the restoration of the Judean exiles.” (P. 67)

Gray comments that the phrase “to their place” means “to their country or home.” (P. 246) Compare **Numbers 24:25a**,

And Balaam arose, and he went;

and he returned to his place...

<sup>11</sup>Gray comments that “the ‘ground of Yahweh’ is Canaan. Compare ‘the land of Yahweh,’ **Hosea 9:3**; ‘the holy ground’ (**Zechariah 2:16**).” (P. 246)

<sup>12</sup>The Hebrew noun is עֲבָדִים, “slaves / servants.”

<sup>13</sup>The Hebrew noun is שִׁפְחוֹת, “maid-servants” who belong to their owner, i.e., are “female slaves.”

<sup>14</sup>Slotki states that “With the Judeans and Babylonians, the role of master and slaves will be reversed.” The earlier statement about the immigrants and non-Jews being accepted into Israel and served with self-giving love is here totally reversed. The Judeans / Israelites are here depicted as taking their former captors as their slaves, and playing the role of slave-owners, ruling over their slaves, both male and female!

(continued...)

<sup>14</sup>(...continued)

Gray comments: “Restored to their land, the Jews will need slaves, which the later law forbade them to seek from those of their own race (**Leviticus 24:44-46**); they will therefore subject to slavery those of the nations who do not seek and obtain incorporation in the Jewish community as *gerim* (**verse 1**). The tables will be turned: those who had enslaved the Jews will now become their slaves. Babylon for the moment seems to be lost sight of, or rather has become a generic term for all oppressors of the Jews. The writer lives at a time when many nations at one time or another had enslaved the Jews.” (P. 246)

And again we note that the prophetic authors do not speak with one accord on such matters—but rather, in their writings we hear the discordant voices of opposing view-points. Whereas the earlier statement, in the light of **Isaiah 40-55**, can be understood as calling for the acceptance of non-Jews, this statement in **verse 2** can be understood as condoning slavery of non-Jews. What do you think? How will you resolve this?

All too often, beginning students of the **Bible** will throw up their hands in despair, and quit their study, even giving up on religion—as I have personally witnessed. But this is a “counsel of despair”—it is in just such passages as this that the student is being challenged to think and grow, and develop his or her own theological convictions.

We say, Ask yourself, Which view do you think truly reflects the will and mind of God? Is it the call for loving acceptance of foreigners, immigrants, to be willing to serve them self-sacrificially, as Jesus so willingly did? Or is it the call to segregation from foreigners, to the building of walls of exclusion, making those different from us as our slaves”? Either view can be fortified by biblical texts and examples.

Those whose hearts have been renewed in the light of Jesus Christ will have little trouble in making their decision. They will not want to make anyone their slave. What do you think?

<sup>15</sup>Motyer entitles **14:2-23** “The overthrow of Babylon: the end of the king.”

He comments that “center-piece” of this passage is “the ‘song of the fallen king’ in **verses 4b-21**...It is pointless to try to identify the song with any known king...It is much more satisfactory to see here a poem within the ‘day of the Lord’ genre...The general idea of a hostile world power is personalized into the imaginative portrayal of the end of world king and this, in turn, receives intermediate realization in the end of the imperial dynasty of Babylon (**verses 22-23**). The more we think of **chapters 13-27** as a study of the principles of world history merging forward into eschatology [the final end of history], the easier it becomes to see that from the start Babylon carries overtones of the ‘city of emptiness’ (**24:10**) whose fall is the end of all that opposes the Lord’s rule.” (P. 142)

(continued...)

---

<sup>15</sup>(...continued)

Motyer entitles **14:3-4a** "Introduction." He comments that "Both David (**2 Samuel 7:1**) and Solomon (**1 Kings 8:56**) were mistaken in thinking the moment had come in their day. The fulness awaits the day of the Lord." (P. 142)

This is a strange comment coming from such a scholar—who insists again and again that the **Bible** is literally "the word of God." These two texts say that YHWH gave both David and Solomon "rest," and the passage in **1 Kings 8:56** is emphatic:

Blessed (be) YHWH, Who gave rest to His people Israel,  
according to all that He spoke!  
One thing from all His word, the good one, not a word has fallen / failed,  
which He spoke by (the) hand of Moses His slave / servant!

But Motyer evidently thinks himself wiser than Solomon, boldly stating that Solomon (along with David) "was mistaken." What do you think? Do you think it befits a **Bible** scholar, who claims every word in the **Bible** in the "infallible word of God" to claim that these two passages are "mistaken"?

We think Motyer is mistaken, and that the biblical promise of "rest" has many varying applications and fulfillments. The **Bible** depicts YHWH as leading His people to "rest"—but that does not always mean the "eternal rest" at the end of time! See the **New Testament Book of Hebrews, 4:8**, where a similar claim is made that denies what is claimed in **Joshua 23:1**, which is similar to **1 Kings 8:56**.

Oswalt comments on **verses 3-4** that "Here again the analogy with Egypt is carried out. The Lord will give relief from the pain, the trouble, and the hard service, in short, the slavery. In His grace, the tables will be turned so that the slaves, formerly bowed down, will stand over the fallen king, once so mighty...It is an expression of that release from their enemies that they will be able to taunt the very one who had vaunted himself over them..."

"Kaiser comments that such an attitude is contradictory to **New Testament** principles, yet it is the very sort of thing which is said about Babylon in the **Book of Revelation (18:1-24)**. While it is incumbent upon Christians to foster concern for their enemies and to seek reconciliation with them, nothing in the Christian faith says we ought to be sad when those who deny God and would destroy His people are overthrown." (P. 313)

This is a strange comment. **Revelation 18** is in no way a "taunt song" to be sung by Christians over the fall of Babylon / Rome. Rather, while Christians can rejoice over what has happened, the chapter contains the elements of genuine lament for the fall of the great city which had on its hands the blood of so many Christian martyrs. But Oswalt says nothing about the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5-7**; see also **Luke 6:17-49**). The command of Jesus is to love your enemies, and do

(continued...)

## מַעֲצָבֶיךָ וּמְרִגְזֶיךָ

וּמִן־הָעֲבָרָה הַקָּשָׁה אֲשֶׁר עָבַדְתָּ בָּךְ:

And it will happen, on the day when YHWH has given rest to you,<sup>16</sup>  
from your pain, and from your turmoil,  
and from the hard slavery in which you were enslaved;<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>(...continued)

good to them and bless them. To taunt them because of their fall is the very opposite of His teaching. What do you think?

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 3**: “*And it shall be (or come to pass) in the day of Jehovah’s causing thee to rest from thy toil (or suffering), and from thy commotion (or disquietude), and from the hard service which was wrought by thee (or imposed upon thee)...*”

“In this verse and the following context, the prophet, in order to reduce the general promise of the foregoing verse to a more graphic and impressive form, recurs [goes back] to the downfall of Babylon, as the beginning of the series of deliverances which he had predicted, and describes the effect upon those most concerned, by putting into the mouth of Israel a song of triumph over their oppressor. This is universally admitted to be one of the finest specimens of Hebrew, and indeed of ancient composition.” (P. 288)

Kaiser comments on **verse 3**: “The day in which Yahweh gives rest to the suffering community must be understood on the basis of **13:6** and **9** as the day of Yahweh. It brings an end to weary toil (compare **Genesis 5:29**), to the restless turmoil and forced labor (**Exodus 4:14; 6:9**) which is now imposed upon the community that is being directly addressed. When the people are set free the נַחֲלָה, [possession, property, inheritance] will become מְנוּחָה, [resting-place, rest]; the land of their inheritance will be a place of rest, a place where they will remain undisturbed (compare **Deuteronomy 19:9f.** and **25:19.**” (P. 26)

<sup>16</sup>Gray holds that this phrase means “releases thee from servitude.” (P. 247)

<sup>17</sup>Isaiah has good news to proclaim to the people of Judah. Their nation is faced with a crisis of international proportions--Assyria, Babylon, and Media on the east and north; Egypt on the southwest; Moab and others on the southeast--all harboring hostile intent against Judah. Isaiah counsels quietness, and trust in YHWH, the Divine Warrior, the Lord of History, Who is working out His strategy, His purpose, in human history--specifically, in the history of Judah.

(continued...)

<sup>17</sup>(...continued)

His purpose is to "give rest" to His people, enabling them to live in peace and security upon their own land. Even if deportation and captivity in a foreign land may be their lot, still YHWH God is working out His plan, His purpose--and His people can trust Him for the future (see especially **verses 1-2; 26-27**), in which they will be enlarged and Divinely blessed with "rest." YHWH's compassion upon, and choice of His people is still the basis for their hope and for their future.

There is a "philosophy of history" inherent in this biblical teaching, that is common to the spokespersons of Israel. YHWH has a plan, a purpose, which is being worked out in the midst of history, with all its noisy conflicts, and the rise and fall of nations. It seems that the most important actors on the stage of human history are the great kings and emperors, the generals and admirals, with their powerful armies and navies. But behind the scenes, and on the real throne of the universe, is YHWH, the universal God of all peoples and nations, Who is bringing about the fulfillment of His purpose of love and compassion for His people.

In the light of the prophetic vision, it is obvious that an old world is perishing, and a new world of joyful rest is being brought into being for God's people--where all their pain, turmoil, and slavery will be ended, and they can live in quiet "rest"! Compare **verses 7-8**.

But what kind of "rest" will it be? One that belongs to them exclusively, while others are their slaves? Or will it be a "rest" which they share with all others? It is a question with which the biblical authors struggle. It is the struggle in which Jesus was engaged against the High Priests and Pharisees of his day. It was, in the time of **Isaiah 40-55**, the struggle that becomes obvious between its viewpoint and that of **Ezra-Nehemiah**.

<sup>18</sup>Watts comments on **verses 4-7** that they "portray a time to come for Israel, like that of **chapter 11** for Jerusalem...In these verses...it is not the person of the tyrant, but the condition of tyranny whose end is celebrated...The poem celebrates Yahweh's victory in *shattering the rod of rulers* and bringing *rest* and *quiet* that provokes *joyful song*...It draws together the themes of the entire section. Oppression has ceased because Yahweh Himself has broken the power of rulers. *All the land is at rest* because of Yahweh's intervention. The implication is clear--not because of rebellions by Babylon, by Egypt, by Philistia, or any others...

"The passage imparts a sense of God's control of all things, which will be ordered in their own time. God assured Jerusalem (**10:12**) that He Himself would deal with the Assyrian when the assigned task was complete. Now here He refers to Babylon's assigned 'time'--yet to come, but sure to come--and calls Israel's attention to the goals God has set for her that are 'yet' to come to pass--but also sure. These are

(continued...)

וְאָמַרְתָּ  
אֵיךְ שָׁבַת נָגַשׁ  
שְׁבַתָּה מִדְּהַבָּה:

---

<sup>18</sup>(...continued)

goals, fixed in God's Own strategy for he world (**verses 24-27**) which will come only through His direct intervention when His victory is complete." (P. 204)

Slotki comments that **verses 4b-8** depict "General relief and joy over the defeat of the Babylonian king." (P. 67)

What do you think? Where Watts says it is not the person of the tyrant, Slotki says it has reference to the Babylonian king. We think Slotki is correct; and this was Alexander's view, who translates / comments on **verse 4**: "*That thou shalt raise this song over the king of Babylon and say, How hath the oppressor ceased, the golden (city) ceased!*" (P. 288)

Kaiser comments that "The liberated people will take up its taunt against the world power at which people now tremble..."

"Anyone whose starting point is the Christian universalism of salvation as found in Paul, and for whom there can be no distinctions of nation or race in the church (compare **Galatians 3:28**), may regard **Isaiah 14:1-4a** as a 'revoltingly arrogant expectation' (Duhm) or the testimony of 'the unseemly piety of a late period' (Fohrer)..."

"While one cannot go as far as Delitzsch in saying that 'to be ruled by the people of God, is in the mind of the prophet the good fortune of the nations, and to allow themselves to be governed by that people in their liberty,' one must at least agree with him that it was not possible for the **Old Testament** hope to be identical with that of the **New Testament**, if only 'because for the time and the outlook of the **Old Testament** the church could not be manifested in any other form than that of a nation.' Nevertheless the scribe [late editor] envisages the possibility of others joining the Jewish nation and faith, so that his purpose is perhaps well described by saying that he regards the time of the judgment of the world as also a time of decision [that is a time for deciding to become proselytes]." (Pp. 26-27)

We say, Why not let the passage say what it says, and not attempt to water it down, to make it mean something acceptable to the Christian faith? Why not admit that there is much in the prophetic messages of the **Old Testament** that is contrary to the Christian faith? Making proselytes into servants / slaves is not a very inviting prospect for the proselytes!



and you will take up this proverb / parable / satire<sup>19</sup> concerning the King of Babylon,<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup>The Hebrew word is מִשְׁלַּל, *mashal*, which means "proverb" or "parable." Slotki states that it also means "satire, a satirical song." ((P. 67)

Motyer states that "'Taunt' does not convey the sense here. This is not an exercise in jeering or mocking. The word *mashal* is the general Hebrew word for 'proverb' or 'parable,' a saying or a way of putting something whereby the inner truth comes to light." (P. 142)

Watts disagrees, holding that the noun can "also be used for the ironic or taunting comparison of a taunting song," and he uses this word "taunt" throughout his commentary on **chapter 14**. (P. 203)

We emphasize that the proverb or parable or satire that follows is not to be taken literally, as if it is reporting on actual happenings in the nether-world, or telling us that ghosts can speak, or that human-beings can build thrones above the stars, or that archangels have fallen from heaven! No, the language that follows is "mythological" in nature--it speaks in symbolical, parabolical, satirical language. If we take this chapter literally, as if it were a picture of literal, historical events, we will never understand its meaning!

Alexander agrees, stating that "[משל, proverb, parable, satire] may have a special reference to the bold poetical fiction [yes, that is Alexander's words!] following. If so, it may warn us not to draw inferences from the passage with regard to the unseen world or the state of departed spirits...

"Calvin's description of the opening sentence as sarcastic, has led others to describe the whole passage as a *satire*, which is scarcely consistent with its peculiar merit as a song of triumph...

"The king introduced is an ideal personage, whose downfall represents that of the Babylonian monarchy." (Pp. 288-89)

But why call the king "an ideal personage"? The King of Babylon was not an "ideal"--he was a real live person!

<sup>20</sup>Babylon (in Hebrew, בָּבֶל, *babhel*) is taken from Assyrian, in which it meant "Gate of God." It was the ancient capital city of Babylonia, located on the banks of the Euphrates River, some 50 miles south of modern Baghdad. It was the capital city of Hammurabi (about 1750 B.C.E.), during the first Babylonian Empire; then, following the rise and expansion of Assyria, it once again became the capital city of the "New Babylonia," especially under the reigns of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar (605-562 B.C.E.). During the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem (eighth century B.C.E.), it was the capital city of Merodach-Baladan, at the same time that it was subject to Assyrian rule.

(continued...)

---

<sup>20</sup>(...continued)

It seems to many from the study of **Isaiah 13-14** that the Babylon named here is the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, who overwhelmed Judah in the sixth century B.C.E., destroying the temple in Jerusalem, and carrying a majority of Judah's leaders into captivity. In addition to being a powerful commander-in-chief of the Babylonian military, Nebuchadnezzar was a great builder, who fortified and embellished his capital city of Babylon, with its great temple of Marduk, named Esagila, and the "hanging-gardens" of Babylon.

However, the name of the King of Babylon is not given, and the reference could be to either Merodach-Baladan, or Nebuchadnezzar, or some other ancient tyrant in Mesopotamia. The fact is that in ancient writings, many rulers claimed to be the "King of Babylon," including Tiglath-Pileser, Sargon, and Sennacherib, even though in fact they were Assyrians--simply because of the fame of the City of Babylon, and its traditional power.

Watts states that "The King of Babylon here is the wily, stubborn, and arrogant Merodach-Baladan, who was still a thorn in Assyria's side in 703 B.C.E. when he sent his delegation to Hezekiah (**chapter 39**). In the setting of this scene, however, he has just taken Babylon and stands at the height of his prestige and power. **Verses 3-4** look beyond his fall to a time when his prowess will be well on the way to oblivion in the ruins of his city, but when Yahweh's rest for His people will have only begun." (P. 204)

"Marduk-apla-iddina II (cuneiform spelling; in the **Bible** Merodach-Baladan, also called Marduk-Baladan, Baladan and Berodach-Baladan, literally, Marduk has given me an heir) was a Chaldean prince who usurped the Babylonian throne in 721 B.C.E. and reigned in 722 B.C.E.--710 B.C.E., and 703 B.C.E.--702 B.C.E.

"Marduk-apla iddina II was known as one of the kings who maintained Babylonian independence in the face of Assyrian military supremacy for more than a decade. Sargon of Assyria repressed the allies of Marduk-apla-iddina II in Elam, Aram and Israel and eventually drove (ca. 710 B.C.E.) him from Babylon. After the death of Sargon, Marduk-apla-iddina II briefly recaptured the throne from a native Babylonian nobleman. He reigned nine months (703 B.C.E. – 702 BC). He returned from Elam and ignited rebellion in Babylonia. He was able to enter Babylon and be declared king again. Nine months later he was defeated near Kish by the Assyrians, but managed to flee to Elam. He died in exile a couple of years later." (**Wikipedia**, 7/29/2016)

Along this line, we are reminded of how the recent modern ruler of Iraq (where ancient Babylonia was located), Saddam Hussein, made grandiose claims for himself, claiming to be the lineal descendant of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, and did everything in his power to incite the Arab world against the tiny nation of Israel to its west. Saddam Hussein, by his own choice, became in every sense of the word a "tyrant"--a harsh, oppressive ruler, who murdered his own people, and who cared little for human life--willing to enter into a hopeless war, committing national suicide rather than admit

(continued...)

and you will say:<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>(...continued)

his mistakes and turn back from his aggressive taking over of Kuwait, his weaker neighbor to the south.

This is not by any means a claim that **Isaiah 13-14** is written concerning Saddam Hussein. But it is to claim that this "proverb, parable, satire," had a striking application to this modern "King of Babylon," who made the ancient King of Babylon his prototype!

<sup>21</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: "*That thou shalt raise this song over the king of Babylon and say, How hath the oppressor ceased, the golden (city) ceased!*" (P. 288) He adds that "The king here introduced is an ideal personage, whose downfall represents that of the Babylonian monarchy." (P. 289)

Slotki's translation of the second line of **verse 4** is "The exactress of gold ceased!" He comments that "The Hebrew **מְדַבְּחָה**, **madhebhah** is of uncertain meaning. The [Aramaic] Targum connected it with *dehabh*, the Aramaic equivalent of *zahabh*, 'gold.' Hence most Jewish commentators have explained it as 'the golden city,' either on account of Babylon's wealth or in allusion to Nebuchadnezzar of whom it was said, 'You are the head of gold (**Daniel 2:20**). But the use of such an Aramaism here is doubtful..."

"Modern scholars agree in changing **ד**, *daleth* to **ר** *resh* and understand the word as 'the insolent (city).' It is noteworthy that Rashi also defines the meaning as 'pride.'" (Pp. 67-68)

Watts states that "The best rendering is to read **מְדַבְּחָה**, a hiphil feminine participle 'arrogance,' while the implication of oppressive tax-gathering is likely." (P. 201)

Translation of this last line of **verse 4** vary, from "the golden city ceased!" to "How is oppression ended!" to "How his insolence has ceased!" to "How his fury is ended!" to "How did his arrogance end?" to *καὶ ἀναπέπαυται ὁ ἐπισπουδαστής*, "and the taskmaster rested."

Gray entitles **14:4b-21** "The Fall of the Tyrant." He comments that "The poem expresses the exultation over the fall of a Tyrant who had treated the peoples of the world with unsparing and unremitting severity. In the first strophe the world-wide terror, which his career had inspired, and the world-wide relief and joy at his fall, are effectively contrasted..."

"The second strophe illustrates in another way the supreme position of the Tyrant in the world of his time. His entrance to Sheol is depicted: he is greeted by all

(continued...)

---

<sup>21</sup>(...continued)

the kings of the earth, who are amazed that one who had been so much greater and more powerful than they, is now weak as one of themselves...

“In the third strophe the overweening pride and ambition of the Tyrant is pictured. Not content with conquering earth, he would have conquered heaven and dethroned the supreme God and King; actually he attains to the lowest depths of Sheol. Such is the fate of his spirit...

“The fourth strophe dwells on the fate of his dead body. It receives no royal burial in the mausoleum which he had built for himself, but lies unburied, one of a heap of carcasses on the battlefield where he fell...

“The final lines, or strophe (**verses 20b-21**) are more miscellaneous. First, they find reason for the Tyrant’s fate in the fact that he had ruined his own land and people as well as others, and then assert that he and his race shall pass out of memory. And finally they call for the slaughter of his children, so that no future member of his line may repeat his career...

“How far does this poem depict the actual career of a single definite historical individual? How much of it was determined by certain definite events, how much by the imagination of the poet? Of course the speeches of the cedars in **verse 8**, of the shades [ghosts] in **verse 10**, of the Tyrant himself in **verses 13-14**, and of the people on the battlefield after the battle, **verse 16**, all of which betray a keen dramatic sympathy and power of expression, are due to the poet’s imagination. But how much more?...

“Had the Tyrant actually fallen when the poem was written? Or does the poet merely throw himself forward in imagination to the day and the scene which he feels would be the fitting conclusion to the career of the cruel and arrogant conqueror under whose government he has lived and suffered?

“If **verse 19** be imaginative prophecy, then it is simplest to see in the entire poem a paean over Assyria, or Babylon, personified [or the whole body of Assyrian and Babylonian kings personified]. So it is of the character and achievements of a people rather than of a single definite monarch that Ezekiel thinks, even when he uses the term ‘king of Tyre,’ ‘king of Egypt,’ in prophecies that have several points of contact with this poem. See **Ezekiel 28-32**...

“But if **verse 19** refers to an actual historical event, it refers to details of which nothing is otherwise known, whether the king in question be Sennacherib, Nebudhadnezar...or Nabonidus.” (Pp. 250-51)

(continued...)

---

<sup>21</sup>(...continued)

Kaiser entitles **verses 4b-21** "How you are Fallen from Heaven, Shining Star..." He comments that "This taunt, in the form of a lament, upon the death of a world ruler and the fall of his empire, is one of the most powerful poems not only of the **Old Testament**, but of the whole literature of the world. It is meant to refer in its present context to the end of the king of Babylon...But since the poem itself mentions neither the name of the ruler or of his country, there is no guarantee that the interpretation by the redactor [the one combining multiple sources together into one document] is in accordance with the intentions of the poet. Thus it is not surprising that critical **Old Testament** scholarship in the last two centuries has proposed many different interpretations...

"There have been attempts to understand the song as a poem which was in fact composed after the death of one of the rulers of the ancient Near East who are known to us...But this interpretation borders on another, which has largely been preferred to it, that in his song the poet is expressing the certain hope of the end of a hated ruler. In this case it is impossible to decide whether the emperor intended is an Assyrian, Babylonian or Persian king, or even Alexander the Great, since there are no criteria to be found within the poem for its dating...

"Finally, we must consider whether he may not have been anticipating the moment in which God was to bring about the end of the final world ruler in the long chain of empires which had destroyed each other and yet remained essentially the same...

"But perhaps the poet's understanding of the poem was the same as that of the redactor's. Since the king of Babylon played so fateful a role in the history of the kingdom of Judah, which survived the fall of his kingdom, it is easy to understand why in post-exilic Judaism it was he who became the symbol of the power hostile to God...

"Thinking back to the fall of the Assyrian and particularly of the Babylonian kingdom, people came to realize the transitoriness of every world power and every tyrant, to the last of whom the true lord of the world would deliver the final blow...A glance at **Ezekiel 28:12ff.** [song concerning the prince of Tyre] shows how Judaism itself could take up Canaanite myth and make use of it in its own theology of history. In addition, the mythical allusions in **Isaiah 14:12ff.** were also enough to show contemporaries that the tyrant had offended against the Deity of the highest God and was the cause of his own fall...

"In view of these considerations, the balance is in favor of regarding this poem as composed in the post-exilic period, well after the events of the sixth century...

"In **verse 8b** we hear the rejoicing of the cedars of Lebanon, which delight in the end of him who felled them; in **verse 10b** we perceive the astonishment and at the same time the malicious pleasure in the question of the kings in the abode of the

(continued...)

---

<sup>21</sup>(...continued)

shades ['ghosts']; he who was once beyond compare has now shared their fate and suffered death. In **verses 16b-17, 18b** we hear the equally astonished but already answered question of those who discover the body of the tyrant in the slaughterer's yard. The death of a just and wise king may be lamented, but the tyrant's end elicits nothing but rejoicing and malicious pleasure on earth and in the underworld...

This basic feeling explains the transformation of the themes of the funeral song into its opposite: the lament for the dead emphasizes the incomparability of the dead person in order to arouse sorrow at his loss and to placate his shade; but this song does so only in order to celebrate the liberation that has come with his death. Nothing is left of him but an insubstantial shade cast down into the lowest depths of the underworld...

"The conciliatory and comforting theme of the king's honorable burial among his fathers, the assurance of a good name and of a life continued in his children, is pitilessly transformed into the opposite in **verses 18-20a** and **20b-21**...

"Whereas in the first stanza, extending from **verse 4b** to **verse 8**, we are on the earth, which together with its trees celebrates its liberation, the second stanza in **verses 9-11** carries us down to the shades [ghosts] of the underworld. The third stanza, **verses 12-15**, reflects in the language of myth, the disastrous failure of the attempts to climb up into the highest heaven, an attempt which has ended in the uttermost depths of the underworld. Then, in the fourth stanza, **verses 16-19a**, we are once again on earth among the onlookers at the slaughterer's yard gazing at the disgraced body...

"The final stanza, consisting of **verses 19b, 20-21**, keeps in the first instance to the theme of the lack of burial in a tomb, in order to assert the complete comfortlessness and utter ruin of the tyrant. Then, in the demand for the slaughter of his sons, it once again comes to a climax, and with it reaches the end of the poem...

"The prophet is inspired by a firm certainty that the man of self-confidence and *hybris* [the Greek word for extreme or foolish pride], who arrogantly and in contempt for other men reaches out for the rule over the world which is reserved for God alone, will suddenly fall victim to the judgment of God and bring down his empire and his progeny into the depths." (Pp. 32-33)

Kaiser adds the warning, "perhaps one does not need to be a king or a tyrant to heed a warning against arrogantly over-vaunting himself." (P. 33)

Oswalt entitles **14:4b-21** "The song." He comments that "There is general agreement that this is one of the finest of Hebrew poems. It manifests a balance of terms, a forcefulness, and a power of imagery that is typical of the best of Hebrew poetry. The total impact is unforgettable. It is divided into four stanzas of almost equal length, each one describing a different scene...

(continued...)

<sup>21</sup>(...continued)

“The first (**verses 4b-8**) depicts the relief which pervades the earth with the tyrant gone...

“The second (**verses 9-11**) tells of the astonishment in Sheol when the dead discover that even this man is mortal...

“The third stanza (**verses 12-15**) moves from Sheol to heaven, showing that the tyrant’s ignominy [public shame, disgrace] is the more devastating because he pretended to be so much...

“Finally, **verses 16-21** return to the earth and tell of the final disgrace to overbearing pride: the denial of a decent burial and the destruction of his descendants.

“Part of the power of the poem lies in its careful mockery of the lament form... This song for the dead is a song of joy, not grief. How terrible this man was! How wonderful that he has been hurled out of heaven! Here in fact the singer welcomes death as a blessing...

“At the same time, such intense pleasure over destruction of one’s enemy raises questions for a Christian. Is there any sense in which we can participate in such rejoicing? (Compare **Matthew 5:43-48**. And see footnote 15)...

“First, it must be said that an evil principle is involved here more than a specific person. It is true that the fall and destruction of any individual is no cause for joy. Even the death of a Hitler is a loss to God. At the same time, there is no sense in which Christians are called upon to stand quietly by when the forces of evil are dealt a telling blow by the hand of God (**Revelation 19:1-8**). Wherever evil is weakened and righteousness triumphs, there is cause for joy.” (Pp. 315-16)

Kaiser entitles **14:4b-8** “The rejoicing of the earth at the death of the tyrant.”

He comments that “in the style of a lament for the dead, the song begins with an אָהֵ, ‘Ah, how...’ (**verse 4b**). If the continuation is compared with the lament for Saul and Jonathan (**2 Samuel 1:19, 25 and 27**) the parodying [imitation with deliberate exaggeration] of the form is obvious at once.” (Pp. 33-34)

<sup>22</sup>Oswalt comments that this mention of the tyrant’s “oppressive” nature “accords very well with the claims of the Assyrian kings. In their annals they report at great length the violence and the unwavering nature of their assaults upon their neighbors. If we accept their word, they mastered the technique of ruling through terror. The blows which would come upon anyone who dared to dissent from Assyrian domination were so massive and so total that nation after nation were cowed into submission...

(continued...)

ceased the raging!

14:5<sup>23</sup> שִׁבַּר יְהוָה מַטֵּה רָשָׁעִים

שֵׁבֶט מַשְׁלֵיִם:

YHWH has broken the rod of wicked (task-masters),  
the (royal) scepter of rulers!<sup>24</sup>

14:6<sup>25</sup> מִכָּה עַמִּים בְּעֵבְרָה

---

<sup>22</sup>(...continued)

“Nevertheless, Isaiah is able to believe in a God Who is larger than the gigantic world monarchs, Who is able to break their scepters, symbols of their power, like matchsticks. The audacity of such faith is still almost breathtaking. Yet that is precisely the burden of Isaiah’s preaching: the God of tiny Judah is God of all the universe and before His bar [of judgment] all human pretension must bow.” (Pp. 316-17)

Do you agree with Oswalt? We do! Let us ask, Do we have an “audacious (bold, daring) faith”? Or is our faith timid, afraid of taking a risk?

<sup>23</sup>Alexander comments on / translates **verse 5**: “This verse contains the answer to the question in the one before it. *Jehovah hath broken the staff of the wicked, the rod of, the rulers...*The rod and staff are common figures for dominion, and their being broken for its destruction.” (P. 289)

<sup>24</sup>Centuries before it comes to pass (if **Isaiah 13-14** was written in the eighth century B.C.E.), or during the very time of captivity and oppression, as it rages (if written during the Babylonian captivity in the sixth century B.C.E.), the people of YHWH God can sing this "proverb / parable / satire" concerning the tyrants, proclaiming his / their fall, cessation--on the basis of their faith in God!

YHWH, the Divine Warrior, the Lord of History, will not allow such oppressors to continue on their mad, oppressive way! No matter how powerful their rod and scepter may seem, they have been and will be broken by YHWH!

Do you think such a song was sung by the Kuwaitis following the fall of Saddam Hussein? What about by the surviving inmates of Auschwitz and Buchenwald upon the death of Adolph Hitler, or the survivors of the Gulag Archipelago when Stalin died?

But what about earlier, while they were still in power? Could those with bold, audacious faith sing such a song even before their death?

<sup>25</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “*Smiting nations in anger by a stroke without cessation—ruling nations in wrath by a rule without restraint—literally,*

(continued...)



מַכָּת בְּלִתֵּי סָרָה  
 רָרָה בְּאַף גּוֹיִם  
 מְרַדֵּף בְּלִי חֲשָׁדָי:

One who attacks people with wrath,  
 attack without pause;  
 one who rules nations with anger--  
 persecution without restraint.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup>(...continued)

which *he* (or *one* indefinitely) *did not restrain*. The participles may agree grammatically either with the rod or with the king who wields it...

“The great majority both of the oldest and the latest writers make the whole [verse] descriptive of the Babylonian tyranny...[However,] Coceius...applies this to the tyranny of the Antichrist...and [refers ] to the persecution of true Christianity on the false pretense of heresy, schism, or apostasy. By the side of this may be placed Abarbenel’s [Isaac ben Judah Abravanel (1437–1508) interpretation of the whole verse as relating to God Himself.” (Pp. 289-90)

<sup>26</sup>Kaiser comments that “Nothing more glorious can be said of the dead king in this panegyric [eulogy] lament than that he exercised a merciless rule of violence and terror over the nations.” (P. 34) Compare **Jeremiah 50:23**,

How he was cut down and was broken--  
 (the) forge-hammer of all the earth / land!  
 How it became for a waste / horror--  
 Babylon among the nations!

We read this descriptive language in **Isaiah 14** concerning the ancient King of Babylon, and think of how history has repeated itself. Saddam Hussein attacked and annexed the tiny neighboring country of Kuwait, in a fashion similar to that of Hitler, in his attacking and occupation of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Saddam Hussein was responsible for the murder, rape, and pillaging of the innocent civilians of Kuwait. He ruled his own nation with harshness, using poison gas to murder Kurds, and led his nation into an eight-year long war with its neighbor to the east, Iran. Hundreds of thousands died in the ruthless quest of this modern King of Babylon for power. He shot his SCUD missiles into civilian population centers of Israel--Tel Aviv and Haifa. Truly, Saddam Hussein was a worthy descendant of the tyrannical rulers of ancient Babylon!

14:7<sup>27</sup> נָחָה

שָׁקֵטָה כָּל-הָאָרֶץ

פָּצְחוּ רִנָּה:

It was at rest;<sup>28</sup>

it became quiet, all the land / earth--<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>27</sup>Kaiser comments on **verses 7-8** that because of the dead king's merciless rule of violence and terror, "there is no lamentation after his death: the whole earth has at last found rest and is no longer devastated by the tyrant's campaign. Even nature joins in the chorus of joy. The poet portrays the Syrian juniper tree, similar to the cypress, and the proverbial cedars of Lebanon breaking into song. Their arch enemy who demanded their wood is dead! Behind this statement by the trees of Lebanon in the poem there lies the long history of the exploitation of the forests of Lebanon by the rulers of Syria at that period [i.e., late post-exilic times]." (P. 34) We say by the rulers of Assyria and Babylon during their long reigns of terror.

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: "*At rest, quiet, is the whole earth. They burst forth into singing (or a shout of joy)...The land had rest* is a phrase employed in the **Book of Judges** (e.g. **5:31 [3:11, 30; 8:28]**) to describe the condition of the country after a great national deliverance...The verb to *burst* is peculiarly descriptive of an ebullition [sudden outburst] of joy long suppressed or suddenly succeeding grief." (P. 290)

Oswalt observes that "The idea of singing in view of deliverance is a special feature of the **Book of Isaiah** (this phrase, פָּצְחוּ רִנָּה, 'to break into singing,' occurs only in **Isaiah**: here and in **44:23** and **49:13**). Many commentators have pointed out the occurrences [of singing in view of deliverance] which appear in the second part of the book (**44:23; 49:13; 54:1; 55:1**), but the concept also appears in the first part, as here, and in **chapters 24-26**, where the fierce song of the drunken conquerors is replaced by the jubilant song of the redeemed (**24:9, 14, 16; 25:5; 26:1, 19**). In place of the wailing of mourners for this death (**2 Samuel 1:24**), there is a spontaneous outburst of laughter and joy." (P. 317)

<sup>28</sup>The verb here is נָחָה, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person feminine singular qal of the verb נָחַ, "to rest," meaning "it (the earth) rested." A world at rest is a world that is a מְנוּחָה, a "place of rest."

<sup>29</sup>In a world at rest, a world that is a "place of rest," there is quiet. The noise of war—of violence, of screaming anguish, of cries of lament—is silenced. And where there is rest and quiet, there is the possibility for security.

(continued...)

they broke forth (with) a ringing cry.<sup>30</sup>

14:8<sup>31</sup> גַּם־בְּרוֹזִימִים שִׁמְחוּ לְךָ

---

<sup>29</sup>(...continued)

Isn't that what you want? And isn't that what YHWH wants for His people?

<sup>30</sup>Now the sounds that break the silence are the songs of joy, uttered over the fall of the tyrant king.

<sup>31</sup>Watts entitles **verses 8-21** "Taunt over a Fallen Tyrant."

He comments that "The מִשָּׁל, or taunt, proper [**Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines the noun as 'proverb' or 'parable'; the Greek translation (Rahlfs) is θρηνησιον, 'lament'], is found in **verses 8-20a**. It is a common style and content which could have been sung by any of Israel's neighbors about any aspiring world-conqueror...The taunt is also characterized by its direct address to the fallen and disgraced tyrant...

"The taunt ridicules the pretensions of Divine status and power which the tyrant affected with the bitter reality of his overthrow and assassination (**verses 11-15**). His ambitions are compared to the Gods (**verses 13-14a**). His end is compared favorably with that of kings (**verses 18-19a**). His abandoned corpse is likened to those which all-too-often are simply 'thrown away' (**verse 19b**). The frame of the poem contrasts his condition in life with in death [notice the element of 'comparison,' which is found in many forms of the מִשָּׁל]...

"The poem consists of four parts: **Verses 8-10**, the response of the trees and the kings in Sheol; **verses 11-14**, 'How you have fallen!'; **verses 16-17**, thought of onlookers; and **verses 18-20a**, a contrast to the usual royal funeral." (P. 208)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 8**: "Not only the earth and its inhabitants take part in this triumphant song or shout, but the trees of the forest. *Also (or even) the cypresses rejoice with respect to thee—the cedars of Lebanon (saying) now that thou art fallen (literally lain down), the feller (or woodman, literally the cutter) shall not come up against us. Now that we are safe from thee, we fear no other enemy...*

"As to the meaning of the figures in this verse, there are three distinct opinions. The first is, that the trees are emblems of kings and other great men..The second opinion is, that the trees, as such, are introduced rejoicing that they shall no more be cut down to open roads, or to supply materials for barricades or forts, or for luxurious buildings...The third opinion...is the one proposed by Calvin, who supposes this to be merely a part of one great picture, representing universal nature as rejoicing...

(continued...)

אַרְזֵי לְבָנוֹן

מֵאֵז שִׁכְבָּתָּ

לֹא-יַעֲלֶה הַכְּרַת עֲלֵינוּ:

Even cypress trees<sup>32</sup> rejoiced at you,  
cedars of Lebanon--[saying:]

Since you lay down (dead),  
he does not come up--the one cutting us down!<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>(...continued)

“Both here and elsewhere in the **[Bible]** inanimate nature is personified, and speaks herself, instead of being merely spoken of...The trees are not to be considered as historically stating what has happened or not happened since a certain time, but as expressing, at the very moment of the tyrant’s downfall, or at least soon after it, a confident assurance of their future safety.” (Pp. 290-91)

Watts comments on **verse 8** that “Mesopotamian kings regularly took working parties to the forests of *Lebanon* to cut timber to build their palaces and public buildings. Such timber is unavailable in Mesopotamia as in Palestine...The fall or weakening of a monarch or empire brought welcome respite to Lebanon’s forests.” (P. 208)

Oswalt comments that “Not only humanity will share in the song of deliverance but all of nature as well, for the Near Eastern tyrants boasted of their dominion not only over humanity but over nature, too. In each case evidence of dominion was the capacity to destroy. So the kings boasted of how many lions they had killed or how they had laid waste the trees...

“This kind of dominion, so different from that envisioned in the **Bible (Genesis 2:15; Deuteronomy 20:19)**, has resulted in the near total decimation of the great forests which once covered much of the Lebanon mountains and parts of northern Mesopotamia. So nature, no less than humanity, will breathe a sigh of relief upon the great king’s death.” (Pp. 317-18)

<sup>32</sup>Slotki suggests the translation “fir trees.” (P. 68)

<sup>33</sup>We will not do well to interpret these words literally, as if the **Bible** teaches that cypress trees and cedars of Lebanon are able to rejoice and sing, uttering such words.

No, this is "proverbial," "parabolic" language—remember the Hebrew word מִשָּׁל, **mashal**. When the Babylonians (or other conquerors) attacked their victims in and around Palestine, they commonly came to the forests of Lebanon, to cut down the great

(continued...)

<sup>33</sup>(...continued)

trees growing there, to be used in the building of offensive mounds and siege-towers for attacking walled cities, as well as for building ships for their navies--and beyond that, for the making of fine furniture for their palaces in Mesopotamia, where there was no such timber. Here, Isaiah says, in parabolic language, the trees of Lebanon rejoice and sing, since the proud tyrant who had come to cut them down was at an end--he was dead, and could no longer inflict damage upon them!

Slotki comments that “The cutting of the trees of Lebanon is known to have been among the exploits of the kings of Assyria (compare **Habakkuk 2:17**); and though there is no specific record that Nebuchadnezzar has acted similarly, his inscriptions found in Lebanon confirm the implication of the text.” (P. 68)

<sup>34</sup>Motyer comments on **verses 9-15**: “This poem is an imaginative visit to Sheol. Though neither an architect’s drawing of the world-to-come nor a sociologist’s report, a poem can be expected to draw out principles and focus issues. In this way it expresses some central **Old Testament** truths about the dead...

First, the dead are alive—in Sheol. In the **Bible**, ‘death’ is never ‘termination’ but a change of place and of state with continuity of personal identity. Sheol is the ‘place’ where all the dead live (see **Job 3:11-19; Psalm 49:9**).

Secondly, in Sheol there is personal continuity and mutual recognition; the king is recognized as he arrives (**verse 10**). Those already there rise from their thrones, not because there are thrones in Sheol but to show that they are the same people as they were on earth...Thirdly, Sheol is a place of weakness with loss, not enhancement, of earthly powers. The dead are ‘shades’ or ‘shadowy ones’...In **verse 11** Sheol is related to the grave and the decomposing corpse...

“The **Old Testament** awaits Jesus and the illumination of immortality (**2 Timothy 1:10**) to fulfil its hints of the resurrection of the body. Yet in this as in all else, the **Old Testament** establishes truth, not error; the dead live on, personality continues with mutual recognition. The dead, as incomplete personalities waiting fulness, can neither help nor hurt the living—a perfect answer to spiritism.” (Pp. 143-44)

And so, even though claiming the poem is “imaginative” [showing creativity or inventiveness], Motyer claims that he can deduce truths from its depiction of Sheol, the “nether world.” And though the depiction has former kings sitting on thrones in the nether world, he states that we know that is not so—but the text only means that they are still alive and recognize one another—that is the truth which we should draw from the text.

Such interpretation enables Motyer to make an imaginative story become the basis for absolute truth—a very slippery slope! We are reminded of those who

(continued...)

---

<sup>34</sup>(...continued)

understand the parables of Jesus to be teaching economic truths concerning the payment of wages (i.e., it is right to pay a person who has worked only one hour the same as the person is paid who has worked all day long), etc. We say, imaginative stories, such as this one in **Isaiah 14**, and the parables of Jesus as well, must be understood in terms of what their author intended to teach by them, not as sources of absolute truth concerning other subjects than the intended one.

Isaiah's intention is clearly to depict the terrifying, hopeless condition that confronts the earthly tyrant upon his death—not to depict absolute truths concerning the after-life, i.e., activities in Sheol! What do you think?

Slotki comments on **verses 9-11** that they depict “The scene in the nether-world where Babylon's former victims meet [Babylon's deceased] king with derision.” (P. 68)

In these verses, the "parable / proverb / satire / taunt-song" moves from earth, where God's people and nature lift their voices in song, to the underworld, where the inhabitants join in the song being sung to the King of Babylon.

Oswalt comments on **verses 9-11** that “With a sure feel for contrast, the author moves the scene from the earth to the underworld, showing that the same event which brought peace and quiet to the world has brought agitation to the realm of the dead. The source of the agitation is the discovery on the part of the dead that the terrible king who had dispatched so many of them to death is in fact no different than they. Although his glory had made him seem almost immortal, he too must bow to corruption and decay.” (P. 318)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 9**: “The bold personification is now extended to the invisible or lower world, the inhabitants of which are represented as aroused at the approach of the new victim and as coming forth to meet him. *Hell from beneath is moved (or in commotion) for thee (i.e. on account of thee) to meet thee (at thy coming; it rouses for thee the giants (the gigantic shades [ghosts] or specters), all the chief ones (literally, he-goats) of the earth; it raises from their thrones all the kings of the nations.* Sheol [שְׁאוֹל] means] first a *grave* or individual sepulchre, and then *the grave* as a general receptacle, indiscriminately occupied by all the dead without respect to character, as when we say, the rich and the poor, the evil and the good, lie together in *the grave*, not in a single tomb, which would be false, but under ground and in a common state of death and burial...

“The English word *hell*, though now appropriated to the condition or the place of future torments, corresponds in etymology and early usage, to the Hebrew word in question [שְׁאוֹל, **she'ol**].” (P. 291)

What do you think? Do you believe the **Bible** teaches that there is a “hell”?

(continued...)

לְקַרְאֵת בּוֹאֵד  
 עוֹרֵר לְךָ רִפְאִים  
 כָּל-עֲתוּדֵי אֶרֶץ  
 הַקִּיִּם מִכִּסְאוֹתָם  
 כָּל מַלְכֵי גוֹיִם:

*Sheol* / the underworld / grave<sup>35</sup>, <sup>1</sup>, <sup>2</sup> below was excited over you,

<sup>34</sup>(...continued)

Readers of the **King James Bible** certainly do, but those who read Hebrew and Greek realize how the word “hell” is a mistranslation. See our end-notes 1 and 2.

Gray entitles **verses 9-11** “The Tyrants reception in Sheol [שְׂאוֹל / ᾗδης, Grave / Underworld]”

He comments that “This strophe depicts the excitement and emotions of the inhabitants of Sheol at the descent into their midst of a monarch whose fame had reported him so great that he seemed likely to escape the common lot that had befallen even monarchs before him. These kings of earlier days, according to a prevalent belief that the distinctions of life were in some degree perpetuated in Sheol (compare e.g. **Ezekiel 32:21-23; 1 Samuel 28:15**), sit each on his throne. They respectfully rise to greet the new-comer and address him with words that reflect at once their sense of his greatness and a certain satisfaction that he is now made weak as they [have].” (Pp. 253-54)

<sup>35</sup>The “grave / underworld” is a translation of the one Hebrew word שְׂאוֹל, *she)ol*, which is translated ὁ ᾗδης, “*the hades* by **Rahlfs**. The Hebrew noun means simply “grave” or “underworld,” and the Greek noun means the same thing--the underworld, as the place of the dead; the words are both used simply as synonyms for “the grave.”

Greek mythology went to great lengths to “populate Hades,” and to give its readers a full knowledge concerning Hades--later Christian writers took up Greek mythological descriptions of Hades and clothed them in religious language--especially such writers as Dante and Milton, with their lengthy writings that serve as “tour-guides” to the underworld. But it is, we think, a misuse of such proverbial or parabolical language, as if it is intended to be a geographical description of the underworld! Some biblical literalists still today insist that by taking all the biblical passages such as this, and putting them all together, they can draw a realistic picture of the underworld or of

(continued...)

to greet your coming,  
awakening dead spirits / ghosts<sup>36</sup>, <sup>3</sup> for you,  
all powerful bosses<sup>37</sup> on earth.  
It [*Sheol*] raised from their thrones  
all [who were] kings of nations.<sup>38</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup>(...continued)

hell, much as did Dante and Milton. We think such efforts are misguided, resulting in superstition rather than in valid religion.

Here, the shadowy world of the dead, Sheol /Hades itself, is personified, and described as if it is an individual, able to go to its inhabitants and call them forth from their sleep of death. Throughout the **Bible**, use is made of the ancient mythological descriptions of the underworld, but only in the way it is used here--in "proverbial," "parabolic" ways, not intended to be taken literally. Again, we say, It is a completely mistaken procedure to take passages such as this and, having combined them, use them as literal, "road-maps" to the underworld! We might as well insist that cedar trees have a voice, and can sing, as to insist that the powerless ghosts in the world of the dead are able to be awakened and enter into a chorus!

<sup>36</sup>Slotki's translation has "the shades," and Slotki comments that: "Hebrew **רֵפְאִיִּם**, **rephaiym**, is literally 'the powerless ones,' the thin and shadowy personalities of the dead' (quoting Davidson, a Christian theologian)."

**Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines the plural noun as "shades, ghosts," connected with "sunken, powerless ones," as a name for the dead. See our end-note 3 for an article on "ghosts" in **Wikipedia**.

<sup>37</sup>Slotki notes that the noun here, **עֵתוּדֵי**, construct form of **עֵתוּדִים**, is "literally 'he-goats of,' as leaders of the flock (compare **Jeremiah 50:8**); used figuratively of chieftains (see **Ezekiel 34:17**)." (P. 68)

Watts translates by "bucks," holding that the word "refers to the rams or bucks of the flock...The metaphorical relation of shepherd (the great king) and the heads of the flock (his vassal kings) is appropriate here." (P. 206)

<sup>38</sup>If this language is taken literally, as being a Divine revelation concerning the nature of the underworld, we could take this passage as a proof-text that kings have "thrones" there! But this is not the point of the passage. Such statements are only "proverbial," "parabolaical," "satirical" in nature, and are not intended to be a literal, Divine unveiling concerning the nature of the after-life!



14:10<sup>39</sup> כָּל־מַלְאָכָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלָיו

גַּם־אַתָּה חֲלִיַת כְּמוֹנוּ

אֵלֵינוּ נִמְשַׁלְתָּ:

All of them respond, and they say to you:

Even you--you have become weak like us!

To us, you have been made similar!<sup>40</sup>

14:11<sup>41</sup> הַיּוֹרֵד שְׂאוֹל גְּאוֹנָךְ

---

<sup>39</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 10**: “All of them shall answer and say to thee--thou also art made weak as we--to us art likened!...[It is] a natural expression of surprise that one so far superior to themselves should now be a partaker of their weakness and disgrace.” (Pp. 293-94)

Oswalt states that “The departed kings are pictured as seated on their thrones in Sheol, the underworld. While Sheol is personified here, there is no God or Goddess of the underworld, Who would be a central figure if this poem were written outside the Israelite milieu. Compare ‘The Descent of Ishtar’ in Pritchard’s **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 107-09)...

“When the mighty king appears they rise as though to do homage, which one might expect if this were a normal lament. But instead they mock him by reminding him that in the sight of death all human distinctions are meaningless.” (P. 318)

<sup>40</sup>Kaiser comments: “The kings of the realm of shadows give the newcomer, whose glory and reputation have reached the underworld through those who were killed by him, or about whom they had learnt through the special knowledge they have as dead beings [where is there anything in the text stating that dead beings have ‘special knowledge’?], a welcome which is full of astonishment and yet of malicious pleasure. He whose power surpassed that of all the kings and mighty ones of the earth is now an insubstantial shade like them.” (P. 37)

<sup>41</sup>Motyer comments on **verses 11-15**: “This second Sheol passage contrasts what the king intended and what he achieved.” (P. 144)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**: “Down to the grave is brought thy pride (or pomp)--the music of thy harps--under thee is spread the worm--thy covering is vermin. That שְׂאוֹל is here used in its primary sense of grave, is clear from the second clause.” (P. 294) Yes!

(continued...)

---

<sup>41</sup>(...continued)

Motyer states that “it is not the cemetery that is in view but the home of the departed in the next world [but what does this mean? Obviously, the passage is talking about the grave!]...The grave exposes the frailty, the insubstantiality of our humanity...It is in the light of a verse like this that passages like **2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5** come into their own.” (P. 144) We agree. Paul expresses the basis for his continuing in bold proclamation even in the midst of extreme suffering:

16 So we do not lose heart.  
    Though our outer self is wasting away,  
    our inner self is being renewed day by day.

17 For this light momentary affliction  
    is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory  
    beyond all comparison,

18 as we look not to the things that are seen  
    but to the things that are unseen.  
For the things that are seen are transient,  
    but the things that are unseen are eternal.

5:1 For we know [by faith!] that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed,  
    we have a building from God,  
    a house not made with hands,  
    eternal in the heavens.  
[Where did Paul get this conviction? We say, from reading the Psalms, for just  
one example, **Psalm 23!**]

2 For in this tent we groan,  
    longing to put on our heavenly dwelling,

3 if indeed by putting it on  
    we may not be found naked.

4 For while we are still in this tent,  
    we groan, being burdened--  
not that we would be unclothed,  
    but that we would be further clothed,  
so that what is mortal  
    may be swallowed up by life.  
[Where did this conviction come from? Try **Isaiah 25:6-9!**]

5 He who has prepared us for this very thing is God,  
    who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.  
(What a contrast to this passage is to **Isaiah 13-14!** Do you share in these  
convictions which empowered the life of Paul?)

Kaiser comments on **verse 11** that here the poet “sharply stresses the difference between the former glory and the present loathsome existence of the great lord, and everything, such as music, which once distinguished the way of life, the dwelling and the pleasures of the king, are gone. For him too, the sign over the realm of the dead is Dante’s ‘Abandon hope, all ye who enter here!’ There is a gruesome identification of existence in the grave and in Sheol in the second line: Instead of the king’s magnificent

(continued...)

הַמִּית נְבִלִיךָ  
 תַּחֲתֶיךָ יִצַּע רָמָה  
 וּמִכְסֵיךָ תוֹלְעָה:

Brought down to *sheol* is your exaltation,  
 the music of your guitars!<sup>42</sup>

<sup>41</sup>(...continued)

bed there are maggots and worms, which crawl horribly over the body, as his couch and covering. Whereas other kings sit on their shadowy thrones even in the underworld, the tyrant, cast out without a [monument], lacks even the feeble reflection of his former greatness and glory.” (Pp. 37-38)

Oswalt states that “This verse continues the mockery of the lament by contrasting two radically different pictures of a funeral. In the first we see the royal corpse being carried on its final journey with all the pomp and ceremony which can be mustered to show the power and importance of a person. Somber and elegant music is playing and the corpse is decked out with every kind of finery...

“But suddenly that picture is replaced with another more terrible, but much more realistic one. There is nothing but silence and a rotting corpse covered with worms... So, says Isaiah, human pride is but pretty trappings on a corpse. The worms bring all of us, mighty and helpless alike, to the same level (so Gilgamesh, denying that his mighty friend Enkidu could have died, is forced to the realization by a worm crawling from the corpse’s nostril).” (Pp. 318-19)

<sup>42</sup>Where our Hebrew text has נְבִלִיךָ, “your harps / lutes / guitars,” 1QIs<sup>a</sup> has נְבִלְתֶךָ, “your corpse,” or “your disgrace.”

Slotki’s translation of נְבִלִיךָ has “the noise of thy psalteries,” and he comments that this refers to “The songs, accompanied by music, which [had] lauded his [the king of Babylon’s] triumphs.” (P. 69)

Translations of the phrase vary, from “the noise of thy viols” to “the strains of your lutes!” to “the sound of your harps” to “the noise of your harps” to “the music of your lyres” to no mention at all of music, whether vocal or instrumental, in **Rahlf’s**.

Alexander observes that “The size and shape of the נְבִלִים are of no exegetical importance here, as the word is evidently put for musical instruments or music in general, and this for mirth and revelry.” (P. 294)

(continued...)

Spread beneath you for a bed are (the) maggots,  
and for your coverings<sup>43</sup>, worms!<sup>44</sup>

14:12<sup>45</sup> אֵיךְ נִפְלֵת מִשְׁמַיִם

---

<sup>42</sup>(...continued)

In line with the preceding comments, we must not make of this statement a proof-text that there are musical instruments being used to play music in the grave / underworld!

<sup>43</sup>Where our Hebrew text has the plural מִכְסֵיךָ, “your (singular) coverings,” some Hebrew manuscripts and 1QIs<sup>a</sup> have the singular מִכְסֶיךָ, “your covering.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has the singular, τὸ κατακάλυμμα σου, “the covering of yours.”

<sup>44</sup>Slotki comments that “He who had thought himself an immortal God experiences the fate of an ordinary human.” (P. 69)

Gray comments: “No throne in Sheol for the once proud monarch. Dethroned and disgraced at the last in life he has nothing in death but a bed of maggots and a coverlet of worms.” (P. 255)

In recent memory, the proud modern “King of Babylon,” Saddam Hussein, strutted before his armies, having his soldiers bow to kiss his hand, as he made grandiose claims concerning what he was going to do in the “Mother of Battles.” He may have been surrounded by music, and felt safe in his underground bunker. But “the paths of glory lead but to the grave!” The Divine judgment of death was pronounced upon the proud tyrant, and the grave awaited his hanging, following which, we believe, he joined with all of the former tyrants in their helpless, hopeless condition! It is crude language, and harsh. What awaited this proud human tyrant, just as it did the ancient king of Babylon, was a bed of maggots, with a bed-spread of worms, instead of the beautiful Persian rugs to which he had become accustomed! The Divine sentence had been passed, and there was simply no escape from its verdict!

<sup>45</sup>Oswalt entitles **verses 12-21** “Fallen from heaven, cast out on earth.”

He comments that “In **verses 12-15** the scene shifts from the underworld to heaven and illuminates the pretense of human pride. That pride refuses to brook any rival, even God Himself, insisting that all His prerogatives will be his own...

“Some of the church fathers, linking this passage to **Luke 10:18** and **Revelation 12:8, 9**, took it to refer to the fall of Satan described in those places. However, the great expositors of the Reformation were unanimous in arguing that the context here does not support such an interpretation. This passage is discussing human pride, which, while monumental to be sure, is still human and not angelic. In fact, it is this very characteristic which makes this passage of special interest...

(continued...)

---

<sup>45</sup>(...continued)

“Since the earliest discovery of ancient Near Eastern religious literature this portion of the poem and other sections of the **Bible** have been compared to that literature. In this case, the vigor of this comparison was only increased by the discovery of the numerous verbal similarities with Canaanite myths uncovered at Ugarit. It is interesting that despite this vigorous investigation there is no single mythical story which can be said to be the prototype for **Isaiah 14:12-15**. But it is of greater significance that among the numerous stories of a challenge to the High God, all the challenges are by another God. The remarkable thing about the Isaiah passage is that the challenge is by a human being...

“The prophet seems to be saying that ultimately the battle is between Creator and creatures, and the issue is whether we will accord Him the right due Him as Creator and bow to Him in glad service or will continue to insist that we are as He is and continue to have our arrogance mocked by the worm. As a creature Satan is an apt example of this creaturely pride. Thus, while it cannot be said that these verses refer to him, they do apply to him as they do to all creatures...

“By alluding to the great literature of his day, drawing upon the rich connotations of these stories, Isaiah drives home the point that making God in our image is the great folly of humanity.” (Pp. 320-21)

We say, Isaiah drives home the point that allowing pride to deceive ourselves that we are God is the great folly of humanity. What do you say?

Slotki comments on **verses 12-15**: “The prophet apostrophizes [addresses an exclamatory passage in a poem] the king of Babylon, contrasting his former pride and splendor with his grievous degradation and fall.” (P. 69)

Gray entitles **verses 12-15** “The Tyrant attains, not to the heaven of his ambition, but to the lowest hell.”

Kaiser entitles these verses “The failure of the attempt to climb into heaven.”

He comments that “By the use of an old Canaanite myth, the arrogant intentions of the world ruler are contrasted with his ultimate fall into the underworld.” (P. 38)

He also states that in **verses 12-13** “The mythical archetype as it were comes to life in the fall of the world ruler. His dishonored end forms the sharpest contrast with his plans to conquer the world, or, in mythical terms, his attempt to seize the throne beyond the stars (compare **Life of Adam and Eve 15**) which stands upon the mountain of God, and upon which the destinies of the whole world are decided.” (Pp. 40-41)

Gray comments on **verse 12**, “The Tyrant is half compared, half (for the moment) identified, with the radiant hero of some astral myth. A similar instance of mingled comparison and identification of an earthly power with a mythic figure occurs in

(continued...)

הֵיִלֵּל בֶּן־שַׁחַר  
נִגְדָּעַתָּ לָאָרֶץ  
חֹלֵשׁ עַל־גּוֹיִם:

How you have fallen from the heavens,  
"Shining-One," "Son of the Dawn"!<sup>46</sup>

---

<sup>45</sup>(...continued)

**Ezekiel 28:11-19.** Whence the myth came, whether from Babylon or Phoenicia, and what was its exact form is uncertain." (P. 255)

Alexander translates **verse 12**, "How art thou fallen from heaven, Lucifer, son of the morning--felled to the ground, thou that didst lord it over the nations." (P. 295)

<sup>46</sup>The two Hebrew names given to the King of Babylon are הֵיִלֵּל, *heylal* and בֶּן־שַׁחַר, *ben shachar*, "Shining-One," and "Son of [the] Dawn." Translations of this line vary, from "O Lucifer, son of the morning!" to "O Shining One, son of Dawn!" to "O Day Star, son of Dawn!" to "morning star, son of the dawn!" to "Daystar, son of Dawn" to ὁ ἑωσφόρος ὁ πρῶτὸ ἀνατέλλων, "the morning star, the one rising early."

Alexander states that "Tertullian and other [church 'fathers'], Gregory the Great, and the scholastic commentators, regarding **Luke 10:18** as an explanation of this verse, apply it to the fall of Satan, from which has arisen the popular perversion of the beautiful name *Lucifer* to signify the Devil." (P. 295)

Slotki comments that "The morning-star (*son of the morning*) under the name of Ishtar [Mesopotamian Goddess of fertility] was worshiped by the Babylonians, and Nebuchadnezzar's days of power and glory are well represented by their comparison with the shining star." (P. 69)

Watts states that: "This section seems to be based on another...myth. A suggested summary of the story would be: Helel son of Schachar was a great hero who determined to make himself the equal of a God, El Elyon [God Most High]. His ambition was to raise himself above the clouds, above all the stars of God, to the very mountain in the farthest north where Gods gather--and there to reign as king over the universe, including the Gods. But the conclusion of this ill-advised ambition was his precipitous fall into *sheol*, perhaps after a battle with El Elyon [God Most High] Himself. It is generally thought that this must have come from a culture outside Israel, but as yet no such myth has been found in Canaan or among other peoples. The taunt in **verses 12-15** has 'historicized the motif and poetically related it to the fallen tyrant' (quoting A. Ohler)." (P. 209)

(continued...)

---

<sup>46</sup>(...continued)

Motyer similarly states that “Behind Isaiah’s reference to the *morning star*...lies a Canaanite mythology of the ‘revolt in heaven’ genre...The **Old Testament** uses such allusions without attributing reality to the *dramatis personae* [the characters in the story / myth].” (P. 144)

Those who insist on understanding everything in the **Bible** literally, will have to hold that these two names, "Heylal" and "Ben Shachar" were literal names of the King of Babylon. Others will take the King of Babylon to be a thinly disguised "proverb" that in truth points to the origin of Satan. In fact, this passage has been so understood, and especially on the basis of the **King James Version**, which uses the Latin Vulgate translation as an English word, "Lucifer," which has been understood as a biblical name for the Archangel cast down from heaven to become the Devil. In Latin, "Lucifer" simply means "Light-Bearer," an apt translation of the Hebrew Heylal, "Shining One." **New Revised Standard Version** translates it as "Day Star."

Kaiser states that “The proper name **הַיְלֵל**, translated ‘Shining Star,’ is derived from a Semitic root which means ‘to be (become) pure and bright, to shine.’ The **Greek Bible** translates it ὁ ἑωσφόρος, ‘the bringer of the morning light, morning star’ and with this translation certainly gives the right starting point for a reconstruction of the underlying myth. The morning star had intended to climb high up above the clouds and the highest star in order to set up his throne upon the mountain of the assembly of the Gods in the uttermost north, and so to take away from the highest God, **אֵל עֵלְיוֹן** [God Most High], the rulership of the world. But the attempted usurpation ended lamentably with his fall into the underworld.” (P. 38)

See his pages 38-40 for extended discussion of this proposed myth at Ugarit and in Greek literature. He mentions the similar myth of the primal man in **Ezekiel 28:11ff.**, and states that “The continuing influence of such conceptions is shown by **Matthew 11:23** and **Sibylline Oracles 5:72**. Jewish conceptions of Satan were particularly influenced by them (compare **Enoch 86; Life of Adam and Eve 11ff.; Luke 10:18**, compare also **2 Corinthians 11:14** and **Revelation 20:1ff.**).” (P. 40)

Oswalt states that “*Day Star, Son of the Morning* reflects the likelihood that *helel ben-sachar* refers to the planet Venus, which never reaches the zenith [highest point] before the sun rises and apparently extinguishes it. Helel probably comes from the root meaning ‘bright’ and thus logically applies to the brightest star. In Canaanite mythology the God Athtar, with Whom the Gods attempt to replace Baal at one point, may also be the morning star. In that story, however, Athtar does not seek the position and, upon finding himself unsuited for it, voluntarily leaves it...

“Recent attempts to derive the **Isaiah** account from the Greek myth of Phaeton, in which the central figure loses control of the chariot of the sun and is struck by a thunderbolt of Zeus in order to save the earth from the sun’s fire, suffer from the

(continued...)

You have been cut down to the earth,

(the) one being weak / prostrate over nations!<sup>47</sup>

14:13<sup>48</sup> וְאַתָּה אֲמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבְּךָ

<sup>46</sup>(...continued)

evidence that the Greek myth is derived from the Near Eastern stories rather than being the precursor of them. Once again, the indications are that the prophet was not dependent upon any one story, but used a number of current motifs to fit his own point.” (Pp. 321-22)

<sup>47</sup>Our Hebrew text has חוֹלֵשׁ עַל-גּוֹיִם, “one being weak / prostrate over nations” raises difficulties. Is the king being depicted as really weak, with his body lying prostrate over nations, holding them down, keeping them from being able to move, paralyzing them? The phrase is given varying translations from “which didst weaken the nations” to “O vanquisher of nations” to “you who laid the nations low” to “you who once laid low the nations” to “conqueror of nations” to ὁ ἀποστέλλων πρὸς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, “the one sending forth to all the nations.” Watts has “you plunderer of nations.” Slotki has “That didst cast lots over the nations,” and Slotki says this means “to determine the days on which the respective nations shall render service.” (P. 69)

We see no evidence for Slotki’s translation or understanding, and in fact, see little sense in any of the translations, including our own.

Oswalt comments that the phrase *weak upon the nations* is translated by some as ‘who weakened the nations,’ but “the normal meaning of the verb is intransitive, and the parallel ‘cast down on the earth, weak on the nations’ yields a good sense when appropriately interpreted as in **New English Bible**, ‘sprawling across the nations.’” (P. 322) Do you think this is a “good sense”?

According to this song, like a great tree, he himself has been cut down, and he now lies prostrate “over the nations.” All of this involves “mixed-metaphors”—a fallen star, a felled tree, and a prostrate body. Of course, none of the metaphors—fallen star, felled tree, or prostrate body, are meant literally, but rather, are meant figuratively, symbolically.

The use of a present participle here is worth noting--the King of Babylon is lying weak and prostrate over the nations. Does this mean that in the light of the Divine sentence and judgment, he is already cut down, lying prostrate, dangerously close to the grave? Perhaps—but this is very strange language, and we are uncertain as to its meaning. What do you think?

<sup>48</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 13-14**: “Worldly power was not enough for him [the king of Babylon]. He aspired to be the equal of God.” (P. 69)

(continued...)



הַשָּׁמַיִם אֶעֱלֶה  
מִמַּעַל אֲרִים פְּסָאִי  
וְאֶשֶׁב בְּהַר-מוֹעֵד  
לְכוֹכְבֵי-אֵל בְּיַרְכְּתֵי צָפוֹן:

And you--you said in your heart,<sup>49</sup>  
(Into) the heavens, I will go up!  
Above I will exalt my throne!  
And I will sit on the assembly-mount,<sup>50</sup>  
in the far reaches of the north!<sup>51, 4</sup>

<sup>48</sup>(...continued)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 13**: “His fall is aggravated by the impious extravagance of his pretensions. *And (yet) thou hadst said in thy heart (or to thyself)–the heavens will I mount (or scale)–above the stars of God will I raise my throne–and I will sit in the mount of meeting (or assembly)–in the sides of the north...*”

It is universally agreed that he is here described as aiming at equality with God Himself.” (P. 296)

<sup>49</sup>The remainder of **verses 13** and **14** contain the (internal) words of the King of Babylon, in his proud self-assertiveness--spoken within his heart, i.e., in his self-understanding.

Motyer states that “While **verses 11** and **12** dealt mainly with public facts, the transformation in the status and influence of the king, **verse 13** takes us into his heart, the place of secret ambition.” (P. 145)

<sup>50</sup>Slotki suggests changing from “the mount of meeting” to “the appointed mount.” “The mount is assumed to be that of Zion (compare **Psalms 48:3**), while others identify it with Aralu, the sacred mountain on which, in Babylonian mythology, the chief Gods meet. Nebuchadnezzar’s ambition was to join the assembly of his people’s chief Gods.” (P. 70) See the next footnote.

<sup>51</sup>Alexander comments on the phrase “in the mount of meeting (or assembly)–in the sides of the north.” He says there are two distinct interpretations:

First, the phrase הַר-מוֹעֵד [mount of meeting / assembly] is understood as analogous to אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, [tent of meeting / assembly], “and denotes the mountain

(continued...)

---

<sup>51</sup>(...continued)

where God agreed to meet the people, to commune with them, and to make Himself known to them.” Thus הַר־מוֹעֵד [mount of meeting / assembly] is understood to be “Mount Zion or Mount Moriah,” in Jerusalem.

But those who hold this interpretation “are under the necessity of explaining *sides of the north* [הַר־מוֹעֵד בְּרִפְתֵי צְפוֹן, ‘mount of meeting / assembly in the far reaches / sides of the north] by the assumption that Zion lay upon the north side of Jerusalem.” The notorious fact that Zion was on the south side of the city has caused some to claim that Mount Moriah, which was on the north side of Zion, is meant.

“According to this view...[the passage] describes the king of Babylon as insulting God by threatening to erect his throne upon those consecrated hills [Zion or Moriah].”

Objections to this interpretation include that “although this allusion to the sacred mountains of Jerusalem would be perfectly appropriate if uttered by a Jew, it is wholly misplaced in the mouth of [the king of Babylon].

“[The second interpretation] makes the Babylonian speak the language of [Babylon] with reference to the old and wide-spread oriental notion of a very high mountain in the extreme north, where the Gods were believed to reside, as in the Greek Olympus. This is the Meru of the Hindu mythology, and the Elborz or Elborj of the old Zend books...The meaning...as thus explained is, ‘I will take my seat among or above the Gods upon their holy mountain.’” (Pp. 296-97)

Gray thinks this language concerning the assembly-mountain, in the far reaches of the north, “may have had a connection with the Babylonian conception of the World-Mountain piercing into heaven, where the Gods assembled to determine destinies... Anu, the chief member of the principal Divine triad of the Babylonians, had his throne in heaven, and apparently was particularly localized in the Northern heaven, at the north pole.” (Pp. 256-57)

Motyer likewise states that “Behind the phrase *the mount of assembly* lies the mythological idea that the Gods live on mountains. The *assembly* is the gathered pantheon...Mount Zaphon lay in the north of Palestine and in Canaanite mythology was the seat of the Gods...

“**Psalm 48:2-3** uses the same expression with the implication that if there should be such a place as ‘the apex of Zaphon’ it would be Zion.” (P. 145)

- 2/1 Great (is) YHWH, and exceedingly praised,  
in our God’s city, mountain of His set-apartness!--
- 3/2 beautiful of elevation / height,  
rejoicing / exultation of all the land / earth--

(continued...)

14:14 אֶעֱלֶה עַל-בְּמֹתַי עַב  
אֲדַמָּה לְעֵלְיוֹן:

---

<sup>51</sup>(...continued)

Mount Zion,  
far-reaches of (the) north,  
city of a great King!

See our end-note 4, where it is claimed that the assembly mount in the far reaches of the north is referring to Jebel Aqra, a limestone mountain located on the Syrian–Turkish border near the mouth of the Orontes River on the Mediterranean Sea, a sacred mountain where near-eastern religions have worshiped throughout the centuries..

Oswalt comments that “*the mount of assembly* is here associated, as the parallel shows, with Mount Zaphon or Mount Cassius in north Syria, where the Gods were reputed to meet as did the Greek Gods on Mount Olympus [the highest mountain in Greece; ‘In Greek mythology Olympus was the home of the Twelve Olympian gods of the ancient Greek world. It is the setting of many Greek mythical stories. The Twelve Olympian gods lived in the gorges, where there were also their palaces. Pantheon (today Mytikas) was their meeting place and theater of their stormy discussions. The Throne of Zeus (today Stefani) hosted solely him, the leader of the gods. From there he unleashed his thunderbolts, expressing his godly wrath. The Twelve Olympians were Zeus, Hera, Demeter, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Ares, Hermes, Hephaestus, and the twelfth was either Hestia or Dionysus.” (Wikipedia, 8/2/2016)] Although Zaphon was particularly associated with Baal, the Divine assembly was presided over by El. Thus Isaiah makes the kings of Babylon aspire to the kingship of the Gods.” (P. 322)

For those who insist on understanding the **Bible** in a wooden, literal way, it must be asked, "What is the exact location of this 'Assembly Mount in the far reaches of the north'?" What is obvious from this language is that it is mythological to the core, and is closely related to the mythologies of Mesopotamia, Canaan, and Greece--in all of which the idea of a mountain assembly of the Gods was held in common. Are we to take this as a literal revelation concerning the place where the "Divine council" meets, on a mountain in the north, say Jebel Aqra, or as it is called in Turkey "Mount Kel"? That is certainly not what we moderns would call "the far north," but it was from the standpoint of the ancient Near Easterners.

Contrast this statement of the King of Babylon--instead of the "far reaches of the north," the King of Babylon is headed for the "far reaches of the pit"!

I will go up above (the) high-places of (the) cloud(s)!<sup>52</sup>

I will make myself like the Most High!"<sup>53</sup>

14:15<sup>54</sup> אֶל-שָׁאוֹל תִּנְרָד

---

<sup>52</sup>Oswalt comments that “The speaker is boasting of his intent to reach heights unattainable by anyone but the Highest of all. By contrast, the **Bible** depicts God’s power as manifested in His stepping on the high places of the earth (**Amos 4:13; Micah 1:3**), which prerogative He gladly shares with those who love Him (**Deuteronomy 32:13; 33:29; 2 Samuel 22:34; Psalm 18:33; Isaiah 58:14; Habakkuk 3:19**). The human problem is that we will not accept God’s gifts within the limits imposed by Him. *We wish to be God dispensing the gifts.*” (Pp. 322-23)

<sup>53</sup>Kaiser comments on **verses 14-15** that “This attempt transgresses the limits laid down for both mortal and heavenly beings, for he is trying to take the place reserved for the highest God alone, and is consequently punished by a fall into the deepest and darkest depths of the underworld.” (P. 41)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 14**: “*I will mount above the cloud-heights; I will make myself like the Most High.* This is commonly regarded as a simple expression of unbounded arrogance, but Knobel thinks there may be an allusion to the oriental custom of calling their kings Gods, or to the fact that Syrian and Phoenician kings did actually so describe themselves...’Not satisfied with making himself equal to any of the inferior deities, his ambition led him to aspire after equality with the Supreme God’ [quoting Henderson].” (Pp. 297-98)

We think that what is meant by all of this is to picture the over-bearing pride, the presumption, the insolent arrogance of the King of Babylon. He not only makes himself into a "God"--he thinks himself equal to, or greater than the “Most High God”!

Watts states that “**Verse 14** speaks of עֶלְיוֹן ‘Most High.’ This was an epithet for אֱלֹהִים, El [the Supreme God in the Canaanite pantheon] in Jerusalem from earliest times (compare **Genesis 14:18-22**). It was widely used in Canaanite stories.” (P. 211)

<sup>54</sup> Alexander comments on / translates **verse 15**: “But instead of being exalted to heaven, thou shalt only be brought down to hell—(not at the side of the north, but) to the depths of the pit...the imagery is unquestionably borrowed from the grave.” (P. 298)

Oswalt states that “Despite the high pretensions, or precisely because of them, the king is plunged into the underworld. Death mocks every person’s claim to be God. This truth is entirely congruent with the teaching of **Genesis 3**. The forbidden fruit was proffered to Adam and Eve as being able to make them like God (**Genesis 3:15**). Instead it brought them the ultimate proof of their finitude: death (**Genesis 3:22**; compare also **Job 20:6, 7**.” (P. 323)

## אֶל-יַרְכְּתֵי-בֹר:

Surely to sheol / (the) grave / underworld you will be brought down,  
to the far reaches of (the) pit / destruction!<sup>55</sup>

14:16<sup>56</sup> רֵאֵיךְ אֵלֶיךָ יִשְׁגִּיחוּ

---

<sup>55</sup>Watts comments on **verses 16-20a**: “The observations of those who view the corpse reflect their astonishment and horror. The body has not been buried, but abandoned like garbage (**verse 19**). He shares the fate of the dead among the poorest people: like the *aborted fetus*, like the *clothes of one stabbed* in a brawl, one killed in a *fall*, one *trampled* by a mob or on a battle-field, he is simply dumped in a pit and left to the birds and animals...It is hard to believe that this man once ruled the world with tyrannical cruelty and absolute power...But this tyrant is in disgrace because he is perceived to have ‘fouled his own nest,’ *destroyed his own land*, and *killed his own people*.” (P. 211)

The King of Babylon has claimed that he will go up above the stars, to the far reaches of the north; the fact is, says the prophet, he will go down to the underworld of the dead, to the far reaches of the pit!

The Hebrew word used here for "pit" is בֹּר, *bor*, which originally meant a "cistern," the kind of dug-out cavern that was lined with plaster, and used to hold water. Then, when the plaster had cracked, and was no longer able to hold water, it was used as a prison, especially for captives in war. Here, we think, the "pit" is another word for the grave, the underworld. See **Isaiah 38:18**,

Because *sheol* will not confess / give thanks to You,  
(or) death praise You.  
Those going down (to the) pit  
will not hope for Your true-faithfulness!

<sup>56</sup>Motyer comments on **verses 16-21** that “The element of contrast is further revealed as the poem returns to the earthly scene: what the king might have expected and what actually happened. There is neither an imposing tomb nor a continuing line to perpetuate him.” (P. 145)

Gray summarizes **verses 16-20a**, “The once all-conquering tyrant lies on the battlefield where he fell, a rotting and unburied corpse.” (P. 257)

Slotki comments on **verses 16-19**: “The scene shifts from the nether-world to the battlefield, where the unburied corpse of the tyrant lies exposed to the elements and the beasts and birds of prey.” (P. 70)

Kaiser entitles **verses 16-19** “His dishonored end.”

(continued...)

אֵלֶיךָ יִתְבּוֹנְנוּ  
הַזֶּה הָאִישׁ מִרְגִּיז הָאָרֶץ  
מִרְעִישׁ מַמְלָכוֹת:

Those who see you will stare wonderingly at you,  
they will study you carefully, [saying:]  
Is this the man<sup>57</sup> who caused the earth to quake?  
The one who shook kingdoms?<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup>(...continued)

He comments that “The catalogue of the misdeeds of the fallen tyrant, whose desecrated body is found in the rubbish pit by the passers-by, corresponds to the praise of the deeds of a dead king in a genuine lament. The man before whom the earth trembled and kingdoms shook, who devastated the earth and its cities, and whose prisoners languished in his dungeons to the end of their lives, the terror of the world, now lies among the bodies of the rabble [disorderly crowd, mob].” (P. 41)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 16**: “*Those seeing thee shall gaze (or stare) at thee, they shall look at thee attentively, (and say) Is this the man that made the earth shake, that made kingdoms tremble?...The simplest and most natural supposition is that the scene in the other world is closed, and that the prophet, or triumphant Israel, is now describing what shall take place above ground. The gazing mentioned... is not merely the effect of curiosity, but of incredulous surprise...The prominent if not the only feeling here expressed is neither scorn nor pity, but astonishment.*” (Pp. 298-99)

<sup>57</sup>Obviously the triumphant song is not talking about some Archangel named "Lucifer" who has fallen from heaven to earth; rather, the object of the taunt-song's mockery is a man, nothing more than a little man, who in pride pretended that he was equal to God Most High! Watts states,

“Whatever the myth might have said, the text in **Isaiah** tells of a tyrant king who is overcome, not by the resistance of a God, but by his own ambition to be as high as a God, to ascend to heaven, to reign above the stars, to sit in the mountain assembly, and to be like the Most High. (Pp. 210-11)

<sup>58</sup>Most likely, what the song originally meant had to do with the proud Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar's world-wide conquests, in which he overthrew the city-states and world-powers of his day, spreading the Neo-Babylonian Empire from east to west, like Assyria before him, and like Persia and then Greece and Rome after him.

(continued...)

14:17<sup>59</sup> שֵׁם תִּבְלֶה כְּמִדְבָּר

וְעָרָיו הָרַס

אֲסִירָיו לֹא־פָתַח בֵּיתָהּ:

He placed / made (the) world like the desert,

and its cities he threw down;

his prisoners—he did not open / release to their home!<sup>60</sup>

14:18<sup>61</sup> כָּל־מַלְכֵי גוֹיִם כָּלֵם

<sup>58</sup>(...continued)

In recent history, as we saw the rise of Saddam Hussein in modern Babylonia (Iraq), we saw another "King of Babylon" who took on the combined forces of the United Nations, threatening anyone who dared to oppose him with death—including other Arab nations, and the coalition of nations who had gathered to stop his aggression. How well this song could be applied to him!

<sup>59</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 17**: “*Made a (fruitful or habitable) world like the desert, destroyed its cities, and its captives did not set free homewards.* These are still the words of the astonished spectators as they behold the body of the slain king.” (P. 299)

<sup>60</sup>Translations of the last line of **verse 17** vary from “*that opened not the house of his prisoners*” to “*Who never released his prisoners to their homes*” to τούς ἐν ἐπαγωγῇ οὐκ ἔλυσεν, “*those in captivity / distress he did not loose / untie.*”

<sup>61</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 18-19**: “The dignified burial of other kings is contrasted with the indignities to which the king of Babylon is exposed.” (P. 70)

Kaiser comments: “The emphasis upon the honorable burial of the kings of the world in general presents the refusal of any burial to the tyrant as an even more severe punishment than his death alone. For the people of the ancient world there was no more terrible fate than to remain unburied, and no more sacred duty than that of giving burial to relatives or comrades in arms (compare e.g., Sophocles, **Antigone**, 450ff.)...

“Those unburied were condemned not to rest until the last remnants of their body decayed, and their shadowy existence came to an end with it...The battle for the body of Patroclus, the ransoming of Hector’s body and the burial of Polyneices by Antigone show how much importance the Greeks attributed to proper burial. (Compare Homer’s **Iliad** XVII; XXIV and Sophocles, **Antigone**, 69ff.) (Pp. 41-42)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 18**: “*All king of nations, all of them, lie in state (or glory), each in his house.* There is here a special reference to the

(continued...)

שִׁכְּבוּ בְּכַבּוֹד אִישׁ בְּבֵיתוֹ:

All the kings of the nations, all of them,<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>61</sup>(...continued)

peculiar oriental feeling with respect to burial...

“Diodorus [Greek historian who lived from 90 to 30 B.C.E. and who wrote the monumental universal history **Bibliotheca historica**] says that the Egyptians paid far more attention to the dwellings of the dead than of the living. Some of the greatest national works have been intended for this purpose, such as the pyramids, the temple of Belus [see on the Internet, ‘Temple of Belus’, with its many pictures of the ancient temple in Babylon erected to Zeus Belus], the cemetery at Persepolis [see on the Internet ‘Images for Cemetery at Persepolis,’ with its many pictures of the free-standing stone houses / tombs and many others carved out of the rock hills, much like the houses and businesses carved out of the rock in Petra, Jordan; Cairo Egypt’s ‘City of the Dead’ cemetery contains numerous houses built for the deceased, in which some relatives continue to live]. The environs of Jerusalem are full of ancient sepulchres...

“The want of burial is spoken of in [the **Bible**] as disgraceful even to a private person (**1 Kings 13:22**), much more to a sovereign (**2 Chronicles 21:20; 34:24**). The ancient oriental practice of burying above ground and in solid structures will account for the use of *house* here in the sense of sepulchre...The grave is called **בֵּית עוֹלָם**, [house of long-lasting-time], **Ecclesiastes 12:5**, which says of the elderly,

Also, from / of a high place they will be afraid, and terrors in the way.  
And the almond-tree blossomed,  
and the grasshopper drug himself along,  
and the caperberry was frustrated,  
because the human is going to his long-time home / house,  
and those mourning gathered round in the street.

**Job 30:23,**

Because I knew,  
death, you will return me,  
and (there is) a house of an appointed meeting  
for everyone living.

“The words of this verse [**Isaiah 14:18**] might possibly be understood to describe the generality of kings as dying in their beds and at home—they have lain down, (i.e.) died each in his own house. But there is no need dissenting from the unanimous judgment of interpreters that the verse relates to burial.” (P. 300)

<sup>62</sup>The phrase “all of them” is omitted by 1QIs<sup>a</sup>, and both the Greek and Syriac translations.



lie gloriously in death, each in his house / burial-vault / family tomb.

14:19<sup>63</sup> וַאֲתָהּ הַשְּׁלֶכֶת מִקְבְּרָךְ

כְּנֹצָר נִתְעַב

לְבוֹשׁ הַרְגִים מִטְעֵנִי חָרַב

יִזְרְדֵי אֶל-אֲבְנֵי-בֹר

---

<sup>63</sup>Kaiser entitles **verses 19b-21** “The absolute end.”

He comments that “He who has brought ruin not only upon himself but upon his country and his people by his excessive urge for power now finds no one to show mercy and carry out the duty of burial for him. Even the continuance of his name, and his flesh and blood, in his children and children’s children is denied him. Since from the seed of the criminal one could expect further crimes, and a renewed attempt to seize world power with all its terrible consequences for inhabitants of the earth, his sons too have to be slaughtered...”

“In accordance with early legal ideas, which were unaware of the individual personality, sons had to atone for the guilt of their fathers (compare **2 Kings 14:5-6**; **Deuteronomy 24:16** [no—this is a denial of the demand for sons being punished for the sins of their fathers] and **Joshua 7:24-25**; **1 Samuel 22:16ff.**; **2 Samuel 3:29** and **21:1ff.**; but also **Ezekiel 18:4**, compare **verses 5ff.** with **verses 14ff.**)...”

“We have here, however, in addition to the idea of kinship, the further conception that the rule of the tyrant might be continued through his sons. How close the poet is with his final demand to the political realities of antiquity can clearly be seen by recalling the fate of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah: Nebuchadnezzar had him dragged before him at Riblah. There his sons were slain before his eyes. Then the wretched king was blinded and carried off in chains to Babylon, to the deepest dungeon (compare **2 Kings 25:6ff.**). It may be that the poet had this in mind when he was writing the last lines of this poem.” (Pp. 42-43)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 19**: “With the customary burial of kings he now contrasts the treatment of the Babylonian [king’s] body. *And thou art cast out from thy grave—like a despised branch, the raiment of the slain, pierced with the sword, going down to the stones of the pit, (even) like a trampled carcass (as thou art)...*”

“Gesenius and the other modern [19<sup>th</sup> century] writers understand the prophet as contrasting the neglect or exposure of the royal body with the honorable burial of the other slain [kings], those who are (soon) to go down to the stones of the grave, i.e. to be buried in hewn sepulchres.” (P. 800)

## כפּוֹר מוֹבֵס:

And you--you have been cast out from your grave,<sup>64</sup>  
like a despised root--<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup>Where our Hebrew text has מִקְבְּרֶךָ, “from your grave,” **Rahlfs** has ἐν τοῖς ὄρεσιν, “in / on the mountains.”

Watts holds that “The text does not require the meaning ‘thrown out of your tomb,’ but may be read ‘thrown out without a tomb’” (P. 207), and Oswald agrees, saying it should be understood as cast out, without a tomb.” (P. 324)

We say, Perhaps—but this is certainly not obvious to us.

Slotki states that “your grave” means “the elaborate sepulchre which is your due as a king; instead your body lies ignominiously [shamefully] unburied.” (P. 71)

<sup>65</sup>Slotki’s translation has “like an abhorred offshoot,” “which, when cut off from the tree, is unceremoniously cast away.”

The Hebrew noun נֹצֵר, “sprout / shoot,” occurs in the **Book of Isaiah** at:

### **Isaiah 11:1,**

And a branch will arise out of Jesse’s stump;  
and a sprout from his roots will bear fruit!  
(This “sprout” is another name for the promised coming king.)

### **Isaiah 14:19,** here,

And you--you have been cast out from your grave,  
like a despised sprout--  
dressed with those you murdered, those pierced by a sword,  
those who are going down to the stones of the pit--  
like a carcass, trodden under foot!  
(This “sprout” is the opposite of honorable or beloved)

### **Isaiah 60:21,**

And your people, all of them, (will be) righteous;  
for long-lasting time they will inherit earth / land--  
a sprout of My planting,  
a work of My hands,  
to make itself beautiful.

(continued...)

dressed (with those you) murdered,<sup>66</sup> those pierced by a sword,

---

<sup>65</sup>(...continued)

(Here it is an honorable title, not of a coming king, but of YHWH's people in the future)

Motyer comments that the fallen king here in **Isaiah 14** "is a 'rejected / detested' ...*branch*, in contrast with the honored branch from Jesse's root (**11:1**). The king is a 'shoot' of kings but is reckoned fit only for the compost heap." (P. 145)

Where our Hebrew text has כְּנֹצֵר נִתְעַב, "like a despised / abhorred shoot / sprout," **Rahlfs** has ὡς νεκρὸς ἐβδελυγμένος, "like an abominable corpse."

Oswalt states that the translation *like an untimely birth* is an interpretation of (literally) 'abominable branch,' which must be either a textual corruption or a figure for something else, since there is no reason to think that an actual branch would have been seen as abominable. Both Symmachus and the [Aramaic] Targum contain the reading 'untimely birth,' which may involve a correction from נֹצֵר, [sprout, shoot, branch] to נִפְלָא, [untimely birth, abortion] 'miscarriage.' But given the association of 'branch' with offspring no such correction is required." (P. 324)

<sup>66</sup>Where our Hebrew text has לְבוּשׁ הַרְגִים, "dressed / clothed (with) killed / slain," **Rahlfs** has no word for "dressed / clothed," but only the phrase μετὰ πολλῶν τεθνηκότων, "with many having died."

Alexander comments that this form of expression, "clothed (i.e.) covered with the slain," our "dressed with those you murdered," *who are buried in stone sepulchres*, "is rather descriptive of a common burial than of any invidious [unfair, unjust] distinction. It is much more natural to understand ['going down to stones of a pit'] as a description of the indiscriminate interment of a multitude of slain in a common grave, such as a pit containing stones or filled with stones to cover the bodies...

"In order to reconcile this verse with the history of Nebuchadnezzar, to whom they exclusively apply it, the Jews have an old tradition, given not only in the **Seder Olam** [**Seder Olam Rabbah** is a 2nd-century C.E. Hebrew language chronology detailing the dates of biblical events from the Creation to Alexander the Great's conquest] but by Jerome in almost the same words, that when Nebuchadnezzar recovered his reason, he found Evilmerodach his son upon the throne, and threw him into prison. When the father died, the son refused to become king again, lest his predecessor should again return; and in order to convince him of the old man's death, the body was disinterred and exposed to public view...[But] there is no need...of seeking historical details in this passage, which is rather a prediction of the downfall of the empire than of the fate of any individual monarch." (Pp. 300-01)

(continued...)

those who are going down to the stones of the pit--<sup>67</sup>

like a carcass, trodden under foot!<sup>68</sup>

14:20<sup>69</sup> לֹא־תִחַד אֲתָם בְּקְבוּרָה

כִּי־אֲרֻצֶּךָ שָׁחַת

עִמָּךְ הַרְגַת

---

<sup>66</sup>(...continued)

Motyer comments that “Stripped of his royal robes, the king now has nothing to clothe him but the bodies of those who died in the battle, heaped together ignominiously ...His grave is unmarked and therefore unconsciously *trampled underfoot*, walked over ...There is no-one concerned to secure a suitably royal burial for the king. His forebears were carried to the family mausoleum (**verse 18**) but he will not *join them* / be joined with them.” (P. 145)

Oswalt states that “*clothed with the murdered* yields a very incongruous picture, yet no better interpretation of the phrase has emerged. If the battlefield imagery is retained, then it is possible that ‘clothed’ means ‘covered,’ i.e., with a pile of corpses. But there may also be some idea intended of the multitude of those he has himself slain weighing him down and providing his only shroud. In either case the pit here referred to is the grave and not the underworld.” (P. 324)

But we understand the noun *sheol* in Hebrew to mean both “grave” and “underworld.” Is Oswalt correct in making a distinction between them?

<sup>67</sup>Where our Hebrew text has אֶל־אֲבְנֵי־בֹרַךְ, “to stones of a pit,” **Rahlfs** has εἰς ἄδου, “into Hades / grave / underworld.”

<sup>68</sup>Where our Hebrew text has כַּפְּנֵי מוֹבֵס, “like a corpse trampled underfoot,” **Rahlfs** has ὁν τρόπον ἱμάτιον ἐν αἵματι πεφυρμένον οὐκ ἔσται καθαρόν, “in the same way a garment having been mixed / stained with blood will not be clean.”

<sup>69</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 20**: “*Thou shalt not be joined with them* (the other kings of the nations) *in burial, because thy land thou hast destroyed, thy people thou has slain. Let the seed of evil-doers be named no more for ever...*”

“The only natural interpretation of the words is that which applies them to the Babylonian tyranny as generally exercised. The charge here brought against the king implies that his power was given him for a very different purpose.” (Pp. 301-02)

Gray summarizes **verses 20b-21**: “May no descendant of the Tyrant survive to repeat his career.” (P. 261)

# לֹא-יִקְרָא לְעוֹלָם

## זֶרַע מְרַעִים:

You will not be joined with them<sup>70</sup> in burial!"<sup>71</sup>

Because you have destroyed your land,<sup>72</sup>  
your (own) people you have murdered—<sup>73</sup>

it will not be called (by name) to long-lasting time,  
a seed of evil-doers!"<sup>74</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup>The "them" is referring to the kings buried honorably, mentioned in **verse 18**.

<sup>71</sup>The King of Babylon, in his over-reaching pride, claims himself to be equal to the Most High God. But the Divine sentence expressed in this "song," is that he is already a dead man, a corpse that will be thrown out for the wild animals to devour, without benefit of burial, in spite of all his proud claims!

<sup>72</sup>Where our Hebrew text has "your land" and "your people," the Greek translation has "My land" and "My people."

<sup>73</sup>Oswalt comments that "The judgment contained in this verse [20a] is a surprising one because it is unexpected. The reader expects to find the king judged for what he has done to the foreign lands which he has oppressed (so the **Septuagint** 'My land...My people'), but instead it is his own land his own people he has destroyed and for which he is judged...The pride which has fueled every great tyrant's imperial designs has been as destructive to his own land and people as it was elsewhere." (P. 324)

In our lifetime, we remember the terrible ruin inflicted on Germany by Hitler in his lust for power, and likewise the ruin of Moscow and Saint Petersburg by Stalin's rule.

<sup>74</sup>The last two lines of **verse 20** are given varying translations: from "the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned" to "Let the breed of evildoers Nevermore be named!" to "May the descendants of evildoers nevermore be named!" to "Let the offspring of the wicked never be mentioned again" to "The offspring of the wicked leave no name behind them" to οὐ μὴ μείνησ ἐῖς τὸν αἰῶνα χρόνον σπέρμα ποιηρόν, "You will certainly not remain into the ages of time, evil seed!"

Oswalt comments on **verses 20b-21** that "The final judgment is aimed at the destruction of even the monarch's name. The hope is expressed that his personal name will be forgotten and his family name be destroyed with his heirs....

"So here the reversed lament reaches the final point of parody [imitation with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect]. Instead of wishing that the deceased's name will endure after him and that his children will bring honor to that name through their

(continued...)

<sup>74</sup>(...continued)

own long and productive lives, the singer wishes the opposite: may the earth quickly be delivered from even having to remember that this man was.

“So ends pride. Having sought to leave its mark on the world by brute force, it now sees all its works, and even its memory, destroyed by death. In contrast, Isaiah argues that those who lay aside their pride and become chosen servants of God are those who will live forever in His memory (**11:10-16; 25:6-8; 27:19; 27:13; 40:27-31; 54:7, 8**).” (P. 325)

Saddam Hussein, the modern-day "King of Babylon," truly "destroyed his own land," and "murdered his own people." Rather than yield to world-opinion, as expressed through the United Nations General Assembly, and rather than being willing to retreat from his naked aggression in Kuwait, he allowed the allied bombers to destroy his air-force, reduce his nation's highways and bridges to rubble, and almost return Iraq to the stone-age. He caused the death of tens of thousands of his own soldiers, as well as the deaths of civilians in his own nation and in the nation of Kuwait. The judgment of God rests upon the ruler who acts in such a way! So says **Isaiah 14!**

Delitzsch, in his **Commentary on Isaiah**, stated (concerning Nebuchadnezzar of old): “In this way is vengeance taken for the tyrannical manner in which he has oppressed and exhausted his land, making his people the involuntary instruments of his thirst for conquest, and sacrificing them as victims to that thirst. For this reason he does not meet with the same compassion as those who have been compelled to sacrifice their lives in his service. And it is not only all over for ever with him, but it is so with his dynasty also. The prophet, the messenger of the penal justice of God, and the mouthpiece of that Omnipotence which regulates the course of history, commands this.” (P. 315)

Certainly it is true to biblical understanding to say that this same Divine verdict from the ancient Near East was passed on the modern King of Babylon, Saddam Hussein! But to state that “it is all over for ever with him (the Babylonian predecessor of Hussein),” is to forget that the judgment of God is a judgment of love, and in the light of **Ezekiel 16:53-58**, we may ask, If God is going to restore the fortunes of Samaria, Sodom, and Jerusalem, after their destruction by Divine decree, will He not also do the same for the Babylonian king who has fallen by Divine decree?

<sup>75</sup>Alexander comments on / translates **verse 21**: “That the downfall of the Babylonian power shall be perpetual, is now expressed by a command to slaughter the children of the king. *Prepare his sons for slaughter, for the iniquity of their fathers. Let them not arise and possess the earth, and fill the face of the world with cities...*”

“The dramatic form of the prediction is repeatedly shifted, so that the words of the triumphant Jews, of the dead, of the prophet, and of God Himself, succeed each other, as it were, insensibly, and without any attempt to make the points of the transition

(continued...)

---

<sup>75</sup>(...continued)

prominent. The command in the first clause is not addressed specifically to the Medes and Persians, but more indefinitely to the executioners of God's decree against Babylon." (P. 302)

Watts states that **verse 21** "may also be spoken over his corpse. It puts into effect the curse of **20b-c** by ordering the execution of his sons...**Verses 8-20** speak of the results of ambition, a kind of fateful, deserved end. But here people are urged to take matters into their own hands. It was often near eastern practice to execute the family of a fallen ruler (compare **1 Kings 15:28-30** (the annihilation of the household of Jeroboam); **2 Kings 10:17** (Jehu's annihilation of the household of Jeroboam, as commanded by YHWH through Elijah). *The fathers* suggests that guilt belongs to the dynasty, not simply the man. But the idea is broader. Compare

**Exodus 20:5,**

You shall not bow down to them (idols),  
and you shall not serve them;  
because I, YHWH your God—a jealous God,  
visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons,  
upon thirds and upon fourths (generations),  
to the ones hating Me.

**Exodus 34:7,** where YHWH is proclaiming His nature as One

Keeping steadfast love for the thousands;  
bearing / forgiving iniquity and transgressions and missing-of-the-mark;  
and will certainly not acquit (the impenitent)  
—visiting iniquity of fathers upon sons,  
and upon sons of sons,  
upon thirds and upon fourths (generations)!

"The second half of the verse (**Isaiah 14:21**) bases the execution on prevention. So *they cannot possess* and build *cities*. It was common practice among Assyrians and Persians (and later Greeks and Romans) to maintain control of conquered lands by building their own fortresses and administrative cities there. They guaranteed their fame and protected their borders in this way. Such cities must have been both feared and hated by the older populations." (P. 211-12)

Watts explains the section **Isaiah 14:8-21**: "This powerful poem which is proposed as appropriate for Israel to sing when the king of Babylon is dead must be seen for what it is and is not. It is not specifically Israelite or Yahwistic in content or theology. It is not specifically tailored for the king of Babylon. It is a masterful poem to be sung over a tyrant who has fallen victim to his ambition and pride. Its picture of death and the realm of the dead was common to the Ancient Near East. Israel, for lack

(continued...)

בְּעֵינֵי אֲבוֹתָם  
 בַּל־יִקְמוּ וַיִּרְשׁוּ אֶרֶץ  
 וּמְלֶאכֶת פְּנֵי־תֵבֶל עָרִים:

Prepare for his children a slaughtering-place,  
 for the iniquity of their fathers;<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup>(...continued)

of a specific doctrine of its own, shared it, even if without enthusiasm or conviction. The apparent reflection of a ‘Lucifer myth’ in **verse 12** is just that. It is a simile to picture fall and disgrace of the tyrant...

“The fragile and temporary nature of tyrannical power is the theme. It speaks to the human tendency to idolize momentary power, forgetting how fleeting its terror and its glitter can be, forgetting that history’s mills ‘grind slow but wondrous fine’ [the proverbial expression comes from George Herbert in his collection of proverbs entitled **Jacula Prudentum** (1652)]. Death is the great leveler. This is a universal truth that requires neither revelatory explanation nor theological reflection—only dramatic reminder. Those who depend on the power of an individual, contrary to the lasting social structures and contracts, will not survive his death. This bit of common wisdom also need only to be spoken to be found true. When the poem has been used in apocryphal and Christian circles to picture the fall of an angelic Satan, the reference must be to the shadowy mythical background of the poem rather than to the poem itself. It is significant that the fall of Satan (**Revelation 12**) makes no reference to **Isaiah 14.**” (P. 212)

<sup>76</sup>Where our Hebrew text has אֲבוֹתָם, “their fathers,” **Rahlfs** has τοῦ πατρός σου, literally “for the father of yours (singular).”

The Hebrew text issues a command for deadly war—for the preparation of slaughter for the royal family of Babylon, so that what the king of Babylon has done cannot be repeated again by his descendants who will take his place.

And the passage raises ethical questions—questions concerning “just war,” and the legitimacy of children suffering for the sins of their father(s).

See the **Wikipedia** article “Just War Theory,” where the theories set forth by Augustine and Thomas Aquinas are referred to.

For the question of whether or not children should be put to death for the sins of their fathers, or fathers for the death of their children, see **Deuteronomy 24:16; Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:19-20**, and compare these passages with the

(continued...)



so that they will not arise and dispossess land,  
and will (not) fill earth's surface (with) cities!<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>76</sup>(...continued)

statements in **Exodus** concerning YHWH's practice of such, and the many instances in the **Bible** which depict Divine capital punishment being inflicted on whole families because of the sin of their father(s)—for one example, see **Numbers 16**, the story of “Korah’s Rebellion, which can be multiplied by the many examples of extermination of Canaanite city-nations in the **Book of Joshua**.

Motyer comments that “The **Old Testament** forbids human judicial processes to punish children for parental sins (**Deuteronomy 24:16**) but the solidarity of the race necessitates just such visitations in the providential ways of God [we wonder what this means. Is the law forbidding punishment of children for their parents’ sins, trumped by race solidarity? I.e., can we refuse to make laws commanding punishment of children for parental failures, but then turn around and take the life of entire families and nations for parental failures? Surely this is mistaken!]....

“Here Isaiah imagines a proclamation going out to guarantee against the perpetuation of a royal line such as this. The *cities* were power-bases and also, as was the first Babel (**Genesis 11:1ff.**), symbols and occasions of human boasted self-sufficiency. This will never be allowed to happen again.” (Pp. 145-46

Motyer’s view would endorse the murder of the entire family of the Russian Romanov family for the Czar’s crimes in 1918; or the murder of all the citizens of Berlin, Germany, for the crimes of Adolph Hitler.

Yes, this passage in **Isaiah 14** can be understood as teaching such a thing, and as being in line with these other biblical statements, but it is also going against the biblical prohibitions of punishing children for their parents’ crimes, as seen in **Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel**.

But however we may attempt to resolve this conflict of viewpoints, we must say, Jesus certainly never endorsed such a view, but instead taught love and forgiveness for enemies rather than such a murderous, annihilating procedure. What do you think?

<sup>77</sup>Slotki comments that the “cities” will be “inhabited by wicked men like themselves. Others render עָרִים, ‘cities,’ as ‘enemies.’” (P. 71) Neither **Rahlf’s**, nor any of the English translations we are using, have anything other than “cities.”

Alexander comments that “The best sense...is afforded by the old interpretation ...which takes עָרִים in its usual sense as the plural of עִיר ‘city,’ and understands the clause to mean, lest they overspread and colonize the earth.” (P. 303)

<sup>78</sup>Watts entitles **verses 22-27** “Three Statements of Yahweh’s Plans.”

He comments that “**Verses 22-23** are a quote from Yahweh Himself which emphasizes the oracular form of the words by three uses of the formula ‘Oracle of Yahweh’...The oracles emphasize Yahweh’s determination to destroy Babylon. They balance the words in **13:17-22**.”

“The second passage (**verses 24-25**) is cast as an oath spoken by Yahweh of Hosts that Assyria will, in time, be eliminated from Palestine. It begins with an assurance that Yahweh’s plans and His fulfillment are congruent and may be trusted. It closes with an echo of His promise in **10:27**. This passage parallels the ‘Day of the Yahweh’ passage in **13:9-16**...”

“The third passage (**verses 26-27**) is the strongest claim for Yahweh’s strategy in a **book** in which the idea occurs repeatedly.” (P. 214)

Slotki entitles **verses 22-23** “Epilogue.” It is certainly the case that beginning with **verse 22**, YHWH is depicted as speaking, as the three-fold “saying of YHWH” in **verses 22-23** emphasizes.

Gray summarizes **verses 22-23**: “Yahweh promises to wipe out the Babylonians, and to make of Babylon a desolate city.” (P. 262) He observes that the phrase נֹאֵם יְהוָה, “(it is) a saying of YHWH,” occurs three times in these two verses, and nowhere else in **13:1-14:21**.

Motyer states that “The use of the phrase three times is like a triple seal of authenticity and validation.” (P. 146)

Kaiser entitles **verses 22-23** “The Total Annihilation of Babylon.”

He describes the passage as “a concluding comment upon the prophecy concerning Babylon in **chapters 13** and **14**...”

“Not only the adults but also the children will be exterminated (compare **Genesis 21:23; Job 18:19; Ben Sirach 41:5; 47:22**) so that the nation will never be able to recover from the blow it has suffered. **Verse 23**, on the other hand, takes up the idea in **Isaiah 13:19ff.** of the total destruction of the city, which after its conquest will become a marsh...”

“Although the political role of Babylon in history may have long been over, for post-exilic Judaism the city, which had played so ominous a role in its own history, remained a symbol of all the forces on this earth which are hostile to God.” (Pp. 43-44)

Oswalt entitles **14:22-23** “The Lord’s promise.”

(continued...)

---

<sup>78</sup>(...continued)

He comments that “these two verses serve as a further indication that the taunt-song itself is to be taken as a figurative statement and not as directed at one individual. It is Babylon as a whole which stands over against God in pride, and it is Babylon as a whole which will be wiped out and whose works will be scattered across the desert.” (P. 325)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 22**: “This verse contains an intimation that the destruction just predicted is to be the work not of man merely but of God, and is to comprehend not only the royal family but the whole population. *And I (Myself) will rise up against them (or upon them), saith Jehovah of hosts, and will cut off progeny, and offspring, saith Jehovah.* The last four nouns are put together to express posterity in the most general and universal manner...The more general meaning of the terms...is given in the **Septuagint [Rahifs]** (ὄνομα καὶ κατάλειμμα καὶ σπέρμα, ‘name and residue / remnant and seed / descendant’)..

“The agreement of the prophecy with history is shown by J. D. Michaelis from the facts, that none of the ancient royal family of Babylon ever regained a throne, and that no Babylonian empire ever rose after the destruction of the first, Alexander the Great’s project of restoring it having been defeated by his death.” (P. 303)

But in the 20th century, “In 1983, Saddam Hussein began rebuilding the city [of ancient Babylon] on top of the old ruins. (Consequently, artifacts and other finds may be under the city.) Hussein invested in both restoration and new construction in Babylon, as well as Ninevah, Nimrud, Assur and Hatra, to demonstrate the magnificence of Arab achievement. He installed a portrait of himself and Nebuchadnezzar at the entrance to the ruins, and reinforced the Processional Way--a large boulevard of ancient stones--and the Lion of Babylon, a black rock sculpture about 2,600 years old. Hussein inscribed his name on many of the bricks, in imitation of Nebuchadnezzar. One frequent inscription reads: “This was built by Saddam Hussein, son of Nebuchadnezzar, to glorify Iraq.” These bricks became sought after as collectors’ items after Hussein’s downfall.

“...Hussein wanted to build a modern palace called Saddam Hill over some of the old ruins, in the pyramidal style of a Sumerian ziggurat. In 2003, he intended the construction of a cable car line over Babylon, however plans were halted by the 2003 invasion of Iraq.” (**Wikipedia**, 7/22/2016)

Who knows how many other “modern Nebuchadnezzars” there have been prior to Saddam Hussein?

Watts comments on **verse 22** that “Like **13:1** and **14:19-22** the object of God’s wrath is again Babylon itself, not simply her king and dynasty...[As Wildberger and others] have suggested, Babylon is here much more than the Chaldean capital, but

(continued...)

נָאִם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת  
וְהִכַּרְתִּי לְבָבֶל שֵׁם וְשָׂאֵר  
וְנִין וְנֶכֶד נָאִם יְהוָה:

And I will arise / stand against them--  
a saying of YHWH of Armies--  
and I will cut off for / from Babylon, name and remnant,  
and offspring and posterity--<sup>79</sup>  
a saying of YHWH!

14:23<sup>80</sup> וְשִׂמְתִּיהָ לְמוֹרֵשׁ קֶפֶד

<sup>78</sup>(...continued)

represents the contemporary ‘super power’ (as it does in **Revelation 18:10, 12**).  
Undoubtedly, overtones of the broader symbolism are here...

“The destruction is to be total. *Name* includes its reputation, fame, and value. A *remnant*, though it be a very small one, may hope for restoration. Babylon will have none. No *offspring* or *descendant* emphasizes the absolute destruction of the city as a people.” (P. 214)

<sup>79</sup>It is a statement YHWH’s intention of total annihilation for Babylon: He is going to cut off from Babylon וְנִין וְנֶכֶד וְשָׂאֵר, “name and remnant / remainder, and offspring / posterity and progeny / posterity.” That means, Babylon will be entirely wiped out. Compare

**Genesis 21:23**, where the Philistine king Abimelech asks Abraham to swear that he will not deal falsely וְלִי וְלִנְיָי וְלִנְכְדִי, “to / with me and to / with my offspring / posterity and to / with my progeny / posterity.”

**Job 18:19**, where Bildad states concerning the wicked person:

No offspring [נִין] for him,  
and no posterity [נֶכֶד] among his people...

<sup>80</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 23**: “And I will render it (literally, place it for) a possession (or inheritance) of the porcupine, and pools of water, and will sweep it with the broom (or besom [a broom made of twigs tied around a stick]) of

(continued...)

וְאֲנִי־מִים  
וְטֹאטְאֵתִיהָ בְּמִטְאֵטָא הַשְּׂמֹד  
נֶאֱמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת:

And I will make her a possession of hedgehog(s),<sup>81</sup>  
and marshes of water,  
and I will sweep her away with a broom, to exterminate (her)!<sup>82</sup>  
—a saying of YHWH of Armies!<sup>83</sup>,<sup>5</sup>

14:24<sup>84</sup> נִשְׁבַּע יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת לֵאמֹר

<sup>80</sup>(...continued)

*destruction*...The exposure of the level plains of Babylonia to continual inundation without great preventive care, and the actual promotion of its desolation by this very cause, are facts distinctly stated by the ancient writers. Some suppose this evil to have had its origin in the diversion of the waters of the Euphrates by Cyrus.” (Pp. 303-04)

Watts states, “The city as a geographical location, a place of human habitation, will be equally destroyed, covered with swamps, peopled by wild animals.” (P. 214)

<sup>81</sup>Slotki’s translation has “bittern [a bird of the heron family],” but he suggests translating by “hedgehog,” and adds that “the Hebrew root signifies ‘to roll.’ The animal, when attacked, rolls itself up and lies like a lifeless ball until the danger is over.” (P. 72)

The Hebrew noun is קֶפֶד which **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines as “porcupine,” based on its *rolling* itself together. **Rahlf**s has ἐχίνοι, “urchins / hedgehogs.” We think “hedgehog” is the best translation, as porcupines do not roll themselves up into a ball, but hedgehogs do. See the Internet articles on “Hedgehogs and Porcupines,” with numerous pictures.

<sup>82</sup>Motyer comments that “The *broom* is a vivid image; it removes every last vestige. The Lord’s broom is mighty enough to sweep the whole of great Babylon to destruction and oblivion.” (P. 146)

<sup>83</sup>See our end-note 2 for a sermon on **Isaiah 13** which I preached at the beginning of the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein in 1990.

<sup>84</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 24-27** that they depict “The destruction of the Assyrians in the land of Judah and the threat of a similar fate to all other nations who have evil designs against it.” (P. 74)

Gray entitles **verses 24-27** “Yahweh’s plan to destroy Assyria on the Mountains

(continued...)

---

<sup>84</sup>(...continued)  
of Palestine.”

He states that “This poem or fragment is unconnected with that which precedes it...**Verses 1-23** deal with the approaching fall of Babylon, **verses 24-27** with the approaching destruction of Assyria...

“If the fragment is Isaiah’s...it may have been written during the campaign of Sennacherib; but the phrase *My mountains* (**verse 25**), and ideas in **verse 25** and **verse 26** recalling Ezekiel and later writers, leave room for the suspicion that it is the work of a post-exilic writer familiar with Isaiah’s prophecies.” (P. 263)

Motyer entitles **verses 24-27** “The end of Assyrian power: a universal purpose exemplified and validated.”

He comments that “The substance of these verses is that the Assyrian threat, current in Isaiah’s day, would be decisively crushed in the Lord’s Own land (**verses 24-25**)...This attested act of God is then used as an example of the way the Divine hand governs all nations and executes an irresistible world purpose (**verses 26-27**)...The historical act which they see will be replicated in the eschatological judgment on the whole world and now acts as a guarantee of it.” (P. 146)

We agree, but would change the language from “the eschatological judgment” to “future judgments.”

Kaiser entitles **verses 24-27** “Yahweh’s Plan against Assyria and against the Nations of the Earth.”

He comments on **verses 24-25a** that “The short poem shows that in spite of his entire dependence, discernible throughout, upon phrases and ideas derived from his study of scripture, the scribe who was enlarging the **Isaiah roll** was able to create a well composed and impressive whole...

“Although the world power disguised by the pseudonym Assyria [meaning Persia, or Alexander’s Macedonia] was able in his age to determine the course of history and the fate of the people of God, yet he was certain that Yahweh could calmly observe this, and that Israel could take comfort in the midst of its trials, because Yahweh’s irrevocable plan would ultimately bring an end to this world power...

“When the new Assyria or one might almost say, the eternal Assyria, repeatedly manifested in a new form, set out with the nations of the world to storm Zion, it would suffer the same fate as that undergone, according to the stories which circulated among the devout, by Sennacherib’s attack upon Hezekiah’s Jerusalem (compare **chapters 36-37**) and would suffer total annihilation (compare **Isaiah 30:27ff.** as well as **Psalms 70:14** (= **108:14**); **44:6**; **Isaiah 63:6**, and also **Jeremiah 12:10**.” (Pp. 48-49)

(continued...)

---

<sup>84</sup>(...continued)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 24**: “From the distant view of the destruction of Babylon, the prophet suddenly reverts to that of the Assyrian host...that while God had decreed the deliverance of His people from remoter dangers, He would also protect them from those near at hand. *Jehovah of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely (literally, if not) as I have planned (or imagined) it has come to pass, and as I have devised, it shall stand (or be established)...*

“Kimchi [Radak] explains  $\text{הָיָה}$  to be a preterite [past tense] used for a future...and this construction is adopted in most versions ancient and modern [19<sup>th</sup> century]. It is, however, altogether arbitrary and in violation of the only safe rule as to the use of the tenses, viz. that they should have their proper and distinctive force unless forbidden by the context or the nature of the subject, which is very far from being the case here...The true force of the preterite and future forms, as here employed, is recognized by Aben Ezra, who explains the clause to mean that according to God’s purpose, it has come to pass and will come to pass hereafter...

“Jarchi [Rashi, Solomon bar Isaac paraphrases the verse as:] ‘Thou hast seen, O Nebuchadnezzar how the words of the prophets of Israel have been fulfilled in Sennacherib, to break Assyria in My land, and by this thou mayest know that what I have purposed against thee shall also come to pass.’ (Compare **Ezekiel 31:3-18**)...

“This view of the matter makes the mention of Assyria in this connection altogether natural, as if he had said, of the truth of these predictions against Babylon a proof has been afforded in the execution of the threatenings against Assyria...Another method of expounding this verse, therefore, is:...’As I intended, it has come to pass, and as I purposed, it shall continue.’ The Assyrian power is already broken, and shall never be restored.” (Pp. 304-05)

Oswalt states that “The oracle against the Mesopotamian world power comes to its conclusion with this passage...

“The abrupt switch from Babylon to Assyria has been very perplexing to commentators...It is possible to explain the shift in names without resorting to [theories of various documents having been combined], if it is granted that the prophet has been using ‘Babylon’ in a representative way...Here then the writer is making a transition from the general and symbolic to the specific and literal. The Mesopotamian power, symbolized by Babylon, represents the power and glory of this world ranged against the God of Israel Who has promised to redeem His people. The superiority of the Lord to that symbol has been shown. But what about the specific, current representative of that power? Do these truths apply to the actual as well as to the symbolic? The answer is a resounding yes!” (Pp. 326-27)

(continued...)

אִם-לֹא כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּמְיִיתִי כִּן הִזְתָּה

וּכְאֲשֶׁר יַעֲצִיתִי

הִיא תִקְוֶם:

YHWH of Armies swore, saying:

Did it not, just as I thought / planned<sup>85</sup>—so it happened?

And just as I counseled,<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>84</sup>(...continued)

Do you agree with Oswald? It seems to us that Oswald is attempting to get around a difficulty in the text.

<sup>85</sup>The verb here is דִּמְיִיתִי, which in the Qal would mean “I was like.” In the Piel, as it is here, the verb means “I likened, compared; imagined, thought, devised” (**Brown-Driver-Briggs**).

H. D. Preuss, in his article on דָּמָה in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** III, pp. 250-60, states that this verb, when used in the Piel, has “a ‘declarative-estimative’ meaning (to declare or consider something or someone to be in the condition suitable or appropriate,’ but also ‘to plan’ and even ‘to think.’” (P. 251) He states concerning this occurrence in **Isaiah 14:24**, that it means to “think, plan,” and “Here...Yahweh’s thoughts and plans (compare **Isaiah 31:3**) are against Assyria’s, viz., as a fixed and self-fulfilling (‘it will stand’) resolution to destroy Assyria. Assyria no longer ‘plans’ punishment in the sense that Yahweh does (**10:5ff.**), but in its arrogance intends to destroy and exterminate its enemy, Judah.” (P. 253)

<sup>86</sup>The verb here is יַעֲצִיתִי, “I advised / counseled.” Gray translates by “I have planned,” and states that “This, like all Yahweh’s plans,

**[Psalm 33:11,**

YHWH’s counsel will stand (firm) to long-lasting time;  
His heart’s plans / thoughts to generation and generation.

**Proverbs 19:21,**

Many thoughts / purposes (are) in a man’s / person’s heart / mind;  
but / and YHWH’s counsel / advice—it will stand!]

(continued...)



it will stand / be fulfilled:<sup>87</sup>

14:25<sup>88</sup> לְשִׁבְרֵי אַשּׁוּרִי בְּאַרְצִי

וְעַל-הָרֵי אֲבוּסֵנִי

וְסָר מֵעֲלֵיהֶם עֲלוֹ

וְסָבְלוּ מֵעַל שְׁכֻמוֹ יִסּוּר:

to break Assyria in My land,

and upon My mountains<sup>89</sup>, <sup>6</sup> I will trample him.<sup>90</sup>

---

<sup>86</sup>(...continued)

but unlike many human (**Isaiah 8:10**) plans, will be carried out.” (P. 263)

<sup>87</sup>Oswalt comments that “It is probable that for many Judeans the disappearance of the Solomonic empire and the rise of the Mesopotamian powers raised very serious theological questions. Was God still Lord of history if His people did not dominate history? Isaiah, from a Divine vantage point, was in a position to say that the problem, far from going away, was going to become worse, since Israel would lose her very nationhood. Yet he insists that it is the God of Israel alone Who guides history in a purposive and ultimately beneficial way (**5:19; 10:6, 15; 19:12, 17; 23:9; 25:1; 34:2; 41:2, 3, 21-29; 42:5-9; 43:8-21; 44:28; 47:10-11**)...

“The problem is no less real today, and the modern reader must decide as the Judeans had to, whether Isaiah is right or wrong. Assyria is gone these 2500 years, but Isaiah’s people and his faith live on. Isaiah was not wrong.” (P. 328)

<sup>88</sup>Alexander comments on / translates **verse 25**: “[The prophet] now declares what the purpose is, which is so certainly to be accomplished, namely God’s determination to break Assyria (or the Assyrian) in My land, and on My mountains I will trample him; and his yoke shall depart from off them, and his burden from off his back (or shoulder) shall depart...

“The place here assigned to the destruction of Assyria sufficiently refutes the application of the name for Babylonia by Calvin...and others.” (Pp. 306-07)

<sup>89</sup>Slotki comments that the phrase “My land” means “The land of Israel,” and the phrase “My mountains” means “The mountains of Judah.”

And we note that while there are oftentimes statements in the **Hebrew Bible** identifying Israel as “God’s land,” there are also passages such as **Genesis 1-3** that depict the whole world as belonging to God by right of creation, and depicting all humanity as being made in the image and likeness of God. See our end-note 4 for an

(continued...)

And his yoke will be turned aside from upon them,  
and his burden from upon his shoulder will turn aside.<sup>91</sup>

14:26<sup>92</sup> זֹאת הַעֲצָה הַיְעוּצָה עַל-כָּל-הָאָרֶץ

---

<sup>89</sup>(...continued)

article from **Wikipedia** on “Jews as the chosen people.”

<sup>90</sup>Gray comments that “Yahweh’s plan is to destroy Assyria, and in order that it may be clear that He is the Author of this destruction, the destruction is to take place in His Own land (compare **Ezekiel 38:16, 22-23; 39:21-22**), on the hills of Palestine... Yahweh is conceived as a Warrior (compare **Isaiah 63:1-6**) mangling...and then trampling...on the prostrate corpse of Assyria...”

“If the term [Assyria] has its primary sense and refers to the Assyrian Empire, this passage was written at all events before the close of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, and anticipates the elaboration of this idea in **Ezekiel 38-39**...With Ezekiel, the term ‘mountains of Israel’ is a favorite mode of reference to Palestine.” (Pp. 263-64)

Oswalt states that “The reference to Assyria’s destruction within God’s land has led many to conclude that this passage stemmed originally from the destruction of Sennacherib’s army in 701 B.C.E. However, others have pointed out Ezekiel’s references to the destruction of Israel’s enemies on the mountains (**39:4, 17**). This point, along with the broadly general function of this first oracle, suggests that these phrases are a stock literary device and do not refer to a particular destruction....”

“In this section (**verses 13-23**), the author is exploring the ramification of the earlier statements, showing that God can deliver His people from the effects of their distrust because all the nations are under His judgment.” (P. 328)

<sup>91</sup>Motyer comments, “See **chapter 37** [with its story of the destruction of 185,000 of Sennacherib’s soldiers at the gates of Jerusalem, and Sennacherib’s return to Nineveh, where he was murdered by his two sons] for the fulfilment of this verse.” (P. 146)

<sup>92</sup>Motyer comments on **verses 26-27**: “Things are now on a universal scale (the whole world, all nations; compare **Isaiah 13:5**). The Assyrian incident is the model for the eschaton.” (P. 146)

Motyer is reading the word “eschaton,” final end, into the text. Instead of “eschaton,” we would say “history.”

Watts states concerning these two verses that “The third of the three statements speaks of Yahweh’s plan...The strategy that is planned is the one which the entire [**Book of Isaiah**] reveals and discusses. It includes the judgment on His people and the purification of His city (**chapters 1-5**). It covers the role of the Assyrian and judgment on those who oppose this role. It will be shown in later chapters to span the

(continued...)

## זֹאת הַיָּד הַנְּטוּיָה עַל-כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם:

This—the counsel which was counseled upon all the earth,<sup>93</sup>

and this—the hand, the one stretched out over all the nations.<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup>(...continued)

time to the Exile and the Persian period. But the verses stress again the impossibility of successfully opposing God. Only God Himself can end the punishment, can call off the Assyrians, can turn back the judgment. Rebellion or resistance is futile...

“[He explains that] “the destruction of Babylon for its rebellion and the certain end of Assyrian power over Canaan are fixed in God’s plan, assured by His authority and sovereignty...

“Israel’s sin and resistance to God has led to her destruction (733 and 721 B.C.E.) and to her deportation (720 and 718 B.C.E.). The neutral stance of Ahaz has made it possible for his dynasty to continue and for Jerusalem to survive. Undoubtedly, these points were not missed by the early readers of the [**Book of Isaiah**]. Nor should they be missed by the modern reader.” (P. 215)

Alexander comments on / translates **verse 26**: “The prophet now explains his previous conjunction of events so remote as the Assyrian overthrow and the fall of Babylon, by declaring both to be partial executions of one general decree against all hostile and opposing powers. *This is the purpose that is purposed upon all the earth, and this the hand that is stretched out over all the nations.* On the supposition that this relates to Babylon alone, or to Assyria alone, we are obliged to understand the whole earth and all nations as describing the universal sway of these great power respectively.” (P. 307)

Watts states that the **Book of Isaiah** confronts the events of history with the reality of the living God Whose acts and Whose plan are becoming visible in the events of the day. In that light the times reveal “an old world perishing” and a “new about to be born (quoting Th. C. Vriezen, probably from his **An Outline of Old Testament Theology**).” (P. 216)

<sup>93</sup>Slotki comments on the phrase “upon the whole earth” that “The collapse of Assyria was an event which affected the whole of the then known world.” (P. 72)

<sup>94</sup>Gray comments that “Not only Assyria, strictly speaking, is the object of Yahweh’s plan: all the nations of the world also must assemble on the mountains of Judah to feel there the destructive power of Yahweh. Compare **Joel 4**<sup>Heb</sup> / **3:12ff.**<sup>Eng.</sup>” (P. 264)

14:27<sup>95</sup> כִּי־יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת יַעֲזֹב וּמִי יִפְרֹץ

וַיִּדְרֹ הַנְּטוּיָהּ וּמִי יִשְׁבִּיבָנָהּ:

Because YHWH of Armies counseled—and who will frustrate (it)?

And His hand (is) the one stretched out, and who will return it?

14:28<sup>96</sup> בְּשֵׁנֶת־מוֹת הַמֶּלֶךְ אֲחֻז

---

<sup>95</sup>Alexander comments on / translates **verse 27**: “As the preceding verse declares the extent of God’s avenging purpose, so this affirms the certainty of its execution, as a necessary consequence of His almighty power. *For Jehovah of Hosts hath purposed (this), and who shall annul (His purpose)? And His hand (is) the one stretched out, and who shall turn it back?...*”

“Here again Gill is felicitous in paraphrase, ‘There’s nothing comes to pass but He has purposed, and everything He has purposed does come to pass.’” (Pp. 307-08)

<sup>96</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 28-32** that they depict “The threatened danger to Philistia, and the peace and security promised to Judah.” (P. 72)

He entitles **verse 28** “Superscription.”

Gray entitles **verses 28-32** “The Fate of Philistia.” He comments that “Some event, presumably the death, overthrow, or enfeeblement of some victorious adversary, who had inflicted severe suffering on the entire Philistine country, has led the Philistines to rejoice (compare **2 Samuel 1:20**). The prophet warns them that their rejoicing will be short-lived, for worse things await them from the same quarter; an army descending from the North will destroy the Philistines, root and branch.

“Appended to **verse 32**, and at present interwoven with **verse 20a, b**, this prediction of the destruction of Philistia promises that the poor (**verse 30**), i.e., the Jewish nation, or the afflicted part of that nation (**verse 32**), will find security in Zion.

“So much seems clear; but the identification of the adversary and the determination of the date of the poem are closely related problems which cannot be solved with certainty...

“But since the ‘asp’ [our ‘serpent’] and the ‘fiery serpent’ are sprung from the same root as ‘the rod’ that has already inflicted injury on Philistia, we may infer

(1) that the writer has the same hostile nation in view throughout, and believes that the same nation that has already smitten Philistia will destroy it; and

(2) that this nation is not Judah, for Judah would have attacked Philistia from the *East*

(continued...)

---

<sup>96</sup>(...continued)

(compare **9:11; 11:14**); this power descends from the *North*.

The writer is doubtless thinking of the great coast road from the North by which alike Assyrian, Babylonian, and, later, Greek invaders came.” (P. 265)

Motyer entitles **verses 28-32** “Philistia: the Davidic dynasty and the Davidic promises.”

He comments that “It is understandable that Isaiah should find Ahaz’s death a significant event. It was his refusal of the way of faith and his decision to tie Judah’s fortunes to the coat-tails of Assyria that marked, for the prophet, the end of the Davidic dynasty as it had been known...

“When Ahaz, the arch collaborator with Assyria, died in 715 B.C.E. it would seem that Philistia took the opportunity to make overtures to Hezekiah...A strength other than the Lord must have been on offer and a refuge other than in Zion. It is likely, therefore, that Philistia, backed by Egypt, was offering the strength of an anti-Assyrian alliance as the way to recover national sovereignty. To Isaiah this was preposterous...All the security Zion needed was to be found in the Lord Who had founded the city.” (P. 147)

Watts follows the Syriac translation by entitling **verses 28-32** “Burden over the Philistines.”

He comments that “The introduction calls **verses 29-30** a ‘burden.’ Like that over Babylon and those that follow, the phrase is used with so-called ‘foreign prophecies’...The whole becomes a parable for Judah and Jerusalem to teach them the futility of resisting God’s signals. **Verse 31** is a choral ‘woe’ over Philistia whose funeral is near. The avenging army is in sight. **Verse 32** is a cryptic conclusion for [**chapters 7-14**]...It began with a question mark over Jerusalem’s fate in 734 B.C.E. (**chapter 7**) at the beginning of Ahaz’s reign. Now it draws to a close. The city and the throne have survived to have the question raised again. In **7:7** Isaiah answered: ‘It shall not happen.’ **Verse 32** confirms: ‘Yahweh has made Zion secure!’” (P. 218)

Oswalt entitles **14:28-17:11** “Judgment on Judah’s Neighbors,” He entitles **verses 28-32** “The Philistines.”

He comments that “With this oracle Isaiah begins the series of judgments against those neighboring nations in whom Judah might be tempted to trust for deliverance from the Mesopotamian power. But, as always, the prophet declares that those nations are under sentence as well and can do nothing for or against Judah. If she is to experience an ultimate deliverance, it must come from God, Who alone is ultimate. Nevertheless, the tendency to trust in defensive alliances against Assyria was a strong one, dating at least as far back as 853 B.C.E. when Shalmaneser III reports his encounter at Qarqar in Syria with an army composed of contingents from almost

(continued...)

---

<sup>96</sup>(...continued)

every country in the Levant [a geographical term that refers to a large area in Southwest Asia, south of the Taurus Mountains, bounded by the Mediterranean Sea in the west, the Arabian Desert in the south, and Mesopotamia in the east—today including Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan] as far south as Ammon...

“The precise date and occasion of this particular oracle has been the source of considerable debate...Nevertheless, its main import is clear: the Philistine expectation of freedom from their oppressors is a vain one and any alliance with them would be an alliance with destruction.” (P. 330)

Kaiser entitles **verses 28-32** “Against the Philistines.”

He comments that “If we follow the Hebrew text, we have a word of Yahweh. For the ‘I’ Who speaks in **verse 30b** is certainly none other than Yahweh, Who is here addressing the Philistines directly. But to our astonishment the discourse immediately drops the style of direct address, and the first person is replaced by the third person. The great Hebrew **Isaiah manuscript** from Qumran Cave 1 in fact uses the first person in both cases, while the Greek translation has the third person in both cases...Perhaps the saying concerning Philistia in **verses 29** and **31** existed independently and was only later enlarged by the addition of the promise to the poor in Zion.” (P. 50)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 28**: “*In the year of the death of King Ahaz, was this burden, or threatening prophecy, against Philistia...*Jerome notes this as the first prophecy belonging to the reign of Hezekiah, and J. H. Michaelis accordingly makes this the beginning of the fourth division of the **book.**” (P. 308)

Motyer comments on **verse 28**: “This is the second time Isaiah has dated an oracle by a death (see **Isaiah 6:1**)...When Ahaz refused the way of faith (**Isaiah 7:9-13**), Isaiah made no secret of the unparalleled damage that had been done to David’s house (**7:17**) but, nevertheless, in that setting he affirmed the hope of David’s line in ‘Immanuel’ terms. So here, on the death of the unbeliever, Isaiah steps forward to reiterate the promises. The faithlessness of people does not dilute the faithfulness of God.” (P. 147)

Watts comments on **verse 28**: “In the confused chronology of the period this could be 718 B.C.E. (16 years after 735-34 when Ahaz began to reign: **2 Kings 16:1**) or 715 B.C.E. (14 years before 701 B.C.E.: **2 Kings 18:13**) or 728 B.C.E. (4 years before 724 B.C.E. when Shalmaneser marched on Samaria). The more likely date is 718 or 715 B.C.E.” (Pp. 218-19)

What do you make of this comment? We say, the biblical statements concerning the date are indeed confusing, and certainly not clear. Is that what you mean by “the **Bible** is the Word of God”? We say, God’s Word indeed comes to us through the

(continued...)

הִיָּה הַמֶּשָׁא הַזֶּה:

In (the) year of the King Ahaz' death,<sup>97</sup>

this (is) the oracle (that) came:

14:29<sup>98</sup> אֶל-תְּשֻׁמְחֵי פְלִשְׁתִּים כְּלִיךָ

---

<sup>96</sup>(...continued)

biblical writings, but those writings are the writings of limited human beings like ourselves, who are sometimes confused, as are their writings—exactly what we should expect in the light of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**! The prophetic message is enigmatic, puzzling, “seen through a mirror darkly”!

Kaiser comments on **verse 28** that “Its opening words are clearly based upon **Isaiah 6:1**, where we read: ‘In the year that King Uzziah died’...Perhaps the heading is a product of the history of the Messianic interpretation of the oracle, as illustrated by the

Greek translation of **verse 30**. According to the Greeks, the seed of the serpent will feed the poor; thus **verse 29** is understood in a Messianic sense. The Targum, the Aramaic paraphrase, interpreted the text in exactly the same sense...But **verse 31** quite clearly requires an enemy from the north. This makes the Messianic interpretation impossible.” (Pp. 51)

<sup>97</sup>Slotki states that the death of Ahaz occurred “probably in the year 720 B.C.E.” (P. 72)

<sup>98</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 29**: “*Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of thee (or all Philistia), because the rod that smote thee is broken, for out of the root of the serpent shall come forth a basilisk [legendary reptile, said to be the king of serpents], and its fruit a flying fiery serpent...*”

“The name פְּלִשְׁתִּים is applied in Hebrew to the southwestern part of Canaan on the Mediterranean coast, nominally belonging to the tribe of Judah, but for ages occupied by the פְּלִשְׁתִּים or Philistines, a race of Egyptian origin who came to Canaan from Caphtor, i.e. according to the ancients Cappadocia, but according to the moderns either Cyprus or Crete, most probably the latter...[The name] is commonly rendered in the **Septuagint [Rahlfs]** οἱ ἀλλόφυλοι... The Philistines are spoken of...in **Isaiah 9:11; 11:14**, and throughout the historical books of the **Old Testament** as the hereditary enemies of Israel...The Greek name Παλαιστίνη, a corruption of פְּלִשְׁתִּים, is applied by Josephus and other ancient writers to the whole land of Israel, from which comes our *Palestine*, employed in this same manner...”

“All interpreters agree that the Philistines are here spoken of as having recently escaped from the ascendancy of some superior power, but at the same time threatened

(continued...)

---

<sup>98</sup>(...continued)

with a more complete subjection. The first of these ideas is expressed by the figure of a broken rod or staff...The other is expressed by the very different figure of an ordinary serpent producing or succeeded by other varieties more venomous and deadly. (Pp. 308-09)

Oswalt comments on **verse 29** that “The most obvious interpretation of the *broken staff* would be that it refers to Ahaz; thus his death, to which **verse 28** refers, would be the cause of the Philistine rejoicing. However, the biblical accounts make it plain that the Philistines had not suffered at Ahaz’s hand. In fact, **2 Chronicles 28:18** indicates that the reverse was true, with Ahaz losing several cities to Philistine invaders...

“Older commentators interpreted the staff as being a reference to the Jewish nation or the Davidic monarchy, both of which were in considerable disarray by the time of Ahaz’s death and both of which had caused the Philistines great grief. In this view Hezekiah is the adder and the Messiah is the flying serpent...

“More recent commentators have concluded that the staff refers to an Assyrian monarch who died in the same year as Ahaz. The most tempting possibility is Tiglath-pileser III, who died in 727 B.C.E. If the figure in **2 Kings 18:13**...is an error and Ahaz did die in 727 B.C.E. at the beginning of Hezekiah’s reign, then the dates do coincide. Furthermore, Tiglath-pileser did do considerable damage to the Philistines and his death could have prompted such rejoicing and plans to throw off the Assyrian yoke, although no such plan is reported elsewhere in the **Bible** or in extrabiblical literature...

“At the same time it seems strange that Ahaz’s death would be mentioned if it is in fact the death of another monarch that is important. This, coupled with the facts that Ahaz may have died in 715 B.C.E. and that a known Philistine revolt was beginning about then, suggests that the broken staff is not in fact any dead monarch, but merely the general Assyrian weakness which was still prevailing at that time and which was being used at the time of Ahaz’s death as an argument for Judah to join the Philistine scheme.

“On this supposition Isaiah is warning that the serpent (a free association from staff?) is not dead. In fact, its offspring will be considerably more dangerous than anything yet seen. Of course, Isaiah was exactly correct. The Assyrian dragon was not dead; it was just coming to its full strength in Sargon, then Sennacherib and Esarhaddon, and any attempt to stand against it in merely human strength was futile.” (Pp. 331-32)

Kaiser states that “By far the greatest difficulty, however, lies in the lack of clarity found in the text...as to whether the poet is describing as successive generations the snake, the adder and the flying fiery dragon, or whether he calls the offspring of the snake first an adder and then a dragon...

(continued...)



כִּי נִשְׁבַּר שִׁבְט מִכָּךְ  
 כִּי־מִשְׁרֵשׁ נִחַשׁ יֵצֵא זָפַע  
 וּפְרִיזוּ שָׂרְף מְעוֹפְףִי:

You (feminine) shall not rejoice, Philistia, all of you--<sup>99</sup>  
 because / that (the) rod striking you is broken.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup>(...continued)

“If the prophecy is dated in the year of the death of Sargon it would be composed in anticipation of the great Palestinian revolt of the year 703-01 B.C.E., and would show us the joy of the oppressed nations and the prophet’s forecast, a gloomy one in spite of its vigor, and meant in fact not to warn the Philistines but his own people...

“We may seek the historical reference in the year during the reign of Alexander [the Great, 356-323 B.C.E.), when there may have been rejoicing in the Philistine cities and in Gaza, which by this time had long been settled by the Arabs, at the defeat of the

Persian King at Issos, in ignorance of what Tyre and Gaza, who dared to resist the Macedonian, were to face.” (Pp. 52-53)

<sup>99</sup>Slotki comments that “No district or town [in Philistia] is excluded from the warning.” (P. 73)

Kaiser entitles **verses 29 + 31** “The warning to the Philistines.”

He states that “the prophet-poet addresses the whole land of the Philistines, in order to call a halt to its untimely joy at the death or defeat of a ruler under which it has suffered severely...It is clear that a ruler of the next or next but one [in a position that is just before the last one; what a confusing phrase!] generation will bring about an oppression far overshadowing what has been suffered at the hands of the previous generation. The snake is followed by the adder which is feared because of its fatal bite...while the adder is followed by the fabulous winged, fiery serpent, the dragon... Whereas the Philistines regard the danger as past, they and—as we can say when we look at the stanza that follows—the whole world of the nations are in fact faced with an intensification of the threat from which there is no escape.” (Pp. 53-54)

<sup>100</sup>Slotki comments that “This may refer to the death of Tiglath-pileser III in 727 B.C.E., of Shalmaneser IV in 722 B.C.E. or of Sargon in 705 B.C.E. Others take it as referring to Ahaz whose death...is assumed to have taken place in 720 B.C.E.” (P. 73)

Motyer states that “The *rod that struck you* was David himself. No other king was so consistently victorious over the Philistines (compare **1 Samuel 17:50; 18:25-30; 19:8; 23:1-5; 2 Samuel 5:17-25; 8:1**. Many suppose that the broken rod refers to the

(continued...)

Because from (the) root of a serpent will go forth a snake,<sup>101</sup>  
and its fruit a fiery flying serpent!<sup>102, 7</sup>

---

<sup>100</sup>(...continued)

death of an Assyrian king...Tiglath-Pileser III, who died in 727/6 B.C.E., or Shalmaneser V, who died in 722 B.C.E...There was no way in which the death of either king has 'broken' Assyria, which was now ruled by the great Sargon II. In such a circumstance what would the Philistines have to be happy about?)." (P. 148)

Watts, quite differently, asks, "*The rod that struck you*—is this King Ahaz or is this Shalmaneser?...There was a rebellion against Assyria in Palestine after the death of Shalmaneser. Ahaz followed his earlier practice and remained a loyal vassal [to Assyria]. Philistine cities joined in the rebellion. The *rod* and the *snake* are best understood as references to Shalmaneser who laid siege to Samaria for so long and who dominated Palestine. The *viper* and *darting adder* are references to Sargon who broke the Palestinian rebellion in 718 and in 714 B.C.E." (P. 219)

Will you agree with Motyer, or with Watts? On what basis? We repeat that these differences in interpretation demonstrate the "cryptic / enigmatic / puzzling nature of the prophetic message!

<sup>101</sup>Slotki comments that "Either Hezekiah is meant, or a descendant of the Assyrian kings alluded to [in the first part of the verse]." (P. 73)

Gray comments that "If under the dead king the Philistines were smitten with a stick, under the new king they will be smitten with serpents...In any case the meaning is that the future greater mischief will issue from the same quarter as the mischief that is past." (P. 268)

Motyer states that "**Exodus 4:2-3** and **7:10-12** account for the odd movement of thought from *rod* to *snake*...The picture is impressionistic: the rod which had received its death-blow would, nonetheless, increase in strength, vitality and deadly menace to its foes." (P. 148) We say, Perhaps...but this seems rather far-fetched.

<sup>102</sup>The last two lines of **verse 29** are given varying translations:

**King James**, "for out of the serpent's root shall come forth a cockatrice [a mythical beast, essentially a two-legged dragon or serpent-like creature with a cock's head], and his fruit *shall be* a fiery flying serpent."

**Tanakh**, "For from the stock of a snake there sprouts an asp, A flying seraph branches out from it."

**New Revised Standard**, "for from the root of the snake will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent."

**New International**, "from the root of that snake will spring up a viper, its fruit will be a darting, venomous serpent."

**New Jerusalem**, "for the serpent stock will produce a viper, its offspring will be a flying

(continued...)

14:30<sup>103</sup> וְרָעוּ בְּכוֹרֵי רָלִים

וְאֲבִיוֹנִים לְבַטַח יִרְבְּצוּ

וְהִמְתִּי בְרָעַב שְׂרִשָּׁךְ

---

<sup>102</sup>(...continued)  
dragon.”

**Rahlf**, ἐκ γὰρ σπέρματος ὄφεων ἐξελεύσεται ἔκγονα ἀσπίδων καὶ τὰ ἔκγονα αὐτῶν ἐξελεύσονται ὄφεις πετόμενοι, “For out of (the) seed of snakes will go forth descendants of asps; and their descendants will go forth flying snakes.”

**Watts**, “For, from the root of a snake a viper will emerge, and his fruit (will be) a darting adder.” (See pictures of a darting adder on the Internet.)

Slotki comments that “The purport [meaning, substance] of the verse is that, though the foreign ruler under whom they had hitherto suffered is dead, a descendant of his would arise and be mightier and more dangerous than the deceased king.” (P. 73)

We ask, Is there such a thing as “flying snakes”? See the **Wikipedia** article in our end-note 7 for a modern affirmative answer to the question. Slotki comments that the flying serpent “is said to be the deadliest of its species.” (P. 73) But this **Wikipedia** article holds that this is not at all the case, their venom being dangerous only to their small prey.

<sup>103</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 30**: “*And the first-born of the poor shall feed, and the needy in security lie down, and I will kill thy root with famine, and thy remnant it shall slay.* The future condition of the Jews is here contrasted with that of the Philistines. The figures in the first clause are borrowed from a flock, in the second from a tree, but with obvious allusion to a human subject.” (P. 309)

Gray likewise comments on **verse 30**: “The hostile power will destroy Philistia with famine and the sword of war, but will leave Judah unmolested. The Jews will live in peace and plenty.” (P. 268)

Oswalt states that “In stark contrast to the ominous serpentine prediction of the previous **verse [29]**, this one **[30]** begins with a quiet picture of sheep in a pasture, some feeding and others stretched out in sleep. These are identified as the very poorest (“firstborn of the poor” is a way of expressing the superlative)...and most needy of people. Presumably, in the light of **verse 32**, it is the poor of Judah who are intended, in contrast to the mighty ones of Philistia. For those mighty ones there is no hope. They will be exterminated so thoroughly that nothing will remain of them to spring up again...

“So God teaches again that the helpless who depend on Him are stronger than the powerful who refuse such dependency.” (Pp. 332-33)

## וְשִׂאֲרֵיתֶךָ יִהְרֹג:

And first-born ones of poor (weak) people<sup>104</sup> will graze / feed,<sup>105</sup>  
and poor (needy) people will lie down in safety.

And I will put your root to death with the sword,

---

<sup>104</sup>Slotki states that the phrase “firstborn of the poor” means “the poorest of the poor. According to others it means ‘the children of the poor’; the fathers were enslaved and oppressed while their children will live in freedom and safety. Judah is so described because it suffered poverty and persecution more than any other nation.” (P. 73)

But is this really what the text says? Does “firstborn of the poor “ mean “the poorest of the poor”? Doesn’t it mean the first-born child of a poor family? And is it a fact that Judah “suffered poverty and persecution more than any other nation”? It seems obvious that many other nations suffered under the hands of the Assyrians in a similar fashion to that of Judah. We do not think Slotki’s comment is helpful at this point, but rather, misleading.

What we understand the text to be saying is that the tables will be turned, and poor people, formerly enslaved and maltreated by the Assyrians / Babylonians will be adequately provided for, while those who oppressed them will be put to death. What do you think?

Motyer states: “While it is by no means obvious what the phrase...‘the firstborn of the poor’ means, firstborn is another exodus motif (**Exodus 4:22**).” (P. 148)

<sup>105</sup>Kaiser entitles **verses 30a + 32b** “The refuge of the devout on Zion.”

He states that “With an adversative ‘but,’ the seer transfers his gaze in the second stanza from the Philistines to the quite different fate of the devout in Jerusalem. Just as Jerusalem, according to the tradition that was current in the intervening years, had been saved from Sennacherib’s attack by its trust in God (compare **Isaiah 36:1ff.; 37:9bff., 22ff.**), so it would not fall to the final enemy with his powerful army. The people of God, described in the language of the psalm as the lowly and the poor, have therefore no need to despair. Like a flock protected by a good shepherd it can feed and lie down in safety (compare **Psalms 23; 77:21; 78:53; 80:2; 95:7; 100:3; Isaiah 40:11; Ezekiel 34:15; 28:26; 34:25** and frequently)...

“Because Yahweh has Himself laid the unshakeable foundation walls of Zion (compare **Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 87:1**) those among His people who know that they are dependent upon His help and put their trust in it will find refuge and safety here in all the storms that are to come (compare **Zephaniah 3:13; Isaiah 10:2**).” (P. 55)

and your remnant it will kill!<sup>106</sup>

14:31<sup>107</sup> הִילִילִי שְׁעַר זַעֲקֵי-עִיר

נִמּוּג פְּלֶשֶׁת כָּלֶךָ

כִּי מִצָּפוֹן עֹשֵׁן בָּא

וְאֵין בּוֹדֵד בְּמוֹעֲדָיו:

---

<sup>106</sup>For this mention of “your root” and “your remnant,” see **verse 22**, where we take it to mean the entire family of the king of Babylon. We think it means the same thing here, that YHWH intends to annihilate all of the king of Babylon’s descendants.

Motyer comments that “For Philistia, whatever holds promise for the future (*root*) and whatever exists in the present (*survivors* / ‘remnant’) are alike doomed: there will be total destruction.” (P. 148)

Kaiser holds that **verse 30b** should be placed following **verse 32a**.

<sup>107</sup>Oswalt comments on **verses 31** and **32** that “These two verses repeat the form of **verses 29** and **30**, the first promising doom on the Philistines and the second contrasting Judah’s security. These verses particularly support the idea of the Philistine rebellion in 715 B.C.E. as the context of this passage, for they make it plain that the enemy will come from the north, and it seems likely that the envoys mentioned in **verse 32** are those from Philistia seeking Judean involvement in the alliance.” (P. 333)

Slotki comments on **verse 31** that “Philistia will be fatally hit and subdued, but Judah will prosper.” (P. 73)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 31**: “*Howl, O gate! Cry, O city! Dissolved, O Philistia, is the whole of thee; for out of the north a smoke comes, and there is no straggler in his forces.* The Philistines are not only forbidden to rejoice, but exhorted to lament...The diversity of judgments as to the particular enemy here meant, and the slightness of grounds on which they severally rest, may suffice to show that the prophecy is really generic, not specific, and includes all the agencies and means by which the Philistines were punished for their constant and inveterate enmity to the chosen people, as well as for idolatry and other crimes.” (Pp. 310-11)

Watts comments that **verse 31** “returns to the call to mourning of **verse 29a**. The coming of Assyrian armies from the north signals their approaching end.” (P. 219)

Wail, gate!<sup>108</sup> Cry out, city!

Philistia melted away, all of you!<sup>109</sup>

Because from (the) north smoke is coming,<sup>110</sup>

---

<sup>108</sup>Motyer comments that “The gate was the key target in an attack; once it yielded the city had fallen. The address here is not to any particular city but to city and gate as such, in Judah as well as Philistia. Both are equally under Assyrian threat. But beyond that the outcome is different.” (P. 148)

Oswalt states, “*Howl, gate* invokes again the imagery of the siege, for often the battle surged around the gateway, as the Assyrian engineers brought their battering rams into play outside and as suicide squads inside prepared to counterattack if the first or second set of doors gave way.” (P. 333)

<sup>109</sup>Kaiser comments that “What is one day to happen is as though present to the seer. Thus he already calls upon the gates and city to raise the cry of lamentation because they will be over-powered by the imminent attack. Here the gate is addressed not as the place where the inhabitants gather, but as the crucial point in the conquest of the city. It must wail, because the savage mob of the enemy will pour through it into the conquered city. A greater horror will seize the whole land of the Philistines, and not merely some of the cities, when it perceives the signs of the advancing army.” (P. 54)

<sup>110</sup>Slotki states that the smoke coming is a “metaphor for the devastating hosts, burning buildings and crops in their way.” He adds that the phrase “out of the north” could point to Assyria’s coming, since “Assyria was to the north of Philistia,” but says “Judah, whose capital was Jerusalem, lay to the northeast...[and] may also be described as being in the north.” (P. 73)

Oswalt comments that “*For from the north comes a cloud of smoke* may be a figurative reference to the Assyrian army itself as the cloud or it may be taken somewhat more literally as the cloud of cities put to the torch along the line of the Assyrian advance. In either case, the onslaught is inexorable [impossible to stop or prevent], marked by the perfect order of which the Assyrians were so proud (**Isaiah 5:27, 28**).” (P. 333)

Kaiser states that “The fact that the smoke comes from the north is in accordance with the usual route of attack from the empires of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, but must have reminded the readers, who were no doubt familiar with the **Book of Jeremiah**, of the enemy from the north who had become a typical figure (compare **Jeremiah 1:14-15; 4:6; 6:1; 13:20; 46:20; 47:2; 50:3, 41; 51:48** and **Ezekiel 26:7**).” (Pp. 54-55)

and there is no one straggling in its ranks!<sup>111</sup>

14:32<sup>112</sup> וְמִה־יַעֲנֶה מִלְּאֲכֵי־גֹי

---

<sup>111</sup>Motyer points out that “The phrase *not a straggler* is unparalleled and the meaning is not certain.” (P. 148)

The phrase in Hebrew is אֵין בּוֹדֵד בְּמוֹעָדָיו, “there is not one being separate / isolated in his appointments / appointed places / times.”

Translations of the phrase vary, from “none *shall be* alone in his appointed times,” to “there is no straggler in his ranks,” to οὐκ ἔστιν τοῦ εἶναι, “there is not to be / exist.” **NETS** translates “there is no way to live.”

We take the phrase to mean that it is not a disorganized force that is coming, but rather a tightly-knit, well disciplined army, without any stragglers.

Kaiser states that “A powerful, disciplined and therefore doubly dangerous army is approaching! The sense of the Hebrew text of the great Qumran manuscript [1QIs<sup>a</sup>] is that the army is so numerous that no one can count it.” (Pp. 54-55)

<sup>112</sup>Alexander translates / comments on **verse 32**: “*And what shall one answer (what answer shall be given to) the ambassadors of a nation? That Jehovah has founded Zion, and in it the afflicted of His people shall seek refuge*. The meaning of the last clause is too clear to be disputed, viz., that God is the Protector of His people. This is evidently stated as the result and sum of the whole prophecy, and as such is sufficiently intelligible. It is also given, however, as an answer to ambassadors or messengers, and this has give rise to a great diversity of explanations...

“Instead of ambassadors (מִלְּאֲכֵי [our ‘messengers of’]), kings (מַלְכֵי) is given by all the old Greek Versions except Symmachus, who has ἀγγέλους [‘to messengers / angels’]. The older writers for the most part make ambassadors the subject of the verb—*what will the ambassadors answer?*” (P. 311)

Gray comments on **verse 32** that “In contrast to Philistia (**verses 29-31**), Zion, the existing city (compare **Isaiah 28:16**), is safe, for none other than Yahweh has founded it...In Zion, Yahweh’s people will find a secure retreat...

“The odd expression *the messengers of (the) nation*...must imply that the Philistines sent envoys to Jerusalem (compare **Isaiah 18:2; Jeremiah 27:3**) to seek aid, and received in response the words of **verse 32c.d**—for them a somewhat irrelevant answer. The answer would doubtless be more relevant if addressed to messengers of Assyria demanding the capitulation of Jerusalem; but the difficulty is to establish the connection of an Assyrian embassy to Jerusalem with a threat of the destruction of Philistia.” (P. 270)

(continued...)

כִּי יִהְיֶה יִסַּד צִיּוֹן

וּבֵּה יַחֲסוּ עַנְיֵי עַמּוֹ:

And what will (anyone) answer a nation's messengers?<sup>113</sup>

That YHWH founded Zion,<sup>114</sup>

---

<sup>112</sup>(...continued)

Motyer comments on **verse 32** that “Now Isaiah offers a reply to the Philistine envoys. In substance, the future of Zion is very different. In the face of the same threat, it will be secure and its people safe...The primary reality for the Lord's people in any situation— and especially in a crisis—is the Lord Himself...The Zion-people have no need to seek Philistia's help or to fear what Philistia fears; they have the Lord in Zion.” (Pp. 148-49)

Watts states that **verse 32** “implies that an embassy sits in the ante-chamber of the palace awaiting an answer...The answer is clear. Yahweh is the foundation of Zion's security. Not Sargon, not alliances, not armed rebellion—but Yahweh!...Israel's future lies with Zion. This theme, rather than the messianic theme, dominates the **Book of Isaiah**. His people must refer to the remnant of Israel, as well as Judean villagers. The city is and will be a secure refuge.” (P. 219)

Oswalt comments that “Given the fact that Assyria is not broken and that the Philistines are under the judgment of God through the Assyrian army, Isaiah sees only one answer for the Philistine envoys: God Who brought Zion into existence is Zion's only security (**28:16**).” (P. 333)

Watts explains **verses 28-32**: “The notice of Ahaz's death marks the close of an era. Philistia with Babylon symbolized the implacable rebels against Assyrian power in the ninth decade of the century. So together they are judged. The balance of power still lay with Assyria. The constant warfare was a disaster for the village people. And Yahweh's signal still summoned the Assyrian. The other side of the coin showed Yahweh's support for a neutral Zion, still following the Ahaz-doctrine of passive vassalage with Isaiah's support. Neutral Zion will provide refuge for God's people which the belligerent Samaria was unable to do.” (P. 219)

<sup>113</sup>Slotki states that the “messengers” are “probably envoys from Philistia seeking an alliance with Judah,” and that the “nation” means Philistia. (P. 74)

<sup>114</sup>Kaiser comments on **verse 32a** that “The redactor [editor] wanted to make the picture of the nations gathered before the walls of Zion even clearer. He therefore describes the giving of the calm answer of the certainty of faith to the messenger of the army brought up by King Dragon [? Is Kaiser making a play on the mention in **verse 29** of the **נָפֶע**, a poisonous snake, symbolical of an enemy king?] or to all the kings of the

(continued...)



and in it (the) poor (afflicted) of His people will seek refuge!<sup>115</sup>

---

<sup>114</sup>(...continued)

nations gathered there, who would demand the surrender of the city as Sennacherib's Rabshakeh and Sennacherib himself once did (compare **Isaiah 36:1ff.** and **37:9bff.**).” (Pp. 55-56)

<sup>115</sup>Slotki comments that “No alliances are necessary when God is Protector.” But he notes that “Others render: ‘and what shall each of the messengers of the nation answer?’ The nation is then Judah, and the messengers are those sent by Hezekiah to carry the tidings of his deliverance from Sennacherib.” (P. 74)

(continued...)

---

<sup>115</sup>(...continued)

## 1. “Hell” in the King James Bible

**Deuteronomy 32:22**, For a fire is kindled in mine anger, and shall burn unto the lowest hell [תַּחְתִּיתַיִת שְׁאוֹל, ‘as far as sheol beneath / lowest’; the Greek has ἄδου, ‘of hades’], and shall consume the earth with her increase, and set on fire the foundations of the mountains.

**2 Samuel 22:6**, The sorrows of hell [שְׁאוֹל, sheol; Greek, θανάτου, ‘of death’] compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me;

**Job 11:8**, [It is] as high as heaven; what canst thou do? deeper than hell [מִשְׁאוֹל, ‘from sheol’; Greek, τῶν ἐν ἄδου, ‘the ones in hades’]; what canst thou know?

**Job 26:6**, Hell [שְׁאוֹל, sheol; Greek, ὁ ἄδης, ‘the hades’] [is] naked before him, and destruction hath no covering.

**Psalms 9:17**, The wicked shall be turned into hell [לְשִׁאוֹלָה, ‘to sheol’; Greek, εἰς τὸν ἄδην, ‘into the hades’] [and] all the nations that forget God.

**Psalms 16:10**, For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [לְשִׁאוֹל, ‘to sheol’; Greek, εἰς ἄδην, ‘in / to hades’]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

**Psalms 18:5**, The sorrows of hell [חַבְלֵי שְׁאוֹל, ‘cords of sheol’; Greek, ὠδίνες ἄδου, ‘pains of hades’] compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me.

**Psalms 55:15**, Let death seize upon them, [and] let them go down quick into hell [שְׁאוֹל, sheol; Greek, εἰς ἄδου, ‘into hades’]: for wickedness [is] in their dwellings, [and] among them.

**Psalms 86:13**, For great [is] thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell [מִשְׁאוֹל תַּחְתִּיתַיִת, ‘from lowest sheol’; Greek, ἐξ ἄδου κατωτάτου, ‘from deepest hades.’]

**Psalms 116:3**, The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold upon me [מִצְאוֹנֵי שְׁאוֹל מִצְרֵי שְׁאוֹל, ‘pains of sheol found me’; Greek, κίνδυνοι ἄδου εὐροσάν με, ‘dangers of hades found me’]: I found trouble and sorrow.

**Psalms 139:8**, If I ascend up into heaven, thou [art] there: if I make my bed in hell [שְׁאוֹל, ‘hades’; Greek, εἰς τὸν ἄδην, ‘into the hades’], behold, thou [art there].

**Proverbs 5:5**, Her feet go down to death; her steps take hold on hell [שְׁאוֹל, ‘sheol’; Greek, εἰς τὸν ἄδην, ‘into the hades’].

**Proverbs 7:27**, Her house [is] the way to hell [דְּרָכֵי שְׁאוֹל, ‘ways of sheol’; Greek, ὁδοὶ ἄδου, ‘roads of hades’], going down to the chambers of death.

**Proverbs 9:18**, But he knoweth not that the dead [are] there; [and that] her guests [are] in the depths of hell [בְּעַמְקֵי שְׁאוֹל, ‘in depths of sheol’; Greek, καὶ ἐπὶ πέτευρον ἄδου, ‘and upon a roosting perch of hades’].

**Proverbs 15:11**, Hell and destruction [וְאַבְדוֹן וְשְׁאוֹל, ‘sheol and destruction’; Greek, ἄδης καὶ ἀπώλεια, ‘hades and destruction’] [are] before the LORD: how much

more then the hearts of the children of men?

**Proverbs 15:24**, The way of life [is] above to the wise, that he may depart from hell beneath [מִשְׁאוֹל מִטְהָה, 'from hades downwards'; Greek, ἵνα ἐκκλίνας ἐκ τοῦ ἄδου σωθῆ, 'in order that turning aside out of the hades, you may be saved / delivered.'

**Proverbs 23:14**, Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell [וְנִפְשׁוֹ מִשְׁאוֹל תִּצִּיל, 'and his innermost-being from hades you will deliver'; Greek, τὴν δὲ ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἐκ θανάτου ῥύσῃ, 'but then the psyche / life of his from death you might rescue.'

**Proverbs 27:20**, Hell and destruction are never full [שְׁאוֹל (וְאַבְדָּה) [וְאַבְדָּה] לֹא תִשְׂבַּע, 'sheol and destruction will not be satisfied / filled'; Greek, ἄδης καὶ ἀπώλεια οὐκ ἐμπίμπλονται, 'hades and destruction are not filled / satisfied'] so the eyes of man are never satisfied.

**Isaiah 5:14**, Therefore hell hath enlarged herself [וַהֲרִחֲבָה שְׁאוֹל נַפְשָׁהּ, 'sheol enlarged her innermost-being / appetite'; Greek, ἐπλάτυνεν ὁ ἄδης τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ, 'the hades enlarged its innermost-being'] and opened her mouth without measure: and their glory, and their multitude, and their pomp, and he that rejoiceth, shall descend into it.

**Isaiah 14:9**, Hell from beneath [מִתַּחַת שְׁאוֹל, 'sheol from beneath'; Greek, ὁ ἄδης κάτωθεν, 'the hades from below'] is moved for thee to meet [thee] at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, [even] all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

**Isaiah 14:15**, Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell [אֶל-שְׁאוֹל, 'to hades'; Greek, εἰς ἄδου, 'into hades'], to the sides of the pit [אֶל-יַרְכְּתֵי-בּוֹר, 'to sides of a pit'; Greek, εἰς τὰ θεμέλια τῆς γῆς, 'to the foundations of the earth'].

**Isaiah 28:15**, Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement [כָּרַתְנוּ בְרִית אֶת-מֹות וְעַם-שְׁאוֹל עֲשִׂינוּ, 'we cut a covenant with death, and with sheol we made a seer / visionary'; Greek, ἐποιήσαμεν διαθήκην μετὰ τοῦ ἄδου καὶ μετὰ τοῦ θανάτου συνθήκας, we made a testament with the hades, and with the death agreements']; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves:

**Isaiah 28:18**, And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell [אֶת-שְׁאוֹל, 'with sheol'; Greek, μετὰ τοῦ ἄδου, 'with the hades'] shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it.

**Isaiah 57:9**, And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase [thyself even] unto hell [עַד-שְׁאוֹל, 'as far as sheol'; Greek, ἕως ἄδου, 'as far as hades'].

**Ezekiel 31:16**, I made the nations to shake at the sound of his [Assyria's] fall, when I cast him down to hell [שְׁאוֹלָהּ, 'to sheol'; Greek, εἰς ᾗδου, 'into hades'] with them that descend into the pit: and all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water, shall be comforted in the nether parts of the earth [בְּאַרְץ תַּחְתִּית], 'in lowest land / earth'].

**Ezekiel 31:17**, They also went down into hell [שְׁאוֹלָהּ, 'to sheol'; Greek, εἰς ᾗδου, 'into hades'] with him unto [them that be] slain with the sword; and [they that were] his arm, [that] dwelt under his shadow in the midst of the heathen.

**Ezekiel 32:21**, The strong among the mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of hell [מִתּוֹךְ שְׁאוֹל, 'from (the) midst of sheol'; Greek, ἐν βάθει βόθρου, 'in depth of a hole / pit'] with them that help him: they are gone down, they lie uncircumcised, slain by the sword. [This is the first occurrence of the noun βόθρος, 'Hole,' as a translation of שְׁאוֹל. It may be related to the origin of the translation of sheol in German as *hoelle*, meaning 'underworld' or 'hell.'

**Ezekiel 32:27**, And they shall not lie with the mighty [that are] fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down to hell [שְׁאוֹל, 'sheol'; Greek, εἰς ᾗδου, 'into hades'] with their weapons of war: and they have laid their swords under their heads, but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though they caused their terror in the land of the living.

**Amos 9:2**, Though they dig into hell [בְּשְׁאוֹל, 'into sheol'; Greek, εἰς ᾗδου, 'into hades'], thence shall mine hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, thence will I bring them down:

**Jonah 2:2**, And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell [מִמְעַי הַדָּגָה, 'from the fish's belly'; Greek, ἐκ τῆς κοιλίας τοῦ κήτους, 'out of the belly of the sea-monster'] cried I, [and] thou heardest my voice.

**Habakkuk 2:5**, Yea also, because he transgresseth by wine, [he is] a proud man, neither keepeth at home, who enlargeth his desire as hell [כְּשְׁאוֹל, 'as / like sheol'; Greek, καθὼς ὁ ᾗδης, 'just like the hades'], and [is] as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathereth unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all people:

**Matthew 5:22**, But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire [εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός, 'into the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom, of the fire].

**Matthew 5:29**, And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast [it] from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not [that] thy whole body should be cast into hell [εἰς γέενναν, 'into gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom'].

**Matthew 5:30**, And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast [it] from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not [that] thy

- whole body should be cast into hell [εἰς γέενναν, 'into gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom].
- Matthew 10:28**, And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [καὶ ψυχὴν καὶ σῶμα ἀπολέσαι ἐν γέεννῃ, 'both innermost-being and body to destroy in gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom].
- Matthew 11:23**, And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell [ἕως ᾄδου, 'as far as hades']: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day.
- Matthew 16:18**, And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell [πύλαι ᾄδου, 'gates of hades'] shall not prevail against it. [We take 'gates of hades' to mean 'death.']
- Matthew 18:9**, And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast [it] from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire [εἰς τὴν γέενναν τοῦ πυρός, 'into the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom of the fire'].
- Matthew 23:15**, Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell [υἷον γέεννης, 'son of gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom] than yourselves.
- Matthew 23:33**, [Ye] serpents, [ye] generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell [ἀπὸ τῆς κρίσεως τῆς γέεννης, 'from the judgment of the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom']?
- Mark 9:43**, And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: [εἰς τὴν γέενναν, εἰς τὸ πῦρ τὸ ἄσβεστον, 'into the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom, into the fire, the unquenchable one']! [We take the reference here to be to the many statements in the Hebrew Bible, especially Jeremiah concerning the 'passing through fire' of infant children to the Canaanite Gods at an altar in the Valley of Hinnom, just outside the walls of the ancient City of David, combined with the language of **Isaiah 66:24** concerning unquenchable fire burning rebels just outside Jerusalem.]
- Mark 9:45**, And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: [εἰς τὴν γέενναν, 'into the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom']; later Greek manuscripts have the additional statement, 'into the unquenchable fire'].
- Mark 9:47**, And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire [εἰς τὴν γέενναν, 'into the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom' with no word for 'fire' in the Greek text]:
- Luke 10:15**, And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell [ἕως τοῦ ᾄδου, 'as far as the hades'].
- Luke 12:5**, But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell [εἰς τὴν γέενναν, 'into the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom']; yea, I say unto you, Fear him.

**Luke 16:23**, And in hell [ἐν τῷ ᾗδῃ, 'in the hades'] he lift up his eyes, being in torments [ἐν βασάνοις, 'in torments'], and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

**Acts 2:27**, Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [εἰς ᾗδην, 'in hades'], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

**Acts 2:31**, He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell [εἰς ᾗδην, 'in hades'], neither his flesh did see corruption.

**Jacob (James) 3:6**, And the tongue [is] a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell [ὑπὸ τῆς γέεννης, 'by the gehinnom / Valley of Hinnom'].

**2 Peter 2:4**, For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast [them] down to hell [ταρταρώσας, being held captive in Tartarus] and delivered [them] into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment...' [Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich-Danker states that "Tartarus was thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out, and it was so regarded in Israelite apocalyptic as well." Compare with this the statement concerning Jesus' having gone "in Spirit / spirit to the souls in prison who were disobedient in the days of Noah, **1 Peter 3:18-19.**]

**Revelation 1:18**, I [am] he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death [τὰς κλείς τοῦ θανάτου καὶ τοῦ ᾗδου, 'the keys of the death and of the hades'].

**Revelation 6:8**, And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell [καὶ ὁ ᾗδης, 'and the hades'] followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

**Revelation 20:13**, And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾗδης, 'and the death and the hades'] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

**Revelation 20:14**, And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. [καὶ ὁ θάνατος καὶ ὁ ᾗδης ἐβλήθησαν εἰς τὴν λίμνην τοῦ πυρός. οὗτος ὁ θάνατος ὁ δεύτερός ἐστιν, ἡ λίμνη τοῦ πυρός. 'And the death and the hades were thrown into the lake of the fire; this is the death, the second one, the lake of the fire.']

2.

## Gehenna / Hell

“Gehenna...from the Hebrew Gehinnom (Rabbinical: גֵּהֶנְנוֹם / גֵּהֶנְג ) is a small valley in Jerusalem. In the **Hebrew Bible**, Gehenna was initially where some of the kings of Judah sacrificed their children by fire. Thereafter it was deemed to be cursed (Jeremiah 7:31, 19:2-6).

“In Rabbinic literature and Christian and Islamic scripture, Gehenna is a destination of the wicked. This is different from the more neutral Sheol / Hades, the abode of the dead, although the **King James Version** of the **Bible** usually translates both with the Anglo-Saxon word Hell.

“In the **King James Version** of the **Bible**, the term appears 13 times in 11 different verses as Valley of Hinnom, Valley of the son of Hinnom or Valley of the children of Hinnom. The Valley of Hinnom is the modern name for the valley surrounding Jerusalem's Old City, including Mount Zion, from the west and south. It meets and merges with the Kidron Valley, the other principal valley around the Old City, near the southeastern corner of the city.”

“In Rabbinical Judaism the picture of Gehenna as the place of punishment or destruction of the wicked occurs frequently in the **Mishnah** in Kiddushin 4.14, Avot 1.5; 5.19, 20, Tosefta t. Bereshith 6.15, and Babylonian Talmud b.Rosh Hashanah 16b:7a; b. Bereshith 28b. Gehenna is considered a Purgatory-like place where the wicked go to suffer until they have atoned for their sins. It is stated that the maximum amount of time a sinner can spend in Gehenna is one year. There are also four people who do not get a share in Olam Ha-Ba.[23] Those people are Doeg the Edomite, Ahitophel, Balaam, and Gehazi.

“Due to Jewish religious tradition regarding the bloodiness of its history, Gehenna became a metonym for ‘Hell’ or any similar place of punishment in the afterlife.

“The traditional explanation that a burning rubbish heap in the Valley of Hinnom south of Jerusalem gave rise to the idea of a fiery Gehenna of judgment is attributed to Rabbi David Kimhi's commentary on **Psalms 27:13** (about 1200 C.E.). He maintained that in this loathsome valley fires were kept burning perpetually to consume the filth and cadavers thrown into it. However, Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck state that there is neither archaeological nor literary evidence in support of this claim, in either the earlier inter-testamental or the later rabbinic sources. Also, Lloyd R. Bailey's "Gehenna: The Topography of Hell" from 1986 holds a similar view...

“Eventually the Hebrew term Gehinnom became a figurative name for the place of spiritual purification for the wicked dead in Judaism. According to most Jewish sources, the period of purification or punishment is limited to only 12 months and every Sabbath day is excluded from punishment. After this the soul will ascend to Olam Ha-Ba (the world to come), be destroyed, or continue to exist in a state of consciousness of remorse.” (**Wikipedia**, 2/12/2018)



3.

### **Ghosts**

“In folklore and mythology, a ghost (sometimes known as a specter, phantom, apparition, spirit, spook, or haunt) is the soul or spirit of a dead human or animal that can appear to the living. Descriptions of ghosts vary widely from an invisible presence to translucent or barely visible wispy shapes, to realistic, lifelike visions. The deliberate attempt to contact the spirit of a deceased person is known as necromancy, or in spiritism as a seance.

“The belief in manifestations of the spirits of the dead is widespread, dating back to animism or ancestor worship in pre-literate cultures. Certain religious practices-- funeral rites, exorcisms, and some practices of spiritualism and ritual magic--are specifically designed to rest [reach?] the spirits of the dead. Ghosts are generally described as solitary essences that haunt particular locations, objects, or people they were associated with in life, though stories of phantom armies, trains, ships, and even the ghosts of animals have also been recounted. (**Wikipedia**, 7/19/2016)

#### 4. Mount Zaphon, in the Far-Reaches of the North

“Jebel Aqra is a limestone mountain located on the Syrian–Turkish border near the mouth of the Orontes River on the Mediterranean Sea. Its Turkish side is also known as Mount Kel (*Kel Dağı*). Rising from a narrow coastal plain, Jebel Aqra is a mariners' landmark which gathers thunderstorms.

“The cult site is still represented by a huge mound of ashes and debris, 180 feet (55 meters) wide and 26 feet (7.9 meters) deep, of which only the first 6 feet (1.8 meters) have been excavated. The researchers only reached as far as the Hellenistic strata before the site was closed, as it lies in a Turkish military zone on its border with Syria.

“Jebel Aqra has a long history as a sacred mountain. The Hurrians called it Mount Hazzi and considered it the home of their storm God Teshub. The Hittites continued his worship, celebrating Teshub's victory over the sea in the Song of Kumarbi found in their capital Hattusa. They also celebrated the mountain in its own right, naming it as a divine guarantor on their treaties and observing rites in its honor. The ancient port of Ugarit (modern Ras Shamra lies 30 kilometers (19 miles) to its south. Texts discovered there in the 1920s, including the Baal Cycle, showed its residents considered the peak of Mount Sapan (Akkadian, Ugaritic, & Phoenician: apānu) to house the lapis and silver palace of their storm God Ba'al (lit. "The Lord") and his sister Anat. Ba'al is now often identified with Hadad and his variations understood as local cults. The form Ba'al Zaphon was worshiped widely: his temple at Ugarit held a sandstone relief dedicated to him by a royal scribe in Egypt and the king of Tyre called on him as a divine witness on a treaty with the emperor of Assyria in 677 B.C.E.

“It appears in the Hebrew Scriptures as Mount Zaphon. In ancient Canaanite religion, Mount Sapan was sometimes accounted as the home of all the Gods, not only Ba'al and his sister. As Mount Zaphon, it appears in that role in the Hebrew Scriptures' **Book of Isaiah**. From its importance and its position at the northern end of Canaan, it also became a metonym and then the word for the direction "north" in the Hebrew language.

“Under various forms, worship continued through antiquity, when it was called Mount Casius and lay 10 kilometers (6.2 miles) north of Posideium (modern Ras al-Bassit). Even closer, the earliest Hellenic foothold in the Levant lies at the beach on its northern flank at Al Mina. Here Euboeans and Cypriotes experienced some of their earliest on-site experience of northwest Semitic cultures, from the early eighth century B.C.E. onwards. "The Hittite name persisted in neo-Hittite culture into the ninth century B.C.E., and so when Greeks settled on the north side of Mount Hazzi they continued to call its main peak 'Mount Kasios'", Lane Fox points out, observing that it was the Mount Olympus of the Near East.[Lane Fox, Robin (2009), "A Traveling Mountain," *Traveling Heroes in the Epic Age of Homer*, New York: Knopf, pp. 243–258.]

“The cult of the God of the mountain was transferred, by *interpretatio graeca* [Greek interpretation], to *Zeus Kasios*, the "*Zeus of Mount Kasios*", similar to Ras Kouroun in the Sinai. Tiles from the Greco-Roman sanctuary at the site, stamped with

the God's name, were reused in the Christian monastery that came to occupy the eastern, landward slopes of Kazios.

“When kings and emperors climbed Mount Kasios to sacrifice at its peak sanctuary, it was a notable cultural occasion. Seleucus I Nicator sought there the advice of Zeus in locating his foundation, a Seleuceia (one of many) on the coast. Coins struck there as late as the first century B.C.E. still show the city's emblem, the thunderbolt, sometimes placed upon the cushion of a throne. In the winter of 114/15 C.E. Trajan was spared in a major earthquake that struck Antioch; commemorative coins were struck featuring the shrine of Zeus Kasios, with its pointed roof on pillars, and a representation of its rounded sacred stone, or betyl. Trajan's adoptive son Hadrian accompanied him; he returned in 130 C.E. to scale the mountain at night, no doubt, Lane Fox remarks, to witness the rising of the sun, visible for several minutes from the peak, while the land below lay still in darkness; it was said later that a thunderbolt at the peak struck the animal he was about to sacrifice. In spring 363 C.E. the last pagan emperor, Julian, scaled the mountain, where he had an epiphanic vision of Zeus Kasios, according to his friend and correspondent Libanius.

“Greek theophoric names *Kassiodora* and *Kassiodorus*, equally meaning a "gift of Kasios", recall a vow of one or both parents made to ensure fertile conception.

“Christian hermits were drawn to the mountain; Barlaam [legendary Indian Christian martyr, acknowledged by Eastern Orthodoxy] challenged its demons by founding a monastery near the tree-line on its eastern slopes, and Simeon Stylites the Younger [Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger [also known as 'St. Simeon of the Admirable Mountain'] (521–May 24, 597 C.E.) is a saint in the Eastern Orthodox Church and Catholic Churches of Eastern and Latin Rites. He is said to have stood for forty years on a pillar near the mountain's northern flanks until his death.” (**Wikipedia**, 7/28/2016)

## 5. **Darnell's Sermon Applying Isaiah 13-14 Saddam Hussein**

Here is a sermon preached as the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein began:

What a terribly gruesome, vengeance-loving song **Isaiah 13:1-23** is! What's it doing in our **Bible**? It is a song of joy that a great king has fallen, a song that rejoices in his death, glorying in the fact that his physical body will now become a banquet for maggots and worms! Is that what you mean by "Holy Scripture"?

But not to worry. We church people know well how to handle passages of scripture like this--passages that speak too openly and frankly about death, or sex, or other things we'd rather not talk about. What you must learn to do is to just leave them alone--leave them buried in the "Old Testament." That's a safe place, where they'll never bother anyone! Just let sleeping dogs lie, with the rest of the "Holy Bible," gathering dust on the family bookshelf, or in the family trunk in the attic. Yes, that's the way to deal with a passage like this. Don't stir up problems by reading such passages. Don't give them a serious thought. Never talk about them. Never sing a song about them--but then, you don't need to worry about that--there's not a song in the hymn-book that would ever use such crude words as these! The committees that pick out songs for our song-books are sufficiently trained in the sanitization of our worship to see to it that any such songs as these are left completely out of consideration!

No, just make up your own views concerning the meaning of politics, and history, and the rise and fall of nations, and what the future holds for America, and Russia, and China, and Iraq, and Afghanistan, and Iran, and Israel. Pretend that the **Bible** doesn't speak about people like Saddam Hussein or Adminejad of Iran. Let the preacher stick to "spiritual things," like "The Marks of the One True Church," and let them preach on truly important matters, like baptism (I mean, "immersion"! ). Let them take texts like **Acts 2:38**, or **John 3:16**, or **John 14:6** and preach on them every Sunday, over and over, telling so-called "saved people" how to "get saved," explaining to baptized people the importance of baptism! Argue about those favorite texts, split churches over them, make them the heart and center of the whole **Bible**. But leave passages like **Isaiah 13-14** (or its companion text, **Ezekiel 27-28**) alone! Texts like these can only succeed in confusing and leading people astray. Sure, we say we believe that the **Bible** is "the word of God," but what does that have to do with gruesome passages like this?

Or, on the other hand, if you insist on reading and using passages like this for Christian preaching and teaching, then again, not to worry. Here's an "easy out," a way to get around these passages without ever really grappling with their true meaning: make these passages mean something they were never intended to mean. Make the "King of Babylon" into a thinly-disguised veil for the "Devil," for "Satan." Take the passages completely out of their context in the history of Israel, and throw them back into the time before creation, in that mysterious, heavenly world of God and His messengers (better yet, call them by a Greek name, "angels")! Make these texts into a mysterious Divine revelation of prehistoric happenings, of the origin of Satan and of all evil, in a heavenly fall of an Archangel named "Lucifer," long before the creation of the world and of human beings!

And then, on the basis of these texts, force all other Christians to accept your view of the Devil and His origin, or else relegate them into the status of second-class, non-**Bible**-believing Christians! And, having done all of this, you will have succeeded in getting around having to take these passages seriously, in their actual, historical meaning. It's just as good a way as the first way of totally neglecting them! The fact is, these are the ways we have dealt with such texts as this in **Isaiah 13-14**!

And yet, in spite of all our efforts to neglect or get around these passages, there they are--still a part of our **Bible**--and when we are dead and gone, they will still be there in the **Bibles** our children and grandchildren will be reading, if they still believe the **Bible** is important. And what are they going to make of these texts? Will they continue to neglect them, or insist on interpreting them in such a non-historical way? I hope not! No, I hope that we can learn to come to terms with these passages, and find genuine historical understanding and meaning in them--both for ourselves, and for those who follow after us. Indeed, I believe that this is entirely possible in our own time!

This passage in **Isaiah** is addressed to a people who had suffered grievously under a political tyrant, Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian King or Emperor. They are a people who had been plundered by Nebuchadnezzar, who had totally destroyed their temple and their capital-city of Jerusalem, and who had carried many of them far away from Israel into Babylonian captivity. They are a people who have known first-hand the tragic reality of war, and what it means to endure the suffering of national disaster and humiliating, oppressive exile, with the loss of their homes and homeland. Their families have been murdered, and their lives have been totally devastated. Year after year they have lived under the heel of a tyrant ruler--in Babylon, where modern day Iraq is located. Is it any coincidence that the modern Iraqi tyrant, Saddam Hussein, called himself a modern "Nebuchadnezzar"?

**Isaiah 13-14** is addressed to just such a people, who have suffered under the ruler of ancient Babylon--modern-day Iraq. These chapters announce the coming of the "Day of YHWH" upon Babylon, the conqueror and captor of the Jewish people. The prophet for YHWH assures proud Babylon and her egotistical tyrant king, Nebuchadnezzar, that there is a God of justice Who avenges all political and social oppression in human history. Just as God once rained down destruction in the "overthrow" of Sodom and Gomorrah, so God has reserved His "day" for Babylon, a day on which proud Babylon and her egotistical king will be plunged into destruction for the haughty evil and proud oppression which have filled their heart and life. And, what is said of Babylon, and the King of Babylon, in these chapters, is intended as a lesson for every nation, and for every ruler on earth:

This is the counsel that has been counseled for all the earth;  
and this is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations! (**14:26**)

It is the clear teaching of **Isaiah 13-14** that there is a God of all peoples and nations, a God Who entrusts political power to human rulers--all sorts of rulers, in all nations under heaven. Not just to "Jewish" or "Christian" rulers--but to Czars, and Kings, to Emperors and Dictators, to Presidents and Party Chiefs, to cruel bosses and to humble shepherds as well. Yes, God entrusts to them the privilege and responsibility

to rule, to guide, to govern, to lead humanity into its future. Human rulers do not achieve their power, they do not come to their positions apart from God's purpose and providence. The God of the **Bible** is not some parochial God, only interested in His peculiar parish--whether that parish be described as Jewish, or Christian, or Muslim, or Buddhist, or Hindu, or Catholic, or Protestant, or Baptist, or Lutheran, or Mormon.

No, the God of the **Bible** is the God of Europe and North America, and the God of the Persian Gulf and Asia, and Africa, and Latin America, as well. He is the God of Australia, and the far-flung islands of the seas, and of the North and South Poles too! He doesn't just work through certain churches and hierarchies of priests--He is the God Who is served by all peoples and nations, and Whose will is being worked out in the midst of wars, and political movements, and the rise and fall of kings and kingdoms! His purposes are being fulfilled even in the midst of humanity's insane wars--just as they are being worked out in the wild, ferocious animals of the jungle and the ocean swamps (if you doubt this, please re-read, or read, **Job 38-41!**)

Along with this there is seen in this passage the mysterious truth of human freedom which has been given to all peoples and nations. God is our Creator and Sustainer, the One to Whom we must all give our ultimate account. But still, God will make none of us into marionettes on strings, or into Divinely-controlled robots with heavenly computers! Not at all. He sets us all free, gloriously, and tragically free--free to make, free to do, free to choose, free to decide for ourselves; but also free to become bigots, and pretend to be Divine, and to murder and oppress the innocent, to build concentration camps with crematoria, and Gulags, and killing fields.

He gives us great privileges, and with those privileges, heavy responsibilities--the privilege and responsibility to join with Him in creating a world of justice and peace. He also allows us the freedom to pervert that privilege, to misuse our responsibility, to turn this world into a hell of injustice, and oppression, and ugliness, if we so choose.

The King of Babylon, as described in **Isaiah 13-14**, is a true-to-life example of the awesome reality and tragic possibilities of human freedom. The very one, chosen to high position and responsibility, can easily begin to think he is far more than he really is, to act as if he is God Himself, rather than God's servant. That' s the origin of evil! That' s the origin of the demonic, the satanic power in human history!

It's something that happens here and now, in our own human history, as finite human beings seek to make themselves Divine, instead of worshiping and serving the one true and living God! The origin of evil is not to be found in something that happened long before creation, in a far-off heavenly world, but something that happens again and again in our lives, in our human history, as tiny human leaders begin to look upon themselves as being more than they really are, thinking of themselves as Gods, and therefore treating their fellow human beings as their servants, whose destiny and welfare can be subordinated to their own glory, or whims. That' s the origin of evil.

People ask, "Where did the Devil come from?" The biblical answer is, "Right there--wherever and whenever tiny human beings, entrusted with Divine freedom and responsibility, choose to make of themselves little Gods, usurping authority over life and

death, and serving their own selfish purposes rather than humbly submitting themselves to the will of God, rather than becoming suffering servants of the living God, creating peace on earth through serving the hungry, the naked, the poor, the widow and the orphan!"

That is why the King of Babylon is described in "satanic," "demonic" terms in this passage; and that is why we are able to describe Saddam Hussein in just such terms at the turn of the twentieth century!

It is also the teaching of this passage that Almighty God allows good people, righteous people, to suffer dreadfully under tyrants like the King of Babylon, or the modern President of Iraq, Saddam Hussein--who, instead of humbly using their God-given responsibility for bringing peace to the world through justice and truth, choose instead to proudly serve their own selfish appetites and cruel policies of expansion and aggression and lies. Under them, God allows people to endure long and terrible pain, turmoil, and hard slavery, even death.

No, the **Bible** does not hide its eyes from the fact of political oppression--whether that of the Pharaohs, and the Kings of Babylon, or of American slave-owners and the worshipers of military power, in our own time. Humanity is never promised in the **Bible** a "bed of roses"--but, quite to the contrary, we are assured that we will be confronted by narrow-minded bigots, and little men in big offices, who in pride make themselves into Gods--like the King of Babylon, and Hitler, and Idi Amin, and Stalin, and Saddam Hussein, and the other like leaders in Syria, and Iran, and elsewhere. We are assured that there will be long periods of holocaust, and suffering in human history, as a result. Becoming a Jew, or a Christian, or a Muslim, and saying your prayers at bed-time, will never serve as a rabbit's foot, able to eliminate suffering and tragedy from your life. Suffering and trial are part and parcel of the human experience, because of human freedom.

I have oftentimes observed that "God must really love human freedom, and the necessity for human beings to make tough decisions"--because He certainly gives us plenty of them, and allows us to live with their consequences!

And yet, this passage assures us, the "Day of YHWH" will surely come in human history, when God, the ultimate Ruler of all peoples and nations, gives rest to the oppressed peoples of the earth. Even more emphatically, this passage rings out with the assurance that God on that "day" brings a terrible end to the reign of the oppressive tyrants of human history! And just because it is Almighty God's decision, His judgment, His sentence, we can act as if it has already come to pass! So this passage teaches!

Yes, this passage that we have read is a terribly gruesome, stinging song that cuts with biting sarcasm, and that rejoices over the fallen tyrant's fate. It is gruesome--but it is intended as a "proverbial / parabolic song"--a song intended to teach every one of us Divine wisdom. It's not just talking about the ancient King of Babylon--it's announcing a truth that goes far beyond the King of Babylon, to be applied to every proud oppressor, to every unjust political system, to every person who, in pride, acts as if he or she were God--in all of history! That's why I insisted that this passage could be

applied forcefully to the modern "King of Babylon"--to Saddam Hussein, and to Iraq, the nation that now occupies the area once occupied by ancient Babylon.

There will be such oppressors in human history--yes. There will be people who look upon themselves as God. Yes. And righteous people, good people, innocent people, will sometimes, even oftentimes, have to suffer grievously under such tyrants. No, God will not pull us out of the real world of suffering and evil; He will not miraculously transform our place in history into a bed of roses. Religious voices may claim that He will, but it is not the case.

And yet, this passage tells us that we need not be perplexed or afraid, as if evil were forever on the throne, as if earth's tyrants have the final word over our lives, and over human history. For they do not! God is the ultimate King of the world; He is the Lord of human history. And every oppressive system and every proud tyrant, every self-made "God," will ultimately go down to terrible defeat, as God calls forth armies to fight against and destroy them!

In this biblical passage, we can hear the call of God to us--to lay aside our egotistical pride, our self-deifying, to turn to God as little children--to acknowledge God as God, because He is, and to acknowledge ourselves as His children, because we are--and to turn to His service and obedience in humble trust, knowing that despite all the evils in human history, God is still God, and He will provide for us, and it is to Him, and to Him alone, that our ultimate loyalty belongs!

The evil tyrants will fall; and God will provide a wondrous, glorious future for all His people--if not on this earth, and in this earthly life, then beyond this earth, in His eternal world! This much we can believe! The Persian Gulf War is only beginning, and Saddam Hussein is still making his proud claims. But he will go down--indeed, his sentence has already been passed, and his end is sure! And we can be assured that our God will bring about a new day of peace with justice throughout the Persian Gulf area. This is our hope, and it will not fail us. It is still our confidence, and this is our prayer!

Lord Jesus, we lift up our prayers in Your name to God our Father--the Lord of history, the God of all peoples and nations, Who is working out His great purposes in the rise and fall of nations, even in the midst of human brutality and wars.

Great God, Ruler of the universe, You have made known Your purpose to us. In the midst of the pain, turmoil, and hard slavery experienced because of human evil, You are bringing into being Your new world of peace and rest--in which every person, and every family, in all the earth, can live quietly, with security and plenty, upon their own land, sharing in the bounty of Your Kingdom. O God, let Your Kingdom come speedily; let Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven! Grant, O God, the speedy overcoming of evil, and the coming of peace with justice for all peoples upon this earth!

O God, when tyrants arise, and impose their will upon the earth--oppressing those weaker than themselves, attacking with unceasing wrath, and ruling with unrestrained anger and persecution, we become afraid--as if they were indeed the



rulers of this world. We act as if the most important actors in human history are the military leaders, and the politicians, with their massive weapons of destruction.

But You are on the real throne of the universe, O God, King of kings, and Lord of lords! And You are fulfilling Your purpose of love and compassion for all people, as You raise up brave warriors for justice, who are willing to sacrifice their lives in overcoming the wicked dictators. Give them courage and strength, O God! Give them victory in the midst of evil! Through them, the old world of evil is perishing, and the new world is being brought into being for Your people--where all pain and turmoil and slavery will be ended, and the earth can live in blessed "rest" and "peace"! Thanks be to You, O God!

The wicked tyrants, such as Saddam Hussein, have been weighed in the scales of justice, and have been found wanting. You have pronounced their end. Surely they will be brought down to the grave, to the far reaches of the pit! Because they--and Saddam Hussein especially--have destroyed their own land, and murdered their own people!

O God, we have prayed for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, and the coming of a new day of peace with justice for all the Middle Eastern countries--for Iraq, and Kuwait; for Israel and the Palestinians; for Lebanon and Syria and Iran--and for Ethiopia and Sudan, and Somalia--and for all the countries of this earth, where war and bloodshed continue--including Central and South America!

We know that the only alternative to war and hatred is to turn from our own selfish, hurtful ways, to accept Your gift of forgiveness and new life offered to us so powerfully in Jesus. Grant that his good news may go out throughout all the world in our time, and that Your Kingdom may take control of the hearts and lives of all peoples and nations--so that wars may cease, and we may live at peace with one another, in the peace and prosperity of Your Kingdom! Amen!

6.

## Jews as the Chosen People

“In Judaism, ‘chosenness’ is the belief that the Jews, via descent from the ancient Israelites, are the chosen people, i.e. chosen to be in a covenant with God. The idea of the Israelites being chosen by God is found most directly in the **Book of Deuteronomy** as the verb *bahar*, and is alluded to elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** using other terms such as ‘holy people’. Much is written about these topics in rabbinic literature. The three largest Jewish denominations--Orthodox Judaism, Conservative Judaism and Reform Judaism—maintain the belief that the Jews have been chosen by God for a purpose. Sometimes this choice is seen as charging the Jewish people with a specific mission--to be a light unto the nations, and to exemplify the covenant with God as described in the **Torah**.

“This view, however, did not preclude a belief that God has a relationship with other peoples--rather, Judaism held that God had entered into a covenant with all humankind, and that Jews and non-Jews alike have a relationship with God. Biblical references as well as rabbinic literature support this view: Moses refers to the ‘God of the spirits of all flesh’ (**Numbers 27:16**), and the **Tanakh (Hebrew Bible)** also identifies prophets outside the community of Israel. Based on these statements, some rabbis theorized that, in the words of Nethanel ibn Fayyumi, a Yemenite Jewish theologian of the 12th century, ‘God permitted to every people something He forbade to others... [and] God sends a prophet to every people according to their own language.’ (Levine, 1907/1966)..I

“The **Mishnah** states that ‘Humanity was produced from one man, Adam, to show God's greatness. When a man mints a coin in a press, each coin is identical. But when the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, creates people in the form of Adam not one is similar to any other.’ (**Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5**) The **Mishnah** continues, and states that anyone who kills or saves a single human, not Jewish, life, has done the same (save or kill) to an entire world. The **Tosefta**, a collection of important post-Talmudic discourses, also states: ‘Righteous people of all nations have a share in the world to come.’” (**Sanhedrin 105a**). **Wikipedia**, 7/20/2016)

7.

## Flying Snakes

“*Chrysopelea*, more commonly known as the **flying snake** or **gliding snake**, is a genus that belongs to the family Colubridae. Flying snakes are mildly venomous, though the venom is only dangerous to their small prey. Their range is in Southeast Asia (the mainland (Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), Greater and Lesser Sundas, Maluku, and the Philippines), southernmost China, India, and Sri Lanka.

“*Chrysopelea* is also known by its common name ‘flying snake.’ It climbs using ridge scales along its belly, pushing against rough bark surface of tree trunks, allowing it to move vertically up a tree. Upon reaching the end of a tree's branch, the snake continues moving until its tail dangles from the branch's end. It then makes a J-shape bend, leans forward to select the level of inclination it wishes to use to control its glide path, as well as selecting a desired landing area. Once it decides on a destination, it propels itself by thrusting its body up and away from the tree, sucking in its abdomen and flaring out its ribs to turn its body into a ‘pseudo concave wing,’ all the while making a continual serpentine motion of lateral undulation [see the video on the Internet ‘Lateral Undulation in Snake Locomotion’] parallel to the ground to stabilize its direction in midair in order to land safely.

“The combination of sucking in its stomach and making a motion of lateral undulation in the air makes it possible for the snake to glide in the air, where it also manages to save energy compared to travel on the ground and dodge earth-bound predators. The concave wing that a snake creates in sucking in its stomach flattens its body up to twice its width from the back of the head to the anal vent, which is close to the end of the snake's tail, causes the cross section of the snake's body to resemble the cross section of a frisbee or flying disc. When a flying disc spins in the air, the designed cross sectional concavity causes increased air pressure under the centre of the disc, causing lift for the disc to fly. A snake continuously moves in lateral undulation to create the same effect of increased air pressure underneath its arched body to glide. Flying snakes are able to glide better than flying squirrels and other gliding animals, despite the lack of limbs, wings, or any other wing-like projections, gliding through the forest and jungle it inhabits with the distance being as great as 100 meters [over 328 feet, more than the length of a football field]. Their destination is mostly predicted by ballistics; however, they can exercise some in-flight attitude control by ‘slithering’ in the air.

“Their ability to glide has been an object of interest for physicists and the United States Department of Defense in recent years, and studies continue to be made on what other, more subtle, factors contribute to their gliding. According to recent research conducted by the University of Chicago, scientists discovered a correlation between size and gliding ability, in which smaller flying snakes were able to glide longer distances horizontally. According to research performed by Professor Jake Socha at Virginia Tech, these snakes can change the shape of their body in order to produce aerodynamic forces so they can glide in the air. Scientists are hopeful that this research will lead to design robots which can glide in the air from one place to another.”  
(Wikipedia, 7/20/2016)

