

Isaiah Chapter 28, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

YHWH's Teaching–

Evaded by Proud, Intoxicated Politicians–

but Present and Followed

in the Common Occupations of Humanity

28:1' הוֹי עֵטְרַת גִּאוֹת שְׁכַרֵי אֶפְרַיִם

¹There are two end-notes for **chapter 28**: “The phrase **בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא**, **bayom hahu**), “in that day,” in the Book of Isaiah”; and “Occurrences of the Hebrew Noun **הַמְנוּחָה**, **hammenuchah**, “the place of rest” in the **Hebrew Bible**.”

Motyer entitles **chapters 28:1-37:38** “The Lord of History,” and holds that “the occasion [for these chapters] is that of the ‘Egyptian alliance’...in the days of Hezekiah. Judah is seen willfully refusing the way of trust in the Lord for trust in Egypt; Egypt is revealed as blustering and ultimately ineffective, and the Assyrian army, bending its colossal power to punish the rebels, is destroyed by the (an) angel of the Lord.

“In the first section (**chapters 28-29**), though the material is woven round the episode of the Egyptian alliance, neither Egypt nor Assyria is named and Isaiah’s purpose is to elucidate the principles involved in the situation and in the Lord’s dealings with His people...Then in **chapters 30-32** Isaiah comes to grips with Egypt and Assyria by name...

“In **chapters 33-35** the acts of God in history become the pattern of His eschatological acts...and in **chapters 36-37** the firm rock of history is offered as a secure foundation for the hopes just outlined. It is as if Isaiah were saying, ‘See what He has done. Now trust Him, for He will yet do all He has promised.’”

Motyer entitles **28:1-29** “The One Foundation.” He comments that “the section begins (**verses 1-6**) and ends (**verses 23-29**) with double illustrations drawn from nature and agriculture...

He entitles **28:1-6** “Ephraim an End and a Beginning,” and states that “The hill of Samaria (**1 Kings 16:24**), with its terraced vineyards and fertile valleys, is seen as a garlanded reveler whose time has all but run out (**verse 1**). The Lord has in hand an irresistible foe (**verses 2-3**) and Samaria will be gobbled up with the same alacrity [eagerness] and unthinkingness as a passer-by picks and swallows a first-ripe fig (**verse 4**). But a better day is yet to dawn (**verses 5-6**), on which the Lord will be the true crown of His people and their city will be impregnable.” (Pp. 227-29)

Oswalt entitles **28:1-33:24** “The Folly of Trusting the Nations,” **28:1-29:24** “Woe to the Drunken Rulers,” and **28:1-13** “Ephraim.”

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He comments that “In **chapters 28-33** Isaiah continues his treatment, begun in **chapter 7**, of the foolishness of trusting the nations instead of the Lord. He returns to a particularizing mode to do so. That is, he deals with the specific political situation in Judah, rather than with the worldwide picture. The same approach was seen in **chapters 13-27** where particular situations were addressed (**chapters 13-23**) before a general truth was drawn (**chapters 24-27**)...

“The Assyria with which Ahaz had allied himself is first finishing up with Samaria (**28:1-13**) and then turning its unwanted attentions on Judah (**29:7-8**). The flood which Isaiah had foretold (**8:6, 8**) is about to burst in full force against the southern kingdom.

“In the intervening years between Samaria’s fall (721 B.C.E.) and Sennacherib’s attack on Jerusalem (701 B.C.E.), it appears that Judah’s foreign-policy makers turned more and more toward alliance with Egypt (**30:3; 31:1**). To Isaiah, this alliance was just as stupid as the earlier one with Assyria had been...

“To the prophet, the thought that someone would commit himself to fickle Egypt instead of to God Who had proven Himself again and again was simply incredible (**30:15-33**). It was a course of action which could only be proposed by a cynical, faithless leadership drunk on its own power and privilege (**28:7-8; 29:15-16; 30:1; compare also 1:23; 7:13; 9:14-16; 19:11-15**), blind to the necessarily destructive results of such a course. Thus this section is marked by the repetition of the funeral cries of ‘Woe!’ (**28:1; 29:1, 15; 30:1; 31:1; 33:1**). If Judah persists in this way there is only a funeral ahead for her as there is for Ephraim. Yet, she need not persist; there is an alternative. She may turn from the blind, drunk politicians to the King Whose character had been impressed upon Isaiah from the day of his calling (**29:17-24; 30:18-33**).

“The structure of the segment appears to be tripartite. First, **chapters 28 and 29** paint the picture for us: foolish leaders, a multitude of enemies, the false counsel that something must be done at once, humanly speaking, for there is no hope in God. Second, **chapters 30 and 31** depict the proposed solution: dependence on Egypt and the folly of that solution. **Chapters 32 and 33** then give the true solution: the revelation of the King and His presence in their midst.

“Many commentators argue that **chapter 33** should be separated from **chapters 28-32** and joined with **34 and 35**. However, the main reason for this is the supposed apocalyptic flavor to the language of **chapter 33**. But this is hardly conclusive...There is good reason to connect this chapter with **chapters 28-32** and separate it from **chapters 34-35**...

“Above all, the concepts are those of **chapters 28-32**: ‘woe’ (**33:1; 28:1**, etc); ‘wait’ (**33:2; 30:18**); the King (**33:7, 22; 32:1**); foreign speech (**33:19; 28:11**); ‘apocalyptic’ versions of salvation (**33:3-6, 13-16; 29:17-24; 30:19-33**). All of these

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argue forcefully that **chapter 33** is in fact a conclusion to the themes of **chapters 28-32...**

“28:1-29:24 are alive with scorn as the prophet depicts the situation in Judah and among its leaders. He begins by denouncing the leaders of the northern kingdom and predicting their doom (**28:1-3**), which was probably beginning to become apparent to even the most unperceptive. But then he destroys any Judean smugness which might have been arising by coming to his main point: the Judean leaders are just like their counterparts in Samaria and thus may expect the same fate...But the leaders in Jerusalem are accused of something more severe than those in Samaria: a cynical mocking spirit which believes nothing and trusts no one...

“The position taken here is that all of **28:1-13** refers to Ephraim...It must still be admitted that the address might shift to Judah as early as **verse 7**, a position many commentators take...

“Because the leaders of Samaria are drunken and senseless, the people are not able to understand the elemental truths of life. Therefore, God must teach them through the hard school of experience.” (Pp. 504-06)

Slotki introduces **chapters 28-32** by stating that “This group of oracles, with the exception of **28:1-6** which obviously deals with the Northern Kingdom and must be dated before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E., is assigned to the early years of the reign of Sennacherib (705-702 B.C.E.). Throughout the prophecies in this group, God’s purpose is contrasted with the foolish plans of the Judean politicians. Isaiah in the name of God counsels allegiance and loyalty to Assyria, and warns against the fatal consequences of an alliance with Egypt...

“**Chapter 28:1-6**, as an introduction to the series, may have been added as a reminder and a warning that the earlier fate of Samaria might also befall Jerusalem... **Verses 1-4** depict the fatal consequences of the misguided policy of the drunken nobles of Ephraim.” (P. 126)

Kaiser comments that “The composition which we possess in **chapters 28-32** takes its present form from the theme of the eschatological struggle for Jerusalem, the climax and turning point of the eschatological drama. But it is not possible to subdivide it with certainty.

“The basic material which it contains is a collection of sayings of Isaiah from the period of the revolt of Judah against Assyria in the year 703-701 B.C.E. This collection was put into its original form at the earliest between 597 and 587 B.C.E., and possibly not until after the conquest of Jerusalem in 587...

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“The collection may be ascribed to a school of disciples of Isaiah, as an indication of its connections with the thought and preaching of the prophet. [Portions that should be ascribed to Isaiah, demonstrate how he] in the decisive years of his ministry consistently pointed to the ruinous effect of a policy and an attitude which trusted in the support of Egypt instead of in Yahweh...

“Isaiah had an acute sense of the contradiction between a formal obedience limited to the cult [worship in the temple] and the practical atheism demonstrated by the response to the approaching danger from Assyria...He unceasingly stresses that the nation will be faced with a terrifying awakening from its dreams...As is shown by the saying in **22:1-4, 12-14**, which has been preserved outside the collection and which was composed after the Assyrian troops had withdrawn from Jerusalem, the prophet persisted in his proclamation of judgment even after the capitulation had taken place.

“Not only because we assume that the prophet’s preaching was coherent...but also for reasons based upon the history of religion and the psychological and sociological background, in this commentary we regard **29:1-18; 30:27-33** and **31:4-9** as deriving either not at all or only in part from Isaiah. From the point of view of tradition history, they derive from the myth of the battle of the nations and look forward to the salvation of Jerusalem by Yahweh Himself at the last moment, by non-military means...

“From a psychological point of view the mixture and alternation of prophecies of judgment and of salvation is hardly conceivable in the concrete situation of the years 703-701 B.C.E. Apart from the fact that they would have represented a remarkable vacillation in the prophet’s preaching, a people which still played an active part in its own history would rightly have dismissed them.” (Pp. 234-35)

Alexander summarizes the contents of **chapter 28**: “Samaria, the crown of Ephraim, shall be cast down by a sudden and impetuous invasion, as a just judgment upon sensual and impious Israel (**verses 1-4**). To the remnant of Israel, Jehovah will Himself be a crown and a protection, a source of wisdom and of strength (**verses 5-6**). Yet even these imitate the example of apostate Israel, and in their self-indulgence cast off the authority of God and refuse the instructions of the prophet, to their own undoing (**verses 7-13**). But their impious contempt of God and self-reliance shall but hasten their destruction. All who do [not] build upon the sure foundation laid in Zion, must inevitably perish, as the enemies of Israel were destroyed of old (**verses 14-22**)...

“The delay of judgment no more proves that it will never come, than the patience of the husbandman, and his preparatory labors, prove that he expects no harvest; and the difference of God’s dealings with different men is no more inconsistent with His general purposes of wrath or mercy, than the husbandman’s treatment of the different grains is inconsistent with his general purpose of securing and enjoying them (**verses 28-29**).

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“This chapter is by most of the late [mid-nineteenth century] writers joined with **chapters 29-33**, as belonging to the same date and subject...It was obviously written before the downfall of Samaria, but how long before is neither ascertainable nor of importance to the exposition of the prophecy.” (Pp. 443-44)

Watts entitles **chapters 28-33** “Requiem for the Kingdom of Judah,” and comments that they are “set in the final half-century of Judah’s existence (about 640-05 B.C.E.) in the reigns of Josiah and Jehoiakim [there is not a mention of either Josiah or Jehoiakim in these chapters or elsewhere in the **Book of Isaiah!**]. The disintegration of the Assyrian Empire with the concurrent rise of Egypt and Babylon occupied world attention while Judah was acting out the final scenes of the judgment pronounced on her a century earlier.

“Each of the [various segments in these six chapters] begins with ‘Woe,’ a monotonous funeral chant...Clearly, the message is that Judah has no political future. Instead, [these chapters] continue to portray true hope as centered in Yahweh’s support of Zion as a city of worship...

“Specific references to Assyria and to Egypt occur in the central chapters of this section. The references to Assyria are preoccupied with its imminent fall (**30:31; 31:8**). References to Egypt deal with the eagerness of certain parties in Jerusalem to make contacts and alliances with Egypt (**30:2; 31:1**)...

“It is clearly an age in which Egypt is active and gaining strength while Assyria is weakening and fading away...In 626 B.C.E. the Assyrians were defeated at the very gates of Babylon...

“The politics of Judah’s last half-century were overshadowed by its position as a miniature border state between empires in Mesopotamia and Egypt. When Assyrian power ebbed at mid-seventh century, a great Egyptian wave swept across Palestine to the Euphrates. But when Babylonian power prevailed in 605 B.C.E., the Egyptian tide ebbed. And Judah was drowned in the undertow.” (Pp. 352-55)

Watts entitles **28:1-29** “Disaster from Expansion,” and comments that “Three episodes comprise this scene. The first, ‘The Drunkards of Ephraim’ (**verses 1-13**) casts a sad backward look at Ephraim’s closing years...and at the intervening years in that region....

“The second, “Foundation Stone in Zion” (**verses 14-22**), is addressed to the leaders in Jerusalem who claim to be bound by a ‘covenant with death’...

The third, ‘Yahweh’s Strategy’ (**verses 23-29**) uses a lesson from a farmer’s experience to illustrate God’s work for Israel.” (P. 357)

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With regard to **verses 1-13**, Watts states that “The episode is composed of three parts: **Verses 1-4** are a mourning cry over Ephraim, using the metaphor of drunkards to recall the confused last years of the Northern Kingdom almost a century before (compare **chapters 5 and 10**). **Verses 5-8** recount Yahweh’s presence with the remnant, and their potential for renewed social health, but a series of disasters followed because the leaders continued in a state typified by drunkenness. **Verses 9-13** use a parable of teaching children their letters to show how God used even drunken priests and prophets to speak His message to a people doomed to repeated disaster.

“The episode’s unity lies in the consistent metaphor of drunkenness for Ephraim. It contrasts the bumbling and repulsive ineptness of people, priest, and prophet (**verses 1, 3-4, 7-8**) with the decision (**verse 2**), determined compassion (**verses 5-6**) and patience (**verses 9-10**) of Yahweh as He worked with them. The episode fits the beginning of Josiah’s reign.” (P. 362)

Kaiser entitles **28:1-4** “Against the Crown of Ephraim.”

He comments that “Modern commentators are unanimous in relating this prophecy of warning, taking the form of a stylized proclamation of woe, to the city of Samaria, and in attributing it to Isaiah...It probably falls in the period around 724 B.C.E., when King Hoshea of Ephraim began to offer resistance to Assyria...

“But this completely ignores an aspect of the prophecy which long ago caused Duham to date it in the very earliest part of the prophet’s ministry. This was the perfectly correct observation that Isaiah could have spoken in the mysterious terms of **verse 2** only before any attack by the Assyrians had taken place...Isaiah could not have been called before 742 B.C.E...By the year in which King Uzziah died (compare **Isaiah 6:1**) the danger from Assyria was already obvious in Jerusalem. A cryptic description of the enemies of the northern (or of the southern) kingdom would have been even in the earliest years of the prophet’s ministry a pure frivolity such as we have no need to attribute to a prophet who lived in a period and a world of political upheaval...

“Thus we must conclude that it is impossible for the present passage to have been composed not only by Isaiah, but at any time before the exile. Rather, this prophecy of warning gives us insight into the eschatological hopes of certain circles in Jerusalem who did not consider that the former capital of the northern kingdom and of the later province of Samaria ought to be omitted from the list of cities and nations who were destined to suffer the final chastisement.” (Pp. 237-38)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: “*Woe to the high crown of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower, his ornament of beauty, which (is) on the head of the fat valley of the wine-smitten.* Here, as in **Isaiah 9:9, 21; 11:13**, we are to understand by Ephraim the kingdom of the ten tribes, by the drunkards of Ephraim its vicious population, and by the lofty crown the city of Samaria, so called as the chief

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וְצִיץ נֶבֶל צְבִי תִפְאַרְתּוֹ
אֲשֶׁר עַל־רֹאשׁ גֵּיא־שְׁמֹנִים
הַלְּוֹמֵי יֵינִי:

Ah! / Woe!² (The) crown of majesty / pride³ of Ephraim's⁴ drunken ones,⁵

¹(...continued)

town and the royal residence, but also with allusion to its local situation on an insulated hill overlooking a rich plain or valley. 'It would be difficult to find, in all Palestine, a situation of equal strength, fertility, and beauty combined' [quoting Robinson's **Palestine**, volume iii, p. 146 [Edward Robinson (1794-1863) is often described as the father of Biblical Archaeology].” (P. 444)

Oswalt comments on **verse 1** that “As the Masoretic Text has it, this verse has a double meaning. On the one hand, it speaks of garlands of flowers worn on the heads of drunken partygoers...But there is another garland, one set at the head of a fertile valley. This must refer to Samaria, whose walls crowned a lovely hill in the middle of a rich valley leading out toward the coast. Like the faded garland, Samaria's time of loveliness is gone. The Assyrians are at the gates and it is only a matter of time until the end.” (P. 506)

Kaiser holds that “The custom of crowning practiced by heavy drinkers very likely already betrays Hellenistic Greek influence...[The proto-apocalyptic prophet] is apparently portraying only a hard-drinking group of men who according to the Greek custom of the symposium are each wearing a crown of flowers, which begins to fade in the course of the evening. Another indication of the late hour is that the company is drunk, or, in the dramatic language used, struck by the wine. That they belong to the heartland of the former northern kingdom is shown by the reference to Ephraim.” (Pp. 238-39)

²Watts comments that with this opening word, הוֹי, **hoy**, “Ah,” “Alas!” or “Woe!”, “The lament continues that of..chapter 10...recalling the dreadful fall of the Kingdom of Israel.” (P. 362)

³Slotki comments on the phrase “crown of majesty / pride” that it refers to the city of “Samaria which, with its circle of towers, was set like a crown on the summit of a low hill rising from the midst of a fertile valley.” (P. 126) See **1 Kings 14:24**,

And he (Omri) purchased the mountain / hill of Samaria
from Shemer, for two talents of silver.
And he built (up / on) the mountain / hill,
and he called (the) name of the city which he built
by (the) name of Shemer, lord / owner of the mountain / hill, Samaria.

(continued...)

and (the) withering blossom⁶ of its beauty's honor

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The **NIV Study Bible** notes that "Seven miles northwest of Shechem, Samaria rose about 300 feet above the surrounding fertile valleys (referred to as a 'wreath' in **Isaiah 28:1**). The original owner may have been persuaded to sell his property...on the condition that the city be named after him...The site provided an ideal location for a nearly impregnable capital city for the northern kingdom...With the establishment of this royal city, the kings of the north came to possess a royal citadel-city like that of the Davidic dynasty...Archaeologists have discovered that Omri and Ahab also adorned it with magnificent structures to rival those Solomon had erected in Jerusalem. From this time on, the northern kingdom could be designated by the name of the royal city, just as the southern kingdom could be designated by its capital, Jerusalem." (P. 508)

Alexander quotes Ewald as saying "Samaria was in its situation like a crown, and as the people were habitually drunk, the city is poetically represented as a reveler's crown." (P. 444)

Watts states that **עֲטָרֶת**, (**atereth**, "crown," "may be of gold or silver for a king, of flowers for a party, or refer to the crownlike figure of a walled city on a hill." (P. 362)

Where our Hebrew text has the Hebrew noun for "majesty" or "pride" **גִּאּוֹן**, **ge)uth**, 1QIs^a has the synonym **גִּאּוֹן**, **ga)on**, "exaltation" or "majesty."

⁴Slotki notes that "Ephraim" refers to "the Northern Kingdom." (P. 126)

⁵Where our Hebrew text has **שִׁכְרֵי**, **shikkorey**, "drunken ones," "drunkards," **Rahlf**s translates by οἱ μισθωτοὶ, "the hired ones," or "the hirelings," evidently reading the Hebrew text as **שִׁכְרֵי**, **sekhiyrey**, which means "hired ones." Watts notes that some Greek manuscripts translate correctly, μεθύοντες, "drunken ones."

Watts comments that "The metaphor of drunkenness dominates the episode. It is a figure of Israel's stumbling, bumbling life during the last decades of its existence (about 740-21 B.C.E.). Its relevance a century later lies in Josiah's regained control over that territory. Now one mourns again the circumstances that led to that earlier disaster." (P. 362)

⁶Slotki states that the phrase "fading flower" (our "withering blossom") is "another metaphor for the beautiful city." (P. 126) Yes, but it implies that a former beauty is rapidly passing away. As Motyer puts it, "*Fading* indicates that the party is almost over!" (P. 229)

Alexander states that "The fading flower implies that the glory of Samaria was transient, with particular allusion to its approaching overthrow by Shalmaneser." (P.

(continued...)

which (is)⁷ upon (the) head⁸ of a valley⁹ of rich fatness,¹⁰
of those struck down by wine!¹¹

⁶(...continued)
445)

Watts states that “*Pride and glory...are contrasted with נבל צייץ, tsits nobhel, ‘a drooping blossom’...which pictures its present state.*” (P. 362)

⁷Watts holds that **verses 1-13** are all referring to conditions in Ephraim “a century earlier,” and so makes all the verb past tense verbs. But does the text give definite indications that conditions a century earlier are being described? We do not think so.

⁸Watts comments that “רֹאשׁ, rosh, ‘head’ may describe the hill of Samaria above a fertile valley... But ‘head’ may also refer to its status as a capital of the country.” (P. 360)

⁹Where our Hebrew text has the construct form גַּי, gey), “valley of,” 1QIs^a גַּי, g)y, “proud ones of.”

¹⁰Slotki notes that the phrase “fat valley” is “literally ‘valley of fatness,’ i.e., a fertile valley.” (P. 126)

Alexander states that “this **verse [1]** contains three examples of the Hebrew idiom, which, instead of an adjective, uses one substantive to qualify another; crown of elevation for lofty crown, *beauty of glory* for glorious beauty, and *valley of fatnesses* for fat valley.” (P. 444)

¹¹Alexander states that “wine-smitten or wine-stricken is a strong description of the intellectual and moral effects of drunkenness.” (P. 445)

Slotki comments that here “Samaria is likened to the head of a drunkard encircled with a chaplet [garland or wreath for a person’s head] of fading flowers.” (P. 126)

Translations of the last two lines vary:

King James, “which *are* on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!”

Tanakh, “On the heads of men bloated with rich food, Who are overcome by wine!”

New Revised Standard, “which is on the head of those bloated with rich food, of those overcome with wine!”

New International, “set on the head of a fertile valley-- to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine!”

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28:2¹² הִנֵּה חֹזֵק וְאַמִּץ לְאֲדֹנָי

כְּזֶרֶם בָּרָד שֶׁעַר קָטָב

כְּזֶרֶם מַיִם כְּבִירִים שֹׁטְפִים

הִנִּיחַ לְאֶרֶץ בִּיד:

Look—the Lord¹³ has a strong and mighty one,¹⁴

¹¹(...continued)

New Jerusalem, “sited at the head of the lush valley, to those prostrated by wine!”

Rahlfs (the entire verse): οὐαὶ τῷ στεφάνῳ τῆς ὑβρεως οἱ μισθωτοὶ Ἐφραιμ τὸ ἄνθος τὸ ἐκπεσὸν ἐκ τῆς δόξης ἐπὶ τῆς κορυφῆς τοῦ ὄρους τοῦ παχέος οἱ μεθύοντες ἄνευ οἴνου, “Woe to the crown of the arrogance—the hired people of Ephraim, the flower that is falling from the glory upon the highest point of the stout mountain, the ones being drunk without wine.”

¹²Alexander translates / comments on **verse 2**: “Behold, there is to the Lord (i.e. the Lord has) a strong and mighty one, like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty rushing waters, he has brought (it) to the ground with the hand.” (P. 445)

¹³Alexander observes that “The oldest editions of the Hebrew text, and a large number of manuscripts read יהוה instead of אדני [YHWH instead of my Lord].” Of course, the Dead Sea scrolls had not been discovered in Alexander’s time, but now, with their discovery, we see that where our Hebrew text has לְאֲדֹנָי, **la)dhonay**, “to the Lord of mine,” 1QIs^a has לִיהוה, “to YHWH,” or perhaps “to the YHWH.”

¹⁴**Rahlfs** translates by ἰδοὺ ἰσχυρὸν καὶ σκληρὸν ὁ θυμὸς κυρίου, “Look—the wrath of (the) Lord (is) strong and harsh,” whereas the Hebrew text is referring these attributes to someone who belongs to YHWH, that is, the Assyrian(s) who would conquer Northern Israel. The Latin Vulgate has “behold, powerful and strong (is) the Lord.”

Slotki comments that this is referring to “the king of Assyria, the appointed agent of God against Samaria.” (P. 126)

Alexander observes that “most interpreters, including the most recent [mid-nineteenth century] understand [power and strength] as descriptive of a person, and apply them directly to Shalmaneser or to the kings of Assyria indefinitely.” (P. 445)

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like a down-pour of hail, a storm of destruction,¹⁵
like a down-pour of water(s),¹⁶ like the great ones, overflowing,
he lay / cast down¹⁷ to the earth with a hand!¹⁸

¹⁴(...continued)

Motyer states that “Instead of the ambiguous [a strong and mighty one], Isaiah could have named Assyria as the power which would overthrow Samaria, but in **chapters 28-29**...he is concerned with the principles embodied in the events, not the agents.” (P. 229)

Watts states that the phrase “mighty and strong” here “refers to the Assyrian emperor Shalmaneser (compare **Isaiah 10:3** and **2 Kings 17:3-6**) or to Sargon II who actually captured the city and took its people into exile (**2 Kings 17:6**). He was the Lord’s agent in destruction (**Isaiah 10:5-6**).” (Pp. 362-63)

Kaiser comments that “One who is ‘strong’ and ‘mighty,’ under the command and with the authority of Yahweh, is to break in upon this festival gathering of Samaritans, unsuspecting in their ‘drunkenness.’ Whether the poet meant by him a particular eschatological figure or thought of him merely as a representative of the eschatological nations who in their march on Jerusalem would also threaten the Samaritan hills and their principal city, is impossible to tell. The comparison of the enemy with mighty, overflowing waters seems to point to a connection with the expectation of the tempest of the nations against Zion, since these themes occur in the same context elsewhere in the **Book of Isaiah** (compare **17:12**; **28:15**; and also **8:5-8**). In any case the enemy will burst in as unrestrained and irresistibly as a hailstorm over the city and the valley, or like a mighty and overflowing torrent of water.” (Pp. 239-40)

¹⁵Slotki suggests the translation “pestilential wind,” “metaphorically describing the Assyrian invasion.” (P. 126)

Watts notes concerning the Hebrew קִטְבִּי, **qetebh**, “destruction,” that “Jews at a later date knew a demon by this name,” and some have held that here it may be the name of a God, Qetebh, “who was a companion of Reshep or Deber as agents of death.” (P. 360)

¹⁶Motyer comments that “The ‘forces of nature’ (hailstorm, wind, rain) are, as ever, elements in a Theophany, motifs of direct Divine action.” (P. 230)

¹⁷Watts notes that the root of the hiphil verb הִנִּיחַ, **hinniyach**, is נָחַ, “to rest,” which in the hiphil has a double meaning, “to give rest,” or “to lay, set down.”

¹⁸Slotki states that this phrase, which is literally “with a hand,” means “with violence.” (P. 126)

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¹⁸(...continued)

Alexander holds that statement is “describing the crown of Ephraim as torn from his head and thrown upon the ground by the hand of a victorious enemy...It is as if he had said, a strong and mighty enemy, rushing upon you like a hail-storm or a driving rain, shall cast your crown upon the earth with his hand.” (P. 446)

Motyer observes that “**Verse 2** ends with ‘by hand,’ while **verse 3** opens with ‘by foot.’ This association of differing aspects of personal agency implies ‘by every sort of destruction,’ ‘by every available means.’” (P. 230)

Oswalt comments on **verse 2** that “One of the characteristics of the Hebrew people seems to have been their ability to ignore the signs of the times (compare **chapter 22**). They apparently adopted the view that they would not worry about tomorrow until it came and in the meantime would eat, drink, and play themselves into forgetfulness...

“Thus Isaiah was not alone when he sought, as here, to get people to take corrective action by depicting the horrors about to fall on them (**Jeremiah 25:32-38; Ezekiel 24:6-14; Amos 3:9-15**). Like Jonah, these prophets knew that their words need not come true if the people would repent and change (**Jonah 4:1-2**)...

“But they also knew that unheeding continuance would be the guarantee of the certainty of the visions they foresaw. So here Isaiah draws upon all his verbal powers to try to alert his people to their danger. The one who is coming (Assyria) is incredibly powerful and violent. He will burst upon them like a hailstorm, stripping the plants of their leaves, and the following downpour washing away even the ravaged stalks. Everything will be flattened under the oppressor’s hand.” (P. 507)

¹⁹Oswalt comments on **verses 3-4** that “After the storm has swept over the party nothing will be left but a few bedraggled garlands trampled in the mud. Again, the double imagery is present, for Samaria is also intended, as **verse 4** makes plain...

“The city will be eaten up on sight, like an early fig. These fruits, appearing in June well before the main harvest in September and October, were large and sweet. Thus they were usually eaten at once:

Hosea 9:10,

Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel;
 like first-fruit in a fig-tree in its beginning I saw your fathers.
 They came (to) Baal-Peor
 and they dedicated themselves to the shameful thing;
 and they became detestable things, like their beloved!

Micah 7:1,

(continued...)

עֵטֶרֶת גְּאוֹת שְׁכוּרֵי אֶפְרַיִם:

With both feet they will be trampled,²⁰

¹⁹(...continued)

Alas to me!

Because I have become like summer-gatherings,
like gleanings of a vintage!

There is no cluster (of grapes) to eat,
(or) a first-ripe fig my appetite longed for!

Nahum 3:12, words spoken to the City of Nineveh:

All your fortresses—

fig trees with first-ripe figs--

If they are shaken,

and they will fall upon a mouth of one eating!

Jeremiah 24:2, where Jeremiah has been shown two baskets of figs:

The one basket—exceedingly good figs,

like the first-fruit figs;

and the other basket—exceedingly bad figs,

which will not be eaten because of (their) badness.

“Samaria will be like that, says the prophet. And although the actual siege took three years, it was but an instant in the long span of time. All the pride of Ephraim, which had been so long in building, would be toppled very quickly unless the drunkards who were her leaders very quickly came to their senses.” (P. 508)

Watts comments on **verses 3-4** that “The Assyrian attack is seen as an explanation of the faded crown. Like a first-born fig refers to the first figs to appear on the tree and is used as a figure of the ease with which the mighty Assyrians swallowed up the city.” (P. 363)

Alexander translates **verse 3**: “*With the feet shall be trodden the lofty crown of the drunkards of Ephraim.*” He comments that “It is cast down by the hand and trampled under foot.” (P. 446)

²⁰The verb תִּרְמָסְנָה, **teramasnah**, is niph'al imperfect, 3rd person feminine plural, “they will be trampled.” Alexander comments that “The plural form of the verb [with an apparently singular subject] has been variously explained. The ancient versions all translate it as a singular. The Rabbins make [the subject] עֵטֶרֶת, (**atereth**, ‘crown’ a collective [i.e. ‘crowns.’])” (P. 446)

(continued...)

the crown of majesty of Ephraim's drunken ones!

28:4 וְהִיְתָה צִיצַת נֹבֵל צְבִי תִפְאַרְתּוֹ

אֲשֶׁר עַל-רֹאשׁ גֵּיא שְׁמָנִים

כְּבִכּוּרָה בְּטָרֵם קִיץ

אֲשֶׁר יִרְאֶה הַרְאֶה אוֹתָהּ

בְּעוֹרָה בְּכַפּוֹ יִבְלַעְנָהּ:

And it will happen²¹—(the) withering blossom²² of its beauty's honor
which (is) upon (the) head of (the) valley of rich fatness,
like a first-ripe fig before summer,
which the one looking will see it--
while it is still in his hand, he will swallow it!²³

²⁰(...continued)

We think the “crown” is made up of many individuals, prominent people in Samaria, who are drunkards.

Oswalt comments on the use of “hand” in **verse 2** and now the use of “feet” in **verse 3**: “‘Hand’ here can be understood as an abstraction: ‘power,’ or in a more literal way as a giant knocking things down with his fist. The use of ‘feet’ in **verse 3** suggests the literal imagery.” (P. 502)

²¹Where our Hebrew text spells the conversive / consecutive verb correctly, וְהִיְתָה, **wehayethah**, “and it will happen,” 1QIs^a has וְהִיְתָה, **wehayyethah**, a mistake in spelling.

²²The word צִיצַת, **tsitsath** is the feminine singular construct form of the masculine singular צִיץ, **tsits**, “blossom,” “flower” in **verse 1**.

²³Alexander translates **verse 4**: “*And the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley, shall be like a first-ripe fig before summer, which he that sees it sees, and while it is yet in his hand swallows it.*”

He comments that “This comparison expresses the avidity [extreme eagerness] with which the enemy would seize upon Samaria, and perhaps the completeness of its desolation. The fruit referred to is the early fig of Palestine which ripens in June, while

(continued...)

²³(...continued)

the regular season of ingathering is from August to November, so that the former is regarded as a rarity and eaten with greater relish...

“The immediate eating of the fruit is only mentioned as a sign of eagerness or greediness.” (Pp. 446-47)

Slotki comments on **verse 4**: “Assyrians will greedily and easily devour Samaria as one snatches and swallows the first-ripe fig which is esteemed a great delicacy.” (P. 126)

Motyer states that “With *like a fig ripe before harvest!*’...Isaiah appeals to something familiar. The Hebrew flows rapidly so as to suggest ‘no sooner seen than eaten,’ as if the person concerned was hardly aware of what he had done. So ripe is Samaria for picking, so destined for total disappearance!” (P. 230)

Kaiser states that in **verse 4** “the proto-apocalyptic prophet moves on...to the real purpose of his prophecy of warning, when he foretells the rapid and indeed instantaneous annihilation of an object which unfortunately for our curiosity is described only in poetic terms...

“Before the summer figs which come from the second flowering are harvested in August, the less numerous early figs, particularly prized as being the first fruit of the year, are ready to pick. Anyone who finds them on a tree by the wayside plucks and eats them straight away: and the poet expects that the end of the adornments of Ephraim, Samaria or Gerizim will come just as quickly.” (P. 240)

²⁴Slotki states that **verses 5-6** depict “A glorious future (some regard it as the Messianic Age) under the Sovereignty of God Who will be Israel’s strength in war and a source of justice in civic life.” (P. 127)

Oswalt comments on **verses 5-6** that “Isaiah here depicts what could have been, if the right crown had been put in place...When all the false garlands have been trampled in the mud, then the real one can appear...

“In every age there is a remnant which is a part of that great final one. They are characterized by the ability to see through the tinsel of life, beyond the trappings of appearances, to those truths which are eternal, which will prevail.” (P. 508)

Here Oswalt is preaching, introducing ideas foreign to this passage, such as “that great final remnant,” “the tinsel of life,” etc.

Watts views **verses 5-6** as the chanting of a chorus, expressing “its faith that Yahweh used the catastrophe in order that He become *a crown of glory* for the *remnant* who were left (compare **Isaiah 10:20-23**). Although the king and his court were gone,

(continued...)

²⁴(...continued)

Yahweh remained. Through His spirit, *justice* could again be found in the courts and genuine *strength* for its defenders.” (P. 363)

Kaiser entitles **verses 5-6** “Justice and Courage for the Israel of the Time of Salvation.”

He comments that “The proto-apocalyptic writer who speaks here is quite deliberately presenting a contrast to the previous woe against the ‘crown of Ephraim’ in **28:1-4**...

“Whereas in the tempest of the nations the ‘crown of Ephraim’ is to be destroyed, the almighty Yahweh Sebaoth will by contrast be a glorious crown for the remnant of His people...In the future the dignity and honor of the remnant will depend upon the support of their God Who will display His power in saving the remnant and in subsequently guaranteeing its internal and outward security...

“The remnant includes not only the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea who have survived the tempest, but all those of the former people of the twelve tribes who have survived the ages and who have now been set free...

“Thus the proto-apocalyptic writer supplements the image of **28:1-4**, which his predecessor drew in purely negative terms, even though he no doubt followed **17:4-6** in estimating the number of the Ephraimites who would be saved as very few.

“The prophecy in **1:27** that Zion shall be redeemed by justice will, according to the theologian writing here, become a reality in the time of salvation for the whole of the new Israel, because Yahweh Himself will support, as the spirit of justice, him who sits in judgment...

“There is at least a possibility that the proto-apocalyptic writer was thinking of the righteous king of the time of salvation, who according to **11:1-3** would judge righteously under the direct influence of Yahweh. Just as Yahweh guarantees the internal security of the remnant, the Israel of the time of salvation, He also takes care of its external security, by being the spirit of strength to its warriors, so that they can turn back any future attack upon one of the cities of Judah...

“We can translate by saying that Yahweh gives courage to the new Israel to go on asserting itself in the present world. For in the expectation of the proto-apocalyptic writers, the new Israel will dwell upon an earth which, while it has been changed, by the revelation of Yahweh, is still the same real world.” (Pp. 241-42)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 5**: “*In that day shall Jehovah of Hosts be for (or become) a crown of beauty and a diadem of glory to the remnant of His people.* By the remnant of the people Jarchi understands those of the ten tribes who

(continued...)

לְעֵטְרַת צְבִי וְלְצִפְרֵת תְּפֹאֲרָהּ

לְשֵׁאֵר עַמּוֹ:

In that day,²⁵ ¹ YHWH of Armies²⁶ will be

²⁴(...continued)

should survive the destruction of Samaria; Knobel [understands] the remnant of Judah itself, which should escape Shalmaneser's invasion expected by the prophet...Kimchi understands] the kingdom of the two tribes, as the remnant of the whole race. This last approaches nearest to the true sense, which appears to be, that after Samaria, the pride of the apostate tribes, had fallen, they who still remained as members of the... chosen people, should glory and delight in the presence of Jehovah, as their choicest privilege and highest honor. The expressions are borrowed from the first verse, but presented in a new combination." (P. 448)

Motyer observes that "Delitzsch entitles these **verses [5-6]** 'the fringe of hope'... No sooner is the day of being swallowed up announced (**verse 4**) than the day of new beginnings takes over. This also then is true: while the Lord brings punishment, He never goes back on His promise to preserve His people." (P. 230)

Yes--and it is important to keep in mind that according to **Genesis 1-11**, the entire human race is His creation, His children, His people. And while YHWH brings punishment on all peoples and nations, including Israel and Christians, Isaiah sings the glad song that He will ultimately fulfill His promise to swallow up death and all its signs for all people and nations--see **Isaiah 25:6-8**.

Do you believe this? Why? Why not?

Do you read the **Bible** with the assumption that only the Jews, or only the Christians, or only the people of a certain religious persuasion are God's children? Do you think God is as narrow-minded as the legalistic Pharisees of Jesus' day, or as some Christians are today?

²⁵Slotki holds that the phrase **הַיּוֹם הַהוּא**, **bayom hahu**), "in that day," means "After the fall of Samaria and the survival of a faithful remnant. According to others, *that day* is the dawn of the Messianic Age." (P. 127) For occurrences of this phrase in the **Book of Isaiah**, see our end-note 1.

Note how often the phrase occurs in the first half of the **Book of Isaiah** (some 44 times), and then only once in **chapters 40-66**. It is obvious that the phrase does not have reference to one certain time, but is a common phrase used to point to many different "days" or "times." It is certainly a phrase used for the "good times coming," including Messianic times; but it is also used for dreaded days of judgment that are

(continued...)

for a crown of honor²⁷ and for a diadem of beauty²⁸
to His people's remnant;²⁹

28:6³⁰ וְלִרְוַח מִשְׁפָּט

²⁵(...continued)

coming. We think it is a mistake to describe the phrase as a “Messianic or eschatological tag-line.” Sometimes it is used of days or times in the past.

²⁶Alexander observes that “Instead of Jehovah of Hosts, the [Aramaic] Targum has *the Messiah of Jehovah*.” (P. 448) Watts quotes Wildberger to the effect that the Targumists “could not conceive that the change announced here could happen except by the appearance of the Messiah.” (P. 360)

²⁷Oswalt asks, “But in what sense will God be the crown of His people? He will be the true King as depicted in **11:1-9**. Instead of the drunken, craven rulers Israel and Judah had come to expect, He will bring a new spirit to the throne.” (P. 50)

²⁸Motyer states that “The adjectival nouns ‘glory’ [our ‘honor’] and ‘beauty’ are repeated from **verse 1**, i.e. the replacement of the false by the true, the fading by the durable, the human by the Divine. It is a mark of the people of the Messianic day that they see the Lord Himself as their true adornment.” (P. 230)

But there is not a word in the text concerning “the people of the Messianic day”!

²⁹Slotki comments that by the “residue” or “remnant” is meant “the faithful who will survive the destruction.” (P. 127)

For the Hebrew noun שְׂאֵר, **she)ar**, “residue,” “remnant,” see its 38 occurrences in the **Hebrew Bible** beginning in **Isaiah**:

Isaiah 10:19, 20, 21, 22; 11:11, 16; 14:22; 16:14; 17:3; 21:17 and 28:5;
Zephaniah 1:4;
Malachi 2:15;
Esther 9:12, 16;
Daniel 2:18; 7:7, 12, 19;
Ezra 3:8; 4:3, 7, 9, 10, 10, 17, 17; 6:16; 7:18, 20;
1 Chronicles 11:8; 16:41;
2 Chronicles 9:29; 24:14.

³⁰Alexander translates **verse 6**: “*And for a spirit of judgment to him that sitteth in judgment, and for strength to them that turn the battle at the gate.*” He comments that “The war meant is...wholly defensive. The two great requisites of civil government are here described as coming from Jehovah.” (P. 448)

(continued...)

לְיֹשֵׁב עַל־הַמִּשְׁפָּט

וְלַגְבוּרָה מְשִׁיבֵי מַלְחָמָה שְׁעָרָה:

and for a spirit of justice,³¹

for the one sitting over the justice(-system),³²

and for strength of those turning back battle at (the) gate!³³

28:7³⁴ וְגַם־אֵלֶּה בִּיַּיִן שָׁגוּ

³⁰(...continued)

We assume that Alexander means providing justice and defense for a country as the “two great requisites of civil government.” Do you think Isaiah was attempting to give a description of the functions of civil government?

³¹Oswalt comments that “the use of the term spirit [רוּחַ], **ruach**] here is instructive as regards the other occurrences in the **book** (50 times), for it implies both a changed atmosphere and a new empowerment...”

“Where God and His character are lifted up, there is a whole new spirit about the enterprise (4:4; 11:2, 3; 30:1; 37:7; 54:6; 57:15; 65:14)...There is a Divine empowerment. Ultimately the human spirit is not able to do what it must. There must be an infusion of the Divine spirit if life is to replace death, if victory is to come rather than defeat (32:14; 44:3, 5; 59:21; 61:2).” (Pp. 508-09)

³²Slotki states that the one sitting in judgment [our “over the justice system”] is “the judge or the king.” (P. 127)

³³Slotki states that this means “at the gate of their enemies. They will repel the enemy and pursue him as far as the gate of his country. Others construe at the gate as referring to their own city, i.e. they will drive the enemy from the interior of the city into which he had penetrated.” (P. 127)

Motyer notes that “At the gate could be ‘to the gate,’ the former expressing impregnable defense, the latter the power of conquest against the gate of the enemy.” (P. 230)

³⁴Motyer entitles **verses 7-22** “No trust, no security.”

He comments that “The heart of the initial ‘woe’ is contained in this eight-part meditation on Jerusalem’s leaders... Their drunken dissipation (**verses 7-8**) gives Isaiah a starting point of comparison with Samaria...Their attitude is described as scoffing (**verse 14**) and mocking (**verse 22**)...[It is] an advanced stage of practical atheism: the world has to be run by human common sense—what would God have to do with that? To this Isaiah replies (**verses 9-13**) that experience will prove the scorned word to be

(continued...)

³⁴(...continued)

inescapable and that to turn from the way of faith is to embrace death (**verses 14-19**). This core section ends (**verses 20-22**) with a restatement of human inability to achieve a satisfying life (**verse 20**) and a final appeal to the rulers based on certain Divine retribution (**verses 21-22**)." (Pp. 230-31)

Oswalt comments on **verses 7-13**: "This segment continues the thought of **verses 1-6** by making the accusations more specific. Not only are the rulers drunken and foolish, but the religious leaders, the priests and the prophets, upon whom the nation depends for Divine guidance, are in the same condition...The debauched leaders mock the prophet's apparent repetitive simplicity, but he turns their own words back upon them to depict their fate. The atmosphere of the segment is grimly realistic...

"There is no more hardened nor cynical person in the world than a religious leader who has seared his conscience...They have learned how to debunk everything and to believe nothing (**Hebrews 10:26-31**), all the while speaking loftily of matters of the spirit (**James [Jacob] 3:13-18**)." (P. 509)

Kaiser entitles **verses 7-13**: "Against the Drunken Scoffers."

He comments that "This prophecy of warning is so extraordinarily dramatic, and gives so natural an impression, that it has had little difficulty in retaining its place among the basic Isaianic material of the book. At the same time, the literary analysis of the prophecy has caused difficulty to almost every commentator...

"Isaiah must have witnessed this disgusting scene, which would have followed a sacrificial meal, and which showed that there were good grounds for the regulation in **Leviticus 10:8-9** that priests should drink no wine or beer." (Pp. 243-44)

Slotki comments on **verses 7-8**: "Having held up the fate of Samaria as a warning to the people of Judah and Jerusalem in **verses 1-4**, Isaiah now turns to the latter who, he exclaims, are no better either morally or politically." (P. 127)

Motyer entitles **verses 7-8** "Introduction." He asks, "Was Isaiah an eye-witness at this scene? He does not say so but it would be easy to write a scenario for a leadership banquet celebrating the return of the ambassadors from Egypt (compare **30:1-7**) secure in the agreement which they have signed (**verses 14-15**), with Isaiah intruding as a disgusted watcher. He sees their indulgence as personally tragic. They are befuddled / 'swallowed up'...that is, what they swallow is in reality swallowing them." (P. 231)

Oswalt comments on **verses 7-8** that "A sense of horror is in the prophet's voice as he relates the fact that the rot has reached even to the religious leadership...If the spring is defiled, how can good water come from it? Yet that kind of defilement had happened soon enough (**1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22** [Eli's sons]).

(continued...)

³⁴(...continued)

“Some take it that the debauchery described here is in conjunction with the worship. While this certainly may have been so, and **verse 7d** might be urged in support of that idea, it is not defiled worship that is being attacked so much as it is the overall blindness and stupidity which the unrestrained indulgence produced. The repetitive language (stagger-wine, wander-beer, stagger-beer, swallowed up-wine, wander-beer, stagger-reel) seems to imitate the stumblings and giggings of the drunk.” (P. 510)

Watts states that in **verses 7-8** “The remaining representatives of God, the *priests* and the *prophets*, are accused of being drunkards. The disgusting picture is portrayed in detail.” (P. 363)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: “*And (yet) those also (or even these) through wine have erred, and through strong drink have gone astray. Priest and prophet have erred through strong drink, have been swallowed up of wine, have been led astray by strong drink, have erred in vision, have wavered in judgment...*”

“Having predicted in the foregoing verse that when Ephraim fell Judah should continue to enjoy the protection of Jehovah, the prophet now describes even this favored remnant as addicted to the same sins which had hastened the destruction of the ten tribes, that is, sensual indulgence, and the spiritual evils which it generates... The meaning...is, that the Jews, although distinguished from the ten tribes by God’s sparing mercy, should nevertheless imitate them in their sins...”

“There is great probability in Henderson’s suggestion, that the prophecy refers to the national deterioration in the reign of Manasseh...”

“The priest and prophet are named as the leaders of the people, and as those who were peculiarly bound to set a better example.” (Pp. 418-19)

Kaiser states concerning Isaiah’s prediction of the fall of Samaria, that “although he may have received approbation from many circles in Jerusalem when he prophesied the fall of Samaria...with his eschatological message he seems to have encountered not merely rejection but mockery among some circles, which we ought most probably to identify with those associated with the temple priesthood. This led him to place the prophecy of warning, with its reason, against the scoffers immediately after the prophecy against the ‘crown of Ephraim,’ especially since both spoke of drunkards...”

“Anyone who agreed that it was right to foretell the fall of the crown of Ephraim ought at least to ask whether there were not reasons for believing that the same disaster would come upon Jerusalem. Anyone who from the Jewish point of view regarded the Samaritans...as immoral and blinded, ought to consider whether the same judgment could not be passed upon Jerusalem.” (P. 247)

כֹּהֵן וְנָבִיא שָׁגוּ

בַּשֵּׁכָר נִבְלְעוּ

מִן־הַיַּיִן תַּעֲוֹ

מִן־הַשֵּׁכָר שָׁגוּ בְרֵאָה

פֶּקֶן פְּלִילִיָּה:

And also these³⁵ went astray³⁶ by the wine,
and by the strong drink they wandered:
priest and prophet³⁷ went astray,³⁸

³⁵Slotki holds that the phrase “these also” is “pointing to the inhabitants and leaders of Judah” (p. 127)

³⁶Watts translates the qal perfect, 3rd person masculine plural שָׁגוּ, **shaghu**, “(they) reeled,” but notes that the root verb “has a basic meaning ‘go astray, err.’ But a use for drunkenness occurs in **Proverbs 20:1** and for love in **Proverbs 5:19-20**.” (P. 360)

Proverbs 20:1,

A scoffer / mocker—the wine;
a murmurer / growler—strong drink;
and everyone going astray / being intoxicated by it
will not be wise.

Proverbs 5:19-20,

- 19 A female deer of loves,
and a female mountain goat of favor / grace—
her breasts will saturate you / water you
in every time / at all time(s);
with her love you shall go astray / be intoxicated constantly!
- 20 And why / for what will you go astray / be intoxicated, my son,
with a strange woman?—
and will you embrace (the) breasts / bosom
of a foreign woman?

³⁷Slotki notes that the priests were “forbidden while on duty to drink any alcoholic liquor.” See **Leviticus 10:9**, where the commandment is given to Aaron, the high

(continued...)

by the strong drink they were swallowed up,³⁹
from / because of the wine they wandered,
from / because of the strong drink they went astray / were intoxicated in the seeing;
they tottered (in the) judgment / decision!⁴⁰

³⁷(...continued)
priest,

Wine and strong drink you shall not drink—
you and your sons with you,
when you come into (the) tent of meeting;
and you will not die—
(it is) a long-lasting statute for your generations.

“The priests, whose function is to decide questions and direct the people, totter through their intemperance.” (Pp. 127-28)

Watts notes that the phrase **כֹּהֵן וְנָבִיא**, **kohen wenabhiy**), is changed slightly in 1QIs^a to **כֹּוֹהֵן וְנָבִי**, which “shows the variant spellings for the same words at Qumran.” He adds that the Aramaic Targum has **סֹפֵר**, “scribe,” in place of “prophet.” (P. 361)

³⁸Slotki states concerning the prophet that his or her “clearness of vision is dulled by indulgence in drink...The prophets cannot discern the significance of the Divine message they receive and are therefore unable to impart it.” (P. 127)

Motyer likewise states that “The prophet was the organ of immediate revelation (*visions*); the priest gave ‘judgment,’ the application of the law to individuals and situations...In this function, however, they *stagger and stumble*.” (P. 231)

³⁹Oswalt comments that “*swallowed up by wine* introduces an ironic twist in the midst of the repetition. The self-indulgent always imagine they can control their passions: it is they who swallow the wine. But it is a law of human nature that unrestrained passion soon rules the person in its unrelenting demand for greater satisfaction. Wine has now swallowed its drinkers.” (P. 510)

⁴⁰The word **פְּלִיִּיָּה**, **peliyyah**, occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, making it very difficult, if not impossible to determine its meaning. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** holds that it means “the giving of a decision.” Holladay has “decision, judgment.”

However, there are a number of closely related Hebrew words that can help to throw light on the meaning here:

(continued...)

28:8⁴¹ כִּי כָל-שֻׁלְחָנֹת מְלֵאוּ קִיא צֹאֵה

בְּלִי מָקוֹם:

Because all (the) tables were filled (with) vomit, excrement / filth--⁴²
there is no place (left)!⁴³

⁴⁰(...continued)

פְּלִיל, masculine singular, “judge”; פְּלִילִים, masculine plural, “judges, umpires.”

פְּלִילָה, feminine singular, office of judge or umpire, found only at **Isaiah 16:3**.

פְּלִילִי, adjective, found only at **Job 31:28**, probably meaning “for a judge, “calling for judgment.”

פְּלִילֵיהֶם, here, **Isaiah 28:7**, of priests, perhaps meaning their intervention on behalf of Yah, or their giving of Yah’s decision.

Oswalt notes that “*They stagger in a vision, they reel in a decision* expresses the fact that their drunkenness was pervading even their official functions.” (P. 510)

⁴¹Slotki comments on **verse 8** that “The verse may be taken figuratively as describing the low state of morality and religion in Jerusalem or, according to others, it may be a literal description of a revolting scene of debauchery actually witnessed by the prophet. It is suggested that a banquet was being held by the Judean aristocracy to celebrate the break away from Assyria, and that Isaiah, surprising the revelers, came upon such a scene as here described.” (P. 128)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 8**: “*For all tables are full of vomit, without a place* (i.e. a clean place)...The only natural interpretation is that which supposes tables to denote the places where men eat and drink, and the other terms the natural though revolting consequences of excess.” (P. 450)

Oswalt comments that **verse 8** “reaches the heights of realism and puts the writer’s disgust in the strongest terms...Those who should lead the nation in commitment to God’s ways wallow in their own filth and think it amusing.” (P. 511)

⁴²Where our Hebrew text spells the noun קִיא, **qiy**), 1QIs^a spells it קִיחַ, **qiych**, which Wildberger thinks “is probably a careless transcription” (Watts, p. 361).

⁴³Slotki’s **American-Jewish Translation of the Scriptures** has “and no place is clean.” Slotki states that this is literally “without (a clean) place (מְקוֹם, **maqom**).” “The Hebrew word [**maqom**] is used in Rabbinic literature to designate God as omnipresent; hence the homiletic interpretation ‘without God’ (**Aboth**).” (P. 128) **Aboth** is a tractate in the **Mishnah** and also in the **Babylonian Talmud**.

(continued...)

⁴³(...continued)

Oswalt comments that “The final two words, בְּלִי מְקוֹם, *there is no place*, seem to utilize ellipsis [omission of a word] to cap the tone of disgust. It is as though Isaiah had said, “There was not one clean spot in the place!” The abrupt phrase says it more bitinglly.” (P. 511)

Translations of **verse 8** vary:

King James, “For all tables are full of vomit *and* filthiness, *so that there is* no place *clean.*”

Tanakh, “Yea, all tables are covered With vomit and filth, So that no space is left.”

New Revised Standard, “All tables are covered with filthy vomit; no place is clean.”

New International, “All the tables are covered with vomit and there is not a spot without filth.”

New Jerusalem, “Yes, every table is covered in filthy vomit, not one is clean!”

Rahlfs, ἀρὰ ἔδεται ταύτην τὴν βουλήν αὕτη γὰρ ἡ βουλή ἕνεκεν πλεονεξίας, “A curse will devour this counsel, for the counsel (is) for the sake of greediness.” (And we wonder, what Hebrew text is being translated here? Certainly not the Masoretic Text! As Alexander notes, “The **Septuagint** [our **Rahlfs**] translation of this verse does not exhibit any trace of the original.” (P. 450))

⁴⁴Slotki entitles **verses 9-13** “Dialogue between the prophet and the mocking revelers.”

He states that **verses 9-11** contain “the revelers’ retorts [witty remarks] to the prophet’s admonitions. ‘To whom is he lecturing?’ they say in effect. ‘Does he take us for babes that he constantly dins into our ears the same old nursery rhymes?’ The revelers are the politicians of the pro-Egypt party.” (P. 128)

Motyer entitles **verses 9-13** “The Inescapable Word.”

He comments that “The three subsections here (**verses 9-10, 11-12, 13**) are united by the identical wording in **verses 10** and **13** and by the link between **verses 10** and **11**. In Hebrew the same word (רָצָה) opens each verse...The thrust is plain: the word of grace rejected becomes the word of condemnation...

He asks concerning **verses 9-10**, “Do the revelers suddenly notice the watching prophet and round on him in mockery? In any case, Isaiah is obviously recalling criticisms directed against his ministry and, in particular, against its simplicity of content (**verse 9**) and of expression (**verse 10**)...

“The sophisticated, worldly priests and prophets of **verse 7** thus dismiss the thought that anyone can add to their store of information or be their teacher in the

(continued...)

⁴⁴(...continued)

things of God, least of all one whose teaching seems to them so elementary as to be mere play-school material, suitable for those in the earliest stage of learning, weaned from their milk...reflecting the patience of a teacher building up the pupil's knowledge bit by bit, watching for growth points and adding a little here, a little there. What they mocked was exactly what Isaiah aimed to achieve and what is the worthiest goal of preacher and teacher: capturing and sharing the essential simplicity of revealed truth, engaging in systematic edification." (Pp. 231-32)

Watts comments on **verses 9-10**: "One scoffs at what such teachers could possibly teach, even to the youngest children. Like a bumbling schoolmaster, they repeat letters of the alphabet, ט tsade and ק qoph, using their earlier names 'tsaw' and 'qaw,' for the children to learn...Interpreters have understood this to mean everything from speaking in tongues to being code-words for great thoughts...But the picture of the drunken teacher is most simple and appropriate..."

“זַעִיר, **ze(iyr)**, 'little,' in this context, seems most likely to refer to the children of **verse 9b**. Both verses deal with the issue of teaching knowledge (**verse 9a**) and the incompetency of the drunken teachers, the prophets and the priests (**verse 7b**)." (P. 363)

Alexander translates **verse 9**: "*Whom will he teach knowledge? And whom will he make to understand doctrine? Those weaned from the milk and removed from the breasts.*"

He comments that "The [Aramaic] Targum makes this a description of Israel as the favored people to whom the law was exclusively given. In like manner some of the older Christian writers understand it as descriptive of the persons whom Jehovah, or the prophet acting in His name, would choose as proper subjects of instruction, that is, simple and child-like disciples, who as new-born babes desire the sincere milk of the word (**1 Peter 2:2**)..."

"But the children here described are weanlings [those no longer drinking from their mothers' breasts], not sucklings...It is therefore commonly agreed, that the last clause must be taken in a contemptuous or unfavorable sense, as denoting children not in malice merely but in understanding (**1 Corinthians 14:20**). On this assumption some have explained the verse as meaning, that the priest and the prophet, mentioned in **verse 7**, were utterly unfit to teach the people, being themselves mere children in knowledge and in understanding..."

"Another interpretation makes the words descriptive not of the teachers but the taught, as being no more fit to receive instruction than the child just weaned. J. D. Michaelis applies the last clause not to their incapacity but to their unwillingness to be instructed, as being long since weaned and now too old to return to the breast..."

(continued...)

וְאֶת־מִי יִבִּין שְׁמוּעָה
 וְגַמּוּלֵי מִחֶלֶב
 עֲתִיקֵי מִשְׁדָּיִם:

To whom will He teach knowledge?⁴⁵

⁴⁴(...continued)

“Lowth...explains it as the language not of the prophet but of the wicked men... expressing their indignation and contempt at the prophet’s undertaking to instruct them as if they were mere children. Whom does he undertake to teach? And whom would he make to understand his doctrine? Children weaned from the milk and removed from the breast?...”

“This interpretation has in substance been adopted by all later writers, as affording a good sense and one admirably suited both to the foregoing and the following context.” (Pp. 450-51)

Oswalt comments on **verse 9** that “It was bad enough that the religious leaders of Northern Israel were involved in such behavior, but even worse was their attitude about the behavior. They were not repentant or concerned. Instead, they justified themselves and mocked the prophets who sought to correct them...”

“So here, the drunkards lash out at the prophet, telling him that they are old enough to know what they are doing and that they do not need somebody to keep harping on their sins...How odd that the more correction we need, the less we think we need it.” (P. 511)

Kaiser comments on **verse 9** that “Isaiah’s antipathy, which he had no doubt made known on previous occasions, may have been expressed at the time by shouting at them, and the prophet may have composed from the substance of his remarks the question and answer dialogue which we find in **verses 9** and **10**. This is a telling characterization of persons who disqualify themselves by their own behavior while at the same time claiming to be those who truly proclaim the will of God. They reject the idea that they need any instruction about the true content of the knowledge which they impart as priests or the ‘message,’ the revelation, which is received from them as prophets. In short, they consider they have the right to take issue with Isaiah who is acting towards them as if he was teaching children.” (Pp. 244-45)

How do you understand this verse?

⁴⁵Where our Hebrew text has the noun דַּעַה, **de(ah)**, “knowledge,” **Rahlfs** translates by $\kappa\alpha\kappa\acute{\alpha}$, **kaka**, “evil things.” It seems apparent that the Greek translator has

(continued...)

And who will understand what is heard?⁴⁶

Those weaned from milk,
those removed from (the) breasts?⁴⁷

28:10 כִּי צִוּ לְצִוּ

צִוּ לְצִוּ

קוּ לְקוּ

קוּ לְקוּ

זְעִיר שָׁם

זְעִיר שָׁם:

Because, command to the command,
command to the command;
line to the line,
line to the line;
a little there,
a little there.⁴⁸

⁴⁵(...continued)

mistaken the ד, *daleth*, for a ר, *resh*. The Aramaic Targum has אוריתא, “the law.”

⁴⁶Slotki’s translation has “message,” and he comments that it is literally “that which is heard,” that is, “an alleged communication from God.” (P. 128)

⁴⁷Oswalt comments that “*Those weaned from milk* with its parallel phrase expressed the thought that the prophet was treating them like toddlers in attempting to teach them righteousness. Normally, children in the Near East are weaned between the ages of three and five years, the time when the most rudimentary truths are being taught them. Thus any attempt to remind these people of the element of right and wrong was construed as demeaning, treating them like weanlings.” (P. 512)

⁴⁸Slotki comments on **verse 10** that “The Hebrew original sounds like the mocking of nursery rhymes or the stammering of drunkards: **tsaw latsaw tsaw latsaw, kaw lakaw kaw lakaw, zeer sham zeer sham.**” (P. 128)

(continued...)

⁴⁸(...continued)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 10**: “For (*it is*) rule upon rule, rule upon rule, line upon line, line upon line, a little here, a little there. . .

“The interpretation of this verse varies...with that of the one before it. Those who understand **verse 9** as descriptive of God’s favor to the Jews, explain this in like manner as relating to the abundance of the revelations made to them, including rules and counsels suited to every emergency of life...Those who apply **verse 9** to this incapacity of the people for high attainments in spiritual knowledge, regard **verse 10** as a description of the elementary methods which were necessary for them. Those who apply **verse 9** to the incapacity of the religious *teachers* of the Jews, explain **verse 10** as a description of their puerile [childishly silly] method of instruction...

“But as all the latest writers make **verse 9** the language of the Jews themselves, complaining of the prophet’s perpetual reproofs and teaching, they are equally agreed in making **verse 10** a direct continuation of the same complaint...

“Gesenius understands this verse as having reference to the constant additions to the law of Moses in Isaiah’s time, the design of which...is to fortify the doctrine that the **Pentateuch** [**Genesis** through **Deuteronomy**], as we now have it, is long posterior to the days of Moses.” (Pp. 451-52)

How will you interpret **verses 9-10**? We think the description can well apply to the **Pentateuch**, and to the **Books of Isaiah** and **Jeremiah**, and **Psalms**, and **Proverbs** as well, with their “command upon command,” “line upon line,” “little by little.” What do you think?

Oswalt states that **verse 10** “has occasioned many suggestions but little agreement (meaningless words used in mockery [such as in English ‘blah, blah, blah’]; meaningless words used to teach children to walk; drunken babbling; as puns on vomit and filth; as portions of a rubric used to teach the alphabet; as actual Akkadian, to be read as ‘Go out, let him go out...! Wait, let him wait...! Servant, listen...’)...

“The sense is clear enough: the drunkards accuse the prophet of the simple, repetitive instruction used in teaching children.” (P. 512)

For **verse 10**, **Rahlfs** has:

θλιψιν ἐπὶ θλιψιν
προσδέχου ἐλπίδα ἐπ’ ἐλπίδι
ἔτι μικρὸν ἔτι μικρὸν
Tribulation upon tribulation,
receive / wait for hope upon hope;
still a little, still a little.

(continued...)

⁴⁸(...continued)

This is not a translation of the Hebrew, but an attempt to make sense of a text that the Greek translator couldn't understand, except for the last line.

Kaiser states that "The significance of the words *tsaw-latsaw*, *qaw-laqaw* in **verse 10** has been much discussed. At first they were usually treated as words with meaning, and *tsaw* was regarded as an abbreviation of *mitswah*, 'commandment,' or of a conjectural *tsawa*, 'precept,' while *qaw* was identified with the known word 'measuring line,' so that the expression was taken as a mockery of what was assumed to be the constantly moralizing teaching of these prophets.

"The solution to the puzzle is now sought in [other directions], although by no means all commentators yet agree. The words are taken [by some] as onomatopoeic, imitating the speech or the sound of the rapid footsteps of the prophet incessantly following his calling...[Or,]

"On the basis of **verse 11**, the suggestion has been made that the words are a mocking imitation of the way Isaiah usually spoke...

"Others, looking back to **verse 9**, regard [the phrases] as the imitation of meaningless words with which children are taught to walk...

"In view of **verse 11**...there are two possibilities. The first is that of a vulgarism or colloquial term corresponding to our 'burble, burble'...

"An alternative and less artificial suggestion is that the words are an imitation of a teacher, i.e. at that period, a wise man, who is teaching his pupils the alphabet and is making them write down from dictation the letters which were later called *tsadhe* and *qoph*, with plenty of interjection and advice...One can imagine that the voice of a teacher repeating the letters over and over again to the boys who are writing them could sound ridiculous to someone who overheard them by chance, particularly if he heard only the sounds." (Pp. 245-46)

⁴⁹Slotki comments on **verses 11-13** that they contain "the prophet's ominous reply, ending with a sarcastic imitation of their own babble and turning the tables on the scoffers." (P. 128)

Oswalt states that in **verses 11-13** "The prophet now turns the mockers' words back upon themselves as he pronounces the word of judgment. God's words to them were in fact simple and gentle. But since they refused to hear them, they will indeed hear the harsh repetitive words, but from the lips of Assyrian taskmasters..."

"Since they would not learn the simple truths of life from God's spokesmen, they will learn them at the end of whip and prod (**Isaiah 8:6-8; Deuteronomy 32:29;**

(continued...)

⁴⁹(...continued)

Matthew 23:37-39)." (P. 512)

Motyer comments on **verses 11-12** that "If we continue the idea of Isaiah gate-crashing the leaders' celebratory banquet, then we have here his thoughts as they mocked his simple recipe for national security." (P. 232)

Kaiser comments on these two verses that "This further prophecy of warning takes up the mocking comparison of the prophet who never preaches anything but disaster, and envisages that Yahweh will speak to the scoffers in Jerusalem through foreigners who speak a language unknown to the Jews...by whom Isaiah's contemporaries would understand, and were meant to understand, the Assyrians...

"He [YHWH] had shown them the way to rest, a place and condition of undisturbed safety from their enemies...and called upon their leaders to give His rest to the people who were worn out by the disturbances of recent decades...

"The catastrophe was a consequence which they had brought upon themselves by rejecting what Yahweh offered through the agency of the prophet. Thus **verse 12** is a summary of Isaiah's preaching by a redactor [editor] looking back upon the past and working at the earliest between 597 and 587 B.C.E." (P. 246)

Alexander translates **verse 11**: "*For with stammering lips and with another tongue will he speak unto this people.*" He comments that "As לְעִנִי שִׁפְהָ, **la(aghey saphah** [a strange combination, a masculine plural construct adjective with a singular feminine noun] may denote either foreign or scoffing speech...

"As they had mocked at the Divine instructions by their stammering speech, so He would speak to them in turn by the stammering lips of foreigners in another language than their own...

Of the older writers some explain this verse as descriptive of God's tenderness and condescension in accommodating His instructions to the people's capacity as nurses deal with children...

"Others understand it to mean that through their own perverseness these instructions had been rendered unintelligible and of course unprofitable, so that their Divine Teacher had become as it were a barbarian to them." (P. 452)

Motyer states that "When the simple intelligibility of the word of God is refused, Divine judgment falls in the shape of the unintelligible (compare **1 Corinthians 14:20-22** [where this passage in **Isaiah 28** is referred to])." (P. 232)

14:20 Brothers, do not become children with [your] understandings,
but rather be children towards evil;

(continued...)

וּבְלִשׁוֹן אַחֶרֶת
יְדַבֵּר אֶל-הָעַם הַזֶּה:

Because with mocking lip / speech
and with another tongue / language⁵⁰

⁴⁹(...continued)

but with [your] understandings become mature adults!
14:21 In the law it has been written that:
With other languages,
and with the tongues of others,
I will speak to this people;
and not even in this way will they listen to Me!
says [the] Lord.
14:22 So then the [ecstatic] languages are for a sign
not to the ones who have faith,
but rather to those without faith.
But the message spoken for [God]
is not for those without faith,
but for those who have faith.

Watts comments on **verse 11** that “The respondent insists that God continued to speak to His people even through such a *stammering lip*. *With another tongue* is understood...to refer to the Assyrians...God spoke to that age even if it had to be through drunken prophets / priests and through the Assyrian invaders.” (P. 363)

⁵⁰Slotki’s translation has “For with stammering lips and with a strange tongue,” and Slotki comments that “Isaiah describes the harsh foreign accents of the Assyrian invaders. The politicians spurned the word of God in mocking syllables; God will send upon them in earnest a barbarous foe whose uncouth language will sound in their ears like their own mocking syllables (compare **verse 13**).” (Pp. 128-29)

“Barbarous” means “savagely cruel, exceedingly brutal,” or “primitive, uncivilized.”

“The word barbarian was used originally by the Greeks to refer to any non-Greek: Egyptians, Persians, Indians, Celts, Germans, Phoenicians, Etruscans, Macedonians, Carthaginians, Vikings, Goths – all of these became known as barbarians. The ancient Greek word βάρβαρος (*bárbaros*) meant “babbling.” To the Greek ear, someone who did not speak the Greek language babbled, producing the onomatopoeic sound “bar bar bar” which became *bárbaros*, and later *barbaria* in Latin.” (**Internet**, “Beyond Words—Language Blog” 3/7/2017)

That is, “Everybody else’s language sounds like ‘babbling.’”

He will speak to this people.⁵¹

28:12⁵² אֲשֶׁר | אָמַר אֲלֵיהֶם

זֹאת הַמְנוּחָה הַנִּיחִי לְעֵינַיִךְ

וְזֹאת הַמְרִנָּה

וְלֹא אָבִיא שְׁמוֹעַ:

Who said to them,⁵³

This⁵⁴ (is) the place of rest⁵⁵, ²–give rest to the weary!⁵⁶

⁵¹Watts comments that the phrase הָעַם הַזֶּה, **ha(am hazzeh**, literally “the people, the this one,” is “a specific, but impersonal, designation which contrasts with the personal ‘My people’ or ‘your people’ in other places.” He refers to Wildberger, who “notes the deep disappointment inherent in its tone.” (P. 363)

The exact phrase occurs some 78 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, some seven times in **Exodus**, fifteen times in **Numbers**, six times in **Deuteronomy**, three times in **Joshua**, twice in **Judges**, five times in **1 Kings**, twice in **2 Chronicles**, twice in **Nehemiah**, nine times in **Isaiah**, nineteen times in **Jeremiah**, once in **Micah**, twice in **Haggai**, and three times in **Zechariah**.

⁵²Alexander translates **verse 12**: “Who said to them, This is rest, give rest to the weary, and this is quiet, but they would not hear.”

He comments that “the judgments threatened in the foregoing verse were the more evident, just because He Who threatened them had warned the people, and pointed out to them the only way to happiness...Who was it that should speak to them with another tongue? He Who had so often said to them, etc.” (P. 452)

⁵³Slotki comments that this means “by the prophet in the name of God.” (P. 129) We agree. Isaiah is YHWH’s “spokesperson,” one chosen to speak for YHWH.

⁵⁴Slotki comments that “this” is referring to “the pro-Assyrian policy. Another interpretation is: This (city, Jerusalem) will be a place of rest and refreshment to those who trust in God during the Assyrian campaign.” (P. 129)

⁵⁵Slotki comments that “The true way of peace and safety for the troubled people was to keep away from any alliance with Egypt and to discountenance the anti-Assyrian party.” (P. 129) But does the text say this? We don’t think so.

(continued...)

And, This (is) the place of repose;⁵⁷
and they were not willing to listen.⁵⁸

⁵⁵(...continued)

The Hebrew noun here is **הַמְנוּחָה**, **hammenuchah**, “the place of rest.” For its occurrences in the **Hebrew Bible** see our end-note 2.

⁵⁶Slotki holds that this is referring to “the common people who are the main sufferers in any war.” (P. 129)

Alexander, in like manner, states that “The sense is not, that the true way to rest is to give rest to the weary [we disagree, holding that this is exactly the meaning of the text!]; the latter expression is a kind of parenthesis, as if He had said, This is the true rest, let the weary enjoy it. By *this* we are therefore to understand, not compassion and kindness to the suffering, but obedience to the will of God in general. This is true rest which I alone can give, and the way to which I have clearly marked out...To *give rest to the weary* does not mean to cease from warlike preparations, or to relieve the people from excessive burdens, whether of a civil or religious kind, but simply to reduce to practice the lesson which God had taught them.” (Pp. 452-53)

Motyer similarly states that “The idea of entering into rest is spelled out in **30:15** as ‘returning [to God]...rest...quietness...trust’; it is the message preached to Ahaz in **7:4, 9**...The resting-place is the stone the Lord has placed in Zion (**verse 16**), offering a firm foundation for trust.” (P. 232)

We say to Slotki and Alexander and Motyer, Nonsense! Listen to this text: if you want to enter the Divinely intended place of rest, Give rest to the weary! If you want to receive Divine forgiveness, Forgive others! If you want to get right with God, get right with your mate, your child, your neighbor, your enemy! Give, and it will be given to you! Forgive, and you will be forgiven! God’s rest / resting-place begins right here and now, in the messed up world we are living in. Do all in your power to give rest to the weary—amazingly, it will be rest for your own soul! Quit denying what this text says, quit refusing to listen to it, referring rather to other texts!

⁵⁷Instead of our “place of repose,” Slotki’s translation has “refreshing,” and Slotki holds that this means “for all the nation.” (P. 129)

It is obvious from this text that the noun here, **הַמְרִיגָה**, **hammerge(ah)**, “the repose,” is a virtual synonym of the preceding noun **הַמְנוּחָה**, **hammenuchah**, “the rest.”

⁵⁸Oswalt comments on **verse 12** that “Actually, God’s words had been simple and straightforward [but no—the prophetic message, as has been demonstrated in **chapters 24-27**, is filled with riddles / enigmas, with obscurity and inexactness; some of the message has been simple and straightforward, but by no means all of it!]...But

(continued...)

⁵⁸(...continued)

something within the human heart wants to find its security in its own devices over which it has final control. So they would not listen.” (P. 513)

Oswalt, like others, holds that God’s word was not to give rest to the weary, but rather to trust in God instead of trusting in human alliances. But this is not allowing this text to speak for itself, and substituting something else in its place.

Watts urges his readers to “Note the close association of these verses with **Exodus 33:13-14**, a conversation between Moses and YHWH:

- 13 And now, if please, I found favor in Your eyes,
 please make known to me Your ways, and I will know You—
 so that I will find favor in Your eyes;
 and see—that Your people is this nation!
- 14 And He said, My face / presence will go / lead—
 and I will cause rest for you!

Watts comments that **הַמְנוּחָה**, **hammenuchah**, the rest “carries connotations of dwelling and of the secure conditions of that residence...The verse builds a beautiful chiasmus [x-pattern] of five lines which portray Yahweh’s original offer to Israel of rest in Canaan and her responsibility to give rest to the weary there...But Israel failed to fulfill that condition [Divine command].” (P. 364) Yes!

But there is no “there” concerning where Israel is to give rest to the weary. It is not a “geographical place,” but rather an attitude of loving concern for those who are weary. We are reminded of the statement of Jesus in **Matthew 11:28**, calling the weary to find rest in him.

Come to me, all those laboring and having been heavy-burdened,
 and I, I will give you rest / cause you to rest.

Rahfs translation of **verse 12** is different from the Hebrew text. It takes the verse to be the words of the foreigners, speaking in a different language:

λέγοντες αὐτῷ τοῦτο τὸ ἀνάπαυμα τῷ πεινῶντι
 καὶ τοῦτο τὸ σύντριμμα
 καὶ οὐκ ἠθέλησαν ἀκούειν
 saying to him [Israel?], This (is) the rest / resting-place for the hungry person;
 and This (is) the destruction.
 And they were not willing to listen.

That is, the decision whether or not to give rest to the hungry is the decision between rest and destruction. Compare **Matthew 25:31-46**, where the choice is between caring for the “hungry etc.” and long-lasting destruction.

צוֹ לְצוֹ
 צוֹ לְצוֹ
 קוֹ לְקוֹ
 קוֹ לְקוֹ
 זַעִיר שֵׁם
 זַעִיר שֵׁם

⁵⁹Slotki comments that in **verse 13** “the prophet scornfully repeats their mocking syllables (see **verse 10**), imparting to them a sinister import.” (P. 129)

Alexander translates **verse 13**: “*And the word of Jehovah was to them rule upon rule, rule upon rule; line upon line, line upon line; a little here, a little there; that they might go, and fall backwards, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken.*”

He comments that “The law was given that sin might abound. The only effect of the minute instructions, which they found so irksome, was to aggravate their guilt and condemnation.” (P. 453)

Alexander’s comment is based upon Paul’s statement in **Romans 5:20**, as if Paul’s interpretation is the definitively correct interpretation, as if he had all knowledge and did not “see through a mirror darkly, as he states in 1 Corinthians 13:7-12. Do you think this is in fact what Isaiah means? Was the only effect of the minute instructions found in the law of Moses to cause sin to abound? Was that the Divine intention in giving the law of Moses? Or was that law given in order to guide the people in the right way? Is this the way **Psalms 119** looks at the law of Moses, as the means for causing sin to abound? Certainly not! The psalmist praises YHWH for the fact that His law causes righteousness to abound! But still, if the laws of YHWH are not obeyed, but are disregarded and disobeyed, sin will certainly abound, as Paul says!

There’s nothing new to this. If you had no traffic laws, there would be no breaking of those laws, no traffic tickets or violations. But where traffic is, laws are necessary in order to ensure safety in driving. The more the traffic, the more the laws that become necessary. They are given, not to cause violations, but to avoid accidents and injuries, even death. But the more traffic laws there are, the more violations there will be. Paul’s interpretation would say, “Traffic laws were given that traffic violations might abound.” We say, No, that’s not what they were given for. That’s only what happened when they were given and people failed to follow them.

What do you say?

לְמַעַן יִלְכוּ
 וְכִשְׁלוּ אַחֲרָיִם
 וְנִשְׁבְּרוּ
 וְנוֹקְשׁוּ
 וְנִלְכְּדוּ:

And YHWH's⁶⁰ word will become for them,
 command to the command,
 command to the command;
 line to the line,
 line to the line;⁶¹
 a little there,
 a little there;
 so that they will walk,
 and will stumble backwards;⁶²
 and will be broken,
 and will be ensnared,

⁶⁰Where our Hebrew text has YHWH, **Rahfs** has κυρίου τοῦ θεοῦ, “of Lord of the God.”

⁶¹Slotki comments that “The Rabbinic interpretation is line by line of retribution for every precept by precept [our ‘command to the command’] they have wantonly [deliberately] transgressed...Retribution will come within a very short time...Only few of them will survive the rigors of captivity.” (P. 129)

⁶²Oswalt states that the phrase “*so that they will go and stumble* reiterates the truth which many modern child psychologists have discovered: in order for maturity to be reached, the child must be allowed to suffer the consequences of its actions. For the parent to intervene constantly and to nullify the results is to give the child a wholly misshapen understanding of life. So these events come upon God’s people in order that they may fall and thus learn.” (P. 513)

and will be captured.⁶³

28:14⁶⁴ לִכְן שָׁמְעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה

⁶³Oswalt comments on **verse 13** that “Since they would not listen to the gentle words of God, but mocked them, the people of Samaria were doomed to learn the effects of sin at the hands of a much harder teacher—experience.” (P. 513)

Watts explains **verses 1-13**, stating that “The low ebb of circumstances [in Judah] recalls the sorry last days of northern Israel. They had become alcoholics, or like alcoholics. The Lord sent a strong power to destroy them (**verse 2**). Even the reminder that Yahweh will turn things around in the day of His triumph (**verses 5-6**) does not prevent the continued description of those sorry days when even priests and prophets in drunken stupor could only repeat nonsense syllables (**verses 7-11**). Even efforts to get his message through by foreigners brought no better response. So ‘the word of Yahweh’ to that generation, which appeared to be only monosyllabic nonsense spoken by drunken prophets and priests (**verses 11-13**), turns out to have been deliberate reminders of the inexorable processes of judgment that fulfilled the prediction of **8:15**.” (Pp. 364-65)

Watts insists that these verses should all be put in the perfect / past tense. But the verses as they stand in our text, appear to be describing something happening in the present or in the immediate future. What do you think? Do you think Watts is correct in changing its present and future verbs into the past tense? We do not.

⁶⁴Oswalt entitles **28:14-29:24** “Jerusalem.” He entitles **28:14-22** “Covenant with Death.”

He comments that “The focus now shifts to Jerusalem, as indicated by the ‘therefore’ in **28:14**. If a terrible fate has befallen Samaria, this is no time for rejoicing, says Isaiah. For the rulers of Jerusalem (**28:14-22; 29:15-17**) are as senseless as those of Samaria, and the priests and prophets are as drunken and blind (**29:1, 9-14**). Therefore, Jerusalem’s fate will be as severe as Samaria’s. But as in the former word (**28:5, 6**), there is a note of hope here too. God will fight against Jerusalem’s enemies (**29:5-8**), and one day there will be a renewal of the spirit of God’s people (**29:17-24**)...

“The segment **28:14-22** is directed to those foolish leaders of Jerusalem whose plans are based upon the cynical and faithless projections of the future. But Isaiah tells them that cynicism cannot provide a secure foundation against the shocks of life (**verse 19**). Only faith can do that (**verse 16**).” (Pp. 515-16)

Watts entitles **28:14-22** “Scoffers in Jerusalem.”

He comments that in these verses, “the setting has changed...The words are addressed to the leaders in Jerusalem (**verses 14, 18, 22**). They are to turn their attention from old Ephraim to current events in Jerusalem where Yahweh’s crucial actions are about to take place (**verses 16, 21**). The leaders put forward their

(continued...)

⁶⁴(...continued)

'covenant with death' (**verse 15**) as their reason for recalcitrance [resistance to authority or control]. Yahweh announces His Own initiative, continuing His commitment of a 'stone' laid in Zion (**verse 16**) to accomplish His continued goals of 'justice' and 'righteousness.' He will insist on breaking the offending treaty (**verses 18-19a,b**). The very idea brings terror (**verses 19c-20**). Yahweh's new initiative is formally announced (**verse 21**). The leaders are warned of the decree of full annihilation which had been determined for the whole land (**verse 22** as in **chapter 24** and **6:11-13**). The polemical dialogue turns on 'the covenant with Death' and 'the stone' which Yahweh has placed in Zion." (P. 368)

While we question Watts' view that **verses 1-13** refer to past events a century earlier, while **verses 14-22** deal with current events (we think both passages deal with current events), we appreciate very much Watts' view that the "stone" is not something that is going to be laid in Zion in the future, but has already been laid there.

Kaiser entitles **verses 14-22** "God's Strange Works."

He comments that "It is certain that in its present form **28:14-22** is meant to be understood as a unity. But it is extremely doubtful whether the passage was a unity originally...It has often been noted that the saying concerning the cornerstone fits remarkably loosely into its context." (Pp. 249-50)

He entitles **verses 14-15, 17a, 17b** and **18** "The pact with death."

He comments that "Isaiah addresses his demand to listen to the word of Yahweh to a group...whom he describes as 'scoffers'...and also as 'proverb-makers of this people'...Those who are addressed are clearly the spokesmen of a larger group to whom Isaiah has an antipathy...

"In face of an imminent danger they believe that they are potentially immortal... The scoffers are behaving as though they have made a pact with death and the underworld; as though both had assured them that they would not bring them into their power; as though they were immortal]...

"In Isaiah's view, these opponents are claiming potential immortality in the face of a danger which he compares to a flood; they regard lies and falsehood as giving them protection against it. The waters, the raging, שׂוֹטֵף, **shoteph**, overflowing or rising, אֲבָר, (**abhar**, flood are really, as can be seen from a glance at the history of this theme, the waters of death and the underworld...This arrogant people are imagining themselves safe from premature death." (Pp. 250-51) Compare:

Psalms 124:4, if it has not been for YHWH's help,

(continued...)

⁶⁴(...continued)

Then the waters would have overflowed us,
a wadi would have passed over our innermost-being / life!

Psalm 18:5-7^{Heb} / 4-6^{Eng},

5/4 They encompassed me--cords of death;
and torrents / wadis of worthlessness overwhelm me!

6/5 Cords of (the) underworld / grave surrounded me;
snares of death came to meet me!

7/6 In the distress that is mine, I will cry out, O YHWH,
and to my God--I will be delivered!
He will hear my voice from His temple,

Psalm 69.2-3^{Heb} / 1b-2^{Eng}

2/1b Save / deliver me, O God!
Because waters came as far as my innermost-being / life!

3/2 I sunk in deep mire,
and there is no standing-place;
I entered into depths of water,
and a flowing stream overflowed me!

Psalm 69:14-15^{Heb} / 13-14^{Eng}

14/13 Deliver me from (the) mud / mire,
and I will not sink!
I will be delivered from ones hating me,
and from (the) depths of water!

15/14 It will not / let it not overflow me, a flowing stream of water;
and it will not / and let it not swallow me!

Motyer entitles **verses 14-19** "The security that failed."

He comments that "Refusing the true resting-place, they will find that there is no other security." (P. 232)

He comments on **verses 14-15**, asking "What is in reality the security they have chosen? Nothing but signing their own death warrant..."

"We can envisage the envoys (**30:1-7**) returning in triumph, flourishing their bit of paper (proclaiming 'Peace in our time!'), trumpeting their alliance with Egypt. Isaiah names no names, he is concerned with the principle of what they have done. They have covenanted for their own death! Outside trust in the Lord and His promises there is only death, there is no alternative salvation." (Pp. 232-33)

(continued...)

אֲנָשֵׁי לִצְוֹן
 מְשַׁלֵּי הָעַם הַזֶּה
 אֲשֶׁר בִּירוּשָׁלַם:

Therefore, listen to YHWH's word,
 men of scorning,⁶⁵

⁶⁴(...continued)

Slotki comments on **verses 14-15** that “The prophet addresses the scoffers and ballad-mongers, probably the orators of the anti-Assyrian party, who by exaggerated assertions seek to lull the people into a sense of false security.” (P. 129)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 14**: “*Therefore (because your advantages have only made you more rebellious) hear the word of Jehovah, ye scornful men (literally men of scorn, i.e. despisers of the truth), the rulers of this people which is in Jerusalem...*”

“*This people, here as elsewhere, may be an expression of displeasure and contempt. Jerusalem is mentioned as the seat of government and source of influence. The whole verse invites attention to the solemn warning which follows.*” (P. 453)

Oswalt comments on the sense of **verse 14**: “If these things have befallen the drunkards of Ephraim, you scoffers in Jerusalem ought to take note.” (P. 516)

Watts likewise states that Jerusalem here “bears a haunting resemblance to those last years of the Northern Kingdom.” (P. 369)

⁶⁵Slotki’s translation has “scoffers,” and he comments that it is literally “‘men of scoffing,’ לִצְוֹן, **latson**, derived from לִיץ, **liyts** [‘to scorn’]. The Hebrew also bears the connotation of ‘ungodly,’ ‘men who scorn all religious teaching.’ The politicians of the pro-Egyptian party scoffed as the Divine message was delivered by the prophet.” (P. 129)

Motyer notes that “Scoffers...is a Wisdom Literature term for someone far gone in spiritual cynicism,

self-assured: **Proverbs 1:22,**

How long, simple-minded ones, will you love simplicity?
 And scornful people—scorn;

(continued...)

those ruling this people⁶⁶

who (are) in Jerusalem:

28:15⁶⁷ כִּי אִמְרָתָם

⁶⁵(...continued)

they took pleasure for themselves?

And foolish ones will hate knowledge?

“beyond correction: **Proverbs 13:1**,

A wise son—correction / instruction of a father;
and a scorner will not listen to / hear a rebuke.

“arrogant and scorning spiritual realities: **Proverbs 14:9a**,

Foolish people will scoff at / make fun of guilt / offense...” (P. 233)

⁶⁶Slotki’s translation of the Hebrew phrase מְשִׁלֵי הָעָם, **moshley ha(am** is “the ballad-mongers of this people,” and Slotki states, “Rather, ‘composers of parables, or taunt-songs’...Less probably is the translation...‘that rule.’” (P. 129)

The reason for this is that the root מָשַׁל, **marshal**, is used in Hebrew to mean “to rule” and also “to use a proverb.” See the article on this root in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament**.

Watts translates by “speech-makers,” and states that both this and “scoffers” are “degrading terms applied to the political leaders of Jerusalem.” He suggests that instead of “speech-makers,” the noun could better be translated “makers of proverbs.” (P. 369)

⁶⁷Slotki comments that “**Verse 15** is a protasis [the clause expressing the condition in a conditional sentence (e.g., *if you asked me* in *if you asked me I would agree*)] to **verses 16-18** which are the apodosis [the clause expressing the consequence, *I would agree*].” (P. 130)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 15**: “*Because ye have said (in thought or deed, if not in word) we have made a covenant with death, and with hell ([שְׁאוֹל, she)ol] the grave, or the unseen world) have formed a league; the overflowing scourge, when it passes through, shall not come upon us, for we have made falsehood our refuge, and in fraud we have hid ourselves.* The meaning evidently is, that if their actions were translated into words, this would be their import... שְׁאוֹל, she)ol is here nothing more than a poetical equivalent to מוֹת [death].” (P. 453)

(continued...)

כָּרַתְנוּ בְרִית אֶת-מוֹת
וְעַם-שְׂאוֹל עָשִׂינוּ חֵזָה
(שֵׁיט) [שׂוֹט] שׂוֹטֵף כִּי- (עֵבֶר) [יְעֵבֶר] לֹא יְבוֹאֵנוּ
כִּי שָׁמְנוּ כִזָּב מִחֲסָנוּ
וּבְשִׁקָּר נִסְתַּרְנוּ:

Because you (plural) said:

We cut a covenant with death,⁶⁸

⁶⁷(...continued)

Motyer agrees, stating that “The grave (שְׂאוֹל, **sheol**) is not the place of burial but the abode of the soul after death.” (P. 233)

Watts comments that **verse 15** “presents the leaders’ statement of Jerusalem’s foreign policy and thus of their faith. בְּרִית, ‘covenant’ is to be understood in the sense of ‘treaty’ or ‘firm agreement.’ *Death* and *Sheol* [grave, underworld] are used metaphorically to excuse an action which might otherwise be deemed unacceptable or which jeopardizes their lives.” (P. 369)

What do you think? Do you think Jewish leaders in Jerusalem would publicly state that they had made a covenant with “death / Death”? This sounds much more like Isaiah’s pejorative description of what they have done in forming a covenant with Egypt.

Watts continues: “‘Lie’ and הַשִּׁקָּר, ‘the Falsehood’ round out the names attributed to the treaty-partner, probably Egypt. The speech has parodied [humorously extravagantly imitated] the kind of thing...that might actually said. But why should the terms *Death*, *Sheol*, *Lie*, and *Falsehood* be used? [Some commentators have] suggested that these refer to the Egyptian God of death, Osiris...Osiris would have served as the Divine Guarantor of this treaty with Egypt. Death and Sheol come directly from such an identification. Lie and Falsehood are derisive prophetic characterizations of the idol and its mythical representation.” (P. 369)

Perhaps...but we think it much more likely that all of the names attributed to the treaty-partner are derisive prophetic characterizations of the Judean covenant with Egypt. What do you think?

⁶⁸Slotki comments that their cutting a covenant with death means that “death has no terrors for them.” (P. 130)

(continued...)

and with *sheol* we made a seer.⁶⁹

⁶⁸(...continued)

Oswalt states that “*We have made a covenant with death* may be interpreted in two ways. It may be a literal quotation and may indicate that the princes have engaged in sorcery and have entered into an agreement with the Gods of the underworld: Death (*Mot*) and Plague (*Reshef*). In return for protection from these Deities the worshiper agrees to do certain things. (Note: two texts which may refer to these Deities are:

Psalm 23:4,

Even if / when I walk in the valley of death's / Death's shadow,
I will not be afraid of evil.
Because You are with me;
Your club and Your walking-staff, these comfort me.

Psalm 91:6, which states that the believer will not be afraid

from a pestilence / Pestilence (that) walks in the dark,
from destruction / Destruction (that) destroys at mid-day / noon.

“Compare Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, p. 140 for the Ugaritic account of Mot devouring Baal and Anat's attempt to force Him to restore Baal)...

“Another possibility is that the prophet is engaging in sarcasm. The rulers may not have meant to, but in fact by their cynical refusal to trust God they have rejected life and chosen death...Obviously the princes would not have believed that their covenant was with ‘lie’ and ‘falsehood.’ But Isaiah puts words in their mouths to show the true import of what they have done.” (P. 517)

We agree, but would also include “death and sheol” as being put into their mouths by Isaiah.

⁶⁹This line has been given varying translations:

King James, “and with hell are we at agreement”;

Tanakh, “Concluded a pact with Sheol”;

New Revised Standard, “and with Sheol we have an agreement”;

New International, “with the realm of the dead we have made an agreement”;

New Jerusalem, “and with hell are we at agreement”;

Rahfs, καὶ μετὰ τοῦ θανάτου συνθήκας, “and with the death agreements / compacts.”

Slotki comments that this means “We have called upon the powers of Sheol to help us and secured their consent.” (P. 130)

(continued...)

An overflowing scourge,⁷⁰ when it passes over,⁷¹ will not come to us;⁷²

⁶⁹(...continued)

But we ask, why use the word חֹזֶה, **chozeh**, “seer” or “visionary”? **Brown-Driver-Briggs** translates by “*with She’ól we made a vision* (had a vision, in connection with She’ól--i.e. by necromancy...which makes us secure; parallel with כרת ברית אֶת־מוֹת, [‘we cut a covenant with death’]; some translate *oracle* here and **2 Kings 17:13**; another has ‘we have appointed a prophet with Sheol, who is answerable to us for it.’”

Rahfs, the Latin Vulgate, and the Aramaic Targum all have, *we are at (or have made an) agreement(s)*. Does this mean that the people of Jerusalem have made sheol / death / the grave their “seer,” their “visionary” who can speak with authoritative voice, making an agreement / covenant with them?

Alexander comments that חֹזֶה, **chozeh**, “seer” or “visionary,” is “properly a participle (*seeing*) often used as a noun to denote a *seer* or prophet...Hitzig supposes that in making treaties it was usual to consult the seer or prophet. Ewald supposes an allusion to the necromantic art of divination as a safeguard against death, and translates the word by ‘oracle’...The more common explanation of the usage traces it to the idea of an interview or meeting and the act of looking one another in the face, from which the transition is by no means difficult to that of mutual understanding or agreement.” (P. 454)

⁷⁰The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” שֵׁיט, **shit**; second, the *qere*, “to be read,” שׁוֹט, **shot**, evidently only different ways of spelling the same word, “scourge,” or “whip.” 1QIs^a supports the second, *qere* reading.

Alexander calls the “overflowing scourge” a “mixed metaphor,” which combines “two natural and common figures for severe calamity.

Motyer calls it “a gloriously mixed metaphor of both flogging and drowning. The reference undoubtedly is to the Assyrian invasion.” (P. 233)

Oswalt states that “Perhaps the stinging effect of wind-driven rain in a cloudburst or the stripping power of hail (**verse 17**) suggested the confluence of the images. (Note that the **Koran [89:13]** uses the same imagery: ‘Your Lord pours over them the scourge of punishment’...On the work of the Storm-God as an ‘overflowing flood,’ see the **Code of Hammurabi #’s 45, 48 [ANET, p. 168].**)

“In any case, the point is clear: Isaiah does not believe lies can save anyone from the coming flood.” (P. 517)

(continued...)

because we made a lie our cover / shelter,
and in the falsehood we hid ourselves!⁷³

⁷⁰(...continued)

Watts comments that **שִׁיט שׁוֹטֵף**, **shit shoteph**, “an overwhelming scourge,” is “used to describe great foreign invasions. The [Book of Isaiah] has pictured these as the work of God in **chapters 10, 13**, and other places. This speech interprets Jerusalem’s foreign policy in light of the conviction that these invasions (i.e., the Assyrian and the Babylonian) are actually inspired by Yahweh.” (P. 370)

⁷¹Again the Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” **עָבַר**, (**abhar**, qal perfect, 3rd person singular, “it passed over”; second, the *qere*, “to be read,” **יַעְבֵּר**, **ya(abhor**, qal imperfect, 3rd person singular, “it will pass over.” Oswalt notes that “The Qere is normally favored because of the parallel with **verse 18** and because the imperfect makes better sense than the perfect.” (P. 514)

⁷²Slotki calls this “An assertion of complete self-confidence.” (P. 130)

⁷³Slotki comments on these last two lines that they are “the prophet’s ironical reproduction of their confident assertions. They claim to have found a refuge and a shelter in the power of Egypt, but, he warns them, there is there neither shelter nor refuge but only lies and falsehood.” (P. 130)

But is it Egypt that they have made their refuge, or their superstitious covenant / agreement with death and the grave, sheol? Or is the “covenant with death and sheol” simply Isaiah’s belittling description of their covenant with Egypt? Here again the prophetic text is puzzling, and differing answers are forthcoming.

Watts comments that “**שָׂמְנוּ**, **samnu**, “we are established,” and **מַחְסְנוּ**, **machsenu**, “our refuge,” and **נִסְתָּרְנוּ**, **nistarnu** “we have hidden ourselves” are “all phrases with religious meaning and were common to temple usage [in the ancient Near East]...The leaders undoubtedly mixed pious religious language...with their political assurances that Jerusalem was secure under their policies. This speech derides their policy as a treaty with *lie* and *the Falsehood*, both referring to idolatrous Egypt or its Pharaoh.” (P. 370)

Kaiser comments that “Lies and falsehood represent an attitude which is contrary to the objective order and therefore untrue, and as such is characteristic of the Godless person who is subject to judgment...Since man has to seek refuge in Yahweh...any other refuge which man tries to find is necessarily a lie. Thus the prophet’s charge against his opponents is reduced to their reliance in the face of imminent danger not upon God but upon some human aid....

(continued...)

⁷³(...continued)

“We may assume that it belongs in the situation of the years 703-701, and that its background is in fact Hezekiah’s policy of alliances, which had probably just been initiated. Isaiah rejects it, because in his eyes it expresses the fact that the people were seeking help not from Yahweh but from earthly forces. By the rejection of his warnings and threats about the danger from Assyria, which is described here as a flood, the advocates of this policy were behaving as if they were potentially immortal, and did not realize that by their Godless actions they were bringing upon themselves the danger from which they imagined they were seeking refuge...

“Yahweh will immediately make clear that the falsely chosen earthly refuge does not contain what it promises. Hail, which we find elsewhere as the instrument of the eschatological judgment, will sweep away the false refuge, which by implication is very fragile, and waters will overwhelm the shelter. Thus **verse 18** explicitly states that the pact with death and the underworld will be of no use when the flood, or to abandon the metaphor, the Assyrian army, sweeps over the land and claims its victims.” (Pp. 251-52)

⁷⁴Slotki states that **verses 16-22** are the “apodosis to **verse 15** [see footnote 67]. Justice will be permanently established, all falsehood swept away, the scoffers and the ungodly crushed beyond hope, and only those who trust in the Lord will achieve salvation.” (P. 130)

Motyer comments on **verses 16-17** that “The true security (a sure foundation) which they refused and the simple way of trust which is its corollary (**verse 16**) are contrasted with the fragility and ultimate worthlessness of human alternatives (**verse 17**).” (P. 233)

Alexander translates **verse 16**: “*Therefore thus saith the Lord Jehovah, Behold I lay in Zion a stone, a stone of proof, a corner stone of value, of a firm foundation; the believer will not be in haste.*”

He comments that “To the words of the scoffers are now opposed the words of God Himself. Because you say thus and thus, therefore the Lord says in reply what follows. You trust for safety in your own delusions; on the contrary, I lay a sure foundation, and no other can be laid. This foundation is neither the temple (Ewald) nor the law (Umbreit), nor Zion itself (Hitzig), nor Hezekiah (Gesenius), but the Messiah, to whom it is repeatedly and explicitly applied in the **New Testament**:

Romans 9:33,

even as it has been written,
Look--I am placing in Zion a stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offence;

(continued...)

⁷⁴(...continued)

and the one placing trust upon it
will not be put to shame.

(This verse does not claim that the stone / rock is the Messiah. Paul may be referring to faith in God and God's actions as still the foundation with the coming of the Messiah)

Rahifs' translation of **Isaiah 28:16** is:

Because of this, in this way says Lord,
Look, I, I will throw / lay down into / for the foundations of Zion,
a stone, very costly / precious, choice,
a valued cornerstone,
into / for its foundations—
and the one believing upon it will certainly not be put to shame.

Romans 10:11,

For the scripture says,
Everyone who trusts upon it / him will not be put to shame.
(Nor does this verse claim that the stone is the Messiah.)

1 Peter 2:6,

That is why it is contained in Scripture,
Look--I am laying a stone in Zion, a cornerstone--
chosen, valuable--
and the one who believes in it / him will not be put to shame!
(Again, this verse does not identify the "stone" with the Messiah.)

Oswalt comments that "The **New Testament** makes it plain that the ultimate foundation for trust in God is the character of God as revealed in Jesus. In his life and work all that the **Bible** has said about the trustworthiness of God comes to its fulfillment (**Romans 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:4-6...**)

"Nor is there any incongruity between those assertions and the sense of this verse. The question being dealt with here is the basis for life's choices: the machinations of people or the trustworthiness of God. At the same time, it may be asked whether Isaiah had his primary focus upon the Messiah here (as he clearly does in **chapters 9 and 11**) or whether his initial intent is more general. If it is more general, as it seems, the possibilities for the identification of the stone are numerous...

"They are: the law (Eichhorn), the temple (Ewald), Yahweh's saving work (Feldmann), Yahweh's relations to this people (Duhm), the archetypal Davidic monarch (Delitzsch), true believers (Eichrodt), Zion (Childs), the remnant (Donner), Yahweh's

(continued...)

⁷⁴(...continued)

promise (Koenig), and faith itself (Kaiser, along with Marti, Fohrer, and Wildberger). To these may be added Yahweh Himself (Cheyne)...

“Although the law and the temple (as well as Zion) seem rather strained, each of the other positions has points in its favor. Perhaps no one identification is correct. The cornerstone may be the whole complex of ideas relating to the Lord’s revelation of His faithfulness and the call to reciprocate with the same kind of faithfulness toward Him. That entire message would one day be summed up in Jesus Christ.” (P. 518)

We say, The same thing that was going on in ancient Jerusalem in the time of Isaiah was also going on in the time of Jesus Christ—would the people put their trust in God and His Self-revelation, or in human governments and political alignments? Would the people in the time of Jesus trust his “good news” of loving forgiveness and mission to the ends of the earth, or trust in their political / religious correctness and exclusive self-righteousness that rejected all but the orthodox? The command in the time of Isaiah was to put their trust in YHWH and pursue justice and righteousness for all humanity—giving rest to the weary; the same command was being embodied in Jesus, not only in his teaching, but in his selfless giving of himself to that mission of justice and righteousness for all peoples and nations, especially the weary.

We say the “stone” is faith / belief in God, that pursues justice and righteousness for all humanity. What do you think?

Watts comments on **verse 16** that “Yahweh...repudiates the implication that the old values could no longer be held. He affirms again that what He has done and is determined to do in Zion deserves trust and faith.” (P. 370)

We agree, but insist that according to the text, the stone is something that has been laid in Zion—not something that is going to be laid there. And it is a stone that has been laid by a third person, not by YHWH Himself. We take it to be the foundation-stone of trust / belief in YHWH, and the doing of justice and righteousness, which Isaiah, YHWH’s spokesperson / prophet has laid in Zion by his life’s work.

Watts differs—he states that “What God has done and is doing in Zion is the key to all this history. Such a cornerstone of Zion could be understood in terms of the Davidic House or the Temple...The Temple, its function and its witness, is the abiding element in Zion. It continued as the symbol of God’s presence, His work, and His will. This stone is acclaimed as a tested stone, a cornerstone, and a foundation well founded. The believer is affirmed in his patience, as he waits for God to complete His work.” (P. 370)

We say, No. Not a physical building, a temple built on massive ashlar. Rather, a spiritual building, a temple made up of believers in YHWH, who exhibit that trust / belief by devoting their lives to the pursuit of justice and righteousness. This is who Jesus was and is—the embodiment of faith / belief in YHWH, that devotes itself even to

(continued...)

הַנְּנִי יֵסֵד בְּצִיּוֹן אֶבֶן
אֶבֶן בְּתוֹן
פְּנֵת יִקְרָת
מוֹסֵד מוֹסֵד
הַמֵּאֲמִין לֹא יִחִישׁ:

Therefore⁷⁵ in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

⁷⁴(...continued)

death in the pursuit of justice and righteousness for all people—especially for those rejected as unclean and unworthy by orthodox temple worshipers! And the believer is not called to simply wait for God to complete His work—he or she is called to step out in faith to practice justice and righteousness in the midst of an unbelieving, harsh and cruel world, even at the cost of their lives.

Kaiser comments on the “stone.” “It is immediately obvious that a foundation, and particularly a cornerstone, must consist of strong, resistant material, because it has to bear the weight of the building...

“In plain terms, this means that justice and righteousness are to be the standard which Yahweh will apply in His future acts in history. That it will be impossible for those who arrogantly despise God to endure in the judgment follows as a matter of course...

“**Verse 16**, however, points to the alternative which exists, of holding firm and unshaken to Yahweh, trusting in Him and so avoiding the judgment...Thus the cornerstone is formally speaking the promise, but in practice the faith which gives a refuge as safe as the foundation stones which neither hail nor floods can damage. Very much in the spirit of the great prophet, the redactor [editor of the text of **Isaiah**] contrasts the unsuccessful policy which had led the kingdom of Judah to catastrophe with the faith which is the alternative, and which could have protected the country from catastrophe.” (P. 254)

In the face of all these differing answers we call to mind the nature of the prophetic message, as stated in **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:7-12**. It is a message that has come through visions and dreams, and that is filled with puzzle / enigma, and we should not be surprised that even here, in this passage that seems so clear, this broad array of differing answers are given as to the meaning of the stone laid in Zion.

⁷⁵Oswalt states that “therefore” here “is because of the rulers’ boast that they have secured themselves against trouble that the word of the Lord comes to them...

(continued...)

⁷⁵(...continued)

“As in **8:14**, the message here is a double-edged one. God is establishing [the text uses the past tense, and says ‘he,’ someone other than God laid the foundation] a structure in Zion which will be a source of comfort and encouragement to those who will trust Him, but a bar of judgment for those who refuse to do so...

“The imagery of laying the foundation for a building is used to make the point. If the foundations are cheap stones, shoddily laid, it is not possible for the building to survive the shocks which will come to it. See **Matthew 7:24-27**,

- 24 Everyone therefore who hears these words of mine,
and does them,
will be likened to a man, a wise one,
who build the house of his upon the rock.
- 25 And the rain came down,
and the rivers came,
and the winds blew,
and they fell against that house,
and it did not fall,
for it had been founded upon the rock.
- 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine,
and is not doing them,
will be likened to a man, a fool,
who build the house of his upon the sand.
- 27 And the rain came down,
and the rivers came,
and the winds blew,
and they struck against that house,
and it fell;
and its fall was great!

“That is what these rulers have done. They have rested the nation’s survival upon the promises of the idolatrous rulers of Egypt, the negotiations perhaps engaged in secretly to avoid the wrath of such persons as Isaiah. By contrast, God is also laying a foundation whose very nature should be such as to condemn the false trusts which are filling Jerusalem.” (Pp. 517-18)

⁷⁶The Hebrew verb is **יָסַד**, **yissadh** (piel perfect, 3rd person masculine singular of the root **יָסַד**), he founded / established.” And since it is YHWH Who is depicted as the Speaker, it seems He must be speaking of what someone other than Himself has done. But translators typically refuse to translate literally, making the verb either present or future tense, and changing the 3rd person pronoun into a 1st person pronoun.

The Greek translator was the first to do this, changing the Hebrew’s **הִנְנִי יֹסֵד**, “look

(continued...)

⁷⁶(...continued)

at Me, he laid” into ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἐμβαλῶ, “Look, I, I will lay...” Oswalt translates by “I am laying,” claiming that the verb is imperfect—but in this claim, we think he is mistaken.

King James, “I lay; **Tanakh**, “I will found”; **New Revised Standard**, “I am laying”; **New International**, “I lay”; **New Jerusalem**, “Now I shall lay”; **Rahlfs**, ἐγὼ ἐμβαλῶ εἰς τὰ θεμέλια, “I will throw into / lay for the foundations...”

English Standard has “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone...” However the Hebrew text is literally “Look at Me—he laid in Zion a stone...” 1QIs^a reads מְסִיד, **msyd**, which we cannot translate. Slotki’s translation has “behold, I lay,” and he comments that “The unusual Hebrew construction may be translated ‘Behold I (am He that) laid.’” We think this is mistaken (compare **English Standard**), because there is no “I am He that” in the text, nor any “I am the One Who...”

The Masoretic Hebrew text uses the perfect / past tense, and the subject of the verb is apparently someone other than YHWH. What do you think it means?

We suggest that YHWH is talking about Isaiah, and his prior teaching that YHWH’s people must live by faith. This teaching is the foundation stone on which Zion has been built, and the only foundation stone of which it will ever be built.

Or, can the foundation stone be “justice and righteousness” (see **verse 17**)? Or can it be both—that is belief / trust in YHWH, that seeks justice and righteousness? We say, Yes!

Jesus was the embodiment of justice and righteousness, and he constantly called on his followers to believe, to walk by faith, both in God and in himself.

We see nothing unusual about the Hebrew construction—what is unusual is the refusal of translators to follow the tense of the Hebrew verb, and the failure to recognize that YHWH is depicted as speaking of what someone other than Himself has done in the past, prior to this statement.

However when we come to **Isaiah 29:14**, we will see a very similar statement, in which “Look at Me” is followed by the statement in the 3rd person singular, and there we think it must mean that YHWH is speaking of what He Himself has done:

Therefore, look at Me--

He will continue to do wonders / marvels with this people,
doing wonders / marvels and the wonder / marvel!

In the light of this statement, we think that here in **Isaiah 28:16**, the 3rd person singular may be referring to what YHWH Himself has done likewise—that He is the One Who has laid the “firm foundation stone” in Zion.

⁷⁷Slotki states that “The *stone* is either intended for the Messiah or Hezekiah, or may indicate generally the inscrutable purpose of God in His relation to Israel.” (P. 130)

What do you think? Are these the only alternatives for who or what is meant by “the stone”? The text does not mention the Messiah or Hezekiah. Who or what do you think is intended by “the stone” that had been laid in Zion? Oswalt observes that the Aramaic Targum translates “stone” by “kings.”

Alexander states that “The objection, that the stone here mentioned was already laid, has no weight, as the whole theocracy existed with a view to the coming of the Messiah.” (P. 454) But this does not answer the objection. Granted that Israel looked forward to the coming of the Messiah; but Israel did not claim that the Messiah as the sure foundation had already been laid!

What had already been laid in Zion was the teaching that Israel must live by faith in YHWH, and live out that faith by doing righteousness and justice. Isaiah (along with Moses and the other prophets in Israel), had made this clear—but no one more explicitly than Isaiah. The whole **Book of Isaiah** teaches this—it is the only sure foundation-stone upon which Israel or humanity can build securely! YHWH, we think, is depicted as affirming that “he—Isaiah” had laid that foundation-stone.

Motyer, instead of claiming that the foundation-stone is the Messiah, claims that it is Zion: “The city embodies all the royal promises and therefore summons its inhabitants to faith. Of course, the *stone* could refer to the Lord Himself:

(Isaiah 8:13-14,

- 13 YHWH of Armies—Him you people shall set-apart / consecrate;
and He (is) your Fear / Awe-inspiring One,
and He (is) your Object of Trembling!
- 14 And He will be for a Sacred Place / Sanctuary,
and for a Stone of Striking,
and for a Rock of Stumbling,
for (the) two houses of Israel,
for a Trap and for a Snare,
for (the) inhabitant of Jerusalem.)

as the great Resident in Zion, inviting His citizens to trust Him to look after the city He has chosen to indwell. Or again (compare:

Psalm 2:6, where YHWH is depicted as stating:

"And I, I have enthroned My King
upon Zion, My set-apart mountain!"

Psalm 118:22, where evidently a royal figure states that YHWH has delivered him:

(continued...)

a stone of testing,⁷⁸

⁷⁷(...continued)

A stone the builders rejected
became for a cornerstone!

“The stone might be the Davidic monarchy as the formal bearer of the promises. But the heart of the matter remains the same: promises have been made and the people are summoned to trust.” (P. 233)

⁷⁸What is an **בִּבְחָן**, **ebhen bochan**, “stone of testing”?

Brown-Driver-Briggs states that it means “a *tested, tried stone*, i.e. approved for use as a foundation-stone.”

Holladay says it means, “a **tested** stone; a **touchstone** for testing gold; others, a fine-grained **schist gneiss** (marble?) used for statues, etc.

The problem is that **בִּבְחָן**, **bochan**, occurs only here in the entire **Hebrew Bible**, and as a result, its meaning cannot be determined by usage elsewhere—and we wonder where these lexicographers got their definitions.

Rahfs translates by *πολυτελής*, **polutele**, “very costly,” “precious.” But this may only be a guess of the Greek translator.

Alexander comments that “The phrase literally rendered *stone of proof* [has been given] two interpretations. Calvin understands by it a stone which was to be the test or standard of comparison for others; but the common explanation is more natural which makes it mean a stone that has itself been proved or tried and found sufficient.” (Pp. 454-55)

Motyer states that “A ‘tested stone’ / a ‘stone of testing’ is either one ‘which has undergone tests,’ or ‘which imposes tests’ by offering the opportunity either to build upon it or to turn to another foundation.” (P. 233)

One thing seems sure to us—faith in God will be constantly tested and tried in those who seek to “walk by faith.” In the same way, the person who seeks to embody justice and righteousness will be constantly tested and tried. Such faith and commitment is never easy. Indeed, as the hymn-writer says “The way of the cross,” while it “leads home,” is a way of constant trial and suffering. But also, that way has been tested by untold multitudes of faithful believers, and they unite their voices to say it is a tested way, that meets the test of life-long experience.

What do you think “stone of testing” means? The very fact that we have to ask the question once again demonstrates the puzzling, enigmatic nature of the prophetic

(continued...)

a precious cornerstone,⁷⁹
a foundation having been founded--⁸⁰

⁷⁸(...continued)
message.

⁷⁹This line, **פִּנְתַּת יִקְרָת**, **pinnath yiqrath**, means, we think, “a precious cornerstone.” **Tanakh** translates by “a tower of precious cornerstones,” but we see no justification for “tower” or for the plural “cornerstones.”

⁸⁰This line / phrase **מוֹסַד מוֹסַד**, **musadh mussadh** is given varying translations: **King James** and **New Revised Standard**, “a sure foundation”; **Tanakh**, “Exceedingly firm”; **New International**, “for a sure foundation”; **New Jerusalem**, “a firm foundation-stone”; **Rahfs**, εἰς τὰ θεμέλια αὐτῆς, “into / for the foundations of her (i.e., Zion).”

The first word is a noun meaning “foundation.” The second word, although identical to the first in an unpointed Hebrew text, is pointed by the Masoretes as a hophal participle, **מוֹסַד**, **mussadh** “*the being founded, founding*, leading to the translation “a foundation having been founded.”

Alexander comments that this phrase is “a kindred idea” to “stone of testing,” and is expressed by the phrase **מוֹסַד מוֹסַד**, **musadh mussadh**, “a cognate noun and participle, literally meaning a founded foundation, i.e. one entirely firm and safe,” which he translates by “a firm foundation.” (P. 455)

Motyer states, “Note the emphasis on ‘foundation’ throughout; the superstructure is not yet there. See:

1 Peter 2:4-8a, where Peter is speaking about the Lord:

- 4 to whom coming (plural), a living stone,
by people indeed having been rejected,
but then with / to God chosen, precious / valued;
- 5 and yourselves as living stones,
you are being built (into) a spiritual household,
for a set-apart priesthood,
to offer up spiritual sacrifices,
acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.
- 6 Because it is contained in scripture / writing:
Look—I am laying in Zion a stone, a corner-stone,
chosen, precious / valued;
and the one believing upon him will not be put to shame!

(continued...)

the one believing / trusting⁸¹ will not be in haste!⁸²

⁸⁰(...continued)

- 7 To you (plural) belongs the honor / preciousness, to the ones believing;
but then to those not believing, a stone which the builders rejected--
this one became for a head of a corner / cornerstone,
8 and a stone of stumbling,
and a rock of scandal / trap!

What Motyer evidently implies by this quotation is that with the coming of Jesus Christ, the superstructure has appeared. (P. 233)

⁸¹Alexander comments that מְאִמֵּן, **ma)amiyn** [hiphil participle, masculine singular, “one believing / having faith / trusting”] “may either be referred specifically to the corner-stone or taken in the general sense of trusting or believing in God.” (P. 455)
See:

Isaiah 7:9b,

אִם לֹא תִאֱמָנּוּ
כִּי לֹא תִאֱמָנּוּ:

if you people will not stand firm / have confidence / believe,
then you people will not be made firm / be established!

Isaiah 28:16 (here),

Therefore in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
Look—he founded / established in Zion a stone,
a stone of testing,
a precious cornerstone,
a foundation having been founded--
the one believing / trusting will not be in haste!

Genesis 15:6, where it is said concerning Abram:

And he believed / placed confidence in the YHWH,
and He considered it to / for him a right-relationship / righteousness.

⁸²Slotki comments that the person who believes “will remain steadfast in his faith however long realization may be delayed.” (P. 130) That is, the true believer will patiently await the Divine fulfillment of promises, not “jumping the gun,” not attempting to “hurry God up.”

Alexander likewise states that it means the believer “will not be impatient, but will trust the promise, even though its execution be delayed. This suits the connection

(continued...)

⁸²(...continued)

better than the sense preferred by the modern [mid-19th century] German writers, will not flee, or have occasion to flee, in alarm or despair. The [Greek translation] adopted in the **New Testament** (οὐ μὴ καταισχυθῆ, 'will certainly not be put to shame')... makes more prominent the fact that the believer's hopes shall not be disappointed... But...it is better to regard the Greek as paraphrasing rather than translating the original expression...

"The force of the figures in this verse is much enhanced by the statements of modern travelers in relation to the immense stones still remaining at the foundation of ancient walls." (P. 455)

Yes—one needs to look no further than the foundation stones—"ashlars"-- at the base of the retaining wall of the ancient temple in Jerusalem.

"The temple wall and retaining wall were constructed out of limestone blocks called ashlar. The typical building of this time during Herod's extensive building projects were built with what are known as "Herodian-ashlars." Ashlars are large stone blocks cut smooth, with narrow margins around the edges and smooth slightly raised bosses in the center. They are easy to identify and locate in the Western Wall and in the rest of the Temple Mount wall. Many can be seen in other walls and buildings throughout the city as well, having been reused for the last 2,000 years since the Romans toppled the temple and much of its retaining wall." ("Ashlar Stones—Herod's Building Material," Internet, 3/30/2017, with a series of photographs)

The largest of the ashlars at the base of the retaining wall weighed from 570 to 630 tons! Many of these ashlars were so large that the Roman soldiers were unable to move them.

Motyer translates by "will never be dismayed," and comments that the root **חָשַׁח**, **chush**, "is found twenty times elsewhere in **Isaiah**, always with the sense of 'hurrying.' Here it means 'rushing hither and yon (as of the ambassadors hurrying to Egypt), all haste and flurry...in contrast to the *rest* and *repose* (**verse 12**) they could have enjoyed. (Pp. 233-34) Compare:

Isaiah 7:4, where Isaiah is instructed what to say to King Ahaz:

And you shall say to him,
 Be guarded, and show quietness;
do not be afraid;
 and your heart shall not be timid
because of these two stumps of smoking fire-sticks—
 at the burning anger of Rezin, and Aram, and Remalyahu's son.

Isaiah 30:15,

(continued...)

28:17⁸³ וְשִׁמְתִי מִשְׁפָּט לְקוֹ

וְצִדְקָה לְמִשְׁקָלָהּ

וַיְעַה בְּרֹד מַחְסֵה כֶּזֶב

וּסְתֵר מַיִם יִשְׁטְפוּ:

And I will place justice for a (measuring) line,

⁸²(...continued)

Because in this way my Lord YHWH, Set-apart One of Israel, spoke:

In returning and rest / quietness you (plural) will be saved / delivered;
in being quiet and in trust will be your strength;
and you were not willing.

What do you think this means?

Oswalt states that “For the person who puts his or her trust in God, there can be a serenity and a calm deliberateness which is not possible otherwise.” (P. 519)

But see **verse 12**, which states that “this is the rest—give rest to the weary!”

⁸³Alexander translates **verse 17** by, “*And I will place judgment for a line and justice for a plummet, and hail shall sweep away the refuge of falsehood, and the hiding-place waters shall overflow.*”

He comments that “The meaning of the first clause is, that God would deal with them in strict justice; He would make justice the rule of His proceedings, as the builder regulates his work by the line and the plummet. The English version seems to make judgment or justice not the measure but the thing to be measured...”

“To their confident assurance of safety God opposes, first, the only sure foundation which He Himself has laid, and then the utter destruction which was coming on their own chosen objects of reliance.” (P. 455)

Watts comments on **verse 17** that “God commits Himself again to justice and righteousness as the only fitting standards by which to measure right and wrong. The implication is that the fluctuating reasonings of practical politics or personal advancement...are not to be trusted...” (P. 370)

We say, True belief / trust in YHWH has as its fruit justice and righteousness—where these are missing, there is no genuine belief / trust! And we add that this is a sure conclusion to be gained from the **Book of Isaiah**, in spite of its visionary nature, its puzzles and enigmas. YHWH God demands justice and righteousness!

and righteousness for a leveling instrument.⁸⁴

And hail will sweep away a lie's cover / refuge,
and waters will overwhelm a hiding-place!⁸⁵

⁸⁴These first two lines of **verse 17** are given varying translations:

King James, "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet"

Tanakh, "But I will apply judgment as a measuring line And retribution as weights";

New Revised Standard, "And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet" [plummet, also called 'plumb bob' is a piece of lead or some other weight attached to a line, used for determining perpendicularity];

New International, "I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line" [plumb line is a string with a metal weight at one end that, when suspended, points directly towards the earth's center of gravity and so is used to determine verticality];

New Jerusalem, "And I will make fair judgement the measure, and uprightness the plumb-line."

Rahfs, καὶ θήσω κρίσιν εἰς ἐλπίδα ἢ δὲ ἐλεημοσύνη μου εἰς σταθμούς, "And I will place judgment / what is right for hope; but then the compassion of Mine for weights (?)."

Slotki comments that the line and the plummet or plumb bob are "metaphors borrowed from the builder's art." (P. 130)

Motyer states that "Justice and righteousness either describe the quality of life the Lord desires in His believing people and to which He will apply His measuring line and His plumb-line (the tests of horizontal and vertical exactitude), or else they describe how the Lord will act in judgment against the scoffers. These two meanings are obviously complementary." (P. 234)

Oswalt comments that "As God erects His building upon the cornerstone of His Own faithfulness, He will make justice and righteousness the standards for measurement. As a result, that building will stand. But every other structure will fall." (P. 519)

Is that what the "stone / cornerstone" is—YHWH's Own faithfulness? Add this to the many different understandings of what the stone of this passage is, including mine. Isaiah certainly teaches that YHWH is faithful—and it is because of the Divine faithfulness that His people can and should walk by faith, put their trust in Him, bringing forth the fruits of justice and righteousness.

⁸⁵Slotki states that the "hail" and "waters" are "God's destructive agencies, represented perhaps by the invading army of Assyria." (P. 130)

28:18⁸⁶ וְכִפֵּר בְּרִיתְכֶם אֶת־מִוֹת

וְחִזּוֹתְכֶם אֶת־שְׂאוֹל לֹא־תִקּוּם

שׁוֹט שׁוֹטֵף כִּי יַעֲבֹר

וְהָיִיתֶם לוֹ לְמַרְמָס:

And your (plural) covenant with death will be covered over,⁸⁷

⁸⁶Motyer comments on **verses 18-19** that “The final subsection is a point by point contradiction of their proud confidence. Their signed agreements will prove meaningless...their boast of immunity will be exposed as hollow...To the metaphor of flood and whip is added that of a marauding beast.” (P. 234)

Watts comments on **verses 18-19a** that “Their self-serving *covenant* will be swept away and repeated waves of the *scourge* will devastate the land again. The regular incursions by Nebuchadnezzar in 603, 598, and 587 B.C.E., as well as other unrecorded military pressures, are clearly in view.” (P. 370)

Alexander translates **verse 18**: “*And your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your league with hell shall not stand, and the overflowing scourge—for it shall pass through, and ye shall be for it to trample on.*” (P. 455)

Slotki comments on **verse 18** that it contains “a retort [a sharp response] to the arrogant boasts in **verse 15** with the use of similar phrases and metaphors.” (P. 131)

Oswalt states that “In the hour when the oppressor sweeps over the nation all her secret agreements and covenants will prove useless...They will end up beaten flat like a grainfield over which a flood has run.” (P. 519)

⁸⁷The verb here is **וְכִפֵּר**, **wekhuppar**, 3rd person masculine singular pual, with *waw-conversive / consecutive*, “and it will be covered over.” The verb is commonly used in terms of “atone” and “atonement,” with reference to the “covering over” of sins. Translations vary from “disannulled,” to “annulled,” to “broken,” to ἀφέλη, **aphele**, “be taken away.” Slotki claims that it is literally “smeared over.” (P. 131)

Alexander comments that **כִּפֵּר** seems to be here used in its primary sense of *covering*, or perhaps more specifically *smearing over*, so as to conceal if not to obliterate, applied in this case to a writing, the image in the mind of the prophet being probably that of a waxed tablet, in which the writing is erased by spreading out and smoothing the wax with the stylus...

(continued...)

and your vision with *sheol* will not stand;
An overwhelming scourge, when it passes over--
and you will be for it a trampling-place!⁸⁸

28:19⁸⁹ מְדֵי עֲבָרוֹ יִקַּח אֶתְכֶם

כִּי־בִבְקָר בִּבְקָר יַעֲבֹר

⁸⁷(...continued)

“[There are in this verse a] combination of expressions which cannot be strictly applied to the same subject. An army might trample, but it could not literally overflow; a stream might overflow, but it could not literally trample down.” (P. 456)

⁸⁸Slotki comments that “Justice and righteousness will be the standards of political and social activities, completely sweeping away intrigues and secret machinations.” (P. 130)

Do you agree with Slotki? Is it justice and righteousness that sweep away evil, or the foreign powers, Assyria and Babylonia that do the sweeping away?

⁸⁹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 19**: “As soon (or as often) as it passes through, it shall take you (or carry you away); for in the morning, in the morning, (i.e. every morning), it shall pass through in the day and in the night, and only vexation (or distress) shall be the understanding of the thing heard...”

“The meaning may be that the threatened visitation shall come soon and be frequently repeated. There are three interpretations of the last clause, one of which supposes it to mean, that the mere report of the approaching scourge should fill them with distress; another, that the effect of the report should be unmixed distress; a third, that nothing but a painful experience would enable them to understand the lesson which the prophet was commissioned to teach them.” (P. 456)

Alexander says the meaning is probably “that nothing but distress or suffering could make them understand or even attend to the message from Jehovah.” (**ibid.**)

Slotki comments on **verse 19**: “The visitation will be continued until all the guilty men are carried away; and the retribution will be so terrifying that even the report of it will strike terror in the hearts of those who grasp its significance.” (P. 131)

Oswalt states that Isaiah says, “the flood will come again and again, taking the country over and over. This can be seen to be a correct assessment of Assyrian military doctrine. The Assyrian annals report numerous returns to the same areas, each return being accompanied by vast slaughter and pillage. The steady hammer blows of such an attack spread out over years, whether calculatedly so, or as a result of political exigencies elsewhere, could be expected to reduce a people to shivering terror, as the prophet noted here.” (Pp. 519-20)

בַּיּוֹם וּבַלַּיְלָה

וְהָיָה רַק-זוּעָה הַבֵּינָן שְׁמוּעָה:

As often as its passing over,⁹⁰ it will take you (plural);⁹¹
because morning by morning it will pass over,
by day and by night.

And it will be only terror to understand (the) message!⁹²

28:20⁹³ כִּי-קָצַר הַמִּצֵּעַ מִהַשְׁתַּרְעַ

⁹⁰This is referring to the “overwhelming scourge” in line 3 of **verse 18**.

⁹¹Translations vary from “it shall take you,” to “it shall catch you,” to “it will carry you away,” to “it will seize on you.”

⁹²Watts comments that “This message could do no other than bring *terror*, for it shows Jerusalem’s policies to be totally and disastrously wrong. They have failed to assess what God is doing in their time. They have misjudged the relative strength and will of the great powers.” (P. 370)

We say, They have failed to recognize their own responsibility to trust YHWH, and devote themselves to justice and righteousness, rather than entering into political intrigue and alliances. What do you think?

⁹³Motyer entitles **verses 20-22** “Conclusion: A Strange Deed.”

Alexander translates **verse 20**: “*For the bed is too short to stretch one’s self, and the covering too narrow wrap one’s self.*”

He comments that “This is probably a proverbial description of a perplexed and comfortless condition. Jerome absurdly makes the verse a description of idolatry considered as a spiritual adultery...”

“The connection with the foregoing verse is this: you cannot fully understand the lessons which I will teach you now until your bed becomes too short, etc.” (P. 456)

Slotki comments on **verse 20**: “The impossible and vexatious situation of the people is graphically depicted by the use of what is perhaps a popular saying. It is compared with that of a man sleeping on a short bed under a narrow covering. He cannot stretch himself because the bed is too short; and if he gathers himself up, his limbs will be exposed to the cold because the covering is too narrow.” (P. 131)

Motyer comments that “Part of the terror of the message will be the exposure of the inadequacy of their efforts after security. The metaphor of the *bed* reflects ironically

(continued...)

וְהַמִּסְכָּה צָרָה כְּהִתְכַנָּס׃

Because the bed was (too) short from / for stretching oneself out,
and the covering was cramped / narrow (?) when gathering oneself.⁹⁴

28:21⁹⁵ כִּי כְהִרְפְּצִים יְקוּם יְהוָה

⁹³(...continued)

the refused resting-place of **verse 12**. They have made their own bed and must now lie on it, but only to find that if they lie [fully stretched out] the bed is too short, and if they curl up the blanket is too narrow! To wrap around you is ‘when one curls up.’” (P. 234)

Oswalt states that “This verse probably reflects a then popular proverb which is used here to cap the destruction of the foolishness of the alliances made. They cannot do what they claim. The bed is not big enough to contain them, nor the blanket wide enough to cover them. So promises are easy to make but difficult to keep.” (P. 520)

We say, Belief / trust in YHWH that devotes itself to producing justice and righteousness, giving rest to the weary, gives the believer a true “resting-place.” It is a broad, life-long place of rest, that covers all of life. No other choice is so “wholistic”! The believer “rests” in YHWH’s faithfulness; his or her life is filled with responsibility for giving rest to the weary!

What do you say this text means? Does it not participate in the riddle-like, enigmatic nature of the prophetic message? The text calls for interpretation, but offers little real guidance for the task.

⁹⁴English translations vary slightly, but the Greek is totally different:

King James, “For the bed is shorter than that *a man* can stretch himself *on it*: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself *in it*.”

Tanakh, “The couch is too short for stretching out, And the cover too narrow for curling up!” **New Revised Standard**, **New International** and **New Jerusalem** similar;

Rahlfs, στενοχωρούμενοι οὐ δυνάμεθα μάχεσθαι αὐτοὶ δὲ ἀσθενούμεν τοῦ ἡμᾶς συναχθῆναι. “Being confined to a narrow space we are not able to fight; but then we ourselves are weakened so as (not) to (be able to) gather ourselves together.” Is this an example of the Greek translator attempting to solve the riddle / enigma of the text? We think it is.

⁹⁵Oswalt comments on **verses 21-22** that they “conclude the segment [**verses 14-22**] in a powerful way...”

“Very possibly false prophets were invoking the old stories as proof that God would side with His people come what may. Isaiah recalls the stories too. As He broke out upon the Philistines at Mount Perazim (‘flood,’ **2 Samuel 5:20**; **1 Chronicles 14:11**) and struck down the Canaanites fleeing from Gibeon (‘hail,’ **Joshua 10:11**), so He

(continued...)

⁹⁵(...continued)

would fight against His enemies again. But who are God's 'enemies'? Those who do not obey Him (**Psalm 139:19-24** [surely this is a mistaken reference by Oswalt!]). Thus God will work, He will perform His deeds, but they will be strange and foreign because they will be against His people, not for them [but when in the **Hebrew Bible** was God ever not against His people who were disobedient?]. God never belongs to anyone, and if He cannot find those who will serve Him in one place, He will find them in another." See:

Malachi 1:11,

Because from sun's rising and as far as its setting My name (is) great among the nations!

And in every place incense is brought near for My name, and a pure gift / offering--

because My name (is) great among the nations!--said YHWH of Armies.

(Yes! But most English translations use future verbs instead of present verbs, because of the conviction of translators that this could only be said after the coming of Jesus Christ.)

"The scoffers are already in bondage because of their mockery of God, and unless they stop at once, they will have forged their chains so tightly that nothing can break them...Destruction is decreed for the land, but people within the land may still find God, if they can hear His call and repent of their folly." (P. 520)

Alexander translates **verse 21**: "*For like mount Perazim shall Jehovah rise up, like the valley in Gibeon shall He rage, to do His work, His strange work, and to perform His task, His strange task.*"

He comments that "Into such a condition as that just described [in **verse 20**], they shall be brought, for some of the most fearful scenes of ancient history are yet to be repeated..."

"Interpreters are not agreed as to the precise events referred to in the first clause. The common opinion is that it alludes to the slaughter of the Philistines, described in **2 Samuel 5:18-25**, and in **1 Chronicles 14:9-16**, in the latter of which places Gibeon is substituted for Geba. The valley meant will then be the valley of Rephaim. Ewald, on the contrary, applies the clause to the slaughter of the Canaanites by Joshua, when the sun stood still on Gibeon...(**Joshua 10:7-15**)...Hendewerk...

applies the first part of the clause to the breach of Uzzah (פֶּרִץ עֹזָה, **perets (uzzah)**) described in **2 Samuel 6:6-8**, and the last half to the slaughter of Israel in the valley of Achor (**Joshua 7:1-26**)... Neither Hendewerk's hypothesis nor Ewald's is so probable as that of Gesenius and most other writers, which refers the whole clause to the double slaughter of the Philistines by David...

(continued...)

כְּעֵמֶק בְּגִבְעוֹן יִרְגֹז
 לַעֲשׂוֹת מַעֲשֵׂהוּ זָר מַעֲשֵׂהוּ
 וְלַעֲבֹד עֲבֹדָתוֹ נִכְרִיָּה עֲבֹדָתוֹ:

Because like Mount Perazim, YHWH will arise,⁹⁶

⁹⁵(...continued)

“That these were foreigners and heathen, only adds to the force of the threatening, by making it to mean that as God had dealt with those in former times, He was now about to deal with the unbelieving and unfaithful sons of Israel. It is indeed not only implied but expressed, that He intended to depart from His usual mode of treating them, in which sense the judgments here denounced are called strange works, i.e. foreign from the ordinary course of Divine providence [but surely the reader of the **Hebrew Bible** knows how often YHWH’s actions toward His people have been depicted in just this manner!].

“The English word *strange* is here the only satisfactory equivalent to the two Hebrew adjectives זָר, **zar**, and נִכְרִיָּה, **nokhriyyah**. The idea that punishment is God’s strange work because at variance with His goodness, is not only less appropriate in this connection, but inconsistent with the tenor of Scripture, which describes His vindicatory justice as an essential attribute of His nature.” (P. 457)

We are reminded of the **Book of Job**, and YHWH’s speeches in **chapters 38-41**, in which God’s presence and activity in the unknown, mysterious animals that make up the animal kingdom are detailed—an area of reality where the doctrine of exact retribution (so dear to Job’s friends) does not apply, and where God is at work in strange, unusual ways. That view can be multiplied a million times over in terms of the massive universes being unveiled by science in modern times, both in the infinitely small and the infinitely large, where we are beginning to see the unbelievable extent of the universe(s), and the creative hand of God in areas beyond our comprehension or imagination—and like Job, we are caused to bow in humility, confessing our ignorance, but at the same time confessing the miraculous nature of reality.

⁹⁶Slotki comments that Mount Perazim is “where, with God’s help, David inflicted a great defeat on the Philistines.” (P. 131) See **2 Samuel 5:20**,

And David came into Baal-Peratsiym / Perazim;
 and David struck them there.
 And he said, YHWH broke through my enemies before me,
 like a bursting-forth of waters!
 For this reason he called that place’s name Baal of Bursting-Forths.

(continued...)

like a valley in Gibeon He will quake,⁹⁷
to do His deed—strange / peculiar (is) His deed;
to work His work—foreign (is) His work!⁹⁸

⁹⁶(...continued)

Motyer agrees that the reference is to David's triumphs over the Philistines in **2 Samuel 5**. He comments that "The Lord once masterminded the Davidic triumphs, which were a stepping-stone to national security and the foundation of Zion as the national capital (**2 Samuel 6**), but those who now reject the Davidic-Zion foundation of the Divine promise will find that their portion is wrath on the same scale, a strange and alien task indeed!" (Pp. 234-35)

⁹⁷For the Valley of Gibeon, see **1 Chronicles 14:16-17**,

16 And David did just as the God commanded him,
and he struck camp(s) of Philistines from Gibeon and as far as Gozrah.
17 And David's name / fame went forth into all the lands;
and YHWH gave / placed his fear upon all the peoples.

⁹⁸Slotki states that the Divine work is strange / foreign "since He has never dealt so harshly with His people." (P. 131)

Do you agree with Slotki? Reading the **Book of Judges**, would you not have to say that YHWH is constantly depicted in the **Hebrew Bible** as dealing extremely harshly with His people?

Watts comments that "In the Isaiah text the 'holy war' concept that Yahweh fights for Israel is turned around. Here the reference, *His work*, is to the Assyrian and Babylonian begun in the days of Tiglath-Pileser and continued by Nebuchadnezzar. The implications were clear, though neither name is called. That Jerusalemites should cry out in disbelief: זָר מַעֲשֵׂהוּ, **zar ma(asehu)**, 'His work is strange!' and נִכְרִיָּה עֲבֹדָתוֹ, 'His service is alien!' is understandable. They believed that Yahweh's proper work lay in calling, saving, and leading Israel to fulfill His promises to Abraham to establish His people in Canaan and to David to establish Zion in safety and security...

"The [**Book of Isaiah**] has argued repeatedly that they were blind, uncomprehending, and unbelieving to His 'other work' which the prophets had announced, that through the Assyrians and the Babylonians He was bringing total devastation to the land and exile to its peoples. Thus, in their eyes, this message contradicted their understanding of what they considered to be His real 'work' in and through Israel. It is no wonder they called it *strange* and *alien*. They may well have found that God Himself had become *strange* and *alien* to Israel." (P. 371)

What do you think the "strange work" of YHWH is?

⁹⁹Slotki states that **verse 22** is a “final thrust at the scoffers.” (P. 132)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 22**: “*And now scoff not, lest your bands be strong; for a consumption and decree (or even a decreed consumption) I have heard from the Lord Jehovah of hosts, against (or upon) the whole earth...*”

“Bands, i.e. bonds or chains, is a common figure for afflictions and especially for penal sufferings...To strengthen these bands is to aggravate the suffering...”

“The last clause represents the threatened judgments as inevitable, because determined and revealed by God Himself.” (P. 457)

Watts comments that “The last speech exhorts Jerusalemites not to scoff at this announcement and not to ignore it.” (P. 371)

Watts explains the passage **28:14-22** as follows: “Judah’s current leadership found itself in a hopeless situation...Yahweh’s work in Zion was begun long before and continued through this time. His foundation stone was a standard for judging righteousness and justice. These policies could not survive that test. Not the shifting political treaties, but the recognition and acceptance of Yahweh’s affirmed foundation in Zion, deserve faith.

“That ‘stone’ could be construed to refer to the Davidic dynasty. But this does not conform to the usual line of the [**Book of Isaiah’s**] assurance. The place of Zion as God’s chosen meeting-ground with Israel and the peoples, that is the temple, is what is promised throughout the [**Book of Isaiah**] as that to which God is committed for the future. It is the place of the word (*Torah* in **2:3**) and of His presence.

“Parallel to that is the recognition of the ‘work’ of Yahweh which is identified with the ‘overwhelming scourge.’ This is consistent with the [**Book of Isaiah’s**] picture of God’s instigation and involvement in the Assyrian invasion and devastations under Nebuchadnezzar...”

“It defied understanding for most Israelites. Thus it was accurately called ‘His strange work,’ ‘His alien task’...The prophetic faith, which holds that God works not only in the comfortable ways of election, salvation, and protection for His people, but also through the great movements of history for the accomplishments of His purposes for His people and the world, is mind-boggling. Few indeed are those who hold such a faith. The [**Book**] of Isaiah does hold it...”

“This...work, the laying of the foundation stone, is part of the action deemed so ‘strange’ and ‘alien’ (**verse 21**). That God could at one and the same time affirm the durability and value of Zion with its temple (**verse 16**) and also rise against its government through foreign invaders was incomprehensible to most Israelites. The

(continued...)

פִּן־יִחְזְקוּ מוֹסְרֵיכֶם
 כִּי־כִלָּה וְנִחְרְצָה שְׁמִעְתִּי
 מֵאֵת אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת
 עַל־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ:

And now, you shall not act as scorers,
 so as not to strengthen your bonds.
 Because complete and decided destruction I have heard
 from my Lord YHWH of Armies,
 over all the earth / land!¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹(...continued)

[**Book of Isaiah**] proclaims that this was in fact God’s strategy. The kingdom was doomed. But the values inherent in Zion and the temple, symbols of Yahweh’s presence and purpose, would remain the foundations of faith.” (Pp. 371-72)

We say, Not Zion and the temple, but belief / trust in YHWH, producing the fruits of justice and righteousness, giving rest to the weary, is the stone which YHWH servant, Isaiah, had laid in Zion. That is what would endure when Zion and the temple fell. It would be the very heart of the mission and ministry of Jesus, the “rock” upon which His church would be built! It is still today the mission of God’s people in this world.

But at the same time, we recognize the puzzling / enigmatic nature of the prophetic text. What do you say?

¹⁰⁰As we study the **Book of Isaiah**, we are gradually learning to “sing the song of Isaiah,” as we read and meditate upon so many of its wonderful, inspiring, hope-imparting passages. But we must not overlook the many other passages, that stand side by side with those hope-imparting passages—passages like this that warn of judgment, of fiery trials, of testings, of destructions that await the believer before those hopes are fulfilled. The believer is called to live out his or her faith in the midst of a world that is filled with competing loyalties, with power-hungry dictators, with constant temptation and life-threatening dangers—they are not make believe, they are very real. But the believer, in spite of having to face these realities, has taken hold of YHWH and His promises, determined to hold onto and obey YHWH’s call whatever the cost, even if the earth / land is being destroyed all around him.

Biblical faith is not Pollyanna faith [naive belief of someone who thinks good things will always happen and finds something good in everything]. Biblical faith does

(continued...)

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

not deny, but squarely faces harsh reality. But it does so with a song in its heart, a song that we are learning to call “The Song of Isaiah.”

¹⁰¹Slotki comments on **verses 23-29**: “Isaiah, having described the judgment and retribution which God would bring upon the rulers and people, invites them now to listen to a parable taken from country life from which the obvious lessons might be drawn by them...

“The farmer ploughs and breaks up his land, but these acts are not an end in themselves. His object is to achieve the subsequent sowing and reaping. So God may inflict heartbreaking woe and suffering on His people, but His aim is their ultimate reaping and enjoying of the blessings that are in store for the faithful. God’s wisdom directs the varied activities of the husbandman who adapts his processes to the seasons of the year and the nature of the seeds; similarly the wisdom of God directs the destinies of His people, adapting His dealings to their characters and moral conditions. Other and similar comparisons readily suggest themselves.” (P. 132)

But the text itself does not identify these verses as a “parable.” What do you think? Is it meant to be like the parables of Jesus? And are we to understand the parables of Jesus as being likewise puzzling and enigmatic, like the prophetic message?

Oswalt entitles **verses 23-29** “The Laws of Nature,” and we wonder why he hasn’t entitled the passage “The Laws of God in Nature.”

He comments that “After the furious denunciations of **verses 14-22**, these verses, with their quiet pastoral allusions, come as something of a shock. Furthermore, because the writer gives no interpretation...it is not certain what was the intended purpose of the segment...

“Broadly speaking, the prophet is pointing to a simple peasant who farms according to certain principles which he has learned from God. Thus he knows when to plow and when to sow. He knows what needs to be sown where (**verses 24-25**) and how to adapt his threshing techniques to the different plants so as not to destroy the grain (**verses 27-28**). How does he know these things? God, the great Teacher and Counselor, has shown him (**verse 29**).

“But what does this mean in this context? Several possibilities offer themselves:

(1) The segment offers a note of hope...Despite their sin, God will not continue to plow His people under forever, nor will He drive His threshing sledge over them until they are crushed.

(continued...)

¹⁰¹(...continued)

(2) God is not locked into merely one mode of activity. Those foolish leaders who said that the old God was inadequate for a new age did not even understand nature.

(3) God is the true Counselor and His counsel is simple, straight-forward, and productive (**verse 12**). What the leaders are proposing is as stupid as a farmer plowing all year, or trying to thresh tiny cummin seeds with an oxcart. Even an uneducated peasant, taught by God, knows better than that.

“Although all of these are possible, the last seems to fit the context best in its stress on the importance of God’s counsel, its simple wisdom, and its implied contrast of stupid counselors with wise peasants.” (Pp. 521-22)

But where did the idea of “an uneducated peasant” come from? Is this not being read into the text? According to this passage, the humble farmer is educated by God!

Alexander translates **verse 23**: “*Give ear and hear my voice; hearken and hear my speech.*”

He comments that “This formula invites attention to what follows as a new view of the subject. The remainder of the chapter contains an extended illustration drawn from the processes of agriculture. Interpreters, although agreed as to the import of the figures, are divided with respect to their design and application...”

“Some regard the passage as intended to illustrate, in a general way, the wisdom of the Divine dispensations. Other refer it most specifically to the delay of judgment on the sinner, and conceive the doctrine of the passage to be this, that although God is not always punishing, any more than the husbandman is always ploughing or always threshing, He will punish at last. A third interpretation makes the prominent idea to be this, that although God chastises His Own people, His ultimate design is not to destroy but to purify and save them...”

“To these must be added, as a new hypothesis, the one maintained by Hitzig and Ewald, who reject entirely the application of the passage to God’s providential dealings, and apply it to the conduct of men, assuming that the prophet’s purpose was to hold up the proceedings of the husbandman as an example to the scoffers whom he is addressing...”

“The obvious design for which the comparison is introduced is not to comfort but to alarm and warn...The prophet [is explaining] by this comparison the long forbearance of Jehovah, and to show that this forbearance was no reason for believing that His threatenings would never be fulfilled. As the husbandman ploughs and harrows, sows and plants, before He reaps and threshes, and in threshing employs different modes and different implements, according to the nature of the grain, so God allows the actual infliction of His wrath to be preceded by what seems to be a period of inaction but is

(continued...)

¹⁰¹(...continued)

really one of preparation, and conforms the strokes themselves to the capacity and guilt of the transgressor.” (Pp. 457-58)

But again we observe that the text does not identify this passage as either a “parable” or a “comparison.” What do you think it is? Why was it introduced at this point in **Isaiah**?

Motyer entitles **verses 23-29** “True Discrimination in Sowing and Reaping.”

He comments that “As the chapter opened with an implied question, so it closes with an open question [Yes, a question concerning a farmer’s procedure in ploughing and sowing]. Jerusalem’s life-style mirrors that of Samaria but will Jerusalem’s history follow the same immediate path [this is not the question asked in the text]. Samaria paid for its pride by overthrow; is Jerusalem similarly to fall [there is no such question asked in the text]?...

“Like many prophets, Isaiah could take up the role of the ‘wise man’ when it suited his purpose (compare Nathan in **2 Samuel 12:1-3**). He does so here, replying to these implied questions [where are these questions implied in the text?] with two parables. The first (**verses 23-26**) is one of sowing. The harsh activity of ploughing, breaking, harrowing, is not an end in itself; it is purposeful, aiming at sowing the carefully planted crop. This corresponds to **verses 1-6**, the harsh judgment on Samaria with the ‘fringe of hope’ at the end...

“The second parable (**verses 27-29**) is one of reaping. Each crop has to be gathered in a way appropriate to it; the wrong treatment would destroy the crop. This corresponds to **verses 7-22** and the question how far to take the parallel between Samaria and Jerusalem. It gives an indefinite reply, implying only that what happened to Samaria is not necessarily what will happen to Jerusalem, for the farmer has learned his discriminating ways from God (**verse 26**), Who is wonderful in counsel (**verse 29**). He will act purposefully and with Divine discriminating wisdom.” (P. 235)

Do you agree with Motyer? Would you have given this interpretation on your own, simply on the basis of the text? Do you see the text as implying these questions?

Watts calls the passage “a parable,” and states that “The parable of the farmer who must work differently in different seasons and who is careful not to destroy the results of one season’s work while doing that of another is applied to Yahweh’s plans and work [it is applied in this way by commentators like Watts, but the text itself makes no such application!]....

“The parable in wisdom style defends the prophetic understanding that God acts in history in accordance with the times and conditions as He moves to achieve His goals. This is God’s עֲצָה, (**etsah** ‘strategy’ (**verse 29**)) [No, the farmer’s wise

(continued...)

הַקְשִׁיבוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ אִמְרָתִי:

Give ear, and listen to my voice!

¹⁰¹(...continued)

procedure is because of YHWH's עֵצָה, (**etsah** 'counsel'; the text is not claiming anything about YHWH's overall purpose in history! Such an understanding only comes from making the depiction of YHWH's teaching the farmer his techniques a parable of what He Himself is doing in history].

“The genre of this passage is called תּוֹרָה, **torah**, ‘instruction’ (**verse 26** [which says YHWH teaches the farmer his techniques, but says nothing about the ‘genre’ of this passage, and does not use the noun **torah**!]) and אִמְרָה, (**imrah**, ‘saying’ (**verse 23**). These stand in clear contrast to the ordinary prophetic genres [but do they? Many prophetic passages are considered **torah** / teaching, and sayings!], but are at home in wisdom literature...

“The parable of God’s instruction to the farmer parallels the tradition that God introduced agriculture to mankind (**Genesis 3:23; 4:1-16**)...While this is merely implied in **Genesis**, it is stated in considerable detail in the literature of the Ancient Near East. An ancient Sumerian myth describes the process by which Enlil and Enka taught the farmer...Diodorus of Sicily reports Egyptian teachings that Osiris was interested in agriculture among other arts and crafts...Isis was credited with the discovery of wheat and barley culture...Virgil, the Latin poet, wrote a beautiful passage of how Ceres instructed farmers in their craft...Ovid, another Latin poet...wrote a similar passage...

“However, the genre of each of these passages is different from the one here in **Isaiah**. They tell of the God’s instruction with no intention to project meaning beyond the telling. Here, the material become a ‘parable’ because it is told as an analogy for another truth: that God’s strategy for history, like His strategy for agriculture, is wonderful and achieves success. Thus His instruction should be sought by political leaders, as it is sought and followed by farmers. And His strategy is to be trusted with patient faith by the king’s counselors as it is by simple farmers.” (Pp. 375-76)

But nothing of this concerning “analogy for another truth” is made apparent in the text itself. All of this is being introduced by Watts and the other commentators who make similar use of the passage as a “parable.”

The passage simply depicts YHWH’s teaching the farmer how to be successful—and opens the door to understanding YHWH’s **torah** / teaching in a much broader way than limiting the Divine **Torah** to the **Bible** or “Sacred Scripture.” YHWH is the Divine Teacher of humanity, in other areas of life besides “religion”! Dare we say in all areas of life, in the research laboratories, in governmental organization, hospital care, etc. etc.? We say, All genuine education comes from God! Yes, we dare to make that claim. What do you think?

Pay attention, and listen to my speech!¹⁰²

28:24¹⁰³ הַכֹּל הַיּוֹם יִחַרְשׁ הַחֲרָשׁ לְזָרַע

¹⁰²Slotki states that in this verse, “The prophet addresses the rulers and the people inviting their careful and serious attention and contemplation.” (P. 132)

Motyer comments that “Here we have the call of the wisdom teacher... *What I say* is ‘my speech.’” (P. 235)

Oswalt agrees, stating that “Give ear...appears to be a conventionalized form of address used in wisdom literature.” (P. 522)

Compare **Psalm 49:2**^{Heb} / **1b**^{Eng}

- 2/1b Hear this, all the peoples!
Listen / pay attention all inhabitants of (the) world!
- 3/2 Also children of a human beings,
also children of (the) man,
(all) together, wealthy and needy!

We say, Perhaps...but in fact this imperative verb, הַאֲזִינּוּ, **ha)aziynu**, “give ear,” “pay attention,” only occurs this once in the **Book of Psalms**, never in the **Book of Proverbs**, and once in the **Book of Job (34:2)**. Rather, it occurs in the following passages, mainly in **Isaiah**:

Deuteronomy 32:1; Judges 5:3; 2 Chronicles 24:19; Nehemiah 9:30; Isaiah 1:10; 28:23 (here); **51:4; 64:3** and **Hosea 5:1**. We say the phrase is more at home in **Isaiah** than in the wisdom literature. We think Oswalt has overstated the case.

¹⁰³Alexander translates **verse 24**: “*Does the ploughman plough every day to sow? Does he open and level his ground?*”

He quotes Gill as commenting “He may plough a whole day together when he is at it, but he does not plough every day in the year; he has other work to do besides ploughing.”

Alexander sums up the verse: “As if he had said, Is the ploughman always ploughing? Is he always ploughing and harrowing?” (P. 458)

Motyer comments that “The emphasis falls on *continually* (‘all the day’). *The farmer ploughs for planting* / ‘in order to plant’; the harshness is wedded to purpose.” (P. 235)

(continued...)

יִפְתַּח וַיִּשְׂדֵד אֶדְמָתוֹ:

Will the one plowing plow all the day¹⁰⁴ to sow / plant?¹⁰⁵

He will open¹⁰⁶ and will harrow¹⁰⁷ (drag with spikes) his ground.

28:25¹⁰⁸ הֲלוֹא אִם-שָׂנָה פְּנִיָּהּ

¹⁰³(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verse 24** that “The prophet opens with a rhetorical question which aims to get the hearers on the speaker’s side. Of course, no plowman keeps on plowing every day. He does not keep on plowing and harrowing as if these were ends in themselves. Rather, because his aim is to sow, he will one day quit plowing...A farmer knows this elemental fact of his profession. Surely it is not asking too much of the royal counselors to know as much about their business.” (Pp. 522-23)

Watts states that “*All day* translates the Hebrew literally. In parallel to **verse 28** forever [our ‘endlessly’], it apparently means ‘all the time,’ ‘continually.’ Other tasks need to be interspersed with plowing in the process of agriculture.” (P. 376)

¹⁰⁴Oswalt notes that the phrase כָּל הַיּוֹם, **kol hayyom** is “literally ‘all the day,’ but the sense is clearly ‘day after day.’” (P. 520) Is that clear to you? It isn’t to us!

¹⁰⁵Slotki comments that “to sow” “equals ‘since his intention is to sow,’ the ploughing being only the necessary preparation.” (P. 132)

¹⁰⁶We take this “opening” of the ground to mean the farmer’s plowing of the field, what is called “tillage,” digging, overturning, stirring the soil in preparation for planting.

¹⁰⁷To “harrow” the ground means in modern agriculture to use an implement consisting of a heavy frame set with teeth or tines that is dragged over plowed land to break up clods, remove weeds, and cover seed. In the ancient Near East similar rudimentary implements were used by farmers.

¹⁰⁸Alexander translates / comments on **verse 25**: “Does he not, when he has leveled the surface of it, cast abroad dill, and scatter cummin, and set wheat in rows, and barley (in the place) marked out, and spelt in his border?...”

“That is to say, he attends to all these processes of husbandry successively, with due regard to time and place, and to the various crops to be produced.” (P. 458)

Motyer comments that the different verbs, *sow*, *scatter* and *plant*, indicate careful action. Each seed is dealt with discriminatingly. Both [phrases,] ‘in its place’ (שׂוֹרָה, **sorah**) and ‘in its plot’ (נִסְמָן, **nisman**), are otherwise unknown (and lacking in the Greek translation). ‘In its place’ is often translated ‘in rows,’ but in any case the

(continued...)

וְהִפִּיץ קֶצֶחַ
וּכְמֵן יִזְרַק
וְשֵׁם חֲטָה שׁוֹרֶה
וְשִׁעֲרָה נִסְמָן
וּכְסֹמֶת גְּבֻלָּתוֹ:

Will he not, when he leveled its surface--
and he will scatter black cummin seed,
and will sow cummin?¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸(...continued)

intention is to develop the idea of planned, purposeful action. Likewise ‘in its field’ is ‘as its border.’ There is a master-plan governing all.” (P. 235)

Oswalt states that “The farmer also knows how to plant each seed according to its own character. The very fine black cummin is scattered on the ground, whereas the larger seeds are sown in marked rows and plots. Finally, spelt is planted at the borders, perhaps partly as a view-block, to prevent penurious neighbors from temptation to steal, but perhaps also to mark off one person’s plot from another’s.” (P. 523)

Watts states that “The farmer’s work is diverse in what he does and what he plants. His seeds include spices (*dill* and *cummin*) as well as a variety of grains.” (P. 376)

¹⁰⁹Slotki comments on the seeds mentioned, that “black cummin, *Nigella sativa*...is cultivated in Egypt and Syria for its seeds, which are black and used as a condiment [a substance such as salt or ketchup, used to add flavor to food]. They are hot to the taste and are sprinkled thickly over flat cakes of the country before they are baked...

“*Cummin sativum*...seeds are often used as a spice in the East, both bruised to mix with bread, and also boiled in the various messes and stews which compose an Oriental banquet. It is also used medicinally as a stimulant.” (Pp. 132-33)

In these statements concerning the different types of cummin, Slotki is quoting H. B. Tristram, a natural scientist, author of **The Natural History of the Bible**. Tristram lived from 1822-1906—he was an English clergyman, Bible scholar, and ornithologist—who was an early supporter of Darwinism, attempting to reconcile evolution and creation, but who later rejected Darwinism.

And he will put a row of wheat,¹¹⁰
and barley (in) its appointed place,¹¹¹
and spelt-wheat (at) its border?

28:26¹¹² וַיִּסְרוּ

לְמִשְׁפַּט אֱלֹהֵי יוֹרְנֹו:

And He will discipline / train him;
by the ordinance / right order¹¹³ of his God He will teach him.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰Watts, along with others, translates שׁוֹרָה וְשַׁעֲרָה, **sorah use(orah**, by “in rows,” while others have “in place.” The first word, שׁוֹרָה, **sorah** occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, and as a result its meaning is difficult to determine. It sounds very much like the second word, שַׁעֲרָה, **se(orah**, “barley.”

¹¹¹The Hebrew word here, נִסְמָן, **nisman**, apparently a niphil participle from the root נִסְמַן, found nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**, making its definition very difficult to determine. Suggestions include “*in an appointed place*,” or “in a determined portion” (**Brown-Driver-Briggs**); **Holladay** simply states the word is “unexplained.”

¹¹²Alexander translates **verse 26**: “*So teaches him aright his God instructs him.*”

He comments that “This is the form of the Hebrew sentence, in which *his God* is the grammatical subject of both the verbs between which it stands.” (P. 459)

¹¹³The phrase לְמִשְׁפַּט, **lammishpot**, literally “to the justice / judgment,” according to Slotki “bears the meaning of right order or method.” (P. 133)

Oswalt translates the phrase by “according to right principle,” and states that this is “a classic example of the fact that מִשְׁפַּט, **mishpot** means more than legal judgment or justice. It is in fact the creation order, both physically and spiritually. There are principles in both realms upon which life depends and which, if followed, will lead to life.” (P. 523)

Watts likewise states that “This word is usually translated ‘justice.’ Its use in this setting demonstrates a facet of its meaning which is not immediately obvious when used in law.” (P. 376)

Compare **Wisdom of Ben Sirach 7:15**,

(continued...)

28:27¹¹⁵ כִּי לֹא בַחֲרוּץ יִדְרֹשׁ קִצֵּחַ
 וְאוֹפֵן עֲגֹלָה עַל-כַּמֶּן יוֹסֵב
 כִּי בַמַּטָּה יִחַבֵּט קִצֵּחַ
 וְכַמֶּן בַּשֶּׁבֶט:

¹¹³(...continued)

Do not hate toilsome work;
 even farm-work was created by the Highest.

¹¹⁴Motyer comments that in **verse 26**, “Here is an aspect of the **Bible** doctrine of creation. What appears as a discovery (the proper season and conditions for sowing, farm management, rotation of crops etc.) is actually the Creator opening His book of creation and revealing His truth—but revealing Himself also, for can the God Who teaches purpose be less than purposeful Himself? When He harrows His people, is it not in order to sow?” (Pp. 235-36)

We say, Yes—but the text does not make any of this explicit. It only makes explicit the fact that YHWH teaches the farmer proper agricultural methods.

¹¹⁵Slotki comments on **verses 27-28**: “The appropriate methods of threshing apply to the several kinds [of crops being threshed]; but how ruinous would be the method suitable for one kind [of crop] if applied to another [different kind of crop]! ‘Neither seed could bear the heavy cylinder of the corn-threshing instrument, or the feet of oxen; but while the cummin can be easily separated from its slight case by slender rod, the harder pod of the Nigella requires to be beaten with a stouter staff in order to dislodge the seed.’” (P. 133)

Oswalt states concerning these two verses that “From plowing and planting, Isaiah turns to the techniques of threshing. The same techniques cannot be used on small grains as are used on the larger ones.” (P. 523)

Alexander translates **verse 27**: “For not with the sledge must dill be beaten, and cummin with the rod.”

He comments that “Having drawn an illustration from the husbandman’s regard to times and seasons, he now derives another from his different modes of threshing out the different kinds of grain...Nothing more is necessary here to the correct understanding of the verse than a just view of the contrast intended between heavy and light threshing.” (P. 459)

Because black cummin is not threshed with a sharp threshing instrument,¹¹⁶
and a cart wheel (is not) rolled over cummin.

Because with the stick black cummin is beaten out,
and cummin with the staff.

28:28¹¹⁷ לַחֵם יִדְרֹק

כִּי לֹא לִנְצַח אֲדוֹשׁ יְדוֹשְׁנוּ

וְהַמִּם גִּלְגַּל עֲגֻלָּתוֹ

וּפְרָשָׁיו לֹא־יִדְקֵנוּ:

(Is) bread crushed?

Because not endlessly¹¹⁸ will he indeed tread it.

¹¹⁶Motyer comments on **verse 27** that “In harvesting, the threshing sledge [חֲרוּץ, **charuts**] was a heavy wooden platform, studded underneath with sharp stones and metal and weighted on top. It was dragged to and fro over the crop. The cartwheel [אֹפֶן עֲגֻלָּה, **ophan (aghalah)**] was probably a roller fitted with cutting discs. Such treatment would be disastrous for caraway and cummin, which need hand harvesting with *rod* and *stick*.” (P. 236)

¹¹⁷Alexander translates / comments on **verse 28**: “*Bread-corn must be crushed, for he will not be always threshing it; so he dries the wheel of his cart (upon it), but with his horsemen (or horses) he does not crush it...*”

“Dill and cummin must be threshed out with the flail; wheat and barley may be more severely dealt with; they will bear the wheel, but not the hoofs of horses...Bread-corn must be bruised, but not with horses’ hoofs.” (Pp. 459-60)

Motyer comments on **verse 28**: “But even the appropriate method must be kept within appropriate bounds, for used to excess it too would destroy. Hence grain must be ground ‘but one does not go on threshing and threshing it, nor keep driving the wheels of his threshing cart over it, nor keep grinding it with his horses.’” (P. 236)

Oswalt states, “Yes, the wheat is threshed, but only until it is separated from the chaff, for the threshing itself is only a means, not an end.” (P. 523)

¹¹⁸The phrase לִנְצַח, **lanetsach**, means “to the perpetuity,” or “to the lastingness,” probably connoting the idea of continuity, without ceasing to do something else. We translate by “endlessly.”

And he will move noisily a cart wheel,
and his horses will not crush it.¹¹⁹

28:29¹²⁰ גַּם־זֹאת מֵעַם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת יִצְאָה

¹¹⁹Translations of **verse 28** vary:

King James, “Bread *corn* is bruised; because he will not ever be threshing it, nor break *it with* the wheel of his cart, nor bruise it *with* his horsemen.”

Tanakh, “It is cereal that is crushed. For even if he threshes it thoroughly, And the wheel of his sledge and his horses overwhelm it, He does not crush it.”

New Revised Standard, “Grain is crushed for bread, but one does not thresh it forever; one drives the cart wheel and horses over it, but does not pulverize it.”

New International, “Grain must be ground to make bread; so one does not go on threshing it forever. The wheels of a threshing cart may be rolled over it, but one does not use horses to grind grain.”

New Jerusalem, “When you are threshing wheat, you do not waste time crushing it; you get the horse and cart-wheel moving, but you do not grind it fine.”

Rahlfs, μετὰ ἄρτου βρωθήσεται οὐ γὰρ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ἐγὼ ὑμῖν ὀργισθήσομαι οὐδὲ φωνὴ τῆς πικρίας μου καταπατήσῃ ὑμᾶς, “with bread it is eaten; for not into the ages will I be angry with you (plural); neither will My voice of irritation tread you down.”

Targum Jonathan, “Corn they tread out, yet they will not continue to tread it out for ever; but he will throw it into confusion with the wheel of his wain [archaic noun for ‘wagon’ or ‘cart’], and would separate the corn, and blow away the chaff.”

It seems apparent from these varying translations that the English translators were puzzled by the Hebrew text, and tried to make sense of it in different ways. But the Greek translator has given up on the Hebrew text, and turned it into a pious statement about God.

What do you think?

Slotki’s **American-Jewish Translation of the Scriptures** has “Is bread corn crushed? Nay, he will not ever be threshing it; And though the roller of his wagon and its sharp edges move noisily, He doth not crush it.” But Slotki states that this rendering “is questionable; an alternative to be preferred is: ‘and though he noisily drive the wheel of his wagon and his horses (over it).’ Tristram remarks that ‘the horses were not employed yoked to any implement, but simply driven wildly over the sheaves strewn upon the threshing-floor.’” (P. 133)

¹²⁰Alexander translates / comments on **verse 29**: “*Even this (or this also) from Jehovah of hosts comes forth; He is wonderful in counsel, great in wisdom...*”

“The literal translation of the last clause is, *He makes counsel wonderful, He makes wisdom great...*”

(continued...)

הַפְּלִיאַ עֵצָה

הַגְּדִיל תּוֹשִׁיָּה:

This also was sent forth from YHWH of Armies,¹²¹

He gave wondrous counsel,¹²²

¹²⁰(...continued)

“As to the meaning of the whole verse, some suppose that the preceding illustration is here applied to the Divine dispensations; others, that this is the conclusion of the illustration itself. On the latter hypothesis, the meaning of the verse is, that the husbandman’s treatment of the crop, no less than his preparation of the soil, is a dictate of experience under Divine teaching. In the other case, the sense is, that the same mode of proceeding, which had just been described as that of a wise husbandman, is also practiced by the Most High in the execution of His purposes.” (P. 460)

Motyer states that “Such purposeful, knowing action is a revelation from the Lord (**verse 29a**) and a revelation of the Lord (**verse 29b**)...*Wonderful* points to that which is beyond the human, belonging to another realm, supernatural [but it is something in the most common of occupations, that of farming—not beyond nature!]. Wisdom (תּוֹשִׁיָּה, **tushiyyah**) ‘denotes the foresight which plans ahead’ [quoting Dhorme], hence ‘effective wisdom,’ the wisdom which knows how to achieve results.” (P. 236)

¹²¹Slotki comments on the phrase “this also,” that “Even this, the husbandmen’s craft; much more so the fate and destinies of mankind.” (P. 133)

Oswalt comments on the phrase “*This too has gone forth*,” as perhaps meaning that “God has taught the farmer the principles of threshing as well as those of plowing and planting (**verses 24-26**). But the exalted tone of this verse suggests that more than this is intended. This is the conclusion of the argument begun in **verse 14**. If the Almighty God has given both physical and spiritual counsel, and if the farmer accepts the physical as a matter of course and finds life, what are Jerusalem’s leaders doing scoffing at His spiritual counsel? Only those who are drunk or blind could miss the implication, says the prophet.” (P. 524)

But no, the prophet does not say this—Oswalt, the commentator does.

¹²²The phrase here, הַפְּלִיאַ עֵצָה, **hiphliy**) (**etsah**, which we translate by “He gave wondrous counsel,” uses the verb, the root of which is פִּלֵּא. We are accustomed to the noun פִּלְאָה, **pele**), which is translated “wonder” or “marvel,” referring to the wondrous acts of YHWH in history, and we ordinarily think of such wondrous acts as the marvelous deliverance of Israel from Egypt, or the defeat of foreign forces, or (for Christians) the virgin birth of Jesus, or his resurrection from the dead. But here Isaiah

(continued...)

He enlarged abiding success!¹²³

¹²²(...continued)

points to the mundane, everyday, ordinary work of a farmer—who is taught that work in a wondrous, marvelous way by YHWH.

What do you think? Do you consider the gynecologist's or mid-wife's ability to safely guide the birth of a baby a God-given wonder / marvel? Have they been taught by God? Is a mother's learning to breast-feed her baby a wondrous, marvelous teaching of YHWH? What about that baby's learning to talk? What about a youth's learning to balance and ride a bicycle? What about the teen-ager's learning a skill that will provide him or her with a life-long occupation? Is YHWH at work in teaching all of these their skills and abilities?

And we ask, Where will you find God? Will you find God in ancient history, in stories of His mighty acts thousands of years ago? We say, Yes, you will hear stories of God's mighty, wondrous acts in those ancient times. But, we insist, look for God in your own life, in the "here and now"—in your own education, in the skills and abilities that have brought you successful accomplishments. Have you not been taught by God? Or was all of this your own doing, apart from Divine gifts and instruction?

Did you teach yourself how to breathe? Did you instruct your lungs, and your heart, and your spine to do their work properly? Has there not in fact been Divine instruction going on throughout your life, perhaps through parents and teachers and experts in your field, even though unrecognized by you? Have you consciously chosen to be blind to those realities? Has the culture you have grown up in taught you that we are "self-made men and women," that we "pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps," with no help from others, with no help from God? Do you dare to question and deny that "big lie"?

¹²³Slotki states that the text is literally "He produced wonderful counsel, He magnified wisdom." He adds that "the last word תושייה, **tushiyyah**, is common in **Proverbs** and **Job**, and connotes 'practical method' to accomplish what is planned." (P. 133)

This passage from **Isaiah 28:24-28** sounds very much like an excerpt from an agricultural class in crop production, depicting the preparation of the soil, the planting of different seeds in their respective plots, and the varying methods of harvesting and caring for the produce. In all of this, Isaiah insists, YHWH of Armies is present, teaching the farmer, ensuring abiding success.

What do you think? Do you have a view of Divine revelation / teaching that is limited to spokespersons / prophets such as Moses, David, Isaiah, Jesus, the inspired Apostles / followers of Jesus?

(continued...)

¹²³(...continued)

Isaiah teaches a much broader view of YHWH's teaching. And what Isaiah says here concerning the farmer, can be expanded to say God is teaching in every human occupation and industry, leading humans to discover productive ways of operation.

Do you agree with such a view of God? Is He actively involved wherever human work and research goes on, teaching His people? Do you think God has taught you as you have pursued your career? What about the musician, who in rare moments of inspiration, produces music that reverberates through generations?

1. **The phrase בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא, bayom hahu), “in that day,” in the Book of Isaiah**

The phrase occurs some 45 times in the **Book of Isaiah**, at **2:11** (the day of YHWH), **17** (same), **20** (same); **3:7** (a day of judgment on Judah and Jerusalem), **18** (same); **4:1** (same), **2** (perhaps Messianic, “the branch”); **5:30** (a day when the wicked are punished); **7:18** (a day when YHWH “whistles” for Assyria to come against Israel), **20** (a day when Assyria “shaves” Israel), **21** (same), **23** (same); **10:20** (a day when Israel leans on YHWH in truth), **27** (a day when Assyria’s burden departs from Israel); **11:10** (a day when the “root of Jesse” stands as a signal, Messianic), **11** (a day when Israel’s remnant is restored); **12:1** (a day when Israel praises YHWH for His salvation), **4** (a day when Israel gives thanks to YHWH); **17:4** (a day when Jacob / Israel is brought low), **7** (a day when a man looks to his Maker), **9** (a day when strong cities will be deserted); **19:16** (a day when Egypt will like women trembling in fear), **18** (a day when five cities in Egypt speak the language of Canaan), **19** (a day when there is an altar for YHWH in Egypt), **21** (a day when YHWH makes Himself known to the Egyptians), **23** (a day when a highway reaches from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyrians and Egyptians will worship together), **24** (a day when Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria); **20:6** (a day when inhabitants of the coastland bewail their danger from Assyria), **22:8** (a day when Israel looked to the weapons of the “house of the forest”), **12** (a day when YHWH called for weeping and mourning), **20** (a day when Eliakim takes Shebna’s position), **25** (a day when Eliakim, the “sure peg,” is cut down); **23:15** (a day when Tyre will be forgotten for seventy years); **24:21** (a day of YHWH’s punishment); **25:9** (a day when all peoples and nations praise YHWH for His swallowing up death); **26:1** (a day for singing about “our strong city”); **27:1** (a day when YHWH punishes Leviathan), **2** (a day for singing of YHWH’s pleasant vineyard), **12** (a day when YHWH threshes and gleans the people of Israel), **13** (a day of a great trumpet being blown, and persecuted Israelites will worship on the holy mountain in Jerusalem); **28:5** (here; a day when YHWH is a crown of glory for the remnant of His people); **29:18** (a day when the deaf hear and the blind see); **30:23** (a day when livestock graze in rich pastures); **31:7** (a day when idols are cast away) and **52:6** (a day when Israel knows that it is YHWH speaking).

Note how often the phrase occurs in the first half of the **Book of Isaiah**, and then only once in **chapters 40-66**. It is obvious that the phrase does not have reference to one certain time, but is a common phrase used to point to many different “days” or “times.” It is certainly a phrase used for the “good times coming,” including Messianic times; but it is also used for dreaded days of judgment that are coming. We think it is a mistake to describe the phrase as a “Messianic or eschatological tag-line.” Sometimes it is used of days or times in the past.

2. Occurrences of the Hebrew Noun **הַמְנוּחָה**, **hammenuchah**, “the place of rest”
in the **Hebrew Bible**:

Genesis 49:15, where it is said of the Tribe of Issachar,

וַיֵּרָא מְנוּחָה כִּי טוֹב
וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי נְעִמָּה
וַיִּט שִׁכְמוֹ לְסִבְלָה
וַיְהִי לְמִסְעָבָד:

And he saw a resting-place, that (it was) good,
and the land, that (it was) pleasant;
and he bent his shoulder to bear a heavy load,
and he became a slave-labor force.

(In Jacob’s predictions of his sons’ futures, he depicts Issachar as a “raw-boned donkey” who saw a resting-place that it is good, and a land that it is pleasant, that is, the area in the promised land where his tribe would settle—even though it would eventually become a place of his enslavement.)

Numbers 10:33,

וַיִּסְעוּ מִהַר יְהוָה
דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
וְאֲרוֹן בְּרִית־יְהוָה נִסַּע לִפְנֵיהֶם
דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלֹשֶׁת יָמִים
לְתוֹר לָהֶם מְנוּחָה:

And they pulled out from YHWH’s mountain,
a journey of three days.

And YHWH’s covenant chest was pulling out before them,
a journey of three days,
to seek out for them a place of rest.

(Here the “resting-place” is the place where Israel was to stop its journey and encamp until moving on further towards the promised land. Compare **Numbers 10:36**.)

Deuteronomy 12:9,

כִּי לֹא־בִאתֶם עַד־עַתָּה אֶל־הַמְנוּחָה
וְאֶל־הַנַּחֲלָה אֲשֶׁר־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ נֹתֵן לְךָ:

Because you did not come until now to the resting-place,

and to the inheritance which YHWH your God is giving to you (singular).

(In the Arabah, east of the Jordan, Moses explains to Israel that they have not

yet reached the resting-place and the inheritance that YHWH was giving them; that is, the land of the Canaanites to the west of the Jordan, which was intended to be Israel's final "stopping-place," or "resting-place.")

Judges 20:43,

כִּתְרוּ אֶת־בְּנִימִן
הֲרִיכֵהוּ מִנוּחָה
הֲרִיכֵהוּ עַד נֹכַח
הַגְּבֵעָה מִמִּזְרַח־שֶׁמֶשׁ:

They surrounded Benjamin;
they pursued him (to) a place of rest.

They trampled him as far as Nokhach,
the hill on the east of Shemesh.

(This difficult text apparently means "a place of rest," or stopping-place as the Benjaminites fled from their attackers.)

2 Samuel 14:17, where a woman from Tekoa is attempting to persuade David to allow Absalom to return home

וַתֹּאמֶר שִׁפְחַתְךָ
יִהְיֶה־נָא דְבַר־אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ לְמִנוּחָה
כִּי כַּמַּלְאָךְ הָאֱלֹהִים
כֵּן אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ
לְשִׁמֵּעַ הַטּוֹב וְהָרַע
וַיְהִי אֱלֹהֶיךָ יְהִי עִמָּךְ:

And your female servant said,

Now my lord the King's word will be for a resting-place—

Because, like a messenger / an angel of the God,

so (is) my lord the King,

to listen to the good and the evil.

And YHWH your God will be with you!

(Here the "resting-place" evidently means the conclusion of her search for justice for her from those seeking her life.)

1 Kings 8:56, where Solomon includes in his prayer at the dedication of YHWH's temple in Jerusalem:

בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַן מִנוּחָה לְעַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל
כָּל אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר

לֹא־נִפְּלָ דְבַר אֶחָד מִכָּל דְּבָרָיו הַטּוֹב
אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר בְּיַד מֹשֶׁה עַבְדּוֹ:

Blessed (is) YHWH, Who gave a resting-place to His people Israel,
according to all which He spoke!

Not one word fell / failed of all His good word,
which He spoke by (the) hand of Moses His servant!

(Here the “resting-place” is obviously Israel’s occupation of the promised land,
now with its central place of worship dedicated. King Solomon blesses YHWH,
“Who gave a place of rest to His people Israel”; this is different from the temple’s
being YHWH’s place of rest;)

Isaiah 11:10,

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא
שָׁרֵשׁ יֵשׁוּי אֲשֶׁר עִמָּד לְנֶס עַמּוֹת
אֵלָיו גּוֹיִם יִדְרֹשׁוּ
וְהָיְתָה מִנְחַתוֹ כְּבוֹד:

And it will happen on that day–

Jesse’s root, who will stand as a sign for the peoples,
nations will come, seeking him,
and his resting--place will be glorious!

(Here, “his resting-place” evidently means the country over which the “Root of
Jesse” reigns as king. It will be a “glorious” place to live, so much so that the
nations will come seeking for it. His resting-place will be glorious; we naturally
ask, where will that be? Jesus, the Messiah, says, “Come to Me, all who are
weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest”, **Matthew 11:28**. Jesus Himself
is the resting-place, according to the **Gospel of Matthew**.)

Isaiah 28:12,

אֲשֶׁר אָמַר אֲלֵיהֶם
זֹאת הַמְּנוּחָה
הַנִּיחִי לְעֵינַי
וְזֹאת הַמְּרֻגְעָה
וְלֹא אָבוּא שְׂמוֹעַ:

Who said to them,

This (is) the place of rest--
give rest to the weary!

And, This (is) the place of repose;
and they were not willing to listen.

(Here, “the place of rest” is obviously referring to Northern Israel, or Ephraim, as

part of the promised land where Israel found a “resting-place.” And since Israel had been given “rest” there, the Divine command was that the nation should likewise “give rest to the weary.” Note that the synonym of **הַמְנוּחָה**, “the place of rest,” is **הַמְרִגְעָה**, “the place of repose.”)

Isaiah 32:18,

וַיֵּשֶׁב עַמִּי בְנוֹה שְׁלוֹם
וּבְמִשְׁפָּנוֹת מְבֹטָחִים

וּבְמְנוּחָת שְׁאֲנָנוֹת:

And My people will dwell in a dwelling of peace,
and in dwelling-places of confidences
and in places of rest, secure ones.

(Here the noun is in the plural, and it has synonyms: “a dwelling of peace,” and “dwelling-laces of confidences”—and the “places of rest” are described as “secure ones.”)

Isaiah 66:1,

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה
הַשָּׁמַיִם כִּסְאִי

וְהָאָרֶץ רֵגְלִי
אֵי־זֶה

בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנוּ לִי
וְאֵי־זֶה

מְקוֹם מְנוּחָתִי:

In this way YHWH spoke:

The heavens—My throne!

And the earth—footstool for My feet!

Where (is) this--,

a house which you people will build for Me?

And where is this—

a place for My rest?

(Here YHWH is depicted as “Can a building on earth truly be YHWH’s resting-place?”, implying that any building on earth is too small, and cannot be such, because the heavens are His throne, and the earth is the footstool of His feet!)

Jeremiah 45:3, Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, complains that he has found no resting-place, evidently meaning a home and security;

אִמַּרְתָּ אֹי־נָא לִי
כִּי־יִסַּף יְהוָה יָגוֹן עַל־מְכַאֲבֵי
יִגְעֵתִי בְּאַנְחָתִי
וּמְנוּחָה לֹא מָצָאתִי:

You (Baruch) said, Woe now to me!
Because YHWH added grief upon my sorrow!
I grew weary with my groaning,
and a resting-place I did not find!

Jeremiah 51:59, the “whispering wizard” editor of the **Book of Jeremiah** informs the reader that Seraiah was שֵׂר מְנוּחָה, “chief of resting place(s),” probably meaning officer in charge of arranging camps for Israel's captives:

הִדְבֵּר אֲשֶׁר־צִוְּהָה יְרֵמְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא
אֶת־שֵׂרִיָּה בֶן־נְרִיָּה בֶן־מַחְסֵיָּה
בְּלִכְתּוֹ אֶת־צַדִּיקְיָהוּ מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה בְּכֹל
בְּשַׁנַּת הָרְבַּעִית לְמַלְכוֹ
וּשְׂרִיָּה שֵׂר מְנוּחָה:

The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded
to Seraiah, son of Neriyah, son of Machseyah,
when he went with Tsidqiyahu, King of Judah (to) Babylon,
in the fourth year of his reign
(and Seraiah [was] the one in charge of resting-place(s)).

Micah 2:9-10,

9 נָשִׁי עַמִּי תִגְרָשׁוּן מִבֵּית תַּעֲנֻגִיהָ
מֵעַל עַל־לִיָּהּ תִקְחוּ הַדְרֵי לְעוֹלָם:

Women / wives of my people you (plural) are driving out from the house of her /
their delight,
from her / their children you are taking away my glory for long-lasting-time!

10 קוּמוּ וּלְכוּ
כִּי לֹא־זֹאת הַמְנוּחָה
בְּעֵבֹר טְמֵאָה תִחַבֵּל
וְחַבֵּל נִמְרָץ:

Arise and go!
Because this is not the place of rest—
because of uncleanness, it ruins;
and / with a destruction made grievous!

Zechariah 9:1,

מִשָּׂא דְבַר־יְהוָה
בְּאַרְץ חֲדַרְקַן
וְדַמְשֶׁק מִנְחָתוֹ
כִּי לַיהוָה עֵין אָדָם
וְכָל שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

Burden of YHWH's word:

in / against (the) land of Chadrak;
and Damascus (is) its / His resting-place.

Because humanity's eye belongs to the YHWH,
and all Israel's tribes!

(Strangely, this passage apparently states that YHWH's Word is in or against
Syria, and that Damascus is His or its resting-place; English translations vary:

King James, "The burden of the word of the LORD in the land of Hadrach, and
Damascus *shall be* the rest thereof: when the eyes of man, as of all the
tribes of Israel, *shall be* toward the LORD."

Tanakh, "A pronouncement: The word of the LORD. He will reside in the land of
Hadrach and Damascus; For all men's eyes will turn to the LORD -- Like
all the tribes of Israel --";

New Revised Standard, "An Oracle. The word of the LORD is against the land
of Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus. For to the LORD belongs the
capital of Aram, as do all the tribes of Israel";

New International, "An Oracle The word of the LORD is against the land of
Hadrach and will rest upon Damascus-- for the eyes of men and all the
tribes of Israel are on the LORD--

New Jerusalem, "A proclamation. The word of Yahweh is against Hadrach, it
has come to rest on Damascus, for the source of Aram belongs to
Yahweh no less than all the tribes of Israel;"

Psalm 23:2,

בְּנֵאֲוֹת דְּשֵׂא יִרְבִּיעֵנִי
עַל־מֵי מְנַחֹת יִנְהַלֵּנִי:

In green pastures He causes me to lie down;

beside waters of resting-places He leads / shepherds me.

(The psalmist's personal relationship with YHWH means he has found guidance
and provision for his deepest needs; the psalmist is using the metaphor of

shepherding to describe religious realities; he has found his “resting-place” in YHWH; compare **Matthew 11:28-30**.)

Psalm 95:11,

אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי בְּאִפִּי
אִם־יָבֹאוּן אֶל־מְנוּחָתִי:

Therefore I swore in My wrath,

They shall not enter into My resting-place!

(Israel is called to worship God their Shepherd; but a prophetic voice speaks in the midst of their worship, warning that they must listen to His voice, and not have hardened hearts like Israel in the wilderness at Meribah and Massa; for forty years YHWH was disgusted with their fathers, and swore in His anger, “they will not enter into My resting-place”—meaning that the wilderness generation would not be able to enter into YHWH’s promised resting-place, the land of Israel; this is the key text from the **Hebrew Bible** in **Hebrews 3:1-4:13**, where the author makes מְנוּחָה / κατάπαυσις a synonym of “Sabbath-rest,” a very questionable synonym.)

Psalm 132:8, speaking of the bringing of the ark of the covenant from the fields of Jair to the moveable sanctuary in Jerusalem, to its resting-place, where Israel will worship at YHWH’s footstool:

קוּמָה יְהוָה לְמְנוּחָתֶךָ
אֲתָה וְאָרוֹן עֲזָרְךָ:

Rise up, O YHWH, to Your resting-place—

You and (the) chest / ark of Your strength!

Psalm 132:13-14,

13 כִּי־בָחַר יְהוָה בְּצִיּוֹן
אֲתָה לְמוֹשָׁב לּוֹ:

Because YHWH chose Zion;

He desired it for a dwelling-place for Himself.

14 זֹאת־מְנוּחָתִי עַד־יָעַר
פַּה־אֲשֵׁב כִּי אֲוִתֶיהָ:

This is My resting-place until until [so, the Hebrew text literally];

Here I will dwell, because I desired it.

(Is this the kind of belief that **Isaiah 66:1** is questioning? We think it is.)

Ruth 1:9, where Naomi tells her daughters-in-law that they should return to their mothers’ homes, and asks YHWH’s blessing on them that they may find a

resting-place in the home of another husband:

יִתֵּן יְהוָה לְכֶם
וּמְצֹאֵן מְנוּחָה

אִשָּׁה בֵּית אִשָּׁה
וּתְשִׁק לָהֶן

וּתְשָׂאנָה קוֹלָן וּתְבַכִּינָה:

YHWH will give / May YHWH give to you (both),
and you will / may you find a resting-place,
each one (in the) house of her husband!

And she kissed them;
and they lifted up their voice and they cried.

1 Chronicles 22:9, where YHWH tells David that his son Solomon

הִנֵּה-בֵן נוֹלָד לָךְ

הוּא יִהְיֶה אִישׁ מְנוּחָה

וְהִנַּחֹתִי לוֹ מִכָּל-אֹיְבָיו מִסָּבִיב

כִּי שְׁלֹמֹה יִהְיֶה שְׁמוֹ

וְשָׁלוֹם וְשִׁקֵּט אֶתֶן עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמָיו:

Look—a son is being born to you.

He will be a man of a resting-place.

And I will give rest to him from all his enemies from around.

Because Solomon will be his name;

and peace and quietness I will give upon / over Israel in his days!

(What does this mean, “a man of a resting-place”? We take it to mean he will be the kind of king in Israel that will make of it a “resting-place,” a secure home-place for Israel.)

1 Chronicles 28:2, where David tells how he had it in his heart to build a house (or ‘temple’) as a place of rest for the chest / ark of the covenant:

וַיִּקָּם דָּוִד הַמֶּלֶךְ עַל-רַגְלָיו

וַיֹּאמֶר שָׁמְעוּנִי אַחִי וְעַמִּי

אֲנִי עִם-לִבִּי לְבָנוֹת בֵּית מְנוּחָה

לְאָרוֹן בְּרִית-יְהוָה

וּלְהָרִם רַגְלֵי אֱלֹהֵינוּ

וְהִכִּינוּתִי לְבָנוֹת:

And David the King arose upon his feet,

and he said, Listen to me, my brothers and my people!
I, with my heart (determined) to build a house / temple of a resting-place
for the chest / ark of YHWH's covenant,
and for a footstool of our God's feet.
And I prepared to build.

