

Isaiah Chapter 29, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes
Isaiah's Prophetic Message–
In a Vision Characterized by Puzzling Enigmas,
Depicts Jerusalem's Future--Through Present Suffering to Future Glory¹

¹**Chapter 29** has four end-notes: (1) “The Oldest Name for Jerusalem, Uru-Salima”; (2) “Harry Hoffner on the Word **זִיחַ**, **Jobh**, and Necromancy”; (3) “The Sealing of Documents in the Ancient Near East”; and (4) “Abraham, Nimrod, and the Fiery Furnace.”

Slotki entitles **chapter 29** “The Fate of Zion.”

Alexander comments on **chapter 29** that it “consists of two parts, parallel to one another, i.e. each containing the same series of promises and threatenings, but in different forms. The prophetic substance or material of both is that Zion should be threatened and assailed, yet not destroyed, but on the contrary strengthened and enlarged. These ideas are expressed in the second part much more fully and explicitly than in the first, which must therefore be interpreted according to what follows...

“In the first part, the threatening is that Zion shall be assailed by enemies and brought very low (**verses 1-4**). The promise is that the assailants shall be scattered like dust and chaff, vanish like a dream, and be wholly disappointed in their hostile purpose (**verses 5-8**)...

“In the second part, the prophet brings distinctly into view, as causes of the threatened judgments, the spiritual intoxication and stupor of the people, their blindness to revealed truth, their hypocritical formality, and their presumptuous contempt of God (**verses 9-16**). The judgment itself is described as a confounding of their fancied wisdom (**verse 14**). The added promise is that of an entire revolution, including the destruction of the wicked, and especially of wicked rulers, the restoration of spiritual sight, joy to the meek and poor in spirit, and the final recovery of Israel from a state of alienation and disgrace, to the service of Jehovah and to the saving knowledge of the truth (**verses 17-24**)...

“The attempts to explain the first part of the chapter as relating to the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, or Titus, have been unsuccessful, partly because the description is not strictly appropriate to either of these events, and partly because the connection with what follows is, on either of these suppositions, wholly obscure...

“Those who deny the inspiration of the writer regard the last part as a visionary anticipation which was never fully verified. Those who admit it are obliged to assume an abrupt transition from the siege of Jerusalem to the calling of the Gentiles...

(continued...)

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“The only key to the consistent exposition of the chapter as a whole is furnished by the hypothesis already stated...that the two parts are parallel, not merely successive, and that the second must explain the first. That the second part describes not physical but spiritual evils, is admitted on all hands, and indeed asserted by the prophet himself. This description is directly and repeatedly applied in the **New Testament** to the Jews contemporary with our Savior...

“It does not follow from this, that it is a specific and exclusive prophecy respecting them; but it does follow that it must be so interpreted as to include them, which can only be effected by regarding this last part of the chapter as descriptive of the Jews, not at one time merely, but throughout the period of the old dispensation—an assumption fully confirmed by history. The judgment threatened will then be the loss of their peculiar privileges, and an exchange of state with others who had been less favored, involving an extension of the church beyond its ancient bounds, the destruction of the old abuses, and the final restoration of the Jews themselves...

“If this be the meaning of the second part, it seems to determine that of the first as a figurative expression of the truth, that the church should suffer but not perish, the imagery used for this purpose being borrowed from the actual sieges of Jerusalem...

“Thus understood, the chapter is prophetic of two great events, the seeming destruction of the ancient church, and its reproduction in a new and far more glorious form, so as not only to include the Gentiles in its bounds, but also the converted remnant of God’s ancient people.” (Pp. 460-61)

Motyer entitles **verses 1-14** “A problem solved, a problem stated.”

He comments that in **chapter 28** “Samaria is guaranteed a future hope beyond the calamity, but of the future of Jerusalem...nothing is said...The detailed answer is reserved for the present passage. It consists of two oracles...

(1) The Lord acting in judgment, Reducing the city to dust (**verses 1-4**), Inducing coma in those who have chosen blindness (**verses 9-12**);

(2) The Lord acting in transformation, Dispersing the foe in an eleventh-hour rescue (**verses 5-8**), Performing a supernatural act of changing hearts and imparting new wisdom (**verses 13-14**). (P. 236)

Motyer entitles **verses 1-8** “Chastisement and deliverance.”

He comments that “We cannot read these verses without seeing Sennacherib, the assault of 701 B.C.E., and the dramatic, last-minute, Divine deliverance (**chapters 36-37**)...[The Lord’s] people are never left to destruction; though they be humbled by the foe, it is the foe who is ultimately humbled.” (P. 237)

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Oswalt entitles **29:1-14** “The city of God.”

He comments that “This third part of the denunciation of Jerusalem provides the formal parallel to **28:1-6**, where Ephraim is denounced...The word of judgment is very shortly followed by the word of redemption...”

“It appears that the leadership was urging an alliance with Egypt precisely because they doubted God’s capacity to save them...Isaiah’s response would then be twofold: God is in fact so powerful that to refuse to trust Him is to experience destruction from Him...after which destruction He is still able to save.” (Pp. 525-26)

Watts entitles **29:1-8** “Woe, Ariel.”

He comments that “The episode deals with the critical siege of Jerusalem by interpreting it in the context of the Zion festival in which Yahweh tests the city by ordeal in order to humble her...The great drama demonstrates the helplessness of the city in itself...”

“Once Yahweh has decided Zion’s fate the oppressing nations will no longer be a factor. They will appear like a dream, a memory of the festal drama’s terrible moment of humiliation...”

“The usual form has the nations gathered around the city with Yahweh defending it. But here the situation is reversed. Yahweh lays siege to the city and is identified with the besieging peoples.” (P. 381)

Kaiser entitles **29:1-8** “The Affliction and Redemption of Zion.”

He comments that “The poem which we find [here] can be divided without doing violence to its content into three stanzas of ten lines, **verses 1-3, 4-6** and **7-8**, each forming a unity...”

“The ‘woe’ which begins in **verse 1** leads us to expect a prophecy of warning. But by **verse 7**, if not before, we have the description of salvation...”

“Since ultimately the poem must be interpreted as a whole, and therefore on the basis of its conclusion, it should be defined as a description of salvation. The distinctive movement within it, from threat to deliverance, derives from the complex of ideas associated with the battle of the nations for Jerusalem, in which as the nations attack the city of God they are to be defeated by Yahweh Himself.” (P. 264)

²Slotki comments on **verses 1-4** that “Jerusalem, now gay and festive, will be surrounded by many enemies and humbled to the dust.” (P. 134)

(continued...)

אֲרִיאֵל קִרְיַת חֲנָה דָּוִד

סִפּוּ שָׁנָה עַל-שָׁנָה

חֲגִים יִנְקָפוּ:

Alas / Woe,³ Ariel!⁴,¹

²(...continued)

Kaiser entitles **verses 1-3** “The future affliction of Jerusalem.” He states that “In mysterious terms, referring to an equally mysterious event, a poet thinking in apocalyptic terms, begins his woe upon Ariel. He makes it clear himself that this means the city of Jerusalem, by describing Ariel as the city where David encamped...

“While the community is unsuspectingly celebrating its New Year festival, the poet knows the secret of the ages, but clearly not well enough to give exact details...

“What he is saying is that in a few years at the most the prophecy which Yahweh has given him to utter will come about, and the altar hearth, or sacrificial hearth, of Jerusalem will be surrounded by a hostile army on Yahweh’s command. When the poet foretells mourning and lamentation (compare **Lamentations 2:5**) he certainly has in mind the present attitude of the people of Jerusalem, who are not to pass unscathed through the great affliction.” (P. 267)

Slotki also comments on **verse 1** that “The prophet apostrophizes [addresses an exclamatory passage to] Jerusalem.” (P. 134)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: *Woe to Ariel (or Alas for Ariel), Ariel, the city David encamped! Add year to year; let the feasts revolve...*

“All interpreters agree that Ariel is here a name for Zion or Jerusalem, although they greatly differ in the explanation of the name itself.” (P. 461)

Motyer states that “*Ariel* is first David’s city (**verse 1a**), secondly the city under Divine duress (**verse 2a**), then a title that somehow typifies that distress (**verse 2b**), and finally the Zion which the Lord delivers (**verses 7-8**).” (P. 237)

³Watts states that the opening word of **verse 1**, הוֹי, **hoy**, translated by the Greek as οὐαί, **ouai**, “woe,” “alas,” “picks up the feeling of death in Jerusalem that was introduced by the mood of **chapter 28**, especially by ‘the covenant with death’ (**28:15**).” (P. 381)

⁴Slotki comments that אֲרִיאֵל, **(ariy)el**, “is a compound of ‘hearth of’ (**ari**) and ‘God’ (**El** [Supreme God]). It is used in the sense of ‘altar hearth’ (compare **Ezekiel**

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43:15-16); and the word is applied to Jerusalem as the location of the temple.” (P. 134)
But the name is puzzling.

Brown-Driver-Briggs holds that the name means “Lioness of God.”

Alexander states that “Besides the explanation which resolves the form into **הַר-אֵל**, **har-el** (‘mountain of [Supreme] God’), there are two between which interpreters are chiefly divided. One of these makes it mean *lion of God*, i.e. a lion-like champion or hero...here applied to Jerusalem as a city of heroes which should never be subdued...The other hypothesis explains it, from an Arabic analogy, to mean the *hearth* or *fire-place of God*, in which sense it seems to be applied to the altar by **Ezekiel 43:15-16**,

- 15 And the Mount of (Supreme) God [**hahar)el**], four cubits;
and from the Ariyel and upwards, the horns, four.
16 And the Ariyel twelve (cubits) long,
by twelve (cubits) wide,
squared / square—to its four sides.

“and the extension of the name to the whole city is the more natural because Isaiah himself says of Jehovah that His fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem (**Isaiah 31:9**,

And his [Assyria’s] rocky-cliff will pass away from fear;
and his princes will be dismayed by / from a standard / signal—
a saying of YHWH,
Who has a fire in Zion,
and has a furnace in Jerusalem!)

...The Rabbins combine the two explanations of the Hebrew word by supposing that the altar was itself called the lion of God, because it devoured the victims like a lion, or because the altar (or the temple) was in shape like a lion, that is, narrow behind and broad in front!” (Pp. 461-62)

Motyer states that “It was the privilege (**Psalm 84:4-5**^{Heb} / **3-4**^{Eng},

- 4/3 Even a bird found a house / nest,
and a swallow—has a nest (synonym),
where she put her young ones,
with / alongside Your altars, YHWH of Armies,
my King and my God!
5/4 How blessed, those who dwell (in) Your house / temple!
Still / continually they will praise You! Selah)

(continued...)

⁴(...continued)
and the peril (**Isaiah 33:14**,

Missers-of-the-mark in Zion were in dread;
trembling took strong hold of profane people.
(Saying) Who will be a temporary resident for us (in) devouring fire?
Who will temporarily reside for us (in) a long-lasting burning masses?)

of Zion to live in the presence of this fire, alike a danger to sinners (**Isaiah 6:4**) and the means of their salvation (**Isaiah 6:6-7**)." (P. 237)

Oswalt comments on the phrase "*Woe to Ariel*" that it "expresses Isaiah's warning to Jerusalem for tending to rely upon its cult to save it, while refusing to rely upon God. That Jerusalem is intended is made plain by the references to David and to the festivals." (P. 526)

He goes on to state that "The precise meaning of *Ariel* is still in dispute. There are essentially three alternatives:

- (1) a variant upon *urusalima* [see our end-note 1], 'city of Salem' (Jerusalem), to *uruel*, 'city of El'...But the shift from *uru-* to *ari-* is not easily explained...
- (2) 'Lion of God' as supported by references to Judah as a lion (**Genesis 49:9**), and the lion throne...
- (3) 'altar,' 'hearth' (**Ezekiel 43:15**, and probably the Mesha inscription, line 12)...

"This [third] interpretation...has gained considerable popularity in recent years... Jerusalem prides itself as being God's altar-hearth, the very heart of the only cult that pleases Him. But, in fact, God is not pleased at all." (P. 526)

Watts comments that "If the reference is to an ancient epithet related to the city, as is probable, it refers to El ['Supreme God'] as the founding Patron Deity of the city. The meaning is that although Jerusalem is a city founded by God in Jebusite, pre-Israelite times, and although David himself claims the city, Yahweh must fight against it." (Pp. 381-82)

Kaiser asks, "And why does the poet choose the name *Ariel*? Was the meaning 'sacrificial hearth,' which is assumed in **verse 2b** at least, intended from the first to recall that here the nations were to be sacrificed to Yahweh, as the later, much more apocalyptic poem **Isaiah 30:27-29** makes explicit?" (P. 266)

- 27 Look—YHWH's name, coming from afar,
His anger (is) burning, and heaviness (of) an uplifted (cloud);

(continued...)

⁴(...continued)

- His lips were filled (with) fury,
and His tongue like a devouring fire!
- 28 And His Spirit like an overflowing wadi up to (the) neck;
He will divide to sift nations in a sieve of emptiness—
and a halter that leads astray upon (the) jaws of peoples.
- 29 The song will be for you people
like a night for setting-apart a pilgrimage-festival,
and rejoicing of heart,
like the walking with the flute,
to enter into YHWH's mount,
to Israel's Rock.
- 30 And YHWH will cause to be heard His voice's splendor / majesty,
and He will cause to be seen His arm's descent,
with storming anger, and a flame of devouring fire--
a driving storm and rain-storm and hail-stone(s).
- 31 Because from YHWH's voice, Assyria will be dismayed--
with the rod, He will strike!
- 32 And every appointed passing of a staff,
Which YHWH will cause to rest upon him,
with tambourines and with stringed instrument
and with battles (of a) swinging (arm),
He fought against them.
- 33 Because a Topheth / burning-place is prepared from earlier time;
also it has been made ready for the king,
made deep, made wide;
its pile of fire-wood and numerous trees—
YHWH's breath like a wadi of brimstone / sulphur burning in it!

⁵Slotki comments that this means “Jerusalem, or Zion which formed a part of it. The place which recalled the mighty exploits of David...is to be the scene of national humiliation.” (P. 134)

Alexander states that “Here again there seems to be a twofold allusion to David's siege and conquest of Zion (**2 Samuel 5:7**), and to his afterwards encamping, i.e. dwelling there (**2 Samuel 5:9**).” (P. 462) Neither of these passages uses the verb used here, **חָנַח**, **chanah**, “encamp.”

Oswalt comments that “The *city where David camped* expresses another part of Jerusalem's pride: her association with David, the ideal man of God.” (P. 527)

But David's exploits, both early and later in his career show him to have been little more than a lying, murdering bandit (see **1 Samuel 27:8-12**) and later, while king of Israel, he was an adulterer who murdered his lover's husband, and lied to cover his

(continued...)

Add year upon year,⁶

Let pilgrimage-festivals go around!⁷

⁵(...continued)

tracks. His supporters called him a “man after God’s Own heart,” but his historical record leaves much to be desired. He was not a good father to his children, and, in our view, certainly not “the ideal man of God”!

What do you think? Can you call a lying adulterer and murderer “the ideal man of God” even though He has been forgiven? Can you call a forgiven man who refuses to discipline his murderer son “the ideal man of God”? How will you explain all of this?

Rahfs has ἦν Δαυιδ ἐπολέμησεν, “which David warred / fought (against).” And we wonder, did the Greek translator understand the Hebrew text as meaning David’s military camp was set up for battle against Jerusalem? Oswalt notes that “some commentators prefer this [understanding], in the light of **verse 3**, which depicts YHWH encamping against Ariel / Jerusalem.

Watts comments that “City where David camped” is a phrase which “refers to David’s troops kept there [in Ariel / Jerusalem].” (P. 382)

⁶Alexander observes that the phrase “Add year to year” is “understood by Grotius to mean that the prophecy should be fulfilled in two years, or in other words, that it was uttered just two years before Sennacherib’s invasion...Most interpreters explain the words as simply meaning, let the years roll on with the accustomed routine of ceremonial services.” (P. 462)

Watts states that “*Add year to year* is probably a reference to the celebration of New Year’s festivals in which Yahweh’s beneficent Patronage for another year is sought...Although the ritual stresses Jerusalem’s ties to God and is intended to ensure her safety and prosperity, the verse implies that the celebration will not deter God from His determined path.” (P. 382) Again we note how differing interpretation so this phrase can and have been given—the language is elusive, not clear.

⁷Slotki holds that the last two lines of **verse 1** use ironical language. “Let them go on enjoying themselves for a few more years; the approaching disaster will bring it all to an abrupt end.” (P. 134)

For the last line of **verse 1**, **Rahfs** has φάγεσθε γὰρ σὺν Μωαβ, “for you (plural) will eat with Moab.” **King James** has “let them kill sacrifices,” but all of the other translations we are comparing have something like “Let festivals come in their cycles!” or “Let them run their round.”

Motyer states that “Add year to year is either ‘Add one more year to this year; let the cycle of festivals go round once more’ or ‘Let the years roll on, the circling festivals come and go.’ The ambiguity is designed. Isaiah is not dating the calamity but

(continued...)

29:2⁸ וְהִצִּיקוֹתִי לְאַרְיֵאל

וְהָיְתָה תְּאֵנִיָּה וְאֵנִיָּה

וְהָיְתָה לִי כְּאַרְיֵאל:

And I will cause distress to the (city of) Ariel;
and there will be mourning and lamentation;⁹

⁷(...continued)

affirming its certainty. Neither the passage of time nor the practice of religion (compare **Isaiah 1:11-15**) will avert it.” (P. 237)

Oswalt states “*Add year to year* seems to be a sarcastic invitation by the prophet to go right on with the useless round of rituals, which, like the pagan rituals built around nature’s cycle, go nowhere.” (P. 527)

All of these differences in interpretation of **verse 1** demonstrate once again the nature of the prophetic message—as being based on visions filled with puzzling enigmas, just as **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:7-12** state.

⁸Alexander translates **verse 2**: “*And I will distress Ariel, and there shall be sadness and sorrow, and it shall be to me as Ariel.*”

He comments that “Let the years revolve and the usual routine continue, but the time is coming when it shall be interrupted.” (P. 462)

Oswalt comments that “God’s response to the ‘altar-hearth’ is to place it under siege!...Isaiah wants to make it plain that God is no mere spectator in the theater of history. God will be laying siege to Jerusalem when Assyria stands at the gate.” (P. 527)

⁹Oswalt translates this line by “*She will become mourning and lament,*” and comments that this is what Ariel / Jerusalem will become “in place of light-hearted religious festivity...The city will not merely do these things, she will become them. Then indeed she will be Ariel, an altar-hearth, when the nation itself becomes the sacrifice.” (P. 527)

This is a possible translation of the Hebrew, although none of the English translations we are comparing so translate. They mostly choose the translation “And there will be...” **New International** translates by “she will mourn and lament.” **Rahlf**s changes to καὶ ἔσται αὐτῆς ἡ ἰσχὺς καὶ τὸ πλοῦτος ἐμοί, “and the strength and the wealth of hers will belong to Me.”

(continued...)

And it will be for Me like the (city of) Ariel!¹⁰

29:3¹¹ וַחֲנִיתִי כַדָּוָר עָלֶיךָ׃

וְצַרְתִּי עָלֶיךָ מִצָּב

וַהֲקִימְתִי עָלֶיךָ מִצָּרָת׃

And I will encamp like the circle¹² against you (singular);¹³

⁹(...continued)

Watts states that “The first two lines [of **verse 2**] clearly indicate that Yahweh will be an Enemy to Ariel with predictable results.” (P. 382)

¹⁰Slotki’s translation has “And she shall be unto Me as a hearth of God.” He suggests the alternative translation “as the altar hearth,” where “the victims bleed and burn; so will Jerusalem run with the blood of the slain.” (P. 134)

Alexander states that “the last clause may be either a continuation of the threatening or an added promise. If the former, the meaning probably is, it shall be indeed a furnace or an altar, i.e. when the fire of affliction or Divine wrath shall be kindled on it. If the latter, *it shall still be a city of heroes*, and as such withstand its enemies. Or, combining both the senses of the enigmatical name, it shall burn like a furnace, but resist like a lion.” (P. 462)

Yes, the name is “enigmatical”—as fits the nature of the prophetic message!

¹¹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 3**: “*And I will camp against thee round about (literally, as a ring or circle), and push against thee (or press upon thee with) a post (or body of troops), and raise against thee ramparts (or entrenchments).*”

“The siege of Ariel is now represented as the work of God Himself...intimating that the siege described is not a literal one.” (P. 462) But Isaiah has no trouble depicting literal sieges as being the “work of God Himself,” as He uses the Assyrian armies as a tool in His hand (see **Isaiah 10:15**)!

¹²The phrase כַּדָּוָר, **khaddur**, is found only here and at **Isaiah 22:18** in the **Hebrew Bible**, and its meaning here is uncertain, although in **22:18** the meaning “like the ball” seems appropriate. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggests “like the circle / ball,” and Oswalt suggests “as a circle” (i.e., the besieging army “encircling” Jerusalem). **Rahlfs** translates by ὡς Δαυιδ, “like David,” the translator evidently mistaking the final ך, **resh**, for ך, **daleth**, and understanding the Hebrew text to be כַּדָּוָר.

(continued...)

and I will raise a siege against you, a palisade / entrenchment;
and I will raise up against you siege-works / ramparts!¹⁴

29:4¹⁵ וְשַׁפְּלֵתִי

¹²(...continued)

The noun וְדִר, **dur**, by itself, occurs at **Ezekiel 24:5**, where it may mean “a heap (of bones).”

¹³Slotki comments that “God Himself, so to speak, will join the besieging army.” (P. 134)

Oswalt comments that “David may have camped within Jerusalem [the text has no preposition such as ‘within,’ but only says Ariel is a city ‘David encamped,’ which could also mean ‘encamped against’], but God will encamp against her. As the besieging Assyrians encircle the city, walling it in so none can enter or leave, it will in fact be God in the form of the Assyrians.” (P. 527)

Watts states that “God is laying siege to the city. Two words from the root צור, **tsur** / צַרְר, **tsrr** are used: וְצַרְתִּי, **wetsartiy**, ‘I shall lay siege’ and מְצֻרוֹת, **metsuroth**, ‘siege-works’...G. Gerlemann...found this a word used of hunting when a wild animal is surrounded. Irwin...thinks this makes the meaning of Ariel ‘Lion of God’ much more plausible. The Lion of God is surrounded by the Divine Hunter. This is the artistic metaphor which interprets the siege of Jerusalem.” (P. 382)

¹⁴Alexander states that “the dubious phrase וְצַרְתִּי עָלֶיךָ מְצַב [second line of **verse 3**] is understood by Ewald as meaning *I enclose thee with a wall*, or literally, *close a wall around thee*. To the supposition that these words relate to Sennacherib’s attack upon Jerusalem, it has been objected that the history contains no record of an actual siege.” (P. 462)

Oswalt comments on the words *towers...siege-works* that “The Assyrian reliefs depict the many ingenious devices which the Assyrians developed in order to break into walled cities. Among these were great wheeled towers which included a battering ram on the bottom and spaces for attackers on the top. These were pushed up against the city walls on ramps of earth and wood.” (Pp. 527-28)

See Pritchard’s **Ancient Near East in Pictures**, pp. 128-29, and articles on “Battering Rams” on the Internet.

¹⁵Kaiser entitles **verses 4-6** “Deliverance from the utmost distress.”

He comments that “In **verse 4** he juxtaposes two different conceptions, the first that of a person who has fallen to the ground and begs his conqueror for mercy, and

(continued...)

מֵאֶרֶץ תְּדַבֵּר

וּמֵעַפְרַת תִּשָּׁח אִמְרָתְךָ

¹⁵(...continued)

the second that of a dead person who speaks out of the earth like a ghost with a voice reduced to a whisper. This makes clear that the enemy attack which God Himself has brought about will bring Jerusalem into the utmost distress and that, rescued [sic. 'reduced'?] to humility (compare **Isaiah 2:9; 5:15, 20-23**) the city will beg its God for deliverance. Or the poet may be thinking only of a terrified and virtually inaudible whimpering...

“The poet seems to be trying to portray solely the terrified collapse of the people of Jerusalem in the face of the utmost distress. In this way he provided the dark background for the bright picture of the wholly unexpected deliverance which is to be brought about by Yahweh’s direct intervention in the form of a Theophany in a storm. He shows His concern for His city by making His thunder crash, His whirlwind roar and His thunderbolts come down upon the besiegers.” (P. 268)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: “*And thou shalt be brought down, out of the ground shalt thou speak, and thy speech shall be low out of the dust, and thy voice shall be like (the voice of) a spirit, out of the ground, and out of the dust shall thy speech mutter...*”

“Grotius understands this of the people’s hiding themselves in subterranean retreats during Sennacherib’s invasion, while Vitranga shows from Josephus that such measures were actually adopted during the Roman siege of Jerusalem. But the simple meaning naturally suggested by the words is, that the person here addressed, to wit, the city or its population, should be weakened and humbled. Some suppose the voice to be compared with that of a dying man or a departing spirit; others, with that of a necromancer who pretended to evoke the dead.” (Pp. 462-63)

Slotki comments on **verse 4** that it is “a scene of humiliation and dejection. Instead of the normally loud clamor of a city at peace, sepulchral [gloomy, dismal] voices will be heard like the mutterings of the necromancer.” (P. 134)

Oswalt comments that “This **verse [4]** may be composed of two figures, or only one. In the second part of the verse, death is clearly talked about as the formerly loud, boasting voices are reduced to the chirpings and twitterings of the dead.” (P. 528)

Watts translates “From a land you will speak,” and states that “a *land* must here refer to the world of the dead...Ariel, after being besieged, descends into the land of the dead, becoming like a ghost.” (P. 382) The noun **אֶרֶץ**, **erets**, is ambiguous, and can mean either “earth,” “land,” or “ground.” **Rahfs** has εἰς τὴν γῆν, “into the earth / land.”

וְהָיָה כְּאוֹב
מֵאֲרִיז קוֹלֶךָ
וּמֵעַפָּר אִמְרֹתֶיךָ תִּצְפָּצֵף:

And you will be abased;

from earth / ground you will speak,
and from (the) dust¹⁶ your speech will be humbled.

And it will be like an **obh** / communication with the dead;¹⁷
from earth your voice (will come);^{18, 2}
and from dust your speech will peep / chirp.¹⁹

¹⁶Where our Hebrew text has מֵעַפָּר, ‘from dust,’ the Greek repeats its preceding phrase εἰς τὴν γῆν, ‘into the earth / land.’

¹⁷For this matter of the **obh** / communication with the dead speaking out of the ground, see Harry Hoffner’s article quoted in our end-note 2. But this language is far from clear to the average reader of the **Book of Isaiah**, whether in the Hebrew or in its various translations—rather, it is enigmatic.

¹⁸Compare **Isaiah 8:19**,

And when they shall say to you people,
Seek to those who communicate with the dead,
and to those familiar with spirits (of the dead),
those who chirp, and those who murmur / mutter--
should not a people seek to its God / Gods,
on behalf of the living to the dead?

¹⁹Alexander states that “the last verb [in **verse 4**] תִּצְפָּצֵף, **tetsaphtseph** (pilpel imperfect, 3rd person feminine singular) properly denotes any feeble inarticulate sound, and is applied in **Isaiah 10:14** and **28:14** to the chirping or twittering of birds.” (P. 463)

Rahlfs translation of **verse 4** is:

καὶ ταπεινωθήσονται οἱ λόγοι σου εἰς τὴν γῆν
καὶ εἰς τὴν γῆν οἱ λόγοι σου δύσονται
καὶ ἔσται ὡς οἱ φωνοῦντες ἐκ τῆς γῆς ἢ φωνὴ σου
καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἔδαφος ἢ φωνὴ σου ἀσθενήσει

(continued...)

¹⁹(...continued)

And the words of yours will be humbled into the ground,
and into the ground, the words of your will go down;
and the voice of yours will be like those speaking out of the earth;
and towards the ground (synonym) the voice of yours will be weak.

Watts states that in **verses 4-8** there are five parallel observations:

Jerusalem's voice will be like that of a ghost (**verse 4b**);
Her hordes will be like fine dust (**verse 5**);
Yahweh will decide her fate (**verses 5c-6**);
These hordes of nations will seem like a dream (**verse 7**);
The experience will prove ephemeral [lasting only a short time] (**verse 8**).

Mormons have claimed that “When the **Old Testament** prophet Isaiah wrote of voices that would ‘whisper out of the dust,’ he was referring to the publication of the **Book of Mormon**.” See the **Wikipedia** article on “Book of Mormon” (3/24/2018). But no, Isaiah was referring to the humbled voice of the people of Judah / Jerusalem as they endured the Divinely driven siege against them more than 2,000 years before the publication of the **Book of Mormon**!

²⁰Slotki comments on **verses 5-8**: “In the hour of his victory, the enemy is overwhelmed and destroyed.” (P. 134)

Oswalt states that in **verses 5-8** “the tone shifts from judgment to redemption. The prophet wants his hearers to know that not only can God save them now, He can also save them after they will have experienced the consequences of their refusal to trust Him. How foolish to trust Egypt in view of such powerful grace. What now seems so horrifying and insurmountable is in fact of no more substance than a dream.” (P. 528)

Alexander translates **verse 5**: “*Then shall be like fine dust the multitude of thy strangers, and like passing chaff the multitude of the terrible ones, and it shall be in a moment suddenly.*”

He comments that “Calvin understands by strangers foreign allies or mercenary troops, which he supposes to be here described as powerless and as enduring but a moment. Others among the older writers take strangers more correctly in the sense of enemies, but understand the simile as merely descriptive of their numbers and velocity. It is now very commonly agreed, however, that the verse describes their sudden and complete dispersion...It is not the noise of a great crowd, but the crowd itself that can be likened to fine dust or flitting [moving swiftly and lightly] chaff...”

(continued...)

וְכַמּוֹץ עֵבֶר הַמּוֹן עֲרִיצִים

וְהָיָה לְפֶתַע פְּתָאִים:

And it will like fine dust, your crowd of foreigners,²¹

and like chaff passing over, a crowd of awe-inspiring / terror-striking people;
and it will be for suddenness, suddenly!²²

²⁰(...continued)

“The terms of this verse readily suggest the sudden fall of the Assyrian host, nor is there any reason for denying that the prophet had a view to it in choosing his expressions. But that this is an explicit and specific prophecy of that event is much less probable, as well because the terms are in themselves appropriate to any case of sudden and complete dispersion, as because the context contains language wholly inappropriate to the slaughter of Sennacherib’s army. To the Babylonian and Roman sieges, which were both successful, the verse...is entirely inapplicable...

“These considerations, although negative and inconclusive in themselves, tend strongly to confirm the supposition founded on the last part of the chapter, that the first [part of the chapter] contains a strong metaphorical description of the evils which Jerusalem should suffer at the hands of enemies, but without exclusive reference to any one siege, or to sieges in the literal sense at all. That the evils which the last part of the chapter brings to light are of a spiritual nature, and not confined to any single period, is a fact which seems to warrant the conclusion, or at least to raise a strong presumption, that the Ariel of this passage is Zion or Jerusalem considered only as the local habitation of the church.” (P. 463)

Oswalt comments on **verse 5** that “The weighty, powerful enemies are in fact no more substantial than powder (dust beaten even finer) or wind-driven chaff.” (P. 528)

²¹Where our Hebrew text has זָרִיקַי, **zarayik**, the masculine plural noun “strangers,” “foreigners, with the second person feminine singular suffix, “your,” referring to the city of Jerusalem, 1QIs^a has זָרִיקַי, which according to Oswalt means “your insolent ones.” Watts translates by “your insolent population.” (P. 382)

²²Translations vary as to whether this last line should go with what precedes it, or with what follows it in the next verse. That is, is this line describing the enemy foes as passing away suddenly, or is it describing the coming of YHWH’s visitation? Either understanding is possible. And the fact is that the prophetic message is filled with puzzling enigma, with uncertainty rather than clarity.

29:6²³ מֵעַם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת תִּפְקֹד

בְּרַעַם וּבְרַעַשׁ וּקוֹל גָּדוֹל

סוּפָה וְסַעֲרָה

וְלֶהֱבֹאֵשׁ אוֹכְלָה:

From YHWH of Armies you (singular) will be visited,²⁴

with thunder and with shaking and a great voice / sound–
storm-wind and tempest,
and flame of devouring fire!²⁵

²³Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: “From with (i.e. from the presence of) *Jehovah of hosts shall it be visited with thunder, and earthquake, and great noise, tempest and storm, and flame of devouring fire...*”

“The direct application of this verse to the fall of Jerusalem is wholly inadmissible, since the preceding verse describes the assailants as dispersed, and this appears to continue the description.” (Pp. 463-64)

Oswalt comments on **verse 6** that “God will *visit* His people as they cry out to Him for mercy. But this visiting is not merely to pay a call upon them. God comes to His people to right their wrongs. If they are wrong, His coming means punishment (**Isaiah 24:21** [which uses this same verb תִּפְקֹד]), but if they are now in a condition of being wronged, He comes to deliver.” (P. 528)

²⁴Slotki comments that this visit, or visitation, will be “God’s intervention to save Jerusalem, by directing thunder, etc. against the enemy.” (P. 135)

Alexander states that “As תִּפְקֹד, **tippaqedh** [niph'al imperfect, 2nd person masculine singular or 3rd person feminine singular]...may be considered as addressed directly to the enemy; or the verb may agree with הַמִּזֵּן, **hamon** [sometimes considered feminine, sometimes masculine]...The city cannot be addressed, because the verb must then be feminine, and the preceding verse forbids the one before us to be taken as a threatening of Ariel.” (P. 464)

²⁵Oswalt comments that “The language here is the classic language of Theophany:

Exodus 19:16-19,

(continued...)

²⁵(...continued)

- 16 And it happened on the third day, when morning came;
and there was thundering and lightnings,
and a heavy cloud upon the mountain,
and an exceedingly loud ram's horn sound(ing);
and all the people who (were) in the camp were terrified.
- 17 And Moses brought out the people from the camp to meet the God,
and they stationed themselves at the mountain's edges.
- 18 And Mount Sinai smoked, all of it,
because YHWH descended upon it in the fire,
like the brick-kiln's smoking;
and all the mountain trembled;
and its smoke went up exceedingly.
- 19 And the sound(ing) of the ram's horn (was) advancing,
and became exceedingly loud;
Moses would speak,
and the God would answer him with a voice.

1 Kings 19:11-13,

- 11 And He said, Go forth, and you shall stand on the mount before YHWH.
And look! YHWH (was) passing by.
And a great and strong wind,
tearing apart mountains, and shattering rocks before YHWH.
YHWH was not in the wind.
And after the wind, a quaking / earthquake.
YHWH was not in the quaking / earthquake.
- 12 And after the quaking / earthquake, fire.
YHWH was not in the fire.
And after the fire, a voice—a thin / small whisper.
- 13 And it happened, as Elijah heard,
and he wrapped his face in his cloak / robe.
And he went forth, and he stood (in) the opening of the cave.
And look! A voice (came) to him;
and it said, What belongs to you here, Elijah?

Ezekiel 21:3-4^{Heb} / 20:47-48^{Eng},

- 3/47 And you [Ezekiel] shall say to a forest of the south,
Hear YHWH's word!
In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
Look at Me—igniting a fire against you!
And it will devour every moist tree in you, and every dry tree.
Not a single flame will be quenched--
and all faces from south to north will be scorched by it!

(continued...)

²⁵(...continued)

4/48 And all flesh will see that I, YHWH, I burned it;
it will not be quenched!

expressing through imagery the conviction that God can intervene in power in our world.” (P. 529)

Watts comments on **verse 6** that “Yahweh is the only reality. He alone has power and can make a decision. After He has acted (**verses 7-8**) all the threats of the nations will seem as unreal as a dream only partly remembered.” (P. 383)

Watts explains **verses 1-8** as having a similar meaning to that of **chapter 7**. “The passage interprets Jerusalem’s military difficulty as God’s humiliation of the city which must precede His decision about her fate. When the decision has been made, everything else will seem unreal, like a dream. Yahweh, His sovereign decisions and His salvation—these are the only realities to consider, the only decisive factors.” (P. 383)

²⁶Slotki comments on **verses 7-8** that they depict “the enemy’s swift dispersal and disillusionment.” (P. 135)

Oswalt comments on these two verses that “Against the backdrop of God’s terrifying reality, the nations and their might will seem but a dream.” (P. 529)

Kaiser comments on them that “*It was like a dream*. If the people of Jerusalem, set free by Yahweh’s miraculous direct intervention, look back upon the day of distress, they will imagine that they had only dreamt of a siege by an immense multitude of nations...Before they have understood what is happening the danger will have been removed. The nations, on the other hand, will be like a hungry or thirsty person who satisfies his needs in a dream and then wakes up hungry or thirsty; their prey seemed as certain as anything could be, but Yahweh’s intervention will have deprived them of the fruit of their campaign.” (P. 268)

Alexander translates **verse 7**: “*Then shall be as a dream, a vision of the night, the multitude of all the nations fighting against Ariel, even all that fight against her and her munition [military weapons and supplies], and distress her.*”

He comments that “Calvin understands this to mean that the enemy shall take her unawares, as one awakes from a dream. The modern [mid-19th century] writers generally understand both this verse and the next as meaning that the enemy himself should be wholly disappointed, and his vain hopes vanish as a dream...

“But the true sense appears to be the one proposed by Grotius and others, who regard the comparisons in these two verses as distinct though similar, the enemy being first compared to a dream and then to a dreamer. He who threatens your destruction

(continued...)

הַמּוֹן כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם
הַצְּבָאִים עַל-אַרְיֵאל
וְכָל-צְבֹיָהּ וּמִצְדָּתָהּ
וְהַמְצִיקִים לָהּ:

And it will be like the dream, a vision (of the) night--²⁷
a crowd of all the nations,
those fighting against Ariel,
and all those fighting her and her stronghold,²⁸
and the ones constraining her.

29:8²⁹ וְהָיָה כַּאֲשֶׁר יַחֲלֵם הָרֶעִב

²⁶(...continued)

shall vanish like a dream...He who threatens your destruction shall awake as from a dream, and find himself cheated of his expectations...

“These seem to be the two comparisons intended, both of which are perfectly appropriate, and one of which might readily suggest the other.” (P. 464)

We say that these differing interpretations are rooted in the nature of the prophetic message—which is filled with puzzling, enigmatic statements. It is not so much one interpretation’s being “true” (as Alexander claims), and the other “false”—but rather, the language itself leads to the differing interpretations.

²⁷Slotki comments that their being like a dream or a vision, means they will be like something “that suddenly vanishes.” (P. 135)

²⁸Where our Hebrew text has מִצְדָּתָהּ, **metsodhathah**, “her stronghold,” 1QIs^a has מִצְרְתָּהּ, **mtsrrthh**, changing the ד / **daleth** to a ר, **resh**, “siege-work / rampart.” As we have seen a number of times, this easily happens when writing Hebrew.

²⁹Slotki states that **verse 8** contains “a realistic metaphor to describe disillusionment and disappointment.” (P. 135)

Alexander translates **verse 8**: “*And it shall be as when the hungry dreams, and lo he eats, and he awakes, and his soul is empty; and as when the thirsty dreams, and lo he drinks, and he awakes, and lo he is faint and his soul craving; so shall be the multitude of all the nations that fight against Zion.*”

(continued...)

וְהִנֵּה אוֹכֵל
 וְהִקְיִץ וְרִיקָה נַפְשׁוֹ
 וְכֹאֶשֶׁר יַחֲלֵם הַצָּמֵא
 וְהִנֵּה שֹׁתֵה
 וְהִקְיִץ וְהִנֵּה עֹף
 וְנַפְשׁוֹ שׁוֹקֵקָה
 כֵּן יִהְיֶה הַמּוֹן כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם
 הַצְּבָאִים עַל-תֵּר צִיּוֹן:

And it will be just like when the hungry one dreams,
 and look—he is eating.

And he awakes, and his innermost-being / appetite³⁰ is empty.

²⁹(...continued)

He comments that Calvin's interpretation "as meaning that the Jews should be awakened by the enemy from their dream of security and find themselves wholly unprovided with the necessary means of defense, is forced and arbitrary." (P. 464)

Oswalt comments that "It is possible that the dreamer here is the attacker, in that satisfaction is dreamed of but not actually attained. On the other hand, it may be simply a further illustration of the unreality of a dream. This latter interpretation seems the more likely, since there would be no reason to shift the focus away from the Judeans." (P. 529)

³⁰Slotki notes that "the Hebrew word נַפְשׁוֹ, **nephesh** is twice employed in the verse for 'appetite.'" (P. 135) As Alexander observes, the appetite is "first described as *empty* (i.e. unsatisfied), and then as *craving*." (P. 464)

Alexander states that "A...striking and affecting parallel from real life is found in one of Mungo Park's journals, and pertinently quoted here by Barnes: 'No sooner had I shut my eyes than fancy would convey me to the streams and rivers of my native land. There, as I wandered along the verdant bank, I surveyed the clear stream with transport, and hastened to swallow the delightful draught; but alas! disappointment awakened me, and I found myself a lonely captive, perishing of thirst amid the wilds of Africa.'" (Pp. 464-65)

And just like the one thirsty dreams,
 and look—he is drinking;
 and he awakes, and look—(he is) weary,
 and his appetite is longing (for water).
 In this way it will be (for the) crowd of all the nations,
 the ones fighting against Mount Zion!

29:9³¹ הַתְּמָה־מָה־וַיִּתְמָה־וּ

³¹Motyer entitles **verses 9-14** “Crisis: blindness and illumination.”

He asks, “Did Isaiah have Sennacherib in mind again?...[And then answers his own question:] The prophet does not link this present collection of brief oracles with the Sennacherib incident.” (P. 239)

Oswalt entitles the same section “Blindness of rote religion.”

He comments that “The thought here is parallel to **28:7-13**. Why will it be necessary for God to bring His people down to destruction before the salvation promised in **28:5-6** and **29:5-8** can be experienced? The answer is the same in each case: those who should be gifted with discernment, who should be able to perceive the mysterious workings of God in history, are so stupid that they cannot understand God’s ways even when they are presented to them in plain script. As a result, the ordinary people are led astray by spurious wisdom and the nation is sunk in degradation. The

result is that God will once again, as in Egypt, have to do something shocking to show Himself. But here, as in **28:21**, the first shock will be destructive, so that new growth can come up.

“Here, following the lead of **29:1**, the drunkenness seems not so much literal (as opposed to **28:7, 8**) as figurative. The leadership are so drugged by the soporific [its tendency to induce sleepiness] of cult that they cannot recognize the disastrous state of their relationship to God. This is always the word to the orthodox: while God takes no pleasure in the debauched, neither does He delight in those who make their religion a substitute for a life-changing relationship with Him:

Psalm 51:18-19^{Heb} / **16-17**^{Eng},

18/16 For You will not be pleased with [animal] sacrifice--
 and / or I would give (it);

an offering-up--

You would not be pleased (with).

19/17 God’s sacrifices are a broken spirit,
 a broken and crushed heart,

O God, You will not despise!

(continued...)

³¹(...continued)

Micah 6:6-8,

- 6 With what shall I come before YHWH,
bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with year-old calves?
- 7 Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams,
with tens of thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my firstborn child as my transgression-offering,
the fruit of my body as my innermost being's missing-of-the-mark
offering?
- 8 He declared to you, O human being, what is good,
and what YHWH is requiring from you--
only to enact justice,
and to fall in love with steadfast love,
and to walk humbly with your God!

“This is not to say that God does not care for ceremony, but only that the ceremony He approves is not an end in itself.” (Pp. 530-31)

Do you agree? It is difficult to defend religious ceremony in the light of such passages!

Watts entitles **verses 9-14** a “Like a Dream.”

He comments that “This episode turns from the political emergency to address the people...the citizens of Jerusalem...[It] picks up the theme of drunken stupor from **chapter 28** and that of God-caused blindness from **Isaiah 6:9-10**. It also resumes the theme of insincere worship from **chapter 1**.” (P. 385)

Slotki comments on **verses 9-12** that “The prophet denounces the obtuseness of the people of Jerusalem who fail to appreciate his warning.” (P. 135)

Kaiser entitles **verses 9-12** “The Blinding.”

He comments that “The transition from verse to prose [prose beginning in **verse 11**] shows that we must distinguish **verses 11** and **12** from the short prophecy of warning in **verses 9** and **10**. The two latter verses are clearly meant as a commentary upon the prophecy of warning, declaring that ‘the vision of all this’ will be completely incomprehensible to those who are addressed, as a result of Yahweh’s action in rendering them insensible to it, and that it is bound to remain so because it is like a sealed book which can of course be understood neither by those who can read nor, needless to say, by those who cannot read in any case...

(continued...)

³¹(...continued)

“We must interpret it for good or for ill as referring to the context with its eschatological statements. We can then conclude that the eschatological interpretation of the prophets was disputed. This interpretation saw the ancient prophecies against Jerusalem and Judah uttered by Isaiah in the eighth century and later written down as not having been fulfilled by the events of 701 and 587, and looked forward to a new threat to Jerusalem preceding the onset of the age of salvation...

“We need only think of the disappointment which must have followed the proclamation of the intense hopes of Zechariah (compare **Zechariah 6:9-15**), or the failure of the anti-Persian disturbances, presumably provoked by eschatological expectations, which seemed to have begun at the beginning of the reign of Xerxes, and the troubles which seemed to have taken place during the Phoenician revolt round about 340...

“The eschatological teacher who speaks here...regards it as hopeless to attempt to convince his opponents that his belief is true. Only when the monstrous event which radically alters history comes upon them will they recognize in terror the truth of this word...

“As far as the concrete form of his expectations are concerned, the eschatological teacher may have been mistaken, but by contrast to his opponents, who presumably relied upon the devout practice of the cult, he was right in his belief that the future was wholly reserved to God and not unchangeably determined by the present power structure of the world. To those who hope, the world looks different. Thus it is people who hope who are best able to change the world. But a Christian who accepts this must remember that he is mortal, while the hope that has been offered to him is immortal.” (Pp. 269-71)

Alexander translates **verse 9**: “*Waver and wander! Be merry and blind! They are drunk, but not with wine; they reel, but not with strong drink.*”

He comments that “Here begins the description of the moral and spiritual evils which were the occasion of the judgments previously threatened...”

“In the first clause, the prophet describes the condition of the people by exhorting them ironically to continue in it; in the second, he seems to turn away from them and address the spectators...”

“The terms of the first clause are very obscure [yes, indeed!]. In each of its members two cognate verbs are used, but whether as synonymous, or as expressing different ideas, appears doubtful. Ewald adopts the former supposition, and regards the first two as denoting wander...the last two blindness...”

“Gesenius, on the contrary, supposes verbs alike in form but different in sense to be designedly combined. To the first he gives the sense of lingering, hesitating,

(continued...)

הַשְׂתַּעֲשְׂעוּ וְשַׁעֲרוּ
שִׁכְרוּ וְלֹא-יִין
נַעֲרוּ וְלֹא שִׁכְרָה:

Make yourselves linger, and be astounded;³²

³¹(...continued)

doubting; to the second, that of wondering; to the third, that of taking pleasure or indulging the desires; to the fourth, that of being blind. The second imperative in either case he understands as indicating the effect or consequence of that before it: refuse to believe, but you will only be the more astonished; continue to enjoy yourselves, but it will only be the means of blinding you.” (P. 465)

Oswalt comments on **verse 9** that “It is apparent that what the prophet has said about Judah’s present and future has come as something of a wonder to Judah’s rulers. Talk of trusting God instead of Egypt, of victory through defeat, leaves these men shaking their heads. They are not spiritual men, but are wise in the way of the world. To them, such talk is simply foolish...

“So here in an agony of frustration [the prophet] cries out to them, ‘Alright, go ahead and be blind; be insensible, like a drunk...

“There can be no more frightening motivation to listen to God than this, the thought that if you refuse to hear today, one day you might no longer be able to hear.” (P. 531)

Watts comments on **verse 9** that “The commands are still addressed to the festal throng, moving through Jerusalem to the throbbing carnival sounds. They move in a kind of stupor.” (P. 385)

³²Translations of this first line of **verse 9** vary, from “Stay yourselves, and wonder,” to “Act stupid and be stupefied!” to “Stupefy yourselves and be in a stupor,” to “Be stunned and amazed,” to “Be stupefied and stunned,” to ἐκλύθητε καὶ ἔκστητε, “Be faint and amazed.”

Motyer comments on the **New International’s** translation: “*Be stunned* (root: מָזַהַ) is only used in the reflexive...and means ‘to delay, hesitate, be indecisive’...

Amazed (root: תָּמַהַ) can mean ‘to marvel’...or ‘to be bewildered’...If the Jerusalem leaders are indecisive now in the face of the Lord’s call they will condemn themselves to bewilderment, the inability to make sense of things.” (P. 239)

(continued...)

blind yourselves, and be blind;³³
they were drunk,³⁴ and not (with) wine;³⁵
they wandered,³⁶ and not (from) strong drink.

29:10³⁷ כִּי־נִסְּךְ עֲלֵיכֶם יְהוָה רִוַח תַּרְדֵּמָה

³²(...continued)

Watts observes that “the stupor is from God, as He had predicted in **Isaiah 6:9-11**. The *prophets*, leaders, and *seers* are affected alike.” (P. 385)

³³The phrase in our Hebrew text, הַשְׁתַּעֲשְׂעוּ וְשַׁעַר, using two forms of the verb שַׁעַר, **sha(a)**, “be smeared over, blind,” is omitted by the Greek translation.

Our English translations vary, from “cry ye out, and cry,” to “Act blind and be blinded!”

Watts notes that the root verb is ambiguous [indeed! This is the nature of the prophetic message!], evidently meaning “blind yourselves,” or “make sport, take delight in,” or “gaze at.” His translation has “gaze intently!” It is obvious that dogmatism in translation of such a difficult word is unjustified.

³⁴The Greek translation is κραίπαλήσατε, **kraipalesate**--second person plural aorist imperative, “have a drunken headache!”

³⁵Alexander states that “By spiritual drunkenness we are probably to understand unsteadiness of conduct and a want of spiritual discernment.” (P. 465)

Motyer states that “Isaiah passes from the warning imperatives of [the first part of the verse] to a description, a tacit admission that his appeal has gone unheard.” (P. 239)

³⁶Slotki’s translation has “stagger,” and he comments that this means “mentally, unable to make up their mind.” (P. 136)

The Aramaic Targum has the verb טַעַר, **ta(u)**, “they wandered / went astray.”

³⁷Alexander translates / comments on **verse 10**: “For Jehovah hath poured out upon you a spirit of deep sleep, and hath shut your eyes; the prophets and your heads (or even your heads) the seers hath He covered...”

“The two ideas expressed in the parallel clauses are those of bandaging the eyes and covering the head so as to obstruct the sight. In the latter case, the prophet makes a special application of the figure to the chiefs or religious leaders of the people, as if he had said, he hath shut your eyes, and covered your heads, that is the prophets’. Some have proposed to make the clauses more symmetrical by changing the division

(continued...)

וַיַּעַצֵּם אֶת־עֵינֵיכֶם

אֶת־הַנְּבִיאִים וְאֶת־רְאֲשֵׁיכֶם הַחֲזִים כִּפְסָה:

Because YHWH poured out upon you people a spirit / Spirit of deep sleep,³⁸

³⁷(...continued)

of the sentence, so as to read thus, *He hath shut your eyes, the prophets, and your heads, the seers, hath he covered...*

“The people were blinded by rendering the revelations of the prophets useless.”
(P. 465)

³⁸The noun תַּרְדֵּמָה, **tardemah** means “deep sleep.” The passage affirms that YHWH has poured out this “spirit / Spirit of deep sleep.” The noun occurs here and at:

Genesis 2:21,

And YHWH God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the human being,
and he slept.
And He took one of his sides,
and closed (with) flesh behind it.
(A Divine anesthesia, prior to a surgical procedure of rib-removal)

Job 4:13-17, where Eliphaz, Job’s friend, tells of his spiritual experience while in a deep sleep:

12 And to me a word was stolen,
and it took my ear, a whisper—from it.
13 In excited thoughts from visions (of the) night,
when deep sleep falls upon people,
14 dread encountered me, and trembling,
and it caused my bones to tremble greatly.
15 And a spirit / Spirit would pass by my face;
hair of my flesh would bristle up!
16 It would stop, and I would not recognize its appearance--
a likeness before my eyes
a whisper and a voice I would hear:
17 Will a (weak) human be justified more than Eloah?
Or will a (strong) man be pure more than his Maker?

Job 33:14-17, where the young man Elihu states:

14 Because in one (way) El will speak,
and in two (ways)--

(continued...)

and He closed tight your eyes--
the spokespersons and your leaders, the seers He covered.³⁹

³⁸(...continued)

- will He not regard it?
15 In the dream--
a vision of night--
when deep sleep falls upon people,
in slumbers upon a bed.
16 Then He will uncover (the) ear of people,
and with their correction
He will mark them--
17 to turn aside a human's deed,
and pride from a (mighty) man
He will cover over.

Proverbs 19:15,

Sluggishness causes a deep sleep to fall;
and an innermost-being of slackness, will go hungry!

And we ask, Is it YHWH's Spirit that causes the deep sleep, or human sluggishness? Can it be both?

³⁹Slotki comments on **verse 10** that this pouring out of sleepiness and blindness is like "the hardening of Pharaoh's heart which began with his own obduracy." "So here the people's mental and moral blindness was the effect of their failure to listen to the prophet's warning message from God." (P. 136) We remember how the **Exodus**-story depicts YHWH as intentionally causing the hardening of Pharaoh's heart.

And we ask, Was it the people's failure to listen to the prophet's warning, or the Divine blinding that caused their destruction?

Oswalt comments on **verse 10** that "Interestingly enough it is not the priests who are chiefly to blame for the blindness of the people. Surely they bore their share in suggesting that careful performance of the [religious] ceremonies was all that God wanted. But the ones really to blame were those who could have received a corrective word from God as Amos did, **Amos 5:21-24**, where Amos depicts YHWH as saying:

- 21 I hate, I reject your religious pilgrim-festivals!
And I will not delight in your sacred assemblies!
22 Because even if you people offer up to Me animal sacrifices and gifts,
I will not be pleased!
And (the) peace-offering of your fat animals,
I will not observe!

(continued...)

³⁹(...continued)

- 23 Take away from before Me (the) noise of your songs!
And the melody of your guitars, I will not hear!
- 24 And let justice roll along like streams of water,
and right-relationship(s) like a river that never dries up!
[And note how similar this passage from **Amos** is to **Isaiah 1:11-15!**]

–[the ones to blame were the ones who could have listened to] the prophets and the seers—but did not...If those upon whom the nation depends for a word from God lose contact with God, that nation is lost like an airliner in a fog with dead radios.” (Pp. 531-32)

⁴⁰Slotki comments on **verses 11-12** that “the learned and the ignorant are alike unable to understand the prophets’ communication.” (P. 136)

Motyer states that in these verses “The double illustration covers those who can but cannot be bothered and those who cannot and do not care. Basic to both is a spirit of unconcern. The one will not exert himself to break the seal and read, nor does the other urge him to do so.” (P. 240)

Oswalt states that **verses 11-12** “give a prose illustration of what has just been said. The wise men and the seers are compared to those who know how to read and write: the scribes upon whom the illiterate had to depend in order to carry on the business of life...

“But the scribe could not open a sealed scroll. Only the sealer or his designate could perform that task (**Revelation 5:1-5**)...

“What Isaiah has seen (‘the vision of the all’ = ‘the vision of all this’) is such a sealed scroll to these people. They have the technical skills to understand God’s word, but they lack the spiritual insight which would enable them to see the plain meaning. So, of course, the situation is hopeless for the common person. He cannot even read, let alone open and read. The Church today is in a perilously similar situation. The pews are full of people who look to someone who can ‘read,’ but for all too many who can do so, the document is still sealed.” (P. 532)

And, we add, the fact is that in far too many churches today, those who come to be fed on the great biblical truths still go away hungry, because of the failure of their ministers to study, and learn, and proclaim the biblical message! How wonderful it is to have ministers who constantly seek to know and understand the biblical message, and proclaim it with power! Isaiah was such a minister in his time, and his message, though coming through visions, and being filled with puzzling enigmas, still imparted a powerful message from YHWH!

(continued...)

כְּדַבְרֵי הַסֵּפֶר הַחֲתוּמִים
אֲשֶׁר־יִתְּנוּ אֹתוֹ אֶל־יְוֹדְעֵי (הַסֵּפֶר) [סֵפֶר] לֵאמֹר
קְרֵא נֹאזְהָה
וְאָמַר לֹא אוֹכֵל כִּי חֲתוּמִים הוּא:

And the whole vision has become for you (plural) like words of the book,⁴¹

⁴⁰(...continued)

Watts comments on **verses 11-12** with their phrase “the whole vision.” He states, “This **book [of Isaiah]** is called The Vision. But every act has complained that the people of that generation did not ‘see’ and did not respond. Having a sacred tradition, a Holy Scripture, or Divine vision is of no use if it is sealed.” (P. 386)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**: “*And the vision of all (or of the whole) is (or has become) to you like the words of the sealed writing, which they give to one knowing writing, saying, Pray read this, and he says, I cannot, for it is sealed. . .*”

“The *vison of all* may either mean of all the prophets, or collectively all vision, or the vision of all things, i.e. prophecy on all subjects.” (P. 465) Yes, the language is not definite or exact, but is somewhat puzzling.

Mormons claim that **Isaiah 29:11-12** is a prophecy of the **Book of Mormon**. In the Internet article “Isaiah 29” the chapter is summarized as: “A people (the Nephites) will speak as a voice from the dust—The Apostasy, restoration of the gospel, and coming forth of a sealed book (the Book of Mormon) are foretold—Compare 2 Nephi 27.” (3/25/2018) 2 Nephi 27 is summarized as: “The Book of Mormon will come forth—Three witnesses will testify of the book—The learned man will say he cannot read the sealed book—The Lord will do a marvelous work and a wonder—” (**Ibid.**)

That is, Isaiah is looking far into the future, over 2,500 years, and foretelling the coming of the **Book of Mormon** in America.

So it is claimed. But no—the sealed book of **Isaiah 29** is the prophetic message of Isaiah (and the other prophets), which the people to whom it was spoken / written, either refused or were unable to read and understand. It is not a prophecy of a far-off future!

⁴¹The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” **הַסֵּפֶר**, **hassepher**, “the writing / scroll / book”; and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” **סֵפֶר**, **sepher**, “a writing / scroll / book.”

(continued...)

the sealed one,³
which they will give to one knowing writing, saying:
Read this now!
And he will say, I am not able, because it is sealed.⁴²

⁴¹(...continued)

Alexander states that “The English word *book* does not exactly represent the Hebrew סֵפֶר, **sepher**, which originally signifies writing in general, or anything written... and is here used as we might use *document*, or the still more general term *paper*...”

“In the phrase יָדַע סֵפֶר, **yadha(sepher**, the last word seems to mean writing in general, and the whole phrase one who understands it, or knows how to read it. The application of the simile becomes clear in the next verse.” (P. 466)

Some students are inclined to take the noun with the definite article to mean “the Scripture” (see Watts, “the book, the Scripture,” p. 384) but that is anachronistic, reflecting a time when the various Hebrew writings were brought together to form one book—and then in the fourth century after Christ when the Roman Emperors summoned Christian bishops to meet in councils to decide such things as the “canonical **Bible**.”

In the **Hebrew Bible**, the word *sepher* has many meanings: **Brown-Driver-Briggs** lists “missive,” “document,” “writing,” “book,” “message,” “letter,” “letter of instruction,” “written order or request,” “written decree for publication,” “legal document,” “certificate of divorce,” “deed of purchase,” “indictment,” “scroll” (in which something is written to preserve it for future use), “a book of prophecies,” “genealogical register,” “law-book,” “book of poems,” “book of wars of YHWH,” “book concerned with kings,” “God's record-book,” “God's register of the living,” = “book-learning,” especially “writing.”

⁴²For this matter of a sealed writing / scroll, which the ordinary person is not allowed to open and read, compare **Revelation 5:1-5**,

- 1 And I saw upon the right hand of the One sitting upon the throne a scroll--
one having been written within and without--
having been sealed with seven seals.
- 2 And I saw a strong messenger / angel, proclaiming with a great voice,
Who (is) deserving to open the scroll, and to break its seals?
- 3 And no one in the heaven was able,
nor upon the earth, nor beneath the earth,
to open the scroll, or to look at it.
- 4 And I was crying much,
because no one deserving was found to open the scroll nor to look at it.
- 5 And one of the officials says to me,
Do not cry--look, the Lion,
the one from the tribe of Judah,

(continued...)

29:12⁴³ וְנִתַּן הַסֵּפֶר עַל אִשֶּׁר לֹא-יָדַע סֵפֶר לֵאמֹר

קְרָא נְאֻמָּה

וְאָמַר לֹא יָדַעְתִּי סֵפֶר:

And the book will be given to one who did not know writing, saying,

Read this now!

And he will say, I did not know writing.

29:13⁴⁴ וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי

⁴²(...continued)

the Root of David,
has overcome,
to open the scroll and its seven seals!

But the “sealed book” here in **Isaiah 29** has reference to the vision of the prophet of YHWH, Isaiah, written down, and easily accessible to the people—but which the people refused to read and understand due to their hardness of heart. It was not a legal document such as a title to property.

⁴³Alexander translates and comments on **verse 12**: “*And the writing is given to one who knows not writing, saying, Pray read this, and he says, I know not writing. The common version, I am not learned, is too comprehensive and indefinite...*”

“The comparison itself represents the people as alike incapable of understanding the Divine communications, or rather as professing incapacity to understand them, some upon the general ground of ignorance, and others on the ground of their obscurity.” (P. 466)

Does a writing’s “being sealed” only mean that it is “obscure”? We think “being sealed” normally means that the average person is not allowed to open it—only the person whose name is written on the seal. See our end-note 3. But here, we think, the “being sealed” has been caused by the hardness of heart of those to whom it is addressed.

⁴⁴Slotki comments on **verses 13-14** that they are a “rebuke of the people’s mechanical and formal worship with its resultant punishment.” (P. 136)

Oswalt comments on these two verses that they “take the form of a brief oracle of judgment and sum up the nature of the problem (**verse 13**) and the solution (**verse 14**). The charge is one of hypocritical religion. Because the prophets have not been faithful to declare God’s word, ‘this people’ has lapsed into the manipulative style of religion typical of paganism. This concern that Israel’s religion be one involving the very

(continued...)

⁴⁴(...continued)

seat of the personality, *the heart*, is typical of the **Bible**. Thus the 'fear of the Lord' is a way of life which involves an accurate understanding of Who God is and a corresponding ordering of one's affairs." (P. 532)

Kaiser entitles **verses 13-14** "Against Worshiping with the Lips Alone."

He comments that "Faith and religious practice can be maintained within a community in fixed forms. That this always brings the danger of confusing form and content is not a recent insight, but [on that] was well known to the ancient world [he is referring to Plato]...

"The author of the present passage sees his people, from whom he disassociates himself to some extent by the emphatic use of the expression 'this people,' as following the perverted ways of a cultic piety which for all their outward zeal is clearly a feigned worship to which their hearts are not committed... This shows that their alleged fear of God is nothing more than the following of a standard set by men... The coming act of God will run contrary to their present opinion and understanding, however much faith they put in it...

"Isaiah was the author. This suggests that the specific disobedience of the people should be sought in Hezekiah's anti-Assyrian policy of the years 703-701, which is censured in other prophecies, and which looked for support from Egypt; in **30:1** and **31:1** Isaiah explicitly attacks the sending of an embassy to Egypt without previously consulting Yahweh...

"Whereas the politicians of Jerusalem are convinced that they are doing their best for their country with an anti-Assyrian policy which relies upon Egyptian help, they are in fact leading into a catastrophe, because they have actually changed their plan without consulting God's judgment. There is much which seems right to us men, not only in public life. Perhaps we should ask more often whether it is in accordance with God's will. This would in fact avoid many catastrophes." (Pp. 273-74)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 13**: "*And the Lord said, Because this people draws near with its mouth, and with its lips they honor me, and its heart it puts (or keeps) far from me, and their fearing me is (or has become) a precept of men, (a thing) taught...*

"The apparent reference, in this description, to the Jews, not at one time only but throughout their history, tends to confirm the supposition that the subject of the

prophecy is not any one specific juncture, and that the first part of the chapter is not a prediction of any one siege of Jerusalem exclusively." (P. 466)

Motyer comments on **verse 13** that "Religion remains but reality has perished.

(continued...)

יֵעַן כִּי נִגַּשׁ הָעָם הַזֶּה בְּפִי
 וּבִשְׂפָתָיו כְּבָרוּנִי
 וּלְבָבוֹ רָחַק מִמֶּנִּי
 וַתְּהִי יְרֵאתֶם אֹתִי מִצֹּת אֲנָשִׁים מִלְמֶדָה:

And my Lord⁴⁵ said,

Because this people⁴⁶ drew near⁴⁷ with its mouth,⁴⁸

⁴⁴(...continued)

People continue with observances (they *come near*...), use all the correct words...but without heart reality. And even when their religion ventured upon something inward...it was not a response to the reality of God but a formal correspondence with human instruction: the nemesis of religion without a foundation in the revealed word of God.” (P. 240)

But of course, those to whom Isaiah is speaking, could defend their actions, claiming that all of their actions were rooted in the “word of God,” that is, in the teachings of **Leviticus**, etc.

⁴⁵Where our Hebrew text has אֲדֹנָי, **adhonay**, “my Lord,” a large number of Hebrew manuscripts have יְהוָה, YHWH / Yahweh. When the Greek scribes began translating the **Hebrew Bible** into Greek, they refused to translate the Divine name YHWH, and instead put the vowels of either **adhonay** or **elohiym** on the four-letter name, making it impossible to pronounce, and causing readers to read either “my Lord” or “God.”

⁴⁶Watts comments that the phrase “*This people* is a term that has appeared before (**Isaiah 6:10; 8:11**) when God wants to distance Himself from the people’s attitudes and decisions. Their religion is found to be only verbal. It lacks heart, mind, and will. This affects the character of their worship. *Their fear* means their attitude in worship [only in worship? We say, in all of life!]. It should be founded on a Divinely inspired awe, deep respect of the Holy One. But it has become...’a human command’ which can be taught and recited without involving the [heart, mind, and] will.” (P. 386)

⁴⁷Slotki notes that to “draw near” means coming “to the temple or to worship. Against the [Masoretic] accentuation, a better balance is obtained by translating: ‘draw near with their mouth’; there is no *and* in the text [for example his **American-Jewish Translation** has, “this people draw near, And with their mouth and with their lips do honor Me”].” (P. 136)

(continued...)

and with its lips honored Me,
and its heart was far from Me;
and their fear / reverence of Me⁴⁹
was a commandment learned from men / people.⁵⁰

⁴⁷(...continued)

Alexander observes that some read נִגַּשׁ, **niggas**, “was hard pressed,” for נִגַּשׁ, **niggash**, “drew near.” They “understand the clause to mean, they are compelled to honor me, they serve me by compulsion; or, when they are oppressed and afflicted, then they honor me. The common reading is no doubt the true one.” (P. 466)

⁴⁸The Greek translation omits the phrase “with its mouth.”

⁴⁹Slotki states that the phrase “fear of Me” means their “method of expressing reverence of Me.” (P. 136)

⁵⁰Translations of the phrase, מִצְוַת אֲנָשִׁים מִלְּמוּדָה, literally “a commandment of men / people, taught,” vary:

King James, “taught by the precept of men”;

Tanakh, “A commandment of men, learned by rote”;

New Revised Standard, “a human commandment learned by rote”;

New International, “based on merely human rules they have been taught”;

New Jerusalem, “nothing but human commandment, a lesson memorised”;

Rahlf's, μάτην δὲ σέβονται με διδάσκοντες ἐντάλματα ἀνθρώπων καὶ διδασκαλίας, “But then in vain / to no end they worship Me, teaching commandments of men / people, and teachings.” (The Greek translation is quite different from the Hebrew!)

Where our Hebrew text has מִצְוַת, **mitswath**, “a commandment,” 1QIs^a has כְּמִצְוַת, **kemitswath**, “like a commandment.”

Alexander states that “this clause might be simply understood to mean, that they served God merely in obedience to human authority.” (P. 466)

What do you think the clause means? Does it mean fear / reverence / worship that results from obedience to a commandment, which has been taught by people—say by priests, or prophets, is an invalid relationship with YHWH? Does genuine fear / reverence / worship have to originate within the individual’s heart? Is it something that cannot be taught or commanded, but that arises naturally, spontaneously, from innate feelings of awe and wonder and dependency? Does this text mean that YHWH does not want, nor appreciate, “second-hand” religion? Is real religion something that springs automatically from the human heart—something that is not dependent on

(continued...)

יוֹסֵף לְהַפְלִיא אֶת־הָעַם־הַזֶּה

⁵⁰(...continued)

commandments or teaching or religious traditions?

Look at **verse 14**. Does it take a Divine “wonder,” or “marvel,” to cause us to worship genuinely? And we ask, Are there not untold Divine wonders and marvels all around us, if we really look? Will it take a cataclysmic war, a national disaster, to cause us to worship?

What happens when someone you love dearly suddenly dies? Do you have to be told or taught to grieve? Do you have to follow some commandment concerning mourning? As my beloved Sarah lay on her death-bed, and the life-support machines were being removed, a nurse brought me a booklet, containing a description of the process of dying, and how to express one’s grief. Following her death, I read the book, and appreciated its helpfulness. But I didn’t need to be told how to grieve—not at all. It just sprung up in my heart—it just “came naturally.”

What do you think? Do the feelings of loss, and loneliness, and longing for the dead one, come automatically, without having to be taught? Is there only one right way to grieve, or do individuals express their grief in different ways?

Is there something similar to this in genuine religion? Does it just come naturally and spontaneously as you face your own finiteness in the midst of the awesome reality of life and death and the infinite universe? And as you experience those feelings, deep within yourself, will you then become teachable concerning worship and its forms?

What do you think? When did you first worship? Or have you ever really worshiped? What caused you to worship? Were you obeying a command, or just doing what you were taught to do, or copying what others were doing? Or were you doing what your innermost feelings told you? Were you worshipping “from the heart”?

Have you ever heard a mysterious voice, speaking deep within your heart, coming to you with an inescapably powerful call, that you cannot evade or deny? Did you once think that you had heard such a call, but then stifled it, doubted it, denied it? Or, as far as you are concerned, are the Divine voice and call no longer heard, if ever they were in the past?

⁵¹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 14**: “Therefore, behold, I will add (or continue) to treat this people strangely, very strangely, and with strangeness, and the wisdom of its wise ones shall be lost (or perish), and the prudence of its prudent ones shall hide itself (i.e. for shame, or simply disappear)...”

“This is the conclusion of the sentence which begins with the preceding verse.”
(P. 466)

הַפְּלִיא וּפְלֵא

וְאִבְרָהָּ חֲכֻמַּת חֲכָמָיו

וּבִינַת נְבִיִּי תִסְתַּתֵּר:

Therefore, look at Me--⁵²

He⁵³ will continue to do wonders / marvels with this people,⁵⁴

⁵²Where our Hebrew text has הַנִּינֵי, **hineniy**, “look at me,” 1QIs^a הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי, **hineh)anokhiy**, a longer form of the pronoun.

⁵³For this combination of “Look at Me” followed by a third person masculine singular verb, compare **Isaiah 28:16**, with our argument that the use of the third person singular following “Look at Me” must refer to someone other than YHWH. But the similar occurrence here apparently must be understood to mean “Look at Me,” followed by YHWH’s reference to Himself in terms of the third person masculine singular (in **28:16** followed by a qal perfect / past tense verb; here, in **29:14**, followed by a qal imperfect / future tense verb).

Combining the two passages, and assuming that the 3rd person singular is referring to YHWH Himself, Isaiah depicts YHWH as affirming that He has acted in the past and will continue to act in the future, in powerful, wondrous / marvelous ways, giving His people a solid foundation on which to build their lives!

⁵⁴Alexander comments that הַפְּלִיא [haphliiy), hiphil infinitive construct] is strictly *to make wonderful*, i.e. in a strange or extraordinary manner.” (P. 467)

Watts states concerning the “therefore,” that “For this reason, God must intervene with wondrous acts to restore the sene of His holy and awesome presence.” (P. 386)

Yes. As I read **Job 38-41**, and think of the great world of wild animals and creatures of which I am almost completely ignorant, but which are a part of God’s world, and then look out into the infinite billions of galaxies hurtling through space that the Hubble telescope has begun to reveal, alongside recognizing the infinite atomic worlds within my own body with its DNA ribbon, I cannot do other than bow in awe and reverence for this Holy God! Truly He has done (and does) wonders upon wonders!

What about you? Do you see God’s wonders all around and within you? And if you do, are you willing to listen and search for His will?

doing wonders / marvels and the wonder / marvel!⁵⁵

⁵⁵There is a threefold use of the root פלא, pl) in this verse:

וְיֹסֵף לַהֲפִלִּיאַת, “He will add to do wondrously / marvelously,” using the hiphil infinitive construct;

הַפְּלִיאַת, “to do wondrously / marvelously,” using the hiphil infinitive absolute; and

וּפְלִיאַת, “and the wonder / marvel.”

1QIs^a, instead of the root פלא in all of these occurrences, has the root פלה, with final *he* instead of final *aleph*. But this root has a similar meaning, something like “separate,” “distinct,” even “marvelous.”

This emphasis on “wonder / marvel” means that YHWH will act in history in such powerful, impressive actions, that people, seeing those Divine acts, cannot do otherwise than be astounded, and will be led to recognize and worship YHWH because of His astounding, marvelous works, in the light of which human wisdom and understanding will be dwarfed and humbled, leading to the acknowledgment and worship of YHWH by those witnessing the wonder / marvel.

What do you think is meant by the last of these, “and the wonder / marvel”? Can this be a reference to the drinking-banquet which YHWH promises to prepare on Mount Zion for all peoples and nations, at which He will swallow up death and all its signs forever?

Translations of the first three lines of **verse 14** vary, especially the Greek:

King James, “Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, *even* a marvellous work and a wonder”;

Tanakh, “Truly, I shall further baffle that people With bafflement upon bafflement”;

New Revised Standard, “so I will again do amazing things with this people, shocking and amazing”;

New International, “Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder”;

New Jerusalem, “very well, I shall have to go on astounding this people with prodigies and wonders”;

Rahlfs, διὰ τοῦτο ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ προσθήσω τοῦ μεταθεῖναι τὸν λαὸν τοῦτον καὶ μεταθήσω αὐτούς, “Because of this look–I, I will add to / again remove / transfer this people, and I will remove / transfer them.” (The “wonder” is exile!)

Motyer comments that “This verse begins ‘Behold, I am the One Who will again do marvels / perform another marvel...’ For the change of person from first to third for

(continued...)

And wisdom of its wise ones will perish,
and understanding of its understanding ones will hide itself completely!⁵⁶

⁵⁵(...continued)

emphasis see [his comments] on **28:[16]**. What the new act will be we are not told only its supernatural quality.” (P. 240)

Oswalt comments on **verse 14** that “Two themes of this **Book of Isaiah** in both its parts are God’s capacity to work wonders and His refusal to fit into prearranged, programmed categories. Yet so often this is precisely what the function of religion is: to bring the ineffable within our sphere, to reduce it to our terms, to make God subject to us. [Yes!]...

“Just as the deliverance from Egypt was a wonder, so also will be deliverance from Babylon, especially when preceded by a fall of Jerusalem which was theoretically impossible for God to permit.” (P. 533)

⁵⁶Slotki states that a more literal translation is “shall hide itself’ in shame, because events will prove it to be false.” (P. 137)

Watts explains the overall meaning of **verses 9-14**: “God does not reveal Himself the same way in all seasons. The [**Book of Isaiah**] reveals God’s strategy and intentions to its readers. But the generations portrayed in [the **Book of Isaiah**] were blind to the implications just as **6:9-11** predicted that they would be. Even the Scriptures [the messages of Isaiah] were meaningless to them.

“God recognizes the sorry state of religion which is only lip worship, the repetition of learned phrases. Truly ‘the fear of Yahweh’ is not only the beginning of wisdom, but also the foundation of worship which involves the heart. Holy awe leads to genuine devotion. Yet God in His grace determines to do more ‘wonders’ for this people, miracles which defy prediction or explanation. The ways of God can neither be confined nor limited.” (P. 586)

The apostle Paul quotes the last half of **Isaiah 29:14** in **1 Corinthians 1:19**, and we can compare his translation to Isaiah’s Hebrew text (MT) and its Greek translation in the “Septuagint” (LXX):

MT וְאִבְרָהָּ חִכְמַת חִכְמָיו

וּבִינַת נְבוּנָיו תִּסְתָּר:

and it will perish—wisdom of its (Judah’s) wise ones

and understanding of its (Judah’s) discerning / understanding ones will
hide itself

LXX καὶ ἀπολω̄ τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν

καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν κρύψω

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

and I will destroy the wisdom of the wise ones
and the understanding of the understanding ones I will hide

Paul's Greek is:

ἀπολωθὴν τὴν σοφίαν τῶν σοφῶν

καὶ τὴν σύνεσιν τῶν συνετῶν ἀθετήσω

I will destroy the wisdom of the wise ones

and the understanding of the understanding ones I will set aside

(Paul is obviously quoting from the Greek translation (**Septuagint**), but changes the last word, "I will hide" to "I will set aside.")

We understand Isaiah's "wisdom of the wise" to mean the policies of the Nation of Judah, determined by the King and his counselors, who were agreed on turning to Egypt for help against Assyria, thereby rejecting the Divine counsel given by YHWH through His prophet Isaiah. It does not at all mean that YHWH intends to destroy the wise teachings of **Proverbs** or **Ecclesiastes**, or any of the genuine wisdom found in Israel, or for that matter in Egypt or in Greece. And we suspect that something similar is what Paul means in his **First Letter to the Corinthians**—he means those in the church in Corinth who supposed themselves to be wise enough to reject Paul and his gospel, in favor of their "superior wisdom" and decisions for the church.

⁵⁷Motyer entitles **verses 15-24** "Spiritual transformation." He comments that "The three sections of the poem offer a meditation on the theme of transformation.

The first transformation: the subverting of reason (**verse 15-16**)...

The second transformation: coming world renewal (**verses 17-21**)...

The third transformation: the changed fortune of Jacob (**verses 22-24**)...

He comments that "The contrasting themes 'hiding from the Lord' (**verse 15**) and 'acknowledging the Lord' (**verse 23**) bracket the poem...Once more the contrast between political astuteness and revealed wisdom, which became critical at the time of the Egyptian alliance, forms a perfect background to these verses but no names are named. Rather, Isaiah identifies the principle involved: life must be lived in the light of the wisdom of God...Though His mercies may seem delayed, He will never fail to preserve His people in the exigencies [urgent needs and demands] of history (**29:1-8**), nor will He fail in His ultimate spiritual purposes (**29:9-14**). Rather, the day of spiritual transformation is sure to come (**29:15-24**)." (Pp. 240-41)

Oswalt entitles **verses 15-24** "Those who hide counsel."

(continued...)

⁵⁷(...continued)

He comments that “With this segment the opening indictment of Judah’s leaders comes to a close. It follows the same pattern as noted previously: denunciation of their foolish plans, which are based on the premise that God cannot save, and reaffirmation of God’s intention and ability to save after their folly will have precipitated disaster...

“The thrust of the affirmation is that God, in His care, will shortly free the weak and the helpless from the oppression of their rapacious leaders.” (Pp. 534-35)

Watts entitles **verses 15-24** “Woe, You Schemers.”

He states that “The episode has three parts and a conclusion:...

Verses 15-16, Woe to the planners who exclude God (**verse 15**), who presume to be able to hide (**verse 15**) as if—a threefold simile of clay and potter (**verse 16**).

Verses 17-21, God’s reversal is near (**verse 17**) when blind and meek will be advantaged (**verses 18-19**), when violent cunning will fail (**verses 20-21**).

Verses 22-23, Yahweh announces a new opportunity for Israel.

Verse 24, Conclusion—Then even the ‘errant in spirit’ can understand...

“The reversal of fortunes takes a strange turn. Judgment on those who seek to elude Yahweh’s scrutiny is understandable. The turn of fate that makes the deaf, blind, meek and humble have their day is to be expected in [the **Book of Isaiah**], as is the end of shrewd conniving. But the word about Jacob comes as a surprise. God’s continued love for Israel and His undying hope of genuine response is a symbol of His unending grace.” (Pp. 388-90)

Slotki comments on **verses 15-21**: “The prophet ridicules the arrogance and short-sightedness of the politicians, and reminds them of God’s omnipotence and of the wonderful physical, moral and spiritual transformation He would bring about.” (P. 137)

Motyer entitles **verses 15-16** “The first transformation: the subverting of reason.”

Oswalt comments on **verses 15-16** that they “contain the third of the woes declared in **chapters 29-33**. The first was to the drunkards of Ephraim (**28:1**), and the second to David’s city (**29:1**). This one now sums up the former two and the theme which emerged in the treatment of them: how foolish for the pot to think it knows more than the potter...

“It is apparent that some sort of secret political plan had been made without consultation with people or prophet, and thus, in Isaiah’s view, without consultation with God. Probably this is in reference to the decision to break the vassal-covenant with

(continued...)

⁵⁷(...continued)

Assyria and to rely on help from Egypt.” (Pp. 535-36)

Watts comments on these two verses that “Strategists who think they can elude Yahweh’s sight or knowledge are ridiculed (compare **Psalm 139**).” (P. 389)

Kaiser entitles **verses 15-16** “Atheism?” He comments that “the substance of the accusation in fact lies in the characterization of those to whom the woe refers... Although the comment in **verse 16** on the perverse attitude of those who have made their plan and hidden it from Yahweh is an acute one, it is superfluous, for what we want to see instead is a concrete explanation about who has made a secret plan and in what circumstances...

“That God as the Creator is as superior to man as the potter to the pot he has made is an idea used in **Jeremiah 18:6** to explain a prophecy of judgment, and in **Isaiah 45:9** to introduce a disputation which is the basis for a prophecy of salvation...

“The idea that a human being cannot hide his actions from Yahweh, nor keep items hidden from Him, is an idea which we find in the psalms of lamentation...in wisdom poetry...and also in prophetic writings (compare:

Amos 9:2-4,

- 2 If they dig down into the grave,
from there My hand will take them!
And if they go up into the heavens,
from there I will bring them down!
- 3 And if they hide themselves on the top of Mount Carmel,
from there I will search (them) out, and take them!
And if they hide themselves from before My eyes on the ocean bottom,
From there I will command the serpent, and it will bite them!
- 4 And if they go into captivity before their enemies,
from there I will command the sword, and it will kill them!
And I will place My eye upon them,
for evil, and not for good!

Jeremiah 23:24,

Or will a man be hidden in the secret places,
and I will not see him?
(It is) a saying of YHWH—
am I not filling the heavens and the earth?
(It is) a saying of YHWH.

“The plan conceived in secret and concealed from Yahweh was the decision to send an embassy to the Ethiopian Pharaoh Shabako with a request to send calvary and

(continued...)

לְסִתֵּר עֵצָה
וְהָיָה בְּמַחְשָׁבָם מְעֵשִׂיהֶם
וַיֹּאמְרוּ
מִי רֹאֵנוּ וּמִי יוֹדְעֵנוּ:

Alas for those making deep from YHWH,
to hide counsel / plan!⁵⁸

⁵⁷(...continued)

chariots to drive out or provide a diversionary attack against the punitive campaign begun by Sennacherib against the rebels in the west (compare **Isaiah 30:2** and **31:1**). By so doing, the ruling powers in Jerusalem were behaving towards Yahweh like scoundrels who had every reason to hide what they planned...

“This is not the situation only of the rulers of Jerusalem, but of all [people] before God. If [we] suppose that [we] can ignore God in His actions and therefore call into question the reality of God, [we] are making a comparable error.” (Pp. 275-6)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 15**: “*Woe unto those (or alas for those) going deep from Jehovah to hide counsel (i.e. laying their plans deep in the hope of hiding them from God), and their works (are) in the dark, and they say, Who sees us, and who knows us?...*”

“This is a further description of the people or their leaders, as not only wise in their own conceit, but as impiously hoping to deceive God, or elude His notice. The absurdity of such an expectation is exposed in the following verse.” (P. 467)

⁵⁸Translations of these first two lines of **verse 15** vary:

King James, “Woe unto them that seek deep to hide their counsel from the LORD”;

Tanakh, “Ha! Those who would hide their plans Deep from the LORD!”

New Revised Standard, “Ha! You who hide a plan too deep for the LORD”;

New International, “Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the LORD”;

New Jerusalem, “Woe to those who burrow down to conceal their plans from Yahweh”;

Rahfs, οὐαὶ οἱ βαθέως βουλῆν ποιοῦντες καὶ οὐ διὰ κυρίου, “Woe (to) the ones making a plan deeply, and not through (the) Lord.”

Brown-Driver-Briggs, “they who deeply hide from YHWH (their) counsel.”

Slotki holds that this is being said to “the political conspirators of the pro-Egyptian party who negotiated in secret.” (P. 137) Compare:

(continued...)

And their deed will happen in a dark place.

And they will say:

Who is seeing us? And who is knowing us?⁵⁹

29:16⁶⁰ הַפְּכֵם

⁵⁸(...continued)

Isaiah 31:1-3,

- 1 Alas—those going down (to) Egypt for help;
upon horses they are leaning,
and they trusted in chariot(s),
because (they are) exceedingly great,
and upon horsemen,
because they are strong.
And they did not look to (the) Set-apart On of Israel,
and to YHWH they did not seek!
- 2 And also, He was wise,
and He brings evil.
He will not turn aside His words;
and He will stand against Evil-doers' household,
and against (the) help of those doing wickedness.
- 3 And Egypt (is) human,
and not El / God;
and their horses (are) flesh,
and not Spirit;
and YHWH will stretch out His hand,
and one helping will stumble,
and one helped will fall;
and together all of them will be finished!

Isaiah 36:9, where the Babylonian commander challenges Hezekiah:

And how will you turn back (the) face / front of one of the least governor / captain
of my lord's servants?

And you trusted yourself upon Egypt for chariot(s) and for horsemen!

We say, you have to dig very deep, to get around YHWH's plans, or to hide your
plans from YHWH!

⁵⁹Motyer comments that "The two questions, Who sees us? And (literally) Who
knows us? reflect not a guilty conscience but the people's determination to be their own
unfettered masters." (P. 241)

⁶⁰Slotki comments on **verse 16**: "Human presumption to outwit God is as foolish
as if the potter should be put on a par with the clay he uses in the making of his pots; or

(continued...)

אִם-כְּחָמֵר הַיֵּצֵר יִחְשָׁב
כִּי-יֹאמֶר מִעֲשֵׂה לַעֲשֵׂהוּ
לֹא עֲשִׂנִי
וַיֵּצֵר אֱמַר לְיוֹצְרוֹ
לֹא הִבִּין:

⁶⁰(...continued)

as if a manufactured object should presume to question the intelligence of the man who made it or altogether deny the fact that he had made it.” (P. 137)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 16**: “*Your perversion! Is the potter to be reckoned as the clay (and nothing more), that the thing made should say of its maker, He made me not, and the thing formed say of its former, He does not understand?*”

“The attempt to hide anything from God implies that He has not perfect knowledge of His creatures, which is practically to reduce the maker and the thing made to a level. With this inversion or perversion of the natural relation between God and man, the prophet charges them in one word (הַפְּכֵכֶם, **haphkekhem**, ‘Your perversion!)...Most of the recent [mid-19th century] writers are agreed in construing the first word as an exclamation, *Oh your perverseness!* i.e. how perverse you are!...”

“The verse seems intended not so much to rebuke their perverse disposition, as to show that by their conduct they subverted the distinction between creature and Creator, or placed them in a preposterous relation to each other. Thus understood, the word may be thus paraphrased: (This is) your (own) perversion (of the truth, or of the true relation between God and man).” (P. 467)

Oswalt states that “*Ah, your perversity* sums up the intensity of the prophet’s feelings. They have turned things upside down. They tell God what to do rather than seeking to discern what He means to do. They, *they*, tell Him that He lacks understanding.

“For Isaiah, the doctrine of creation is fundamental. As the Maker of the world, God has the right to determine its direction, and moreover, He does have a direction in mind for it...”

‘It is the forgetting of God’s right as Maker that leads to ethical relativism...The Maker, says Isaiah, does know and cares passionately. Those who say He does not know and care confuse the clay with the Potter, and that is the fundamental error of all strictly human philosophies.” (Pp. 536-37)

Your (plural) perversity / contrariness⁶¹

that the potter should be considered like clay,⁶²

that a product should say to its maker,

You did not make me!⁶³

And a purpose / plan said of its former,

he did not understand!⁶⁴

29:17⁶⁵ הַלֹּא-עוֹד מַעַט מִזֶּעַר

⁶¹Motyer translates by “You turn things upside down,” and states that it is “a derisive exclamation. The noun הֶפְּהֵק, **hephek** is found [elsewhere] only at **Ezekiel 16:34**, where the sense is ‘the very opposite.’ Hence here, ‘Oh your reversal!,’ ‘How you turn things upside down!’” (P. 241)

Brown-Driver-Briggs defines the noun as “the contrary, contrariness, perversity.” **Holladay** has “opposite,” “perversity.”

⁶²How perverse that the clay should consider the potter to be like itself—like nothing more than clay! Have you ever heard God the Creator of humanity being described as “the man upstairs”? How often do we in our theologies depict God as a human being, living in a palace in outer space? But all of these inadequate views of God quickly disappear when we look at the universe(s) through the Hubble telescope, and take seriously modern science’s view of the black hole and the “big bang.” The more we know about physical reality, the more we realize how tiny we human beings are, how insignificant before the Creator God, how silly our depictions of our Creator, how ridiculous our denial of the miraculous!

⁶³How perverse that a product should deny that it had a producer, a planner, a maker!...that a Buick Enclave (should it be able to speak) should claim there were no automotive designers, no engineers, no robots, no human beings responsible for its existence! And the Buick Enclave is simple compared to the human body and mind, with its skeletal and nervous systems, with its encoded DNA, etc. etc. etc. No, no—we are products, we are the results of designed engineering, we are not “self-made”! The only proper response to who we are is to bow in humble worship, in honest thanksgiving to our Creator, Who, through long periods of evolutionary development has made us!

⁶⁴How perverse that a modern human being, recognizing the billions of atoms that make up its body, each cell containing DNA codes that today can be read, to say that our Creator God didn’t know what He was doing! No, no—our existence bears witness to a Creator / Designer Whose plan and purpose is evident in our minds and bodies and in the world we live in! We are in total agreement with Isaiah’s statement!

⁶⁵Kaiser entitles **verses 17-24** “Salvation is Near!” He comments that “A description of salvation which begins with an imminent transformation of nature and

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

concludes with a transformation of society (**verses 17-21**) is followed by a statement [attributed to YHWH] (**verses 22-24**), which combines features of the prophecy of salvation and the description of salvation...

“The promise as a whole gives us an insight into the internal groupings of the Jewish community, as they were seen by a devout scribe who believed in an eschatological theology of history, at a time which cannot be earlier than the Hellenistic period [that is later than Alexander the Great, who died 323 B.C.E.; Kaiser’s certainty in dating the passage is, we think, ill-founded]...

[The author] clearly feels solidarity with the group to which he refers as the ‘meek and poor.’ Radically opposed to them is the group amongst whom he includes the ruthless and the scoffers, who lead a life which is Godless and hostile to other people. Between these two groups stands a third, which in the eyes of this devout Jew clearly lacks a true understanding of scripture [Kaiser translates **verse 18** by ‘In that day the deaf shall hear the words of scripture’]...

“Taken as a whole, this passage makes it quite clear of what such an understanding consists: an eschatological belief and hope that the course of history will soon bring a transformation of everything upon earth by Yahweh Himself...

“We are probably correct [!] in dating this promise before the beginning of the conflicts between Judaism and the Seleucid kings Seleucus IV and Antiochus IV...The particular importance of the poem lies in the way it links together the fear of God, justice and salvation which takes in the whole of the earth, nature and society.” (Pp. 278-79)

Motyer entitles **verses 17-21** “The second transformation: coming world renewal.”

Oswalt states that “In these verses the writer promises in language echoed elsewhere in the **book** that the battle is not necessarily to the strong nor the race to the swift...

“The blind will see, the helpless will be empowered, and those who have made a living of injustice will disappear...God is on the side of the powerless who trust in Him...

“While the Mafia [criminal organizations] slaughter each other and the rich live in mistrustful loneliness, those who love God and have very little live productive and beneficial lives because they are committed to God’s ways. Ultimately the problem is to define successful living. The world’s wisdom says power and comfort are success. God’s wisdom says love and inner abundance are success. Is that foolishness? If so, God’s foolishness is wiser than man’s wisdom (**1 Corinthians 1:25**).” (P. 537)

Slotki comments on **verse 17** that “God in His omnipotence transforms nature at will.” (P. 137)

(continued...)

וְשָׁב לְבָנוֹן לְכַרְמֶל

וְהַכַּרְמֶל לְיַעַר יַחְשָׁב:

Is it not still a little, a trifle (time),⁶⁶

⁶⁵(...continued)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 17**: “Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall turn (or be turned) to the fruitful field, and the fruitful field be reckoned to the forest (i.e. reckoned as belonging to it, or as being itself a forest)? The negative interrogation is one of the strongest forms of affirmation...

“The metaphors of this verse evidently signify a great revolution. Some suppose it to be meant that the lofty (Lebanon) shall be humbled, and the lowly (Carmel) exalted. But the comparison is evidently not between the high and the low, but between the cultivated and the wild, the field and the forest...

“The only natural interpretation of this verse is that which regards it as prophetic of a mutual change of condition, the first becoming last and the last first...Nothing can be more appropriate or natural than to understand the verse...as foretelling the excision of the unbelieving Jews, and the admission of the Gentiles to the church.” (Pp. 467-68)

We think Alexander is reading a great deal into this verse which says nothing about “the excision or cutting off of unbelieving Jews,’ nor anything about “the admission of the Gentiles to the church.” It is this kind of reading into the text that makes Jewish students wary of Christian interpretation of the **Hebrew Bible**.

Motyer’s comment is much more true to the text: “In a very short time, as the Lord reckons history, total renewal will take place and ‘Lebanon will turn into a garden-land.’” (P. 242) Of course, nothing is said in the text about ‘as the Lord reckons history,’ and the verse is not talking about the transformation of God’s people, but the transformation of nature.

Oswalt comments on **verse 17** that “Although some question remains as to the exact meaning of this verse [yes—that is the nature of the prophetic message!], it appears to support the interpretation...of a coming reversal in the positions of the noble and the common...

“The forest will become a plowed field, whereas the fields will grow up in such a luxuriant tangle as to be called a forest. So the mighty of Judah and of the world will fall, but God’s common people will flourish...An alternate interpretation sees the verse as a promise of blessing in an agricultural setting: even Lebanon will be available for cultivation.” (P. 538)

⁶⁶Slotki says that this means “almost at any moment.” (P. 137)

and Lebanon will return to (being) the garden?⁶⁷

And the garden will be considered for the forest?⁶⁸

29:18⁶⁹ וְשִׁמְעוּ בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא הַחֲרָשִׁים דְּבְרֵי-סֵפֶר

⁶⁷Slotki states that Lebanon, “Because it is covered with trees, is here employed as a synonym for *forest*. This clause is repeated in **Isaiah 32:15** and may have been a proverbial saying.” (P. 137)

⁶⁸**New Jerusalem** translates **verse 17** by “Is it not true that in a very short time the Lebanon will become productive ground, so productive you might take it for a forest?”

Rahfs has οὐκέτι μικρὸν καὶ μετατεθήσεται ὁ Λίβανος ὡς τὸ ὄρος τὸ Χερμελ καὶ τὸ ὄρος τὸ Χερμελ εἰς δρυμὸν λογισθήσεται, literally “No longer a little, and the Lebanon shall be changed like the Mountain, the Carmel; and the Mountain, the Carmel, will be considered for a forest.”

⁶⁹Watts comments on **verses 18-19** that “The *deaf*, the *blind*, the *meek*, and the *humble* have suffered much in a world that honors power and cunning. But their day will come when God changes all the rules to work to their advantage.” (P. 389)

Slotki holds that **verse 18** is “a reference back to **verses 11-12**. God will effect a cure for spiritual deafness and blindness.” (P. 138)

Motyer comments on **verse 18** that “This is the individual aspect of the great transformation...a picture of people with new faculties and new appetites, finding satisfaction in God’s book.” (P. 242) But nothing is said in the text about “God’s book” --only Isaiah’s vision of destruction is compared to a “sealed book” (**verse 11**).

Motyer’s language “God’s book” is anachronistic--and comes from centuries later, when printed **Bibles** were published, and people began to call the **Bible** “God’s word,” or “God’s book.”

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 18**: “*And in that day shall the deaf ear hear the words of the book (or writing), and out of obscurity and darkness shall the eyes of the blind see...*”

“As the forest was to be transformed into a fruitful field, so the blind should be made to see, and the deaf to hear. There is an obvious allusion to that figure of the sealed book or writing in **verses 13** and **14**...”

“The Jews could only plead obscurity or ignorance as an excuse for not understanding the revealed will of God. The Gentiles, in their utter destitution, might be rather likened to the blind who cannot read, however clear the light or plain the writing, and the deaf who cannot even hear what is read by others. But the time was coming

(continued...)

⁶⁹(...continued)

when they, who would not break the seal or learn the letters of the written word, should be abandoned to their chosen state of ignorance, while on the other hand, the blind and the deaf, whose case before seemed hopeless, should begin to see and hear the revelation once entirely inaccessible. The perfect adaptation of the figurative language to express the new relation of the Jews and Gentiles after the end of the old economy, affords a new proof that the prophecy relates to that event.” (P. 468)

We have become familiar with Alexander’s use of the non-biblical word “dispensation” again and again, oftentimes with slightly different meanings. Now, instead of “dispensation,” he uses the non-biblical phrase “the old economy (which is coming to an end).” He uses these non-biblical terms to support his view of the superiority of “the Christian dispensation / new economy” to the “Jewish dispensation / old economy,” and the replacement of the “Jewish dispensation / economy” by the superior “Christian dispensation / economy.” See articles on “Dispensationalism” in **Wikipedia**.

We basically reject this method of interpretation of the **Bible**, with its insistence that God deals differently with people in different time periods, for example by law under the Mosaic dispensation, and by grace under the Christian dispensation. The God of the **Bible** certainly is depicted as entering into varying covenants with His creatures, but in our view, dispensationalism carries this biblical truth to ridiculous extremes. The **Hebrew Bible** emphasizes the priority of Divine grace in relationship to the law, and the **Greek New Testament** emphasizes the absolute necessity of obedience to Divine law if Divine grace is to avail. See the articles on the **Internet** under “Criticism of Biblical Dispensationalism.”

At the root of much of the theological divisions over the interpretation of the **Bible** is the insistence that every word in the **Bible** came from God, and a failure to see the human input in the biblical writings, with different authors sometimes holding to quite different theological views. Here, in our study of the **Book of Isaiah**, it quickly becomes fully obvious how Isaiah opposes the legalistic view of the temple and its sacrifices, as found for example, in the **Book of Leviticus**. It also becomes fully obvious how Isaiah, especially in **chapters 40-66**, rejects the legalistic separatist teachings of **Ezra-Nehemiah**.

Dispensationalist interpreters of the **Bible**, with their insistence on the infallibility of Scripture, do not take seriously the teaching of **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12** which insist that the Divine revelation to prophets is “seen through a mirror darkly,” that is, literally, “in an enigma,” in puzzling dreams and visions, which are quite inferior to face-to-face revelation. It is, in our view, impossible to take such enigmatic visions of the future as exact road-maps of the future—which dispensationalists all too often do—trying to harmonize biblical visions that simply will not harmonize without distortion of the biblical text!

(continued...)

⁶⁹(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verse 18** that “This verse may have both a general and a specific meaning in this context. In the general sense, the most downtrodden members of a society are likely to be handicapped, as typified by the deaf and the blind. Thus their hearing and seeing express what God will do for the lowly among His people when His kingship is established on the earth.

Isaiah 32:3-4 (a difficult text to translate),

3 וְלֹא תִשְׁעִינָה עֵינֵי רְאִים
וְאָזְנֵי שְׁמָעִים תִּקְשְׁבֶנָּה:

And (the) eyes of those seering will not see / gaze (with favor / partiality);
and (the) ears of those listening will pay attention;

4 וּלְבַב נְמַהְרִים יִבִּין לְדַעַת
וּלְשׁוֹן עֲלֻגִים תִּמְהַר לְדַבֵּר צְחוּת:

and (the) heart of those who are anxious will understand to know;
and (the) tongue of those speaking inarticulately will hurry to speak
clearly.

Isaiah 35:4-6,

- 4 Speak to those who are anxious of heart,
Be strong, do not be afraid!
Look—our God!
Vengeance will come!
It is God’s recompense;
He will come and He will save you people!”
- 5 Then (the) eyes of blind people will be opened,
and ears of deaf people will be unstopped.
- 6 Then a lame person will leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the mute will gave a ringing cry.
Because waters broke forth in the desert,
and torrent-valleys in the (Jordan) Plain.

“So [Isaiah’s] preaching was a closed [sealed] book to his own generation:

Isaiah 8:16-18,

- 16 Bind up a testimony;
seal *torah* / teaching among my students.
- 17 And I will wait for the YHWH,
the One hiding His face / appearance from Jacob’s house;

(continued...)

וּמֵאֲפֶל וּמִחֹשֶׁךְ עֵינֵי עֹרְרִים תִּרְאֶינָה:

And the deaf will hear words of a writing / book on that day,
and from gloom and from darkness eyes of blind people will see!

29:19⁷⁰ וַיִּסְפוּ עֲנוּיִם בֵּיהוָה שְׂמֵחָה

וְאֲבִיוֹנֵי אֲדָם בְּקִרְוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל יִגִּילוּ:

⁶⁹(...continued)

and I will wait for Him.

18 Look—I, and the children whom YHWH gave to me,
for signs and for portents / wonders in Israel,
from YHWH of Armies,
the One dwelling on Mount Zion.

“But God here promises that the day will come when the blind will see and the deaf will hear. No longer will the words of promise fall on hard, dry ground. Rather, they will find lodging in a receptive soil where they can spring up to become that luxurious growth spoken of in **verse 17**.” (P. 538)

Kaiser comments on **verse 18** that “The deaf and the blind, those members of the Jewish cultic community who honor their God but reject the eschatological interpretation of the prophets...will no longer be able to overlook the true, i.e. the eschatological meaning of scripture, because events meanwhile will have justified it.” (P. 279)

⁷⁰Alexander translates / comments on **verse 19**: “*And the humble shall add joy (i.e. shall rejoice more and more) in Jehovah, and the poor among men in the Holy One of Israel shall rejoice...*”

“Not only should the ignorant be taught of God, but the wretched should be rendered happy in the enjoyment of His favor.” (P. 468)

Motyer calls this “the spiritual aspect of the transformation.” He adds that “Now [the people’s] joy will far exceed what they [previously] experienced. The humble (עֲנוּיִם, **anawiyim**) are the underdogs, those at the bottom of life’s heap...The needy (אֲבִיוֹנִים, **ebhyoniym**) are those capable of being pushed around by stronger, more influential people and vested interests.” (P. 242)

Oswalt comments that **verse 19** “carries on the thought of **verse 18**, using the language of the helpless and oppressed. But a further thought is added, one which will reappear in **verse 23**. This is the idea that the coming deliverance will result in new praise to God.” (P. 538)

And (humble) poor people will add / increase joy in the YHWH,
and (needy) poor people of humanity will rejoice in (the) Set-apart One of Israel!⁷¹

29:20⁷² כִּי־אֶפֶס עָרִיץ

וְכָל־הָלֵץ

וְנִכְרְתוּ כָל־שֹׁקְדֵי אֹן:

Because (the) awe-inspirer / terror-striker⁷³ ceased,

⁷¹Slotki comments that “By the *humble* and *neediest* are meant the depressed classes who have been downtrodden by the unscrupulous nobles.” (P. 138)

Kaiser says that “The meek and poor...those whose whole hope has been and has remained in God, will then be seized by exultant joy...because the time of their sufferings will be over, and they will see what they have faithfully hoped for, the age in which there will no longer be any injustice, and in which the Holy One of Israel will be sanctified by His people...While the devout will be able to rejoice in the Holy One of Israel, this entails the maintenance of His holiness by the destruction of His opponents.” (P. 280)

⁷²Motyer states that in **verses 20-21**, “there is the social aspect of the transformation.” (P. 242)

Kaiser comments on these two verses that “The period in which the ruthless... scoffers...and all other people bent upon evil could have continued their activities will lie in the past, and the enemies of the devout and of God will be destroyed. The example given of the wrongdoings is that of abuses in the courts, as the most obvious perversion of justice.” (P. 280)

Alexander translates **verse 20**: “*For the violent is at an end, and the scoffer ceaseth, and all the watchers for injustice are cut off.*”

He comments that “A main cause of the happiness foretold will be the weakening or destruction of all evil influences, here reduced to the three great classes of violent wrong-doing, impious contempt of truth and goodness, and malignant treachery or fraud, which watches for the opportunity of doing evil, with as constant vigilance as ought to be employed in watching for occasions of redressing wrong and doing justice. This is a change which, to some extent, has always attended the diffusion of the true religion.” (P. 468) We say Yes...but it is an unending task!

⁷³Slotki comments that Isaiah is referring to “tyrannical Assyria.” (P. 138)

(continued...)

and one scorning came to an end;
and all those performing / keeping watch for wickedness⁷⁴ will be cut off!

29:21⁷⁵ מַחֲטִיאֵי אָדָם בְּדָבָר

וְלִמּוֹכֵיחַ בְּשֵׁעַר יִקְשׁוּן

וַיִּטְוּ בַתְּהוֹ צְדִיק:

Those causing humanity to miss-the-mark by a word,⁷⁶
and they lay a trap for the one reproving in the gate,⁷⁷

⁷³(...continued)

Motyer comments that “The *ruthless* (עֲרִיץ, (**ariyts**, ‘awe-inspiring,’ ‘terror-striking’) are the unscrupulous, unsparing in their use of power.” (P. 242)

⁷⁴Slotki states that this means “Men who are on the lookout to work mischief.” (P. 138)

Motyer similarly states that “‘All who have an eye for evil / are watchful for trouble’ are those who are alert to make trouble, those whose interests are served by the breakdown of law and order.” (P. 242)

⁷⁵Alexander translates **verse 21**: “*Making a man a sinner for a word, and for him disputing in the gate they laid a snare, and turned aside the righteous through deceit.*”

He comments that “Some understand the first clause to mean, seducing people into sin by their words. It is much more common to explain דָּבָר, **dabhar** as meaning a judicial cause or matter...The whole phrase may then mean unjustly condemning a man in his cause, which agrees well with the obvious allusion to forensic process in the remainder of the verse...The general sense is plain, that is, that they embrace all opportunities and use all arts to wrong the guiltless.” (P. 469)

Motyer states that in **verse 21**, “three abuses of the legal system are mentioned: false testimony, tampering with witnesses, and denying the innocent the protection of the law.” (P. 242)

⁷⁶Slotki holds that the phrase “by a word” means “by false evidence.” (P. 138)

⁷⁷Slotki comments that the one reproving is “the preacher, judge or any one who condemns wickedness and injustice.” He adds that “in the gate” means in “the place where public affairs were transacted.” (P. 138)

(continued...)

And they thrust a rightly-related person aside⁷⁸ into the confusion.⁷⁹

29:22⁸⁰ לָכֵן כִּה־אָמַר יְהוָה אֶל־בֵּית יַעֲקֹב

⁷⁷(...continued)

Alexander states that “Most of the modern [mid-19th century] writers take it in the sense of arguing, disputing, pleading, in the gate, i.e. the court, often held in the gates of oriental cities...The phrase describes the perversion or abuse of justice by dishonest means, and thus agrees with the expressions used in the foregoing clauses.” (P. 469)

Motyer holds that “‘*The defender / the one who reproves*’ is the person who stands up in court (literally ‘in the gate,’ the place where cases were heard) to oppose the wrong,” (P. 242)

⁷⁸Slotki states that this means they “*turn aside the just* from his rightful claims.” (P. 138)

Alexander states that “By the *turning aside* of the righteous (i.e. of the party who is in the right), we are here to understand the depriving him of that which is his due.” (P. 469)

⁷⁹The phrase בַּתְּהוֹן, **bhattohu**, our “into the confusion,” is translated by the **American-Jewish Translation of the Scriptures** “with a thing of nought,” which Slotki says means with “flimsy arguments.” Other translations have “for a thing of nought,” or “by falsehood,” or “without grounds,” or “with false testimony,” or “groundlessly,” or καὶ ἐπλαγίασαν ἐν ἀδίκοις δίκαιον, “and they turned aside a righteous person with unrighteous persons.”

Alexander comments that “בַּתְּהוֹן, **bhattohu** has been variously understood to mean *through falsehood*...or by means of a judgment which is null and void, or for nothing, i.e. without just cause. In either case the phrase describes the perversion or abuse of justice by dishonest means, and thus agrees with the expressions used in the foregoing clauses.” (P. 469)

Motyer says “‘With false testimony (תְּהוֹן, **tohu**)...here means ‘on no ground at all,’ ‘for some meaningless triviality.’” He adds that “For the setting of all this in pre-exilic Israel, see **Hosea 4:1-2; Amos 2:6-8; 5:10-11**; and **Micah 2:1-2**.” (P. 242)

One thing is clear in the prophetic message—the people of YHWH must defend and fight for justice in society, especially in the legal system!

⁸⁰Motyer entitles **verses 22-24** “The third transformation: the changed fortune of Israel.” (P. 243)

Kaiser’s title is “The nature of the time of salvation.”

(continued...)

אֲשֶׁר פָּדָה אֶת־אֲבֹרָהִם
 לֹא־עָתָה יִבּוֹשׁ יַעֲקֹב
 וְלֹא עָתָה פְּנֵי יַחֲוּרוֹ:

Therefore⁸¹ in this way YHWH spoke to Jacob's household,
 Who redeemed Abraham,^{82, 4}

⁸⁰(...continued)

He comments that "The word of God [that is, the word which is attributed to YHWH] which forms the climax and conclusion of the promise begins with a solemn introduction recalling the history of salvation and proclaims comfort and hope to those who are tempted and suffering...

"The devout poet believed that in the name of his God he could assure his community and those who heard and read the **Isaiah roll** [or scroll] that the time in which the people who had come down in history under the name of Jacob were objectively and subjectively made a mockery and put to shame is now past for ever...

"Yahweh would judge Jerusalem by the flood of the nations and then smite the nations themselves, and the nations would then make pilgrimage to Zion." (Pp. 280-81)

Alexander translates **verse 22**: "*Therefore thus saith Jehovah to the house of Jacob, He who redeemed Abraham, Not now shall all Jacob be ashamed, and not now shall his face turn pale.*" (P. 469)

See our footnote 83 for this phrase "not now."

⁸¹Slotki comments that the word "*Therefore*" means "for the reason that follows in **verse 23**." (P. 138)

⁸²Slotki comments that this means "From the fiery furnace into which, according to [non-biblical] tradition, he had been cast by Nimrod for refusing to worship his idols." (P. 138) See our end-note 1 for the story from **Genesis Rabbah**.

Alexander comments that "There is no need of referring the redemption of Abraham to his removal from a land of idolatry. The phrase may be naturally understood, either as signifying deliverance from danger and the Divine protection generally, or in a higher sense as signifying Abraham's conversion and salvation." (P. 469)

But where in the **Bible** is there any indication of Abraham's "conversion and salvation"? Is that not an example of anachronistic reading of centuries later Christian ideas and vocabulary into the **Hebrew Bible**? We say the biblical story of Abram /

(continued...)

Not now⁸³ will Jacob be ashamed,

⁸²(...continued)

Abraham's lying to Pharaoh and selling his wife Sarah to Pharaoh as a sexual toy is plenty enough to imply Abraham's need for redemption. See **Genesis 12:10-20**.

Isaiah, like the **Book of Genesis**, is much more realistic with reference to Abram / Abraham than are many idealistic views which turn him into a saint, a fountain-head of virtues!

Oswalt states that "Nothing in the canonical literature speaks of any 'redemption' of Abraham." (P. 540) But of course, the **Book of Isaiah** is "in the canonical literature," and speaks of Abraham's "redemption." Oswalt must have meant "nowhere else"!

⁸³Slotki states that the phrase לֹא-עַתָּה, **lo** (**attah**, "not now," means "In the distant future, which, in the prophet's vivid vision, appears as the present." (P. 138)

And we ask, Is that really what "not now" means? Or is this Slotki's way of getting around the obvious fact that the prediction has failed?

But we must be warned, when looking at modern science's view of time and the universe, which involves millions of years, all of our common views of time as "long" and "short" are relatively meaningless.

Compare the statement in **2 Peter 3:8**, "But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Yes, our human understanding of time is dwarfed by the Divine—and where we think 2,500 years is a "long time," for the Lord it is like 2 ½ days!

Alexander comments that "The Hebrew phrase *not now* does not imply that it shall be so hereafter, but on the contrary, that it shall be no more." (P. 469)

What do you think the phrase means in this verse? Does "not now" mean "no more"? Compare **Numbers 24:17**, the only other place in the **Hebrew Bible** where we find this same phrase. It depicts the Moabite prophet Balaam as saying:

I will see him, but not now;

I will behold him, but not near.

A star walked / went from Jacob,

and a rod / sceptre / tribe arose / will arise from Israel;

and it will shatter / wound severely Moab's borders,

and it will tear down all Seth's children!

(There can be little doubt that here in **Numbers 24:17** "not now" means "in the future." Because of this, we agree with Slotki over against Alexander that this is most probably what the phrase means here.)

and not now will his face / appearance grow pale.⁸⁴

29:23⁸⁵ כִּי בְרֵאתוֹ יִלְדֵי מַעֲשֵׂה יָדַי בְּקִרְבּוֹ

⁸⁴Slotki explains that this means “*will not grow pale* from humiliation and insult.” (P). 139)

Motyer comments that “Imaginatively, Jacob is pictured as the anxious observer of the experiences of his descendants, often embarrassed and abashed by what he sees in them, paling with fright lest at any point they have forfeited the promises. But in the day of fulfillment all that will be in the past.” (P. 243)

We say, Perhaps his fright concerning the future of his descendants is because of Jacob, the “heel-grabber’s” own past!

Oswalt translates by “no longer...ashamed,” and holds that this “reiterates one of the themes of **Isaiah** and of the **Bible** in general: Jacob will finally put its trust in God and not in other places. Those other places have let the nation down and it has been disgraced.” (P. 540)

⁸⁵Alexander translates / comments on **verse 23**: “*For in his seeing (i.e. when he sees) his children, the work of My hands, in the midst of him, they shall sanctify My name, and sanctify (or yes, they shall sanctify) the Holy One of Jacob, and the God of Israel they shall fear...*”

“We have seen reason, wholly independent of this verse, to believe that the immediately preceding context has respect to the excision of the Jews and the vocation of the Gentiles. Now the latter are described in the **New Testament** as Abraham’s (and consequently Jacob’s) spiritual progeny, as such, distinguished from his natural descendants. May not these adventitious [formed accidentally] or adopted children of the patriarch, constituted such by the electing grace of God, be here intended by the phrase, the work of My hands? If so, the whole may thus be paraphrased: when he (the patriarch, supposed to be again alive, and gazing at his offspring) shall behold his children not by nature, but, created such by Me, in the midst of him (i.e. in the midst, or in the place, of his natural descendants), they (i.e. he and his descendants jointly) shall unite in glorifying God as the Author of this great revolution...”

“To the passage thus explained, a striking parallel is found in **Isaiah 49:18-21**, where YHWH is depicted as saying to Zion:

- 18 Lift up your eyes all around, and see—
All of them gathered, they came to you.
As I live—a saying of YHWH—
that you shall wear all of them like the ornament,
and you shall bind them on like the bride!
- 19 Because your ruins and your desolations
and (the) land of your destruction--

(continued...)

יְקַדְּשׁוּ שְׁמִי
וְהִקְדִּישׁוּ אֶת-קְדוֹשׁ יַעֲקֹב
וְאֶת-אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יַעֲרִיצוּ:

Because when he⁸⁶ sees his children,⁸⁷ (the) work of My hands in his midst,
they will set-apart My name;
and they will make (the) Set-apart One of Jacob set-apart / special,
and they will reverence / stand in awe of Israel's God!⁸⁸

⁸⁵(...continued)

- because now it will be too small / cramped for (so many) inhabitant(s).
And those swallowing you up will be far away!
- 20 Again they will say in your ears, (the) children of your bereavement,
the place is (too) narrow for me,
draw near to me, and I will dwell (here)!
- 21 And you will say in your heart,
Who gave birth for me to these?
And I—childless and barren, exiled and put away--
and these—who raised (them)?" (Pp. 469-7)

We say, Perhaps...but how did “in the midst of” come to mean “in the place of”?

Watts comments on **verse 23** that “God expects the sight of surviving *children* after all the terrible and uncertain times to lead Israel to view them as the *work of God's hands*, as products of His miraculous preservation. This should prompt genuine worship and commitment in contrast to that in **verse 13**.” (P. 389)

⁸⁶Slotki explains that the personal pronoun “he” refers to “Jacob, the old generation.” (P. 139)

⁸⁷Oswalt comments that “*his children* has been treated primarily in one of two ways, either as a gloss explaining ‘it’ and referring to the works of God’s hands...or as an example of nearer definition: ‘When he, that is, his children, see...*they* will praise’... It fits the Isaianic setting well, for the image of child-bearing and of progeny is a prominent one in the **book**...

“The point here would be that instead of being disgraced by its barrenness, the house of Jacob would be wonderfully fruitful, a condition provoking admiration on all sides...The response of Jacob will be to sanctify the name of the Holy One.” (P. 541)

⁸⁸Alexander comments, much more helpfully in our estimation, that “The emphatic mention of the Holy One of Jacob and the God of Israel as the object to be

(continued...)

⁸⁸(...continued)

sanctified, implies a relation still existing between all believers and their spiritual ancestry, as well as a relation of identity between the Jewish and the Christian church.” (P. 470)

We agree! But this is quite different from saying that the Jews have been cut out, “excised”, and replaced by the Christians!

Motyer comments that “They [believers] will at last confess that He is holy and acknowledge His holiness as central to their lives. Stand in awe (root עָרַץ, (**arats**) is the parent of the adjective ‘ruthless’ in **verse 20**, an enormously strong expression of reverential, trembling dread before the awesome *God of Israel*.” (P. 243)

⁸⁹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 24**: “*Then shall the erring in spirit know wisdom, and the murmurers (or rebels) shall receive instruction...*”

“These words would be perfectly appropriate as a general description of the reclaiming and converting influence to be exerted upon men in general. But under this more vague and comprehensive sense, the context, and especially the verse immediately preceding, seems to show that there is one more specific and significant [sense] included. If the foregoing verse predicts the reception of the Gentiles into the family of Israel, and if this reception, as we learn from the **New Testament**, was connected with the disinheriting of most of the natural descendants, who are, nevertheless, to be restored hereafter, then the promise of this final restoration is a stroke still wanting to complete the prophetic picture now before us...

“That finishing stroke is given in this closing verse, which adds to the promise that the Gentiles shall become the heirs of Israel, another--that the heirs of Israel according to the flesh shall themselves be restored to their long-lost heritage, not by excluding their successors in their turn, but by peaceful and brotherly participation with them.” (Pp. 470-71)

But in so commenting, Alexander is interpreting **Isaiah 29** on the basis of the **New Testament (Romans 9-11)**, reading ideas into the text which are not actually found in it.

Motyer comments that “This **verse [24]** describes two aspects of transformed individual life in those who are *the work of My hands (verse 23)*. They will exhibit steadiness of life.” (P. 243)

Oswalt comments on **verse 24** that “The order of events is significant here: deliverance is followed by praise, which results in understanding...To know understanding and learn knowledge is to come to an experiential grasp of truth...People

(continued...)

וְרוֹגְנִים יִלְמְדוּ-לְקַח:

And those going astray in spirit⁹⁰ will know understanding;
and those murmuring / complaining⁹¹ will learn teaching / instruction.⁹²

⁸⁹(...continued)

come to know God through the demonstration of His holiness in the lives of other people.”

Kaiser states that in **verse 24** “Once again the poet turns to what is clearly his main concern, the true understanding of scripture, which of course after the fulfillment of all the sayings of the prophets would present no difficulties [but this usages of the word ‘scripture’ comes from a much later, post Christian time, when the various writings of the Jewish prophets were put together to form ‘the **Tanakh, Scripture,**’ i.e., the canonical **Bible**.”

And to say that following that gathering together of all the prophetic writings, there would be no difficulties presented, is surely stated in jest—there are all sorts of difficulties for the reader of the prophetic literature attempting to put them all together—take for instance, the **Book of Zechariah!** And in addition, there is the constant presence of puzzling enigmas throughout the prophetic message!...

“In an age which was apparently far from God, the poet, who was convinced that God has once acted in His people, was drawing the attention of his people to the future which would once again belong to their God. And it is regarded as very close [Yes—and in that sense, the prophetic picture is mistaken, unless the passing of some three millennia is not to be considered ‘far away’! See our footnote 83]...

“The **New Testament** church, and particularly the established churches of the present day, contain similar groups with similar concerns. As long as they take God seriously, they will also look forward to the consummation of the world at His hands...

“But how can they really look forward to the future power and glory of God if they do not take it seriously now, and so act in every respect with the aim neither of reviling His name nor of giving others cause to revile it. We do not know at what hour the clock stands in the history of the world (compare **Mark 13:32 / Matthew 24:30**, ‘But concerning that day of that hour, no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father’), but we ought to know where we stand ourselves.” (Pp. 281-2)

⁹⁰Motyer states that the *spirit* is the energy (even ‘gusto’) in which life is lived.” (Pp. 243-44)

⁹¹Motyer comments that “*Those who complain* (root רָגַן, **raghan**) is found [elsewhere] only at **Deuteronomy 1:27; Psalm 106:25**, and is used of bitter refusal of

(continued...)

⁹¹(...continued)
the Lord's word, self-pitying determination to put the worst construction on things,
paranoic inflexibility in the understanding of life." (P. 244)

⁹²Slotki says that this means learning "the true knowledge of Divine worship and
genuine religion." (P. 139)

Motyer comments that the complainers "will *accept instruction* / learn conviction,'
exchange their stubbornness for true instruction." (P. 244)

1.

The Oldest Name for Jerusalem, Uru-Salima

Manfred R. Lehmann, in an article on the Internet on “Jerusalem” (4/9/2017) says the following about the first recorded name for Jerusalem:

“We meet the name of Jerusalem in ancient cuneiform documents as “Uru-Salima” – “City of Peace.”

“In the so-called Tel-el-Amarna tablets, found in Egypt over 100 years ago, the local Canaanite kings corresponded with the Pharaohs of Egypt about their political and military predicaments caused by the invasion of the Habirus (Hebrews). The king of Uru-Salima is among them. This refers to the time around 1400 B.C.E. After the city became King David’s and Solomon’s capital in about 1000 B.C.E., we find the dual form of the name Yerushalayim, which resulted from the fact that the city consisted of two parts; the Upper City, which held the Temple and the Royal Palace, and the Lower City, built on the ridge going down the Hinnom Valley, today called City of David.

2. Harry Hoffner on the Word אֹב, Jobh, and Necromancy

Harry Hoffner has written extensively concerning the word אֹב, Jobh, “skin-bottle” or “pit,” or “necromancer”: “From the fifteenth to the end of the thirteenth centuries B.C.E. examples of this sort appear in the Hittite ritual. In this ritual, sacrificial pits...were dug...in the ground at a place which had been determined by interrogating the Gods. In this pit, oblations (loaves, cheese, butter, honey mixed with milk, oil, honey, wine, beer, and sacrificial blood), expensive gifts of silver (models of the human ear, breast ornaments, a miniature ladder) and often even the sacrificial animal was lowered, [where] someone below in the pit slaughtered it. Two of the objects lowered into the pit symbolized the twofold intention of the entire procedure. The silver model of an ear indicated the wish of the offerer to ‘hear’ and to learn from the inhabitant of the underworld. The silver ladder or staircase expressed the desire that the spirit might ascend to the world above...

“Of particular interest is the personification of the pit as the Deity **DA-a-bi**, who is the object of a particular exorcism ritual. He is the God of the underworld, and presides there over a court of justice in which the scales...are used. **DA-a-bi** belongs to the same class of underworld Deities as the chthonic [pertaining to the Gods and spirits of the underworld] spirit **tarpish**. It is very probable that **tarpish** represents the same ancient migratory word as Hebrew **teraphim**. Thus, both **Jobh** and **teraphim** are to be identified as mantic [relating to divination or prophecy] properties of the underworld, in which it was thought that the source of true knowledge was to be found...

“The **Old Testament** uses this expression in three different senses:

- (1) the pit which has been dugged out, by means of which the spirits of the dead are called up (**1 Samuel 28:7-8**);
- (2) the spirit or spirits of the dead which are troubled (**Isaiah 29:4**); and
- (3) the necromancer who calls forth the spirits to get information (**Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11; 1 Samuel 28:3, 9; 2 Kings 21:6 [=2 Chronicles 33:6]; 23:24; Isaiah 8:19...**)

“The spirit ascends...from the ground and undoubtedly comes forth from a prepared opening. Although the language of **Isaiah 29:4** is perhaps somewhat figurative, still in the scornful words found there we can get some impression of the way in which the spirits were called: ‘Then deep from the earth you shall speak, from low in the dust your words shall come; your voice shall come from the ground like the voice of a ghost, and your speech shall whisper out of the dust.’ The prophets of Yahweh describe the audible manifestations of the **Jobh** as ‘whispering’ or ‘chirping’ (**tsaphtseph**), an expression which denotes the cry of certain birds (**Isaiah 10:14**) or the rustling of the leaves of the willow tree...The different verbs connected with **Jobh** indicate only that here was the source of secret information: a person ‘turned to’... ‘sought’ ...‘used’...the necromancer, who asked advice of...the spirit or spirits who came up out of the pit, or ‘divined by’ (**qasam be, 1 Samuel 28:8**) them.

“**1 Samuel 28** is the most fruitful and probably also the oldest witness in the **Old Testament** for the understanding of **Jobh**. In this passage we learn that the crisis which gave rise to the consultation of the necromancer was a serious military threat (**verses 4-5**). Naturally, the approved ways of seeking advice (...’prophets’; ‘Urim’;...’dreams’) were exhausted first, but Yahweh did not answer...When this happened, out of desperation Saul commanded his officers to seek out for him a woman who had access to an **Jobh**. Saul went to her at night partly to conceal his identity, and partly because necromancers of this sort preferred to do their work at night. He made a twofold request:

- (1) ‘Divine (**qasam**) for me by a spirit (**Jobh**),’ and
- (2) ‘Bring up for me...whomever I shall name to you’ (**verse 8**).

After the woman had obtained a promise of protection from her client (**verse 10**), the name of the dead person who should be brought up was given to her (**verse 11**).

“This passage gives no information as to the procedure the woman used to entice the spirit of Samuel to come forth. When it appeared, she alone had a visionary experience (**verses 12-13**), because Saul had to ask her: ‘What do you see?’ This visionary experience gave the woman greater potential for comprehension, for suddenly she knew the true identity of her disguised client (**verse 12**). She described that which appeared to her in the vision as ‘spirits (...**elohiym**, ‘Gods’) coming up out of the (opening in the) earth’ (**verse 13**), and as ‘an old man...who is wrapped in a robe...(verse 14). The account of Saul’s nocturnal visit to the **ba(-alath) Jobh** is told in artistic literary style. But still there can be no doubt that this document accurately reflects the practice of necromancy in ancient Israel.” (Harry Hoffner, **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** I, pp. 130-34)

All of this, of course, is very strange to our modern, “western” eyes and ears. But in order to interpret the documents of the **Torah**, especially **Exodus**, **Leviticus** and **Isaiah** in a truly genuine way, we must think our way into that ancient world-view, so saturated with magic and the rituals of fertility religion.

3. The Sealing of Documents in the Ancient Near East

“In an intriguing but opaque [not transparent] **Old Testament** passage, the prophet Jeremiah relates an event that occurred about 590 B.C.E. Pursuant to his right of redemption within the family and with prophetic foreknowledge of the transaction, Jeremiah bought from his cousin a field located at Anathoth in the lands of Benjamin. His willingness to make this long-term investment was supportive of God's enduring promise that ‘houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land’ (**Jeremiah 32:15**), notwithstanding the prophecy that Jerusalem would also soon fall to the invading Babylonians (see **verse 3**).

“In order to memorialize his purchase as impressively and as permanently as possible, Jeremiah as purchaser drafted and executed not just a single document but a two-part deed. One part of its text “was sealed according to the law [*mitzvah*] and customs [*huqqim*],” and the other part of the document “was open” (**verse 11**; compare **verse 14**). Jeremiah signed this double document and sealed it, as did several other people who witnessed the transaction and subscribed the text (see **verses 10, 12**). Moreover, in order to preserve this evidence of his purchase, Jeremiah took his doubled, sealed document and, in the presence of his witnesses, securely deposited it with both of its parts in a clay jar, ‘that they may continue many days’ (**verse 14**).

“Jeremiah's detailed account reflects many interesting legal technicalities that were evidently well known and customary in his day. As John Bright says of Jeremiah's text, ‘Technical legal terminology is no doubt involved,’ even though the precise nature of this practice cannot be ascertained from the Hebrew text alone, let alone the ordinary English translations. Only because of several archaeological discoveries in the twentieth century can we now understand this interesting form of ancient legal documentation.

“When written on parchment or papyrus, legal documents were written on a single sheet, but the text was written twice, once at the top and again at the bottom of the sheet. The repeated text could be either a verbatim copy or an abridgment of the full text. The document was then folded so that one part was open for inspection and use, while the other part was protected and sealed.

“A similar procedure was followed when important records were written on metal. In that case two or more metal plates were used. For example, two bronze tablets of the Roman emperor Trajan, with a Roman date equivalent to C.E. October 103, present the full text of an official decree neatly lettered on the open side of the first bronze plate and then repeated exactly in more hurried lettering on the inside faces of the two plates. Having an open version and also a sealed iteration of important documents served several purposes, and in some cases following this convention was legally mandated.

“Sealing (closing) the document was also essential, and the manner of sealing papyrus or parchment documents was relatively standard. Typically, these documents have a horizontal slit from the edge of the papyrus to the middle, between the two texts. The top half was rolled to the middle and then folded across the slit. Three holes were punched from the slit to the other side, thin papyrus bands were threaded through these

holes and wrapped around the rolled-up and folded-over upper portion of the document, and on these bands the seals (wax or clay impressions) of the participants were affixed. The manner of sealing metal documents was functionally the same.

“Witnesses were necessary, and their number could vary. In one Assyrian agreement on a clay tablet from 651 B.C.E. that documented the sale of a property, twelve witnesses were listed. The **Babylonian Talmud** stipulated that ‘at least three witnesses were required by law.’ Accordingly, in most Jewish texts three witnesses were common, and it appears that normally not more than seven were used, although in principle one witness was required to sign on each fold and ‘if there are more than three folds more witnesses must be added, one for each fold.’

When and by whom could these seals be opened? It appears that only a judge or some other duly authorized official could break the seals and open the document. In Babylonia, if a dispute ever arose concerning the correct wording of the contract, a judge could remove the outer envelope and reveal the original tablet. John the Revelator, seeing the book sealed with seven seals, ‘wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book’ that he beheld, until ‘the Lion of the tribe of Judah...prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof’ (**Revelation 5:4–5**; compare **Isaiah 29:11**).” (From the Internet, by Mormon scholar John W. Welch, “Doubled, Sealed, Witnessed Documents,” 4/12/2017)

Signed, Sealed and Delivered: An Archaeological Exposition of Jeremiah 32: 1-15

“This essay is dedicated to Dr. Gabriel ‘Goby’ Barkay and Zachi Zweig, co-directors of the Temple Mount Sifting Project; and to the tens of thousands who have sifted the dirt from the Holy Hill of Zion (**Psalms 102:14**)

Introduction

“It is always the archaeologist’s dream to find inscriptional material, such as a seal, bulla, stela, ostraca, clay tablet, papyrus, scroll, or even just graffiti on a wall. In Israel, an inscription is a rare find, and some are revealed to be forgeries.

“In the summer of 2005, the Jerusalem Post reported the discovery of a tenth-century wall in the City of David in Jerusalem by Dr. Eilat Mazar. One of her area supervisors also discovered a bulla (a dried lump of clay with a seal impression on it) of an individual named ‘Jerucal ben [son of] Shelemiah ben [son of] Shevi.’ The name of this person appears in **Jeremiah 37:3** and **38:1**. This seal impression adds a detail that the **Bible** does not mention: the name of his grandfather, Shevi (Lefkovits 2005:13; Mazar 2007:67-69).

“In this essay we will examine the command that God gave to Jeremiah to redeem a field from his cousin, Hanamel of Anathoth. Particular attention will be given to the archaeological background to this chapter and how it illustrates the biblical text. Jeremiah’s obedience to God’s command, in spite of a hopeless situation, was a vivid lesson to the people of Judah that God would return His people from the Babylonian

captivity. Jeremiah had publicly proclaimed to the people of Judah that God would restore them to the land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah's faith in the promise of God was shown by buying the field at Anathoth, a city already destroyed by the Babylonians. Jeremiah was literally putting his money where his mouth was!

Jeremiah Redeems a Field in Anathoth as a Sign of Future Redemption (**32:1-15**)

The Time Setting. **32:1, 2**

"The date that is given in this chapter is the tenth year of Zedekiah and the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (**32:1**). This date would be in 587 B.C.E. Two deportations of Judeans to Babylon had already taken place (605 B.C.E. and 598 B.C.E.). In the tenth year of Zedekiah, the Babylonians were besieging Jerusalem (**32:2**). Jeremiah was in the court of the prison in the king's house, possibly on the Western Hill.

"In the preceding two chapters (**Jeremiah 30** and **31**), Jeremiah forewarned the Judeans of the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah as well as the Babylonian captivity. But he also predicted that the people would return to the land of Judah. For this reason, these chapters have been called the 'book of consolation' or 'book of hope' (compare **Jeremiah 30:2**). At least nine times he predicts that the people of Judah will return to the land (**30:10, 11, 30:18, 31:3-6, 31:7-9, 31:10-12, 31:16, 17, 31:18, 31:23, 24**).

King Zedekiah complains of Jeremiah's prophecies. **32:3-5**

"The Prophet Jeremiah was not a popular preacher. He did not say to the people of Judah that God did not care about their lifestyle and that they could go on living in their sins. Nor did he say that the Babylonians were a peace-loving people with only good intentions toward Jerusalem and Judah. King Zedekiah understood the words of the prophet: First, the LORD was going to use the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem (**32:3**; compare **21:4-6**); second, King Zedekiah would attempt to flee from the Babylonians but he would be captured and taken to see King Nebuchadnezzar face to face (**32:4**; compare **21:7**); and finally, King Zedekiah would be taken captive to Babylon (**32:5a**). Jeremiah also added that it would be futile to fight the Babylonian army (**32:5b**).

"King Zedekiah did not like Jeremiah's 'doom-and-gloom' preaching. Yet everything Jeremiah said was based on the Mosaic Law as recorded in the Torah. As history unfolded, everything Jeremiah said in his seven encounters with King Zedekiah (**Jeremiah 21:1-7, 32:1-5, 34:1-7, 37:1-15, 37:16-21, 38:1-6, 38:14-28**) came to pass (**2 Kings 25:4-7; Jeremiah 39:1-10**). What Jeremiah had not told him was that his sons would be killed and his eyes would be put out by the Babylonians.

Jeremiah recounts the story of redeeming a field in Anathoth. **32:6-15**

"The city of Anathoth, Jeremiah's hometown, is located 4 kilometers (2½ miles) to the north of the Temple Mount in the tribal territory of Benjamin (compare **Joshua**

18:11-28; Jeremiah 1:1, 11:21-23, 29:27, 32:7-9; Hareuveni 1991). It was also a Levitical city (**Joshua 21:18**). Two of David's mighty men, Abiezar and Jehu, came from this city (**2 Samuel 23:27; 1 Chronicles 11:28, 12:3, 27:12**). A high priest, Abiathar, was exiled to his estate in the city (**1 Kings 2:26**). During the Syro-Ephraimite Campaign, Anathoth was a target for the invading army (**Isaiah 10:30**). After the Babylonian exile, some of the people of Anathoth returned to their hometown, just as Jeremiah had prophesied (**Ezra 2:23; Nehemiah 7:27, 11:32**).

“Jeremiah was in prison when the Lord spoke to him and said that his cousin, Hanamel, was going to visit and ask Jeremiah to buy his field in Anathoth (**32:6-7**). Jeremiah realized it was the hand of the Lord when Hanamel, the son of Shallum, showed up and asked Jeremiah to redeem his field in Anathoth partially based on the laws recorded in **Leviticus 25:23-28**. Jeremiah might have been aware that Anathoth had already fallen to the Babylonians (compare **32:25**). He redeemed the field because God commanded him to do so, rather than thinking: ‘This must be some cruel joke by my relatives who plotted to kill me a few years ago along with the men of Anathoth (**Jeremiah 11:18-23**). Now they are trying to sell me this field after the Babylonians destroyed the city. What a scam!’ God commanded him to buy the field so that Judah would have a sign that they would one day return from captivity in Babylon.

“In **verses 9-15** the transaction is recorded in detail. The first thing Jeremiah did was to weigh out the 17 shekels of silver scraps in order to buy the field (**32:9**). During the Iron Age, money – minted coins – had not yet been invented. So the shekels of silver would have been a weight of silver, not coins. Today, we would call it “junk silver,” e.g., broken pieces of a silver ring, silverware, old silver coins. In 1968, the largest hoard of junk silver ever discovered was in five Iron Age vessels in the ancient city of Eshtemoa in the Judean Hills. These vessels contained a total of 27.21 kilograms (62 pounds) of junk silver (Yeivin 1987:38-44).

“One shekel of silver weighed 11.33 grams (Kletter 1991:122,134). Jeremiah would have purchased the land for about 182.61 grams (0.182 kilograms) of silver. To give the American reader a contemporary perspective, that amount of silver would be equivalent to 73 Mercury-head dimes worth of silver. Keep in mind; however, there is not a speck of silver in the dimes currently being minted because they have been debased by the federal government!

“Unfortunately, the circumstances surrounding the transaction are not known. One cannot conclude that the land was worth \$7.30; the amount of silver used to purchase the land is equal to the amount of silver in 73 Mercury-head dimes, but its value is not. Therefore, we have no idea what the value of silver was at the time or whether its value was inflated because of the siege. We also do not know the size of the field being purchased or its market value. All we know for certain is that Jeremiah paid 17 shekels for that field.

“Jeremiah put 17 stone shekel weights on a pan on one side of the scale and proceeded to put seventeen shekels of silver scraps on a pan on the other side until the scale was balanced (**32:10**). During the 1977 season at the excavations of Tel Lachish, half of a balance beam from a scale was discovered in Stratum IV of Area S, dated to

the middle of the eighth century B.C.E. It was made of ivory, or polished bone, and was 10.1 cm (4 inches) long. If it were complete, then it would be about 20 cm (8 inches) long. The only other balance beam to be found in an archaeological excavation was at Megiddo (Barkay 1996:75-82).

“To finalize the land purchase, two “purchase deeds” were written up: an open one and a sealed one (**32:10-14**). The deeds were identical, but, in case of a dispute, the sealed one was the one that was binding. The sealed deed was put in a safe place so it could be opened if there was a problem. Probably, the transaction information, including the price of the sale, a description of the field being sold, and the identity of the buyer and seller were recorded on the document, which was papyrus. One deed was rolled up and tied with a string. A lump of clay was then placed on the string, and an impression was made with a seal that contained the owner’s name and possibly his title. This clay impression is known as a bulla (plural bullae). Although it is not stated in the text, the witnesses to the transaction might have added their bullae as well (Avigad 1986:125-127; Shiloh 1986:36-38; for illustrations as to how the deed might have been sealed: Avigad 1986:123, Figure 4; Brandl 2000:60, Figures 6; 63, Figure 9).

“The deeds were handed to Baruch the son of Neriah the son of Mahseiah for safe keeping. A bulla with the inscription ‘(Belonging) to Berekhyahu son of Neriyahu the scribe’ was discovered in a non-provenanced [history of ownership is unknown] hoard of bullae and published by Professor Nahman Avigad (1978, 1979, and 1986). A second, identical bulla is in a private collection (Shanks 1996:36-38). Baruch is the shortened form of the name Berekhyahu. Most likely this bulla was used by Baruch to seal documents when he was a royal scribe before 605 / 604 B.C.E. Avigad suggests that “Baruch seems eventually to have left his official position [of royal scribe] and joined Jeremiah in his struggle against the pro-Egyptian, anti-Babylonian policy of the court, a policy which was soon to lead to the destruction of Jerusalem” (1986:130). A word of caution is in order: recently one scholar identified these two bullae as forgeries (Rollston 2003:161), but there is still a scholarly debate as to their authenticity.

“Jeremiah instructed Baruch to take both purchase deeds and place them in an earthen vessel so they would be preserved for a long time (**32:13-14**). During the 1982 season at the City of David excavations in Jerusalem, 51 bullae (later revised to 53) were discovered in Locus 967 in Area G. This is the “first time that so large a group of easily legible Hebrew sealings has come to light in a controlled excavation, in a clear stratigraphic context and accompanied by architectural, ceramic and historical evidence” (Shiloh 1986:16-17). On the floor of what is now known as the ‘House of the Bullae’ were found ‘two vessels of uncommon form—tall kraters [tall, round jars used for storing water, etc.]with high trumpet bases. The latter are distinguished by their exceptionally high-quality slip and wheel-burnish covering the entire body. At the base of the body is a drainage (?) hole, made prior to firing’ (Shiloh 1986:23-24; Figures 6:2-3; Plate 6A). The excavator, Yigal Shiloh, suggested the possibility that these two kraters ‘may have served for storage of the papyri, the bullae from which were found scattered around them’ (1986:36). This collection of bullae dates to the end of the seventh and beginning of the sixth centuries B.C.E., which would make them contemporary with the Prophet Jeremiah (Shoham 2000:30).

Conclusions

“Jeremiah paid 17 shekels of silver to redeem his cousin’s field in Anathoth. He signed the land deed, sealed it with his personal seal, which the witnesses probably did as well, and then delivered the deed to his confidant Baruch for safe keeping in a clay vessel, most likely in an administrative archive. This account ends with the promise from the Lord that “Houses and fields and vineyards shall be possessed again in this land” (32:15).

“The situation looked bleak, because the Babylonians were about to destroy Jerusalem and take the Judeans captive to Babylon. Jeremiah, however, rested in the promise of God and proclaimed that the people would return to their land and rebuild their cities. He put his money where his mouth was by redeeming his cousin’s field.

“Perhaps one day, archaeologists will find a bulla or seal with the name of Jeremiah the prophet on it in a controlled archaeological excavation!

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(From the Internet, 4/12/2017, by Gordon Franz)

4.

Abraham, Nimrod, and the Fiery Furnace

A well-known midrashic story pertaining to Abraham's early life concerns his miraculous deliverance from a fiery furnace, into which he was cast by Nimrod, the notorious Babylonian-Assyrian biblical figure. One of the earliest rabbinic versions of this story is preserved in **Genesis Rabbah 38:11** (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 363-364):

He (Terah) took him (Abraham) and gave him over to Nimrod. (Nimrod) said to him: Let us worship the fire! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship water, which extinguishes fire! (Nimrod) said to him: Then let us worship the water! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the clouds, which carry the water? (Nimrod) said to him: Then, let us worship the cloud! (Abraham) said to him: If so, should we not then worship the wind, which scatters the clouds? (Nimrod) said to him: Then let us worship the wind! (Abraham) said to him: Should we not then worship the human, who withstands the wind? (Nimrod) said to him: You are merely piling words; we should bow to none other than the fire. I shall therefore cast you in it, and let your God to Whom you bow come and save you from it!

Haran (Abraham's brother) was standing there. He said (to himself): What shall I do? If Abraham wins, I shall say: I am of Abraham('s followers); if Nimrod wins I shall say, I am of Nimrod('s followers)." When Abraham went into the furnace and survived, Haran was asked: Whose (follower) are you? And he answered: I am Abraham's follower! So, they took him and threw him into the furnace, and his innards were burned and he died and predeceased Terah, his father. This is the meaning of the verse (**Genesis 11:28**), And Haran died in the lifetime of his father Terah.

(Internet, 4/1/2017)