

Isaiah Chapter 34, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes
YHWH's Fiery Judgments Will Continue In History--
a Prophetic Message Based on Dreams / Visions,
with Puzzling Language and Depictions of the Future

34.1¹ קָרְבוּ גוֹיִם לְשִׁמּוֹעַ

¹Watts entitles **chapters 34-39** “From Curse to Blessing.”

He comments that “A scene of total judgment on Edom is followed by a beautiful idyllic [extremely happy, peaceful, or picturesque] picture of Judah. The [Book of **Isaiah**] then invites the reader / audience to hear a reading of the account from **1 Kings 18-20** of Sennacherib’s siege of Hezekiah’s capital in 701 B.C.E.” (P. 1)

He adds that these chapters make “no mention of the siege of Jerusalem or the subsequent exile. They apparently presume that this is too well known to need another description.” (P. 2)

He entitles **34:1-35:10** “Edom’s Curse–Judah’s Renewal.”

He comments that “These chapters are clearly set off from the preceding and following sections. They are also bound into a unity by a basic theme of God’s vengeance or retribution against Edom (**34:8** and **35:4**) which is to be recorded as a perpetual decision (**34:16-17**)...

Judah’s strife with Edom had a long history...But it apparently came to a climax when Edom supported Babylon’s siege of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E and participated in the sack of the city. Neither **2 Kings** nor **2 Chronicles** records this, but **Obadiah** and related passages clearly state it...

“**Chapter 34** portrays a day of Yahweh’s judgment over the nations. Its structure is clear...The four substantive sentences beginning with כִּי, **khiy** each name something which belongs to Yahweh: קֵצֶף, **qetseph**, ‘anger,’ חֶרֶב, **cherebh**, ‘sword,’ זֶבַח, **zebhash**, ‘sacrifice,’ and יוֹם נִקָּם, **yom naqam**, ‘a day of vengeance’...

“**Chapter 35** portrays the response to Yahweh’s judgment on Edom by Judean residents and by pilgrims on their way to Jerusalem. Southern and southeastern Judah regains access to more favored lands occupied by Edom and to water from which she has been cut off. The pilgrims receive rights of passage to Jerusalem.” (Pp. 7-8))

Slotki states that in **chapters 34-35** “The doom and destruction of Edom are contrasted with the promised redemption.” (P. 159)

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Alexander comments on **chapters 34-35** that “This chapter and the next appear to constitute one prophecy, the first part of which (**chapter 34**) is filled with threatenings against the enemies of the church [Alexander means the Jewish church, the people of YHWH], the latter part (**chapter 35**) with promises to the church itself. The threatenings of **chapter 34** are directed, first against the nations in general (**verses 1-4**), and then against Edom in particular (**verses 5-15**), with a closing affirmation of the truth and certainty of the prediction (**verses 16-17**). The destruction of the enemies of Zion and the desolation of their lands are represented by the figure of a great sacrifice or slaughter, the falling of the heavenly bodies, the conversion of the soil into brimstone and the waters into pitch, and the inhabitation of [being occupied by] animals peculiar to the desert.

“Rabbi Moses Hacohen applies all this to the desolation of Edom in the days of Isaiah [as does] Grotius and Schmidius...Eusebius applies it of the day of judgment and the end of the world. Cyril makes the same application of **verses 1-4**, but applies the rest to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish commonwealth mystically represented here by Edom [as do] Theodoret and Cocceius...

“The rabbinical interpreters [with the exception of Moses Hacohen] explain Edom as a mystical or figurative name for Rome, or rather Christendom, of which Rome was once the representative, and understand the chapter as predicting the future downfall of the Christian powers in the days of the Messiah. On this same rabbinical hypothesis Vitringa rears a Christian exposition, by making Edom the emblem not of Christian but of antichristian (i.e. papal) Rome. So J. H. Michaelis, Gill, and others...Rosenmueller and the other recent [mid 19th century C.E.] German writers regard the whole as an extravagant expression of revengeful malice long posterior to Isaiah...

“The simplest and most satisfactory view of the whole passage is the one proposed by Calvin, who regards it as a general threatening of destruction to the enemies of Zion, Edom being particularly mentioned, as an enemy of ancient Israel, peculiarly inveterate [long established practice] and malignant, and thence used to represent the whole class of such enemies. Thus understood, the prophecy extends both to the past and future, and includes many particular events to which interpreters have erroneously endeavored to restrict it, not excepting the destruction of the antichrist, as the greatest event of this kind which is foretold in prophecy.” (Pp. 18-19)

Oswalt entitles **34:1-35:10** “Trusting God or the Nations: Results.”

He comments that “**Chapters 34-35** present a striking contrast between a productive land turned into a desert (**chapter 34**) and a desert turning into a garden (**chapter 35**). When all is said and done, the prophet says, the issues are clear and rather simple. Arrogant, self-important humanity cannot stand before God. In our attempts to be independent of Him and build the kingdom of Man on earth, we have

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sinned, and the word is the same for all: ‘The soul that sins shall die’ (**Ezekiel 18:4, 20**)...

“Those who choose to wait for God, to put themselves in His hands, though that be in a desert, will discover a highway which leads to a glory not their own...To align oneself with the nations of the earth is to choose a desert, to trust in God is to choose a garden.

“At least since the time of Ewald [Georg Heinrich Ewald, German protestant theologian, 1803-1875], some have said that **chapter 34** was dependent upon **Jeremiah** (see especially **Jeremiah 46:10; 49:7-16; 50:35-38; 51:43**)...Delitzsch recognized that the language of the two chapters showed more affinity with **chapters 40-66** than with **chapters 1-39**...C. C. Torrey proposed that the two chapters had originally formed the introduction to **chapters 40-66**...

“The fact that 1QIs^a shows a gap between **chapters 33** and **34** [we see no such gap in our photocopy] has occasioned the suggestion that the final redaction of the **Book of Isaiah** appeared in two volumes, roughly parallel in structure, and that **chapters 34** and **35** form the introduction to the second volume in a way similar to the way **chapters 1-5** introduce the first volume...

“In a way similar to **chapters 24-27**, they drive home the wisdom of trusting God and the folly of trusting the nations. In this they form the climax to the entire segment...

“The powerful poem in **34:1-17** depicts the effects of God’s wrath upon the nations. In **verses 1-4** the universal nature of the judgment is pictured. Not even the heavens themselves will escape. Then **verses 5-8** particularize the statement by applying it to Edom, much as was done with Moab in **25:10-12**. The language here is of sacrifice, reminding the reader that unless someone provides a sacrifice for our sins, we must ourselves become that sacrifice. Ultimately, as the **New Testament** makes plain, it is only God Himself Who can offer that sacrifice for all (**Romans 5:5-10**; but compare already **Isaiah 53**).” (Pp. 607-08)

We think Oswalt is going far beyond the evidence in his statement that “unless someone provides a sacrifice for our sins, we must ourselves become that sacrifice.” Such a statement limits God to being able to forgive only when sacrifice is offered—and such is not the case. God not only can, but has forgiven freely and fully, apart from any sacrifice. See, for example the powerful statement of **Isaiah 40:1-2**, and the story of King David’s forgiveness without any mention of sacrifice.

Oswalt continues: “**Verses 9-17** continue the address to Edom as the typical nation, depicting the land as left utterly desolate, inhabited by nothing but desert wildlife. This is the end of all human grasping for abundance: death and desolation.” (Pp. 606-08)

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Kaiser comments on **verses 1-17** that “Just as the concluding redaction [editing] of the **Book of Isaiah** placed the Apocalypse in **chapters 24-27** [we have questioned the labeling of these four chapters as ‘apocalypse’] after the oracles against the nations handed down in **chapters 13-23**, in order to turn the attention from individual events to the whole drama which would ultimately bring Israel salvation [Kaiser is overlooking the universalist statement of **25:6-9!**], here again an independent short apocalypse has been inserted after **chapters 28-32** [again we question the identification of **chapter 34** as an ‘apocalypse’]...

“This apocalypse gives an explicit assurance that Yahweh’s final judgment [there is no such phrase as ‘final judgment’ to be found in this chapter!] will also fall upon Edom, which it is clear was particularly hated, and will be followed by the return of the redeemed to Zion...

“The dependence which can be observed in the prophecy of salvation upon Deutero-Isaianic promises from the late exile period, preserved in **chapters 40-55**, has repeatedly led to the view that we have in the case of both chapters a composition which was originally also by Deutero-Isaiah [so, Marvin Pope, ‘**Isaiah 34** in Relation to **Isaiah 35, 40-66**’]...

“A close study of the related material and the whole conception shows that we have here an apocalyptic composition from the post-exilic period...It may even be from the late post-exilic period. **Isaiah 36:16** shows clearly the role which the prophetic book had come to have by this time. It is also clear that this short apocalypse was presumably composed directly in order to be inserted into the **Isaiah roll**...

“Just as Babylon played the role of the world power hostile to God and His people, Edom played both in the exilic and post-exilic period the role of the wicked neighbor, as we can tell from the prophecies of warning directed against it (compare **Lamentations 4:21-22; Psalm 137:7; Obadiah 11; Jeremiah 49:7ff.; Ezekiel 25:12ff.; 35:1ff.; 32:29; Joel 4:19; Malachi 1:2ff.** and **Isaiah 63:1ff.**, and also **Amos 1:11ff.**) Thus the Edomites seem not only to have taken part in one of the first punitive measures of Nebuchadnezzar against Jerusalem and Judah (compare **2 Kings 24:1**) and ultimately in the destruction and plundering of Judah in order to extend their own territory...

“Detailed studies of the poem have shown that the poet’s passion led here to a remarkable formal expression, though not associated with the highest degree of clarity of thought. Anyone who can read the Hebrew text will be aware both of the paronomasia [the use of a word in different senses or the use of words similar in sound to achieve a specific effect, as humor or a dual meaning; punning], the intentional play on the sound of the words chosen in **verses 3b, 4a, 4b, 6b, 7b** and **8a**, and of the parallel openings in verses in **verses 2, (5), 6b** and **8; 12a, 14b** and **15b**...

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“In considering the content, the present-day reader will find the prophecy of the return to Zion the most attractive, while the conception of the great festival of slaughter which Yahweh sets up for the Edomites, who in the **Old Testament** itself are really regarded as a brother nation of the Israelites (**Deuteronomy 23:8**) will be somewhat repulsive. A modern sociologist would perhaps categorize it among the poetry of the oppressed...

“The poet places his hope in God and not in his people’s sword. The reader must perhaps ask the fundamental question whether the God Who is love (**1 John 4:8**) can be reconciled at all by us men with the catastrophes of history...

“In the disasters of history, as in our failures with regard to each other, we human beings are cast upon God Whom we need. But when we come to know Him, we should beg not for the annihilation of our enemies, but for their enlightenment and their conversion (compare **Luke 23:34** [Jesus’ prayer for the forgiveness of those crucifying Him—a verse omitted by a number of early Greek manuscripts].” (Pp. 353-55)

Motyer entitles **verses 1-17** “The second universal proclamation: the final overthrow.”

He comments that “the opening section (**33:1-12**) of this final ‘woe’ acted as a preface, announcing the double theme of salvation and judgment. The salvation theme was developed further in the first universal proclamation (**33:13-24**). The second universal proclamation turns to the judgment theme. Central to the presentation is the use of Edom as typifying the Lord’s eschatological foe.” (P. 268)

Slotki comments on **34:1-4** that “Before describing the vengeance that is to come upon Edom, the prophet begins with a summons to all the nations of the world to hear an oracle on the terrors of the Divine wrath when God will sit in judgment on all peoples.” (P. 159)

Kaiser entitles **verses 1-4** “The judgment of the world is at hand.”

He comments that “a comparison with similar calls in **Deutero-Isaiah** shows that the poet has in mind the summoning of the peoples and nations to judgment, for them to hear the pronouncement of sentence...**Verse 1b** is particularly reminiscent of **Psalms 24:1**. The nations of the earth, the earth and the beings which live upon it are to know that Yahweh has resolved to annihilate all the nations and their armies, because He is enraged at them [compare **Zechariah 1:14-5**,

14 And the messenger / angel, the one speaking with me, said to me,
Cry out, saying, In this way YHWH of Armies spoke:
I was jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion, (with) a great jealousy!

(continued...)

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15 And (with a) great wrath I am angry against the nations, the ones at ease; against which I, I was angry a little, and they helped for evil.]

“The proclamation that a ban has been placed on them entails their extermination. To place a ban upon a hostile army and its property is one of the practices of the war of Yahweh which to us seem primitive, but which was perhaps still possible at this time...The proclamation of a ban before a battle means that the people condemned and their property are stated to be irreconcilable with one’s own people and their possessions...

“The consequence of Yahweh’s anger will accordingly be the total annihilation of the nations [but if so, how can this be reconciled with the coming of the nations to Zion as foretold in **Isaiah 2:2-4**, or the prediction of universal salvation in **Isaiah 25:6-9?**]... The poet begins to work out the image of the huge mountain of corpses (compare also **Ezekiel 39**) which under the southern sun gives off a filthy stench and from which innumerable streams of blood cause the mountains and hills to grow soft and melt away...

“When he goes on to foretell that the firmament of heaven...will be rolled up like a scroll (compare **Isaiah 51:6; 24:18, 21ff.**) he loses track of his image. For he goes on to speak not of the heavenly ocean which would then pour down upon the earth...but of the stars and constellations, the host of heaven (compare **Isaiah 40:26**), breaking loose and falling like faded leaves to the earth [an impossible image for modern understanding!]...

“Since he still needs the destroyed and devastated land of Edom to provide a contrast to the magnificent Holy Way, surrounded by watercourses and flowers, for the returning exiles, and clearly assumes that the geographical circumstances of the earth will continue to exist, he has not worked out final consequences of the destruction of the firmament and of the stars, but has really used it only as an image for the cosmic terrors associated with the day of Yahweh (compare **Isaiah 13:9-10**)...

“The conception of the end of the world can only logically be accepted in association with that of a new heaven and a new earth (compare **Revelation 21:1**). This idea, which is probably of Iranian origin, was not yet wholly accepted by the poet who writes here.” (Pp. 355-57)

In **Isaiah 34:1-4**, YHWH is pictured as being unalterably opposed to the evil of all the nations and peoples. He is calling the whole world to attention, and they will hear—the entire world, and everyone within it. It is a universal Self-revelation of YHWH that is being depicted—you can’t get more universal terms than those used here! YHWH’s wrath and rage is announced against the nations, devoting them to destruction and slaughter. They will be exterminated—in a devastating and final destruction of their world.

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Over against this terribly negative depiction, we remember the absolutely opposite depiction of **Isaiah 25:6-9**, with its promise of the ultimate salvation of all peoples and nations. And we are puzzled to understand how these opposing views can be held by one prophet, or by the **Book of Isaiah**. We must remember that the prophetic message is by its very nature puzzling and enigmatic, being based on revelation through dreams and visions, much like “seeing through a mirror darkly—see **Numbers 12:6-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:7-12**.

We suggest that Isaiah views YHWH as both Judge and Savior, holding that the Divine judgment comes against all peoples and nations, destroying sin and sinners—but in the long run, beyond the destructive judgments, brings salvation—the swallowing up of death and the wiping away of all tears—to those same peoples and nations. We think that an honest appraisal of the **Book of Isaiah** will lead to such a conclusion. And we say, do not conclude that because YHWH intends universal salvation for humanity, that there is no serious judgment to be faced in history or after death by all of us! But that judgment is not one of annihilation, but rather one of cleansing and re-creating, even out of the ashes of death and destruction!

What do you think? How do you put all of this together?

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 1**: “*Come near, ye nations, to hear; and ye peoples, hearken...*Let the earth hear and its fulness (that which fills it, all that it contains), *the world and all its issues* (or productions, all that comes forth from it.”

He comments that “This verse announces as about to be delivered, a prediction of great moment and deserving the attention of the whole world.” (P. 19)

Motyer comments that “Similar calls to the whole world are familiar in the **Psalms (96:1-3; 97:1; 98:1, 2, 4ff.)**. Knowledge of coming judgment is part of a Divine package for the world, which includes first the knowledge of salvation that though the law of God stands (**33:14-16**) there is a forgiving mercy that triumphs over judgment (**33:24**; compare **James [Jacob] 2:13**)...

“Note the scope of the summons: *nations, peoples, earth, world* plus the qualifying phrases *all that is in it / ‘all that fills it’* and *all that comes out.*” (P. 270)

Watts comments on **verse 1** that “The command to attend Yahweh’s court is issued to *nations* and *peoples*...The word pair is inclusive of all forms of social order and government...The land is understood in the [**Book of Isaiah**] to include the entire area of Palestine / Syria which David’s rule related to Yahweh’s kingship... *The world* (תבל) includes all the ‘known world’ and could be understood as the universe. Yahweh’s rights there were based on His role as Creator (compare **Psalms 93:1b-4; 94:3-5; 95:10-13; 98:7-9**.)” (P. 9)

וּלְאֲמִים הַקְּשִׁיבוּ
 תִּשְׁמַע הָאָרֶץ וּמְלֵאָהּ
 תָּבֵל וְכָל-צֶאֱצָאֶיהָ:

Draw near, O nations, to listen!

And peoples, pay attention!

The earth will hear, and its fullness;²

(the) world, and all its offspring.³

כִּי קִצְף לִיהוָה עַל-כָּל-הַגּוֹיִם 34.2⁴

²Oswalt notes that this phrase “is reminiscent of...**Psalm 25:1**, where it is plain that the ‘fullness’ of the earth is its population. It seems likely that the same is the case here.” (P. 608)

³Oswalt comments on **verse 1** that “In a manner somewhat reminiscent of **1:2**, the prophet calls for the whole world to gather round and hear its judgment pronounced ...This pronouncement to the nations looks back all the way to **chapter 13**... Servanthood begins in an abandonment of [human pomp and power] and the realization that God alone is to be trusted. Every other way must end in a desert.” (P. 608)

⁴Motyer states that in **verses 2-4**, “Beginning on the widest canvas, Isaiah reveals the fall of earth (**verses 2-3**) and heaven (**verse 4**) through the onset of Divine indignation.” (P. 270)

Watts comments on these three verses that “The first item on the agenda asserts Yahweh’s right to *wrath* and *fury* over *all nations* and their *armies*...

[The term ‘ban’] comes from the language of holy war...It was used of Israel’s occupation of Canaan...Yahweh claims here, as for Joshua’s occupation, the right to have any or all the nations ‘devoted’ to Him. Nothing from them can be claimed as booty...No part of Edom will fall into Israel’s possession...

“The formula here says *He gives them over to slaughter*. The judgment does not

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וְחַמָּה עַל-כָּל-צָבָאִים

הַחֲרִימָם

נִתְּנָם לַטֶּבַח:

Because wrath belongs to YHWH⁵ against all the nations,
and rage against all their army.
He devoted them to destruction,⁶

⁴(...continued)

have the purpose of making the land ready for another people, as was the case in Canaan, but of simple destruction and devastation. The dead are to be left unburied as a sign of special disrespect...

“The slaughter has its effect on the *mountains* which are blood-soaked and on *the army of the heavens*...[which] usually refers to the stars...

“All creation is affected by the sins of the nations and the necessary Divine reaction. It is a terrible and horrifying picture. But it is only the background for the announcement that follows.” (P. 9)

Alexander comments on and translates **verse 2**: “This verse assigns the reason for the invocation in the one before it. *For (there is) anger to Jehovah...Jehovah has anger (or is angry) against all the nations...And wrath (is to Jehovah) against all their host...He has doomed them, or devoted them irrevocably to destruction...He has given, (i.e. appointed and abandoned) them to the slaughter.* The past tense...describes the Divine determination or decree as really and literally past.” (P. 19)

Motyer comments on **verse 2** that “This is the first explanation (it begins with ‘For’) of the summons in **verse 1**. The Lord is angry is ‘the Lord has indignation.’” (P. 270)

⁵The phrase in Hebrew, לַיהוָה, *layhwah*, “to the YHWH,” as Watts notes, “expresses possession.” He adds that “The setting of an imperial court scene makes it the claim of a royal prerogative. Compare **verses 6a, 6c, and 8.**” (P. 5)

⁶Slotki’s translation of this line is “He hath utterly destroyed them.” But he states that a better translation is “‘placed them under a ban,’ to be destroyed.” (P. 159)

The Hebrew phrase is הַחֲרִימָם, *hecheriyam*, hiphil perfect, 3rd person

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He gave them for the slaughter.

34.3⁷ וַחֲלֵלֵיהֶם יִשְׁלַכּוּ

וּפְגַרֵיהֶם יַעֲלֶה בְּאֵשׁ

וְנִמְסוּ הָרִים מִדָּמָם:

⁶(...continued)

masculine singular from the root חָרַם, **charam**, “to ban, devote, exterminate.” See the article on this root in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament**, V, pp. 180-99, by N. Lohfink.

Oswalt comments that “The pronouncement is one of Divine wrath upon the nations. No cause is specified, but the statement of *cherem*, or devoting to destruction, would have been enough for any hearer, especially any Hebrew..This meant that the spoils must be completely destroyed to prevent any human misappropriation.” (P. 608)

Compare **Isaiah 11:15; Joshua 6:21; 1 Samuel 15:3**. That the concept was not merely Hebrew is shown by the Moabite Stone, lines 14-17:

And Chemosh said to me, Go, take Nebo from Israel! So I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn until noon, taking it and slaying all, seven thousand men, booty, women, girls and maid-servants, for I had devoted them to destruction for (the God) Ashtar-Chemosh. (James B. Pritchard, **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 320-21)

⁷Alexander translates / comments on **verse 3**: “*And their slain shall be cast out...i.e. unburied...They shall not lie unburied merely for a time, but until they rot upon the ground. And their corpses (or carcasses), their stench shall go up...And mountains shall be melted with (or by) their blood, as they are sometimes washed away by rains or torrents.*” (Pp. 19-20)

Motyer comments that “The reference to bodies and their corruption shows that sinners are finally implicated in the judgment due to their sin. Ultimately the adage about hating the sin and loving the sinner breaks down. Sinners pay the price of their sin: the Lord exacts it.” (P. 270)

Yes...but the sinners are all YHWH / God’s children, and He loves them; and beyond His judgment on sin lies His mercy and salvation—see again **Isaiah 25:6-9**. And we wonder, can it be that the “veil” or “covering” that veils or covers all nations is their sin, that YHWH will remove forever?

And their fatally wounded will be cast out,⁸
and the stink⁹ of their corpses will go up;
and mountains will melt with their blood.¹⁰

34.4¹¹ וְנִמְקוּ כָּל-צַבָּא הַשָּׁמַיִם

⁸Slotki comments that “their slain shall be cast out” means “they will lie on the ground unburied.” (P. 159)

Oswalt comments that “Added to the shame of defeat and slaughter is that of exposure of the dead.” (P. 609)

⁹Where our Hebrew text has בַּאֲשָׁם, **bho)sham**, “their stink,” 1QIs^a has בַּאוֹשְׁמָה, **be)oshimah**, which Watts says is apparently a feminine singular qal partiiple from אָשָׁם, **a)sham**, “to offend,” “be guilty” with the preposition ב, **be**, “in,” or “on.” **Rahlf**s has ἡ ὀσμῆ, “the odor / smell.” (P. 5)

¹⁰Oswalt states that “*the mountains will be dissolved with blood* is a figure which is impossible to explain literally. The general idea is that the rivers of blood which will flow down the hillsides will be like the rainwater which dissolves the soil into mud and carries it away...Whether mountains melt or stars rot is not so important as that the entire cosmos is under the hand of the one God to Whom all owe allegiance.” (P. 609)

But before we take such language literally, we must remember the nature of the prophetic message, as coming from Divine revelation through dreams and visions, and as characterized by puzzle and enigma—which certainly appears to be the case in such descriptions as this!

Motyer states that “Soaked / ‘melted’ refers to a novel and dreadful soil erosion, not by wind and water but by the torrential blood of the slain.” (P. 270)

But of course rivers of blood do not dissolve mountains, and stars do not rot—and instead of saying whether this is true or not, it is best to say that such language is highly symbolical, and not to be taken literally.

¹¹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 4**: “*And all the host of heaven (or heavenly bodies) shall consume away...And the heavens shall be rolled up (or together) like a scroll, i.e. like an ancient volume...or a modern map...The best explanation seems...to be...that as God is elsewhere described as having stretched out the heavens like a curtain, their destruction or any total change in their appearance would be naturally represented as a rolling up of the expanse...The [Aramaic] Targum strangely makes כְּסֵפֶר [‘like the scroll / book’] mean according to the book, i.e. the Scriptures...*

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וּנְגִלוּ כִסְפֵי הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְכָל-צִבְאָם יִבֹּל
וְכִנְבֵּלַת מִתְאַנְהָ:

¹¹(...continued)

And all their host (referring to the heavens) shall fade (or fall away) like the fading of a leaf from a vine...And like a fading (leaf) or a withered (fig) from a fig-tree...

“The context clearly shows that the terms used are not symbolical but poetical, and that here, as in **Isaiah 13:10**, the idea which they are all intended to convey is that of revolution, of sudden, total, and appalling change. The imagery of the passage has been partially adopted in **Matthew 24:29**, and **Revelation 6:13**.” (Pp. 20-21)

Motyer states that “The thought may be simply that the whole universe has been caught up in human corruption and will be subject to the judgment.” (P. 270)

And all the army of the heavens¹² will decay,¹³
and the heavens will be rolled up like a scroll;¹⁴
and all their army will wither and fall,
and like (a leaf) from a vine¹⁵ withers and falls.¹⁶

¹²Slotki's translation has "all the host of heaven," and he notes that "Some explain [this] as the heavenly luminaries, others as the celestial powers of evil." (P. 160) Compare **Isaiah 24:21**,

And it will happen on that day,
YHWH will visit (to punish) an army of the height in the height,
and kings of the ground / land, upon the ground / land.
(See our commentary on this passage.)

Oswalt states that "*the host of heaven* would refer not only to the physical stars but also to the pantheon of Gods which the stars represented in the minds of the ancient hearers...It is immaterial whether the literal satyrs will fall in the day of God's judgment; the point is that even the mysterious, unchanging stars, the seeming guarantors of the universe's perpetuity, are in the hands of the God of Jerusalem." (P. 609)

But what does Oswalt mean when he says that such a matter is "immaterial"? We think it is very important to point out that such a statement is highly symbolical and not at all to be understood literally. If, as the **Book of Isaiah** teaches, there is no such reality as the ancient Near East's "pantheon of Gods," then such a statement cannot be taken literally. And to call the stars "unchanging" is to fail to understand the stars as emerging from "black holes," and in the course of time, "burning out," as depicted by modern science. What do you think?

¹³Where our Hebrew text has וְנִמְקָוּ, **wenamaqqu**, "and they will be infected / decay," 1QIs^a has וְהַעֲמִקִּים יִתְבַּקְּעוּ "And the valleys will break open and..."

¹⁴Motyer comments that "It is the Lord Who determines when the story comes to an end and closes the book (*rolled up like a scroll*)." (P. 270)

¹⁵Where our Hebrew text has מִגִּפְּן, **miggephen**, "from a vine," 1QIs^a has גּוֹפָן, **ghophan**, "Gophna." Watts notes that "A place named Gophna appears in Josephus and the Midrash." (P. 5)

¹⁶Motyer comments that "Fall / 'fade' signifies the completion of purpose: the harvest has been reaped. The universe is not eternal; internally, human sin has infected it with built-in obsolescence." (P. 270)

But we ask, Is this language to be understood as depicting "the end of the

(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)
universe”? We think not.

Notice how in numerous prophetic visions of the future, the universe has not come to an end, but continues on in peace and prosperity.

¹⁷Slotki entitles **verses 5-17** “The terrible doom of, and vengeance upon, Edom.” (P. 160)

He comments that **verses 5-8** predict that “the land of Edom will be turned into a blood-bath from which none of the inhabitants will escape.” (P. 160)

Oswalt entitles **verses 5-17** “Judgment on Edom, type of the nations.”

Yes, continue **verses 34:5-15**, YHWH has a "Day"--a day of victory over all His fierce opponents, a day of vengeance and retribution for His people who have suffered unmercifully at the hand of their enemies. Just as YHWH in the long ago came in judgment upon the disobedient, so YHWH proclaims through His prophet the complete and lasting overthrow of the entire world of evil, symbolized by the nation of Edom. The evil world will be returned to תְּהוֹ וְבָהוּ, **thohu wabhohu** (**Isaiah 34:11**; see this same phrase at **Genesis 1:2**), to the chaotic emptiness and confusion and loneliness that existed before God's creative word and Spirit brought the cosmos, the orderly universe, into being.

But the reader of **Isaiah** must guard against the modern interpretation that such language as this means the total end of planet earth—for as the passage goes on to depict, there is still a future for the earth, especially in its new creation; and in spite of this passage’s description of the punishment on Edom as being eternal (see especially **34:10**), the fact is that Edom still exists, and is inhabited today, by people, not just by pelican, porcupine, owl and raven, coyote and ostrich, goats, night-demons and arrow-snakes!

The lesson is, we must not take such graphic language literally, as if the heavens above the earth can be literally “rolled up like a scroll”! But still, the truth is that judgment is visited upon nations throughout history!

Kaiser entitles **verses 5-8** “Yahweh’s sacrificial feast.”

He comments that “In the sky, which is now black as night, there appears a sword which strikes down unerringly upon the hated neighboring people of Edom...

“What happens is mirrored for us in the events at the great sacrificial feast, in which lambs, goats, rams, the wild oxen feared because of their sharp horns, steers and bulls are sacrificed, so that the place of sacrifice is ultimately soaked with blood

(continued...)

¹⁷(...continued)
and manured with fat...

“The place of the festival is given in **verse 7** as Bozrah...some 21.7 miles south south-east of the Dead Sea...

“The mighty judgment upon the nations, and particularly the fearful feast of slaughter by Yahweh, ending with the destruction of Edom, is His revenge for what they have all done to Zion...Whereas the first stanza delineated the universal framework of the events of the final age, the second and third stanza are concerned only with the fate of the hated brother and neighboring nation.” (Pp. 357-58)

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 5**: “*All this shall certainly take place, for My sword (the speaker being God Himself) is steeped (saturated, soaked) in heaven...*”

“The phrase in heaven has been variously explained...The best explanation is that of Calvin, who refers the expression to the Divine determination and foreknowledge. In the sight of God the sword, although not yet actually used, was already dripping blood...*Behold upon Edom it shall come down...And upon the people of My curse or doom, i.e. the people whom I have doomed to destruction.*” (Pp. 21-22)

Oswalt comments that “After the general introduction in **verses 1-4**, the prophet now moves to a concrete example of his topic...

“Why should Edom be used in this way? The answer is that throughout the **Old Testament**, from **Genesis (25:23)** to **Malachi (1:2-3)**, Edom is treated as the antithesis to Israel. More so even than the Amalekites, Edom is noted for attempting to block what God was doing for the world in His Self-revelation to Israel (**Numbers 20:14-21**)...

“Without doubt the Israelite antipathy for Edom was increased when the Edomites aided and abetted the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E. (**Obadiah 11-14; Ezekiel 35:1-15**).” (Pp. 610-11)

Motyer agrees, stating that “Edom is introduced as a case in point and typical of the whole exercise of eschatological judgment.” (P. 270)

Watts comments on **verse 5** that “The specific announcement for this assembly is like that made to the banquet for all peoples in **25:6-8**...The nations are summoned to hear God’s announcement of an amnesty that banishes death (**25:6-8**)...Yahweh Himself makes the announcement. His sword will descend on Edom...

“Yahweh is exercising His right of *ban* on the *people of Edom*...The ban and Yahweh’s fury through the sword have not been applied arbitrarily. The **[Book of**

(continued...)

הִנֵּה עַל-אַדְוֹם תִּירָד
וְעַל-עַם חֶרְמִי לְמִשְׁפָּט:

Because¹⁸ my sword¹⁹ drank to its full²⁰ in the heavens.²¹

¹⁷(...continued)

Isaiah] assumes that its audience / readers would need no explanation of Edom's sins...Yahweh's right to wrath and ban had been stated in general terms in **verses 2-4**. Now the announcement applies them to one people, Edom." (Pp. 9-10)

¹⁸Oswalt translates the initial כִּי, **kiy**, by "when," stating that "*when* reflects the temporal use of **kiy** rather than the causal, which makes little sense here. *When* reflects the transition from the heavens in **verse 4** to the earth in **verses 5-17**." (P. 611)

¹⁹Watts comments that "Yahweh's action against Edom is supported by the assertion of His right to the use of deadly force, the *sword*." (P. 11)

²⁰Oswalt's translation has "when my sword is drunken," and he notes that 1QIs^a has תִּרְאֶה, **tera)eh**, "will be seen," instead our Hebrew text's רִיִּוְתָהּ, **riwwethah**, "became drunk." He observes that G. R. Driver "thinks that the Masoretic Text is incredible." But the text is not at all incredible if understood in terms of a prophetic revelation, based on dreams / visions—see the last paragraph of this footnote.

He comments that "*drunken in the heavens* is surely not expressive of a Divine decree concerning Edom (Calvin, Young)...The figure is that when the Divine sword has done all it can do to the heavenly host, the pantheon of national Gods [is God's might limited when it comes to dealing with the pantheon of national Gods? We think not!], then it will fall on the nations themselves as represented by Edom." (P. 611)

Rahfs translates by ἐμεθύσθη, "it became drunk," "it was intoxicated." Watts translates by "gorged," and he states that it "is literally 'fattened' or nourished." (P. 11)

We say, Surely this type of language is that of a prophetic revelation through dreams or visions, which are not to be taken as "Face-to-face Divine revelation," but rather as much less clear, puzzling, enigmatic language and descriptions. What do you think?

²¹Again, the reader must be careful against taking such language literally, as if YHWH's sword can drink blood, and become fat in so doing (**verse 5**)!

Slotki comments that the language is depicting "Divine fury in preparation for the

(continued...)

Look-over Edom it will go down,²²
and upon a people devoted by Me for judgment.²³

34.6²⁴ חָרַב לַיְהוָה

²¹(...continued)
task of Edom's destruction." (P. 160)

We say the symbolism means for us today that everywhere in the infinite star-worlds revealed by the Hubble telescope—now to be replaced by the much more powerful James Webb space telescope—YHWH's judgment on and destruction of sin is at work, slowly but surely, overcoming, winning victory over evil.

What do you say this symbolism means? Is it incredible or meaningless?

²²Alexander comments that "The Jewish tradition is that Edom in the prophecies means Rome...Calvin's doctrine [is] that the name is here applied to the inveterate enemies of the church at large, and not to any one of them exclusively..."

"The passage is a prediction of the downfall not of Edom only, but of others like him. The fulfilment of these threatenings cannot be traced in the history of ancient Edom. They ceased to be a people, not by extirpation [to remove or destroy totally], but by incorporation with the Jews. The name Idumea, as employed by Josephus, includes a large part of Judea. The Herods, the last royal family of Judah, were of Idumean origin." (P. 22)

²³Compare footnote 6 for this matter of being "devoted" to destruction.

Slotki's translation has "people of my ban," and he states that this means "Edom upon whom the ban was laid by God." (P. 160)

²⁴Alexander translates / comments on **verse 6**: "*A sword (is) to Jehovah (or Jehovah has a sword); it is full of blood...It is smeared with fat...With the blood of lambs and goats, mentioned as well-known sacrificial animals, with the fat of the kidneys (or the kidney fat) of rams, mentioned either as remarkable for fatness or as a parallel expression to the foregoing clause. For there is to Jehovah (or Jehovah has) a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.*" (P. 22)

Oswalt comments on **verses 6-7** that "The destruction of the nations is conceived of as a sacrifice...In a real sense, all sin must end in a sacrifice, either of the sinner or of one in place of the sinner. It is this truth which **Isaiah 53** comprehends. The salvation which is proclaimed and promised in **chapters 49-52** is only possible because Another [note the capital 'A'] has been sacrificed." (Pp. 611-12)

We disagree. Throughout biblical history, YHWH God has been depicted time and again as the God of grace Who forgives freely and fully, oftentimes without any sacrifice involved—such as is depicted in **Exodus 32-34**, and in **Isaiah 1** and **Isaiah 40**.

(continued...)

מִלְאָה דָּם
הַדְּשָׁנָה מִחֶלֶב
מִדָּם כְּרִים וְעֵתוּדִים
מִחֶלֶב פְּלִיּוֹת אֵילִים
כִּי זָבַח לַיהוָה בְּבִצְרָה
וּטְבַח גְּדוֹל בְּאֶרֶץ אֲדוּם:

A sword belongs to the YHWH—
it was full of blood,
it was made fat²⁵ from (their) fat,
from blood of lambs and he-goats,
from fat of rams' kidneys.²⁶

²⁴(...continued)

We insist that **Isaiah 53** is a depiction of YHWH's servant, Israel—what YHWH wants Israel to be—a nation that willingly reaches out to identify with, and bear the sins of others. Israel refused to become such a suffering servant, building a wall to exclude sinners, retreating into a legalistic religion of self-salvation through keeping commandments. Jesus fully embodied **Isaiah 53** in his death. But he did not bear that role alone—it is the mission to which he calls every follower.

To limit God's forgiveness to sacrifice is to be guilty of the mistake of Job's three friends with their doctrine of retribution, saying dogmatically what God can and cannot do.

²⁵Slotki states that instead of “made fat,” a better translation of the Hebrew verb הַדְּשָׁנָה, **huddashnah** (hothpaal perfect 3rd person feminine singular, ‘has fattened itself’) is “greased.” He adds that “The Edomites are likened to animals slaughtered for the altar.” (P. 160)

²⁶Slotki holds that the “lambs...goats...rams” are “figurative for various types among the lower classes of Edom's inhabitants.” (P. 160) We doubt that “rams” would be figurative for the “lower classes,” but would much better be symbolic for leaders of the people.

What do you take the language to mean? Do you take it as figurative, symbolic

(continued...)

Because a sacrifice²⁷ belongs to YHWH in Botsrah,²⁸
and a great slaughtering in the land of Edom.

34.7²⁹ וַיֵּרְדוּ רְאֵמִים עִמָּם
וּפְרִים עִם־אֲבִירִים
וְרוֹתַת אֲרָצָם מִדָּם
וְעִפְרָם מִחֶלֶב יִדְשֶׁן:

²⁶(...continued)

in nature, or as a literal description of the people of Edom as a sacrifice to be offered up on YHWH's altar?

²⁷Watts comments that "The terrible action is further described as a *sacrifice* (זֶבַח, **zebhach**) to which Yahweh claims the right...**Zephaniah 1:7** also speaks of Yahweh's great day as a day of sacrifice." (P. 11)

²⁸Slotki's spelling is "Bozrah," and he states that this is "the capital of Edom, the modern Busaire, south of the Dead Sea. The town should be distinguished from one of the same name in the Hauran [a volcanic plateau, a geographic area and a people located in southwestern Syria and extending into the northwestern corner of Jordan]. It is identified by some with Petra." (P. 160)

Oswalt comments that "Its synonymous usage both here and in **Isaiah 63:1** suggests that it was the chief city in Edom (compare also **Genesis 36:33**; **Jeremiah 49:13, 22**)." (P. 612)

Motyer adds that "Bozrah was twenty-seven miles south of the Dead Sea and was Edom's capital." (P. 271)

Watts states that "*Bozrah* was thought of as the capital of Edom...This town in Edom was located south and east of the southern tip of the Dead Sea but eleven miles north of Petra at a height of 3,000 feet above sea level. It was placed on a mountain spur with steep cliffs on both sides. Its fortress apparently controlled access to the copper mines in the region...Bozrah is mentioned in **Genesis 36:33**, **Jeremiah 49:13, 22**, and **Amos 1:12**." (Pp. 11-12)

²⁹Alexander translates / comments on **verse 7**: "And unicorns shall come down with them, and bullocks with bulls. And their land shall be soaked (or drenched) with blood, and their dust with fat shall be fattened." (Pp. 22-23)

And wild oxen³⁰ will go down³¹ with them,

³⁰The Hebrew noun is רֵאֵמִים, **re)emiym**, which Alexander translates by “unicorns,” in the singular is רֵאֵם, **re)em**, which is defined by **Brown-Driver-Briggs** as “wild ox,” known for its strength and ferocity. The Greek (**Rahlfs**) translation is ἄδροι, **adroi**, “full-grown.”

Alexander comments that “The ancient versions, with great unanimity and uniformity [but not **Rahlfs**!], explain רֵאֵם as meaning the unicorn [a legendary creature that has been described since antiquity as a beast with a single large, pointed, spiraling horn projecting from its forehead. The unicorn was depicted in ancient seals of the Indus Valley Civilization and was mentioned by the ancient Greeks in accounts of natural history by various writers, including Ctesias, Strabo, Pliny the Younger, and Aelian. (**Wikipedia**, 4/6/2018)]...

“This animal has been commonly regarded as fabulous in modern times; but of late [mid-19th century] some traces of it have been found in Tibet and other parts of Asia. But even supposing it to be a real animal, we have no reason to believe that it was ever common in the Holy Land, as the רֵאֵם would seem to have been from the frequency with which it is mentioned...The modern writers are divided between a certain species of gazelle or antelope, and the wild buffalo of Palestine and Egypt. The name may here be used either as a poetical description of the ox, or to suggest that wild as well as tame beasts should be included in the threatened slaughter...

“For רֵאֵמִים, **re)emiym** in this verse some of the old Jews read רֹמִים, **Romans**.” (P. 23)

Oswalt comments that “*wild oxen...bulls with rams* is probably a reference to the leaders of the nation who will fall with the common people. No one will be spared. The land will be like the earth around an altar: soaked with blood and enriched with fat...

“The point is not to try to find a time, or to envision one, when the people of Edom have been, or will be, slaughtered in an overwhelming manner. The point is that human pomp and pride which exalts itself against God does not lead to well-being, *shalom*, but to destruction.” (P. 612)

What do you make of this comment? Is it a tacit admission that the prediction has failed, that Edom still exists, and that people still inhabit the country?

Or does Oswalt recognize that the prophetic message is not to be taken literally, due to its visionary / dreamlike, puzzling, enigmatic nature, and should only serve as a sort of “wisdom” teaching?

(continued...)

and bull calves with bulls.³²

And their land will be saturated from blood,

and their dry earth³³ will be made fat from (animal) fat.

³⁰(...continued)

We think that the prophetic depictions of the future should not be taken literally, as if the prophet had a crystal ball / Divine revelation with exact details, enabling him to accurately foresee the future. No, the prophets “see through a mirror, darkly.” But still, the basic content of those visions, that evil and godlessness will constantly suffer from Divine visitation, can be believed and experienced.

And in addition, we both can and should believe that the same God Who visits in human history with punishment, is the Creator God of all humanity, Who in spite of His visitations for punishment, has a wondrous future in store for His people and all humanity, a future that the prophet with his Divinely given dreams and visions cannot accurately describe, but a future that can be devoutly hoped for.

For example, YHWH’s throwing a great drinking-feast, with rich wine and the finest of meat, for all peoples and nations on Mount Zion, at which death is swallowed up forever, and all tears are wiped away (**Isaiah 25:6-9**), should not be taken literally, as if it was an accurate or detailed picture of YHWH’s intended future. But neither should it be dismissed! Its symbolism can be believed--that the God Who punishes is the Creator God Who intends an unbelievably wonderful future for all humanity!

The prophetic message is filled with symbolism, easily misunderstood; but also we can and do believe that it is telling the truth about the future through that symbolism!

³¹Slotki’s translation has “come down,” and he comments that this means “in the slaughter.” (P. 160)

Alexander mentions that “Others [take it as meaning] to fall or sink under the fatal stroke.” (P. 23)

³²Slotki comments on the wild oxen, bulls, and bull calves that they are “figurative for various ranks among the wealthier and military classes.” (P. 160) Compare footnote 26.

Motyer notes that the plural noun אֲבִירִים, (**abbiyriym** “is not necessarily an animal word at all, but may mean that the thought has moved to the metaphor of mighty meaning important people.” (P. 271)

³³Watts comments on the phrase וְעֶפְרָם, **wa(apharam**, “and their dry soil / dust” that “This is a fine, loose soil which absorbs moisture easily and is also easily moved by the wind.” (P. 12)

34.8³⁴ כִּי יוֹם נִקְמָ לַיהוָה

שְׁנַת שְׁלוּמִים לְרִיב צִיּוֹן:

Because YHWH has a day of vengeance,³⁵

³⁴Alexander translates / comments on **verse 8**: “For (there is) a day of vengeance to Jehovah, a year of recompenses for the cause of Zion, i.e. to maintain her cause...This verse connects the judgments threatened against Edom with the cause of Zion or the church of God.” (P. 23)

Oswalt comments that “God will act, the enemies will be destroyed, and although His timetable is not ours, He does have one (**12:1-6; 40:27-31; 62:1-5**). The use of *day* and *year* expresses the idea of a definite time of action.” (P. 612)

Watts comments that “A fourth right is claimed for Yahweh, the right to a *vengeance day, a year of retribution*. It is the royal prerogative, even responsibility, to bring retributive justice within His kingdom. *Vengeance* in the **Old Testament** is a term used for justice which must be done to level a situation that has become unequal because a violent crime has been committed...The parallel to שְׁלוּמִים, **shillumiyim** [‘requital,’ ‘retribution’] supports this understanding...

“This monstrous event is recompense for Edom’s decisions, attitudes, and actions.” (P. 12)

³⁵Slotki comments that the “day of vengeance” is “against Edom.” (P. 161)

Motyer comments that “The idea of requital (נִקְמָ, **naqam**, ‘vengeance,’ ‘revenge’) is characteristic of **Isaiah 56-66** (compare **59:17; 61:2; 63:4**) and is amplified by *retribution* (שְׁלוּמִים, **shillumiyim**, ‘full settlement’)...

“The further thought is added that the Lord is acting on behalf of His people. They have a cause, a lawful claim, against Edom and the Lord will see to a full settlement. In **verses 9-10c**, the overthrow of Sodom provides the imagery (**Genesis 19**), suitably to the thought of doing what people’s actions deserve. Also the blighted landscape shows again that the ultimate environmental threat is human sin, leaving in its wake a lasting pollution.” (P. 271)

For all occurrences of this noun נִקְמָ, **naqam**, ‘vengeance,’ ‘revenge’ in the **Hebrew Bible**, see: **Leviticus 26:25; Deuteronomy 32:35, 41, 43; Judges 16:28; Isaiah 34:8 (here); 35:4; 47:3; 59:17; 61:2; 63:4; Ezekiel 24:8; 25:12, 15; Micah 5:14; Psalm 58:11 and Proverbs 6:34.**

a year of repayment for Zion's controversy.³⁶

34.9³⁷ וְנִהְפְּכֵי נַחְלֵיהֶּן לְזֹפֶת

³⁶Slotki's translation has "a year of recompense for the controversy of Zion," and he states that a better translation is "'a year of retribution in Zion's quarrel' with Edom." (P. 161) We note that here "a day" and "a year" are used synonymously.

And we remember **2 Peter 3:8's** statement that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years is like one day. Modern science easily speaks of 13 billion years, and the immense number of years it takes for light, traveling from the farthest stars, to reach planet earth. And we realize how foolish it is to think we can put God into a human time-table or calendar. All our measurements are too tiny, too earthly limited for YHWH God, the Creator of the universes and light and the star-worlds!

Watts comments that "Zion stands under the special patronage of Yahweh. Edom's actions against the city made His intervention necessary." (P. 12)

³⁷Oswalt entitles **verses 9-17** "Edom, a desolation."

He comments that "In the most forceful language he can muster, Isaiah pictures the future not only of the land of Edom but also of the whole world which believes it can find fulfillment apart from God. The people have become a sacrifice (**verses 5-8**) and the land is reduced to a volcanic waste. For those of us who live in the nuclear age, these pictures are all too vivid...

"[He adds that in **verses 9-10,**] in terms which are very reminiscent of those applied to Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19:24-28; Deuteronomy 29:23; Psalm 11:6; Jeremiah 49:18; Revelation 14:10, 11**), the prophet pictures the land as a perpetual wasteland of burning pitch and brimstone...In **verse 10**, the primary emphasis is upon the perpetuity of the destruction. Each line begins with a stronger phrase denoting endlessness...

Verses 11-15 depict the depopulated condition of the land in terms reminiscent of **13:21-22** and **14:23**...**Chapters 13** and **14** speak of Babylon, the distant example of human pride. This **chapter [34]** speaks of Edom as the near example. But in each case the glorious land becomes the home not of triumphant humanity but of unclean and mysterious desert animals....

"Again, as in the previous section, it will not do to take the figures too literally. Obviously a land of burning pitch and brimstone could hardly afford a home to animals of any kind." (Pp. 614-15)

Yes. A literal interpretation of such language leads to bizarre conclusions. On the basis of **Numbers 12:6-8**, we should expect prophetic visions to be filled with riddles, with lack of clarity—and so it is with this material. And so it is that Oswald, in

(continued...)

³⁷(...continued)

spite of his constant attempt to make the Isaianic materials clear and reasonable, has to admit that such is impossible here, and that the images involved cannot be combined.

What do you think? How do you understand this material?

Kaiser entitles **verses 9-15** “The eternal devastation of Edom.”

He comments that the author “thought of the end of Edom in a similar way to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (compare **Genesis 19:24ff.**; **Isaiah 13:19**, and also **Psalms 11:6**)...

“The streams of the country are turned into pitch [that is burning pitch, such as was used by the Mongols, who threw containers of burning tar on their victims] and the ground to sulfur [a yellow solid that is a non-metal. It is brittle, easily broken...It burns easily, releasing toxic fumes]. And the country at once bursts into flames like a torch of pitch. Like the sacrificial fire...or the fire of an active volcano, the fire of Edom will not go out, but will go up to heaven forever...

“Unfortunately, the poet cannot rest content and makes what he has already said meaningless by introducing into the country not only all sorts of plants, but also by making it the dwelling of an army of particularly unclean and unpleasant animals and demons... These include the much feared Lilith, originally an ancient Mesopotamian female demon...

“On the other hand, when we read of owls and bustards [large, heavily built, swift-running birds, found in open country in the Old World], jackals and hyenas, poisonous snakes and kites, it needs little imagination to realize how terrible and frightening the place was meant to be, and to take for granted that it was no longer possible for a new kingdom to come into being there, because Yahweh had reduced the country for ever to a place just like chaos, to a real *tohu-wabohu* (compare **Genesis 1:2**), dominated by eternal fire and by plants hostile to men and animals.” (Pp. 358-59)

What do you think? To believe the **Bible**, do you have to believe in the female demon “Lilith”? **Wikipedia** explains that Lilith is “a figure in Jewish mythology, developed earliest in the **Babylonian Talmud** (3rd to 5th centuries C.E.). Lilith is often

envisioned as a dangerous demon of the night, who is sexually wanton, and who steals babies in the darkness.

Slotki comments that in **verses 9-10** “Edom’s complete destruction is represented as a conflagration of burning pitch which leaves nothing but desolation behind it.

(continued...)

³⁷(...continued)

He comments on **verse 9** that “The prophet may have had in mind the account of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19:24**), [both of] which were close to the land of Edom.” (P. 161)

Watts comments on **verses 9-10** that “The effects of the ban bring an end to Edom’s existence as a country and as a people. The resulting destruction is pictured in three ways which may remind a modern reader of the anticipated results of nuclear bombing. The countryside will smell of burning pitch and sulfur. Pitch (זֶפֶת, **zepheth**) occurs in the **Old Testament** only one other time (in **Exodus 2:3** with a very different connotation), but sulfur (גִּפְרִית, **gophrith**) was rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah (**Genesis 19:24**) in a place very near to Edom...

“Israel is threatened with such a judgment in **Deuteronomy 29:22**^{Heb} / **23**^{Eng} where the word מְהַפְּכֶת, **mahpekhath** ‘overthrow’ is used. The same root word הִפָּךְ, **haphak**, ‘overflow’ [‘turn,’ ‘overturn’] appears here at the beginning of **verse 9**. In **Ezekiel 38:22** God allows sulfur and fire to fall on Gog and Magog. And in **Isaiah 30:33** the breath of Yahweh is pictured as a stream of sulfur...

“The desolation is pictured as lasting forever, burning day and night. Other **Old Testament** passages speak of fires that will not or cannot be put out (compare **Isaiah 1:31; 66:24; Jeremiah 4:4; 17:27; Ezekiel 21:4**^{Heb} / **20:48**^{Eng}; and in the **New Testament, Mark 9:48**.” (P. 12)

We say, human fires are quenched or burn out; Divine fire cannot be quenched or burn out—it is YHWH’s fire or breath, which not only destroys but purifies and cleanses, and recreates. It is the fire of Divine love. And while the biblical story in **Genesis 19** depicts the extermination of Sodom in fire and brimstone / sulfur, we must not forget **Ezekiel 16’s** depiction of the restoration of Sodom’s fortune (**16:53-63**)!

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 9**: “And her streams (those of Idumea or the land of Edom) *shall be turned to pitch, and her dust to brimstone, and her land shall become burning pitch*. This verse, as Calvin well observes, announces nothing new, but repeats the same prediction under other figures, borrowed from the

overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, which throughout the **Bible** are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire (**Jude 7**).”

“The soil of Idumea, lying adjacent to the Dead Sea, is bituminous, and abounds in veins or springs of naphtha...Barnes correctly understands [the verse] as expressing in the strongest terms the idea of utter and permanent destruction, as complete and terrible as if the streams were turned to pitch.” (P. 23)

(continued...)

וְעַפְרָה לְגַפְרִית

וְהִיְתָה אֶרְצָהּ לְזַפֵּת בְּעֵרָה:

And her torrent-valleys will be turned to flammable pitch
and her dry earth to burning sulphur
and her earth will become flammable pitch, burning up.

34.10³⁸ לַיְלָה וַיּוֹמֵם לֹא תִכָּבֵּה

לְעוֹלָם יַעֲלֶה עֲשָׁנָה

מִדֹּדָר לְדֹדָר תִּחָרַב

לְנֶצַח נִצְחִים אֵין עֵבֶר בָּהּ:

Night and day it will not be quenched;
to long-lasting time its smoke will ascend.
From generation to generation it will be dried up;

³⁷(...continued)

Yes, but remember the promise in **Ezekiel 16:53-63**, that the fortune of Sodom will be restored by YHWH!

³⁸Alexander translates **verse 10**: “Day and night it shall not be quenched; for ever shall its smoke go up; from generation to generation shall it lie waste; for ever and ever there shall be no one passing through it.” He comments that “The remarkable gradation [a scale or a series of successive changes, stages, or degrees] and accumulation of terms denoting perpetuity can scarcely be expressed in a translation. This is especially the case with the last and highest of the series, which Lowth renders *to everlasting ages*, and Henderson *to all perpetuity*, neither of which is stronger than the common version *for ever and ever*, or approaches much nearer to the strict sense of the Hebrew phrase, *to perpetuity of perpetuities*...The whole is a magnificent prophetic picture, the fidelity of which, so far as it relates to ancient Edom, is notoriously attested by its desolation for a course of ages.” (Pp. 24-25)

Yes...but is this the case, “to everlasting ages”? Edom today is southern Jordan, and travelers can go throughout its length and breadth, finding people living and prospering there, and delighting in the beauties of Petra, the “Rose-red City.” What do you think? Has the Isaianic prophecy been fulfilled? Or is it overstatement?

Or is it simply the nature of the prophetic message, that it is rooted in dreams / visions, characterized by puzzling enigmas?

for enduring perpetuity³⁹ there is no one crossing through it.⁴⁰

34.11⁴¹ וִירְשׁוּהָ

³⁹The phrase לְנֶצְחִים נֶצְחִים is literally “to perpetuity of perpetuities,” but we translate by “for enduring perpetuity.”

Watts suggests the translation “for a forever of forevers.”

Rahfs has καὶ εἰς χρόνον πολύν, “and into much time,” which shows the Greek translator did not understand the Hebrew as meaning “forever and ever.”

⁴⁰Motyer holds that in these last two lines of **verse 10**, continuing through **verse 13**, “The second half of the poem...is linked to the first half by its opening word, ‘Unto perpetuity’ (*ever...again*), which matches the opening words of the preceding lines (*for ever...From generation to generation*). It is only the new topic—the disappearance of human kind, signaled by the advent of the beasts—which shows that it is a new beginning. The ordinary business of life (the person passing through) and the special duties of life (*nobles and princes*, **verse 12**) are alike things of the past, and in their place will come wild animals (**verses 11a, b, 13c, d**) and weeds (**verse 13a, b**)...

“The reason is that God will *stretch out over* it; it is an act of God. *Chaos and desolation* (the *tohu* and *bohu* of **Genesis 1:2**; compare **Isaiah 24:10**; **Jeremiah 4:23**) speak of the meaninglessness, shapelessness, instability and emptiness of things before there was any ordering work of God...

“The *measuring line* pictures designation of land for ownership by marking it out in plots, and the *plumb-line* pictures assessing how something compares with the true and acting accordingly. This emptiness and meaninglessness comes about because it is deserved.” (P. 271)

Is this how you understand the “measuring-line” and the “plumb-line”?

⁴¹Slotki entitles **verses 11-15** “A picture of utter solitude and devastation.” (P. 161)

Watts comments on **verses 11-13**: “In **chapter 13** the destruction of Babylon is also compared to that of Sodom and Gomorrah (**verse 19**) and a description of its desolation follows. The same mood prevails here. The fauna [animal life] and flora [plant life] of desolate and deserted places takes possession of the entire land...used to emphasize the idea that ordered government and exercise of power in Edom is finished.” (Pp. 12-13)

We ask, Is that all that this depiction of total destruction means?

Alexander translates / comments on **verse 11**: “*Then shall possess it* (as a

(continued...)

קִאֲת וְקַפּוֹד וַיִּנְשׂוּף
וְעֵרַב יִשְׁכְּנוּ-בָהּ
וַנְּטָה עֲלֶיהָ קוֹתְהוּ
וַאֲבֵי-בָהּ:

And they will take possession of it,
pelican and porcupine, and owl,
and raven will dwell in it;⁴²

⁴¹(...continued)

heritage) *the pelican and porcupine, the crane and crow shall dwell in it. And he (or one) shall stretch upon it the line of confusion and the stones of emptiness.* Having declared that man should no longer pass through it, he now explains who shall be its inhabitants...These animals should not only occupy the land, but occupy it as the successors and to the exclusion of mankind.” (P. 25)

Oswalt comments on **verse 11**: “The exact identification of the birds and animals mentioned in this verse, with the exception of the raven, remains uncertain. The first has traditionally been identified as a *pelican*. Since the pelican is a water bird, it seems odd that it would be associated with the desert, and for this reason ‘owl’ has been suggested and appears in most modern versions. However, the pelican’s habit of nesting in solitary places may explain how it could appear here.” (P. 615)

⁴²Slotki comments that “The birds enumerated inhabit waste and solitary places.” Compare **Isaiah 14:23**, where it is said concerning Babylon,

And I will make her a possession of hedgehog(s),
and marshes of water,
and I will sweep her away with a broom, to exterminate (her)!
—a saying of YHWH of Armies!

Alexander comments that “The **קִאֲת**, **q)th** is no doubt the pelican, as the etymology of the name (from **קוֹא**, to vomit) agrees with the habits of that bird, and the ancient versions explain it. In this place, it is true, the **Septuagint** has not *pelekan*...but the general term ὄρνεα...The next word has been translated *owl* (Calvin) and *bittern* (English Version), but is now agreed to mean the porcupine or the hedgehog, as explained in the **Septuagint** (ἐχίνου). The next word is now understood to denote, not

(continued...)

and he will stretch over it a measuring-line of chaos,
and stone-weights of confusion.⁴³

⁴²(...continued)
an owl...but a heron or crane; according to the **Septuagint**, the ibis or Egyptian heron...

“The essential idea, as Calvin observes, is that of wild and solitary animals..A remarkable coincidence is furnished by the statements of travelers with respect to the number of wild birds in Edom...

“The apparent inconsistency between this clause and the description of the country in the verse before it only shows that neither can be strictly taken, but that both are metaphorical predictions of entire desolation.” (P. 25)

⁴³Slotki comments that the measuring-line and stone weights are “metaphors borrowed from builders’ tools.” (P. 161)

Yes, the language continues to be metaphorical, and is not to be understood literally.

Oswalt comments that “*The line of chaos and the plummet of destruction* have an ironic tone about them. Normally the line and the plumb bob would be tools of construction, not of destruction. But here God has compared the crooked and deformed structures of the world to His Own righteousness and has decreed demolition ...Edom will return to the chaos from which she [and the whole world] came, there to remain forever.” (P. 615)

Malachi 1:4,

If Edom says, We are shattered / beaten down,
but we will return, and we will rebuild waste-lands / devastations!--
in this way YHWH of Armies spoke:
They will build, but I, I will throw down;
and they will call them Boundary of Wickedness,
and The People With Whom YHWH Was Indignant
Until Long-Lasting Time!

So, Oswalt concludes. But this is to forget the promise in **Isaiah 25:6-9**, that in YHWH’s future, He will give a great feast for all peoples and nations (that would, of course, include Edom!), at which He will swallow up death forever, and wipe away all tears. Judgment and destruction will come upon Edom—but that is not the final word. The final word is one of amazing hope and comfort—salvation for all peoples and nations!

(continued...)

34.12 חֲרִיָּה וְאֵין־שָׁם מְלוּכָה יִקְרְאוּ

וְכָל־שָׂרֵיהָ יִהְיוּ אֶפֶס:

Her nobles⁴⁴—and there is no royalty / kingdom there—will cry out,
and all her rulers will be at an end.⁴⁵

⁴³(...continued)

The two words in lines 4 and 5, translated “chaos” and “confusion,” are קוֹתְהוֹ וְאֲבֵי־בְהוֹ: “a measuring-line of chaos, and stone-weights of confusion.” They remind us of **Genesis 1:2**, וְהָאָרֶץ הִיְתָה תְהוֹ וּבְהוֹ, “and the earth was / became chaos and confusion,” the earth’s condition before the creative handiwork of YHWH which brought order and understanding to the earth. According to this present text, YHWH intends to return the earth to its primeval condition, before YHWH’s bringing of order and understanding to it.

Alexander comments that “The *line* meant is a measuring line, mentioned elsewhere not only in connection with building (**Zechariah 1:16**), but also with destroying (**2 Kings 21:13**). The *stones* meant are not the black flints with which the soil of ancient Edom is profusely covered...but stones use for weights (**Deuteronomy 25:13; Proverbs 16:11**), and here for plum-line or plummet...”

“The same figure is employed by **Amos 7:7-9** to denote a *moral* test or standard, but in this case as a symbol of destruction...”

The sense of the whole metaphor may then be either that God has laid this work out for Himself and will perform it (Barnes), or that in destroying Edom He will act with equity and justice (Gill), or that even in destroying He will proceed deliberately and by rule (Knobel).” (Pp. 25-26)

Somewhat strangely, the Greek translation (**Rahlfs, Septuagint**) has καὶ ὄνοκένταυροι οἰκήσουσιν ἐν αὐτῇ, “and donkey-centaurs (Greek: Κένταυρος, or occasionally hippocentaur, is a mythological creature with the upper body of a human and the lower body of a horse or donkey) shall dwell in it.”

⁴⁴The phrase “her nobles” “stands alone, without a verb. **Rahlfs** reads οἱ ἄρχοντες αὐτῆς οὐκ ἔσονται, “her rulers shall not be.”

⁴⁵Translations of **verse 12** vary:

King James, “They shall call the nobles thereof to the kingdom, but none *shall be* there, and all her princes shall be nothing.”

Tanakh, “It shall be called, ‘No kingdom is there,’ Its nobles and all its lords shall be

(continued...)

⁴⁵(...continued)
nothing.”

New Revised Standard, “They shall name it No Kingdom There, and all its princes shall be nothing.”

New International, “Her nobles will have nothing there to be called a kingdom, all her princes will vanish away.”

New Jerusalem, “Her rulers shall not be, for her kings and her rulers and her nobles shall be destroyed.”

Rahlf's, οἱ ἄρχοντες αὐτῆς οὐκ ἔσονται οἱ γὰρ βασιλεῖς αὐτῆς καὶ οἱ ἄρχοντες αὐτῆς καὶ οἱ μεγιστᾶνες αὐτῆς ἔσονται εἰς ἀπώλειαν, “The rulers of her will not be. For the kings of her and the rulers of her and the great men / nobles of her will be for destruction.”

Alexander, “Her caves and there is no one there (i.e. her uninhabited or empty caves) they will (still) call a kingdom, and all her chiefs will be cessation (i.e. cease to be).”

Slotki comments that the verse means “The nobility is wiped out.”

Alexander states that various senses “put upon the whole clause, among which... three may be mentioned. According to the first, it means that there shall be none to proclaim the kingdom...or to call a king...According to the second, it means that there shall be no kingdom...A third sense, preferred by most of the late [mid-19th century] writers, is that there shall be no one whom they can call *to the kingdom*...This great variety of explanations, and the harshness of construction...may serve as an excuse for the suggestion of a new one:

“...All the interpretations...coincide in giving to **סִרְיִים**, **choriyim** the sense of nobles, which it certainly has in several places (**1 Kings 21:8, 11; Nehemiah 2:16; 4:13**). But in several others, it no less certainly means *holes* or *caves* (**1 Samuel 14:11; Job 30:6; Nahum 2:13**). Now it is matter of history not only that Edom was full of caverns, but that these were inhabited, and that the aboriginal inhabitants, expelled by Esau, were expressly called **סִרְיִים**, **Chorites**, as being troglodytes or inhabitants of caverns (**Genesis 14:6; 36:20; Deuteronomy 2:12, 22**). This being the case, the entire depopulation of the country, and especially the destruction of its princes, might be naturally and poetically expressed by saying that the kingdom of Edom should be thenceforth a kingdom of deserted caverns. How appropriate such a description would be to the actual condition of the country, and particularly to its ancient capital, may be seen in Robinson’s account of Petra (**Palestine**, ii, pp. 514-37).” (Pp. 26-27)

What do you take **verse 12** to mean?

Oswalt comments that “**Verses 12 and 13** speak of the downfall of the palaces and fortresses of the land...The palaces through which courtiers hurried will be a meeting place for jackals, and the fortresses in which the warriors paraded will be

(continued...)

קְמוֹשׁ וְחֹתֶם בְּמִבְצָרֶיהָ
וְהִיתָה נוֹה תַנִּיִּים
חֲצִיר לְבָנוֹת יַעֲנָה:

And thorns will go up (in) her fortified buildings,
thistles and briars in her fortifications.⁴⁷

And she will become a habitation of coyotes / wolves,⁴⁸

a dwelling-place⁴⁹ for ostriches.⁵⁰

⁴⁵(...continued)
nothing but brambles.” (P. 615)

⁴⁶Alexander translates / comments on **verse 13**: “*And her palaces (or in her palaces) shall come up thorns, nettles, and brambles in her fortresses. [This is] the natural consequence of her depopulation.*” (P. 27)

⁴⁷Alexander observes that “In **בְּמִבְצָרֶיהָ**, **bemibhtsariyha** Gill supposes an allusion to the name Bozrah. Grotius explains the phrase to mean within the limits of her ancient walls. The situation here described would of course be the resort of wild and solitary animals.” (P. 27)

⁴⁸Alexander translates this line by “And she shall be a home of wolves,” then notes that the Greek translates **תַּנִּיִּים**, **thanniym** by *σειρήνων*, *sirens*, mythical sisters on the south coast of Italy, who enticed seamen by their songs, and then slew them; and the Latin Vulgate translates by *dragons*. He adds that “Gesenius and Ewald render **תַּנִּיִּים** by *jackals*, but Henderson’s version, *wolves*, is more expressive, and the exact species meant is both dubious and unimportant.” (P. 27)

⁴⁹Where our Hebrew text reads **חֲצִיר**, **chatsiyr**, “settled abode,” “haunt,” 1QIs^a has **חֲצָר**, **chatser**, “settled abode,” “settlement,” “village”; **Rahlfs** has *αὐλή*, “courtyard,” “court.” The Aramaic Targum has **גִּדְרוֹר**, “a court.”

⁵⁰The Hebrew phrase translated “ostriches” is **בְּנוֹת יַעֲנָה**, **bhenoth ya(anah)**, literally “daughters of greed.” For occurrences of this phrase in the **Hebrew Bible**, see: **Leviticus 11:16; Deuteronomy 14:15; Isaiah 13:21; 34:14; 43:20; Jeremiah 50:39; Micah 1:8 and Job 30:29.**

(continued...)

34.14⁵¹ וּפְגָשׁוּ צִיִּים אֶת־אֵיִם

וְשַׁעִיר עַל־רֵעֵהוּ יִקְרָא
אֶת־שֵׁם הַרְגִיעָה לַיְלִית
וּמִצְאָה לָהּ מִנּוּחַ:

And desert-dwellers⁵² will meet⁵³ coyotes / wolves,

⁵⁰(...continued)

For the Hebrew phrase **לְבֵנוֹת יַעֲנָה**, “a dwelling-place for ostriches,” the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has **αὐτῆς στρουθῶν**, “a courtyard of sparrows.”

Alexander notes that this phrase is rendered “daughters of howling” by Augusti, but is now [mid-19th century C.E.] understood to mean, not owls, but female ostriches.” (P. 28)

Oswalt comments that “Jackals and ostriches also appear together in **Job 30:29** and **Micah 1:8**, where their cries are compared to those of mourners, a figure certainly appropriate to this setting.” (P. 616)

⁵¹Motyer comments on **verses 14-15** that “The beasts have permanency and undisturbed security—with wild goats (**שַׁעִיר**, **sa(iyr)**) there may be a hint here of the supposed ‘goat-demon’ (compare **Isaiah 13:21**), just as night creatures (**לַיְלִית**, **liylyth**) may hint at the ‘night-hag.’ But this is by no means certain. Possibly it is simply a case of giving animals emotive names to increase the sense of frightful change and deterioration. Precise identification is impossible in the case of most of the animals in this passage.” (P. 271)

Watts holds that all of these names are rare words, “traditionally understood as desert creatures. Wildberger suggests that here the list has changed to demonic beings thought to inhabit waste places.” (P. 6)

⁵²This plural noun, **צִיִּים**, **tsiyyim**, and the following plural noun **אֵיִם**, **iyyim**, have both been given varying translations. Alexander translates them by “wild (or desert) creatures,” and “howling creatures.” Other translations of **צִיִּים**, **tsiyyim**, include “wild cats,” and “jackals,” but Alexander states that “most writers, with greater probability, take it in the general sense of those inhabiting the wilderness.”

Similarly, **אֵיִם**, **iyyim**, according to Alexander, “may be understood, according

(continued...)

and he-goats will cry out to their neighbor;⁵⁴
there also *lilith* will rest,⁵⁵

⁵²(...continued)

to its etymology, as signifying howlers, i.e. howling animals. However varying translations are given, including “vultures,” “mountain cats,” “wild cats,” “wild dogs,” “wolves,” and “beasts of prey.” He concludes that “The most probable [meaning of the two plural nouns] is...”wild beasts of the desert and wild beasts of the island.” (P. 28)

1QIs^a spells אֵיִאֵמִים, (iyy)miym, perhaps simply a mistake in spelling.

⁵³Alexander states that “The verb פָּגַשׁ, **paghash**, sometimes means to meet or encounter in the sense of attacking (**Exodus 4:24; Hosea 13:8**); but here it seems to have the general sense of falling in with. These lonely creatures, as they traverse Idumea, shall encounter none but creatures like themselves.” (P. 28)

⁵⁴Alexander translates this line by “And the shaggy monster shall call to his fellow,” following the Greek translation’s βοήσουςσεν, “shall shout / cry out.”

Instead of “shaggy monster,” others translate שְׂעִיר, **sa(iyr)**, by “he-goat,” or “shaggy he-goat,” or “field-spirit,” or “field-devil,” or “wood-devil,” or simply “the devil.”

Alexander states that “Amidst these various and fanciful interpretations, the most consistent with itself and with the etymology is still that of the Latin Vulgate, *pilosus*, ‘fellow.’”

⁵⁵Slotki’s translation has “the night-monster,” and he suggests the translation “night-hag.” He states that “The Hebrew לַיְלִית, **Iliiylyth**, in the **Bible** found only here, occurs frequently in Talmudic and particularly in Cabbalistic [mystical interpretation] literature where it is the name of a female demon, Adam’s first wife before Eve, roaming with her retinue in the darkest hours of the night.” (P. 162)

Oswalt’s translation has “he-goat and night-bird,” and he comments that these “are interpreted by some as demonic figures (**Revised Standard Version**, satyr [a male companion of Dionysus with goat-like features and often permanent erection. Early artistic representations sometimes include horse-like legs, but in 6th-century B.C.E. black-figure pottery human legs are the most common. In Roman Mythology there is a concept similar to satyrs, with goat-like features: the faun, being half-man, half-goat, who roamed the woods and mountains], night-hag [night hag or old hag is a fantasy creature from the folklore of various peoples which is used to explain the phenomenon of sleep paralysis. It is a phenomenon during which a person feels a presence of a supernatural malevolent being which immobilizes the person as if sitting on his / her chest or the foot of his / her bed. The word “night-mare” was used to describe this phenomenon before the word acquired its modern, more general meaning. Various

(continued...)

and they will find for themselves a resting-place.⁵⁶

⁵⁵(...continued)

cultures have various names for this phenomenon and / or supernatural character], and this meaning is possible. However, since both the preceding and the following verses speak of regular animals, it seems best to remain with that interpretation.” (P. 616)

Watts has an excursus on Lilith (pp. 13-14), in which he states that this text, **Isaiah 34:14**, “has the only mention of Lilith in the **Old Testament**...The name is very similar to the Hebrew word for night (לַיְלָה, **layelah**). However, the demoness was well known in Mesopotamia...

“Lilith entered Jewish literature at a late date, but her influence continued a long time. Using **Isaiah 34:15** for justification, Lilith became part of the labyrinthine structure of Jewish and then Christian demonology...

“**Midrash bammidbar rabba 119A** teaches that Lilith devours her own children if she cannot find other newborn babies to eat. Rabbi Hanina is quoted in the **Talmud** as teaching that Lilith lives in abandoned houses (citing **Isaiah 24:14**)...Later Jewish literature speaks of Lilith as Adam’s first wife...

“The passage itself [**Isaiah 34:15**] is only trying to present a picture of ruin more devastating than any before it. Thus the wild and spooky feel of the desolate land is powerfully portrayed. Ostriches, snakes, and vultures will join the list of wild creatures and demons who possess the region where for generations to come ‘no one will be passing through.’” (**Isaiah 34-66**, pp. 12-13)

But the passage depicts far more than only “for generations to come”! The fact is, the passage depicts unending destruction of the land of Edom—which simply did not come to pass. And again we ask, What did we expect from a revelation based on dreams and visions, and said in **Numbers 12** and **1 Corinthians 13** to contain puzzling enigma, very much like “seeing through a mirror darkly”? Did we expect clarity, or depictions that would never fail?

⁵⁶Slotki notes that “The beasts mentioned in the verse are denizens [inhabitants / occupants of a particular place] of wild and lonely places.” (P. 162)

Translations of **verse 14** vary:

King James, “The wild beasts of the desert shall also meet with the wild beasts of the island, and the satyr shall cry to his fellow; the screech owl also shall rest there, and find for herself a place of rest.”

Tanakh, “Wildcats shall meet hyenas, Goat-demons shall greet each other; There too the lilith shall repose And find herself a resting place.”

New Revised Standard, “Wildcats shall meet with hyenas, goat-demons shall call to each other; there too Lilith shall repose, and find a place to rest.”

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

New International, “Desert creatures will meet with hyenas, and wild goats will bleat to each other; there the night creatures will also lie down and find for themselves places of rest.”

New Jerusalem, “Demons shall meet with donkey-centaurs and call one to another; there donkey-centaurs shall repose, for they have found for themselves a place to rest.”

Rahfs, “καὶ συναντήσουσιν δαιμόνια ὄνοκενταύροις καὶ βοήσουσιν ἕτερος πρὸς τὸν ἕτερον ἐκεῖ ἀναπαύσσονται ὄνοκέκταυροι εὖρον γὰρ αὐτοῖς ἀνάπαυσιν,
“And demons will meet with donkey-centaurs, and they will cry one to the other; there donkey-centaurs will rest, for they found for themselves rest.”

Alexander, “*And wild (or desert) creatures shall (there) meet with howling creatures. And the shaggy monster shall call to his fellow. Only there reposes the night-monster, and finds for herself a resting-place.*”

Alexander comments on this last line (our last two lines) that “The word לַיְלִית, **liyliyth**, which occurs only here, has experienced very much the same fate with שְׂעִיר, **sa(iyr)**. In itself it means nothing more nor less than *nocturnal*, and would seem to be applicable either to an animal or to any other object peculiarly belonging to the night. The Latin Vulgate renders it by *lamia*, of a Libyan queen, who, having lost her child, was said to prey upon the children of others. With this may be connected another Roman superstition, that of the *strix* or vampire, which sucked the blood of children in the cradle. These superstitions were adopted by the later Jews, and connected with the word before us, as denoting a *nocturnal spectre* (or *she-demon* as Gill calls it), preying upon new-born children...

“לַיְלִית, **liyliyth**, strictly means *nocturnal*, and...its application to a spectre is entirely gratuitous [given unearned]...Ghosts as well as demons would be wholly out of place in a list of wild and solitary animals. That such animals are mentioned in the first clause of this verse and of the next, is allowed by all interpreters, however widely they may differ as to the specific meaning of the terms employed....It is enough if they belong to the same class...with wild cats, jackals, wolves, and arrow-snakes. This is sufficiently secured by making word לַיְלִית, **liyliyth**, mean a nocturnal bird...or more specifically, an owl...or screech-owl...

“If these terms represent the animals occupying Idumea, first as belonging to the wilderness (צִיִּיִּם, **tsiyyiyim**), then as distinguished by their fierce or melancholy cries (אִיִּים, **iyiyim**), and then as shaggy in appearance (שְׂעִיר, **sa(iyr)**, nothing can be more natural than that the fourth epithet should also be expressive of their habits as a class, and no such epithet could well be more appropriate than that of *nocturnal* or belonging to the night...

(continued...)

34.15 שְׁמָה קִנְנָה קִפּוּז׃

וְתַמְלִיט וּבִקְעָה

וְדַגְרָה בְּצִלָּהּ

אֶדְ-שֵׁם נִקְבְּצוּ דְיֹת

אִשָּׁה רְעוּתָהּ:

There arrow-snake⁵⁷ will make a nest,

⁵⁶(...continued)

“We may safely set aside the spectral interpretation as untenable on philological and historical grounds, and as certainly nor worth being taken for granted...

“It only remains to observe that the **Septuagint Version**, the authority of which has done so much to introduce demons into **Isaiah 33:23**, makes use of the word δαίμονια, ‘demons,’ in this verse too, but as the translation of צִיִּיִּם, **tsiyyiym**, while its favorite term ὄνοκενταύροις, **onokentaurois** [‘donkey-centaurs [creatures half-human, half-donkey] is employed to represent both אִיִּיִּם, **iyyiym** and צִיִּיִּם, **tsiyyiym**. This absurd interpretation is so far consistent with itself, that it makes the whole verse a catalogue of nondescript hob-goblins, demons, and ass-centaurs, and if not a refutation of the current exposition of לִילִיִּת, **Iliyliyth**, is at least a severe satire on it.” (Pp. 30-31)

1QIs^a, instead of our Hebrew text’s singular לִילִיִּת, **Iliyliyth**, spells לִילִיֹּת, **liyliyth**, a feminine plural.

Passages such as this, with these strange, mysterious names, have become a “happy hunting-ground” for people obsessed with demon-possession, a place for finding names for various demons.

⁵⁷Alexander comments on the noun קִפּוּז, **qippoz**, that “it is supposed to denote different kinds of birds by Calvin...[but] most of the modern [mid-19th century C.E.] writers explain it to mean the *serpens jaculus* or arrow-snake, so called from its darting or springing motion.” (P. 31)

Brown-Driver-Briggs has “arrow-snake,” while **Holladay** states that “some: a type of small **tree-snake** (*Coluber jugularis*? *C. najadum*? *C. nummifer*?); others, a kind of **owl**.” The noun occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**.

(continued...)

and it will slip away, and will break through
and gather together in its shadow;
there also will be gathered those frequenting ruins,
each one (with) her neighbor.⁵⁸

34.16⁵⁹ דְּרִשׁוּ מֵעַל-סֵפֶר יְהוָה וְקָרְאוּ

⁵⁷(...continued)

Oswalt states that “Owl is somewhat conjectural, but it is preferable to the alternative, ‘arrow-snake’...Neither the hatching nor the keeping of the young under the mother’s shadow applies to this snake.” (Pp. 616-17)

For this noun, **Rahfs** has ἐχῖνος, “hedge-hog.”

Would you not say that at this point at least, the prophetic message is somewhat puzzling, obscure?

⁵⁸Translations of **verse 15** vary:

King James, “There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.”

Tanakh, “There the arrow-snake shall nest and lay eggs, And shall brood and hatch in its shade. There too the buzzards shall gather With one another.”

New Revised Standard, “There shall the owl nest and lay and hatch and brood in its shadow; there too the buzzards shall gather, each one with its mate.”

New International, “The owl will nest there and lay eggs, she will hatch them, and care for her young under the shadow of her wings; there also the falcons will gather, each with its mate.”

New Jerusalem, “ There shall the great owl make her nest, and lay, and hatch, and gather under her shadow: there shall the vultures also be gathered, every one with her mate.”

Rahfs, ἐκεῖ ἐνόσσευσεν ἐχῖνος καὶ ἔσωσεν ἡ γῆ τὰ παιδιά αὐτῆς μετὰ ἀσφαλείας ἐκεῖ ἔλαφοι συνήντησαν καὶ εἶδον τὰ πρόσωπα ἀλλήλων, “There a hedgehog made a nest, and the earth saved / delivered its children with safety / security; there deer met and saw the faces of one another.”

Alexander comments that “As to the particular species of animals referred to in this whole passage, there is no need, as Calvin well observes, of troubling ourselves much about them...The general sense evidently is, that a human population should be succeeded by wild and lonely animals, who should not only live but breed there, implying total and continued desolation.” (P. 31) See our footnote 38.

⁵⁹As **verses 34:16-17** state, this is the universal testimony of YHWH's revelation to the prophet, as contained in the written message of His scroll, which

(continued...)

אֶתֶּת מִהֵנָּה לֹא נֶעְדְּרָה
אִשָּׁה רְעוּתָהּ לֹא פָקְדוּ
כִּי־פִי הוּא צִוָּה
וְרוּחֹ הוּא קִבְּצָן:

Seek from (what is written) upon⁶⁰ YHWH's scroll,⁶¹ and read—⁶²

⁵⁹(...continued)

the reader is invited to read.

Oswalt states that “**Verses 16-17** form the conclusion not only to this section on the desert-dwellers but to the entire poem.” (P. 617)

Motyer comments on **verses 16-17** that “Those who were called to listen (**verse 1**) to the awesome tale of coming judgment are bidden to assure themselves of its certainty.” (Pp. 271-72)

Watts states that in these two verses, “The judicial procedure closes with the formal instructions for the transcript, Yahweh’s scroll, to be read aloud to be sure that no item of the curses that comprise the judgment has been omitted. The procedure emphasizes that they are His express commands. That they are collated and arranged by *His Spirit* stresses His direct participation in their origin. They are not something prepared by His office staff.” (P. 14)

Kaiser entitles **verses 16-17** “The testimony of scripture.”

He comments that ‘In order to emphasize that his prophecy of judgment would certainly be fulfilled, and to silence any doubts on the part of his readers or hearers, the poet anticipates the future, in which it will be possible to read through the **Book of Isaiah** and confirm that everything has been fulfilled which was prophesied here...All these animals will have seized possession of Edom, because Yahweh has commanded them thither...

“The full extent of the many allusions to other biblical passages in this poem can be seen only by working through the Hebrew text.” (Pp. 359-60)

Slotki comments on **verse 16** that “The prophet addresses those who are to witness the fulfilment of his prediction.” (P. 162)

⁶⁰Alexander states that the phrase מֵעַל, **me(al)** “does not mean *from top to bottom*...but simply *from upon*, as we speak of reading a sentence off a book or paper.

(continued...)

not one⁶³ from these was lacking.⁶⁴

⁶⁰(...continued)

This expression seems to have been used in anticipation of the verb קָרָא, **qera(u)**, which has here the sense of publishing by reading aloud.” (P. 32)

⁶¹Slotki comments that “the book of the Lord” (his translation) means “the book in which are recorded the prophecies spoken in the name of God including the one on Edom [i.e., the **Book of Isaiah**].” (P. 162)

But Slotki adds that “A traditional interpretation takes *the book of the Lord* to refer to the **Book of Genesis**, written like the whole of the **Torah** [the **Five Books of Moses**] at the command of the Lord [where is anything like this said in the **Book of Genesis**, or anywhere else is the Five Books?]....

No one of these was (not shall be) missing is an allusion to the animals which Noah, as instructed by God, had taken with him into the ark (**Genesis 7:8-9**). The comparison between the two groups of animals is in the nature of an *a minori ad majus* [From the smaller scale argument to the larger one--(if a law permits one to do what is greater, all the more it permits one to do what is lesser): If the command of God caused none of the animals to abstain from coming into Noah’s ark, despite the obvious shortage of food-stuffs, how much more would His judgment and decree cause none of the animals to abstain from coming to Edom where there would be an abundant supply of flesh and fat!” (P. 163)

This interpretation may be traditional, but it is hardly convincing! What do you think the statement means?

Alexander says that “The *book of Jehovah* has been variously explained to mean the book of His decrees (Aben Ezra), His annals or record of events (Forerius), the Scriptures generally, or more particularly the **Book of Genesis**, or that part which relates to clean and unclean animals (Jarchi), the Mosaic law relating to that subject (Joseph Kimchi), the law in general (Calvin), the **Book of Revelation** (Gill), the Book of Prophecy in general (Junius), the Prophecies against Edom in particular (Atling), and finally this very prophecy (David Kimchi)...

“The most natural interpretation seems to be that which makes this an exhortation to compare the prophecy with the event, and which is strongly recommended by the fact that all the verbs are in the past tense, implying that the prophet here takes his stand at a point of time posterior to the event...

“*The book* may then be this particular prophecy, or the whole prophetic volume, or the entire Scripture, without material change of sense. The persons addressed are the future witnesses of the event.” (P. 32)

Oswalt states that “There does seem to have been a concept of a heavenly book of destiny among the Hebrews (see **Psalm 40:8**^{Heb} / **7**^{Eng}; **Psalm 139:16**; **Malachi 3:16**;

(continued...)

⁶¹(...continued)

Daniel 7:10; Revelation 20:12). Thus the author is assuring the reader that all this is for certain; it is written in God's book. The major drawback is that the reader, or hearer, cannot inquire into that book, although he is invited to." (Pp. 617-18)

Motyer asks, "But what is *the scroll of the Lord*? There is no other passage of Scripture to which appeal might be made to support of the details of this prediction...

"Isaiah has forecast certain things about animals and other passages support what he says. But we can as easily translate it 'read, because...', i.e. a summons to a searching knowledge of God's word on the ground that every detail of it—even down to the birds of Edom—comes from His mouth and will be implemented by His Spirit and His hand. Such a truth comes naturally from Isaiah in the light of **8:16ff.** (with its emphasis on possession of and attention to the Divine word as the hallmark of the remnant) and **29:11-12, 18** (with its 'book' metaphor of true spirituality)...

"It is suitable to think that at least from **8:16** onwards Isaiah cultivated a 'book religion,' keeping the mind freshly in touch with the things of God by searching in the Lord's book (including his own deposited writings) as the true nourishment of spiritual conviction." (P. 272)

Perhaps...but Motyer is reading the ideas of "Scripture" (i.e. a canonical **Bible**) and "book religion" into the text, something that only became possible in post-Christian centuries. For the Jews, the **Torah** (Five Books of Moses), the **Nebiiym** (Early and Later Prophets) and the **Kethubiym** (Writings, Job, Psalms, etc.) were all written on hand-written scrolls, kept in chests in sacred meeting places—hardly anything similar to our "**Bibles**" with the entire **Tanakh** (**Torah**, **Nebiiym**, and **Kethubiym**), or with "Old Testament and New Testament" bound together in one volume, something that only became possible long after the coming of Christ.

But people in the time of Isaiah would have access to the sacred scrolls, and could go to their meeting-places ("synagogues" following the exile) to read from those scrolls. We take the passage to be referring to this.

⁶²The first line of **verse 16** is entirely missing in the Greek translation (**Rahifs**).

⁶³1QIs^a reads "and not one" at the beginning of this line.

⁶⁴Slotki states that this means "Not one of the desert birds or beasts enumerated [in the preceding verses...not one shall be missing] from the deserted and devastated land of Edom." (P. 162) Probably...but the text does not make this specific.

Alexander translates this line by "*One another they miss not*...He comments that "The context requires an allusion to the meeting of different species, not of the

(continued...)

Not an individual her neighbor—they did not visit / appoint.⁶⁵

Because my voice,⁶⁶ it commanded,

⁶⁴(...continued)

individuals of one kind.” (P. 32)

⁶⁵This is a difficult line to translate. 1QIs^a omits the phrase “*Not one from these (animals) will be lacking.*” Instead, it reads, “And one (feminine) was not missing, a female, her neighbor.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has καὶ μία αὐτῶν οὐκ ἀπώλετο, “and not one of them perished.” English translations have “no one of these shall fail,” or “Not one of these shall be absent,” or “Not one of these shall be missing.”

⁶⁶Where our Hebrew text has פִּי, **piy**, “my / My mouth,” 1QIs^a has פִּיהוּ, “his / His mouth (He commanded).”

Slotki’s translation has “For My mouth,” and he comments that this means “the prophet is speaking in the name of God.” (P. 163)

But the prophet is speaking, and has mentioned YHWH in the third person, and Slotki’s translation, with its capital ‘M’ makes it sound like it is YHWH Himself speaking. While we believe that Isaiah acted as the mouth or voice of YHWH, that does not mean it was no longer Isaiah doing the speaking.

Alexander states that “The sudden change of person from my mouth to his spirit has led to various explanations...A plausible solution is the one proposed by Aben Ezra and Kimchi, who refer the suffix in רוּחוֹ, **rucho** to פִּי (my mouth and its breath), and thus makes God the Speaker in both clauses. But on the whole, the simplest course is either to suppose...that Jehovah speaks in one clause and the prophet in the next...or that the prophet really refers the command to his own mouth instrumentally, but then immediately names the Divine Spirit as the efficient agent...The Spirit of God is not merely His power but Himself, with special reference to the Holy Ghost, as being both the author and fulfiller of the prophecies.” (Pp. 32-33)

Such a view of the Spirit of God as being God Himself is of course an anachronistic interpretation of the ancient prophecy in terms of post-Nicene Christian theology, long after the time of Isaiah.

Oswalt comments that “The Sovereign of the universe has commanded this desolation and He will bring it to pass. Just as He sovereignly apportioned Canaan to

His people Israel, so He has apportioned the Edoms of this world to the birds of the desert.” (P. 618)

However we may solve these problems in translation, it is obvious that the text is truly “enigmatic,” puzzling in nature—exactly as **Numbers 12:6-8** teaches.

and His Spirit, it gathered them.⁶⁷

34.17⁶⁸ וְהוּא־הַפִּיל לָהֶן גּוֹרָל

וַיִּדּוּ חֲלָקְתָּהּ לָהֶם בַּקֶּן

עַד־עוֹלָם יִירָשׁוּהָ

לְדוֹר וָדוֹר יִשְׁכְּנוּ־בָהּ:

And He,⁶⁹ He caused a lot to fall for them,⁷⁰

and His hand divided it for them⁷¹ with a measuring-line;
until long-lasting time they will inherit it;

to generation and generation they will dwell in it.⁷²

⁶⁷The Greek translation of **verse 16 (Rahfs)** is quite different: ἀριθμῶ παρῆλθον καὶ μία αὐτῶν οὐκ ἀπώλετο ἑτέρα τὴν ἑτέραν οὐκ ἐζήτησαν ὅτι κύριος ἐνετείλατο αὐτοῖς καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ συνήγαγεν αὐτάς, “By number they passed by, and not one of them perished; they did not seek one another, because Lord commanded them, and His Spirit gathered them.”

⁶⁸Alexander translates **verse 17**: “*He too has cast the lot for them, and His hand has divided it to them by line.*” He comments that this is “an evident allusion to the division of the land of Canaan, both by lot and measuring-line. See **Numbers 26:55, 56; Joshua 18:4-6**. As Canaan was allotted to Israel, so Edom is allotted to these doleful [cheerless] creatures.” (P. 33)

⁶⁹Slotki comments on the phrase “And He,” that “the subject is emphasized in the text. What happened to Edom was deliberately decreed by God.” (P. 163) We agree.

⁷⁰The Hebrew phrase is לָהֶן, **lahen**, 3rd person feminine plural, “to them (feminine).”

Slotki states that this means YHWH apportioned “to each animal its particular locality.” (P. 163)

⁷¹In spite of the previous phrase לָהֶן, **lahen**, 3rd person feminine plural, “to them (feminine),” here the phrase is לָהֶם, **lahem**, 3rd person masculine plural, “to them (masculine).” Again we remark the “enigmatic” nature of the text. Watts comments that “The masculine לָהֶם ...following the feminine לָהֶן ‘to them’ is confusing.” (P. 6)

⁷²Alexander comments that “Having referred to the allotment as already past, he
(continued...)

⁷²(...continued)

now describes the occupation as future and perpetual. For ever shall they hold it as a heritage, to all generations shall they dwell therein.” (P. 33)

Watts comments that “Yahweh’s decisions have settled the fate of Edom’s inhabitants and the territory permanently.” (P. 14)

But the modern student of **Isaiah** must ask the question, Is this in fact what has happened to Edom / modern southern Jordan? Is southern Jordan devoid of human inhabitants, filled with burning sulfur and pitch, inhabited only by wild animals? And the answer is an unequivocal No. See our footnote 38.

So what do you make of such a dire prediction as this in **Isaiah 34**? Is it the infallible word of God? Or is it a dream-like vision, filled with enigma / puzzle, not to be understood literally or dogmatically? We choose the latter. What about you?

And we conclude that on the pathway to YHWH’s universal feast, at which He will swallow up death forever, wiping away all tears, bringing salvation to all peoples and nations, there will be constant Divine judgments, as the consequences of human sin is punished, and the Divine fire burns up evil.

What are your conclusions concerning this chapter?