

Isaiah Chapter 41, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

41:1' תְּהַרְישׁוּ אֱלֹהִים

¹Slotki comments that **chapter 41** teaches “God’s omniscience and omnipotence, the vanity of other Gods, the Lord’s loving care of Israel and the summons to Cyrus, the instrument for the liberation of His exiled people.”

He comments on **verses 1-4**, “The nations are invited to a judicial discussion in the presence of God Who is to prove His omnipotence and their utter impotence.” (P. 192)

Alexander sums up **chapter 41** by stating, “Until the ends of Israel’s national existence are accomplished, that existence must continue in spite of hostile nations and their Gods, Who shall all perish sooner than the chosen people, **verses 1-16**. However feeble Israel may be in himself, [YHWH] will protect him, and raise up the necessary instruments for his deliverance and triumph.” (P. 117)

But where in this chapter is anything said concerning “until the ends of Israel’s national existence are accomplished”? No such thing is said. And whereas Alexander usually gives a verse by verse statement of what the chapter holds, his summation here is greatly lacking.

He does not mention: the Divine call to the coastlands and nations to enter into dialogue with YHWH, and to renew their strength, just as He has promised to Israel at the close of **chapter 40, verse 1**; YHWH’s claim to having raised up one from the east (not named, but obviously speaking of Cyrus), who is having a successful campaign, **verses 2-4**; the fear that this successful campaign has had on the nations, and their resort to the manufacture of idols as a result, **verses 5-7**; YHWH’s choice of Israel to be His servant, whom He promises to help and uphold, **verses 8-10** (with no mention of a time-limit); YHWH’s promise of Divine protection and defeat of all Israel’s enemies, **verses 11-13**; YHWH’s call to “worm” Israel to “fear not,” because of YHWH’s making Israel a powerful fighting force, “threshing the mountains,” and rejoicing in YHWH, **verses 14-16**; YHWH’s promise to come to the aid of the poor and needy, turning the wilderness into a place of rivers and springs of water and abundant tree-life, **verses 17-20**; YHWH’s challenge to the idol-Gods to speak, foretelling the future, doing something that proves their power, and not just an “abomination,” **verses 21-24**; YHWH’s stirring up one from the north (again, unnamed, but we think of Cyrus), which none of the idol-Gods has foretold or proclaimed—but they give no answer; they are a delusion, and empty wind!, **verses 25-29**.

Oswalt states that the section **41:1-20** “aims chiefly at reassuring fearful Israel. Following on the themes introduced in **chapter 40**, it makes two points:

- (1) Israel need not fear the nations, who will be terrified by what God will do in their history (**verses 1-7, 21-29**).

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(2) God has not rejected His people but will in fact use them to accomplish His purposes in the world (**verses 8-20**).

The purpose here is one of motivation. How can a condemned and fallen people ever become the Servant of God in the world? How can they begin to exercise the trust that was taught in **chapters 13-39**?" (P. 79)

But these are Oswalt's questions—not **Second Isaiah's**. **Second Isaiah** depicts YHWH as claiming that Israel is in fact His "servant," empowered by YHWH to accomplish His mission. And Israel is spoken to, not as a "condemned and fallen people," but as those whose iniquity has been forgiven and who has paid double for all her sins (**40:2**).

North entitles **verses 1-7** "The Victor from the East." He comments that "Yahweh bids the nations assemble for a judicial inquiry. Can they say who it is that has set in motion the conqueror who is victorious wherever he goes? It is Yahweh, Who has been active in the world since its beginning, and will be to its end. Well may the nations fear and (in the present text) set to work to make more potent idols...

"The passage...must be interpreted against the background of ancient legal procedure... Litigants, if unable to come to an amicable settlement, would appeal to court for a 'judgment' (מִשְׁפֵּט) between them...or a judgment or decision pronounced by a judge sitting in court...

"A court was held in the open air, 'in the gate'...There is here no mention of judges. The omission is significant and necessary, because Yahweh is One of the parties involved. Indeed, it is He Who brings the action, and there can hardly be judges in a case where He is concerned, unless it be all heaven and earth, as in **Micah 6:1-2**. The theater here is almost as wide, the summons being to the far coastlands and peoples...

"The proceedings open with a call for silence. It is Yahweh Who calls for this as He opens His case...Here the Convener of the court Himself brings the action and His imperative is emphatic: 'Keep silence and listen to what I have to say.'" (Pp. 92-3)

Oswalt comments that "The summons to judgment begins with God's demand that the clamoring nations be silent in His presence...This Deity of little Judah has the right to tell the whole world [He is addressing 'coastlands' and 'peoples'] to give Him reverential silence." (P. 80)

Westermann states that "In the trial speeches (**41:1-5, 21-29; 43:8-15; 44:6ff.; 45:2-25**...) Yahweh and the Gods of the nations confront one another in a legal process, the purpose of which is to decide who is truly God...

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“**Deutero-Isaiah** shifts the arena of decision from the battlefield to the law court...The hitherto accepted proof of a God’s Divinity, His power to win military victory for His Own people, was replaced by another, the dependable and unremitting continuity between what a God says and what He does...

“The announcement of an event in advance and its realization in actual fact—is made the criterion of true Divinity *vis-a-vis* the foreign Gods. In this way **Deutero-Isaiah** magnificently sums up the pre-exilic prophets’ proclamation of doom. There Yahweh proved Himself to be God by announcing the doom of His chosen people in advance and then giving effect to this by destroying them as a nation. That a God should prove His Divinity by letting His Own people be defeated was something the ancient world had never even dreamt of! This, however, alone afforded any possibility of renewed historical action on God’s part after His people’s downfall, and this is the very thing that **Deutero-Isaiah** proclaims: by giving effect to His sentence of doom God proved Himself to be God: therefore, Israel may now place utter confidence in His word of salvation [which, we add, is also being announced before it takes place]...

“The design which Cyrus is to serve is God’s purpose of salvation for His people. This strikes a completely new note; God is about to save His chosen people from the destruction of their national life without the deliverance being bound up with military victory on their part. In order that liberty may be won for the people of the true God, the victory is to go to the foreign king who serves other Gods [and specifically, the God Marduk].” (Pp. 15-16)

Westermann points to **43:22-28**; **50:1-2** and **42:18-25** as passages which show **Second Isaiah’s** agreement with the prophets of doom. He states that “The trial speeches against Israel are chiefly concerned with her past sins. They reveal **Deutero-Isaiah** as following the tradition of the pre-exilic prophets of doom, affirming and reiterating the message which they also declared. His hearers were still unable to realize that the origin of the doom which had overtaken God’s chosen people lay in God Himself. They were bringing charges against Him...accusing Him of having cast His people off...In answer to this, **Deutero-Isaiah** said that there was no other way in which God could have acted (**43:28**), for Israel sinned against Him (**43:24b, 27; 50:1b**)...

The trial speeches which the prophet addressed to his fellow-countrymen were not designed to move Israel to repentance, now that she saw the true state of things and to make her beg God for mercy; no, with a certitude which admitted of no doubt **Deutero-Isaiah** now tells them that the situation has been completely transformed. God has forgiven His people (**43:25**). And He now looks for one thing and one only from men who could not understand Him, and who accused Him—their acceptance of the change to salvation which accompanied forgiveness, and their joyous affirmation of the opening words of the prologue [**40:2**], ‘cry to her that her iniquity is pardoned.’” (Pp. 15-18)

יְגִשׁוּ אֶזְרָא יַדְבִּירוּ יַחְדָּו

לְמִשְׁפָּט נִקְרְבָה:

Be silent before Me, coastlands!²

And peoples, let them renew strength!³

Let them draw near—⁴, ¹ then they will speak together!

Let us draw near for the justice / judgment / decision!⁵

²For this word אֶזְרָא, “coastlands,” see footnote 59. The plural imperative verb “Be silent,” means “Stop talking, and listen in silence, as I speak!”

³It is not just the Israelite exiles in Babylon who are called to renew their strength—but all peoples, in all nations.

Knight comments that “Here is the Lord of history speaking. He Who stoops to *renew the strength of the weary* can obviously as easily command the nations to *renew their strength*. (P. 27)

Motyer likewise states that the Lord is “offering the Gentiles the same strength that is Israel’s privilege. This is the point of the call, which will be developed further in 41:21-42:17. It is at the heart of Isaiah’s message that the Gentiles are to be the fellow-heirs with Israel (19:24-25; 27:13). The Lord, therefore, extends to them, in the envisaged pressures of life, the same renewal that is available to Israel, i.e. by coming to Him. It cannot, however, be done just like that: there is an issue to be settled, hence the courtroom terminology of approaching, speaking, meeting together and judgment (מִשְׁפָּט, not ‘condemnation,’ but reaching an authoritative decision).” (P. 309)

⁴It is a Divine invitation for all the peoples and coastlands to “draw near” to YHWH. For passages related to drawing near to God, see our end-note 1.

⁵Translations of the last three lines of **verse 1** vary:

King James, “let them come near; then let them speak: let us come near together to judgment.”

Tanakh, “Let them approach to state their case; Let us come forward together for argument.”

New Revised Standard, “let them approach, then let them speak; let us together draw near for judgment.”

New International, “Let them come forward and speak; let us meet together at the place of judgment.”

New Jerusalem, “let them come forward and speak; let us assemble for judgement.”

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Rahfs, ἐγγισάτωσαν καὶ λαλησάτωσαν ἅμα τότε κρίσιν ἀναγγειλάτωσαν, “let them draw near, and let them speak together; then justice / judgment let them announce!”

It is a universal Divine invitation; the peoples and coastlands are invited to come into the Divine presence for communication and justice—reminiscent of **Isaiah 1:18**—YHWH’s invitation to the wayward Israelites, “Come, let us reason together / be reprov-ed by each other!” It is also reminiscent of **Isaiah 2:3-4**, where the nations come to Zion to learn YHWH’s **Torah**, and His judgment / justice that leads to universal peace.

YHWH is not just the God of the Israelites; He is the God of all peoples and territories, and He wants to enter into dialogue with all of them, sharing His strength with them. While the Divine voice calls upon peoples to be silent before YHWH, in order to hear His Word, YHWH also promises that they will be able to speak. He doesn’t want this to be a one-sided conversation.

Alexander comments that “YHWH] now summons the idolaters themselves to enter into controversy with Him...The challenge is a general one directed to the whole heathen world.” (P. 117-18) But the verse doesn’t say “idolaters,” nor is there anything said about “heathen.” This is “put-down” language, and it is not necessary to use it here—the condemnation of idolatry will come soon enough!

If our translation and the Greek translation are correct, and the speaking together comes as a result of the peoples drawing near to God, then this text can be seen as a Divine invitation to a reversal of the divisions of humanity resulting from the Divine judgment at the tower of Babel (**Genesis 11**) of not being able to speak together and understand one another.

Knight comments on **verse 1** that “It is as if God were calling the nations to a court of justice; and in the judicial language found at **Deuteronomy 25:1**, passes judgment upon them, something which is His right to do.” (P. 27)

But is this simply a matter of YHWH’s “passing judgment” on the nations, as if the results of this invitation have already been decided? We think not. Rather, it is a matter of YHWH’s wanting to enter into dialogue, a call to reasoning together, to enable a new day of communication, of speaking honestly and openly, leading to understanding between YHWH and His creatures, made in His image and likeness, so that the whole world may share in His strength.

⁶Oswalt comments on **verses 2-4** that “The evidence to which God calls a response is His activity in human history. He does not appeal to a primordial creation epic or to some extraterrestrial war among the Gods. These are never the arena of

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revelation for the **Hebrew Scriptures**. Rather, God always chooses to reveal Himself in the context of human-historical experience.” (P. 80)

But is this true? Appeal is made again and again in **Isaiah 40-55** to “the former / first things,” which can easily be understood as a reference to the “primordial” [existing at or from the beginning of time] material in **Genesis 1-11**, profound theological material that cannot be found in the literature of the idol-Gods, but by which believers can understand their historical origins, and their relationship to YHWH. YHWH reveals Himself in terms of the primordial, in terms of history, and also in terms of the eschaton-“eschatology”—which the idol-Gods have not and cannot do.

We certainly agree that YHWH is depicted as revealing Himself in the **Hebrew Bible** in the context of history, and we agree with Oswalt when he states that “It was this understanding that enabled the Hebrew prophets to look at an Assyrian Sargon, a Babylonian Nebuchadnezzar, and a Persian Cyrus, and to say with almost breathtaking aplomb that all of them alike were tools in the hand of their God—not for Israel’s national survival, but for their national purification.” (P. 81)

But we think Oswalt is mistaken in claiming that the only way YHWH reveals Himself is through human history. The **Hebrew Bible** depicts YHWH as revealing Himself in many other ways as well—through nature (think of YHWH’s speeches to Job in **Job 38-41**, which sounds very much like an ancient course in zoology!), through enigmatic, puzzling dreams and visions, through Theophanies, through humanity’s search for wisdom, etc. etc. It is a mistake to try and limit God!

Translations of **verse 2** vary:

King James, “Who raised up the righteous *man* from the east, called him to his foot, gave the nations before him, and made *him* rule over kings? he gave *them* as the dust to his sword, *and* as driven stubble to his bow.”

Tanakh, “Who has roused a victor from the East, Summoned him to His service? Has delivered up nations to him, And trodden sovereigns down? Has rendered their swords like dust, Their bows like wind-blown straw?”

New Revised Standard, “Who has roused a victor from the east, summoned him to his service? He delivers up nations to him, and tramples kings under foot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow.”

New International, “Who has stirred up one from the east, calling him in righteousness to his service? He hands nations over to him and subdues kings before him. He turns them to dust with his sword, to windblown chaff with his bow.”

New Jerusalem, “Who has raised from the east him whom saving justice summons in its train, him to whom Yahweh delivers up the nations and subjects kings, him who reduces them to dust with his sword, and to driven stubble with his bow”;

Rahlf's, τὴν ἐξ ἡγείρεν ἀπὸ ἀνατολῶν δικαιοσύνην ἐκάλεσεν αὐτὴν κατὰ πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ πορεύσεται δώσει ἐναντίον ἐθνῶν καὶ βασιλεῖς ἐκστήσει καὶ

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δώσει εἰς γῆν τὰς μαχαίρας αὐτῶν καὶ ὡς φρύγανα ἐξωσμένα τὰ τόξα αὐτῶν, “and He raised up from (the) east(s) right-relationship; He called it to / against His feet; and he will go; he will give (it) before nations; and he will amaze kings; and he will give to (the) earth their swords; and like brushwood having been cast out, their bows.

Alexander, “Who hath raised up (or awakened) from the east? Righteousness shall call him to its foot; it shall give nations before him, and cause him to tread upon kings; it shall give (them) as dust to his sword, and as driven stubble to his bow.”

Alexander comments that following the first line, there is “an abrupt transition from the form of interrogation to that of prediction. The speaker...interrupts his own question before it is complete in order to supply what must otherwise be presupposed.” (P. 118)

The verse is difficult to translate, in part due to its use of the ambiguous third person pronoun “he.” We think that the first line is asking a question—concerning who it is that is the ultimate cause of the action going on in their observable history, while the remaining lines answer that question by referring to Cyrus, as the instrument in YHWH’s hand. Our English translations all take the “he” to be referring to YHWH.

Knight asks, “What is this plan of God then? Again **Deutero-Isaiah** hints at it, without naming the person of Cyrus, king of Persia, who even as he [**Deutero-Isaiah**] was speaking was carrying forward a triumphant campaign of conquest in Asia Minor. But **Deutero-Isaiah** insists that Cyrus’ advance was primarily God’s doing and only secondarily the action of a man. He comes both from the east and *from the north* (**41:25**). That is actually the route that Cyrus took.” (P. 27)

We take the verse to mean that YHWH is asking a question to open the proposed dialogue between the peoples of the coastlands and Himself. Who is it, do they think, that is carrying forward this movement in world history (through Cyrus), that will reveal His plan—His nature and His goal?

It is an excellent question in our own day. Who or what is it that is the ultimate cause of all the political turmoils and changes that are occurring in our modern history? Is it simply human freedom at work? Or is it the heartless dictators, or those who defend against their actions? Or is there some “invisible hand” at work in human history? Has the fall of the dictators, and the rise of constitutional democracies in their stead, not pointed to some hidden power working out purposes of good in history? And if so, what is it, or Who is it? What is its or His name? Is it possible for humanity to discover the answer beyond educated guesses? **Isaiah 40-55** seeks to answer just such questions, pointing to YHWH God as the hidden hand at work in human history.

Motyer comments on **verse 2** that “An anonymous conqueror is described, and the question is asked who initiated his career (**2a**), is his master (**2b**), determined what

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יִקְרָאֵהוּ לְרִגְלוֹ
 יִתֵּן לְפָנָיו גּוֹיִם
 וּמַלְכִים יִרְדֶּה
 יִתֵּן כַּעֲפָר חֲרָבוֹ
 כְּקֶשׁ נִדְף קִשְׁתּוֹ:

Who stirred up / awakened⁷ righteousness⁸ from (the) east?^{9, 2}

⁶(...continued)

he shall do (2cd) and how (2e-3). The oldest interpretation is that this refers to Abraham, either in his victory over the kings (**Genesis 14**) or in the victories of his descendants under Joshua...But [that it refers to Abraham] hardly accounts for the picture of international turmoil in **verses 5-7**, which would suit a reference to Joshua (see **Joshua 5:1; 10:1; 11:1**). Most interpreters find here an anticipation of the conquests of Cyrus (**44:24-47:15**), which were well known for their ease, speed and the panic they created. Any and all views can be accommodated in a passage which is designedly non-specific...

“That the conqueror will presently become Cyrus is obvious, but it is best to leave Isaiah to spring that news at his own time. Here his concern is only with the basic question of where authority and rule lie in world events. He will reply that all events originate in heaven, all individuals are stirred and guided by the Lord, all empires rise and fall at His direction: there is no other ultimate agent.” (P. 309)

⁷The verb עָוַר, to rouse oneself, to awaken, occurs oftentimes in the **Hebrew Bible**. Here, in the hiphil form, הִעָוַר, it means “to rouse / stir up to activity,” and often occurs depicting YHWH’s “stirring up” kings to take action. See for example,

Isaiah 13:17 (where YHWH tells Babylon He is stirring up the Medes against him);

Isaiah 41:25 (YHWH has stirred up one from the north);

Isaiah 45:13 (YHWH stirred up Cyrus in right-relationship; compare this present verse);

Jeremiah 50:9 (YHWH is stirring up a gathering of nations against Babylon);

Jeremiah 51:11 (YHWH stirred up the spirit of the Medes against Babylon);

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Ezekiel 23:22 (YHWH is stirring up Oholibah's / Jerusalem's lovers against her—the Babylonians and the Assyrians);

Ezra 1:1-4 (YHWH stirred up the spirit of Cyrus to make his proclamation that YHWH had charged him to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, allowing the exiles to return);
2 Chronicles 36:22-23, same;

1 Chronicles 5:26 (the God of Israel stirred up the spirits of Pul and Tiglath-Pileser, kings of Assyria, to take members of the half-tribe of Manasseh into exile);

2 Chronicles 21:16 (YHWH stirred up the spirits of the Philistines and Arabians against Jehoram, king of Judah.

Compare the imagery in **Deuteronomy 32:10-12**,

10 He found him (Jacob) in a land of wilderness--
and in a howling chaos of waste.

He surrounded him, He understood him,
He guarded him like a pupil of His eye!

11 Like a vulture / eagle will stir up its nest,
over its young birds it will hover,

(if a young bird falls) it will spread out its wings, it will lift it up,
it will bear it upon its feathered-wings.

12 YHWH alone will lead / guide him [Jacob]--
and there is no One with him, a foreign God.

(Yes, YHWH is like a griffon-vulture, hovering over its nest of chicks, stirring them up from sleep to be fed, protecting them from falling; so YHWH watches over Jacob; and as the passages just referred to show, YHWH also hovers over the nations, stirring up their leaders to action, calling individuals and nations to be His "servant.")

Motyer states that this "stirring" is "as if from sleep, therefore pointing to the first prompting to action." (P. 309)

⁸The noun here is צִדְקָה, **tsedheq**. Both **Tanakh** and **New Revised Standard** translate by "victor," and North supports this translation, stating that "victory" is meant, as "Hebrew צִדְקָה and צִדְקָה, 'righteousness,' come, especially in **Deutero-Isaiah** and the **Psalms**, to mean righteousness as vindicated, i.e. 'victory,' 'prosperity.'" But we doubt that this is a valid translation. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines the noun by "right-ness," or "righteousness," our "right-relationship," without the definite article. Holladay defines it by "what is right, just," and "(legal) rightness," and "justice." See the following passages:

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Leviticus 19:36, where it refers to honest scales and weights; **Deuteronomy 25:15**, similar;

Deuteronomy 1:16, where YHWH commands judges to determine / judge **tsedheq** between a man and his brother and his temporary resident; **16:18**, similar;

Deuteronomy 16:20,

Righteousness, righteousness you (singular) shall pursue,
so that you may live, and may inherit the land,
which YHWH your God is giving to you.

But as this passage shows, **tsedheq** is not limited to Israel; it is something that YHWH stirs up / awakens in the east—specifically in and through the Persian ruler Cyrus. Slotki says that the prophet means Cyrus, but adds that “The Targum and Jewish commentators understand it of the patriarch Abraham.” (P. 193)

Still, **Brown-Driver-Briggs** translates by “(who) in victory calls him at every step,” or “on whose steps attends victory.” Both **Tanakh** and **New Revised Standard** translate by “victor,” and Knight translates “victory,” admitting that it is an “equivocal translation.” (P. 27). We see no reason or justification for these translations, except perhaps for a refusal to imagine that a Persian emperor could possibly be a servant of righteousness. But in **chapter 58** righteousness will be defined as breaking the yokes that bind others—and the Persian Cyrus did exactly that—allowing the captives from many different nations to return to their homelands.

Alexander rejects the translation of **צֶדֶק**, **tsedheq** by “victory” or “victor,” stating that “Here and elsewhere **צֶדֶק**, **tsedheq** means the righteousness of God as manifested in His providence, His dealings with His people and their enemies.” (P. 118)

We take this passage to mean that the Persian Cyrus has been called by YHWH to be the embodiment of “righteousness.” And the story of his accomplishments, building a world-wide empire, releasing the captive peoples of whatever religions, enabling them to return home and rebuild their sanctuaries, is a good example of what genuine “righteousness” is all about. Cyrus is an early Eleanor Roosevelt, who defends the “rights” of all human beings, regardless of their nationalities or religions. In so doing, the biblical text proclaims, he is truly YHWH’s messiah (**Isaiah 45:1**)!

⁹There should be little doubt that YHWH’s awakening / stirring up righteousness from the east is referring to YHWH’s calling Cyrus, the Medo-Persian ruler. See **45:1a** and **45:13**,

45:1a, In this way YHWH spoke to His anointed one, to Cyrus...

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he proclaims it¹⁰ at his (every) foot / step;

⁹(...continued)

45:13, I, I will stir up / awaken him in / by righteousness;
and all his pathways I will make straight.
He will build My city,
and My exiled people he will send forth,
not for a price, and not for a bribe—
said YHWH of Armies.

Slotki quotes O.C. Whitehouse in the **Century Bible** as saying, “His (Cyrus’) conquests may indeed have already begun. For we know that between the years 553 and 550 he conquered Astyages, king of Media, and in the years that followed extended his conquests to Lydia.” (P. 193)

For a **Wikipedia** article on the life of Cyrus, see our end-note 2.

Alexander comments that “The question, whose appearance is predicted in this verse, has been always a subject of dispute. Eusebius, Theodoret and Procopius understand it as describing the triumphs of true religion, or the gospel, here called *righteousness*. Cyril and Jerome apply it to the Lord Jesus Christ...as the Righteous One...Cocceius [thinks of] the apostle Paul. The Jews make Abraham the subject of the passage, excepting Aben Ezra, who, with Vitringa and all the latest writers [in the nineteenth century], understand it as a prophecy of Cyrus...The truth appears to be that this is a more general intimation of a great eventful movement from the East, which is afterwards repeated with specific reference to Cyrus and his conquests.” (P. 119)

Oswalt comments that “is almost certainly Cyrus, the first emperor of the Persian Empire, who conquered the Babylonian Empire and permitted all the exiled people of that empire, including the Jews, to return home. The Persian homeland lay to the east of both Babylon and Jerusalem.” (P. 81)

¹⁰We take this to mean “Cyrus proclaims *tsedeq*, “righteousness,” or “human rights,” at every step. In the **Wikipedia** article previously mentioned, it is stated that the world-wide empire of Cyrus was dedicated to “human rights.” Cyrus Sorat, in his article on the Internet describes the Cyrus Cylinder:

“The Cyrus cylinder was discovered in 1878 C.E. at the site of Babylon. It is inscribed in Akkadian cuneiform. Now housed in the British Museum, it includes a detailed account by Cyrus of his conquest of Babylon in 539 B.C.E. and his subsequent humane treatment of his conquered subjects.

“It has been hailed as the world's first declaration of human rights. The (incomplete) inscription on the cylinder starts by describing the criminal deeds of the Babylonian king Nabonidus; as well as how Marduk, the Babylonian God, had looked for a new king and chosen Cyrus. It continues with the famous: “I am Cyrus, king of

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he delivers nations before him,¹¹

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the world, the great king, the powerful king, king of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad, king of the four quarters of the world."

"After a description of Cyrus' ancestry and of royal protocol, it goes on to explain how Cyrus established peace and abolished forced labor: 'The people of Babylon...the shameful yoke was removed from them.' The inscription continues by detailing reparative building activities in Babylon as well as asking for prayers for Cyrus. It makes specific reference to the Jews, who have been brought to Babylon--and who Cyrus supported in leaving for their homeland. Further demonstrating his religious tolerance, Cyrus restored the local cults by allowing the Gods to return to their shrines. The cylinder describes the Great King not as a conqueror, but as a liberator and the legitimate successor to the crown of Mesopotamia.

"The same text has also been found, in a more complete version, in an inscription discovered in the ancient city of Ur, in Mesopotamia. Both documents corroborate many of the details in **Ezra 1:1-5** describing Cyrus supporting the Jews in returning to Judea from captivity to rebuild the temple in 537 B.C.E. **Isaiah 45:1-13** also backs up the idea of Cyrus as a benign and chosen ruler.

"Before the discovery of the cylinder, many skeptical historians believed that the idea of a Zoroastrian emperor like Cyrus the Great allowing a conquered people like the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple was simply not credible and could only be Persian propaganda. Nevertheless, the Cyrus Cylinder, alongside the biblical and other historical statements, seems to substantiate the idea that Cyrus not only allowed many of the nations he conquered to practice their various religious beliefs--an unprecedented tolerance--but that he even actively assisted captive peoples, including the Jews, to return to their lands of origin. This support was not only political but even financial--as he gave grants both from the Imperial treasury and also from his own personal fortune.

"The Cylinder has especial resonance for the Iranian peoples and is an integral part of Iran's cultural heritage and national identity. Antedating the 1789 French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen* by more than two millennia, it can also be considered as a world treasure--and the first international declaration of human rights. The text was translated into all the United Nations' official languages in 1971." (1/21/2015)

See James B. Pritchard's **Ancient Near Eastern Texts**, pp. 314-16, for Nabonidus' statements concerning Cyrus, and Cyrus' own statements from the cylinder / clay barrel.

We think that it is because of the Persian Cyrus' actions in freeing captives, and allowing freedom of religion throughout his empire, that YHWH designates Cyrus as "My messiah" in **Isaiah 45:1**.

and kings he beats down.¹²

He makes (them) like dust (by) his sword.¹³

like chaff driven about (by) his bow.¹⁴

41:3¹⁵ יִרְדָּפֵם יַעֲבוֹר שְׁלוֹם

¹¹See our end-note 2, with its mention of Cyrus the Great's enlightened policy of freeing captive peoples and nations, allowing former captives and exiles to return to their native homes, and helping in the rebuilding of their religious temples. Is that not an example of *tsedeq*, of "righteousness"? We think it is, and that it is an early example of genuine care for people of other religions, which we would do well to follow. What do you think? How different it is from the proud claim to have the "true religion," along with denouncing all other religions as false. It didn't mean that Cyrus gave up his own religion, the worship of Marduk. But it meant that he didn't claim that his religion was superior to or dismissive of all other religions.

What do you think? Do you believe that the Persian Cyrus was truly YHWH's "messiah" because of the way he freed the prisoners and allowed them to return home?

¹²Where our Hebrew text has the qal imperfect verb יִרְדָּף, "he will beat down," 1QIs^a has יוֹרֵד, "he will bring down," and interpolates the word תַּחְתָּיו, "beneath him." **Rahlfs** has καὶ βασιλείς ἐκστήσει, "and kings he will amaze."

¹³Where our Hebrew text reads חַרְבּוֹ, **charbho**, "his sword," **Rahlfs** has τὰς μαχαίρας αὐτῶν, literally, "the swords of theirs."

¹⁴Where our Hebrew text has קֶשֶׁתוֹ, **qashto**, "his bow," **Rahlfs** has τὰ τόξα αὐτῶν, literally, "the bows of theirs."

While following such an "enlightened" policy of freeing captive peoples and nations, Cyrus was by no means a pacifist. He conquered numerous kings, and had them put to death, as he used his sword and bow / military ability to build the largest kingdom ever before known in history, much larger than that of Alexander the Great in later history (356-323 B.C.E.).

¹⁵Translations of **verse 3** vary:

King James, "He pursued them, *and* passed safely; *even* by the way *that* he had not gone with his feet."

Tanakh, "He pursues them, he goes on unscathed; No shackle is placed on his feet."

New Revised Standard, "He pursues them and passes on safely, scarcely touching the path with his feet."

New International, "He pursues them and moves on unscathed, by a path his feet have not traveled before."

(continued...)

אֶרַח בְּרַגְלָיו לֹא יָבוֹא:

He pursues them, he passes over (in) peace / safely;¹⁶
a way with his feet he will not go / enter.¹⁷

¹⁵(...continued)

New Jerusalem, “him who pursues them and advances unhindered, his feet scarcely touching the road?”

Rahlf, καὶ διώξεται αὐτοὺς καὶ διελύσεται ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἡ ὁδὸς τῶν ποδῶν αὐτοῦ,
“And he will pursue them and will pass through in peace, the road of his feet.”

1QIs^a, “and he pursued them and he passed over peace, a way with his feet he does not understand.”

Alexander, “He shall pursue them; he shall pass (in) peace (or safety); a path with his feet he shall not go.”

¹⁶Or, perhaps, “peace passes over.” North translates by “He pursues them (and) passes on unscathed.”

North comments that “The picture is of rapid pursuit, bloodless victory, and a further advance, leaving the defeated enemy in the rear...**Herodotus (1. 78)** says that Cyrus was his own messenger and that Croesus had no news that he was on the way.” (P. 93)

However, **Second Isaiah’s** earlier statement, “and kings he beats down. He makes (them) like dust (by) his sword” hardly sounds like a “bloodless victory”!

¹⁷Knight suggests for this last line “By a route which he does not enter with his feet.” He states that “this might mean...that Cyrus avoids the beaten tracks...[Or, it might mean] ‘A path with his feet he does not tread,’ or in modern words, ‘his feet (scarcely) touch the ground.’ So fast does he advance that he goes like the wind.” (P. 28)

Oswalt suggests two possibilities, the first that “Cyrus’s conquests will be so swift that it will seem as if his feet have not touched the ground”; and second that it describes “something similar to the claims of many earlier conquerors...The Assyrian and Babylonian monarchs had frequently claimed that although their enemies were defended by trackless mountains and forests, they in their own strength and cunning had carved out brand-new roads, over which no one had traveled, and thereby captured the enemies... Perhaps the sense is ‘on which a person’s feet cannot (under normal circumstances) go.’” (P. 83)

Alexander thinks “the clause describes the swiftness of his motions, as flying rather than walking on foot.” (P. 120) North states, “The meaning probably is that his advance was so swift that his feet seemed scarcely to touch the ground, like the he-goat (Alexander the Great) in **Daniel 8:5**, where the phrase ‘touched not the ground’ is actually used.” (P. 94)

(continued...)

41:4 מִי־פָעַל וְעָשָׂה

קָרָא הַדְּרוֹת מֵרֹאשׁ

אֲנִי יְהוָה רִאשׁוֹן וְאֶת־אַחֲרָיִם

אֲנִי־הוּא:

Who did and made (it)—¹⁸

¹⁷(...continued)

The meaning of **verse 3** is obscure, as evidenced by the varying translations. However, as Knight observes, while translation is uncertain, “the picture of Cyrus’ steady advance causing all powers to collapse before him is historically accurate if we place [Isaiah 40-55] in the second half of the 540’s B.C.E.” (P. 27) We do not see how the dating of **Second Isaiah** has anything to do with whether or not the statement is historically accurate.

North comments concerning the victor of **verses 2-3**: “Jewish exegesis has almost unanimously referred the passage to Abraham’s victory over the four kings (**Genesis 14**). The majority of Christian interpreters, until modern times, have been of the same opinion...The general view today is to Cyrus, who is actually named in **44:28** and **45:1**...

“The description...agrees well with the victories of Cyrus up to the fall of Sardis in the autumn of 547 B.C.E., and the passage gives the impression that it was composed while those victories were still the subject of wild surmise. It seems unrealistic, even academic, that the nations should be urgently summoned to debate who called Abraham more than 1,000 years previously.” (P. 95)

¹⁸English translations add in at the end of this first line of **verse 4**, “it,” or “this.” The Greek translation adds in ταῦτα, “these things.” The Hebrew text has no object for the verbs “did and made,” meaning, we take it, “Who has been actively at work in the formation of the generations of humanity?”, which is easily assumed from the following line.

Knight comments that it is “Israel’s God Who has been doing all this—we have two perfect tenses of two similar verbs in succession, of which the first may mean to initiate an action, the second to realize and carry it out...It is He Who has been active since the beginning, because He is the beginning Himself; consequently He *will be with the last*, that is, He will be there at the end...

“**Deutero-Isaiah** does not conceive of Yahweh as static being. He is the active, purposeful, creative God. For *I am He* is the emphatic assertion of Yahweh’s personality...Yahweh then has been active ever since the beginning...This is probably **Deutero-**

(continued...)

calling the generations from (the) beginning?¹⁹
I, YHWH, (with the) first, and with last ones / (those) afterwards—
I (am) He!^{20, 3}

¹⁸(...continued)

Isaiah's technical term for the exodus period when God chose Israel as His son (**Exodus 4:22** and **Hosea 11:1**). Since then God had been calling generation after generation of Israelites to hear and obey His voice." (P. 28)

But, we think, this activity as the text describes it, has been universal in nature, not just with Israelites, but with all the generations of humanity, as **Genesis 1-11** depicts.

Oswalt states similarly that "the Lord (speaking through the prophet) recaps the opening question and demands of His hearers to know Who has done this. With a sweeping assertion of His creatorship, His eternity, His uniqueness, and His Self-existence, the Lord answers His Own rhetorical question. He will be the One Who calls out Cyrus as He has been *calling the generations from the beginning.*" (Pp. 83-4)

¹⁹For this somewhat ambiguous phrase מֵרֵאשִׁית, **mero)sh**, "from head / beginning," see our end-note 3. Here, we think, it obviously means from the beginning or origin of humanity.

Alexander comments that "Calling the generations' may either mean calling them into existence, or proclaiming them, i.e. predicting them; probably the latter." (P. 120)

We think, probably the former. But the text includes in this "calling" the Divine calling of Cyrus to accomplish YHWH's purposes in history, including far more than just the return of the Israelite exiles from Babylon. This is a picture of the God of all the earth, Who is accomplishing His purposes of "righteousness" in all the nations and peoples of earth, not just in Israel.

²⁰For this Divine Self-affirmation, see the related texts in our end-note 4.

Knight comments that "Our author has Yahweh make this great declaration about Himself in the light of what the Israelites were probably learning at that time about the religion of Cyrus the Persian...It is a matter of controversy whether Cyrus was a Zoroastrian by religion or not...The **Gatha (31:8)** a paragraph from Persian literature quite as old as Cyrus runs: 'recognized, O Mazda, that You are the first and the last.' But here, however, Yahweh is not called the last Himself. He is to be at or with the last, or at the end, curiously enough a plural word. The term seems to signify the 'outcome' of particular historical events in space and time...

(continued...)

²⁰(...continued)

“This verse then presents an awesome statement: it is that God will be there at the end, or at the outcome of all our daily actions. Behind this solid world of things is not an it, but an ‘I’...**Deutero-Isaiah** affirms then that God’s relationship with Israel [we say, with all humanity] in terms of ‘now’ must carry within it eschatological [having to do with the final end] significance, since God Himself will be there at the end...These catastrophic events were tightly enclosed within the Divine plan, and were therefore under the control of the living God.” (Pp. 28-29)

Alexander comments that the words “I am He,” mean “the Being to Whom the interrogation has respect, ‘I am He Who has wrought and done it.’” (P. 120)

²¹Knight comments on **verses 5-6** that “By 546 B.C.E. Cyrus had fought his way victoriously to the west coast of Anatolia [our Asia Minor, or Turkey], before which lay the islands of the Aegean [the sea lying between Greece and Turkey], the Dodecanese [12 larger plus 150 smaller Greek islands in the Aegean Sea, of which 26 are inhabited], with Cyprus [an island country in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, the third largest and third most populous island in the Mediterranean], Crete [the largest and most populous of the Greek islands, and the fifth-largest island in the Mediterranean Sea], and the Peloponnese [a peninsula and geographic region in southern Greece, separated from the central part of the country by the Gulf of Corinth] not far away.” (P. 29)

Slotki comments on **verses 5-7** that “The nations tremble and run for protection to their newly manufactured Gods.” (P. 193)

Motyer entitles **verses 5-7** “World response: the flight to idolatry.” He comments that “Invited to draw near to the only and true God, the ‘islands’ (**verse 1**) choose rather to run collectively to idol-making. Incidental to this false choice, Isaiah pursues his polemic against idols, the product not only of human skill (**verse 7**) but also of human fear (**verses 5-6**). Unlike the Lord, the Planner, Mover and Controller, idols are the product of the event, part of people’s defensive arrangements...[The idols] are even more caught by the turn of human events than the idolaters who made them...They turn to each other (6) and then together to idols (**verse 7**). **Verse 7** (compare **40:18-20**) describes the pitiable plight of the world, which Isaiah will bring to a climax at **41:28-29**.” (P. 311)

Oswalt asks, “What is the nations’ response to the evidence of God’s Lordship in history? From one end of the earth to the other they are terrified at what they see. Out of that fear, and facing the prospect of another great world conqueror crashing down on them, they come together in convocation...”

“The activity is reminiscent of the nations in **Psalm 2:1-3**.”

- 1 Why have nations been in tumult,
and, peoples devise empty schemes?

(continued...)

קְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ יִחַרְדוּ

קָרְבוֹ וַיֵּאֲתִיּוּן:

Coastlands saw,²² and they were afraid / in awe;
extremities of the earth, they will tremble,²³

²¹(...continued)

- 2 Earth's kings station themselves,
and rulers have assembled together,
against YHWH,
and against His anointed (king), [saying:]
- 3 Let us tear away every bond that binds us to them;
and let us throw away from us everything that ties us to them!
(What is we took this psalm as speaking of Cyrus, YHWH's messiah?)

Oswalt continues: “But there [in **Psalm 2**] the tone was one of defiance; here it is terror. Unfortunately, their terror moves them to turn not to God but to the Gods. But before the Gods can help them they have to be made! What a tragedy!...

“The move from the fear of the nations in general in **verse 5** to the view of individual persons propping up one another's courage in **verses 6-7** is poignant [touching, heart-rending]...One cannot help feeling sorry for these people whose only hope is to whistle in the dark and tell one another they are building good idols.” (P. 85)

²²For the interpretation of this verse, it is important to ask what or who it is that the coastlands saw. Is it Cyrus' crushing advance, conquering all of those in his way? Or is it YHWH, Who has just declared Who He is?

Alexander tells how “Karl Ludwig Hendewerk [in his commentary on **Isaiah**, 1845], with the first book of Herodotus before him, explains ‘islands’ here to mean the Greek states in the west of Asia Minor—their approach—the message which they sent to Cyrus after the defeat of Croesus—the mutual encouragement described in the next verse—the deliberations of the Panionion [a sacred Ionian sanctuary and the meeting place of the Ionian League]!” (P. 120)

²³Both of the verbs in lines one and two of **verse 5**, וַיֵּיָאֵן, “and they were afraid / in awe,” and יִחַרְדוּ, “they will tremble,” can be understood in a positive light, since the root יָאֵן is constantly used of “fear / reverence of YHWH,” and the root חָרַד occurs in **Exodus 19:16** of the reaction of the Israelites to the appearance of YHWH at Mount Sinai.

For the **Hebrew Bible**, trembling fear of YHWH, which leads to “drawing near” and “coming,” which the text says happens as a result of their fear and trembling, are a

(continued...)

they drew near, and they came!²⁴

41:6²⁵ אִישׁ אֶת־רֵעֵהוּ יַעֲזֹר

וְלְאַחֵיו יֹאמַר חֲזַק:

Each one helps his neighbor,

and to his brothers says, Be strong!²⁶

41:7²⁷, 4 וַיִּחְזְקוּ אֶת־צִרְיָהּ

²³(...continued)

good thing, not at all negative.

But if what the coastlands saw is not YHWH, but Cyrus the Great, the text can be understood in a negative way, of simply being afraid. Can the text mean that the coastlands saw Cyrus as the messenger of YHWH?

²⁴We take the text to mean that the coastlands are deeply impressed by what they saw, feeling the presence of a dangerous adversary at work, threatening them, causing fear and trembling, and leading to come together to form idol-Gods that can stop the advance of Cyrus.

Knight thinks that this means that “there arose a natural human reaction to this common enemy [Cyrus the Great]. Old quarrels are forgotten, and men encourage and help each other to resist the conqueror.” (Pp. 29-30)

Slotki understands it as meaning their coming together “to take council how to stop Cyrus’ triumphant advance.” (P. 193)

²⁵**41:6-7** is the passage that Elliger maintains should be moved from its present location and placed at **40:19**. But that is a matter of re-writing the original text—which places these verses here in order to say that this is the manner in which humanity has acted out of fear—taking refuge in idol-Gods of their own creating, rather than turning to and seeking YHWH the Creator. What do you think?

²⁶Those living in the coastlands reach out to one another, to find some way to stop the relentless advance of Cyrus. But, as the prophet goes on to show, their reaction is miscarried. They help one another in building hand-made Gods—idols—that are powerless to do anything!

²⁷Slotki states that in **verse 7** “The craftsmen engaged in the production of the images encourage one another.”

Knight comments that “Cyrus’ most powerful opponent in Anatolia was King Croesus of Lydia, known till today for his fabulous wealth. Croesus’ workmen had executed his orders well. This was to outdo all other kings in the production of golden

(continued...)

מַחְלִיק פְּטִישׁ אֶת־הוֹלָם פְּעַם
אָמַר לְדָבֶק טוֹב הוּא
וַיַּחֲזַקְתּוּ בְּמַסְמְרִים
לֹא יִמוּט:

And an engraver strengthens a goldsmith,
one beating smooth (with) a hammer²⁸ (strengthens the) one striking an anvil,
saying to the one soldering, It (is) good!
And he strengthens it with nails.
It will not totter.²⁹

²⁷(...continued)

idols such as the world had never seen before. Like a drowning man, Croesus was clutching at straws—in the shape of lucky amulets or silly, gold-lacquered charms—but even these fabulous Gods were helpless before the advance of Cyrus...

“[Deutero-Isaiah’s] whole picture is a comment on what he has already said at **40:19-20** about the futility and stupidity of making one’s own Gods.” (P. 30)

See our end-note 5 for **Wikipedia’s** article on the life of Croesus. See the entire story of Croesus’ activities in seeking to overcome Cyrus through terribly expensive gifts to the various oracles of Greece and Libya in **Herodotus 1.46-70**.

²⁸Where our Hebrew text spells פְּטִישׁ, **pattiysh**, “hammer,” 1QIs^a spells פִּלְטִישׁ, **palittiysh**.

²⁹Alexander thinks this is a sarcastic remark concerning the idol-makers: “The sarcasm consists in making the idolaters dependent upon idols, which are themselves dependent upon common workmen and the most trivial mechanical operations for their form and their stability...The last clause implies that the strength of the idol is not in itself, but in the nails that keep it in its place, or hold its parts together.” (Pp. 120-21)

Oswalt depicts **verse 7** and its description of the work of the craftsmen as follows: “the first, the molder (שָׂרָף), casts the rough form of the idol; the second, the smelter (צִרְף), prepares the precious metals with which the idol will be plated; the third, he who flattens with the hammer (מַחְלִיק פְּטִישׁ), hammers the gold leaf or silver

(continued...)

²⁹(...continued)

plate into place; the fourth, he who strikes on the anvil (הַיּוֹלֵם פְּעֵם), i.e., the blacksmith, fashions the nails [or chains] that will hold the idol in place... The purpose of all this detail is not clear, but the prophet may want to heighten the ironic effect by showing what a complex and arduous task idol making is...Another purpose may be to point out how dependent the Gods are. They cannot be created by just one person; it takes a whole host of people to keep them going...

“In the face of the terror coming from the east, it is not the Gods Who strengthen their worshipers but the worshipers must strengthen each other (**verse 5**) and eventually the idols themselves (**verse 7**).” (Pp. 85-86)

³⁰Oswalt entitles **verses 8-20** “Israel need not fear.” He comments that these verses “now shift the focus from the frightened people of Babylon, terrified by the works of the Lord (**verses 5-7**), to the people of the Lord, who are told that they need not fear anything because of the Lord’s presence with them. No obstacle (**verses 11-16**) and no need (**verses 17-20**) can alter the fact that they are God’s chosen (**verses 8-10**), and that He will help them. This picture of the Holy One of Israel (**verses 14, 16, 20**) calmly reassuring His helpless, chosen people is in strong contrast to that of the fearful people of the nations frantically constructing Gods to meet the onrushing Cyrus (**verses 5-7**)...”

“The movement of thought through the segment from **verse 8** to **verse 20** is from basic encouragement (**verses 8-10**) to promise of deliverance from enemies (**verses 11-13**) to promise of overcoming all obstacles (**verses 14-16**) to promise of full supply of all needs (**verses 17-19**), all to the end that the Holy One of Israel may be recognized.” (Pp. 89-90)

Motyer entitles **verses 8-20** “Three pictures of consolation.” He comments that “the foregoing passage (**verses 1-7**) exposed the uselessness of other Gods and the plight of the pagan world, but this was incidental to its basic task of ministering assurance to Israel. Its message is that the promises of the Lord (**40:1-11**) can be trusted because He is the world ruler, with every event and every actor on the world-stage initiated and controlled by His bidding. The present passage brings this message of comfort to its climax with three pictures assuring of Divine intervention: human hostility (**verses 8-13**, the servant whose enemies are vanquished); personal weakness (**verses 14-16**, the worm which becomes a threshing-sledge); and adverse circumstances (**verses 17-20**, the desert traveler miraculously provided for).

North entitles **verses 8-10** “Israel, Yahweh’s Servant, Is Not to Fear.” He comments that the word “servant”, “literally ‘slave,’ could be anything but a term of reproach. It expressed the weaker partner’s relation to the stronger in a covenant...As such the *servant* was privileged, and entitled, as of right, to look to his master for protection and even ‘steadfast love.’” (P. 97)

(continued...)

יַעֲקֹב אֲשֶׁר בְּחַרְתִּיךָ

זֶרַע אַבְרָהָם

אֶהְיֶי:

And you, Israel, My servant,³¹, ⁵

Jacob, whom I chose (even) you,³²

descendant of Abraham,

³⁰(...continued)

Knight comments on **verse 8** that “Suddenly **Deutero-Isaiah**’s message changes. He has been describing...how Cyrus the Persian monarch is the instrument of God’s plan...What he has to say now is even more surprising than what he has already reported, yet it too must be part of the Good News. His message is that the poor, stricken, downtrodden, exiled people of Israel is God’s real instrument. Israel is no less than, first, *My servant*; second, God’s *chosen* one. Yet **Deutero-Isaiah** has God address Israel here as Jacob. He is evidently reminding his people that they are the true son of their father Jacob the unlikable, as we read of him in **Genesis**.” (P. 50)

³¹For this identification of YHWH’s servant as Israel, see elsewhere **44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20**; as Jacob, see elsewhere **44:1, 2** (with the name *Yeshurun*), **21; 45:4; 48:20**. Christians who insist that the “servant” in **Isaiah 40-55** is Jesus Christ, need to recognize this fact that these ten separate verses identify Israel as YHWH’s “servant.” But Jews who insist that the servant is the nation of Israel, and no one else, need to recognize the fact that these chapters also identify the “servant of YHWH” as an individual who plays the role of servant to the Nation of Israel, and who is therefore not the nation itself.

For all of the occurrences of the noun עֶבֶד, (**ebhedh**, “servant” in the singular in the **Book of Isaiah**, see our end-note 6.

³²North comments that “How **Deutero-Isaiah** came to equate the servant with Israel can only be decided from the contexts in which the equation occurs. In them the leading motif is that Yahweh *chose* Israel. This brings the concept into relation with the doctrine of the ‘election’ of Israel, so prominent in **Deuteronomy**...

“Under the stress of exile the Jews might well conclude that Yahweh had cast them off, as He had every right to do, for their unfaithfulness to their part of the covenant. Yahweh reassures them, *I chose you and have not rejected you*. Never would He abandon the descendants of the man He had loved through toilsome journeyings in the hallowed past.” (P. 97)

one loving Me:³³

41:9 אֲשֶׁר הִחַזְקִיתִּיךָ מִקְצוֹת הָאָרֶץ

וּמֵאַצִּילֶיךָ קָרָאתִיךָ

וְאָמַר לְךָ עַבְדֵי-אֵתָהּ

בְּחַרְתִּיךָ וְלֹא מֵאַסְתִּיךָ:

whom³⁴ I strengthened from the earth's extremities,³⁵

and from its corners I called you;³⁶

³³Our English translations all translate אֶהְיֶה לְךָ, “one loving Me,” or “My loving one,” by “My friend.” But the Greek translation is Αβρααμ ὃν ἠγάπησα, “Abraham whom I loved.” Compare:

2 Chronicles 20:7, the phrase אֶבְרָהָם אֶהְיֶה לְךָ, “Abraham, one loving You / Your lover.” The Greek translation is Αβρααμ τῷ ἠγαπημένῳ σου, “Abraham the beloved one of Yours.”

Jacob (“James”) 2:23, καὶ φίλος θεοῦ ἐκλήθη, “and friend of God he was called.”

Slotki notes that “The patriarch is similarly described in the **Koran**.” (P. 194)

See **Sura 4.125**, “Who can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to God, does good, and follows the way of Abraham the true in faith? For God did take Abraham for a friend.”

³⁴That is, Israel / Jacob, YHWH's servant.

³⁵Slotki comments that “The reference is either to the scattered exiles or to the patriarch Abraham, who came from the distant Ur of the Chaldees.” (P. 194)

We can also think of Jacob in his journeys to Charan, and then with his large family on their way back to Israel; or of Jacob and his family in their move from Israel to Egypt. For the world view of ancient Israel, Charan in northern Mesopotamia and Egypt to the southwest would have been considered “earth's extremities.”

³⁶Oswalt states that “God had already taken the seed of Abraham, the Israelites, from the ends of the earth to their new home in Canaan. God could do it again, and indeed He meant to, because the exile would not change their relation to Him—they would not be forsaken.” (Pp. 90-91)

(continued...)

and I said to you, You are My servant,³⁷

³⁶(...continued)

Knight comments that “from the point of view of Jerusalem, both Egypt and Mesopotamia [Babylon] lay at *the ends of the earth*. **Deutero-Isaiah** is saying that God has already been faithful to Abraham’s descendants when He called them out of Egypt in days of old. He is therefore to be trusted to look after the contemporary generation that is now in Babylon...

“The term ‘servant of the king’ is a Near Eastern technical term for a royal official. Many a jar and seal revealed by excavation have these very words stamped on them. The name ‘servant’ occurs also imposed on a weaker party in a covenant relationship, generally in the Near East, such as conquering kings laid upon [those they had conquered]...Israel therefore knew what she was meant to be when God the King called her to be His servant. She was called, in short, within the covenant, to serve unquestioningly and eagerly, and to be ever ready to execute the will of her royal Master...

“Israel, however, is here called to be God’s servant in a unique capacity. So **Deutero-Isaiah** raises the issue of the mystery of the Divine election. Why is it that God has ‘elected’ or ‘chosen’ Israel and not cast [her] off, so that He could never have rejected her?...**Deutero-Isaiah** cannot imply that a nation such as Babylon was outside God’s purpose and care. The Babylonians were just as much in the grasp of God as was Israel, yet only at the level of the experience of the Divine which they had reached. Their religion was distorted religion, but it was not irreligion [non-religion]...

“**Deutero-Isaiah** therefore lays full emphasis not on Israel herself as the elect, but on election as the action of God alone: *whom I have chosen...whom I took firm hold of...*The words *you whom...I called from [the earth’s] farthest corners* remind Israel that God has led them before now from faraway Egypt into the promised land...God in His turn loved this whole people whom He had chosen. That of course was an extraordinary notion for anyone in the ancient world to entertain. Imagine any one of Babylon’s gilt-plastered Gods loving individual poor peasants huddled in their sordid mud huts on the banks of the Euphrates.” (Pp. 31-32)

³⁷Again, YHWH is depicted as identifying Israel as His “servant.”

Motyer comments on **verses 8-9** that “These verses speak of Jacob / Israel’s status as God’s servant. **Old Testament** slavery / servanthood must never thought of on the model of the West Indian slavery of the Christian era. Mosaic legislation extended protection to the slave and—such was the institution—had to make provision for the slave who loved his master and would not leave slavery (**Exodus 21:2ff.**) Such a ‘slave,’ as a matter of social status, may have been at the bottom of life’s heap, but in another sense he was as powerful as his master, for should he ever have been molested, it was the master the molester had to reckon with.” (P. 312)

I chose you, and I did not reject you!³⁸

³⁸Of course, it would be easy for the Israelites, in exile from their native land as a result of YHWH's sending them there, to argue strenuously with YHWH's assertion that He had rejected them. He had sent Assyria to destroy Samaria, Northern Israel's capital city, and had allowed him to take the great majority of the Northern Israelites into far away captivity in the east. And some two centuries later, He had done a similar thing to Judah and to her capital city Jerusalem, sending Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian armies to capture and destroy both Jerusalem and her sanctuary, and carrying a large portion of Jerusalem's population into captivity in Babylon, again far away in the east. If that wasn't rejection, what was it? We fully understand the closing verses of **Lamentations**:

5:20 Why / for what reason will You forget us for the perpetuity?

(Why) will You forsake us for length of days?

5:21 Return us, YHWH, to Yourself, and we will return!

Renew our days like before / in ancient times!

5:22 Unless You have utterly rejected us,

You have been angry against us excessively.

(Translations of this last verse vary:

King James, "But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us."

Tanakh, "For truly, You have rejected us, Bitterly raged against us." Then, refusing to let the **Book of Lamentations** end with such a negative statement, repeats **verse 21**, "Take us back, O LORD, to Yourself, And let us come back; Renew our days as of old!"

New Revised Standard, "unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure." **New International**, same;

New Jerusalem, "Unless you have utterly rejected us, in an anger which knows no limit."

Rahfs, ὅτι ἀπωθούμενος ἀπόσω ἡμᾶς ὠργίσθης ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ἕως σφόδρα, "Because rejecting, You rejected us; You were angry against us as far as exceedingly!"

But nonetheless, YHWH's voice here in **Isaiah 41:9** is loud and clear and insistent. He had not permanently rejected His servant Israel / Jacob. Disappointed in them, yes. Determined to punish them severely, yes. But not total rejection. The covenant, even if broken by His people, was still in force; the exiles were still His people. He was still determined to fulfill His promises made to their forefathers.

It is an interesting and informative experience to read all of the passages in the **Hebrew Bible** that use this verb **כָּסַף**, "reject," sometimes translated "refuse," or "despise." What **Isaiah 41:9** says is exactly in line with **Leviticus 26:44-45**, where YHWH states that in spite of all the curses which He will bring upon disobedient Israel,

44 And also even this,
when they are in their enemy's land
I did not reject them,

(continued...)

41:10 אֶל-תִּירָא כִּי עֲמַד-אֲנִי

אֶל-תִּשְׁתַּע כִּי-אֲנִי אֱלֹהֶיךָ

אֲמַצְתִּיךָ אֶף-עֲזַרְתִּיךָ

אֶף-תִּמְכַתִּיךָ בְּיַמֵּינִי צִדְקָי:

³⁸(...continued)

and I did not abhor them to finish them off,
to break My covenant with them—
because I (am) YHWH their God!

- 45 And I will remember for them a first covenant
when I brought them forth from Egypt-land,
to / in (the) eyes of the nations
to be / become for them for a God—
I (am) YHWH!
(That is, it is not YHWH's nature to utterly reject His covenant people! Compare
Jeremiah 31:37 and **33:25-26**.)

But over against this claim, there are a number of passages that say exactly the
opposite, for example, **Psalms 78:59-61**, which having depicted Northern Israel's
rebellion against Him, states:

- 59 God heard, and He infuriated Himself;
and He utterly / with force rejected Israel.
60 And He (the) moveable sanctuary of Shiloh,
(the) tent He inhabited among the humanity.
61 And He gave / sent His strength / power into the captivity,
and His beauty into (the) hand of a foe!

Compare **2 Kings 17:20; 23:27; Isaiah 54:6; Jeremiah 6:30; 7:29; 14:19; Hosea 4:6; 9:17; Psalm 89:39^{Heb} / 38^{Eng}**, all of which state that YHWH / God has
rejected Israel. We say that the **Hebrew Bible** depicts YHWH as having oftentimes
been extremely angry with Israel, and having rejected her by sending her into captivity
for long periods of time, leading to the apparent conclusion that He has totally rejected
her; but the **Hebrew Bible** also insists that YHWH still remembers His covenant with
her, and brings her out of her captivity, giving Israel a new life as His people.

We conclude that it is all a matter of Divine love and grace in the midst of Divine
punishment and testing. You may say, and everyone else may say that you are a
wreck; that you've blown it, that you're doomed forever. But God says, Not so! I still
love you, and you are My child. I will never forget My covenant with your ancestors and
with you, even if you deny and question it!

You shall not be afraid,³⁹ because I (am) with you!⁴⁰

You shall not be dismayed,⁴¹ because I (am) your God;⁴²

³⁹Knight comments that ‘Israel’s God includes in His Word of love the call that echoes through the pages of both the **Old and New Testaments**: Fear not, or don’t be afraid (compare **41:13-14**; **43:1, 5**; **44:2, 8**; **54:43**; also **51:7, 12**). This is surely good news to those

(1) who are in the depths of despair and in fear of what man can do to them, and

(2) who have become aware that they are standing on holy ground, because they are now in the presence of the all-holy and ever-living God Who tells them, For I am with you.” (P. 32)

Oswalt states that “This was no new message. It was the same word that Isaiah had given to Ahaz (**Isaiah 7:14**), and that Moses had declared to the Israelites at the Red Sea (**Exodus 14:13-14**) and to Joshua on the plains of Moab (**Deuteronomy 31:8**). It was the key to Joseph’s success (**Genesis 39:2, 21, 23**...But in a situation that would seem to make a mockery of all that they had believed about themselves and their identity (how could they be elect if they had been forcibly taken from God’s land?), they needed to hear in no uncertain terms that God was still with them and the He was still willing to be called their God.” (P. 91)

⁴⁰For the phrase **אֶתְּךָ אֲנִי עִמָּךְ**, “I will be with you” in the **Hebrew Bible**, see **Exodus 3:12** (the Divine promise to Moses); **Deuteronomy 31:23** (the Divine promise to Joshua); **Joshua 1:5**; **3:7** (same) and **Judges 6:16** (the Divine promise to Gideon).

Here the phrase is slightly different, **עִמָּךְ אֲנִי**, literally “with you, I (am),” which occurs nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**.

⁴¹The phrase **אֲלֵ-תִשְׁתַּע**, “you (singular) shall not be dismayed,” is in parallel with the previous phrase **אֲלֵ-תִירָא**, “you (singular) shall not be afraid.” The only other place in the **Hebrew Bible** where the root **שׁתַּע** occurs is in this same chapter, **Isaiah 41:23**, where the idols are challenged:

Declare the things coming hereafter,
and we will know that you (plural) are God / Gods;
yes, do good and do evil,
and we will be dismayed,
and we will see together!

⁴²Surprisingly, this is the only place in the **Hebrew Bible** where this exact phrase, **אֲלֵ-תִירָא אֲנִי**, literally, “I your (singular) God,” occurs. The phrase with a plural your is

(continued...)

I will strengthen you.^{43, 6} surely⁴⁴ I will help you,^{45, 7}

surely I will support you, with My right hand of My righteousness!⁴⁶

⁴²(...continued)

found once, in **Ezekiel 34:31**. No, YHWH has not rejected the Israelite exiles. He is still their God, in spite of the fact that YHWH has sent them into 70 years of captivity!

⁴³The phrase here is אֲמַצְתִּיךָ, “I will make you (singular) firm / strengthen you.”

For some 19 occurrences of the verb אֲמַצְתִּי in the piel, see our end-note 6.

Whereas the craftsman making an idol has to fasten it with nails so that it will not totter, YHWH tells His servant-people that He make them firm—that is, they will not have to seek artificial means to make them firm and steadfast.

⁴⁴North comments on this “particle conjunction” אַךְ, which he translates by “also,” that “**Deutero-Isaiah** uses this monosyllabic particle 25 times, twice in this **verse 10**, three times in **40:24**. The sense is ‘nay more’ but it is difficult to translate it literally without being clumsy.” (P. 97)

The word, which also is used as a noun meaning “nose,” is found over 400 times in the **Hebrew Bible**. Of these, some 133 are the particle conjunction, while some 277 are the noun “nose.”

⁴⁵This exact Divine promise, עֵזְרָהּ לְיָדְךָ, “I will help you (singular),” occurs only three other times in the **Hebrew Bible**, all in **Isaiah 40-55**. See **Isaiah 41:13-14** and **49:8**.

For mentions of Divine help in the **Hebrew Bible**, see our end-note 7.

⁴⁶**Isaiah 41:10** is rooted in YHWH’s Self-revelation to Moses in **Exodus 3**, where Moses, seeing the burning bush, is told he is standing on set-apart, holy ground, and hides his face, afraid to look at God (**verses 5-6**). When Moses is given the Divine commission to go back to Egypt and confront Pharaoh with the demand to let the Israelite slaves go home, he begins to object—and YHWH’s response is, אֲהִיָּה עִמָּךְ, “I will be with you.” That means, Moses can be assured that his mission will be successful, no matter how impossible it may seem, as long as YHWH is present with him.

This verse, **Isaiah 41:10**, is like a re-do of YHWH’s conversation with Moses. The Israelite exiles in Babylon are assured that they do not need to be afraid, because YHWH will be with them, to strengthen and to bless them, assuring them of success in the future that He is causing to occur in them.

(continued...)

41:11⁴⁷ הֵן יִבְשׁוּ וְיִכְלְמוּ כָּל הַנִּחְרִים בְּךָ

יִהְיוּ כְאֵין וְיֵאבְדוּ אַנְשֵׁי רִיבֶךָ:

Look—they will be ashamed, and be humiliated, all of those who are angry against you; they will be like nothing, and they will perish,⁴⁸ (the) men of your dispute.⁴⁹

41:12 תִּבְקָשֶׁם וְלֹא תִמְצָאֵם אַנְשֵׁי מִצְתְּךָ

יִהְיוּ כְאֵין וְכִאֲפֵס אַנְשֵׁי מִלְחַמַּתְךָ:

You (singular) shall seek them, and you will not find them—(the) men of your contention. They will be like nothing, and like ceasing, (the) men of your war.⁵⁰

⁴⁶(...continued)

Christian readers of this passage recall with fondness the promise of Jesus to His followers in the last half of the closing verse of **Matthew 28:20**, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος, literally “and look–I, with you I am, all the days, until the completion of the age!”

⁴⁷Slotki comments on **verses 11-13** that they depict the “confusion and annihilation of Israel’s enemies. God stands behind His people to sustain them.” (P. 194)

Oswalt comments on **verses 11-12** that “In six parallel cola [lines] (all of which end with the 2nd person masculine singular suffix **-ka**, ‘you,’ ‘your’), God declares that all Israel’s adversaries, from those who are angry with them (**verse 11**) to those who are actually making war on them (**verse 12**) will slink away in disgrace, ashamed and humiliated (**verse 11**). They will do so because they are as nothing in the presence of Israel’s God.” (P. 92)

⁴⁸Instead of “and they will perish,” 1QIs^b repeats the verb “they will be ashamed.”

⁴⁹1QIs^a leaves a large space between **verses 11** and **12**. We see no reason for this.

⁵⁰In the finely balanced **verses 11** and **12**, we hear the Divine voice stating that all those opposing and fighting against the redeemed Israelites will be completely unsuccessful, and will disappear. As Motyer puts it, “As the opposition mounts...so does its ultimate ineffectuality: the anger ‘reaps shame’ (**verse 11a**), the lawsuit fails (**verse 11b**), the opponent vanishes (**verse 12a**) and the enemy becomes non-existent (**verse 12b**)...It is a foolhardy thing to meddle with the servant of such a master!” (P. 313)

Alexander has said that the Nation of Israel’s “ends” are depicted in this material –and by that, we assume that he means the end of Israel as God’s chosen people, and

(continued...)

41:13 כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מְחַזֵּק יְמִינְךָ

הָאֹמֵר לְךָ אֶל-תִּירָא אֲנִי עֲזַרְתִּיךָ:

Because I (am) YHWH your God, strengthening your right hand,

the One saying to you (singular), You shall not be afraid, I, I will help you!⁵¹

41:14⁵² אֶל-תִּירָאֵי תוֹלַעַת יַעֲקֹב

⁵⁰(...continued)

the end of the “old dispensation,” which would be replaced by the Christian Church as the chosen people and the “new dispensation of Christianity.” But that is not the case—YHWH is depicted as promising that Israel’s enemies will be unsuccessful and disappear, and that He will continually be with Israel His people both now and in the future, standing with them to help and protect them.

⁵¹This verse is another “Self-identification” of YHWH. The reason that redeemed Israel’s opponents and enemies will be unsuccessful and disappear is because YHWH is Israel’s God, strengthening her right hand, telling her not to be afraid, and assuring her of His help.

We are reminded of Paul’s question in **Romans 8:31**, that “if God is for us, who can be against us?” When God is “on our side,” or better, “when we are on God’s side,” we can be assured of ultimate victory, no matter the circumstances or difficulties of our lives!

Oswalt comments, “Note the parallelisms with **verse 10**...Interestingly, where **verse 10** speaks of God’s right hand, this **verse [13]** says He will hold their right hand. Taken together, these two verses present a powerful picture of Parent and child: in the Father’s right hand is a mighty weapon to defeat any enemy, but His left hand is holding the child’s right. He does not merely stand by to defend, but He is also physically with the child; He will not allow the child to be separated from Him. The final emphatic / underlines the personal involvement of God in all of this.” (P. 92)

Knight comments that “So fundamentally Israel need never be afraid. Her God is the living God; and it is the living God Who is even now holding her by her right hand. The faithfulness, or reliability, or rock-like quality of God is thus conveyed to Israel whom God holds; and this becomes in turn the basis of her whole life and historical existence, no matter what contradictions she may have to face in days to come...

“[This] is said by **Deutero-Isaiah** not once as here, but again and again. This call not to be afraid is one of the basic elements in **Old Testament** revelation.” (P. 34)

⁵²Slotki comments on **verses 14-16** that “Israel is again bidden, as in **verse 10**, not to fear, and a new reason is added. Not only is God his support, but Israel has an

(continued...)

אֲנִי עֲזָרְתִּיךָ מִתֵּי יִשְׂרָאֵל
נֶאֱמַרְתָּהּ וְנֶאֱלַךְ קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:

⁵²(...continued)

inherent spiritual strength and power of resistance to his enemies [that is compared to that of] the threshing-sledge to the corn.” (P. 195)

North entitles these verses “The ‘Worm’ Israel Will Become a Threshing-Board.” He comments that “Again Israel is bidden not to fear. She is now a contemptible ‘worm’ but her ‘Redeemer’ is ‘the Holy One of Israel.’ He will make her a threshing-board capable of crushing mountains...

The main emphasis is the contrast between the insignificant (compare **Job 25:6**) and contemptible (compare **Psalm 22:6**^{Heb} / **7**^{Eng}) worm that Israel now is in her own and her enemies’ eyes, and the threshing-board, capable of dealing not only with corn, but with mountains (a figure for worldly powers) she shall become...

“A threshing-board was a heavy wooden board studded with metal teeth on its underside (compare **Amos 1:3**). After it had been dragged around the threshing-floor, the grain and chaff were tossed into the air by shovel and / or pitchfork (**Isaiah 30:24**; **Jeremiah 15:7**) and the chaff was carried away by the wind.” (P. 99)

Oswalt comments on these verses that “Here the focus changes from defense to offense. Not only will God defend His people against those who trouble them, but He will make them the very tool in His hand to tear down any obstacle that would thwart His plans for them. The Targums make the mountains and the hills of **verse 15** ‘nations’ and ‘kingdoms’ and announce that the Israelites will ‘slay’ (not ‘thresh’) them...**Isaiah** makes no clear reference elsewhere to Israel destroying the nations.” (Pp. 92-93)

There are many positive statements throughout the **Book of Isaiah** with regards to the nations, although **Isaiah 14:2** depicts Israel as one day making slaves of the peoples that once held them captive. But the contemporary of Isaiah, Micah minces no words about this matter of “threshing.” See **Micah 4:13**,

Arise, and thresh, daughter of Zion!
Because I will make your horn iron,
and your hoofs I will make bronze.
And you will pulverize many peoples;
and I will dedicate for the YHWH their unjust gain,
and their wealth to the Lord of all the earth!

You shall not be afraid,⁵³ worm Jacob!⁵⁴
men of Israel,⁵⁵ I, I will help you--⁵⁶

⁵³See our end-note 4 for the phrase, “Do not be afraid” in **Isaiah 40-55**.

⁵⁴Slotki comments that the worm “is a symbol of meekness and humility. The worm crawling upon the ground is at the mercy of every passer-by.” (P. 195) For the worm as a symbol of insignificance, see elsewhere:

Job 25:6,

Furthermore, because a weak human (is a) worm,
and a son of Adam / humanity a worm (synonym)!

Psalm 22:7,

But I am a worm, and not a man;
a reproach of humanity, despised by people.

Knight comments that “**Deutero-Isaiah** daringly offers a paradox such as no human mind could have invented, arguing that the utterly other and good God is the God-of-the-louse-Israel.” (P. 37)

But Knight evidently hasn’t paid much attention to the modern writers of movies and television shows. It is possible for human minds to invent all sorts of weird images!

⁵⁵This line of **verse 14** is given varying translations, from “*and ye men of Israel,*” to “O men of Israel,” to “you insect Israel,” to “O little Israel,” to “You little handful of Israel.” **Rahlfs** has ὀλιγοστὸς Ἰσραηλ, “smallest Israel.” It is certainly no compliment, but is parallel to calling Israel “a worm.” Alexander explains that “As the parallelism seems to require an analogous expression of contempt in the next clause, some either read מֵתִים, **methey**, ‘dead men’) with Aquila...Theodotion...and Jerome, or regard [the word] as a modification of that word denoting ‘mortals’...Septuagint [**Rahlfs**] has ὀλιγοστος [‘one with few companions’], but omits *worm* altogether.” (P. 123)

Knight comments that “Israel has no cause for boasting, merely because she knows herself to be the chosen people. But ‘you men of Israel’ may be better rendered by ‘you louse Israel’...the emphasis is upon Israel’s smallness, unimportance, and bestiality...

“In [this light], the gracious words that follow have all the deeper intent: literally, ‘It is I Who have been helping you’...is the very Word of the Lord, your Redeemer’—the redeemer of a louse!

(continued...)

⁵⁵(...continued)

“These words contain an ultimate insight. They contain the truth that between God and man there is a great gulf fixed. Men say that man is after all really quite good morally speaking, that he is able in his own strength to build an equitable society, that he is essentially capable of rising to meet God and of lifting himself by his own bootstraps. In the light of [Isaiah's words] we see how such beliefs are nothing short of blasphemy. Worms cannot behave except as worms; they cannot raise themselves from crawling on the ground. On the other hand, if by God's grace man can become aware that he is a worm, then God can begin to do something with him.” (Pp. 35-36)

But this is an alternative translation, and perhaps not the “ultimate insight” that Knight takes it to be. For this “worm” is addressed by YHWH God, Who identifies Himself as the “worm's) “Next-of -Kin.” This “worm” has been made in the image and likeness of God, and although small and inadequate on his own, with His Redeemer at his side, coming to lift him up and use him, speaking His powerful word to him, promising to help him, there is no limit to what can be accomplished by YHWH's servant!

As Oswalt states, “*worm* tells us that *men* is to be understood as that which is finite and mortal. At the same time *men* tells us that *worm* is not to be understood as that which is disgusting and worthless...They [the Israelites] may not be much on the scale of things, but they are of infinite worth to God.” (P. 93)

What do you think the text's calling Israel a “worm” is intended to mean?

⁵⁶See our end-note 8 for biblical mentions of YHWH's / God's “help.”

⁵⁷This phrase, נְאֻם־יְהוָה, **ne)um-YHWH**, “a saying / utterance of YHWH,” occurs some 275 times in the **Hebrew Bible**. It occurs only twice in the **Five Books of Moses**, twice in **1 Samuel**, four times in **2 Kings**; twenty-two times in **Isaiah**, 173 times in **Jeremiah** (!), five times in **Ezekiel**, four times in **Hosea**, once in **Joel**, seventeen times in **Amos**, twice in **Nahum**, five times in **Zephaniah**, twelve times in **Haggai**, twenty times in **Zechariah**, once in **Malachi**, once in the **Book of Psalms**, and once in **2 Chronicles**. It is obviously one of Jeremiah's favorite phrases,

The occurrences in **Isaiah** are at: **3:15; 14:22** (twice); **14:23; 17:3, 6; 22:25; 30:1; 31:9; 37:34; 41:14; 43:10, 12; 49:18; 52:5; 54:17; 55:8; 59:20; 66:2, 17, 22** (seven times in **chapters 40-55**).

H. Eising in his article on this phrase in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament IX**, pp. 109-113 (including variations), states that the meaning of נְאֻם, **ne)um**, is “simply ‘speak,’” (p. 110), and the word is often used in parallel with דְּבַר, “word,” “said.”

(continued...)

41:15 הִנֵּה שְׂמֹתֶיךָ לְמוֹרֵגֹ

חֲרוֹץ חֲדָשׁ בְּעַל פִּיפְיֹת

תִּדְוֹשׁ הָרִים וְתִדְקַ

וּגְבַעוֹת כַּמֵּץ תִּשִּׂים:

Look—I place you for a threshing-board—

⁵⁷(...continued)

He goes on to state that “The normal, most common use of the Yahweh utterance formula is to conclude a rhetorical unit beginning with a רַבֵּר such as ‘thus says Yqhwēh’ or ‘the word of Yahweh came.’” (*Ibid.*)

“Oftentimes the prophet appears to be speaking; the formula, however, traces the words back to God, thus making clear (as in the messenger speech) how the God Who speaks to and through His prophets is conceived and represented as being one with them in their proclamation.” (P. 111)

“Our formula [נְאֻם־יְהוָה], **ne)um-YHWH**, ‘a saying / utterance of YHWH’ emphasizes that the message of the prophets comes from God, through Whom their words are true and effectual...Thus [the phrase] with its many associated statements, is a confession of the Self-revealing God of Israel.” (Pp. 112-13)

⁵⁸For גּוֹאֵל, **go)el**, “one redeeming,” “redeemer,” in the **Hebrew Bible**, see our end-note 8.

One thing that becomes clear from reading all of these passages is how the **Book of Isaiah** has more to say about YHWH as Israel’s Redeemer / Next-of-kin than any other **book** in the **Hebrew Bible**, and this is especially true of **Isaiah 40-55!** The captive Israelites in Babylon are assured that their Divine Redeemer / Next-of-kin is coming to their rescue!

North comments that a “redeemer” “was a kinsman upon whom devolved the responsibility of protecting the interests of his relative by every means in his power, whether by ‘redeeming’ him or his property during his lifetime, or by avenging his death if he had been murdered...Yahweh’s covenant bonds with Israel are as close as those which bind members of the same human family, and He will never repudiate His Self-imposed obligations...Yahweh was Israel’s Redeemer at the exodus...He will be the same in the approaching exodus from Babylon.” (P. 100)

sharp, new, possessing mouths / teeth;⁵⁹
you (singular) will thresh and crush mountains,
and you will place / make hills like the chaff.⁶⁰

⁵⁹For this matter of the threshing-boards being a **בַּעַל פִּיפִּיּוֹת**, literally “an owner of mouths,” compare **Psalm 149:6**, where the psalmist urges those who have the praises of God in their throats to also have **חֶרֶב בְּיַדָּם פִּיפִּיּוֹת**, “a sword of mouths in their hand.” The sharp edges of the sword are compared to “mouths” which devour the enemy. The threshing-board likewise devours or chops up the stalks of grain on the threshing floor, separating the grain from its surrounding materials, enabling the grain to be gathered apart from the “chaff.”

⁶⁰Knight observes concerning **verse 15** that “It is hard to imagine a...worm acting as a threshing sledge. The threshing sledge was a flat piece of wood studded on the underside with sharp teeth, or spikes. Domestic animals dragged this implement over the wheat piled on a smooth rock surface . But Israel is here called to be such an implement herself to thresh the mountains and hills.” (P. 37)

Such a threshing board has been used by grain farmers throughout the centuries, pulled by mules or oxen over the sheaves of cut wheat or barley, separating the grain from the straw without damaging it. Following the separation, the threshed grain was gathered up and cleaned by winnowing.

But what is intended by this paradoxical description of Israel as a threshing-sledge? Does it imply that YHWH intends to use Israel in preparing a coming bountiful harvest all across Israel’s mountains for its people’s nourishment, resulting in joy throughout Israel?

Or, is this meant to mean that YHWH will use tiny, insignificant Israel to powerfully thresh its enemies, that will become like the straw and chaff ground off of the grain, and blown away by the wind? Knight states that “Israel is to be the instrument of God’s judgment upon the nations and upon the forces of evil in the world.” (P. 38) Are the mountains and hills meant as symbols for Israel’s enemies, large and small, which Israel will thresh / winnow, resulting in Israel’s joy? The author does not make the meaning of the symbolic language explicit, but the next verse inclines us to agree with Knight.

Slotki holds that the mountains and hills “represent Israel’s formidable enemies. According to others, they symbolize the mighty worldly forces that obstruct the development and spread of the moral and spiritual ideals which Israel upholds.” (P. 196)

Alexander states that “The image presented is the strange but strong one of a down-trodden worm reducing hills to powder, the essential idea being that of a weak and helpless object overcoming the most disproportionate obstacles, by strength

(continued...)

41:16 תִּזְרֹם וְרוּחַ תִּשָּׂאֵם

וְסַעַרָה תִּפְיֵץ אוֹתָם

וְאַתָּה תִּגְלֵל בְּיַהוָה

בְּקִדְוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּתְהַלֵּל:

You will winnow them, and a wind will lift them up,
and a storm-wind / tempest will scatter them.⁶¹

And you will rejoice in the YHWH,
in Israel's Set-apart One you will glory!

41:17⁶² הָעֲנִיִּים וְהָאֲבִיוֹנִים מִבְּקָשִׁים מִיָּם וְאִין

⁶⁰(...continued)

derived from another.” (P. 124)

What do you think this symbolic language means?

⁶¹Slotki comments that “The verse continues the agricultural figure of the preceding [verse]. Crushed to powder and reduced to chaff, the enemies will be carried off and scattered by the winds.” (P. 196)

Alexander states that “The mountains, having been completely threshed, are winnowed, in the usual oriental mode, by being thrown to the wind. Israel, on the other hand, is safe, not through his own strength, but in that of his Protector, in Whom, i.e. in his relation to Whom, he finds his highest happiness and honor.” (P. 124)

Oswalt comments on **verse 16** that “All that stood in Israel’s way—oppressors, sins, obstacles, and whatever else—will be swept away as swiftly as a strong wind sweeps the chaff from the winnowing fork. In a moment it will be gone. This was certainly true of the return from exile. With breathtaking suddenness Cyrus’s victories shook the seeming unshakable Babylonian Empire to its roots and ushered in a brand new day.” (P. 94)

⁶²Slotki comments that **verses 17-20** describe “the present distressing condition of Israel in exile and the promise of a bright future. The text may be understood literally or figuratively.” (P. 196)

By “figuratively,” Slotki evidently means that the depiction may be meant in a general way, not specifically of the exiles in Babylon, but of anyone in a similar condition.

(continued...)

לְשׁוֹנִים בְּצִמָּא נִשְׁתָּה
אֲנִי יְהוָה אֵינָם
אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא אֶעֱזָבָם:

The afflicted poor people and the needy poor people are seeking water, and there is none;

⁶²(...continued)

Compare **Psalm 107:33-35** for similar descriptive language:

- 33 He (YHWH) sets / turns rivers into a desert / wilderness,
and sources / springs of water into thirsty ground;
- 34 a land of fruit into saltiness / barrenness,
from / because of (the) evil of those inhabiting it.
- 35 He sets / turns a desert / wilderness into a marsh / pool of water,
and a land of dryness into the sources / springs of water!

That is, YHWH is in control of nature, and can transform it to either bless or to punish people.

North entitles **verses 17-20** “The Desert Will Be Transformed to Oasis.” He comments that “Yahweh will make provisions for His people’s comfort during their journey across the desert. There will be an abundance of water and the route will be lined with trees...The paragraph begins abruptly and pictures the exiles as though they have already set out on the journey home. It reads as if the Prophet is anticipating objections about the hardships of the journey.” (P. 101)

Alexander states that “the whole passage is entirely metaphorical. Thirst is a natural and common metaphor for suffering. Those who restrict the verse to the Babylonish exile are divided on the question whether it literally describes the hardships of the journey through the wilderness, or metaphorically those of the captivity itself. Both suppositions are entirely arbitrary, since there is nothing in the text or context to deprive the passage of its genuine and full sense as a general promise, tantamount to saying, When My people feel their need, I will be present to supply it. Such a promise those in exile could not fail to appreciate in their case; but it is equally appropriate in others, and especially to the glorious deliverance of the church from the fetters of the old economy.”

As Alexander himself admits, it is certainly not “arbitrary” to apply it to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, but we think it is quite arbitrary on the part of Alexander to say that it applies to the church in its deliverance from the fetters of the old economy! What do you think?

their tongue with the thirst dried up.⁶³

I, YHWH, will answer them;

Israel's God will not forsake them!

41:18 אֶפְתַּח עַל־שְׁפִיִּים נְהָרוֹת

וּבְתוֹךְ בְּקָעוֹת מְעִינֹת

אֲשִׁים מְדָבָר לְאֲגַם־מַיִם

וְאֶרֶץ צִיָּה לְמוֹצְאֵי מַיִם:

I will open upon (the) bare heights rivers,

and in the midst of valleys, springs;⁶⁴

I will make a desert into a marsh / muddy pool of water,

and a dry land into sources / springs of water!⁶⁵

⁶³Knight comments that “We are not told who the poor and needy are. Certainly in the first place they comprise crestfallen Israel in exile. But they also comprise the destitute cities of Judah, whose people had survived in poverty since the fall of the state in 587 B.C.E. (compare **Jeremiah 12:7-13; 14:2-9; Lamentations 5:4-5**). Yet the picture here must also describe all of the wretched sons of men everywhere and at all times.” (P. 38) What do you think?

⁶⁴North comments that “Long ago, He had brought out water from the rock (**Isaiah 48:21; Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-3**). He will do no less during this second exodus. Indeed, He will do more: *He will open up rivers* (נְהָרוֹת) which ‘flow,’ not נַחְלִים, ‘torrent-wadis’).” (P. 101)

⁶⁵For the language of **verse 18**, compare:

Isaiah 30:25,

And there will be upon every high mountain
and upon every lifted-up hill,
streams—channels of water,
on a day of great slaughter, as towers fall.

Isaiah 35:7,

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

And the parched ground will become the marsh;
 and thirsty ground fountains of water;
 in a dwelling-place of jackals, its / their resting-place green grass,
 for reed(s) and rush(es).

Psalm 107:33,

He places rivers for a desert,
 and sources of water for thirsty ground;

Psalm 107:35,

He places a desert for the marsh of water,
 and a dry land for sources of water;

Oswalt comments that “God promises to supply the needs of those who cry out to Him, and to do so in a superabundant manner. The language is clearly figurative. There is no indication that the prophet expected these things to come true in a literal sense. As he has done in so many other places in the **book**, he uses the language of natural impossibility to make the point of God’s limitless ability...

“For a similar use of imagery, see the valley of dry bones in **Ezekiel 37**. Just as Isaiah does, Ezekiel uses a natural impossibility to talk about a miraculous rebirth of the nation [of Israel, from the ‘death’ of exile]. It is significant that both prophets understand that mere physical restoration without a new infusion of the Divine Spirit will be useless.” (P. 95)

What do you think? Are these promises meant literally, or figuratively, or both?
 We say, Both!

⁶⁶North sums up the meaning of **verse 19** as “The desert highway will become a permanent oasis...in which sizeable trees will grow.” (P. 102) Compare **Isaiah 55:13**,

Instead of the thorn-bush,
 a cypress / fir shall grow up;
 and instead of the desert-plant,
 a myrtle (tree);
 And it will be for the YHWH for a name,
 for a long-lasting sign--
 it will not be cut off!

North adds that “If the return was to be in the not-distant future, the trees would have to be full-grown if they were to serve the purpose for which they were intended. This rises the problem whether **Deutero-Isaiah** meant what he said, or whether it is

(continued...)

וְעֵץ שֶׁמֶן אֲשֵׁים בְּעֶרְבָה

בְּרוֹשׁ תְּדַהֵר וּתְאֲשׁוּר יַחְדָּו:

I will place in the desert cedar, acacia and myrtle (trees);
and the olive tree⁶⁷ I will place in the desert-plain,
cypress, elm and box-tree together.⁶⁸

41:20 לְמַעַן יֵרְאוּ וַיֵּדְעוּ

וַיִּשְׂימוּ וַיִּשְׁפִּילוּ יַחְדָּו

כִּי יִרְיֶהוּהָ עֲשֵׂתָהּ זֹאת

וּקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּרֵאָה:

In order that they will see and will know
and will consider⁶⁹ and discern / be wise / successful together,

⁶⁶(...continued)

only poetic license which happened to anticipate modern irrigation and afforestation.”
(Pp. 102-03)

Surely, **Second Isaiah** means what he says—but he may be thinking of full-grown trees being miraculously placed in the desert by YHWH, or being transplanted from other areas. What do you think?

⁶⁷Alexander states that “By the olive tree is meant the oleander or wild olive, as distinguished from the זַיִת, **zayith** or cultivated tree of the same species.” (P. 125)

⁶⁸Knight, with his “universal” understanding of this passage, states that “Once the judgment spoken of at **verse 15** has fallen, **Deutero-Isaiah** presents us with a vision of God’s purpose at its completion as paradise regained.” (P. 39) It is a depiction of the reforestation of the barren wilderness, with plenteous water—but “paradise regained” (John Milton’s **Paradise Lost** and **Paradise Regained**)? Surely this reading far too much into the biblical text!

Alexander comments that “The main idea, common to all explanation of this verse, is that of trees growing where they never grew before.” (P. 124)

⁶⁹The Hebrew verb here is וַיִּשְׂימוּ, **weyasiymu**, “and they will place,” perhaps meaning “and they will place it in their heart.” The original text of 1QIs^a had “and they

(continued...)

that YHWH's hand did this,

and (the) Set-apart One of Israel created it!⁷⁰

41:21^{71, 9} קָרְבוּ רֵיבְכֶם יֵאמֶר יְהוָה

⁶⁹(...continued)

will understand,” but a later hand has written in above this phrase the verb from our Hebrew text.

Alexander explains that this “seems to be an elliptical [cryptic, obscure] expression for **לִבְיָם יִשְׂמוּ**, ‘they will place (their) heart,’ i.e. apply their mind, or give attention.” (P. 125) Our English translations have “consider” or “understand.” **Rahfs** has *ἐννοηθῶσιν*, “may have in one’s thoughts,” “consider,” “reflect.”

⁷⁰Alexander comments that “There is a climax in the last clause: He has not only *done* it but *created* it, i.e. produced a new effect by the exertion of almighty power.” (P. 125)

Knight comments on **verse 20** that “Only God, [**Deutero-Isaiah**] declares, can do all this—only Israel’s God. And He will do it in order that the whole world of men *may see and know*, that is, ‘take it in.’ And this poor, dispirited worm Israel is to be the instrument whereby this transformation of the universe is to take place. So it must necessarily be Yahweh Who is the Creator of this great redemption. He will do it by stooping to make use of that peculiar chosen people, whom He has just addressed as worm and louse.” (P. 39)

Oswalt states that here, in **verse 20**, “God’s purpose in electing and delivering His people is stated as directly as it is anywhere in the **book**. It is in order that people may recognize who God is by reflecting on His creative, miracle-working power in Israel...It is as Israel becomes the living evidence of God’s unique Deity that the world will recognize Him.”

We think the prediction made here has to do with the surrounding world’s witnessing the return of the Israelites from Babylon to Jerusalem—which will cause them to acknowledge YHWH’s ability to foretell the future. But in fact, the return of the Israelite exiles to Jerusalem did not result in the transformation of nature, or have any lasting impression on the surrounding nations, let alone the entire world, leading them to acknowledge YHWH. What do you think?

If this is in fact a Divine promise, how can we account for the fact that it didn’t happen either literally or symbolically? Is all of this only the dream of **Second Isaiah**, which he announces to the people in exile, assuring them that YHWH will fully provide for their return in highly symbolic language?

⁷¹North entitles **verses 21-29** “Yahweh Is the Only God Because He Alone Knows and Determines the Future.” He comments that “Yahweh challenges the

(continued...)

⁷¹(...continued)

heathen Gods to come forward and substantiate the claims made for them. Do they understand the significance of past events or can they predict the future? Let them do anything, either good or ill, to show that they are alive! Yahweh it is Who has stirred up the conqueror. He will send herald with good tidings to Jerusalem...

“The passage is in two parts. **Verses 21-24** imply that Yahweh is the only God because He alone can predict the future; **verses 25-29** assert, as an example, that it is He Who has stirred up Cyrus. The inference is that He knows the future because He, in fact, determines it.

“**Verses 21-24** picture an assize [periodic court] at which the credentials of the Gods are to be examined. This has been anticipated in **41:1-2**, where the peoples are summoned to the bar of judgment. Now it is the turn of their Gods. As in **41:1-2** (and **verses 1-7**) Yahweh is both Judge and a party to the dispute. The Gods are ordered to present their case.” (P. 104)

Slotki comments on **verses 21-24** that “The discussion of **verses 1-4** between God and the heathen nations is now resumed, but the address is directed both to the worshipers (**verses 21, 22a**) and to their idols or false Gods (**verses 22b, 23**).” (P. 197)

Oswalt entitles **41:21-42:9** “The ministering Servant,” and then entitles **41:21-29** “Helpless idols.” He comments that **verses 21-29** “mark the return to the court case after the interlude (**verses 8-20**) in which God assured His fearful servant that they, in contrast to the nations, had nothing to fear from the conquests of Cyrus predicted in **verses 1-7**...Here the idols themselves are called to account...

“Interestingly, this challenge is once more followed with an address to the Servant (**42:1-9**). However, this time it is not the fearful Servant who is addressed with the words of encouragement, but a ministering Servant [and we ask, cannot the fearful servant and the ministering servant be the same?], who is described as bringing justice to the nations (**42:1, 3, 4**) and a renewal of covenant to the people (**42:6**). This language is strikingly like that applied to the messianic figure described in **9:5-6^{Heb} / 6-7^{Eng}** and **11:1-5**...God had predicted Cyrus in advance; likewise, He predicts the activity of His servant.” (P. 99)

In this way, Oswalt introduces Jesus Christ the messiah / servant into the text, holding that the fearful servant and the ministering servant cannot be the same servant, and holding that **42:1-9** is “strikingly like” the language of the two messianic predictions in **chapters 9 and 11 of Isaiah**. The predicted messiah in **chapters 9 and 11** is predicted to bring peace with justice to the earth, but we think it is overstatement to say that the language is “strikingly like” that of **42:1-9**. Only those wanting to introduce the messiah into the interpretation of **chapter 42** would think this.

(continued...)

⁷¹(...continued)

Verse 21 reminds us of **verse 1**, where YHWH summons the coastlands and nations to enter into dialogue / debate with Him. Here, in **verse 21**, YHWH renews that summons, calling upon them to present their strongest arguments.

But the verse, as translated into Greek is quite different. Rather than a renewal of the summons to enter into debate, it is the announcement that YHWH's judgment has drawn near:

The judgment of yours (plural) draws near, says the God;
the counsels of yours drew near, says the King of Jacob!

Returning to his comments on **verses 21-24**, Oswalt states that "Here the idols are called to give evidence that they can tell the future, or that they have ever done so. Can they explain how the world began or how it will end? [We think, the answer from the Mesopotamian Gods is, Yes, we can explain how the world began—with our myths of the great battle between Marduk / Baal and the chaos monster Tiamat; but No, we do not even begin to depict the world's end.] Is there any place where an idol's interpretation of the future has been recorded so that its accuracy can be checked? The prophet answers all these [questions] with a resounding No and a scathing denunciation of the worship of such beings." (P. 99)

Oswalt adds that "Some commentators (e.g., Duhm) suggest that Isaiah's arguments are only so much rhetoric since he certainly must have known about the many ways in which the priests and prophets of the pagan religions purported to give oracles of the future. But study of these oracles shows that they were always guardedly ambiguous, so that almost any outcome could be taken as fulfilment of the prediction. A classic example is the Delphic oracle's response to Croesus' query concerning the outcome of the conflict between himself and Cyrus. Croesus understood the answer 'a mighty empire will be destroyed' to mean that he would be victorious. But after Cyrus' crushing victory, the oracle indicated that it was talking about Croesus's own Lydian Empire." (P. 99)

See our end-note 10 for this matter of oracles in the ancient world, especially Greece. We know of no unambiguous, accurate predictions of the future in the **Sibylline Oracles**.

Oswalt comments that by contrast to the **Sibylline Oracles**, "the **Bible** is noted for detailed and meticulously recorded predictions that it makes, especially about the exile. As Westermann notes, there is nothing like the prophecies of the exile in either the Egyptian or Babylonian literatures." (P. 100) Critics of the biblical prophecies of the exile and return have been forced to redate them as having been written after the events, in order to hold that they were not genuine predictions, but there is, we think, no honest way of claiming a post-exilic date for the **Book of Hosea**.

הַגִּישׁוּ עֲצֻמוֹתֵיכֶם יֹאמֶר מֶלֶךְ יַעֲקֹב:

Bring near (plural imperative) your case / contention, says YHWH;

bring near (synonym) your defenses, says (the) King of Jacob!⁷²

41:22 יַגִּישׁוּ וַיְגִידוּ לָנוּ אֵת אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִינָה

הַרְאֵשְׁנוֹת מִהֵנָּה הַגִּידוּ

וְנִשְׂיֵמָה לְבָנוּ

וְנִדְעָה אַחֲרֵיתָן

אוֹ הַבָּאוֹת הַשְּׂמִיעֵנוּ:

Let them bring near,⁷³ and let them declare to us that which will happen;

the first things, what they (were), declare,⁷⁴

⁷²Knight understands **verse 21** as YHWH's calling upon the Gods of the nations to defend themselves (p. 40). We agree, thinking that this means YHWH is challenging the Gods of the nations to give proofs of their ability to tell what happened in the beginning, and to foretell the future, as He has done; to show whether or not they have been able to predict and then deliver a people in captivity from their bondage, to return to their native land--as YHWH has predicted through the prophet that He is doing for Israel.

Oswalt comments that "Now God turns to those Gods and tells them to mount their strongest defenses. He addresses them as the *King of Jacob*...This is the King speaking. He has manifested Himself to Jacob, but He is nonetheless the sole King before whom all creatures, including their Gods, must bow." (P. 100)

Compare a similar use of "King" with reference to YHWH in **Isaiah 6:5**.

⁷³Where our Hebrew text has יַגִּישׁוּ, **yaggiyshu**, "let them bring near," **Rahlfs** has ἐγγισάτωσαν, "let them come near."

⁷⁴North states that הַרְאֵשְׁנוֹת, "the former, first, chief things," here probably has reference "not to happenings in the remote past, as in **43:18**, but to the early victories of Cyrus already described (**41:2-3**), whose significance Yahweh had announced while as yet they were contemporary (compare **verse 26**). Did any 'God' discern their import? Does any even now understand *what they signify* (literally 'what they [are]') that we may know what will be *their outcome*?" (P. 105)

and we will place (them to) our heart;⁷⁵
and we will know their end / outcome;

⁷⁵It may be that the reference here to הַרְאֵשְׁנוֹת, **hari)shonoth**, “the first things,” may refer to the things that are contained in the biblical story of the universe and humanity’s origin, the story of בְּרֵאשִׁית, **bere)shity**, “in (the) beginning,” as told in **Genesis 1-11**.

What other God has such a story to tell, that will even remotely equal or correspond to this biblical story, with its manifold nuances? Oh yes, Marduk and Baal can tell their stories of conflict with monsters, and their creating out of the ruins of that battle their temples and people to worship them, but nothing to equal the biblical story with its emphasis on all humanity and its duties, etc. YHWH dares to speak of those “first things,” and then to declare what is coming—actual events in history that can be seen and tested—leading to an “eschaton,” to a goal, which He enables His spokesperson to envision through enigmatic dreams and visions that impart hope. Can the Gods represented by their idols do anything like this? Have they done it? If so, then show it!

Knight comments that “The truth, God now declares, can easily be reached since it can be tested by facts. But of course neither idols nor those whose philosophy is idolatrous possess any clue to an exposition of the meaning of history. Yet Yahweh humbly invites [humanity] to set forth [its] philosophical notions...

“The Babylonian religion is in the last resort merely a form of star-gazing, and star-gazing is a futile activity [how can Knight say this, when his hero, **Deutero-Isaiah** calls upon his hearers to look into the heavens, to observe the stars? See **Isaiah 40:26**]. Israel’s God, *the King of Jacob*, on the other hand, has a plan working out through history which will find its ultimate outcome or fruition in God’s good time...This plan of God has had a beginning—at that point in Israel’s history when God raised up Moses to be His prophet. Israel’s history, since it has had purposeful beginning, is thus meaningful history. It is what we today call Heilsgeschichte or ‘Sacred History.’” (P. 40)

What do you think? Do you agree with Knight that the “first things” have to do with Moses? Or do “the first things” have to do with the origins of the universe and humanity, as depicted in the first eleven chapters of **Genesis**? Or is North’s view better, that “the first things” are referring to the opening activities of Cyrus that would lead to the deliverance of Israel’s exiles from Babylon?

We agree with Ortlund, who comments on “the former things” and “the things to come” that this is “a challenge to present the past and the future (**42:9; 43:9, 18; 46:9; 48:3**), providing a connected narrative of the overarching story of the world, a complete world-view, as offered in the **Bible**.” (P. 1314)

Yes—YHWH challenges the Gods represented by idols to present a complete and satisfying world-view—one that can be substantiated by facts.

or, the coming things, cause us to hear!⁷⁶

41:23 תְּגִידוּ הָאֱתִיּוֹת לְאַחֹר

וְנִדְעָה כִּי אֱלֹהִים אַתֶּם

אַף־תִּיטִיבוּ וְתִרְעוּ

וְנִשְׁתַּעַה (וְנִרְא) [וְנִרְאָה] יַחְדָּו:

Declare the things coming hereafter,

and we will know that you (plural) are Gods!⁷⁷

⁷⁶Slotki comments on **verse 22** that “Ability to explain the events of the past and a fore-knowledge of the future are characteristics of a Divine Being. Can the false Gods substantiate a claim to such power?” (P. 197)

Oswalt states that “The Gods must reveal what cannot be otherwise known, *what will happen* (in the future), or suffer the judgment that they are nothing (**verses 24, 29**). Scholars differ over whether *first things* and *latter things* are governed by the preceding phrase ‘what will happen.’ If they are, then the *first things* are in the near future, while the *latter things* are in the more distant future...

“The Gods are being asked to explain the past in such a way as to make sense of the present, and to foretell the future in such a way as to makes its developments intelligible. This is exactly what God had done for His people throughout their history. Can the Gods do that?” (P. 101)

⁷⁷Knight comments that “Babylon’s Gods stare dumbly back at their worshipers when they ask them what the future holds.” (P. 40)

YHWH dares to predict through His prophet the soon-coming release of the Jewish exiles in Babylon, whom He will lead through the transformed wilderness to their former homes in Jerusalem / Israel. Beyond that, He fills their hearts with belief in a wondrous future awaiting them in the future.

And we wonder, What kind of “eschatology” did the Gods Marduk and Baal provide for their people? We know of none. But for the worshipers of YHWH, there is an abundance of visions and dreams of a wondrous future that YHWH is creating and will create for His people, so much so that the **Hebrew Bible** as a whole, and the **Greek New Testament** as well, can be accurately described as “standing on tip-toe, looking out into the future with confident hope, even in the midst of terrifying evil and suffering.”

(continued...)

Yes,⁷⁸ do good and / or do evil,⁷⁹
and we will observe,⁸⁰ and we will see together!⁸¹

⁷⁷(...continued)

We have no doubt that many of those visions and dreams were blurry–enigmatic at best—but never failing to impart hope for the future, in the “new things” that YHWH will cause to happen.

⁷⁸Oswalt translates **אֵלֶּיךָ**, **aph**, by “In fact,” holding that “here, as in **verse 26**, it introduces a summarizing or concluding statement.” (P. 97)

⁷⁹That is, Do something, anything at all! Oswalt comments, “*In fact, do good or ill* expresses the prophet’s exasperation with the Gods and his challenge to them to do *something*.”

The Cyrus cylinder depicts Cyrus as claiming that the God Marduk led him to victory over all his enemies, enabling him to bring a much more just and peaceful world into existence, releasing captives and allowing them to return to their homes, encouraging the rebuilding of their sanctuaries, with the return of the images of the Gods to their rightful sanctuaries.

But did the prophets of Marduk predict this achievement before its happening? The Cyrus Cylinder leads us to believe that Cyrus felt he was called by Marduk to do what he did, but **Isaiah 40-55** is at pains to claim Cyrus’ success as the work of YHWH, which was foretold by YHWH’s prophets. Had Marduk’s prophets done the same? Is there any evidence of that?

⁸⁰Where our Hebrew text has **וְנִשְׂתַּעַה**, **wenishta(ah**, “and we will observe,” 1QIs^a has **וְנִשְׂמַעַה**, “and we will hear.”

Alexander claims that the phrase **וְנִשְׂתַּעַה** **wenishta(ah**, expresses “the act of looking round or about upon those present [in **verse 10**], in that case with the secondary notion of alarm (as looking round for help), but in this case with that of inspection or consideration (we will look about us).” (P. 126)

Alexander has taken the root for this rare verb to be **שַׁעַה**, **sha)ah**, which **Holladay** defines as “look with favor at,” or “care about,” or “look away from.” **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines it as meaning “gaze (steadily, with interest, etc.),” and holds that here in **Isaiah 41:10** means “gaze... about (in anxiety).” We wonder how these lexicographers determine all these nuances are contained in such rare words—and suspect that they are reading those nuances from the context, a very subjective procedure at best.

⁸¹The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, **וְנִירָא**, **wenira)**, “and we

(continued...)

41:24⁸² הַיְ-אַתֶּם מֵאֵין

וּפְעֵלְכֶם מֵאִפֶּע

תוֹעֵבָה יִבְחַר בְּכֶם:

Look–you (plural) (are) less than nothing,
and your work (is) less than nothing,⁸³

⁸¹(...continued)

will see”; second, the *qere*, וְנִרְאֶה, **wenir)eh**, “and let us see.”

Knight comments that this challenge by YHWH means “*Do good or do harm*, that is, ‘Do anything at all, just to show that you are alive; better to do *harm* than to do nothing. Behave as Divine beings should. If you do, we’ll gladly worship you, even in awe and terror. Only, act! But you can’t, for you don’t even exist in the first place!’” (P. 40) That the Babylonian Gods are non-existent is affirmed by the prophet in the next verse.

⁸²Oswalt comments on **verse 24** that “This verse introduces the verdict on the Gods. Because they can neither explain the past nor tell the future, because they are unable to do anything independently, they have no claim to be called Gods. Both they and their works are less than nothing.” (P. 102)

North comments that “The most illuminating commentary [on **verse 24**] is a story in Herodotus (i. 46-51), who relates that when Croesus of Lydia was faced with the prospect of having to measure his power with that of Cyrus, he took the initiative and prepared to attack Media, which had recently been absorbed by Persia. He sent lavish gifts to all the oracles of Greece and even beyond, praying them to let him know what would be the outcome of the campaign...’The oracles told him that if he went against Cyrus he would destroy a great empire; but he forgot to ask, whether it was his own or his rival’s’ (North is quoting G. A. Smith).” (P. 105) See the lengthy story in Herodotus, which exemplifies the massive wealth of Croesus.

⁸³Alexander translates the rare word מֵאִפֶּע, **)epha**(, by “*of nought (or less than nought)*,” and notes that “Solomon Ben Melek makes it a synonym of מֵאִפֶּס, **)ephes** [‘ceasing’].” (P. 126)

Oswalt notes that “The root of...מֵאִפֶּע, **me)apha**(is unknown. Thus it was...conjectured...that this is an error for מֵאִפֶּס, **me)ephes** [‘from ceasing’]...Now 1QIs^a supports the conjecture.” (P. 97)

an abomination will choose among you!⁸⁴

41:25⁸⁵ תְּעִירוֹתַי מִצָּפוֹן

וַיָּאֵת מִמְּזֶרֶח־שֶׁמֶשׁ

יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁמִי

וַיָּבֵא סַגְנִים כְּמוֹ־חֶמֶר

וְכִמּוֹ יוֹצֵר יִרְמַס־טִיט:

I stirred up (one) from (the) north,

and he has come from (the) sun's rising;⁸⁶

⁸⁴Knight comments that “Thus the man who consciously chooses an idol as his God in face of that elemental fact [of the idol’s non-existence] must be an abomination, repugnant to both God and Israel.” (P. 40) Compare the apostle Paul’s statement concerning the idol-Gods in **Romans 1:18-23**.

Knight adds that “Babylon had chosen her Gods. **Deutero-Isaiah** is saying that [those idol-Gods] did not choose Babylon: it was Babylon who chose them.” (**Ibid.**) In the light of the Cyrus Cylinder, we suspect that Cyrus would reply, No, Marduk chose me to do this work!

⁸⁵Slotki comments on **verses 25-29** that “Cyrus’ rise and call to his high office, which were foretold by God through His prophet, are adduced as examples of events which the false Gods did not foresee.” (P. 198)

Oswalt states concerning these verses that “After pronouncing judgment on the Gods for their inability to answer His challenge, God here brings forth His Own evidence. He has raised up Cyrus (**verse 25**). Did the Gods predict it? No! (**verse 26**). But God had done so (**verse 7**).” (P. 102)

North likewise says, “In **verses 25-29** Yahweh states explicitly what He had already implied in the rhetorical question of **verse 2**: ‘I stirred up one from then north and he came, etc. Cyrus’ empire, now incorporating Media and Lydia, stretched in an arc from east of Babylonia round to the Aegean. He could thus be said to come from both north and east.” (P. 105)

⁸⁶This is, we think, the prophet’s description of Cyrus without using his name. From a practical standpoint, all of the great powers to the east of Israel came against Israel from the north, following the fertile Euphrates and Tigris valley (“Mesopotamia”) all the way into Syria, and then descending southward into Israel. Cyrus came from Anshan in Elam, in the Zagros mountains, but conquered the countries surrounding

(continued...)

he will call upon My name;⁸⁷

⁸⁶(...continued)

Elam, all the way to the Indus River—all of which lay to the east of Israel.

Alexander comments that “J. D. Michaelis supposes the two subjects of the clause to be Darius or Cyaxerxes the Mede and Cyrus the Persian, whose respective countries lay to the north and east of Babylonia. The later writers modify this explanation by referring all to Cyrus, here considered at the same time as a Persian and a Mede. A still more satisfactory hypothesis, perhaps, is that the subject of this passage is not a determinate individual, but *the conqueror* indefinitely, who is not identified till afterwards. The use of the word **סַגְּחַיִּים**, **seghaniym**, which is the appropriate description of the Babylonian nobles, contains a covert intimation of the particular events in view. Instead of showing that the passage is of a later date, as some imagine, it affords a remarkable example of prophetic foresight.” (P. 127)

Oswalt comments on **verse 25** that “The one being described is almost certainly the Persian emperor Cyrus...who, although [coming] from the east, came on Babylon from the north. Yet there is no evidence that he ever acknowledged the Lord as his God, which the expression invoke My name or ‘call on the Lord’ normally implies...Perhaps the author means that the conqueror will speak in the name of God...At least this much is implied by **Ezra 1:2-4**. At any rate, when this mighty man comes, he will trample the rulers down in the same way a potter does when he steps into the vat to mix the water and the clay.” (P. 103)

⁸⁷Where our Hebrew text reads **יִקְרָא בִשְׁמִי**, **yiqra) bishmiy**, “he will call on My name,” **Rahfs** has κληθήσονται τῷ ὀνόματί μου, “they shall be called by My name,” and 1QIs^a has “by His name.” Oswalt notes that “This idea has apparently created problems from earliest times [as indicated by these translations in the Greek and at Qumran]. The Aramaic Targum has ‘I will make him strong in My name.’” (P. 97)

He states, “The one being described is almost certainly the Persian emperor Cyrus...who, although hailing from the east, came on Babylon from the north. Yet there is no evidence that he ever acknowledged [YHWH] as his God, which the expression invoke My name or ‘call on [YHWH]’ normally implies...Perhaps the author only means that the conqueror will speak in the name of God...At least this much is attributed to Cyrus by **Ezra 1:2-4** (see below). At any rate, when this mighty man comes, he will trample the rulers down in the same way a potter does when he steps into the vat to mix the water and the clay.” (P. 103)

For the prophet, and for Israel, Cyrus’ allowing the Jewish exiles to return home, and assisting them in the rebuilding of their temple, was a phenomenal event, indicating that Cyrus was YHWH’s messiah, doing YHWH’s will. See **Ezra 1:1-4**:

1 And in the first year of Cyrus, King of Persia,

(continued...)

and governors / prefects⁸⁸ became⁸⁹ like clay,⁹⁰

⁸⁷(...continued)

- to fulfil YHWH's word from Jeremiah's mouth,
YHWH stirred up Cyrus, King of Persia's spirit,
and he caused a voice / proclamation to pass over in all his kingdom,
and also in writing, saying:
- 2 In this way Cyrus King of Persia spoke:
YHWH God of the heavens gave to me all the earth's kingdoms;
and He appointed me,
to build for Him a house / temple in Jerusalem which (is) in Judah.
- 3 Whoever (is) among you from His people, may his God be with him,
and may he go up to Jerusalem which (is) in Judah;
and let him build a house / temple of YHWH, God of Israel--
He (is) the God Who (is) in Jerusalem.
- 4 And everyone that is left remaining from all the places where he lived as
temporary resident,
let the men of his place assist him / left him up with silver and with gold
and with property / goods and with cattle,
with the freewill offering(s) for a house / temple of the God Who is in Jerusalem!

But as can be seen from the Cyrus Cylinder, this was only one example among many of Cyrus the Great's policy of returning captive people to their native homes, and assisting in the rebuilding of their sanctuaries, with the return of their Gods to those sanctuaries. In fact, the Cyrus Cylinder does not even mention YHWH or Israel by name, and Cyrus attributes his success not to YHWH, but to Marduk!

For Jeremiah's foretelling of the fall of Babylon and the return of the captive exiles, see **Jeremiah 25:11-14**, along with **Jeremiah 32:36-38**, neither of which mention Cyrus or Persia by name—which we think they would certainly have had, if they were written after the event.

⁸⁸The noun here, **סְגַנִּים**, **seghaniym**, “prefects,” is a noun found oftentimes in Babylon and in Assyria, and then in Persian Aramaic for public officials in Israel. It occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** at: **Isaiah 41:25** (here); **Jeremiah 51:23, 28, 57**; **Ezekiel 23:6, 12; 23; Ezra 9:2; Nehemiah 2:16, 16; 4:8, 13; 5:7, 17; 7:5; 12:40** and **13:11**. For the Aramaic form of the noun, see **Daniel 2:48; 3:2, 3, 27** and **6:8**.

⁸⁹This phrase contains a singular verb, **וַיָּבֹ֑ה**, **weyabho**), “and he comes” or “and he came,” with a plural subject, **סְגַנִּים**, “prefects.” Translations either interpolate the preposition “on” between the two words, making Cyrus the subject of the singular verb, or change the verb to **וַיָּבֹ֑ס**, **weyabhus**, “and he tramples” or “and he trampled.”

1QIs^a has the plural verb **וַיָּבֹ֑אוּ**, **weyabho)u**, “and they come” or “and they came,” and **Rahlf** has ἐρχέσθωσαν ἄρχοντες καὶ ὡς πηλὸς κεραμέως καὶ ὡς κεραμεὺς

(continued...)

and like a potter will trample on mud.⁹¹

41:26 מִי־הִגִּיד מֵרֵאשׁׁ וְנִדְעָה

וּמִלְפָּנִים וְנֹאמַר צְדִיק

⁸⁹(...continued)

καταπατῶν τὸν πηλὸν οὕτως καταπατηθήσεσθε, “let rulers come, and like clay of a potter, and like a potter treading the clay, in this way you will be trodden down.”

Oswalt notes that both of these changes “seem to be trying to make sense of a reading so hard as to be unintelligible as it stands.” (P. 98)

⁹⁰Translations of this line vary:

King James, “and he shall come upon princes as *upon* mortar”;

Tanakh, “And he has trampled rulers like mud”;

New Revised Standard, “He shall trample on rulers as on mortar”;

New International, “He treads on rulers as if they were mortar”;

New Jerusalem, “He tramples on rulers like mud”;

Rahfs, ἐρχέσθωσαν ἄρχοντες καὶ ὡς πηλὸς κεραμέως, “may rulers come and like clay of a potter...”

Alexander, “and he shall come upon princes as upon mortar...”

⁹¹Alexander comments on **verse 25** that “The expressions are remarkably similar to those in **verse 2**, so that the Prophet may be here said to resume the train of thought which had been interrupted at the end of **verse 4**. Having taken occasion to describe the effect of the event foretold upon the worshipers of idols, and from that to show the impotence of the Gods themselves, he returns to the event which he had been describing, and continues his description. As before, he takes his stand at an intermediate point between the beginning and the end of the whole process.” (P. 126)

Knight states, “How different Israel’s God is from any God that a man can manipulate: not only is He the living God—and thus not mere static Being—He is also the active, purposeful, creative One, Who is constantly revealing Himself in some form of saving activity. The evidence of this at the moment is the victorious advance of Cyrus. *Cyrus is coming...He shall trample* down all opposition in the creative way that the potter tramples the clay. How much more, **Deutero-Isaiah** means us to realize, must Cyrus’ Maker be both the living, the creative God. *Stirred up* is a strong term, for it throws responsibility for all Cyrus’ actions upon Yahweh. In fact, if God has been calling him by name then he is no less than Yahweh’s child, and Yahweh is responsible for him, as is declared clearly at **45:3**.”

“**Deutero-Isaiah’s** hope is that all [humanity] will know the Lord once the coming events have reached their victorious conclusion.” (P. 41)

אֵף אֵין־מְגִיד

אֵף אֵין מְשַׁמֵּיעַ

אֵף אֵין־שֹׁמֵעַ אִמְרֵיכֶם:

Who declared from (the) first, and we will know?⁹²

And from beforehand, and we will say Right?

Also there is no one declaring,

also there is no one causing to hear,

also there is no one listening (to) your words!⁹³

41:27⁹⁴ רֵאשׁוֹן לְצִיּוֹן הִנֵּה הֵנָּם

⁹²For this phrase וְנִדְעָה, **wenedha(ah**, “and we will know,” compare **verses 22** and **23**, where the same phrase has already occurred. Oswalt notes that “this repetition parallels the repetition of...’declare’...in the same verses.” (P. 98)

⁹³Knight comments on **verse 26** that “The Babylonian priests had given no sure oracle about the coming of Cyrus. On the other hand, ever since the days of Moses... Yahweh had planned the advance of this Persian conqueror. **Deutero-Isaiah** means that when God first chose Israel under Moses, He had already foreseen what He would have to do centuries later; for Israel would later need to be disciplined by exile and then renewed through the instrumentality of a particular human agent whom God would rouse up at the right moment.” (P. 41)

We take Knight to be referring to the chapters in **Deuteronomy 28** and **Leviticus 26** with their “blessings and curses” predicted for Israel, depending upon whether or not the nation was obedient to the Divine voice. In both of those chapters there is prediction of exile in the case of disobedience, as well as prediction of possible repentance on the part of the nation in exile. There may also be reference to the predictions of the prophets **Hosea**, **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel** of the return of Israel from exile. These biblical predictions are very explicit concerning this historical matter of exile and return.

Alexander comments that “The meaning of the whole verse is that the events in question had been foretold by [YHWH] and no other.” (P. 127)

⁹⁴Knight comments on **verses 27-28** that “Now God draws attention to the fact that none of the Babylonian Gods has come alive or spoken at the court to which they had been summoned, so that there is no one else besides Himself as a counselor to give an answer, to produce a plan.

(continued...)

וְלִירוּשָׁלַם מִבְּשָׂר אֲתָן:

First⁹⁵ to Zion: Look! Look at them!

And to Jerusalem, one announcing good news I will give.⁹⁶

41:28 וְאֵרָא וְאֵין אִישׁ

וּמְאַלְהָ וְאֵין יוֹעֵץ

וְאֲשָׂאֵלֵם וַיִּשְׁבוּ דְבַר:

And I looked, and there was not a man,

⁹⁴(...continued)

“Isaiah of Jerusalem had already used the word ‘plan’ in his day, and now **Deutero-Isaiah** delights to employ it in his turn.” (P. 41)

Alexander comments on **verse 27** that “This very peculiar idiomatic sentence may be paraphrased as follows: *I am the first to say to Zion, Behold, behold them! And to give Jerusalem a bringer of good news...*The sense is not *the first shall say*, but *I first*, i.e. before any other God or prophet.” (P. 127)

⁹⁵Slotki holds that the phrase רִאשׁוֹן לְצִיּוֹן means “a harbinger to Zion,” that is, the first to bring the news to Zion. (P. 198)

⁹⁶Translations of **verse 27** vary:

King James, “The first *shall say* to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings.”

Tanakh, “The things once predicted to Zion -- Behold, here they are! And again I send a herald to Jerusalem.”

New Revised Standard, “I first have declared it to Zion, and I give to Jerusalem a herald of good tidings.”

New International, “I was the first to tell Zion, ‘Look, here they are!’ I gave to Jerusalem a messenger of good tidings.”

New Jerusalem, “First-fruits of Zion, look, here they come! I send a messenger to Jerusalem...”

Rahfs, ἀρχὴν Σιων δώσω καὶ Ἱερουσαλημ παρακαλέσω εἰς ὁδόν, “First of Zion I will give and Jerusalem, I will urge to a way.” NETS has “I will give dominion to Sion, and I will comfort Ierousalem on the way.”

Oswalt, “As the first [I said] to Zion, ‘Behold, there they are,’ and to Jerusalem a messenger of good news I gave.”

Alexander, “First to Zion, Behold, behold them! And to Jerusalem a bringer of good news I will give.”

and from these, and there was no one counseling,
and I asked them, and they returned a word.⁹⁷

41:29⁹⁸ הֵן כִּלְמֵם אֲנִי

⁹⁷Translations of the puzzling last line of **verse 28** vary:

King James, “that, when I asked of them, could answer a word.”

Tanakh, “Or can respond when I question him.”

New Revised Standard, “who, when I ask, gives an answer.”

New International, “no one to give answer when I ask them.”

New Jerusalem, “who, if I asked, could give an answer.”

Rahlfs, καὶ ἐὰν ἐρωτήσω αὐτούς πόθεν ἔστέ οὐ μὴ ἀποκριθῶσίν μοι, “and if should ask them, from where are you, they would not answer me.”

Oswalt, “among them and there is no counselor.” (We ask, where did the noun “counselor” come from?)

Knight+ comments that the verse means that “the Gods of the nations are as fatuous [foolish, stupid] as are their priests...

“**Deutero-Isaiah** did not know the end of the story which he was interpreting from the beginning. The end, about which he now begins to speak, through the power of the Spirit, unfolds its meaning for him only as Cyrus advances toward the gates of Babylon, and only as he becomes aware in his heart, even before the great moment of release arrives, that God is even then using the sufferings of Israel for His plan.” (P. 42)

Alexander comments on **verse 28** that YHWH “allows them as it were another opportunity of proving their Divinity...First He looks, but finds not what He seeks. Then again, but with the same result. Once more He interrogates them and awaits an answer, but (as the next verse adds) discovers them to be imposters...[but as we translate the verse, and **New Revised Standard** does, it seems to say they returned a word / answer.]

“The verse is full of laconic [brief, concise] and elliptical [cryptic, obscure] expressions, which, however, may be easily completed, as [in this] paraphrase: *I will look* (once more to see whether any of these idols or their prophet can predict the future), *but there is no one* (who attempts it). *From among* (all) *these* (I seek for a response, but there is none. Yet *once more I will ask them, and* (perhaps) *they will return an answer.*” (Pp. 127-28)

⁹⁸Oswalt comments on **verse 29** that it “gives the conclusion of the inquiry, which is introduced with הֵן, **hen**, ‘Behold.’ That conclusion is that the Gods (note the emphatic position of *all of them*), including their works and their images, are worthless. To the word pair אֲנִי, *nothing* [or ‘trouble,’ sorrow,’ ‘wickedness’], and אִפְסֵם, *nothing* [or ‘a ceasing’], is added רִיחַ, *wind*, and תִּהְיוּ, *nothingness* [or ‘formlessness,’ ‘confusion,’

(continued...)

אִפְסֵם מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם

רוּחַ וְתַהוֹ נִסְפֵיהֶם:

Look—all of them, trouble!

A ceasing⁹⁹—their works!

A wind, and formlessness, their molten images!¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸(...continued)

‘unreality,’ ‘emptiness’]...The effect of the [three line structure] is like a series of hammer blows...

“The Gods are not false because they are represented by idols. Rather, the beautiful idols are worthless because the Gods behind them are nothing. The bankruptcy of the theology has been demonstrated in the preceding disputation, and has meant that all the care lavished on the idols (40:18-20; 41:6-7; 44:12-20) is mere foolishness.” (P. 105)

The idol-Gods can’t tell humanity where they came from, or how they are related, or how their lives should be ordered; they cannot distinguish between good and evil, or inform their worshipers how to relate to one another; they are silent, and give no teaching / guidance. They have no view of the future, no basis for hope. They are worthless Gods!

⁹⁹Where our Hebrew text reads אָוֶן,)awen, “trouble, sorrow, wickedness,” 1QIs^a reads אֵינִי,)ayin, “where (is it)?”

¹⁰⁰Alexander comments on **verse 29** that “This is, at once, the termination of the sentence begun in the last clause of the preceding verse, and the summary conclusion of the whole preceding controversy as to the Divinity of any Gods except [YHWH]. To the usual expressions of nonentity the Prophet adds two other strong descriptive terms, viz. wind and emptiness.” (P. 128)

1. **Biblical Passages Related to Drawing Near to God**

Ecclesiastes 4:17^{Heb} / 5:1^{Eng}

Guard your foot
when you go to the God's house / temple;
and to draw near to listen,
rather than giving a sacrifice of the foolish people;
for they are not knowing to do evil.
(Genuine drawing near to God means quietness, and listening.)

Isaiah 29:13,

And my Lord said,
Because this people drew near with its mouth,
and with its lips honored Me,
and its heart was far from Me;
and their fear / reverence of Me
was a commandment learned from men / people.
(Genuine drawing near must be heart-felt, not a matter of repetition of taught words.)

Isaiah 34:1,

Draw near, O nations, to listen!
And peoples, pay attention!
The earth will hear, and its fullness;
(the) world, and all its offspring.
(Genuine drawing near is a matter of listening, of paying attention to God!)

Isaiah 41:1,

Be silent to Me, coastlands!
And peoples, let them renew strength!
Let them draw near!
Then they will speak together.
For the justice / judgment let us draw near!

Isaiah 48:16,

Draw near to Me;
Listen to / hear this!
From (the) first I did not speak in the secrecy.
From (the) time of its happening, there I (am)!
And now, my Lord YHWH sent me forth,
and His Spirit.
(There is apparently a change of speakers, from YHWH to the prophet / author in the fifth line.)

Isaiah 58:2,

And it is Me day by day whom they are seeking,
and in knowledge of My ways they take delight—
like a nation that practiced right-relationship,
and the justice of its God did not forsake!
They call upon Me (for) judgments of right-relationship—
in drawing near to God they take delight!
(But all of this drawing near is useless, because it does not result in social
justice!)

Jacob (“James”) 4:8,

Draw near to the God,
and He will draw near to you (plural)!
Cleanse hands, missers-of-the-mark!
And purify hearts, double-minded!
(Genuine drawing near to God demands cleaning up your act!)

2.

Cyrus the Great

“Cyrus II of Persia [died 531 B.C.E.], commonly known as Cyrus the Great and also known as Cyrus the Elder, was the founder of the Achaemenid Empire [named for Cyrus’ ancestor, Achaemenes]. Under his rule, the empire embraced all the previous civilized states of the ancient Near East, expanded vastly, and eventually conquered most of Southwest Asia and much of Central Asia and the Caucasus [land area between the Black and Caspian Seas]. From the Mediterranean Sea and Hellespont [the Dardanelles, narrow strait between Asia Minor and Europe] in the west to the Indus River in the east [one of the longest rivers in Asia, flowing through Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir and western Tibet].

“Cyrus the Great created the largest empire the world had yet seen. Under his successors, the empire eventually stretched from parts of the Balkans (Bulgaria-Pannonia) and Thrace-Macedonia in the west, to the Indus Valley in the east. His regal titles in full were ‘The Great King,’ ‘King of Persia,’ ‘King of Anshan,’ ‘King of Media,’ ‘King of Babylon,’ ‘King of Sumer and Akkad,’ and ‘King of the Four Corners of the World.’ He also proclaimed what has been identified by scholars and archaeologists to be the oldest known declaration of human rights, which was transcribed onto the Cyrus Cylinder sometime between 539 and 530 BC. This view has been criticized by some as a misunderstanding of what they claim to be the Cylinder’s generic nature as a traditional statement of the sort that new monarchs may make at the beginning of their reign.

“The reign of Cyrus the Great lasted between 29 and 31 years. Cyrus built his empire by conquering first the Median Empire, then the Lydian Empire and eventually the Neo-Babylonian Empire. Either before or after Babylon, he led an expedition into central Asia, which resulted in major campaigns that were described as having brought ‘into subjection every nation without exception.’ Cyrus did not venture into Egypt, as he himself died in battle, fighting the Massagetae along the Syr Darya in December 530 B.C.E. He was succeeded by his son, Cambyses II, who managed to add to the empire by conquering Egypt, Nubia, and Cyrenaica during his short rule.

“Cyrus the Great respected the customs and religions of the lands he conquered. It is said that in universal history, the role of the Achaemenid Empire founded by Cyrus lies in its very successful model for centralized administration and establishing a government working to the advantage and profit of its subjects. In fact, the administration of the empire through satraps and the vital principle of forming a government at Pasargadae [located today in south central Iran] were the works of Cyrus. What is sometimes referred to as the Edict of Restoration (actually two edicts) described in the **Bible** as being made by Cyrus the Great left a lasting legacy on the Jewish religion, where, because of his policies in Babylonia, he is referred to by the **Jewish Bible** as Messiah (**Isaiah 44:24, 26–45:3, 13**), and is the only non-Jew to be called so, **Isaiah 45:1-7**.

“Cyrus the Great is also well recognized for his achievements in human rights, politics, and military strategy, as well as his influence on both Eastern and Western civilizations. Having originated from Persis [one of the thirty-one provinces of Iran and known as the cultural capital of Iran; in the south of the country, in Iran’s Region 2; administrative center is Shiraz], roughly corresponding to the modern Iranian province

of Fars, Cyrus has played a crucial role in defining the national identity of modern Iran. Cyrus and, indeed, the Achaemenid influence in the ancient world also extended as far as Athens, where many Athenians adopted aspects of the Achaemenid Persian culture as their own, in a reciprocal cultural exchange.”

(**Wikipedia**, 1/20/2015)

3.

Divine Self-Affirmations in the Bible

Deuteronomy 4:35,

You (singular) were caused to see (and) to know that YHWH, He is the God;
there is no other besides Him!

Deuteronomy 4:39,

And you shall know today,
and you shall bring it back to your heart,
that YHWH, He is the God in the heavens above;
and upon the earth beneath--
there is no other!

Deuteronomy 32:39,

See / look now that I I (am) He,
and there are no God / Gods beside Me!
I, I cause death, and I will keep / restore life;
I wound severely, and I, I will heal!
And there is no one delivering from My hand!

1 Samuel 2:2,

There is no Set-apart One like the YHWH,
because there is none beside You!
And there is no Rock like our God!

Isaiah 43:10-13,

- 10 You (plural) (are) My witnesses--
a saying of YHWH--
and My servant whom I chose,
so that you (plural) will know and will believe to / in Me;
and you will understand that I (am) He.
Before Me no God was formed;
and after Me, there will not be!
- 11 I, I (am) YHWH;
and there is none beside Me, a Savior!
- 12 I, I declared,
and I saved / delivered,
and I cause to hear,
and there is not among you people a stranger!
And you (plural) (are) My witnesses--
a saying of YHWH--
and I (am) EI!
- 13 Also from today I (am) He,
and there is no one delivering from My hand!

I will make / act,
and who will turn it back?

Isaiah 44:6-8,

- 6 In this way YHWH King of Israel spoke,
and his Redeemer / Next-of-Kin, YHWH of Armies:
I (am) first,
and I am last;
and beside Me there is no God!
- 7 And who (is) like Me?
Let him cry out and declare it!
And let him arrange it for / before Me!
From My setting up a long-lasting people,
and things coming
and when (?) they (feminine plural) will come,
let them declare to them!
- 8 You (plural) shall not be in dread,
and you shall not be afraid.
Did I not from that time caused you to hear,
and I declared?
And you (plural) (are) witnesses!
Is there an Eloah besides Me?
And there is not a Rock--
I knew none!

Isaiah 45:5,

I (am) YHWH, and there is none besides;
other than Me, there is no God.
I will gird you (with armor), and / even though you did not know Me.

Isaiah 45:21-22,

- 21 Make declaration! And bring forward!
Surely, let them take counsel together!
Who caused this to be heard from (long) before,
from past time declared it?
Was it not I, YHWH?
And there is not another God besides Me,
a rightly-related God, and One Who saves--
there is none except Me!
- 22 Turn to Me, and be saved, all earth's ends!
Because I (am) God, and there is not another!

Isaiah 48:12,

Hear / listen to Me, Jaob,
and Israel, My called one!
I (am) He;
I (am) first,
also I (am) One coming afterwards / last!

Joel 2:27,

And you (plural) will know that in Israel's midst, I (am)--
and I (am) YHWH your God,
and there is no other!
And My people will not be ashamed for long-lasting-time!

Psalms 86:8-10,

8 There is none like You among the Gods, my Lord;
and there is nothing like Your works!
9 All nations which You made will come,
and they will worship before You, my Lord,
and they will give honor to Your name!
10 Because You (are) great, and One doing wonders,
You, God, by Yourself!

Psalms 89:6-8^{Heb} / 5-7^{Eng},

6/5 And heavens will praise / confess Your work, YHWH,
also Your true faithfulness in an assembly of set-apart ones!
7/6 Because who in the cloud(s) will be set in order to the YHWH,
will be like the YHWH among Sons of the Gods?
8/7 El / Supreme God, to be feared in (the) great council of Set-apart Ones,
and fearsome (synonym) above all those surrounding Him!

Revelation 1:8,

I, I am the A and the Z / Omega,
says Lord, the God,
the One being, and the One (Who) was being, and the Coming One,
the Almighty!

Revelation 1:17,

And when I saw Him (the glorified Son of Man),
I fell at His feet like a dead person;
and He placed His right hand upon me, saying
Do not fear!
I, I am the First and the Last!

Revelation 22:13, evidently an angel / messenger speaking for the Risen Lord:

I (am) the A and the Z / Omega,
the First and the Last,
the Beginning and the Last / End!

4.

Wikipedia Article on King Croesus of Lydia (595-c. 547 B.C.E.)

“Born about 595 BC, Croesus received tribute from the Ionian Greeks [of central coastal Anatolia] but was friendlier to the Hellenes [an ethnic group native to Greece, Cyprus, Anatolia, Southern Italy and other regions] than his father had been. Croesus traditionally gave refuge at one point to the Phrygian [kingdom in the west central part of Anatolia] prince Adrastus. Herodotus tells that Adrastus exiled himself to Lydia [ancient kingdom covering most of western Anatolia] after accidentally killing his brother. King Croesus welcomed him but then Adrastus accidentally killed Croesus' son, Atys. (Adrastus then committed suicide.)

“Croesus' uneasy relations with the Greeks obscures the larger fact that he was the last bastion of the Ionian cities against the increasing Persian power in Anatolia. He began preparing a campaign against Cyrus the Great of Persia. Before setting out he turned to the Delphic oracle and the oracle of Amphiaraus to inquire whether he should pursue this campaign and whether he should also seek an alliance. The oracles answered, with typical ambiguity, that if Croesus attacked the Persians, he would destroy a great empire—this would become one of the most famous oracular statements from Delphi.

“Croesus was also advised to find out which Greek state was most powerful and to ally himself with it. Croesus, now feeling secure, formed an alliance with Sparta in addition to those he had with Amasis II of Egypt and Nabonidus of Babylonia, and launched his campaign against the Persian Empire in 547 BC. He was intercepted near the Halys River in central Anatolia and an inconclusive battle was fought. It was the usual practice in those days for the armies to disband for winter and Croesus did so accordingly. Cyrus did not, however, and he attacked Croesus in Sardis, capturing him. It became clear that the powerful empire Croesus was about to destroy was his own.”
(1/21/2015)

5. Occurrences of the Noun עֶבֶד, (Ebhedh, “Servant” in the Singular
in the Book of Isaiah

Isaiah 20:3, YHWH calls Isaiah “My servant.”

Isaiah 22:20, YHWH calls Eliakim “My servant.”

Isaiah 24:2, “as with the servant, so with his master.”

Isaiah 37:35, YHWH calls David “My servant.”

Isaiah 41:8, YHWH calls Israel / Jacob “My servant.”

Isaiah 41:9, YHWH says to Israel / Jacob “you are My servant.”

Isaiah 42:1, YHWH says “Behold My servant whom I uphold, My chosen one,” but the servant is not identified by name.

Isaiah 42:19, YHWH says that “My servant is blind.”

Isaiah 42:19, YHWH asks, “Who is blind as YHWH’s servant?”

Isaiah 43:10, evidently speaking to Israel, YHWH says “You (plural) are my witnesses and My servant whom I chose.”

Isaiah 44:1, YHWH calls upon Jacob His servant, Israel whom He has chosen, to listen to Him.

Isaiah 44:2, YHWH tells Jacob, “My servant,” to “fear not.”

Isaiah 44:21, YHWH calls Jacob / Israel “My servant.”

Isaiah 44:21, YHWH tells Jacob / Israel, “I formed you; you are My servant.”

Isaiah 44:26, YHWH says of Himself that He confirms the word of His servant (as well as confirming the word of His messengers).

Isaiah 45:4, YHWH tells Cyrus that He has called him by name, for the sake of My servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen.”

Isaiah 48:20, YHWH tells the exiles in Babylon to go out from Babylon, shouting with joy that YHWH has redeemed His servant Jacob!”

Isaiah 49:3, YHWH’s servant tells how YHWH said to him, “You are My servant Israel, in whom I will be glorified.”

Isaiah 49:5, The servant goes on to tell how YHWH formed him from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob / Israel back to Him. That is, the servant is an individual formed by YHWH to serve in bringing Jacob / Israel back to Him.

Isaiah 49:6, The servant tells how YHWH says It is too light a thing that he should be YHWH's servant to serve Jacob / Israel—he is given an even greater mission, as a light to the nations that YHWH's salvation may reach to the end of the earth!

Isaiah 49:7, the servant is told by YHWH that he is deeply despised, abhorred by the nation (of Israel), but honored by kings and princes.

Isaiah 50:10, the servant asks, Who among you fears YHWH, and obeys the voice of His servant?

Isaiah 52:13, the Israelite exiles, leaving Babylon, are told by YHWH, Behold My servant—and then begins a description of that servant who shall act wisely continuing through **53:12**.

Isaiah 53:11, evidently the voice of YHWH states that “My servant, the righteous one” by his knowledge shall make many righteous and bear their iniquities. But YHWH's sin-bearing servant of **52:13-53:12** is not named.

6. Occurrences of the Verb **יָצַק** in the Piel in the Hebrew Bible

Deuteronomy 2:30, YHWH strengthened / hardened Sihon's heart;

Deuteronomy 3:28, Moses is told to strengthen Joshua;

Deuteronomy 15:7, when a brother Israelite becomes poor, do not strengthen / harden your heart against him;

Isaiah 35:3, when the exiles return, they are told to "strengthen the weak hands";

Isaiah 41:10, YHWH promises the exiles in Babylon that He will strengthen them;

Isaiah 44:14, the idol-maker selects a cypress tree or an oak and lets it grow strong;

Amos 2:14 (twice), when YHWH's judgement falls on Northern Israel, the strong will not be able to strengthen themselves;

Nahum 2:2, as the enemy approaches, the hearers are told to "strengthen their strength":

Psalms 80:16^{Heb} / 15^{Eng}, a prayer for the son that YHWH has strengthened; **80:18^{Heb} / 17^{Eng}**, same;

Psalms 89:22^{Heb} / 21^{Eng}, the psalmist has heard a voice saying that YHWH has strengthened David;

Job 4:4^{Heb} / 3^{Eng}, Eliphaz reminds Job how he has strengthened weak hands;

Job 16:5, Job replies to his miserable counselor friends that if they were in his condition, he would strengthen them with words;

Proverbs 8:28, Wisdom was there when YHWH strengthened the skies above;

Proverbs 24:5, a man of knowledge strengthens his might;

Proverbs 31:17, the woman of strength strengthens her arms;

2 Chronicles 11:17, people who set their hearts to serve YHWH strengthened the Kingdom of Judah;

2 Chronicles 24:13, those working to repair the temple in Jerusalem strengthened it;

2 Chronicles 36:13, Zedekiah strengthened / hardened his heart against turning to YHWH.

7.

Mentions of Divine Help in the Hebrew Bible

Genesis 49:25, the God of Jacob will help Joseph;

1 Samuel 7:12, Samuel set up a stone which he named “Ebenezer,” that is, “Stone of Help,” saying, “To this point YHWH helped us.”

Isaiah 41:10,

You shall not be afraid,
because I (am) with you!
You shall not be dismayed,
because I (am) your God;
I will make you firm.
Surely I will help you,
surely I will support you,
with My right hand of My right-relationship!

Isaiah 41:13-14,

13 Because I (am) YHWH your God,
strengthening your right hand,
the One saying to you (singular),
You shall not be afraid,
I, I will help you!
14 You shall not be afraid,
worm Jacob!
Men of Israel,
I, I will help you--
a saying of YHWH,
and your Redeemer / Next-of-Kin,
Israel's Set-apart One!

Isaiah 44:2a,

In this way YHWH spoke, your Maker,
and your Former from (the) womb:
He will help you (singular).
Do not be afraid My servant Jacob,
and Yeshurun—I chose him!...

Isaiah 49:8,

In this way YHWH spoke:
At a time of goodwill / acceptance / favor I answered you (singular),
and in a day of deliverance / salvation I helped you.
And I guarded you, and I gave you for a covenant of a people,

to raise up a land / earth,
to cause to possess devastated possessions,

Isaiah 50:7,

And my Lord YHWH will help me;
therefore I was not humiliated;
therefore I placed / set my face like the flint-rock,
and I knew that I will not be ashamed.

Isaiah 50:9

Look—my Lord YHWH will help me;
who (is) he (who) will condemn me?
Look—all of them like the garment will wear out;
a moth will devour them!

Psalm 10:14b,

upon You a helpless person will leave (her cause);
(for) an orphan—You became a Helper!

Psalm 28:7,

YHWH (is) my strength and my shield;
in Him my heart trusted, and I was helped;
and my heart exulted,
and from / with my song, I will praise Him!

Psalm 30:11^{Heb} / 10^{Eng},

Hear, YHWH, and show me favor!
YHWH, be / become One helping to me!

Psalm 37:39-40,

39 And (the) salvation / deliverance of rightly-related people (is) from YHWH,
their stronghold / place of safety in time of distress / trouble.
40 And YHWH helped them and delivered them;
He will deliver them from wicked people and will save them,
because they sought refuge in Him.

Psalm 46:6,

God (is) in her [His city's] midst,
she will not be shaken;
God will help her when morning comes / dawns!

Psalm 54:6^{Heb} / 4^{Eng},

Look—God is One helping for me;
my Lord among those supporting my innermost-being!
(Among our English translations, only **New Jerusalem** has the plural in this last line: “the Lord, among those who sustain me.” **Rahfs** has the singular: “and the Lord, Helper of the innermost-being of mine.”)

Psalm 79:9,

Help us, God of our salvation / deliverance,
upon (the) matter / for (the) sake of Your name’s honor / glory;
and deliver us, and cover over / atone for our missings-of-the-mark / sins,
on account of Your name!

Psalm 86:17b,

because You, YHWH, helped me and comforted me!

Psalm 109:26,

Help me, YHWH my God!
Save / deliver me, according to Your steadfast-love!

Psalm 118:7,

YHWH (is) for me / mine as One helping me / my Helper;
and I, I will look (down?) on those hating me!

Psalm 118:13,

Pushing, you pushed me to fall;
and YHWH helped me!

Psalm 119:86b,

(with) falsehood they pursued me—help Me!

Psalm 119:173,

Your hand will be for helping me,
because Your instructions I chose!

Psalm 119:175,

My innermost-being will live, and will praise You;
and Your judicial decisions will help me!

1 Chronicles 12:19^{Heb} / **18**^{Eng},

And a Spirit clothed Amasai, head / chief of the thirty:
To you, David, and with you, son of Jesse, peace, peace to you!
And peace to your helpers!
Because your God helped you!
And David received them,
and gave / appointed them as heads / chiefs of the troop.

1 Chronicles 15:26, God helped the Levites who were carrying the ark / box of the covenant.

2 Chronicles 14:10,

And Asa called to YHWH his God, and he said,
YHWH, there is none with You to help between great to one without
strength;
Help us, YHWH our God!
Because upon You we leaned,
and in your Name we came against this horde.
YHWH our God,
You will not let man restrain with You!

2 Chronicles 18:31,

And it happened, as (the) chariot-captains saw Jehoshaphat [the king of Judah]–
and they said, It is Israel's king!
And they circled around him to wage war.
And Jehoshaphat cried out,
and YHWH helped him;
and God allured them away from him.

2 Chronicles 25:8b, a man of God tells Amaziah that

because there is power in the God
to help and to cause to fall.

2 Chronicles 26:7, God helped Uzziah against the Philistines and the Arabians and the Meonites;

2 Chronicles 32:7-8, King Hezekiah says to the Judean soldiers helping to prepare Jerusalem for the coming of Sennacherib,

7 Be strong, and be courageous (synonym);
do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed before Assyria's king,
and from before all this horde which is with him;
for (the One) with us (is) great(er) than (the One) with him / for those with
us (are) great(er) than (those) with him!

8 With him (is) an arm of flesh;
and with us (is) YHWH our God,
to help us, to fight our wars!
And the people braced themselves / were supported by Hezekiah's words,
King of Israel.

8. גֹּאֵל, Go)el, “One Redeeming,” “Redeemer,” in the Hebrew Bible

Genesis 48:15-16,

- 15 And he (Jacob) blessed Joseph, and he said,
The God before Whom my fathers walked,
Abraham and Isaac,
the God, the One Shepherding me my beginning (?) until this day;
16 the angel / messenger, the one redeeming me from all evil,
will bless the youths!
And my name will be called on them,
and (the) name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
and may they multiply / they will multiply to the many, in the land’s midst!
(Here it is the angel / messenger of God that does the redeeming Jacob from all
evil, evidently meaning taking his side, defending him, identifying with him as
next-of-kin.)

Leviticus 25:25-26,

- 25 When your brother is poor, and sells some of his inheritance,
and his redeemer, the one being near to him / next-of-kin, shall come
and he shall redeem / purchase back his brother’s sold property.
26 And a man who has no redeemer—
and his hand reaches and finds
sufficiency (for) its redemption / purchasing back...
(That is, the poor man earns enough to act as his own redeemer.)

Numbers 5:8, a situation in which a man has no redeemer / next-of-kin;

Numbers 35:27, if a redeemer / next of kin (sometimes translated “avenger of blood”) takes the life of one who has killed his relative, who has gone outside a city of refuge, he will have no blood-guilt); **Deuteronomy 19:6, 12; Joshua 20:3, 5, 9** similar laws;

2 Samuel 14:11, redeemer / avenger of blood mentioned in made-up story by woman of Tekoa, sent by Joab to David, to convince him to change his attitude towards Absalom;

1 Kings 16:11, Zimri killed all the household of Baasha--

לֹא־הִשָּׂאִיר לוֹ מִשְׁתֵּין בְּקִיר
וְגֹאֲלֵיו וְרֵעֵהוּ:

he did not leave remaining to him one urinating on a wall,
and / or his next-of-kin, and / or his neighbor.

Isaiah 41:14,

You shall not be afraid,
 worm Jacob!
Men of Israel,
 I, I will help you--
a saying of YHWH,
 and your Redeemer / Next-of-Kin,
Israel's Set-apart One!

Isaiah 43:14

In this way YHWH spoke, your (plural) Redeemer / Next-of-Kin, Set-apart One of
 Israel:
 For your sake I sent in / to the Babylon,
and I brought down fleeing ones, all of them--
 and Chaldeans in the ships of their ringing cry.

Isaiah 44:6,

In this way YHWH King of Israel spoke,
 and his Redeemer / Next-of-Kin, YHWH of Armies:
I (am) first,
 and I am last;
and beside Me there is no God!

Isaiah 44:24,

In this way YHWH spoke, your (singular) Redeemer / Next-of-Kin
 --and He formed you from (the) womb:
I--YHWH, One making everything
 stretching out heavens by Myself,
hammering out the earth--Who (was) with Me?

Isaiah 47:4,

Our Redeemer / Next-of-Kin,
 YHWH of Armies (is) His name--
Set-apart One of Israel!

Isaiah 48:17,

In this way YHWH spoke, your Next-of-kin / Redeemer,
 Set-apart One of Israel
I--YHWH your God,
 One teaching you to profit / benefit,
causing you to walk in a way you will walk.

Isaiah 49:7,

In this way YHWH spoke,
Israel's Next-of-Kin / Redeemer, his Set-apart One,
to one despised of innermost-being
to one abhorred (by a) nation--
to a servant of rulers:
Kings will see, and will arise / stand up;
princes, and they will worship,
because of YHWH Who was faithful,
Set-apart One of Israel--
and He chose you!

Isaiah 49:26,

And I will cause your oppressors to eat their (own) flesh,
and they will get drunk with their (own) blood, like sweet wine!
And all flesh will know that I (am) YHWH, your Savior,
and your Redeemer / Next-of-Kin, Mighty One of Jacob!

Isaiah 54:5,

Because (the) One marrying you (is) your Maker--
YHWH of Armies (is) His name;
and your Next-of-Kin / Redeemer (is) Israel's Set-apart One--
"God all the earth" He will be called!

Isaiah 54:8,

In a flood of wrath
I hid My face from you (for) a moment;
and with long-lasting steadfast-love
I had compassion on you!
said your Next of Kin / Redeemer,
YHWH!

Isaiah 59:20,

And a redeemer / next-of-kin will come to Zion,
and to those turning away from transgression in Jacob!
—A saying of YHWH.

Isaiah 60:16,

And you will nurse / suck (the) milk of nations,
and (the) breast of kings you will nurse / suck.

And you will know that I (am) YHWH your Savior,
and your Redeemer / Next-of-Kin,
Mighty One of Jacob!

Isaiah 63:16,

Because You (are) our Father!
If Abraham did not know us,
and Israel did not recognize us,
You, YHWH, (are) our Father,
our Redeemer / Next-of-Kin from long ago (is) Your name!

Jeremiah 50:33-34,

- 33 In this way YHWH of Armies spoke:
Children of Israel and children of Judah together are being oppressed;
and all their captors took strong hold of them;
they refused to send them forth.
- 34 Their Redeemer / Next-of-kin (is) strong—
YHWH of Armies (is) His name.
He will certainly contend their contention / plead their cause,
in order to give rest the the land;
and He will cause Babylon's inhabitants to shake.

Psalms 19:15,

Let words of my mouth be acceptable,
and my heart's meditation before You,
YHWH—my Rock and my Redeemer / Next-of-kin!

Psalms 78:35, when Israel was being punished severely by God--

and they remembered that God (was) their Rock,
and El (Supreme God) Most High (was) their Redeemer / Next-of-kin!

Psalms 103:4, YHWH is:

the Redeemer / One Redeeming your life from (the) pit,
the One crowning you (with) steadfast-love and compassions.

Job 19:25,

And I, I knew,
my redeemer / next-of-kin lives;
and afterwards,
upon dry earth / dust he will stand up.
(See commentaries for what this intriguing statement of Job means.)

Proverbs 23:11, which warns against oppressing the orphan,

Because their Redeemer / Next-of-kin (is) strong--
He will contend their contention with you / plead their cause against you!

Ruth 4:1, 3, 6, 8, 14, all concerning Naomi's redeemer / next of kin, whose place Boaz takes, and marries Ruth, Naomi's daughter-in-law.

The Greek Oracles

“Description: The word "oracle" comes from the Latin verb *ōrāre* "to speak" and properly refers to the priest or priestess uttering the prediction. In extended use, *oracle* may also refer to the site of the oracle, and to the oracular utterances themselves, called *khrēsmoi* (χρησμοί) in Greek.

“Oracles were thought to be portals through which the Gods spoke directly to people. In this sense they were different from seers (*manteis*, μάντις) who interpreted signs sent by the Gods through bird signs, animal entrails, and other various methods.

“The most important oracles of Greek antiquity were Pythia, priestess to Apollo at Delphi, and the oracle of Dione and Zeus at Dodona in Epirus. Other temples of Apollo were located at Didyma on the coast of Asia Minor, at Corinth and Bassae in the Peloponnese, and at the islands of Delos and Aegina in the Aegean Sea. The Sibylline Oracles are a collection of oracular utterances written in Greek hexameters ascribed to the Sibyls, prophetesses who uttered divine revelations in a frenzied state.

“Origins: Walter Burkert observes that "Frenzied women from whose lips the God speaks" are recorded in the Near East as in Mari in the second millennium B.C.E. and in Assyria in the first millennium B.C.E. In Egypt the Goddess Wadjet (eye of the moon) was depicted as a snake-headed woman or a woman with two snake-heads. Her oracle was in the renowned temple in Per-Wadjet (Greek name Buto). The oracle of Wadjet may have been the source for the oracular tradition which spread from Egypt to Greece. Evans linked Wadjet with the Minoan snake Goddess, a chthonic deity and one of the aspects of the Great Mother.

“In Greece the old oracles were devoted to the Mother Goddess. At the oracle of Dodona she will be called Diōnē (the feminine form of *Díōs*, genitive of Zeus, literally 'heavenly'), who represents the earth-fertile soil, probably the chief female goddess. Python, daughter (or son) of Gaia "earth" was the earth dragon of Delphi represented as a serpent and became the chthonic deity, enemy of Apollo, who slew her and possessed the oracle.

“The Pythia was the mouthpiece of the *oracles* of the God Apollo. Pythia, the oracle at Delphi, was said to be infallible. Pythia only gave prophecies the seventh day of each month, seven being the number most associated with Apollo, during the nine warmer months of the year; thus, Delphi was not the major source of divination for the ancient Greeks. Many wealthy individuals bypassed the hordes of people attempting a consultation by making additional animal sacrifices to please the oracle lest their request go unanswered. As a result, seers were the main source of everyday divination. The temple was changed to a center for the worship of Apollo during the classical period of Greece and priests were added to the temple organization--although the tradition regarding prophecy remained unchanged--and the priestesses continued to provide the services of the oracle exclusively. It is from this institution that the English word, oracle, is derived.

“The Delphic Oracle exerted considerable influence throughout Hellenic culture. Distinctively, this female was essentially the highest authority both civilly and religiously in male-dominated ancient Greece. She responded to the questions of citizens, foreigners, kings, and philosophers on issues of political impact, war, duty, crime, laws--even personal issues.

“The semi-Hellenic countries around the Greek world, such as Lydia, Caria, and even Egypt also respected her and came to Delphi as supplicants.

“Croesus, king of Lydia beginning in 560 B.C.E., tested the oracles of the world to discover which gave the most accurate prophecies. He sent out emissaries to seven sites who were all to ask the oracles on the same day what the king was doing at that very moment. Croesus proclaimed the oracle at Delphi to be the most accurate, who correctly reported that the king was making a lamb-and-tortoise stew, and so he graced her with a magnitude of precious gifts. He then consulted Delphi before attacking Persia, and according to Herodotus was advised, “If you cross the river, a great empire will be destroyed.” Believing the response favorable, Croesus attacked, but it was his own empire that ultimately was destroyed by the Persians.

“She allegedly also proclaimed that there was no man wiser than Socrates, to which Socrates said that, if so, this was because he alone was aware of his own ignorance. After this confrontation, Socrates dedicated his life to a search for knowledge that was one of the founding events of western philosophy. He claimed that she was ‘an essential guide to personal and state development.’ This Oracle's last recorded response was given in 362 AD, to Julian the Apostate.

“The oracle's powers were highly sought after and never doubted. Any inconsistencies between prophecies and events were dismissed as failure to correctly interpret the responses, not an error of the oracle. Very often prophecies were worded ambiguously, so as to cover all contingencies--especially so *ex post facto*. One famous such response to a query about participation in a military campaign was "You will go you will return never in war will you perish". This gives the recipient liberty to place a comma before or after the word "never", thus covering both possible outcomes. Another was the response to the Athenians when the vast army of king Xerxes I was approaching Athens with the intent of razing the city to the ground. "Only the wooden palisades may save you" answered the oracle, probably aware that there was sentiment for sailing to the safety of southern Italy and reestablishing Athens there. Some thought that it was a recommendation to fortify the Acropolis with a wooden fence and make a stand there. Others, Themistocles among them, said the oracle was clearly for fighting at sea, the metaphor intended to mean war ships. Others still insisted that their case was so hopeless that they should board every ship available and flee to Italy, where they would be safe beyond any doubt. In the event, variations of all three interpretations were attempted: some barricaded the Acropolis, the civilian population was evacuated over sea to nearby Salamis Island and to Troizen, and the war fleet fought victoriously at Salamis Bay. Should utter destruction have happened, it could always be claimed that the oracle had called for fleeing to Italy after all.”

(Wikipedia, 7:17/ 2015)

