

Isaiah Chapter 44, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

44:1¹ וְעַתָּה שְׁמַע יַעֲקֹב עַבְדֵי יְיָ

¹Slotki comments on **verses 1-5** that “The severity and gloom of the preceding section are now mitigated by a promise of future happiness and rejuvenation. The Divine spirit will descend like refreshing rain, and the rising generations will awaken to an understanding of the honor and dignity of belonging to God’s people.” (P. 212)

Alexander states concerning **chapter 44** that “This chapter opens, like the **fortieth** and **forty-third**, with cheering promises to Israel, followed by reasons for confiding in them, drawn from the wisdom, power, and goodness of [YHWH].

“The specific promise, which constitutes the theme or basis of the prophecy, is that of abundant spiritual influences and their fruits, not only internal prosperity, but large accessions from without (**verses 1-5**). The pledge for the fulfilment of this promise is afforded by the proofs of God’s omniscience [the text has no such philosophical word—only that YHWH knows the future], as contrasted with all other Gods (**verses 6-9**). The folly of image-worship is then established by two arguments. The first is that idols are themselves the creatures of mere men (**verses 10-14**). The other is that they are not only made, and made by man, but made of the very same materials applied to the most trivial domestic uses (**verses 15-20**). From this demonstration of the power of [YHWH] to perform His promise we are now brought back to the promise itself (**verses 21-24**). This is again confirmed by an appeal to God’s creative power, and illustrated by the raising up of Cyrus as a deliverer to Israel (**verses 25-28**).” (P. 160)

North entitles **44:1-5** “The Increase of ‘The Lord’s People.’”

He comments that “Yahweh will take measures to ensure the increase of His people in numbers and influence. This increase is likened to the rapid growth of trees that flourish where there is abundance of water. Not only so, but non-Israelites will signify, both by word and by written declaration, their allegiance to Yahweh.”

He adds that “There had been some danger that the Israelite community would dwindle in exile...The pouring out of water and copious rains (**verse 3**) does not refer to the transformation of the desert in preparation for the new exodus (as in **41:17-18; 43:19**), but to the increase of the Israelite population, which will be effected by the out-pouring of Yahweh’s Spirit. The only problem presented by the passage is whether **verse 5** refers to the reclamation of defaulting Jews, or to proselytes from the heathen. If it is to the latter, the thought is introduced abruptly, and yet the language seems to require this interpretation: no Israelite born would need to call himself Jacob, or to add the name Israel to his own.” (P. 132)

Oswalt entitles **44:1-5** “The promised Spirit.” He comments that “Once again, as in **43:25** but on a larger scale, the completely unmerited nature of God’s salvation is underlined. God has reminded the people that their sin has removed Him from any

(continued...)

יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּחַרְתִּי בּוֹ:

And now, listen, Jacob My servant,
and Israel whom I chose!²

¹(...continued)

obligation whatsoever to them; they cannot demand that He deliver. But that does not mean that God will not deliver; it means only that what He does is a free gift growing out of His Own love.

“This section has four emphases. The first is God’s continued love for Israel (**verses 1-2**); the second is the outpouring of the Spirit (**verse 3**); the third is abundant offspring (**verse 4**); and the fourth is the privilege of being counted as an Israelite (**verse 5**)...

“Here the focus is on broader issues: the very fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. God promises that the nation will survive and multiply, that it will be blessed and be a blessing, and that God’s life will be theirs through the Holy Spirit. None need fear that God cannot or will not keep His ancient covenant promises—He is faithful.” (P. 164)

Knight comments on **verse 1** that “The grace of God is nowhere more clearly seen than in this section [**chapter 44**]. One would think that **43:38** had related the end of the story, so to speak, and that *Heilsgeschichte* [‘salvation history’]...had come to a full stop on account of the intransigence, disloyalty, and rebellion of God’s covenant partner, His servant Israel. But God now takes up the theme of His purpose through His chosen instrument without any pause, and as if the extirpation [local destruction] order were no hindrance to His plan. God is of course almighty. Deutero-Isaiah therefore sees that God cannot be thwarted even by the sin of man, even by the deliberate defalcation [the act of misappropriation] of the essential instrument He had planned to use. But in this verse God seems to bypass the whole problem He now faces, for He insouciantly [unruffledly / untroubledly] continues to call Israel His servant even as she declines the honor.” (P. 75)

²Alexander states that **verse 1** is “simply a resumption and continuation of the Prophet’s argument, intended to exhibit the true relation between God and His people.” (P. 160)

Oswalt comments on **verse 1** that “Whatever one’s sins may have been in the past, grace is available *now* for the receiving. At any place in our personal or national history, God tells us, we must live in the reality of present grace, while acknowledging the reality of past sins.

“The repetition of Jacob and Israel from **43:28** is also important for the sense of contrast. There Jacob is under the curse and Israel given up to reviling. That is well deserved, but it is not all that God has to say. Jacob / Israel, downcast and dejected, is

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44:2³ כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה עֲשֶׂה וְיִצְרָךְ מִבֶּטֶן

יִעֲזָרְךָ

אֶל־תִּירָא עֲבָדִי יַעֲקֹב

וְיִשְׁרֹן בְּחֶרְתִּי בּוֹ:

In this way YHWH spoke, your Maker, and your Former from (the) womb:⁴

He will help you (singular).⁵

²(...continued)

called to lift its head and listen to another word from God: Servant! Chosen! God has not given up on them; He still intends to use them for the purpose for which they were created (**43:21**)!" (Pp. 164-65)

³Knight comments on verse 2 that YHWH "just reminds her [Israel] that she was created for that end; and that He has been helping, forming, fashioning and training her for her office ever since she was born, that is, ever since the election of Abraham. Then instead of scolding, which would only have produced resentment, He repeats His call, one that can melt the hardest of human hearts, 'Fear not.'" (P. 75)

⁴For this matter of YHWH's "forming from the womb" beyond this verse, see **44:24; 49:1, 5** and **Jeremiah 1:5**.

North comments that the phrase "from the womb" must mean "from (the time you were conceived in) the womb," not "from (the time you came out of) the womb."

He adds that "The initial 'forming' of a people, as of a person, is *in the womb* (**Job 31:15; Psalm 139:13-16**; compare **Job 10:8-11**). Israel's 'forming,' like Jeremiah's (**Jeremiah 1:5**), was antenatal ['before birth,' 'during pregnancy']." (P. 132)

Alexander states that "the conception present to the writer's mind is that of an individual man...There can be no doubt that the maturing of Israel as a nation in Egypt is often represented as a period of gestation, and the exodus as a birth; but whether there is any such allusion here may be considered doubtful." (P. 161) We wish Alexander had mentioned exactly where this is "often" found, since we recall no such statements beyond this chapter, **verses 2** and **24**. Can you find them?

⁵It is powerful theological reasoning. If YHWH made Israel, if YHWH formed Israel from the womb, certainly He will help Israel—in spite of her failures as His people! And we add, in the light of **Genesis 1-3**, the same reasoning applies to all humanity!

What do you think? How do you feel toward your own children, formed in their mother's womb. If they go wrong, do you forsake and denounce them? Or do you

(continued...)

Do not be afraid My servant Jacob,⁶
and Yeshurun / Upright one—I chose him!⁷

⁵(...continued)
stand by their side, ready to help them if you possibly can? Do you suppose that the Creator God has any less concern for His children?

⁶The reasoning continues: If YHWH, Israel’s Maker and Former is going to help Israel, then Israel / Jacob has no reason to be afraid! And, we insist, the same thing is true for all humanity, whom YHWH has made and formed!

⁷And an additional thought—Israel has been called **יֵשׁוּרֻן**, “Upright One” (see **Deuteronomy 32:15; 33:5, 26; Ben Sirach 37:25**)—who has been chosen by YHWH to be His people / servant! Of course, as the context makes abundantly clear, Israel as a matter of historical fact has not been the upright one that the name imagines. But, the prophet, speaking for YHWH, proclaims, God will still treat Israel as such. There is hope for failures!

Alexander states that this name has “reference to their normal or ideal character, the end for which they were created, and the aspect which they ought to have exhibited.” (P. 161)

Rahifs translates the name by “the beloved one.”

Knight states that “It is interesting how frequently Deutero-Isaiah refers to the song of Moses in **Deuteronomy 32**; for it itself is a prophetic interpretation of what God had *done* at the exodus. It is also interesting that Deutero-Isaiah’s hearers must have been well acquainted with the song to have understood his references...

“For the name *Yeshurun* is used for Israel at only three other places, at **Deuteronomy 32:15** and **33:5, 26**. Both of those chapters are in verse and are very ancient. William Albright, **From the Stone Age to Christianity**, dates [them] 1100 B.C.E.; Otto Eissfeldt, **Einleitung in das Alte Testament**, between 1070 and 1020 B.C.E....In both chapters the word *Yeshurun* appears as a poetic name for Israel...

“The root of the word seems to be the word for ‘upright.’ If such is the case, then the poetic writers employed the name to designate Israel under her ideal character, in the light of what God her Lord saw she could and might be. Moreover, *Yeshurun* occurs here in parallel with the ideal description of Israel’s God that is found under the term ‘Rock,’ a name for God...characteristic of **Deuteronomy 32**...

“Deutero-Isaiah evidently wishes to declare that Israel is not to be dismissed out of hand as God’s failure, in that she cannot keep her bond.” (Pp. 75-6)

44:3^{8, 1} כִּי אֶצְק־מַיִם עַל-צְמָא

וְנִזְלִים עַל-יַבְשָׁה

אֶצְק רֹחִי עַל-זֶרְעֶךָ

וּבִרְכָתִי עַל-צְאֲצָאֶיךָ:

Because I will pour out water upon thirsty (ground),
and flowing (streams) upon dry ground;⁹

⁸Knight comments on **verses 3-4**, stating that “However we understand this strange word [‘Yeshurun’] though, one thing is clear. God is determined to resuscitate Israel’s faith and to raise her from the death of her corpse-like state to a new life of responsibility...Those whom Deutero-Isaiah is now addressing, are soon to know the power of the Spirit’s coming upon them again (compare **Ezekiel 37:1-14**)...The very life of God is to enter into the corpse Israel as she lies in her grave in the broad valley of the Tigris-Euphrates Rivers (**Ezekiel 37:12**).

“God’s original promise to Abraham was couched in the form of a blessing whose potency would enable the seed of Abraham to multiply and be as numerous as the stars of the sky [and be the source of blessing to all the families of the earth]. But now that that seed had fallen into the ground and died, it did not mean that the promise too had died. God was once again about to pour out His Spirit upon Israel’s seed, and the promise would then be one step nearer to its final fulfilment. The combination of water and spirit, which is so important in **New Testament** thought, forms an imagery as ancient as the Tammuz ideology of Babylon [see our end-note 1, Myths of Tammuz and Ishtar] which Deutero-Isaiah would know and whose ideas he could copy. We meet it again at **55:10-11**...

“Another important vision of **Ezekiel (47)**, which Deutero-Isaiah would probably know, outlines the close relationship between the water of life as it pours into a desert and this language that Deutero-Isaiah uses here. But unlike Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah draws his metaphor from a Babylonian geographical background with its artificial irrigation channels unknown to the inhabitants of hilly Palestine.” (P. 76)

⁹North comments that “the following context indicates that *thirsty* (land) and *dry ground* are metaphors for ‘those who are thirsty.’” (P. 133)

In addition, we think, the context shows that the water and flowing streams are metaphors for the Spirit of YHWH which He will pour out upon the people.

I will pour out My Spirit¹⁰ upon your descendant(s),
and My blessing upon your offspring!¹¹

¹⁰North comments that the רוּחַ, Spirit, “here is the Divine energy which creates physical life, as in **32:15**; **Psalm 104:30**; or as in **Ezekiel 37**, where it wakens the ‘dead bones.’” (P. 133)

¹¹Oswalt comments on **verses 3-5** that “It seems likely that the profound questions which the...exile raised for the continued existence of the nation may account for this special emphasis. What about the multiplied descendants promised to Abraham? God was giving them up to the ban, to utter destruction (**43:28**). Was the promise abrogated? Would Abraham’s family line as expressed in the nation come to a dead end? Here, in a thought similar to that of **Ezekiel (37:7-10)**, God promises that His Own Spirit, the energy and vitality that made the world (**Genesis 1:1**), will pour out on the nation so that what the world would have said was dead and dry, even burned over (**Isaiah 6:12-13**), will bloom with all the abundance of spring...

“Just as in **32:15**, the prophet senses that without an infusion of the Holy Spirit into the life of the people, only death and corruption will reign, as it had in the past. He recognizes that apart from this kind of Divine intervention, the same spiritual deficiency that precipitated the destruction of the nation once will do so again. (See **Ezekiel 36:26-28**; **Joel 2:12-14**; **3:1-2**^{Heb} **2:28-29**^{Eng})...

“The previous segment (**43:22-28**) speaks of the problem of Israel’s sinfulness and that this has led to destruction and the reviling of Israel. This segment speaks of God’s gracious salvation that will lead to persons vying for the honor of being an Israelite and belonging to her God (**verse 5**)...Just as **32:15** says, when God pours out His Spirit on His people, there will be a spiritual restoration that will deal with the problem that brought about the exile in the first place. Without that grace, the prophets all know that there is no chance that the people will be able to keep their covenant with God (**Jeremiah 31:31**) and become vessels through which His glory can shine. But with it, the true glory of Israel’s God shining through them would draw the whole world to its light.” (Pp. 166-67) See:

Isaiah 60:2-3,

- 2 Because look—the darkness covers earth,
 and a heavy cloud (covers) peoples.
 And upon you YHWH arises,
 and His glory will be seen over you!
- 3 And nations will come to your light,
 and kings to (the) brightness of your dawning.

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44:4 וְצִמְחוּ בֵּינָם חֲצִיר

כְּעֵרְבִים עַל־יַבְלֵי־מַיִם:

And they will spring up in between¹² (the) green grass,
Like the poplars beside streams of water.¹³

44:5¹⁴ זֶה יֹאמֵר לִיהוָה אֲנִי

¹¹(...continued)

Isaiah 66:18,

And I...their deeds and their thoughts...

she / it (feminine) is coming to gather all the nations and the tongues;
and they will see My glorious radiance.

We understand the first two lines of **44:3** to be metaphorical, and the last two lines to be the reality intended by the metaphors—YHWH’s pouring out His Spirit upon Israel’s descendant(s), and His blessing upon Israel’s offspring—even though Israel’s inherent sinfulness has just been depicted in the close of **chapter 43**. We are reminded of **43:25** with its affirmation of YHWH undeserved grace and forgiveness in spite of Israel’s sinfulness.

Alexander states that “This is the grand reason why God’s people should not despair.” (P. 161)

¹²Where our Hebrew text has בֵּינָם, “in between,” 1QIs^a has כְּבֵינָם, “as between.”

¹³In **verse 4**, the language is again metaphorical. As Slotki states, “The regeneration, fertility and freshness, physical and moral, of the nation is described in metaphorical language.” (P. 213)

Alexander comments that “The subject of the verb is not the Spirit and blessing of [YHWH], as Aben Ezra strangely imagines, but the offspring or descendants of Israel, by whom the blessing was to be experienced...The simple meaning of the whole **verse [4]** is, that they shall grow as willows grow among the grass, i.e. in the moist or marshy spot.” (P. 162)

¹⁴Knight holds that **verse 5** depicts “The water of life converts,” and also depicts “The Spirit changes the human heart.” He states that “There is no suggestion here that only Israelites are to experience this new birth. Thus, says Deutero-Isaiah, a pagan will one day declare ‘I am the Lord’s,’ or ‘I belong to Yahweh.’ Another proselyte will enter the family of God by calling himself by the family name of Jacob, the father of Israel. Still another proselyte will tattoo his hand in the manner that a slave had to do to show

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זֶה יִקְרָא בְּשֵׁם־יְהוָה
 וְזֶה יִכְתֹּב יָדוֹ לַיהוָה
 וּבְשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל יִכְנֶה:

This one will say I belong to the YHWH;¹⁵
 and this one will cry out¹⁶ in Jacob's name;¹⁷
 and this one will write (on) his hand,¹⁸ Belonging to the YHWH,¹⁹

¹⁴(...continued)

to whom he belonged, or even as a jar was marked when it bore the name of its owner. The fourth proselyte mentioned here will, so to speak, be baptized into the people of God with a new name to show his new condition.

“Theologically speaking, this passage is interesting. The children of Israel are born into and claim their heritage of right; pagans are to enter the people of God by profession of faith, just as they do today. The people of Israel is thus ideally more than an enlarged family group of men and women bound together by the ties of blood. Israel is Yeshurun, the Israel that is the ideal of God. So Deutero-Isaiah now portrays her as a supranational idea (compare **Romans 8:14-17; 11:13-24**) or even, to use present-day language, as the Church as she exists in the mind and purpose of God.” (Pp. 76-7)

¹⁵Slotki comments that this line is “A declaration of faith and implicit obedience.” (P. 213)

¹⁶Where our Hebrew text has יִקְרָא, “he will call,” the Greek translation of Symmachus has “he will be called,” translating a Hebrew text with a niph'al / passive verb. That is very slight evidence for the original text, but D. Winton Thomas, the editor of Isaiah in **Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia** suggests reading the niph'al.

¹⁷Alexander states that “The repetition of the pronoun *this* implies, according to Kimchi's explanation, persons of various classes or from different quarters. It is commonly agreed that this verse predicts the accession of the Gentiles, whom it represents as publicly professing their allegiance to [YHWH] and attachment to His people.” (P. 162)

¹⁸Where our Hebrew text reads וְזֶה יִכְתֹּב יָדוֹ, “and this (one) will write his hand,” **Rahlfs** has “and another will write upon,” omitting “his hand.” Codex Vaticanus, Aquila and Theodotian have “with the hand of his,” and on this basis Thomas recommends reading בְּיָדוֹ, “with his hand.”

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¹⁸(...continued)

North comments that “It is best to take ‘his hand’ as accusative object, as we might write, ‘Witness my hand...’ The meaning of **verse 5** is that converts to Yahwism will testify their allegiance both by word of mouth and / or in writing...A proselyte will style himself a ‘son of Israel.” (P. 134)

Slotki translates by “subscribe with his hand,” stating that this means “make public acknowledgment of his belief.” (P. 213)

Alexander mentions “two ancient explanations, one of which makes it mean *he shall write (with) his hand* in allusion to the signing of contracts (**Jeremiah 32:10; Nehemiah 9:38**); the other, *he shall write upon (inscribe) his hand*, in allusion to the ancient custom...of marking soldiers, slaves and other dependents, with the name of their superior.” (Pp. 162-63)

We are reminded of numerous people today who have tattoos written on their hands and arms.

¹⁹North comments that “Nothing is said of any mass conversion of the heathen: the proselytes are to come in by ones and twos, as indeed they subsequently did.” Compare

Isaiah 56:3-8,

- 3 And the foreigner’s child, the one joined to YHWH,
shall not speak, saying,
“YHWH will certainly separate me from His people!”
And the eunuch / castrated man will not say,
“Look—I (am) a dried up tree!”
- 4 Because in this way YHWH spoke:
to the castrated men / eunuchs who observes My Rest-days,
and who choose that in which I took pleasure,
and who take strong hold of My covenant--
- 5 and I will give to them in My house / temple, and within My walls a memorial,
and the name, better than sons and daughters--
a long-lasting name I will give to him, which will not be cut off.
- 6 And the foreigner’s children, who have joined (themselves) to YHWH,
to serve Him, and to love YHWH’s name,
to belong to Him as slaves / servants,
everyone who observes a Rest-day, not profaning it,
and who takes strong hold on My covenant--
- 7 and I will bring them to (the) mountain of My set-apartness;
and I will cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer;
their offerings and their sacrifices (will be) acceptable upon My altar--
because My house will be called A house of prayer for all the peoples!

(continued...)

and by Israel's name he will give title.²⁰

¹⁹(...continued)

- 8 (It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH--
He Who gathers Israel's outcasts:
"I will again gather to (Israel), to His gathered ones!"

North states, "The passage is remarkable as being perhaps the earliest in which what we may call the Church is conceived as a community transcending the boundaries of race. In the ancient world there was no thought of a supra-national or supra-racial faith...A man's religion was determined by his birth, or it might be that people who were incorporated into an empire would adopt the religion of the conquering power. Only in the **New Testament** does the Church become truly international. This was necessitated by the very nature of the Gospel and was made possible by the Roman Empire, which admitted to its citizenship men of diverse races. It was anticipated and foreshadowed by the Prophet of the exile." (Pp. 134-35)

Compare **Psalm 87:4-6** in the next footnote.

²⁰Slotki's translation of **יִכְנֶה** is "And surname himself by the name of Israel." He comments that "The name 'Israelite' will be all-sufficient. It will represent to him the most honored and dignified name, far surpassing all other titles." (P. 213)

The root **כנה** in the piel means "to give title." The Syriac, Aramaic Targum and Latin Vulgate take the verb to be passive, i.e., **יִכְנֶה**, "he will be given title," and Thomas again reads the text in this way.

Verse 5 as a whole, Slotki states, means that "The rising generations will publicly and proudly proclaim their association with Israel and their attachment to his God." (*ibid.*)

Oswalt comments that "this **verse (5)** provides the fitting counterpoint to **43:28**. Far from being a butt of ribald mockery, or a nation whose God could be laughed at (**Ezekiel 36:19-20**), Israel would now be a nation of which it would be an honor to be a member." (P. 167)

See: **Psalm 87:4-6**, a Psalm which we have entitled "Zion, the Mother City of All Humanity":

- 4 I will remember / mention Rahab / Egypt and Babylon as those knowing Me;
look-Philistia and Tyre, with Ethiopia / Cush--
these were born there!
5 And to Zion it will be said, a man and a man was born in it;
and He, (the) Most High will establish her!

(continued...)

²⁰(...continued)

6 YHWH will count / record in writing / recording peoples,
This one was born there! Selah

The following passages are to be compared:

Isaiah 2:2-4 (all the nations and many peoples will come to Zion to learn from YHWH, bringing peace to the nations, and the end of war);

Isaiah 19:19-25 (Egyptians will know and worship YHWH, together with Assyria and Israel);

Isaiah 25:6-9 (YHWH will prepare a great and rich feast for all peoples; He will swallow up death, and remove tears from all faces);

Isaiah 45:14 (the tall Sabeans will come to Israel as its servants, confessing Israel's God as the only God);

Isaiah 45:22-24 (YHWH invites the ends of the earth to turn to Him and be saved; every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess);

Isaiah 56:6-8 (foreigners and eunuchs will worship in YHWH's house of prayer for all nations);

Isaiah 60:3 (Nations and their kings will come to YHWH's light);

Isaiah 66:23 (in the new heavens and earth, all humanity will worship YHWH);

Daniel 7:14 (one like a son of man receives a universal dominion in which all peoples, nations and tongues worship him);

Micah 4:1-3 (same as **Isaiah 2:2-4**);

Zechariah 8:23 (people from all languages and nations will come seeking Israel's God);

Zechariah 14:16 (survivors from all Jerusalem's enemies will come yearly to worship YHWH).

²¹Knight asks concerning verse 6, "Who is this *Lord* [YHWH] to Whom the heathen will turn in longing? For the whole world is longing for His revelation (42:4). The answer comes foursquare.

(1) He is the *King* and *Redeemer* of Israel, that is, of His chosen people here on earth below.

(continued...)

וְנֹאֲלֹ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
אֲנִי רֵאשִׁוֹן
וְאֲנִי אַחֲרוֹן
וּמִבְּלַעֲדֵי אֵין אֱלֹהִים:

In this way YHWH, King of Israel²² spoke,

²¹(...continued)

(2) He is Lord of *hosts* [our 'Armies'], and so is King of all the powers in the realms above.

(3) He is also the beginning of all things.

(4) And He is the end of all things.

No other four corners could contain the whole purpose of creation and redemption as do these. It is that foursquare God then Who has a missionary purpose to work out through Israel, and that God is Yahweh, the covenant God of Israel." (P. 77)

Slotki comments on **verses 6-23** that they depict "God's incomparable power and greatness compared with the vanities and absurdities of idolatry." (P. 213)

Oswalt entitles **44:6-20** "The folly of idolatry." He entitles **44:6-8** "No other rock." And he states that **verses 6-8** contain "a brief, pointed summary of God's absolute claims." (P. 170)

North entitles **verses 6-8** "Yahweh Is The Only God." He comments that "The content of this passage is similar to that of **43:8-13**...Yahweh is again introduced as *Israel's King* (see **41: 21, 43:15**) and Redeemer (see **41:14**). To this is added, for the first time in the prophecy, the title the Lord of Hosts...From now on it appears with some frequency...It is best to think of the 'hosts' as 'the content of all that exists in heaven and earth.'" (P. 136)

²²The phrase "King of Israel" occurs some 124 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, especially in **1 and 2 Kings** and **2 Chronicles**, concerning human kings of Israel. Here, instead of David, or some other king, it is YHWH, "King of Israel." Compare **Isaiah 43:15**, where YHWH is called "King."

Other passages which call YHWH "King" include **1 Samuel 12:12; Psalms 47:7-8; 68:24; 74:12** and **145:1**. In the **New Testament**, see **Matthew 27:42; Mark 15:32; John 1:49** and **12:13**, where Jesus is called "King of Israel."

(continued...)

and his Redeemer / Next-of-Kin,²³ YHWH of Armies.²⁴
I (am) first, and I am last;²⁵
and beside Me there is no God!²⁶

²²(...continued)

Oswalt comments that the effect of these titles for YHWH is “to speak of the special relationship of God to Israel, His intentions toward them, and His ability to carry out those intentions. It is evident that as their King, God does not intend to let Israel be swallowed up in captivity. Instead, He will play the part of the near kinsman who will deliver his abject relative from the effects of misfortune and tragedy. As the Lord of all the hosts of heaven, He has the power to carry out these good intentions whenever He wishes.” (P. 171)

²³For the title “Redeemer / Next-of-Kin” given to YHWH, see **Isaiah 41:14; 43:14; 44:6** (here), **24; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 60:16; 63:16; Jeremiah 50:34; Psalms 19:15; 78:35; 103:4** and **Proverbs 23:11**.

²⁴The Divine title **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**, “YHWH of Armies,” occurs over 265 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, beginning at **1 Samuel 1:3**. 1QIs^a interpolates “(is) His name” at this point in the text.

²⁵For the claim that YHWH is “first and last,” see **Isaiah 41:4; 44:6** (here) and **48:12**. In the **New Testament** see this same claim concerning Jesus Christ at **Revelation 1:17; 2:8**; in **22:13** the claim is on the lips of an angel / messenger that appears to John.

²⁶The third, fourth and fifth lines of **verse 6** constitute another “Self-identification” of YHWH, along with the Divine claim to exclusivity / monotheism. Compare **2 Samuel 22:32, 32; Isaiah 43:11; 44:6** (here), **8; 45:6, 21** and **Psalms 18:32 / 31**.

Alexander comments that “The meaning is not simply, that there is no other true God in existence, but that even the *λεγόμενοι θεοί*, ‘those being said (to be) / so-called Gods,’ (**1 Corinthians 8:5**) exist only by His sufferance [tolerance], and cannot therefore be His equals or competitors.” (P. 163)

Oswalt states that “The message that this royal Redeemer wants to impart is that there is no one who can even be compared to Him. It is not merely that He is the greatest of the Gods, but that in comparison to Him, there is no other God...Israel’s God encompasses all of existence from start to finish, and no other being can compete with Him.” (P. 171)

Knight states that “Yahweh is utterly unique. There are two words for ‘one’ in Hebrew. One is **יְהוָה**, [only, only one, solitary], used for example of an only or unique son...or of an isolated person...But here Yahweh is clearly declared to be one or unique

(continued...)

44:7 וּמִי־כְמוֹנִי יִקְרָא וַיְגִידָהּ

וַיַּעֲרֹכֶהָ לִי מִשׁוּמַי עִם־עוֹלָם

וְאֵתִיוֹת וְאֲשֶׁר תִּבְאֲנָה

וַיְגִידוּ לְמוֹ:

And who (is) like Me?²⁷ Let him cry out and declare it!²⁸

²⁶(...continued)

in this sense [the word יְהוָה does not occur here or anywhere else in the **Book of Isaiah**], for He is Lord of all and wholly other than His creation. But He is also one with His hosts, for amazingly enough He stoops to share His redemptive purpose with them. They are His messengers [the angels]...and convey His will in shared delight and joy.

“More astonishing still, as Deutero-Isaiah will show later in detail, Yahweh is actually one with recalcitrant [having an obstinately uncooperative attitude toward authority] Israel, even as a good husband is one with his erring wife. ‘Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh’ (**Genesis 2:24**). This second word for ‘one,’ אֶחָד, that is used here in **Genesis** cannot obviously be understood merely in a mathematical sense. Yet it lies at the basis of the biblical conception of the nature of God. Remember that this same word for ‘one’ occurs in the so-called *shema* (**Deuteronomy 6:4**), not the word יְהוָה which has been translated as ‘unique’: ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord’ (**Deuteronomy 6:4**). How this word אֶחָד is used can also be seen at **Exodus 36:13** [where the many curtains go together to make the one tent / tabernacle]. This discussion is clearly important for the biblical doctrine of the Trinity.” (Pp. 77-78)

²⁷**Rahlfs** interpolates the phrase “let (him) stand and” at this point in the text, and here again Thomas recommends interpolating יַעֲמֹד וְ, “he will stand and” / or “let him stand and.”

²⁸Alexander states that the verb here, יִקְרָא, “let him cry out,” means “to call aloud or publicly announce.” (P. 163)

The next verb, וַיְגִידָהּ, “and let him declare it,” has a similar meaning. The challenge to the idol-Gods is, If you can do these things, make it known! Announce it loudly and clearly! Make it public!

(continued...)

And let him line up (his evidences)²⁹ before Me,
from My setting up a long-lasting people,³⁰
and (declaring) things coming, and when they will come--
let them declare to them!³¹

²⁸(...continued)

North comments that “The Gods (presumably) are again challenged to a legal process. *If anyone thinks he is like Me, let him...*” (P. 136)

²⁹Alexander notes that “the verb עָרַךְ is correctly explained by Gesenius as a forensic term meaning to state a case.” (P. 163)

³⁰Alexander comments that “Of the phrase עַם-עוֹלָם there are three interpretations. The first is that of the rabbins, who explain it to mean *ancient people*...The second makes it mean *eternal people* [referring] it to the Divine purpose or decree of election. The third gives it the sense of *everlasting people*, i.e. a people who shall last forever...

“In all these senses the description is appropriate to Israel, not simply as a nation but a church, the existence and prerogatives of which are still continued in the body of Christ...It may be doubted, however, whether anything more was here intended than a reference to the origin of the human race.” (P. 163)

³¹Translations of **verse 7** vary:

King James, “And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them.”

Tanakh, “Who like Me can announce, Can foretell it -- and match Me thereby? Even as I told the future to an ancient people, So let him foretell coming events to them.”

New Revised Standard, “Who is like me? Let them proclaim it, let them declare and set it forth before me. Who has announced from of old the things to come? Let them tell us what is yet to be.”

New International, “Who then is like me? Let him proclaim it. Let him declare and lay out before me what has happened since I established my ancient people, and what is yet to come-- yes, let him foretell what will come.”

New Jerusalem, “Who is like me? Let him call out, let him affirm it and convince me it is so; let him say what has been happening since I instituted an eternal people, and predict to them what will happen next!”

Alexander, “And who, like me, will call, and tell it, and state it to me, since I placed the ancient people; and coming things and things which are to come will tell to them (or ‘for themselves’)?”

Oswalt, “So who like me can proclaim, and declare and set it before me—since I established an ancient people—and the coming things and things that are to

(continued...)

³¹(...continued)

come can declare to them?”

Rahfs, “Who (is) like Me? Let him stand; let him call out; and let him prepare for Me—since the time when I made a human being, into the ages; and the things coming, before their coming, let them announce to you!”

Oswalt states that “It seems most likely that the point is that God alone has created a people long ago and both through them and to them has declared the course of things to come. Can any other God do the same for them?” (P. 172)

North comments that “In **41:22** the Gods had been challenged to explain the significance of events in the past, and to announce future happenings. They might with some show of confidence claim that they had done the former. Very well! Let them tell us what the future still holds!” (P. 137)

We take the statement as a challenge that YHWH is depicted as making. If there is another God Who has accomplished such things as YHWH has, let that God come forward, or let His witnesses come forward, and state the Deity’s achievements publicly!

We say, the entire **Book of Isaiah** is just such a witness, coming forward in the name of YHWH, to tell its readers of the wondrous works of YHWH in the past, the present, and the future. What do you think?

Knight thinks that the last half of **verse 7** is obscure, but proposes the following translation: ‘From time immemorial I established a people (compare **51:16**) with (that is, making use of) signs, so when these came into use, they should have been able to expound them.’ (P. 78)

In that light, Knight explains that “The **Book of Exodus** speaks of the *signs* which accompanied the election of Israel—the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, the fire upon the mountain, the water from the rock, and so on. The need for these outward signs was interpreted to Moses in his own original experience of the call of God. Not only did he hear a voice speaking in his heart; he also saw a burning bush (**Exodus 3**). The rod which Moses cast to the ground and the leprosy of his hand (**Exodus 4**) were also each a sign, or **אֹת** given him by God. Each of these was the outward and visible sign and seal of an inward and invisible reality...

“God had declared the meaning of His actions by means of sacramental signs that conveyed in themselves their own interpretation of what He was doing. In turn therefore Israel ought to have been able to understand what God would do next. For on the basis of the signs which she had been given in the past, she should have been able to interpret the future. God’s nature was consistent with that revealed in Moses’ day, and Israel was still the object of His love, since He had created her to be His people from time immemorial [originating in the distant past].” (P. 78)

(continued...)

44:8 אֶל-תִּפְחָדוּ וְאֶל-תִּרְהוּ

הֲלֹא מֵאָז הִשְׁמַעְתִּיךָ וְהִגַּדְתִּי

וְאַתֶּם עַדִּי

הִיִּשׁ אֱלֹהִים מִבְּלַעַדִּי

וְאִין צוּר בְּלִי-יָדַעְתִּי:

You (plural) shall not be in dread, and you shall not be afraid.³²

Did I not from that time cause you to hear, and I declared?

³¹(...continued)

And, we say, that purpose was unmistakable—it was to be a blessing to all the families of the earth (so, Abraham, **Genesis 12:1-3**), and to be a “kingdom of priests” to all the world—which belongs to YHWH (so, Moses, **Exodus 19:6**).

³²Where our Hebrew text reads וְתִרְהוּ, “you (plural) shall (not) be afraid (?),” **Rahfs** has “Do not cover yourselves.”

Oswalt comments that “Again comes the injunction not to fear...God will not abandon them; Babylon will not devour them; the ancient promises will not fall to the ground...When all the promises of the exile had come horrifyingly true, alongside them stood these detailed promises, equally old, that the exile would not be the end...Before all the world Israel will be a living witness to the fact that God has predicted all of this far in advance, and that He had the power to make His promises come true...”

“But the God of the promises is much more than an aloof, if benevolent, Master of history. He is One in Whom we can hide when storms, whether deserved or undeserved, break on us...It is fitting that Isaiah should end this brief restatement of God’s uniqueness on this same note, a favorite of his (**Isaiah 8:14; 17:10; 26:4; 30:29**). Because God is the only God, He can be depended on, but also because of that fact, He alone can be depended on—there is no other.” (P. 173)

Knight comments on **verse 8**, “So, possessing this saving knowledge, it was ridiculous that Israel should be afraid...What Deutero-Isaiah means is that everything which has happened in Israel’s history is interpretable on the basis of what God did at ‘that time’...that is, at the time of the exodus. This is astonishing, but Deutero-Isaiah believed it to be the truth. But what is still more astonishing is that Yahweh permits His Own uniqueness to be evidenced by His unique *witnesses*, the people of Israel.” (P. 78)

And you (plural) (are) witnesses!³³

Is there an Eloah³⁴ besides Me?

And there is not³⁵ a Rock³⁶--I knew none!³⁷

³³The first half of **verse 8** is a call to Israel to fearlessly proclaim what they have seen and know concerning YHWH their God. What He has predicted and done has been spoken openly, and His actions have been seen both by His people and their neighbors.

³⁴This Divine name, אֱלֹהִים, Eloah, is an ancient Semitic name for God. It occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** some 58 times, at: **Deuteronomy 32:15, 17; 2 Kings 17:31; Isaiah 44:8 (here); Habakkuk 1:11; 3:3; Psalm 18:32; 50:22; 114:7; 139:19;**

then especially in **Job: 3:4, 23; 4:9, 17; 5:17; 6:4, 8, 9; 9:13; 10:2; 11:5, 6, 7; 12:4, 6; 15:8; 16:20, 21; 19:6, 21, 26; 21:9, 19; 22:12, 26; 24:12; 27:3, 8, 10; 29:2, 4; 31:2, 6; 33:12, 26; 35:10; 36:2; 37:15, 22; 39:17; 40:2;**

Proverbs 30:5; Daniel 11:37, 38 (twice), 39; Nehemiah 9:17 and 2 Chronicles 32:15.

We think it is a fault that in most English translations of the Bible, אֱלֹהִים, Eloah is simply translated as “God,” without any indication of its difference from the much more usual אֱלֹהִים, “God,” which occurs some 2,570 times in the **Hebrew Bible**.

³⁵Where our Hebrew text reads וְאֵין, “and there is not,” **Rahfs** has “if there is,” reflecting a Hebrew text with וְאֵין.

³⁶North comments that “This epithet for God [‘Rock’] would sound bizarre if it occurred only here. But it occurs 33 times in the **Old Testament**, chiefly in **Deuteronomy 32** and the **Psalms**...Other peoples than Israel might be said to have their ‘Rock’ (**Deuteronomy 32:31, 37; 1 Samuel 2:2; 2 Samuel 22:32**)...When Yahweh says of other Gods, *there is no Rock*, He implies that He is *the Rock* (compare **Deuteronomy 32:4**). The **Old Testament** never says that Yahweh is *like* a rock, but that He *is* the Rock. The word ‘designates YHWH, by a forcible and expressive figure, as the unchangeable support or refuge of His servants; and is used with evident appropriateness where the thought is of God’s unvarying attitude towards His people’ (S. R. Driver, **Deuteronomy**, p. 350).” (P. 137)

³⁷The last half of **verse 8** repeats the exclusive claim of **verse 6**, only this time in the form of a Divine question which YHWH Himself answers: Is there a Rock besides Me? The answer is, No. I know of no Other besides Myself!

(continued...)

³⁷(...continued)

North paraphrases by *There is no other God to My knowledge*, “as though conceding He might conceivably be ignorant.” (P. 137) It is part of YHWH’s legal challenge to the Gods. YHWH states that He knows no other God—challenging those hearing to produce evidence of their existence.

Rahfs’ verse 8 varies from our Hebrew text: “Do not hide yourselves! Did you not hear from (the) beginning? And I announced (it) to you. You are witnesses if there is a God beside Me, and you were not then.”

As Oswald observes, the last line of **verse 8** in the Hebrew is entirely omitted in the Greek translation—he thinks because of an aversion to calling YHWH a “Rock.” (P. 170)

³⁸Slotki comments on **verses 9-20** that they are a “Mordant [caustic, biting] exposure of the futility of idol-worship.” (P. 214) He states that **verses 9-11** depict “the uselessness of the idols and the frailty of their makers.” (*Ibid.*)

Knight describes these verses as “a brilliant piece of writing. It contains sarcasm to a degree. Here Deutero-Isaiah subjects the idol-making of the Babylonians to scorn...

“Deutro-Isaiah’s previous lofty passage had ended asking whether any Divinity exists other than Me. Nor is there any other Rock. (At least) I don’t know of any (verse 8). But the Babylonians knew of many others. And so Deutero-Isaiah has to take up this point and deal with it finally and thoroughly before he can proceed with the main argument.” (P. 79)

North entitles these verses “The Stupidity Of Idolatry,” and notes that the passage “is not addressed to makers of idols but is a satirical [critical, mocking] description of their antic [grotesque, bizarre] stupidity. If it was intended for an audience contemporary with the Prophet, they must have been exiles who were in danger of being seduced by the idolatry around them. Let them see it for what it really is!” (P. 139)

He adds that “in point of fact, classical writers could be just as caustic about idolatry as this passage is...Notwithstanding its grim but boisterous satire, **44:9-20** does at least seem aware of the almost crazy fear evoked by the idol...

“A Hindu yogi would justify the practice of idolatry, not for himself, but for the masses who know no better, the ‘lesser breeds’ who are to all intents and purposes polytheists. The **Old Testament** knows nothing of the distinction between an idol in which the God is supposed to reside, and which may therefore be said to be identical with the God, and a symbol intended to remind the worshiper of God’s presence...

(continued...)

³⁸(...continued)

“When all is said, crude idolatry is no better than the **Bible** depicts it. If we look for a reasoned anti-philosophy of idolatry, we can find it in **Wisdom of Solomon 13-14**. And the conclusion there is no less devastating than it is here.” (P. 140)

North’s argument reminds us of the Muslim **Quran**, in which the idea of Jesus as the “Son of God” is constantly attacked as superstition, demanding the idea of God having a wife and bearing many children, etc.

We think the best thinkers of all religions should get together, and discuss openly and honestly what they believe, without attacking other religions which they do not fully or accurately understand. It cannot be done short-term, but demands years of study and reasoning together. Theological schools should make it mandatory for their students to engage in such dialogue, enabling future religious leaders to be much better informed about world religions. After all, is not this passage in **Isaiah 44:9-20** a challenge to dialogue?

What do you think? Have you read the **Bhagavad Gita**? Have you read the **Quran** (please, with study notes)? And if you have not, what business do you have in denouncing them, as if you understood what they teach? Have you met Hindus and Muslims, and entered into honest dialogue with them? If not, why not? They live all around us in the United States, and their temples and mosques are open to our attendance. Are you afraid that all Muslims are secretly jihadists, planning to overthrow our government?

While in North Carolina, I met Black Muslims who identified Christianity with the Ku-Klux-Klan, which is not very different from identifying all Muslims with ISIS!

Oswalt entitles **44:9-20** “The deadly results of idolatry.” He entitles **44:9-11** “Idolaters are nothing.”

He comments that “Now God turns to the idol-Gods’ witnesses (compare also **43:9**). What of them? What kind of evidence can they produce that their Gods are supreme? The section **44:9-20** addresses that question. In excruciating detail the prophet depicts how the idol worshipers go about constructing an idol. How, he asks, can something like this, made by humans from the stuff of creation, ever save anyone? In fact, he argues, those who bow down to the work of their own hands reduce themselves to nothing. They worship themselves and testify that nothing beyond themselves can save them. [Is this correct? Are the worshipers of idols worshiping themselves, or worshiping a God that their hand-made idol represents?]

“Several modern commentators assert that Isaiah evidently did not understand paganism very well [he mentions Muilenburg, McKenzie, Westermann and Whybray]. If he had, they claim, he would have realized that the idol is only a representation of the God, not the God itself. But it is difficult to believe that this man [the prophet Isaiah, or

(continued...)

³⁸(...continued)

Deutero-Isaiah], everywhere agreed to be the finest theological mind of Israel [everywhere ?], was so obtuse as not to understand this fact. He, like his people, was surrounded by paganism in all its forms. In those circumstances, it is incomprehensible that a brilliant thinker should not understand paganism's fundamental principle.

“Indeed, where better to attack paganism than at the point of its addiction to image making? It is at this point that the fundamental difference between the biblical and the non-biblical religions is clearest. The **Bible** insists that the Supreme Power in the universe is utterly other than the uni-verse. Thus He cannot be represented by any of the forms of the universe [but the **Bible** again and again mentions angelic messengers who represent God, and the Christian religion insisting that God can be seen in Jesus Christ; in this context, Isaiah calls YHWH a ‘Rock’!], and even more to the point, cannot be manipulated through any of those forms. The inevitable result of such a belief is monotheism, whose single original representation in the world is in the Hebrew Scriptures (Monism like that of Confucius or the Greek philosophers is not monotheism). By contrast, the non-biblical religions insist that supreme power in the universe is coterminous with the universe, is inherent in it, and does not exist apart from it. The inevitable result is polytheism, which prevails everywhere the Hebrew Scriptures have not been proclaimed.

“Thus the Achilles’ heel of all paganism is idol making. If it can be shown, as Isaiah does, that it is folly to believe that supreme power resides in a block of wood that was a tree until some-one cut it down and with great effort made it into a God, then a deathblow has been struck at the root of paganism. If the Gods are coterminous with this world, as idol making demonstrates, then it is folly to think that they can radically reshape the world according to some transcendent purpose. They are blind, deaf, and dumb, locked into the cycles of nature, and those who worship them reduce themselves to nothing, meaningless blobs of protoplasm, which live, propagate, and die, all to no end.” (Pp. 175-76)

Oswalt is debating, seeking to prove his point, with fiery, denunciatory words. But calling Isaiah “the finest theological mind of Israel,” or a “brilliant thinker,” does not mean that he cannot be mistaken, or misrepresent the religious views of others. We need to hear the answer given by Hindus and Buddhists (and Roman Catholics and Russian Orthodox Christians with their ornate statues and art-work) as to what they really believe with regard to their images, and whether or not they believe in a Supreme Power transcendent to the universe.

For one example, “Buddhists hold that their images are “visual aids that help one to recall the Buddha in the mind and to remember His great qualities which inspired millions of people from generation to generation throughout the civilized world. Buddhists use the statue as a symbol and as an object of concentration to gain a peace of mind. When Buddhists look upon the image of the Buddha, they put aside thoughts of strife and think only of peace, serenity, calmness and tranquillity. The statue enables the mind to recall this great man and inspires devotees to follow His example and instruc-

(continued...)

וְחַמּוּדֵיהֶם בְּלִיּוּעֵילוֹ
וְעֵדֵיהֶם הֵמָּה בְּלִירְאוֹ
וּבְלִי־דַעַי לְמַעַן יִבְשׂוּ:

Those who mold an idol, all of them—chaos / confusion!³⁹

³⁸(...continued)

tions. In their mind, the devout Buddhists feel the living presence of the Master. This feeling makes their act of worship become vivid and significant. The serenity of the Buddha image influences and inspires them to observe the right path of conduct and thought.” (Internet, 8/4/2015)

We have heard similar statements made by Hindus, who insist that the numerous idols present in their temples are no more than signs pointing to a transcendent, hidden, invisible God (Krishna). We think it far better to enter into dialogue with devotees of the world’s religions, to listen to their views with respect, rather than simply denouncing them with fiery language or worse, as we are seeing in radical anti-iconic Muslim movements such as ISIS in our day, be-heading the “idolaters,” including Christians.

In such a context, we would gladly present and hold to the basic argument which Isaiah makes, but would tone down the rhetoric with its words like “pagan” and “stupid.” Undoubtedly, there are many mistaken views of God in the world. But so are there many mistaken views of God in the hearts and minds of Christians [we recently heard Peyton Manning give thanks to “the Man Upstairs” following his Super Bowl victory]. Very few are able to enter into philosophical debate with someone like Oswalt who uses religious-philosophical terms easily, but which are not found in the text, and which are difficult for ordinary readers to understand.

³⁹The Hebrew word **תִּדְהוּ**, is given varying translations, from “vanity,” to “to no purpose,” to “nothing,” and “nothingness.” **Rahlfs** has “vain / useless / worthless.”

Alexander states that this word “is here to be taken as a negative expression of the strongest kind, denoting the absence of all life, intelligence, and power, and corresponding to the parallel expression *they cannot profit*, i.e. they are worthless.” (P. 164)

Oswalt states that in **verse 10**, “the last thought of **verse 9** is reinforced with a rhetorical question. ‘Who would (be so blind as to) make God, so as not to profit?’... Why, he asks, would people want so badly not to profit that they would try to form **אל**, **EI**, the mighty God?” (P. 177)

And the things they delight in / treasure⁴⁰ will not profit,
 and their witnesses⁴¹--they⁴² do not see (anything),
 and they did not know (anything),⁴³ so that they are ashamed!

44:10⁴⁴ מִי־יֵצֵר אֵל וַפְסֹל נֹסֵף
 לְבַלְתִּי הוֹעִיל:

Who molded an El / Supreme God, and poured an idol / image,
 so that he did not profit?⁴⁵

44:11 הֵן כָּל-חֲבֵרָיו יִבְשׁוּ

⁴⁰Alexander holds that “The *desired* or favorite things of the idolaters are the idols themselves, upon which they lavish time, expense, and misplaced confidence.” (P. 164)

⁴¹North notes that “Just as the Israelites are Yahweh’s ‘witnesses’...the idol-Gods may be said to have their witnesses.” (P. 141)

⁴²The third person masculine plural הֵמָּה, **hemmah**, with the extraordinary Masoretic points placed above it, evidently to call attention to it, is omitted by a few Hebrew manuscripts. 1QIs^a has the word written above the line, indicating that it was not present in the original manuscript.

⁴³Alexander states “the meaning is, that the idolaters who bear witness to the Divinity of their idols are themselves blind and ignorant.” (P. 165)

⁴⁴Knight comments on **verses 10-11**, “Imagine a man fashioning a ‘Divine Being,’ אֵל [‘Supreme God,’ another ancient Semitic name for God, meaning the chief God; but **English Bibles** normally translate by ‘God,’ not making any distinction between this and אֱלֹהִים, the usual name for “God”—some 2570 occurrences], in the hope that the thing he has made with his hands will aid him in life! A free translation of **verse 11** might be, ‘See how all his fellow guildsmen and craftsmen are abashed when their God turns out to be subhuman. They call a meeting, and all stand around in horror and mortification [great embarrassment and shame].” (P. 79)

⁴⁵We take the last line of **verse 10** to mean that the idol-makers are all in the business for making a profit. Who would do all of this difficult labor unless there was some profit in it? The product of their labor may be in fact worthless—but they are worth a great deal to their makers! **New Jerusalem** alone of our translations gives this sense: “Who ever fashioned a god or cast an image without hope of gain?” That is, There’s money to be made in religion!

וְחַרְשֵׁי הַמָּה מֵאָדָם
 יִתְקַבְּצוּ כָּל־ם יַעֲמִדוּ
 יִפְחָדוּ יִבְשׁוּ יַחַד:

Look—all his companions / associates are ashamed!
 And craftsmen—they (are) from humanity / human beings.
 Let them all gather together, let them stand;
 they will be in dread, they will be ashamed together!⁴⁶

44:12⁴⁷ חָרַשׁ בְּרִזְלֵי מַעֲצָד

⁴⁶Alexander comments that **verse 11** means that “the makers of the idol are themselves mere men, and cannot therefore produce anything Divine...The senseless idol and its human makers shall be witnesses against each other, and shall be involved in the same condemnation and confusion.” (Pp. 165-66)

Oswalt comments **on verse 11** that “On the basis of **Hosea 4:17**, which uses the root word here translated *his associates* for Ephraim being joined to idols (compare **Hosea 6:9** as well), we must consider that *his* refers to the idol (Delitzsch and most others). Thus the term *his associates* would refer to the devotees of the idol, its witnesses...

“However, it is possible that associates of the craftsmen are intended...The craftsmen and all associated with them are called to assemble together and give what evidence they can (compare **41:21; 43:9**) that the Gods Whose images they have made are in fact the Lords of the universe, who can predict the course of history and can deliver their people from their fate. In fact, says Isaiah, though they all stand up together, their evidence will quickly be shown to be worthless and they will be plunged into that abyss of terror reserved for those from whose lives all meaning has been stripped away.” (P. 177)

⁴⁷Knight comments on **verse 12**, that “Deutero-Isaiah first speaks generally of craftsmen and guildsmen. Then he takes a specific example from an ironworker...How on earth, Deutero-Isaiah implies, could a man who grows weary produce a God Who does not grow weary and could even give health and strength to His worshipers? Deutero-Isaiah must surely have had in mind here what he has already said about Yahweh, how Yahweh never grows weary, and how He alone gives strength to *His* weary worshipers (**40:28-31**).” (P. 79)

Oswalt entitles **44:12-17**, “Idolaters are confused.” He comments that “The author now turns to an explicit discussion of the way in which an idol is constructed... Without a word of explanation it is apparent to anyone that creation of the transcendent

(continued...)

וּפְעַל בְּפָחָם
וּבְמִקְבוֹת יִצְרָהוּ
וַיִּפְעֵלְהוּ בְזָרוּעַ כַּחוּ
גַּם־רָעַב וְאִין פָּח
לֹא־שָׁתָה מִיָּם וַיִּיעֲרָ:

He carved (with) an iron instrument,⁴⁸

⁴⁷(...continued)

from the mundane is a contradiction in terms [but how often non-Christians make the same charge against Christianity, in its claim that the man Jesus is Divine!]. The poet's skill is in making painfully clear just how mundane the whole process is. He does so by taking us backward step-by-step from the end of the process to the beginning, showing in each stage how ludicrous it is for humans to make Gods. We go from the final step of plating the wooden form with metal to the first step of planting seedlings from which the wood will be cut. The final irony is that the same log that supplies the God also supplies the fuel to heat the craftsman's food and warm his body." (P. 180)

Alexander says that "the description in the last clause [of **verse 12**] seems intended to convey these several ideas—that the man who undertakes to make a God, is himself a mortal, subject to ordinary human infirmities; that his God is utterly unable to relieve him or supply his wants; and that neither these considerations nor the toil which he must undergo in order to attain his end, are sufficient to deter him from his self-tormenting efforts." (P. 166)

Oswalt comments on **verse 12**, that "as the text stands, it lacks a verb, literally 'The worker of iron a sharp tool.' He holds that the Masoretic Text "is almost certainly corrupt here...The versions differ among themselves, suggesting that the problem is of long standing. Latin Vulgate: 'The smith works it with a file'; Aramaic Targum, 'The smith makes an axe out of iron'; Greek and Syriac: 'The craftsman sharpens the iron; he fashions with an axe.'" (P. 177)

He adds that "in both this verse and the next the piling up of activities suggests what a complex and wearisome task the business of making Gods is...No matter how strong the iron-worker may be, he will faint if he does not eat and drink." (P. 180)

⁴⁸The first three words of this line, חֲרַשׁ בְּרִזְלֵי מַעְצָד, literally "engraver of iron, an ax," which makes little sense. North notes that the noun מַעְצָד, "ax," occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** only here and in **Jeremiah 10:3b**,

(continued...)

and worked over the (red-hot) coal(s);
and with the hammers he formed it,⁴⁹
and he made it with his strong arm.
Also, he got hungry, and had no strength;
he did not drink water, and he grew weary.⁵⁰

44:13⁵¹ חֲרַשׁ עֵצִים

⁴⁸(...continued)

...because a tree from a forest, he cut it (down)--
product / work of engraver's hands with the ax.

what should an iron-smith be doing with a woodworker's tool?" (P. 138)

We respond that both passages have to do with the making of idols, and both involve cutting down a tree from the forest. The noun חֲרַשׁ may be used in a broader way than simply "iron-engraver," perhaps meaning "craftsman," one who works with his hands whether on metal or on wood, to make products. Compare **verse 13** for the phrase חֲרַשׁ עֵצִים, literally "one working with trees / wood," which is translated by some as "carpenter." But, as Knight observes, "Here especially we are not sure of some of the technical terms [for idol-makers]." (P. 79)

⁴⁹Where our Hebrew text has the phrase וּבַמַּקְבֹּת יִצְרֶהוּ, and with the hammers he forms it," **Rahlf's** has the difficult phrase καὶ ἐν τερέτρῳ ἔτρησεν αὐτό, "and with a borer he perforated it."

⁵⁰The idol-maker works hard, and uses his strength to fashion the idol. But he is only human, and he grows hungry as his strength wanes. He grows faint from dehydration as he works over the hot coals.

Slotki asks, "If the manufacturer of the idol is so frail and dependent, what can be expected from the idol he makes!" (P. 215)

⁵¹Oswalt comments on **verse 13** that "Now we take a step backward to look at the wood-worker who fashioned the basic form. Again we are impressed by the myriad of activities, all demanding great skill and effort. Using strings as guides he marks out the basic outlines with a sharp-pointed stylus; with files and chisels he cuts out the larger planes; then he traces the finer details with a compass. What is the result? Humanity in its fullest flower. The kind of humanity that needs a house in which to live, a roof over its head to keep out the rain, and four walls to keep out marauders...Above all else, it is an attempt to cast eternal reality into the shape of humanity." (P. 180)

(continued...)

נִטָּה קוֹ
 יִתְאַרְהוּ בַשָּׂרָדׁ
 יַעֲשֶׂהוּ בַמִּקְצָעוֹת
 וּבַמְחֻנְגָה יִתְאַרְהוּ
 וַיַּעֲשֶׂהוּ כְּתַבְנִית אִישׁ
 כְּתַפְאֶרֶת אָדָם
 לְשֵׁבֶת בַּיִת׃

He carved trees;
 he stretched out a line;
 he traces out (its figure) with a marking tool.
 He makes it with the planes,
 and with a compass he traces it out.
 And he made it like a man's figure,
 like a human's beauty,
 to inhabit a house / shrine / temple.⁵²

44:14⁵³ לְכַרְתֵּלּוֹ אֲרָזִים

⁵¹(...continued)

He notes that “Beginning with this verse the verbal aspects move back and forth between perfect (past) and imperfect (present / future) in ways that are mystifying and make translating very difficult...The older commentators (Alexander, Delitzsch, etc.) suggest that the variation is a way of conveying immediacy. The prophet speaks from the middle of the process, with some of it completed and some of it still going on.” (P. 178)

⁵²Slotki comments that the idol-maker stretches out a line “to trace out on the block [of wood] the dimensions of the idol he is making...The choice [of the idol's shape] is made of the human figure as the most beautiful of all creatures [to be placed] in a temple or shrine.” (P. 215)

⁵³Slotki comments on **verses 14-17** that “The materials for the manufacture of the idol and for the cooking of its worshippers' meals come from the same tree. What an origin for a God!” (P. 215)

(continued...)

וַיִּקַּח תְּרִזָּה וְאַלֹנִים
וַיִּאֲמֹץ-לוֹ בַּעֲצֵי-יַעַר
נֹטֵעַ אֶרֶן וְגַשָּׁם יִגְדֵּל:

(He planted)⁵⁴ cedars to cut down for himself;

and he took cypress and oak, and it grew strong for him among trees of (the) forest.

⁵³(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verse 14** that “It is in order to cut wood of his choice that the craftsman planted [the trees that would grow into materials for constructing the idol]...just as sheep were raised specifically for sacrifice...

“The process reflects the complex rituals of pagan religion. Because of the principle of continuity—the idea that the Divine, natural, and human are one interlocked system—certain natural elements are supposed to be more in tune with some Divine functions than others [but compare the **Genesis** story of creation, in which the human being uniquely bears the Divine image and likeness]. Much of the training of a priest in those cultures was the learning of what natural elements went with which God in which part of the ritual...

“As in **verses 12** and **13**, the conclusion of **verse 14** seems to stress again the dependence of the Gods. Here the man planted the tree and the rain made it grow. The God or the Goddess of the idol is completely passive, acted upon, but incapable of independent action...Where is the activity of the Gods, if they have to inhabit a form that is wholly dependent on the human mind for its inception, human skills for its creation, and the gifts of nature for its materials?” (P. 181)

Knight states that “Here the carpenter creates his God in the image of man...This is the reverse of the faith of the **Bible** [see **Genesis 1:26-27**]...The carpenter is shown working with all reverence at his task and choosing the very best materials available. The *cedar* tree did not grow in Babylon. It had to be fetched—at a price—from the Lebanon mountains.” (P. 80)

⁵⁴The beginning of this first line is missing in the Hebrew text. Translations vary in how to begin the line, from “He heweth him down,” to “For his use he cuts down,” to “He has cut down.” **Rahfs** has ὃ ἐκόψεν, “which he cut down.”

He planted a fir,⁵⁵ and rain causes growth.⁵⁶

44:15⁵⁷ וְהָיָה לְאָדָם לְבַעַר

וַיִּקַּח מֵהֶם וַיִּחַם

אֶת־יְשִׁיק וְאֶת־לֶחֶם

אֶת־יֹפְעֵל־אֵל וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּ

עֲשֵׂהוּ כַסֵּל וַיִּסְגְּרֵם לְמוֹ:

And it becomes for a human (fuel) to burn.

⁵⁵Where our Hebrew text reads אֶרְן, “a fir / cedar,” two Hebrew manuscripts read אֶרֶז, “a pine-tree.”

⁵⁶**Rahlf**s shortens the text of **verse 14**: “Which he cut (down), a tree out of the thicket, which (the) Lord planted and (the) rain grew long.”

Alexander comments on this verse that “To show more clearly the absurdity of ascribing Deity to material images, he here goes back, not only to their human origin and their base material, but to the very generation of the trees by which the wood is furnished...He begins with the felling of trees, but interrupts himself in order to go still further back to their very cultivation. The essential idea is that man, instead of being the creature, is in some sort the creator of the wood he worships, since it does or may owe its existence to his agency...”

“The idolater not only chooses suitable trees, but plants and raises them for the purpose... [A clause is added] to complete the picture of the natural origin and growth of that which the idolater adores as superhuman and Divine...[The prophet depicts] the patient perseverance of the devotee, who first does his part and then waits for natural causes to do theirs, and all for the production of an idol!” (Pp. 167-68)

⁵⁷Oswalt comments on **verses 15-17** that “With relentless repetition the prophet now bears down on the final irony. How can a log, part of which was burned in service of human needs, become a God that demands human service and offers deliverance to its supplicants?” (P. 181)

Knight likewise states that “Here a man grovels before a Divinity, half of which he has used to fill his stomach!...Like his smith brother, our woodworker too needs to rest ...Finally our craftsman in his human weakness seeks deliverance and strength from his own creation (compare **Hosea 4:12**; **Romans 1:21**).” (P. 80)

And he took one of them,⁵⁸ and (by its fire) he was warm.
Also he kindles a fire, and he bakes bread.

Also he makes an El / Supreme God, and he worships.
He made it (into) an idol, and he prostrates himself to it!⁵⁹

44:16 חֲצִיּוֹ שֶׁרֶף בְּמוֹ-אֵשׁ

עַל-חֲצִיּוֹ בֶּשֶׁר יֹאכֵל

⁵⁸We take this to mean one of the logs. Translation vary from “thereof,” to “some,” to “part of it,” to “some of it.”

⁵⁹The verse depicts how the idol-maker takes a tree and carves it into an idol; but he also uses the other parts of the tree for building a fire with which to warm himself and to cook food. And then he bows down before the carved part of the tree and worships! **Verses 16-17** enlarge repetitiously on this statement.

Alexander comments that “The argument of this and the succeeding verses is intended to exhibit the absurdity of worshiping the same material that is constantly applied to the most trivial of domestic pursuits.” (P. 169)

Oswalt notes that “If the irony seems a little heavy-handed here, one should compare it to Horace’s satire **Priapus and the Witches (Satires 1.8)**. The opening lines have been quoted by almost every commentator on **Isaiah 44** since Calvin because they so closely parallel **Isaiah**:

Once I was the trunk of a wild fig, a useless log, when a carpenter, uncertain whether to make me a stool (privy?) or a Priapus [a minor rustic fertility god, protector of live-stock, fruit plants, gardens and male genitalia. Priapus is marked by his oversized, permanent erection, which gave rise to the medical term *priapism*. He became a popular figure in Roman erotic art and Latin literature, and is the subject of the often humorously obscene collection of verse called the *Priapeia*.” (Internet, 8/5/2015)]

“But this is only the beginning of the sarcasm, which gets heavier and heavier until the hilarious conclusion. Priapus, a God of fertility...stands as a protector in a graveyard for the indigent. But he is greatly troubled by his inability to prevent witches from coming at night to collect bones and noxious herbs. He describes the horrible rites and the fearsome results as the witches call up the spirits of (the) dead. But he does fulfill his function after all, for suddenly his idol buttocks split open with a sound of escaping gas and the witches are so terrified they rush away, scattering their herbs and amulets as they go. In comparison to this mocker of the Gods and ritual by one of their own, **Isaiah’s** seems positively restrained.” (P. 182)

Oswalt also notes that the last line of **verse 15** is omitted by the Greek translation, but the Aramaic Targum, Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations all have it.

יִצְלָה צְלִי וַיִּשְׁבַּע

אַף־יָחַם וַיֹּאמֶר

הֵאֵח חֲמוֹתַי רְאִיתִי אֵנֶר:

Half of it he burned in a fire;

over half of it he eats flesh.⁶⁰

He roasts a roast and is satisfied;⁶¹

also he is warm, and he says,

Aha! I warmed myself; I saw a flame!⁶²

44:17 וּשְׂאֵרֵיתוֹ לֵאלֵ עֲשָׂה לְפִסְלוֹ

(יִסְגֹּד־) [יִסְגֹּד־] לּוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה

וַיִּתְפַּלֵּל אֵלָיו וַיֹּאמֶר

הֲצִילָנִי כִּי אֵלֵי אַתָּה:

⁶⁰Oswalt comments on **verse 16** that “the sequence half of it...half of it...the remainder of it (**verse 17**) need not be troublesome if one remembers that all of **verse 16** is devoted to what the person does with one half of the log. With that one half he makes a fire that both warms him and heats his food.” (P. 182)

⁶¹For these first three lines of **verse 16 Rahlfs** has:

Of which the half of it he burned in (the) fire;

and burning, he cooked / baked loaves of bread upon them (the coals of fire ?);

and having baked meat upon it,
he ate and was filled.

⁶²Translations of this last line of **verse 16** vary:

1QIs^a, “Ah, I am warm (נָגַד) before the fire.”

King James, “Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire.”

Tanakh, “Ah, I am warm! I can feel the heat!”

New Revised Standard, “Ah, I am warm, I can feel the fire!”

New International, “Ah! I am warm; I see the fire.”

New Jerusalem, “Ah, how warm I am, watching the flames!”

Rahlfs, “Pleasant for me, because I was warmed, and I saw fire.”

And its remainder he made for an El / Supreme God, for his idol.⁶³

He prostrates⁶⁴ himself to it, and he worshiped.

And he prayed to it, and he said,

Deliver me, because You are my God!⁶⁵

44:18⁶⁶ לֹא יִדְעוּ

⁶³Where our Hebrew text has לְפַסְלוֹ, “for his idol / image,” **Rahlfs** has “a carved God.”

⁶⁴The Masoretes offer two readings: the first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” יִסְגֹּד־, and the second, the *qere*, “to be read,” יִסְגֹּד־, both with the same meaning, “he prostrates himself,” the only difference being a matter of exact spelling / pointing.

⁶⁵Alexander comments that “He has kindled his fire, and will use it to prepare food. He has made his idol, and will fall down and pray to it.” (P. 170) What more comment is needed? A picture is worth a thousand words.

Oswalt comments that “Having dealt with the mundane use put to the first part of the log in **verse 16**, we are now told the surprising use to which the remainder is to be put. The piling up of verbs in the third colon of the verse (*worship, prostrate, pray*) seems to express the author’s exasperation with the futility of the exercise...How can that which is solely the result of human effort and care, whose stuff humans have casually consumed in their own service, now turn around and care for them?” (P. 183)

⁶⁶Knight comments on **verses 18-19** that “Here is a clear statement that the Lord has blinded the eyes and hearts of the heathen, so it is beyond their competence even to become aware of the falsity of their notions (compare **2 Thessalonians 2:11-12**,

11 Therefore God sends them a strong delusion,
so that they may believe what is false,
12 in order that all may be condemned
who did not believe the truth,
but had pleasure in unrighteousness).

Thus Deutero-Isaiah points to a fact that the Church must constantly take into account, that people are born into a religious heritage, whether it be in the Congo or in Afghanistan, which to them makes a complete and logical system of belief.” (Pp. 80-81)

Slotki comments on **verses 18-20** that “The intellectual level of the idolater is so low that he is quite incapable of applying the most rudimentary principles of logic to his absurd conduct.” (P. 216)

Yes...and the same criticism applies to Israelites who believed that YHWH lived in the ark of the covenant—see the stories in **1 Samuel 4-6**. The wooden ark, like the

(continued...)

וְלֹא יָבִינוּ
כִּי טַח מְרֵאוֹת עֵינֵיהֶם
מִהַשְׂכִּיל לְבַתָּם:

They did not know,
and they do not understand--
because he / He smeared their eyes so as not to see,⁶⁷

⁶⁶(...continued)

idols had also been made by human hands. And what about Christians who manufacture exquisite wooden or silver or golden crosses to stand in their chapels, or to wear around their necks—are they not also made by human hands?

What do you think? When you call other religions “stupid,” can you avoid the fact that there is also stupidity in your own religion?

Oswalt entitles **44:18-20** “Idolaters are blind.” He comments that the prophet “has argued at length that the reason God can deliver His people is that He was not created by them, is not an extension of them, and does not exist to serve them—in short, that He is not one of the Gods. Here he cannot allow the chance to go by to drive his point home by stressing the opposite. The only One Who can deliver, being truly holy, is One Who is not one of these.” (P. 184)

⁶⁷Oswalt observes that the reference to blindness is oftentimes made in the **Book of Isaiah: 6:10; 29:10; 42:18-19; 43:8**, etc. (P. 184)

Notice that those who are depicted as blind are most often YHWH’s servant, Israel! What do you think? If the worshipers of idols are “blind,” is this blindness any greater than that of YHWH’s servant Israel’s blindness?

And remember that the historical Isaiah’s mission, given by YHWH, was to “blind the eyes” and “deafen the ears,” and “harden the hearts” of those to whom he was sent (see **Isaiah 6:8-13**). How do you explain this? Does Isaiah’s message blind people, or enlighten them? As we read the **Book of Isaiah**, our heart sings its songs, even though there is much that is difficult to understand.

And along this line, compare **Mark 4:10-12**, where the purpose of Jesus’ teaching in parables to “outsiders” is given—to harden their hearts, and keep them from understanding. But for us, the parables seem to be among the clearest, and most understandable of all Jesus’ teachings—which sometimes are difficult to comprehend.

(continued...)

so as not to make their heart wise.⁶⁸

44:19 וְלֹא־יִשְׁיב אֶל־לְבוֹ

וְלֹא רָעַת וְלֹא־תְבוּנָה לֵאמֹר

חֲצִיּוֹ שָׂרַפְתִּי בְּמוֹ־אֵשׁ וְאֶף אֶפִּיתִי עַל־נַחֲלִיו לֶחֶם

אֲצַלֶּה בָּשָׂר וְאֹכֵל

וַיִּתְּרוּ לְתוֹעֵבָה אַעֲשֶׂה

⁶⁷(...continued)

What do you think? In order to understand the message of Isaiah, or the parables of Jesus, do you have to first step inside the circle of faith, to become disciples, in order to understand?

⁶⁸Is the prophet saying that he, by his preaching, or YHWH Himself, blinded the eyes of idolaters, and hardened their hearts so they couldn't understand? And if you think that genuine prophets would never do that; or that certainly YHWH would never do such a thing, remember the stories in **Exodus** of how YHWH intentionally hardened Pharaoh's heart, and especially see the story of Isaiah's calling in **Isaiah 6:10**, where he is commanded by YHWH to harden hearts, deafen ears and blind eyes. Does God have a purpose behind blinding people? Can it be that only when we know we are blind, or deaf, or ignorant, that we are willing to search, really search for God? See also:

Isaiah 29:10,

Because YHWH poured out upon you people a spirit of deep sleep,
and He closed tight your eyes--
the spokespersons and your leaders, the seers He covered.

Job 17:4, where Job states, evidently speaking of his "three friends,"

Because their heart You hid from insight;
therefore You will not exalt them.

Oswalt comments on **verse 18** that "To Isaiah it is evident that the only reason why a person would not see the obvious contradictions in the picture he has just drawn is that, for some reason, they cannot. In the normal course of human intelligence, the implications would surely be plain. So what has happened? Why do they not know (arrive at the truth through deductive reasoning)? The answer is familiar to him: They have become blind and insensitive...So God visits on the pagan mind the gathering darkness it has freely chosen." (Pp. 184-85)

לְבוֹל עֵץ אֶסְגֹּד:

And he will not bring it back to his heart,
and (there is) no knowledge, and no understanding, saying,⁶⁹
Half of it I burned in (the) fire, and also I baked bread upon its coals.
I roasted flesh and I ate.
And its remainder, will I make into an abomination?⁷⁰
Will I prostrate (myself) to a product of a tree?⁷¹

⁶⁹1QIs^a doubles the infinitive לְאִמַּר, “saying”—probably a mistake of the copyist.

⁷⁰The noun תועבה, “abomination,” “repugnant object,” is being placed in the mouth of the idolater from the standpoint of Israel—it is certainly not what the idolater himself would call his object of worship!

As Slotki observes, “This is the prophet’s contemptuous designation of what the idolater calls his God.” (P. 217)

1QIs^a reads the plural, תועבות, “abominations,” “repugnant objects.”

Oswalt comments that “The obvious conclusion from recognizing that the God and these ashes came from the same source is that this is not a God, and therefore is *an abomination*...A wrong choice is not merely a mistake when one’s whole life rides on it. Those are the stakes depending on our choice about the nature of Deity, according to **Isaiah**...

“There is only one Divine Being, only one Holy One. Either the God in my hand is this Being, or it is not. If it is not the Holy One, when I have claimed it is, what is it? It is folly, it is disaster, it is death. I have rested all my destiny of a piece of wood. It is not the Holy—it is unholy, an abomination.” (P. 185)

The debater loves to narrow everything down to a sharp either / or. But what if the person says the idol in his hand is not God, but only a symbol that points to God, as Hindus and Roman Catholics seriously claim? Is that not an alternative to this either / or?

⁷¹Alexander comments on **verse 19** that “The essential meaning is, that they have not sense enough to describe their conduct to themselves in its true colors; if they did, they would stand amazed at its impiety and folly...[the verse makes] the man call himself a fool, or express his resolution to perform a foolish act. But this very incongruity is absolutely necessary to the writer’s purpose, which is simply to tell what the infatuated devotee would say of his own conduct if he saw it in its true light... Hence, too, the

(continued...)

44:20⁷² רַעָה אֶפֶר

לֵב הוֹתֵל הַטָּהוֹר

וְלֹא־יִצִּיל אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹ

וְלֹא יֹאמֵר הֲלוֹא שָׁקַר בְּיַמֵּינֵי:

He is associating with ashes;⁷³

⁷¹(...continued)

use of the term *abomination*, i.e. object of abhorrence, not in the worshipers actual belief, but as it would be if his eyes were opened.” (Pp. 170-71)

North comments at the close of **verse 19** that “Little remains to be said on a passage which is on the whole straightforward. Notwithstanding its apparent doggerel [crude, poor] simplicity, it shows acute observation and psychological penetration. The meticulous fuss of the whole business! The material from which the idol is made! Wood, remnants after a man has lighted his fire and cooked his food (this last detail repeated three times, **verses 15-16, 19**)! The climax of irony comes when the accuser puts the indictment into the mouth of the idol-worshiper, as if he would performe acknowledge the truth of it, if he only had any sense (**verse 19**)!” (Pp. 141-42)

⁷²Knight comments that just because people are born into a religious heritage that to them makes sense, “that does not alter the fact that these beliefs may be so wrong that for him who holds them it is a case of feeding on the ashes of his fire. We translate **verse 20**: ‘Only a deluded mind could lead him thus astray. His faith cannot save his soul; neither is he able to say, Is this thing in my hand not the result of mere wishful thinking?’...The salvation that man needs is found in the competence only of a God Who has created both matter and spirit.” (P. 81)

⁷³This first line of **verse 20**, רַעָה אֶפֶר, is given varying translations from “he feedeth on ashes,” to “he pursues ashes!”, to “he hankers after ashes.” **Rahlf**s has “know that their heart (is) ashes.”

Oswalt notes that “The versions clearly do not know how to interpret the Masoretic Text... The Aramaic Targum has ‘Behold his idol, part of it ashes’; Latin Vulgate, ‘Part of it is ashes’; Syriac omits the phrase.” (P. 184)

Slotki holds that this means “to rely on anything that is vain, useless or worthless.” (P. 217)

Oswalt, translating by “He feeds on ashes,” comments that “Here Isaiah utilizes a favorite metaphor but in a much different sense than elsewhere. Everywhere else in

(continued...)

a deceived heart caused him to miss-the-mark,
and he will not deliver his innermost-being!
And he will not say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?⁷⁴

⁷³(...continued)

the **book** *feeds* or 'grazes' is used to convey the serenity and the abundance that we associate with the picture of a flock of sheep quietly cropping grass (**Isaiah 5:17; 11:7; 14:30; 27:10; 30:23; 40:11; 49:9; 61:5; 65:25**) ...

[But] instead of the rich grass of the messianic kingdom, the idolaters are pictured as trying to find food in a field that has been burned to ashes. Such is the empty reality of the worship of this world." (Pp. 185-86) But we ask, where in this text is anything said about "the messianic kingdom"?

⁷⁴Whereas we take this last line to be a question, the Greek, Latin Vulgate, Syriac and 1QIs^a all take it as an affirmation, i.e., "See, you will not say that 'A lie (is) in my right hand.'"

Alexander comments on **verse 20** that "The concluding question is equivalent in impact to the long speech put into the mouth of the idolater in **verse 19**. By a lie we are to understand that which professes to be what it is not, and thereby deceives the hopes of those who trust in it. See:

Jeremiah 10:14,

Every man [idolater] was stupid, without knowledge;
every refiner (of idols) was put to shame by (the) idol--
because his molten image (is) a lie / falsehood,
and (there is) no breath in them!

Psalms 33:17,

A falsehood—the horse for salvation / deliverance;
and by its great strength, it will not deliver / rescue.

It is a challenge to the religious person to use his or her mind, to think about what he or she is believing or doing. Don't just keep on practicing what you have always done, or believing what you have always believed, or been taught. Look carefully at what you are doing! Question whether or not what you believe is true. Recognize it, if there is a lie in your hand!

And as **Isaiah** asks the worshiper of idols to use reason in evaluating his religion, should we today not be just as willing to use reason in evaluating our own religion?

We were brought up to believe the **Bible**, and were taught that it is a sin to question anything the **Bible** says. We were taught that every word in the **Bible** is infallibly

(continued...)

⁷⁴(...continued)

true, and should be believed. But is that in fact the truth?

If the **Bible** has stories that depict God as a Murderer—as taking the life of every person on earth with the exception of six people, should we believe that? If the **Bible** depicts God as commanding genocide of entire peoples, men, women, and children, should we simply say “The **Bible** says it, we believe it, that settles it”?

When the **Bible** has laws commanding the stoning to death of rebellious sons or daughters, should we carry out that command, and be guilty of murdering our beloved children? When the **Bible** condemns homosexuals, should we without question condemn them? And additionally, since the same **Bible** commands putting them to death, should we not do that? We say, No, No, No!

When the Apostle Paul says women should not be allowed to speak, or ask questions in church, should we simply fall in line and never let a woman preach or teach?, as if Paul’s teachings are a new Mosaic **Torah**? Etc., etc.

The fact is, such an attitude toward the **Bible** is exactly the opposite of the attitude which the **Book of Isaiah** says we should have. Isaiah teaches us to reason with God, to argue honestly with God, to question and express our convictions, and to be willing to say “there is a lie in my hand”! Or is it just idolaters who ought to use their reasoning ability? What do you think? And if you think it is a sin to question or doubt something said in the **Bible**, can you explain how the **Books of Job and Ecclesiastes** got in the **Bible**? They are packed with doubts and questions!

⁷⁵Knight comments on **verse 21**, that “Once again Deutero-Isaiah leads forward logically in his argument. He both answers the problem he has raised in **verses 9-20** and at the same time connects the solution with the point he had reached in his previous argument at **verse 8**. If it is God Who has blinded the hearts of the heathen, as he has just said, and if it is God Who has rendered them logically satisfied with their particular *Weltanschauung*, or world of belief, then how are they ever to know the true God as He really is, and gain that true or whole way of life which Deutero-Isaiah has spoken of before? The answer to that seems now to be clear: it is to come about through Israel’s wholehearted service to Yahweh, for it is she who has to take this whole way of life to the ends of the earth (**42:4**). But Deutero-Isaiah is not satisfied with such an easy answer to this fundamental problem. One does not convert a people convinced of the validity of their beliefs to a new way of life simply by preaching to them. History has proved that a hundredfold. Something more fundamental is needed than mere words to reach home to the hearts of a sinful and prejudiced world.

“At this point we are made aware of the depth of Deutero-Isaiah’s theological grasp. He sees that Israel’s God cannot be postulated as the mere object of human thought. He does not speak of God as Supreme Being, as the Absolute, as that Power

(continued...)

כִּי עֲבָדִי אַתָּה

יִצְרָתִיךָ

עֲבָד־לִי אַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל

לֹא תִנְשָׁנִי:

Remember these things, Jacob and Israel,
because you (singular) (are) My servant!

⁷⁵(...continued)

which controls all things in heaven and earth. Such a ‘thing in itself’ as a Supreme Being has nothing in common with Deutero-Isaiah’s God. Modern man, if he uses such language reveals that he believes himself able to picture this Being Whom he thus defines. But if a man can even imagine his God, then that God is an idol, the result of wishful thinking. Deutero-Isaiah’s God, however, is apprehended by man’s mind solely by virtue of God’s Own free decision and saving activity. It is the nature of Israel’s witness to that freedom and that activity that becomes the all-important factor in the matter of the Divine revelation to the world.

“So Deutero-Isaiah slowly, gradually, and logically moves forward in the argument from this point until he can make clear what the new factor in witnessing to such a God must be. Meanwhile Yahweh promises Israel He will not forget her. (Pp. 81-82)

Slotki comments on **verses 21-22** that “Israel is reminded of his special relationship to God Who alone can blot out his sins and deliver him from his sufferings.” (P. 217)

North entitles **verses 21-23** “Yahweh’s Joy And Pride In Israel.” He notes that the passage seems “a more natural sequel to **verses 6-8** than to **verses 9-20**. Others take **verse 23** as an introduction to the Divine pronouncement in **verses 24-28**.” (P. 142)

Oswalt entitles these verses “Remember the Lord.”

He comments on **verse 21** that “Here the prophet draws on one of the great themes of **Deuteronomy**: *Remember* (compare **Deuteronomy 8:2, 11, 18; 9:7**)...Life is to be lived on the basis of reflection on the character of God as revealed in His treatment of His people in their historical experience...All of Israel’s remembering is to be in the context of her special relationship to God. He had not merely shaped her, but He had shaped her for the special purpose of service. The role of servanthood is mentioned twice in three phrases, and the second occurrence is emphatic...The purpose for which He created her—evidence of His sole Godhood—has not yet been fulfilled. How can He cast her off?” (Pp. 187-88)

I formed you;

a servant for me, you (are), Israel;⁷⁶

you shall not forget Me!⁷⁷

44:22 מַחֲתִיתִי כְעַבְּ פִשְׁעֶיךָ

וְכַעֲנַן חַטָּאוֹתֶיךָ

שׁוֹבָה אֵלַי

כִּי גָאַלְתִּיךָ:

I blotted out / wiped away your transgressions like the cloud,⁷⁸

⁷⁶Here is another, two-fold affirmation that Israel / Jacob is YHWH's "servant."

⁷⁷Alexander comments on **verse 21** that "Having completed his detailed exposure of the folly of idolatry, or rather of the impotence of idols, as contrasted with the power of God, he now resumes the tone of promise and encouragement with which the chapter opens, and assures the chosen people, here personified as Israel or Jacob, that having been constituted such by [YHWH] for a special purpose, they could not cease to be the objects of His watchful care." (P. 171)

And we add, that special purpose is that Israel or Jacob is YHWH's "servant." For Israel as YHWH's "servant," see **44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20**; for Jacob as YHWH's "servant," see elsewhere **44:1, 2** (with the name *Yeshurun*), **21; 45:4; 48:20**.

Alexander states that the last phrase in this verse, לֹא תִנְשִׁינִי, "you shall not forget Me," with more probability should be considered a passive verb, "you shall not be forgotten (by) Me," which he says "is much more appropriate, in this connection, than an exhortation not to forget God." (P. 172)

Perhaps—but it is a very subjective thing to translate a foreign language by what "seems more appropriate"!

The ancient versions read the verb as active rather than passive, for example **Rahlf**s has "and you, Israel, do not forget Me!"

⁷⁸Slotki comments that the phrase "as a thick cloud" means that just as a thick cloud "rapidly scatters and vanishes before the sun or the winds...Israel's sins, too, will vanish likewise as soon as he will return whole-heartedly to his God." (P. 217)

But the text does not say "as soon as he / Israel will return..." Rather, the text depicts "prevenient grace," that is, Divine grace that blots out transgressions and

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⁷⁸(...continued)

redeems even before repentance and return to YHWH (see **Isaiah 43:25**). Repentance is the reaction that Israel is called upon to make because of YHWH's forgiveness and redemption!

Ortlund states that "Repentance is motivated by grace" (p. 1321), but most commentators agree with Slotki that forgiveness of sins awaits the sinner's repentance / return whole-heartedly to God.

Ortlund refers to **Romans 2:4**, where the apostle Paul states that it is God's kindness that leads people to repentance.

What do you think? Did Jesus only forgive people after they had repented?

Alexander comments that "this **verse [22]** meets another difficulty, namely, that arising from a sense of guilt. The assurance given is that of entire and gratuitous forgiveness." (P. 172)

North comments that "As rapidly and completely as clouds disperse before the rising sun (**Hosea 6:4; 13:3; Job 7:9; 30:15**), so Yahweh has wiped out His people's rebellious past (literally 'rebellions'). So far in the prophecy the redemption of Israel has referred to the coming release from Babylon. Here the word has taken on a deeper meaning, that of redemption from sin and guilt: compare **Jeremiah 31:18, 34; Psalm 130:8**). With such an assurance, Israel may *come back* to Yahweh with entire confidence." (P. 142)

It is a beautiful, and deeply meaningful statement—total forgiveness, freely given, with no strings attached, no payments made to another party—simply out of the goodness and grace of YHWH. And if this is true, that God has so forgiven His people, He must have a future in mind!

In my home church, and in the biblical teaching I received in Christian Colleges, I came to believe that there is no forgiveness apart from Jesus Christ; and that the sins of all who lived before the coming of Christ were "rolled forward," to be covered by the blood of Christ, based on statements in **Hebrews 10** and **Romans 3** (see the article on the Internet by Clinton D. Hamilton, one of my former professors, entitled "From Heaven or From Men.")

But as I continued to read the **Hebrew Bible**, I came across passages such as YHWH's promise in **Isaiah 1:18**, and then **Isaiah 40:2**, and then **Isaiah 43:25**, and now here, **Isaiah 44:22**, not to mention the great statements in **Psalms 51** and **103**, or the Divine forgiveness of Kings David and Manasseh, etc. etc., I could not help but question and reject that former teaching. And as I studied the **Gospels**, with their stories of Jesus' ministry to the outcasts and sinners, as He shared Divine forgiveness and acceptance with them prior to His death on the cross, I realized that my teachers were over-

(continued...)

and like a cloud (synonym) your missings-of-the-mark!⁷⁹

Return to Me,⁸⁰

because I ransomed / acted as Next-of-Kin to you (singular)!⁸¹

⁷⁸(...continued)

looking these things, acting as if God couldn't forgive without getting His "pound of flesh."

The God of the **Bible**, especially as seen through the lens of the Second and Third Isaiah, is truly a God of forgiveness and grace. He always has been, and always will be. The same thing is true of the teaching of **Exodus 32-34**. The death of Jesus on the cross was not a denial of that truth, but rather, an example and embodiment of it. What do you think?

And, if God could truly forgive sinful Jews, blotting out their transgressions and sins, do you think He is unwilling to forgive Jews today, or Muslims, or Hindus, or atheists, who love and serve others, sometimes giving their lives on behalf of others, practicing the kind of "self-giving righteousness" that **Second Isaiah** depicts YHWH as demanding from Israel in **chapters 53** and **58**? What do you think Jesus meant in **Matthew 25:31-46** where He is depicted as stating that peoples / nations have served Him without even knowing it, and inviting them to come and enter the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world?

⁷⁹Alexander comments that "the clouds...are here considered as intervening between heaven and earth, as sin is expressly said in **chapter 59:2** to separate between God and His people." (P. 172)

Just as the clouds can disappear from the heavens, so YHWH says He has blotted out, or caused to disappear, their transgressions and sins. What a beautiful illustration of Divine forgiveness!

⁸⁰It is the Divine command / invitation, שׁוּבוּ אֵלַי, "turn back / return to Me," that is, Come back to the One Who loves and forgives you, Who has acted as Your Next-of-kin, taking your side, and Who will provide for your future! It is the kind of God we can gladly and willingly serve for the rest of our lives!

Oswalt comments that "The great danger of the exile would not be that God would be unable to act, but that Israel would fail to respond to His actions." (P. 188)

⁸¹Slotki claims that the phrase כִּי גִאֲלֵתִיךָ, "because I redeemed / acted as Next-of-Kin (to / for) you," is "a prophetic perfect...The redemption is certain to follow Israel's spiritual revival." (P. 218)

(continued...)

⁸¹(...continued)

Of course, this has to be the case if **chapters 40-55** were penned by the historical Isaiah in the 8th century B.C.E.; but if these chapters were penned by a follower of Isaiah in the 6th century, who was contemporary with or slightly earlier than the events being described, as many students of **Isaiah** think, the language may be meant as already having occurred, or in the process of occurring. Again, we are reminded of the powerful statement in **Isaiah 40:2**, that YHWH has pardoned Israel, that she has paid double for her sins.

What do you think? Do you believe in “prevenient grace”? Do you agree with Jacob Arminius and John Wesley and the **United Methodist Book of Discipline** that defines prevenient grace as “the Divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our conscious impulses. This grace prompts our first wish to please God, our first glimmer of understanding concerning God's will, and our 'first slight transient conviction' of having sinned against God. God's grace also awakens in us an earnest longing for deliverance from sin and death and moves us toward repentance and faith”?

Knight comments that “The position of Israel in God’s scheme is central. God must necessarily woo her back to Himself is He is to go forward with His plan that through her His glory might be revealed to all nations. So Deutero-Isaiah repeats that vitally important evangelical truth which he has already uttered and discussed. It is that God forgives us *before* we repent, not when and *if* we repent, as many imagine the content of the gospel to be...

“Perhaps the metaphor of the cloud here is copied from Hosea, who used it three times, for it is a striking one. When you are walking in fog or cloud there seems to be no end to it, and you can be very depressed. But the warmth of the sun can in a matter of minutes completely dissipate the fog and leave not a wrack [wreckage] behind.” (P. 82)

⁸²Slotki comments on **verse 23** that it is “the prophet’s call for all nature to join in song in celebration of the marvelous redemption of God’s people, a redemption which is fraught with the greatest consequences in the religious history of the world.” (P. 218)

We think Slotki is overstating his case here. What do you think? Was the return of the captives from Babylon greater than the return of Jews from all over the globe in the past century, or the exodus from Egypt in the time of Moses?

Oswalt comments on **verse 23** that “Whereas **42:10-13** celebrates the Lord’s victory over His enemies, here the emphasis is on the Lord’s redemption of His people. That theme is entirely appropriate to the Cyrus oracle that follows...

“As the elements of the universe were called on to witness Israel’s rebellion (**1:2**), they are here called on to rejoice over Israel’s salvation (so also **55:12-13**). The cycle will be complete when the heaven and earth themselves participate in the red-

(continued...)

⁸²(...continued)

emption (**65:17-25; 66:22-23**; see also **Romans 8:19-22**). It becomes evident in this pattern that the redemption being progressively unveiled in the **book** involves a great deal more than exile and return, although these provide the backdrop on which the larger picture is painted.” (P. 191)

Compare **Psalm 96:11-13**,

- 11 Let the heavens rejoice!
 And let the earth be glad!
 Let the sea and its fullness thunder [with applause]!
- 12 Let (the) field be jubilant, and all that is in it!
 Then let all the trees of the forest give a ringing cry, before YHWH!
- 13 For He is coming,
 for He is coming to judge the earth!
 He judges (the) world with right relationship,
 and peoples with His true faithfulness!
(YHWH’s coming is depicted as future, but also as present!)

Knight comments on **verse 23** that “There is nothing in heaven or earth that man desires or needs more than this total forgiveness of God. It is here shown to be the one factor that permits Israel’s life to proceed at all. Were there no forgiveness, then her comunal apostasy would have landed her in the *tohu*, the negation or chaos, in which, morally speaking, Babylon was even then wallowing without knowing it. No wonder Deutero-Isaiah uses such extraordinary language at this point in his argument. For it is an extraordinary thing that he is talking about, something that is almost too good to be true. What he is saying is that the Lord has [already] redeemed Jacob in the days of Moses. Why will Jacob not grasp that mighty fact?...

“Moreover...He is now ‘letting His glory be seen in Israel,’ rather than, *will be glorified in Israel*. This is the tremendous theme that Deutero-Isaiah will now continue to unfold as his chapters proceed.

“The very heavens must have begun to appear bluer for those forlorn exiles once they took this good news to their hearts; and since salvation in the experience of many **Old Testament** witnesses produced in them transports of gladness and joy, it is no wonder that the redeemed here should expect the heavens to join them in their joy. They had now learned that *the Lord has done it*, not man. The hills are therefore invited to *break forth into singing*. What is more, even the chaos (depths) that undergirds all life is ordered to join in!” (Pp. 82-83)

Oswalt entitles **44:23-47:15** “The Lord Redeems His Servant.” He entitles **44:23-28** “Announcement of salvation.”

He comments that “God now reveals the means by which the redemption will

(continued...)

הַרְיֵעוּ תַּחְתִּיּוֹת אֲרֶץ
פָּצְחוּ הַרִים רִנָּה יַעַר וְכָל־עֵץ בּוֹ
כִּי־גָאַל יְהוָה יַעֲקֹב
וּבִישְׂרָאֵל יִתְפָּאֵר:

Cry aloud, heavens! Because YHWH did (it) / acted!⁸³

Raise a shout, lowest parts of earth!⁸⁴

Break forth, mountains, (with) a ringing cry—forest, and every tree in it!

⁸²(...continued)

take place [but the Hebrew verb גָאַל, ‘He redeemed’ is in the qal perfect / past tense! Oswalt must be taking this as a ‘prophetic perfect’]: Cyrus. After the opening announce-

ment of salvation (**44:23-28**), the segment falls into three parts: the so-called Cyrus oracle (**45:1-8**), with its following justification (**45:9-13**); an assertion of God’s sovereignty over all the Gods (**45:14-16:13**), which further justifies the use of Cyrus and also sets the stage for the destruction of proud Babylon, which is the third part (**47:1-15**). Especially important is the repeated assertion that the God of Israel is the God of the entire world...Not only can He use unbelievers as easily as believers to accomplish His redemptive purposes, but also everyone, even proud Babylon, is accountable to Him.” (P. 190)

⁸³Slotki again insists that the use of the perfect verb in the phrases כִּי־עָשָׂה יְהוָה, “because YHWH did (it) / acted,” and again in the later phrase כִּי־גָאַל יְהוָה יַעֲקֹב, “because YHWH redeemed / acted as Next-of-Kin to Jacob,” is in reality the “prophetic perfect,” i.e., describing something that has not yet happened as having happened already.

Of course, this has to be the case if **chapters 40-55** were penned by the historical Isaiah, not by a later follower in the sixth century who was contemporary with or just prior to the events, who could be describing events already beginning to happen in his time.

⁸⁴North translates by “deep abysses,” and states that this means “The nether world,” or “pit,” or in Hebrew, “Sheol.” “Sheol is assumed to be outside Yahweh’s jurisdiction, a place where no one praises Him. But already in **Amos 9:2** those who ‘dig into Sheol’ are mistaken if they imagine they have escaped from Yahweh. The present passage is in line with **Psalms 139:7-9**, where heaven, earth and sea, and Sheol, are all within His domain.” (Pp. 142-43)

Because YHWH redeemed / acted as Next-of-Kin to Jacob,
and in Israel He will be glorified / glorify Himself.⁸⁵

44.24⁸⁶ כְּהֵאֲמַר יְהוָה גְּאֻלְךָ

⁸⁵Alexander comments on **verse 23** that it is “an exhortation for all nature to rejoice...The thing *done* is what is mentioned in the last clause, i.e. the redemption of Israel, including the deliverance from exile in Babylon, but not confined to it. [The last two verbs, גְּאֻלְךָ, ‘He redeemed,’ and יִתְפַאֲרַךְ, ‘He will be glorified,’ a qal perfect / past tense and a hithpael imperfect / future tense, are] expressive of what God had done and would yet do for the chosen people.” (P. 173)

North comments that the verse states literally that YHWH “will get Himself glory (or beauty) by means of Israel.” He speculates that a *pejer* “was some kind of festive garland or head-dress,” and the noun תְּפִאֲרָה, “beauty, glory,” is used of women’s finery (**Isaiah 3:18**), of festive garments (**Isaiah 52:1**)... “To translate that Yahweh ‘will show Himself off by means of Israel’ would not be quite reverent but it would bring out the picturesque in the text...There is much in **Isaiah 40-66** to suggest that the redeemed Israel is His proudest achievement.” (P. 143)

⁸⁶Knight states that “**Chapter 44** comes to a climax with a series of magnificent utterances expressing the nature and purpose of God in terms unsurpassed in the **Old Testament**....The covenant God, Who is alive and utters His will by word of mouth, Israel’s *Redeemer-for* to love and to forgive is the essence of Yahweh’s nature. Yahweh’s plan was predetermined before Israel came into existence. This of course is easy for a God Who is the Creator and Author of all things...Here then we have the concept of ‘God in creation’ united with that of ‘God in history’...

“Deutero-Isaiah now interjects a question he puts on God’s lips: ‘*Who was with Me?*’... While no God could ever be with Yahweh, yet paradoxically Yahweh is *with* Israel, to the extent that Yahweh is even *in* Israel. This argument is developed fully in **chapter 45**.” (P. 83)

Slotki comments on **verses 24-28** that “God, the Redeemer of Israel and the Creator of the universe, has appointed Cyrus to accomplish His plans for His people.” (P. 218) Cyrus is not actually named in the **Book of Isaiah** until **verse 28**; his name is repeated in **45:1**.

North entitles these verses “The Curtain Rises For Cyrus.”

Oswalt comments on these five verses, “which culminate in the naming of Cyrus as God’s agent for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, are largely given over to another of the statements of the Divine Self-prediction for which **chapters 40-48** are justly famous (see **40:12-24**; **41:2-4**, **25-29**; **43:10-17**; **44:6-8**; **45:5-7**, **18-21**; **46:5-11**; **48:12-17**). God’s promises to redeem are not the empty vaporings of some vanquished local Deity.

(continued...)

וַיִּצְרֶךָ מִבֶּטֶן
אֲנֹכִי יְהוָה עֲשֵׂה כָל
נֹטָה שָׁמַיִם לְבִדְי
רָקַע הָאָרֶץ (מִי) (אֲתִי) [מֵאֲתָיִן]:

In this way YHWH spoke,⁸⁷ your Redeemer / Next-of-Kin⁸⁸

⁸⁶(...continued)

Rather, they are secured by three claims: He brought Israel into existence by birth (**verse 24a**), He created the whole world (**verse 24b**), and He has foretold the future in ways that make fools of all who rely on techniques in order to tell the future (**verses 25-27**).” (P. 192)

He adds that “**Isaiah** claims that the evidence for the uniqueness of God, that He is the sole Creator, rests on His ability to predict novel turns of history in advance, an ability the idols and their technicians do not have. Specifically those predictions included Assyria’s all but total conquest of Israel and Judah, Assyria’s failure to capture Jerusalem, the fall of Assyria, the fall of Jerusalem and Judah to Babylon, the exile, the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, Cyrus’s proclamation of freedom and encouragement to rebuild, the return of a remnant, and the establishment of a messianic kingdom.” (P. 192)

Scholars under whom I have studied, have sometimes described some (or even all) of these predictions as having been made “after the fact.” But this will not work in terms of the predictions in the **Book of Isaiah** of a universal kingdom emerging out of Israel in the future, which has certainly happened in the emergence in Israel of Jesus Christ and the Christian movement which has truly become a world-wide movement. But neither will it work when the **Books of Deuteronomy, Amos and Hosea**, along with **Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel** are also taken into account, with their predictions of doom--the fall of Israel and Judah to Assyria and Babylon, accompanied by predictions of return from exile, made before those events; and Israel’s continued existence resulting in a universal movement of faith, simply cannot be honestly so described, without having to perform radical surgery on the biblical texts, such as Dr. Steinspring at Duke did in holding that all statements of hope in **Hosea** and **Amos** were added by later editors of those books. What do you think?

⁸⁷Oswalt comments on the phrase “In this way YHWH spoke,” that it recurs frequently in this segment, serving to engender “confidence in God’s promises to redeem and deliver...Thus the use of this phrase underscores an insistence that these promises are not merely the ejaculations of a generally inspired prophet—they are the very words of Almighty God.” (P. 193)

Oswalt is a very conservative commentator, who holds a very high view of the

(continued...)

–and He formed you from (the) womb:⁸⁹

⁸⁷(...continued)

Bible—and we wonder how he can make a comment such as this. Holding as he does that every word in the **Bible** is the infallible word of God, how can he even think that prophetic statements not introduced by this phrase could be described as “mere ejaculations [ejections of semen] of a generally inspired prophet”?

Our view is that every word of the **Bible** should be taken seriously, and should be studied in depth to attempt to ascertain its meaning—which sometimes cannot be accomplished, and we are left in doubt as to the actual meaning.

Still, amazingly, the biblical materials are able to teach and inspire, leading us into a dialogue with, and into knowledge and worship of God the Creator, leading us into searching for His will—even though they come to us by human authors, who often-

times claim to be speaking a message given to them by God, and even though many of the **Bible’s** teachings cannot be considered the infallible, verbally inspired word of God.

We say, Don’t attempt to say which teachings are from God—just continue to study these profound writings, and let God convict you of His truth as you do so. Pray for His guidance, and be open for learning! You will find yourself being taught, and coming to profound conclusions as you move forward on your pilgrimage of faith!

⁸⁸See our end-note 8 on **Isaiah 41:14** for YHWH as “Redeemer.”

⁸⁹For this matter of Divine knowledge “from the womb” or before birth, see:

Isaiah 44:2,

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 / Upright one—I chose him!

Isaiah 49:5,

And now, YHWH spoke--
(the) One forming me from (the) womb for a servant to Him,
to turn back Jacob to Himself,
and Israel will be gathered to Him.
And I was honored in YHWH’s eyes;
and My God was my strength!

Jeremiah 1:5, where YHWH is depicted as saying to Jeremiah:

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you;

(continued...)

I–YHWH, One making everything,⁹⁰
stretching out heavens by Myself,
hammering out the earth⁹¹–Who (was) with Me?⁹²

44.25 מִיִּפְרֹ אֶתֹת בְּיָמַי

⁸⁹(...continued)

and before you went forth from (the) womb, I set you apart.
A prophet to the nations I gave / placed you!

⁹⁰North comments that this statement, “making everything,” is “the nearest the **Old Testament** comes to the conception of ‘the universe’ as we understand it and **Deutero-Isaiah** was the first, indeed the only, writer to use the word in this simplest form [כָּל, not הַכָּל] which is found in **Jeremiah 10:16; 51:9; Ecclesiastes 1:2**; compare **Psalms 103:19; 145:9** [passages which North claims are later in date]. The usual expression for the created world is ‘the heavens and the earth...It is creation the Prophet has in mind at this point; history is the theme of the verses that follow, *Who stretched out the heavens...and spread out the earth.*” (P. 146)

⁹¹It is another of YHWH’s many “Self-identifications.” He alone is the Maker of the universe.

Oswalt comments that “Not only has the Lord made Israel, but He has made all things, and without assistance or advice [compare **40:12-14, 21-22**]...The physical universe is obviously being described on the analogy of a physical building, with the earth as a base and the heavens as a canopy above...The point is that God alone is responsible for the existence of the world as we know it.” (P. 193)

But is this in fact “the world as we know it”? We say it is ancient way of viewing the world, but not at all the world and the universes that we know today through space exploration and the Hubble telescope! What do you think?

⁹²The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” מִי אֶתִי, literally “who with Me?” and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” מִאֶתִי, “from with Me.” The question (according to the *kethibh*), to which the answer is “No one!” is in effect an affirmation of YHWH’s sole Deity—there was no other with Him!

Translations of the phrase vary, from “by Myself,” to “and unaided,” to “who was with Me?”, to “who other?”

North holds that the *kethibh*, “who was with Me?” is “to be preferred: it is supported by 1QIs^a...by [Rahlf’s] and the Latin Vulgate, and is the kind of rhetorical question which Deutero-Isaiah loves. The meaning is much the same either way: ‘who was with Me?’ implies ‘by Myself (alone),’ and vice versa.” (Pp. 143-44)

וְקִסְמִים יְהוֹלֵל
מְשִׁיב חַכְמִים אַחֲזֹר
וְדַעְתָּם יִשְׁכַּל:

He Who frustrates signs / omens of empty-talkers,⁹³
and those practicing divination,⁹⁴ he makes fun of;
He Who turns wise people backward,
and their knowledge he makes foolish.⁹⁵

⁹³North notes that “Here and in **Jeremiah 50:36**...the word **בְּדִיִּים** must have the concrete sense of ‘idle-talkers,’ but in view of the parallel **קִסְמִים** [‘those practicing divination’ in the next line] it is tempting to read **בְּרִים**...the *baru*-priests, whose functions were similar to those of the Roman *haruspices* [officials who interpreted omens by examining the entrails of sacrificial victims].” (P. 144) The Hebrew letters **ד**, d and **ר**, r are easily mistaken for one another, especially in hand-written texts.

North adds that “Babylonian prophets were as sure of themselves as were the prophets of Israel. Nevertheless, Yahweh ‘breaks [our ‘frustrates’] their signs’...For the Babylonian *baru*-priests or ‘seers’ see A. Haldar (**Associations of Cult Prophets Among the Ancient Semites**, 1945, pp. 1-12), who says that their chief function was ‘to acquire and communicate knowledge of the will of the Gods concerning future events’ (P. 2). This they did by various means, notably by inspecting the entrails, especially the livers, of sacrificial animals (Haruspicy).” (P. 146)

⁹⁴Here the plural participle is **קִסְמִים**, “those practicing divination.” North comments that “their specialty was divination by means of arrows (belomancy [combining the Greek words for arrow and divination, i.e., ‘arrow-divination’]). See the vivid description in **Ezekiel 21:18-23**^{Heb} / **23-28**^{Eng}, especially **verse 26**^{Heb} / **21**^{Eng} :

Because Babylon’s king stood at a mother of the way,
at (the) head of the two ways,
to Divine divination.
He shook with the arrows.
He asked among the teraphim / idol-Gods.
He looked at the liver (taken from a sacrificed animal).

⁹⁵Differing from the first person speech attributed to YHWH in the preceding **verse 24**, **verse 25** has third person speech—evidently the prophet’s own speech—concerning YHWH’s nature. Instead of a “Self-identification,” it is the prophet’s

(continued...)

⁹⁵(...continued)

identification of Who YHWH is.

He is the One Who frustrates the signs of empty talkers, makes fun of those claiming to foretell the future by magical means, and Who turns so-called “wise people” backward, making their claimed knowledge foolish. A comparison between YHWH’s teaching of Israel, and the teaching of the religious leaders with their idols, reveals the fullness of Israel alongside the emptiness of those worshiping idols.

The powerful and relevant ethical content of YHWH’s teaching of Israel, when compared with the religious teachings of Mesopotamia, Babylonia, and Egypt, demonstrates how true this statement is. We recognize the many problems that confront the student of the **Hebrew Bible**; but the contrast between the Ten Commandments along with the Covenant Code and the Holiness Code and the teachings of Israel’s writing prophets such as Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah, over against the Law-codes of Eshnunna, Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi shows unmistakably the striking superiority of YHWH’s teaching over against the teachings of Marduk / Baal, etc.!

Modern ethical systems owe little to those ancient Near-Eastern law codes, but are deeply indebted to the **Hebrew Bible**, with its Ten Commandments and with the teachings of Israel’s prophets, even though moderns oftentimes fail to recognize this dependence.

Oswalt comments on **verse 25** that “If it is true that Israel’s God is the only Creator, then it follows that He alone is completely free. The work of the astrologers, diviners, and readers of omens is based on the absolute continuity of the present with the past. What happened before, given similar historical circumstances or similar configurations of elements thought to have a particular continuity with destiny, will of necessity happen again. But the Creator, the one God Who is utterly discontinuous with the creation, is in no way bound to such continuities. He is able to do things that have never happened before...confounding all those whose skill is based merely on encyclopedic knowledge of past congruities.” (P. 194)

Compare **1 Corinthians 1:20**,

Where (is) a wise person?

Where (is) a scribe / religious expert?

Where (is) a debater of this age / world?

Did not the God make foolish the wisdom of the world?

Knight comments on **verse 25** that “Deutero-Isaiah not only sweeps away the wisdom of the complicated and integrated hierarchy of Babylonian priests and philosophers and discounts their whole system of astrology...he also offers a positive philosophy of history in place of their ideas.” (P. 84)

וְעֵצַת מַלְאָכָיו יִשְׁלִים
הָאֵמֶר לִירוּשָׁלַם תּוֹשֵׁב
וּלְעָרֵי יְהוּדָה תִּבְנֶינָה
וְחֲרָבוֹתֶיהָ אֶקְוֶם:

He Who causes His servant's⁹⁶ word to stand,
and His messengers' counsel⁹⁷ he fulfills,⁹⁸

⁹⁶Where our Hebrew text has the singular עֶבְדֹו, “His servant,” Codex Alexandrinus and the Aramaic Targum have the plural, “His servants.”

North comments that “‘His servant’ may be Israel (compare **verse 21** preceding; **43:10**...), or, more likely, for once in a way, Deutero-Isaiah himself.” (P. 147) We agree with North, since Second Isaiah is the one doing the speaking, not Israel.

⁹⁷North translates by *the purpose announced through His envoys*, literally “the counsel of His messengers”...But this ‘counsel’ is not advice that ‘His messengers’ give to Yahweh...It is Yahweh’s *purpose* (or ‘plan,’ ‘intention’...a purpose none can ‘break’ or ‘refute’...and which *His envoys* (the prophets generally) are commissioned to announce.” (P. 147)

Knight states that Deutero-Isaiah “also declared that Israel had been given a glimpse of the Divine counsel, עֵצָה, whose fulfilment nothing can deflect (**40:8; 45:23; 46:10; 48:14; 53:10; 55:11**; compare **Ezra 6:14**). Thus if Israel would only act in faith and obedience—if in other words she would just let herself be the servant and the vehicle of mission in one—then God would guide her arrows to their target.” (P. 84)

⁹⁸Oswalt thinks the phrase “His servant” most probably refers to the prophet himself, and that “His messengers” refers to the prophets of Israel. He states that “One of the ‘words’ that Isaiah and the other prophets had declared was the downfall of Assyria and then of Babylon. Looked at from a purely historical point of view, this word seemed impossible. At least as improbable, it seemed, was the word that Jerusalem and Judah would be restored.” (P. 195)

Even more improbable, in our thinking, was the “word” that out of the defeated remnant of Israel would come a worldwide proclamation, calling all the nations to the worship of YHWH, a word which became reality in the centuries following the emergence of the Israelite, Jesus of Nazareth, and His dedicated missionary followers, a work that continues even to the present in this 21st century.

(continued...)

the One who says to Jerusalem, She shall be inhabited!,⁹⁹
and to Judah's cities, They will be built!,
and I will raise up her ruins!¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸(...continued)

Oswalt states that “Just as those prior to the exile would scoff at such words (Jerusalem was not going to fall; how could it be restored?), so would persons in the exile (the dream is over; face the facts!).” (P. 195)

Even more, how could the returned exiles, facing the difficulties confronting them daily and the lack of any great achievements, begin to believe that out of them would come a worldwide movement, offering hope and meaning for all the nations? Surely such a thing—that Second Isaiah was proclaiming—was an “impossible dream”! Nevertheless, that word was ultimately fulfilled. So we believe—do you?

⁹⁹Where our Hebrew text reads the hophal imperfect תִּשָּׁב, “she will be inhabited,” 1QIs^a has תָּשָׁב, which can be pointed in different ways, perhaps meaning “she will sit / dwell.”

Knight comments that “Right at the center of God’s cosmic plan there stands a city. This particularism of the biblical faith is strange to the wisdom of the Greeks...

“Before the exile, Jerusalem had been that one place in all God’s creation where God had put His name to dwell, so that He could be present in the sanctuary in Jerusalem in a special way (**1 Kings 8:13, 27-30**). Nebuchadrezzar had destroyed that sanctuary, however, and for fifty years now it had seemed as if the arrow he had shot had continued to speed on to bring about the final ruin of the people of God. But God could deflect Nebuchadrezzar’s arrow even after fifty years of flight. God, says Deutero-Isaiah, needs Jerusalem for His purpose now just as truly as ever before. So Jerusalem shall be inhabited again along with the whole area of depopulated and ruined Judah.” (Pp. 84-5)

¹⁰⁰We think it is certainly the case that in the background of this statement lies Moses’ **Torah**, with its multitude of expanding teachings, and at least the literary works of Amos and Hosea, along with the traditions concerning the many leaders of Israel who have spoken in the name of YHWH. If it is the case that **Isaiah 40-55** is the work of a sixth century disciple of Isaiah, then we could include the writings of the historical Isaiah, and perhaps even those of Jeremiah and Ezekiel. With all their limitations, their teaching as a body of work delivered to Israel represents solid ethical instruction, still relevant today; and the predictions that they made concerning judgment coming on Israel have been validated by historical fulfillment. Their word has stood; their counsel fulfilled. Included in that body of teaching given to Israel is the promise that Jerusalem, though destroyed, will be rebuilt, along with the cities of Judah. And now, the prophet

(continued...)

44.27 הָאֵמַר לַצִּוּלָה חֲרָבִי

וְנַהַרְתִּיךָ אֲבִישׁ:

The One Who says to the ocean-deep,¹⁰¹ Be dried up!,
and Your rivers I will dry up!¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

emphatically states, that prediction of the return to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah is on the verge of being fulfilled as well! YHWH Himself is announcing that return!

¹⁰¹North notes that the Hebrew word צִוּלָה, which is found only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, probably means “(the) ocean-deep,” since the related word, מְצוּלָה, means “depth,” “deep,” and is used of the Sea of Reeds. He says “note also the two words for ‘dry ground’ in **Exodus 15:21-22**, corresponding to the two verbs for the drying up of the deep in this verse. Yahweh’s control of nature is the theme of **verse 24**. Here, where the scene has shifted to history, there is some allusion to the exodus.” (P. 147)

¹⁰²Who is it that makes this astounding prediction? It is YHWH, Who can speak to the deep ocean and it will be dried up; Who can dry up rivers. This God Who is in control of nature is certainly able to return His people from Babylon to Jerusalem! For this statement, compare the closely similar statements in:

Isaiah 42:15, YHWH is going forth to war against His foes; He says:

I will make mountains and hills desolate,
and all their vegetation I will dry up;
and I will place rivers for the coast-lands,
and I will dry up swamps.

Isaiah 43:16,

In this way YHWH spoke,
the One giving / making a way in the sea,
and in mighty waters a pathway;

Isaiah 50:2b,

Look—by My rebuke I will dry up a sea,
I will make rivers (in the) desert;
their fish will stink from lack of water,
and will die from thirst!

(continued...)

¹⁰²(...continued)**Isaiah 51:10,**

Are You not She, the One making Yam / (the) sea dry,
 (the) waters of a great ocean?,
 that / that placed (feminine verb) Yam's / (the) sea's depths
 a way to pass / cross over (for) redeemed ones?

Jeremiah 50:38, the concluding verse of **verses 35-38**, speak of YHWH's proclamation of unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon:

A drought to her waters, and let them dry up!
 Because she is a land of idols,
 and in the terrors let them be made mad!

Jeremiah 51:36-37,

- 36 Therefore in this way YHWH spoke:
 Look at Me—contending for your contention / case!
 And I will avenge your revenge,
 and I will make desolate her sea;
 and I will make dry her fountain!
- 37 And Babylon will become heaps (of ruins),
 a dwelling / haunt of jackals,
 a horror and (object of) hissing,
 from no one inhabiting (it)!

Slotki states that “The allusion is to the diversion of the river Euphrates before the walls of Babylon, as recorded by Herodotus, whereby Cyrus was enabled to secure an entrance into the fortified city. Others regard the deep and rivers as a figure of speech for the obstacles Cyrus had to encounter.” (P. 219)

Oswalt comments that “The precise reference of the deep here is uncertain. The Targum translates it as Babylon, while Calvin and others take it to be a reference to the exodus...Can God really restore Jerusalem, as He has said? Consider the exodus; if He can dry up the great deep [the Sea of Reeds / Red Sea] what can He not do?” (Pp. 195-96)

Knight comments that “Such a mighty project [the rehabilitation of Jerusalem and the rebuilding of Judah's cities], as it must have seemed to the exiles who knew that Jerusalem was lying in ruins, was obviously a small thing, declares Deutero-Isaiah, for a God Who can command the deep of chaos and dry up its tidal currents, the rivers that flow along the sea bed.” (P. 85)

¹⁰³Knight comments on **verse 28** that “At exactly the right moment therefore God
 (continued...) ”

וְכָל-חֲפָצַי יִשְׁלַם
וְלֵאמֹר לִירוּשָׁלַם תִּבְנֶה
וְהֵיכַל תִּוָּסַד:

¹⁰³(...continued)

has raised up an instrument to perform His will. The cosmic plan will now continue on its way serene and unimpeded by the sin of man. Once again God will set His name to dwell in the chosen city of Jerusalem, and once again the temple will be standing to receive that name as its dwelling place on earth.

“So at last Cyrus is named, in the very last verse of the chapter. Such is the genius of Deutero-Isaiah, who knows how to pursue his argument step by step as he moves from theme to theme. At this point he shows us how Cyrus is actually the particularizing, the historicizing of the cosmic purpose at that moment in history. Yet that same Cyrus never knew that he was being used by Israel’s God. Moreover, Deutero-Isaiah tells us nothing at all about the character and nature of this powerful man. Obviously neither the faith nor the nature of Cyrus is important in itself...

“A corollary of this fact is also of great interest. It is that the pagan state can evidently be used as God’s instrument of mission, just as much as can the church. For Cyrus—the state—is the instrument of the recreative word of the living God in action in a historical situation...

“Cyrus is called *My shepherd*. This one word in Hebrew can also be vowelled to mean ‘My friend.’ At **48:14** Cyrus is known as ‘he whom Yahweh loves.’ Deutero-Isaiah means that Yahweh chose Cyrus from all other possible alternatives to be His instrument. In this way God has continued to choose the unlikeliest of persons to be His instruments down the arches of the years. He chose the writing of His servant Nietzsche, for example, to prevent the Christian religion from becoming a mere system of ethics. It might be said that because of His servant Karl Marx, the Church awoke to the social implications of its own Gospel to a degree that it might never have done if he had never penned **Das Kapital**.

“Deutero-Isaiah now presents a combination of concepts. First, in the Tammuz ideology of the Babylonians [see our end-note 1] the king was regarded as the shepherd of his people (compare **Jeremiah 3:15; Zehariah 13:7**), and also in Israel many hailed the Davidic line in similar terms (compare **Ezekiel 34**)...

“Secondly, as the instrument of Yahweh, Cyrus is to act even as the Shepherd of Israel acts. All unwittingly Cyrus is to become the instrument of Him Who, as Deutero-Isaiah has already proclaimed, is about to carry the lambs in His bosom home to the ruins of that Jerusalem which figures centrally in God’s cosmic plan (compare **Matthew 16:21; Mark 10:33; Luke 9:31; Revelation 21:2**). Cyrus is thus no less than an ‘arm of the Lord’ (compare **63:11-12** [which is speaking about Moses]).” (Pp. 85-6)

The One Who says to Cyrus, My shepherd!,¹⁰⁴
and All My purpose he will fulfill.¹⁰⁵
And saying to Jerusalem, she shall be built,

¹⁰⁴For this opening line of **verse 28**, **Rahlfs** has, “The One saying to Cyrus to think.”

Oswalt comments that “This **verse [28]** now makes specific the allusions that first appeared in **41:2-3**, and again in **41:25**. Who is it that God has called from the north and east to terrify the nations and to set His despairing people free? It is the Persian emperor, Cyrus...The Cyrus predictions are thus made the specific evidence that God can and does foretell the future. As such, they are made the very fulcrum [something that plays a central or essential role] on which the whole argument for God’s uniqueness turns.” (P. 196)

Concerning the name Cyrus, Slotki comments that in Hebrew it is כּוֹרֶשׁ, **khoresh**; the Persian form is Kurush, the Greek κῦρος, **kuros**, and the Babylonian Kurash. (P. 219)

Cyrus the Great was the Persian conqueror of Media, then Lydia, and Babylonia, who formed the largest world empire that had ever been known. See our footnote 10 and end-note 2 on **chapter 41**, for the history of Cyrus and the Cyrus Cylinder.

That YHWH calls Cyrus “My shepherd,” means, according to Slotki, that “Cyrus will look after the interests of Israel as a shepherd looks after his flock.” (P. 219) We note that here it would have been easy for Second Isaiah to have YHWH calls Cyrus “My servant,” but he does not.

It also means that YHWH, the God of Israel, is the God Who is in control of the greatest world power of that time, Persia—not Marduk!

Oswalt adds that “The description of the pagan emperor in terms appropriate to a Davidic monarch [all of whom were entitled ‘messiah’] must have been troublesome to a devout Judean. How could such a one be called ‘My shepherd’ (compare **2 Samuel 5:2**; **1 Kings 22:17**; **Ezekiel 34:23**)? Or how could it be said that someone such as this, unclean and uncircumcised, could fulfill God’s wish (**Psalms 5:5^{Heb} / 4^{Eng}**)? But this is precisely the kind of new thing that the Lord was talking about (**43:19**).” (P. 197)

North notes that “For *shepherd* as the designation of a ruler see...**40:9**, and compare **2 Samuel 5:2**; **Jeremiah 3:15**; **33:1-4**; **Ezekiel 34** (especially **verses 23-24**). The word so used was common in the ancient world: compare **Hammurabi Code # 51**, Homer ποιμένα λαῶν, ‘shepherd of peoples.’” (P. 147)

¹⁰⁵The added statement, that Cyrus will fulfill all of YHWH’s purpose, means that YHWH is using Cyrus, is in control of Cyrus.

and a temple will be founded!¹⁰⁶

1. **Myths of Babylonia and Assyria**, by Donald A. MacKenzie, [1915],
at sacred-texts.com

CHAPTER V

Myths of Tammuz and Ishtar

Among the gods of Babylonia none achieved wider and more enduring fame than Tammuz, who was loved by Ishtar, the amorous Queen of Heaven--the beautiful youth who died and was mourned for and came to life again. He does not figure by his

¹⁰⁶These are words of ringing hope to be heard by the Jewish exiles in Babylon. YHWH has called Cyrus to be His shepherd, to lead the exiles home. YHWH has said that Jerusalem will be rebuilt! The temple, now lying in ruins, will be established / founded!

What a powerful theological statement this is. Cyrus is not a Jew. He is a worshiper of Marduk--certainly not of YHWH. But still, YHWH calls Cyrus "My shepherd," and in the next chapter, "My messiah / christ." How will you fit these statements into your religious convictions? Do you think God only works through Jews or Christians? Do you believe that Jesus is the "only christ," the only messiah of YHWH?

North comments that "Deutero-Isaiah nowhere else mentions the temple...His final word [concerning the temple] is that in the text...It is Cyrus who orders the rebuilding of city and temple, compare **Ezra 1:2** and **6:3**...

"The passage [**verses 24-28**] is in the nature of denouement [the final part of a narrative in which the different strands of the narrative are drawn together and matters are explained or resolved]. Cyrus has already been more or less openly referred to (**41:2-3, 25**). Here he is to be named. And it is as if when it comes to the annunciation the Prophet keeps the name back as long as he can, so heightening the effect of the revelation when it comes...

"The general trend of the argument is that Yahweh is the sole Creator, that He is the Lord of history, that what He announces through the prophets is verified by subsequent events, and that events now converge upon Cyrus, *My shepherd*." (P. 145)

popular name in any of the city pantheons, but from the earliest times of which we have knowledge until the passing of Babylonian civilization, he played a prominent part in the religious life of the people

Tammuz, like Osiris of Egypt, was an agricultural Deity, and as the Babylonian harvest was the gift of the rivers, it is probable that one of his several forms was Dumuzi-abzu, "Tammuz of the Abyss." He was also "the child", "the heroic lord", "the sentinel", "the healer", and the patriarch who reigned over the early Babylonians for a considerable period. "Tammuz of the Abyss" was one of the members of the family of Ea, God of the Deep...who instructed mankind, like King Osiris, how to grow corn and cultivate fruit trees. As the youth who perished annually, he was the corn spirit. He is referred to in the **Bible** by his Babylonian name.

When Ezekiel detailed the various idolatrous practices of the Israelites, which included the worship of the sun and "every form of creeping things and abominable beasts"--a suggestion of the composite monsters of Babylonia--he was brought "to the door of the gate of the Lord's house, which was towards the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz."

The weeping ceremony was connected with agricultural rites. Corn Deities were weeping Deities, they shed fertilizing tears; and the sowers simulated the sorrow of Divine mourners when they cast seed in the soil "to die", so that it might spring up as corn. This ancient custom, like many others, contributed to the poetic imagery of the **Bible**. "They that sow in tears", David sang, "shall reap in joy. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him."

It was believed to be essential that human beings should share the universal sorrow caused by the death of a God. If they remained unsympathetic, the Deities would punish them as enemies. Worshipers of nature Gods, therefore, based their ceremonial practices on natural phenomena. "The dread of the worshipers that the neglect of the usual ritual would be followed by disaster, is particularly intelligible", writes Professor Robertson Smith, "if they regarded the necessary operations of agriculture as involving the violent extinction of a particle of Divine life." By observing their ritual, the worshipers won the sympathy and cooperation of Deities, or exercised a magical control over nature.

The Babylonian myth of Tammuz, the dying God, bears a close resemblance to the Greek myth of Adonis. It also links with the myth of Osiris. Traces of the Tammuz-Osiris story in various forms are found all over the area occupied by the Mediterranean or Brown race from Sumeria to the British Isles.

Tammuz of the Sumerian hymns, however, is the Adonis-like God who lived on earth for a part of the year as the shepherd and agriculturist so dearly beloved by the Goddess Ishtar. Then he died so that he might depart to the realm of Eresh-ki-gal (Persephone), queen of Hades.

According to one account, his death was caused by the fickle Ishtar...Ishtar's innocence is emphasized by the fact that she mourned for her youthful lover, crying:

Oh hero, my lord, ah me! I will say;
Food I eat not . . . water I drink not . . .
Because of the exalted one of the nether world...

Tammuz died with the dying vegetation...The month of Tammuz wailings was from 20th June till 20th July, when the heat and dryness brought forth the demons of pestilence. The mourners chanted:

He has gone, he has gone to the bosom of the earth,
And the dead are numerous in the land . . .
Men are filled with sorrow: they stagger by day in gloom .
In the month of thy year which brings not peace hast thou gone.
Thou hast gone on a journey that makes an end of thy people.

There is wailing for Tammuz "at the sacred cedar, where the mother bore thee", a reference which connects the God, like Adonis and Osiris, with tree worship:

The wailing is for the herbs:
the first lament is, "they are not produced".
The wailing is for the grain,
ears are not produced.
The wailing is for the habitations,
for the flocks which bring forth no more.
The wailing is for the perishing wedded ones;
for the perishing children;
the dark-headed people create no more.

The wailing is also for the shrunken river, the parched meadows, the fishpools, the cane brakes, the forests, the plains, the gardens, and the palace, which all suffer because the God of fertility has departed. The mourner cries:

How long shall the springing of verdure be restrained?
How long shall the putting forth of leaves be held back?

Whither went Tammuz? His destination has already been referred to as "the bosom of the earth", and in the Assyrian version of the "Descent of Ishtar" he dwells in "the house of darkness" among the dead, "where dust is their nourishment and their food mud", and "the light is never seen"--the gloomy Babylonian Hades.

It is evident that there were various versions of the Tammuz myth in Ancient Babylonia. In one the Goddess Ishtar visited Hades to search for the lover of her youth. A part of this form of the legend survives in the famous Assyrian hymn known as "The Descent of Ishtar." It was first translated by the late Mr. George Smith, of the British Museum. A box containing inscribed tablets had been sent from Assyria to London, and Mr. Smith, with characteristic patience and skill, arranged and deciphered them, giving

to the world a fragment of ancient literature infused with much sublimity and imaginative power. Ishtar is depicted descending to dismal Hades, where the souls of the dead exist in bird forms:

I spread like a bird my hands.
I descend, I descend to the house of darkness, the dwelling of the God
Irkalla:
To the house out of which there is no exit,
To the road from which there is no return:
To the house from whose entrance the light is taken,
The place where dust is their nourishment and their food mud.
Its chiefs also are like birds covered with feathers;
The light is never seen, in darkness they dwell. . . .

Reference has been made to the introduction of Tammuz worship into Jerusalem. Ishtar, as Queen of Heaven, was also adored by the backsliding Israelites as a Deity of battle and harvest. When Jeremiah censured the people for burning incense and serving Gods "whom they knew not", he said, "neither they, ye, nor your fathers", they made answer: "Since we left off to burn incense to the Queen of heaven, and to pour out drink offerings unto Her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and the famine". The women took a leading part in these practices, but refused to accept all the blame, saying, "When we burned incense to the Queen of heaven, and poured out drink offerings unto Her, did we make our cakes and pour out drink offerings unto Her without our men? The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the Queen of heaven." [See **Jeremiah chapters 7 and 44**]

Jastrow suggests that the women of Israel wept for Tammuz, offered cakes to the mother Goddess, &c., because "in all religious bodies...women represent the conservative element; among them religious customs continue in practice after they have been abandoned by men." The evidence of **Jeremiah**, however, shows that the men certainly co-operated at the archaic ceremonials. In lighting the fires with the "vital spark", they apparently acted in imitation of the God of fertility. The women, on the other hand, represented the reproductive harvest Goddess in providing the food supply. In recognition of Her gift, they rewarded the Goddess by offering Her the cakes prepared from the newly ground wheat and barley--the "first fruits of the harvest". As the corn God came as a child, the children began the ceremony by gathering the wood for the sacred fire. When the women mourned for Tammuz, they did so evidently because the death of the God was lamented by the Goddess Ishtar. It would appear, therefore, that the suggestion regarding the "conservative element" should really apply to the immemorial practices of folk religion. These differed from the refined ceremonies of the official cult in Babylonia, where there were suitable temples and organized bands of priests and priestesses. But the official cult received no recognition in Palestine; the cakes intended for a Goddess were not offered up in the temple of Abraham's God, but "in the streets of Jerusalem" and those of other cities.