

Isaiah Chapter 48
Stubborn Israel Is Spoken to By YHWH,
Who Has Tested and Refined Her,
and Now Foretells Her Freedom from Babylon
Through YHWH's Chosen Ally [Cyrus]

48:1¹

1

Chapter 48 has one end-note: "YHWH's Incredible Compassion for Sinners."

Slotki entitles **chapter 48** "Exhortations to the Israelite Exiles in Babylon." He comments on **verses 1-2** that the Israelite exiles "swear by the Name of the Lord and claim to trust in Him, but in reality their profession is hypocritical." (P. 234)

North entitles **chapter 48** "Prophecy And History," and **verses 1-11** "Prophecy, Past And Contemporary." He comments "That there is an 'essential unity' in the **chapter** is not in dispute. That Israel's past has been sinful is a theme common to **verses 1-5** and **18-19**. But the links between the several parts are by no means as close as they are in **chapters 46** and **47**. On the whole, this half-way stage in the prophecy leaves the impression that it is a gathering together of related themes rather than an artistic unity..."

"The main argument of this section is that Yahweh long ago predicted the course of His people's history, in order that as events happened they should have no excuse for attributing them to any idol-God. Similarly now, on the eve of their liberation, He predicts *new things*, this for the sake of His *name* and because He knows how prone they are to misinterpret the courses of events." (Pp. 173-75)

Alexander comments on **chapter 48** that "From his digression with respect to the causes and effects of the catastrophe of Babylon, the Prophet now returns to his more general themes, and winds up the first great division of the Later Prophecies [of the **Book of Isaiah**] by a reiteration of the same truths and arguments which run through the previous portion of it, with some variations and additions..."

"The disproportionate prominence given to the Babylonish exile and the liberation from it, in most modern expositions of the passage, has produced the same confusion and the same necessity of assuming arbitrary combinations and transitions as in other cases which have been already stated..."

"Although Israel is God's chosen and peculiar people, he [Israel] is in himself unworthy of the honor and unfaithful to the trust (**verses 1-2**). Former predictions had been uttered expressly to prevent his ascribing the event to other Gods (**verses 3-5**). For the same reason new predictions will be uttered now, of events which have never been distinctly foretold (**verses 6-8**). God's continued favor to His people has no reference to merit upon their part,

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but is the fruit of His Own sovereign mercy, and intended to promote His Own designs (**verses 9-11**). He again asserts His Own exclusive Deity, as proved by the creation of the world, by the prediction of events still future, and especially by the raising up of Cyrus, as a promised instrument to execute His purpose (**verses 12-16**). The sufferings of Israel are the fruit of his own sin, but his prosperity and glory, of God's sovereign grace (**verses 17-19**)...

"The book closes as it opened [**40:1-2, 9-11**] with a promise of deliverance from exile, accompanied, in this case, by a solemn limitation of the promise to its proper objects (**verses 20-22**). The most novel feature of this chapter is the fulness with which one principal design of prophecy, and the connection between Israel's sufferings and his sins, are stated." (Pp. 209-10)

Watts states that "The heart of [**48:1-22**] lies in two major Yahweh speeches: **verses 3-11** and **verses 12-16**.

"In the first (**verses 3-11**) Yahweh summarizes His proofs of announcements before events take place. Then He indicts Israel for being deaf, rebellious, and unreliable. She must be refined like a fine metal. In **verses 12-16a** He takes up again His defense of the choice of Cyrus. In **verses 18-19** He makes a powerful 'if only' speech of what might have been if Israel's response had been positive...

"**Verses 16b-d** and **verse 20** are structurally important elements depicting an expeditionary leader ready to begin a journey from Babylon toward Jerusalem. **Ezra-Nehemiah** tells of four expeditions in three periods led respectively by Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, paired in each case with an imperial edict to rebuild the temple. This position in the [**Book of Isaiah**] would fit the role of Sheshbazzar in the reigns of Cyrus / Cambyses. The scene suggests that the expedition had poor support from the exilic Jewish community." (P. 176)

Oswalt entitles **chapter 48** "Hear The Lord," and entitles **verses 1-11** "The Word of God," and **verses 1-5** "Former things." He comments that in **verses 1-11**, "Isaiah recaps the argument from prophecy that has been central to his claims in the previous chapters." Concerning **verses 1-2**, he states that "These introductory words set the tone of the discourse. The people are called to hear, and this verb (שמע) is repeated ten times in the next sixteen verses...Implicit here is the central idea of the **Old Testament**: the living God has spoken, revealing Himself in the medium of human speech. Such an astounding fact carries with it its own imperative. If it is true that God has spoken, then He must be listened to." (P. 260)

Of course! But the problem is, How can we know that it is truly the word of God, and not the word of some prophet or priest speaking his own convictions in the name of God? Simply to quote a saying from the **Bible**, and say "God said it, I believe it, that settles it," is simplistic and mistaken—as can easily be seen when applications of biblical statements are made. For example, in the present controversy over LGBT rights and the biblical teaching, it is loudly stated that the **Bible** condemns homosexuality. Yes, it does, in a few select passages.

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But those who argue in this fashion rarely go on to demand the death penalty for homosexuals, which the **Book of Leviticus** also demands (**18:22; 20:13**). There are passages in the **Bible** which demand extermination of entire peoples, men, women, children, and animals—which conflict with Jesus' commandment to love and forgive our enemies. The fact is, these are difficult issues, which demand careful study and nuanced interpretation, rather than simply quotation of proof-texts, and rush to obedience / killing. What do you think?

Westermann entitles **verses 1-11** "The Former Things and the New." He comments that the chapter contains some unusually harsh words, "accusing Israel...in an utterance in which they seem to have no place—this is the real difficulty [in the passage that has puzzled editors]...What does this utterance mean, and what end does it serve?...Its purpose is to help Israel to step out on the way home.

"These sentiments cannot possibly be reconciled with the harsh charge brought against Israel in **verses 1** (the last clause), **4, 5gb, 7b**, and **8-10b**. The latter can never have been uttered in order to strengthen Israel's confidence that the fresh action of God now proclaimed served for her salvation and was leading to her release...What makes it certain that the speaker here is someone other than Deutero-Isaiah is the fact that, when the words of accusation are omitted, **48:1-11** form a well-constructed utterance meant to serve a different purpose. To assume different authorship renders both the prophet's utterance and that of the other speaker more lucid and straightforward." (Pp. 195-96)

Westermann comments on **verses 1-2** that they form "a particularly emphatic address with numerous appositions [the positioning of things close together], and is of the kind used by Deutero-Isaiah to introduce passages of some length or of particular importance, e.g. **44:24-28** and **46:3-4**. Here **48:1-2** introduces the entire chapter, which issues in the call to go forth from Babylon, **verses 20-21**...[The chapter's] purpose...is to make clear to Israel that God's fresh action is designed for her salvation. [The chapter is addressed to the house of Jacob]...This indicates the first basis upon which the history of Israel rests—that solidarity, initiated by the blessing, which reaches back beyond the clans (north and south) to unite the generation now alive with the patriarchs who had received the promise of a future for the chosen people. The further appositions all refer to the other basis of Israel's history—her worship...

"Remembering [God's acts] in praise, the focal point being the holy city, to which they are designated as belonging; 'they stay themselves on the God of Israel,' which is a way of describing the 'confession of trust,' the central part of supplication...The prophet regards Israel's converse with God throughout her history as a continuing factor which, from the human angle, sustained that history." (Pp. 196-97)

Knight comments on **verse 1** that "The previous chapter gives what might be called a typological exposition of retribution. The fall of Babylon still to come is there presented in the form of a theological truth: the zeal of God must necessarily show itself as wrath against sin and, in consequence, against sinners too. On the other hand, retribution alone does not effect redemption, so retribution cannot be the totality of God's action in the face of sin. This is the

(continued...)

שְׁמַעוּ-זֹאת בֵּית-יַעֲקֹב

Hear / listen to this,² House of Jacob--³

¹(...continued)

problem that arises from the failure, not this time of pagan Babylon, but of God's Own chosen people to be what God intended her to be. Has God not planned to use Israel as His instrument for the furtherance of His purpose, that His name might be known to the ends of the earth?

"Deutero-Isaiah begins by emphasizing the privileged position that Israel holds in God's plan of redemption. The people of God are really 'Jacobs,' 'heels' all—the root meaning of the word 'Jacob'—although by grace they have been *called by the name of Israel*. For they too are a libidinous [showing excessive sexual drive, lustful] people. We have only to re-read **Genesis 38** to see what Deutero-Isaiah means, for there Judah behaves as any pagan might do who is unaware of his unique election and relationship to the all-holy God. Thus Israel practices her calling 'neither sincerely nor creatively' as the people of God should...

"Several times in this chapter, therefore, God solemnly addresses Israel with either the word 'Hear' or 'Listen,' or with the clause 'You have heard' (**verses 1, 6, 8, 12, 14, 16**). At each summons the sternness of Yahweh becomes ever more vivid, and the judgment under which specially chosen Israel stands becomes ever more abundantly clear (compare **Amos 3:2**)." (P. 115)

²

It seems to us that the message the prophet wants Israel to hear begins in **verse 3**. But Alexander holds that the call "Hear this!" applies "not exclusively [to] what follows or what goes before, but this whole series of arguments and exhortations. This is a formula by which Isaiah frequently resumes and continues his discourse." (P. 210)

We think this is overstatement, since the exact phrase שְׁמַעוּ-זֹאת, "hear this!" is found only twice in **Isaiah**, and only 4 times elsewhere in the entire **Hebrew Bible**: **Isaiah 48:1, 16; Hosea 5:1; Joel 1:2; Amos 8:4** and **Psalms 49:2**.

However, the use of the plural imperative שְׁמַעוּ, "Hear!" is found oftentimes elsewhere in **Isaiah**, at: **1:2, 10; 6:9; 7:13; 28:14, 23, 23; 32:9; 33:13; 36:13; 41:22; 42:18; 46:3, 12; 48:14, 20; 49:1; 51:1, 7; 55:2, 3** and **66:5**, as well as in numerous other places in the **Hebrew Bible**.

³

Watts observes that there is considerable overlapping in the designations, "but five addresses make sure no one is left out. *House of Jacob* is properly all those descended from the twelve tribes which bore the names of Jacob's sons. The title may also refer to those of the former Northern Kingdom. *Called by the name Israel* is broader, including those who participated in covenant ceremonies. *Who are descended from Judah* picks up the main group of those who came to Babylon in the exile of 587 B.C.E., and who, presumably, were

(continued...)

הַנִּקְרָאִים בְּשֵׁם יִשְׂרָאֵל

those who were called by name, Israel,

וּמִמֵּי יְהוּדָה יֵצְאוּ

and from Judah's waters⁴ they came forth--

³(...continued)

most concerned with the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple. But then the address turns from political and ethnic terms to religious affiliation: *those swearing by Yahweh's name and who confess the God of Israel...*The last designation could we include proselytes." (Pp. 176-77)

4

The phrase here, וּמִמֵּי יְהוּדָה יֵצְאוּ, "and from waters of Judah they went forth," is strange. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has καὶ οἱ ἐξ Ἰουδα ἐξεληθόντες, "and the ones coming out of Judah." D. Winton Thomas suggests changing to read וּמִמֵּי יְהוּדָה יֵצְאוּ, "and from Judah's loins they went forth." Watts follows this suggestion, but we would rather leave the text as it is, admitting that it is unusual.

Alexander states that "the people, by a natural figure, are described as streams from the fountain of Judah [the text does not mention any 'fountain']...Gesenius and other German writers fasten on this mention of Judah as a national progenitor, as betraying a later date of composition than the days of [the historical] Isaiah...[But, Alexander responds to this view] long before the Babylonish exile or the downfall of the kingdom of the ten tribes, the names of Israel and Judah were convertible, not as political distinctions, but as designations of the chosen people, the theocracy, the ancient church. In this sense Israelite and Jew were as really synonymous when Isaiah wrote, as they are now in common parlance." (P. 211)

Oswalt asks, "What is the point of this piling up of descriptors [house of Jacob, called by name Israel, from the waters of Judah, who swear by YHWH, who cause YHWH to be remembered, who are identified with the Holy City, who brace themselves on the God of Israel]?" He answer that "It is surely to set the stage for what follows. There is the appeal to the past...there is an appeal to religious affiliation...there is the appeal of present identification." (P. 260)

Oswalt mentions that "Barthelemy takes it to mean the semen of Judah, while Delitzsch takes it as a fountain or source." (P. 260) North states that "Some of the rabbis (compare the Aramaic Targum, which has 'seed') took 'waters' here as a euphemism in this sense." (P. 174)

הַנִּשְׁבְּעִים בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה

the ones swearing by YHWH's name,⁵

וּבֵּאלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יִזְכְּרוּ

and by / in Israel's God they cause remembrance--⁶

לֹא בְאֵמֶת וְלֹא בְצִדְקָה:

not in true-faithfulness, and not in right-relationship / righteousness.⁷

5

Alexander states that this fourth line of **verse 1** means “swearing by Him as their God, and thereby not only acknowledging His Deity, but solemnly [affirming] their relationship to Him.” (P. 211)

6

Translations of this fifth line of **verse 1** vary from “and make mention of the God of Israel” to “invoke the God of Israel,” to “and confess the God of Israel” (**English Standard Version**) to, “remembering.” Alexander states that this “making mention” means “not in conversation merely, but as a religious act, implying public recognition of His being and authority.” (P. 211)

7

Slotki calls this “acknowledgment of Him” by Israel “sheer hypocrisy.” (P. 234)

Westermann states that “At its end, **verse 1** has the addition, ‘not in truth or righteousness.’ These are the first words of the added matter which runs from here onward through the entire passage...A sudden interruption by a negative statement is completely out of harmony with the purpose which these introductory appositions are meant to serve.” (P. 197)

Alexander translates by “Not in truth and not in righteousness, uprightness, sincerity.” He comments that “It is not necessary to infer from these words, that the Prophet’s language is addressed to a distinct class of Jews, or to the Jews of any one exclusive period, his own, or that of the captivity, or that of Christ. The clause is an indirect reiteration of the doctrine so continually taught throughout these prophecies, and afterwards repeated in this very chapter, that God’s choice of Israel and preservation of [Israel] was no proof of merit upon [Israel’s] part, nor even an act of mere compassion upon God’s part, but the necessary means to an appointed end [that Israel would be a witness of God’s faithfulness in spite of her unfaithfulness]...They were really called by the name of Israel, and that not only by themselves and one another, but by God.” (P. 211)

Oswalt comments that “These introductory verses have another element: a charge... that Israel’s religious profession is insincere. It is neither reliable (truth) nor correct (righteousness). It is in fact, a lie...The prophet is trying to say that if the people as a whole were sincere in what they said about God, they would obey Him, and in this instance would trust Him when He said that He would use a pagan conqueror to achieve His good purposes...

(continued...)

48:2⁸

כִּי־מֵעִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ נִקְרְאוּ

Because⁹ from the set-apart city¹⁰ they were called,

⁷(...continued)

“The implicit charge at the end of **verse 2** seems to be that although the people profess to depend on the God of Israel, they have not truly recognized that He is the Lord of Hosts, the Almighty God Who has all the armies of heaven at His command...Thus the introductory statements function to call attention to the disparity between what is and what ought to be. How can Israel realize all the potential that its great heritage and profound faith have to offer? By squarely facing the contradiction between their words and their actions that is at the heart of their professed faith, by paying careful attention to all that God’s activities with them can teach, and by acting resolutely on what they learn.” (P. 261)

Watts calls the phrase “not in truth” a “‘cynical aside,’ which indicates that the speaker doubts that all these are genuinely interested...This remark documents the scepticism and rejection apparent in the listeners.” (P. 177)

8

Knight comments on **verse 2** that “The Holy One, we recall, named Jerusalem ‘My city’ (**45:13**); in this way that city actually partook of God’s holiness and could be called ‘the Holy City.’ Yet Israel imagined that she too must be automatically holy in this sense, because God had said to her that within the covenant relationship holiness was to be her calling (**Exodus 19:6**)...”

“Relying on her holiness, therefore, she had come to ‘lean upon’ the God of Israel (compare **Micah 3:11**; **Romans 2:17**). In other words she had taken God for granted. What effrontery [Yes, but it is also the case that believers can ‘lean on God’ in a very different and valid way, depending on God for help and guidance rather than following their own petty, limited ideas!] on Israel’s part such an attitude was; what a mis-use of her election it had become! It is possible that Deutero-Isaiah deliberately calls Jerusalem by the title of ‘holy city’ at this particular juncture in order to press home his point more clearly, for this is the first time in history that Jerusalem has been so called by anyone. What he wants to bring home to her is this: how will the unholy people of Israel ever become the servant of God in the unholy land of Babylon?” (P. 116)

9

Oswalt translates כִּי by “Indeed,” stating that it is an “asseverative,” meaning it acts as an emphatic declaration. (P. 256)

10

This name for Jerusalem, “the set-apart city,” or “the holy city,” is found again in **Isaiah 52:1**, and then in **Daniel 9:24**; **Nehemiah 11:1, 18** and in the **New Testament at Matthew 4:5**; **27:53**; **Revelation 11:2**; **21:2, 10**; **22:19**. Knight is correct, we think, in calling its use here its first use in the **Bible**. Alexander states that “It is so called as the seat of true religion,

(continued...)

וְעַל-אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל נִסְמְכוּ

and upon Israel's God they supported themselves--¹¹

יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ:

YHWH of Armies (is) His name.

48:3¹²

הִרְאִישְׁנוֹת מֵאִזְ הַנְּדָתִי

The former / first things¹³ from that time¹⁴ I declared,¹⁵

¹⁰(...continued)

the earthly residence of God, and the center of the church. That the reference is not to mere locality is plain from the application of the name to the whole people." (P. 211)

Muslims still today call Jerusalem *Al-Kuds*, "Glorification of Allah," and this is the name of their Arabic newspaper.

11

Translations of the Hebrew נִסְמְכוּ, "they supported themselves," vary, from "stay themselves," to "lean on," to "claim to rely on," to "rely on," to "upon the God of the Israel leaning for support." See Knight's comment in footnote 7. There is a great deal of difference between "claiming to rely on" and "relying on."

12

Slotki comments on **verses 3-11** that they describe "the ways of God's revelation to His people." (P. 234)

Oswalt comments on **verse 3** that "The first part of the argument has to do with what God has done in the past. In antiquity He announced what He would do in the future. **Genesis 15** reports one such announcement: Abraham is told in advance about the Egyptian sojourn...Not only did the Lord tell what He was going to do in advance, but He also did what He said He would." (Pp. 261-62)

Knight comments that "The redemption from Egypt...was His word *suddenly* proclaimed, and just as quickly it *came to pass*. Thus Israel all along has had the chance to know God's true nature as that of loving care for her and for the world." (P. 16)

13

For this matter of הִרְאִישְׁנוֹת, "the former / first things," see **Isaiah 41:22** (with its end-note 2); **42:9**; **43:9, 18** and **46:9**.

Slotki holds that by "the former things" YHWH means "the events of the past such as the exodus from Egypt, the fall of Sennacherib and the rise of Cyrus." We think of the predictions of Israel's fall to Assyria and exile as predicted by the prophets Amos and Hosea.

(continued...)

וּמִפִּי יֵצְאוּ

and from My mouth they went forth,

וְאֲשִׁמְעֵם

and I caused them to be heard.

¹³(...continued)

North comments that “sometimes the reference is to the early victories of Cyrus; in **43:18** it must be to the exodus; in **46:9** it may be to the exodus, or, more generally, to events in the past... But on the whole it is more likely that ‘the former things’ here are, in a general way, the significant events in Israel’s history. Prominent among them would be the exodus. According to **Genesis 15:12-16**...Yahweh foretold the Egyptian bond-age and exodus to Abraham...Or ‘the former things’ may be the disasters predicted by the prophets from Amos to Jeremiah.” (Pp. 176-77)

14

What is meant by the phrase מֵאֲזַיִת is difficult to determine. It apparently means “from then,” but English translations vary from “from the beginning” to “long ago.” The Greek translation (**Rahfs**) has ἔτι, “still,” or “yet” for this Hebrew phrase. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggests “once,” or literally “from that time”; as an adverb “in time past, of old,” either of a nearer or a remoter past; as a preposition or conjunction, “from time of, since.”

15

Translations of this first line of **verse 3** vary:

King James, “I have declared the former things from the beginning”;

Tanakh, “Long ago, I foretold things that happened”;

New Revised Standard, “The former things I declared long ago”;

New International, “I foretold the former things long ago”;

New Jerusalem, “Things now past I revealed long ago”;

Rahfs, τὰ πρότερα ἔτι ἀνήγγειλα, “The first things still / yet I announced”;

North, “Long ago I foretold the events of times now past.”

Alexander, “The first (or former things) since then I have declared.”

We take the line to mean that YHWH has been active throughout history, foretelling coming events that He later brought to pass--just as He is now doing with regards to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, and the coming of Cyrus to enable their return to Israel. Foretelling future events is nothing new for YHWH—it has constantly been His practice!

North makes the interesting comment that “It was supposed in the ancient world that the fortunes of nations depended on the power of their Gods...Hence, if a people suffered disaster, it was because its God was powerless to save it. Therefore, if Yahweh had not announced the exile beforehand, and insisted that it was He Who was bringing it about, Israel would have assumed that Bel-Marduk was stronger than He.” (P. 177)

פְּתָאִם עָשִׂיתִי

Suddenly I acted / did (it),

וַתְּבֹאֲנָה:

and they came (to pass)!¹⁶

48:4¹⁷

16

Here, as the text continues, it becomes obvious that the former things have to do with the things YHWH has done in Israel's history, not with the biblical story of beginnings.

Westermann comments that "Because of her history Israel knows well the mutual relationship between God's word and His act. There might be a very long lapse of time between the proclamation and its fulfilment. Then God would act all of a sudden, and the thing proclaimed would come to pass." (P. 197)

17

Oswalt comments on **verses 4-5**, asking "But what was the reason for prophecy? Why did God tell in advance what He was going to do? For the first time an explanation is given. He did it because of the fallen human nature...The imagery the author uses here, which occurs elsewhere in the **Bible**, is that of a *stubborn* animal that digs in its heels, stiffens its *neck*, and refuses to be led in a way that it does not want to go (**Exodus 32:9; Deuteronomy 9:6, 13; Psalm 75:6**^{Heb} / **5**^{Eng}...)

"What can God do to counteract this tendency to idolatry? The answer is predictive prophecy. If He can inspire prophets with specific predictions of coming events; if the prophets will clearly attribute them to God; and if the events will come true as predicted, this will be strong evidence that God is Who He says He is...It was not Bel and Nebo (**Isaiah 46:1**) Who caused the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon; it was the Lord. He had foretold it 115 years earlier (**Isaiah 39:5-7**)." (Pp. 262-63)

North comments on **verse 4**, "That Israel had always been self-willed is a recurring reproach in [biblical tradition, especially Deuteronomical materials], but the language here is not just copy-book stuff." What he is referring to here is the unique use of קָשָׁה, "hard" (elsewhere usually "hard of neck"); וַיִּגֵּד בְּרִזְלֵ עֶרְפֶּךָ, "and a sinew of iron your neck"; and וּמִצְחֶךָ נְחֹשֶׁת, "and your forehead bronze."

Knight comments on **verse 4** that "Now a strange statement follows. Deutero-Isaiah declares that God 'foreknew' before His election of Israel that Israel would resist His will. For even as Israel's Creator, He had given her a 'stubborn' heart, a 'brazen forehead,' and an *iron sinew for a neck*. In other words, God had actually created Israel able and determined to resist the purpose that He Himself was planning to work out by His election of her." (P. 116)

מִדַּעְתִּי כִּי קִשָּׁה אַתָּה

Because of / from My knowledge¹⁸ that you (singular) (are) hard / stubborn,¹⁹

וְגִיד בְּרִזָּל עֲרֻפְךָ

and your neck (is) an iron sinew,²⁰

וּמִצְחֶךָ נְחוֹשֶׁת:

and your forehead (is) bronze!²¹

48:5 וְאָנֹכִי לְךָ מֵאָז

And I declared to you from that time,

בְּטֶרֶם תָּבוֹא הִשְׁמַעְתִּיךָ

before it comes I caused you to hear (it).

18

Where our Hebrew text has the phrase מִדַּעְתִּי, “from My knowledge,” 1QIs^a reads מאשר ידעתי, literally “from that I knew,” with dots both above and below the letters *shin*, *resh* and *yodh*, indicating that the copyist questioned the reading.

19

Alexander translates the phrase כִּי קִשָּׁה אַתָּה by “that thou art hard,” and comments that “this is commonly considered an ellipsis [omission of words] for קָשִׁי-לֵב (Ezekiel 3:7), ‘hard of heart,’ or קִשָּׁה-עֲרֻף (Deuteronomy 9:6), ‘hard of neck’, hard-hearted or stiff-necked.” (P. 212)

20

Alexander comments that “The same idea [as hard-hearted or stiff-necked] is expressed still more strongly by... וְגִיד בְּרִזָּל עֲרֻפְךָ, and an iron sinew (is) thy neck.” (Pp. 212-13)

21

Alexander comments that “The hardening of the face or forehead, which is sometimes used in a good sense (e.g. **Isaiah 50:7**), here denotes shameless persistency in opposition to the truth...with some reference...to the habits of animals which push or butt with the forehead.” (P. 213) Slotki comments that the iron neck and the bronze forehead of God’s people are “symbols of obstinacy.” (P. 234)

פֶּן־תֹּאמַר עֲצָבִי עָשָׂם

So that you would not say my idol²² did them,

וּפְסָלִי וְנֹסְפִי צִוּם:

and my (carved) image and my (molten) image²³ commanded them.²⁴

48:6²⁵

22

Oswalt states that the spelling of this noun, עֲצָבִי, “my idol,” has led North [see North’s page 177] to suggest that “the tradition vocalized it to conform to the pronunciation of **bosheth**, ‘shame.’” Oswalt adds that “This kind of treatment of names and words for idols is common in the **Old Testament**.” (P. 257)

23

See **Judges 17:3-4**, where this same double phrase, פְּסָל וְנֹסֶפֶת occurs twice in the description of a single idol.

24

Slotki comments that “This is perhaps an indication that some Jews had lapsed into idolatry while they were in Babylon, and explains the detailed raillery [good-humored teasing, banter] against the manufacture of images in which the prophet indulges.” (P. 235)

We doubt that the prophet intends his language as good-humored teasing or banter! Rather, we think he means his language deeply seriously. It is very difficult to determine whether a statement is meant as teasing or meant seriously in a written document—whereas spoken words, by intonation, can more easily be determined as such.

25

Slotki comments on **verses 6-8** that “Having heard the predictions and witnessed their fulfilment, the people can no longer doubt that God alone plans and rules the destinies of nations. They must, therefore, also believe in the new predictions made by His prophet.” (P. 235)

Oswalt entitles **verses 6-11** “New things,” and comments that “This stanza focuses on the point at issue: God’s ability to do something brand new, something different from what He had done before in the life of His people...The strong words of challenge here fit very well in this sequence. Thus the present text of **chapters 40-48** is structured from the outset and throughout around the conflict between God and His disbelieving people.” (P. 266)

Westermann states that “**Verse 6a** forms the conclusion of this section. It gives a particularly clear indication of the purpose of the utterance. Deutero-Isaiah strives to make his hearers understand. ‘You have heard all this. Must you not yourselves admit it? For when they see and acknowledge how God’s word and His act were united in their history, and how the latter was the product of that unity, then they will also be able to see the fresh and entirely different proclamation.’” (Pp. 197-98)

(continued...)

שְׁמַעְתָּ חִזָּה כְּלָהּ

You (singular) heard—²⁶ see²⁷ all of it!²⁸

²⁵(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verse 6** that “In preparation for the next stage of his argument, Isaiah sums up the significance of what he has just said: you have heard the prophecies; look with understanding eyes and you will see they have all been fulfilled...The nation’s very existence is a fulfillment of the words of the prophets, from Abraham to the present...In contrast to the idol worshipers who were unable to bring forward any evidence that their Gods had spoken what was right (**41:21-24; 43:8-13; 44:7; 46:9-10**), the Hebrews had no option but to announce the plain truth. They could not deny it. Their God knew the future and had the power to bring to pass what He had said.” (Pp. 266-67)

Knight comments on **verse 6**: “So we now reach Deutero-Isaiah’s surprising conclusion to the argument. He declares that God had first let Israel hear the word: ‘Take a look at it as a whole!’ That was when, through the lips of His prophets, He had called upon her to ponder the mighty events through which she had passed, and thereupon to become a witness of God’s actions to her heathen neighbors (compare **43:10**,

You (are) My witnesses--a saying of YHWH--and My servant whom I chose,
so that you will know and will believe in Me; and you will understand that I
(am) He.
Before Me no God was formed; and after Me, there will not be!

Then He puts the onus on each individual Israelite. Israel, however, had not been willing to pay attention. Her heart had been too hard. Therefore God was now about to act once more. Unfortunately this could not be with Israel’s cooperation: it had to be in and through her foolish resistance to His will. This whole conception of a God’s winning His victory through the resistance of His people is surely completely new in the world’s thought.

“On this basis then, Deutero-Isaiah can declare that God is now about to show Israel *new things*. Some interpreters suggest that these things refer to the new exodus which Deutero-Isaiah undoubtedly believed God was about to accomplish for His people, for God was certainly about to set His people free from Babylon and lead them home to Zion. Yet such an ‘act of God’ would be but the ‘sacramental sign’ of a still greater spiritual reality.” (Pp. 116-17)

We say, Perhaps...But it is difficult for us to follow Knight’s argument when simply reading the text, and we wonder. Is Second Isaiah’s argument as clear as Knight makes it out to be?

²⁶

That is, Israel has heard the predictions made by YHWH’s spokespersons.

²⁷

(continued...)

וְאַתֶּם הֲלוֹא תִגִּידוּ

And you (plural),²⁹ will you not declare (it)?

הִשְׁמַעְתִּיךָ חֲדָשׁוֹת מֵעַתָּה

I caused you (singular) to hear new things³⁰ from now on—

וּנְצֻרוֹת וְלֹא יָדַעְתֶּם:

and things guarded, and you did not know them.

48:7³¹

²⁷(...continued)

Where our Hebrew text has the qal imperative, masculine singular רְאוּ, “see!”, the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has no corresponding word: ἤκούσατε πάντα, “you (plural) heard everything,” with no mention of seeing.

28

Having heard those predictions, now the people are invited / commanded to see the fulfilment of all of them.

29

Oswalt observes that “the number [singular or plural] of the subject in the sentence changes from singular to plural halfway through [the verse].” He comments that “the shift indicates the fluidity between the individual and the community in the prophet’s mind. This kind of shift is certainly common in the prophets.” (P. 263)

Rahlfs has plurals throughout the verse, as does the Aramaic targum. Both the Latin Vulgate and 1QIs^a have the same reading as our Hebrew text. Alexander takes this to be a question asked of the idol-Gods of Babylon, “Will not ye predict something?” North comments that “There seems nothing we can do about the abrupt change in the pronominal subject from singular to plural...But the change from singular to plural pronouns is common enough, especially in **Deuteronomy**.” (P. 174)

30

Slotki holds that the “new things” are “such as the fall of Babylon, the redemption of Israel and the recognition of Divine Sovereignty.” (P. 235)

We think the Israelite exiles would be able to see the fall of Babylon and the redemption of Israel, when these foretold events occurred. But the recognition of Divine Sovereignty would not be “seen”—it would be a conclusion which they would draw upon seeing these events occur, and knowing that YHWH’s prophets had foretold them.

31

Slotki comments on **verse 7** that “The events having been announced just before they had come to pass, no one can claim to have predicted or expected them.” (P. 235) This

(continued...)

עַתָּה נִבְרָאוּ וְלֹא מֵאִז

Now they were created, and not long ago;³²

³¹(...continued)

seems like a strange comment, since the prophet is emphasizing again and again that YHWH has predicted these events long before their happening.

Oswalt comments on **verse 7** that it “expands the point made in the last part of **verse 6**. How new are the prophecies being given? So new that they never existed before the present.” He adds that “It is fairly easy to imagine the situation in which this discussion arose. The people might have been saying: If it is true that we are going to suffer a similar fate with Samaria and go into exile, but to Babylon rather than Assyria, and then be restored by an emperor from the east named Cyrus, to a new messianic kingdom, why didn’t Moses or some other prophet tell us about these things? Isaiah’s answer is blunt. Just as prophecy was given so as to refute the claims of the idols (**verse 5**), so not all prophecy was given at once in order to refute the claims of human omniscience...

“An important point here is the insight that this verse gives as to the purpose of predictive prophecy. It is given not so we can know the future, but as confirmatory evidence that we can and should trust God. To use it for the purpose of knowing the future and thus making ourselves secure is only another form of idolatry.” (Pp. 267-68)

Knight comments on **verse 7** stating, “Deutero-Isaiah expounds [makes clear and understandable] these *new things* by saying that even now they are being created. That is to say, they are no mere repetitions of God’s previous mighty acts. Before today, he says, you have never heard of them. They are hidden things (**verse 6**), things that could come forth only from the mind of Israel’s surprising God...Deutero-Isaiah wants his hearers to understand that when they see it, men will not be able to say ‘Behold, I knew it all the time.’

“In passing, we should recognize that it would be ridiculous to ascribe these words to Isaiah of Jerusalem, as do those who believe that Isaiah wrote all sixty-six chapters of the **Book of Isaiah**. This line alone is evidence that he is not the author of this section, **chapters 40-55**...Deutero-Isaiah is claiming [that God can] re-create men and nations to constitute His kingdom, not as of this world (**John 18:36**), but as something wholly new.” (P. 117)

32

This first line of **verse 7** means that the Divine creative action being described is brought into existence for the first time, that is, things that are unique, never before having existed, never before having been heard of. We think this may refer to the Persian Cyrus’ releasing the many different exiles in Babylon, to return to their homes, being given the necessary resources to rebuild their sanctuaries. What victorious conqueror has ever before done such a thing?

North observes that “The verb בָּרָא [‘create’]...is used not only of the initial creation but of God’s creative activity in history.” (P. 178) See: **Isaiah 41:20; 43:1, 7; 45:7-8, 54:16,**

(continued...)

וּלְפָנֵי-יּוֹם וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם

and before a day, and³³ you did not hear them--³⁴

בְּיָמֵי-יְדֹעֵתֶיךָ:

so that you will not say, Look—I knew it!³⁵

³²(...continued)

57:19; 65:18; Jeremiah 31:22; Psalm 51:10^{Heb} / 12^{Eng}. Yes, for the Hebrew Bible, especially for Deutero-Isaiah, creation is on-going—not a “once for all” event.

³³

Oswalt notes that “The conjunction ‘and’ preceding ‘you have not heard creates a problem for the interpretation. If it were not there [as it is not in 1QIs^a], the line would be straightforward: ‘and before today you have not heard.’ [Rahlf’s] reads ‘and you did not hear these things in former days’...The absence of agreement among the versions suggests that all of them are trying to make sense of [the Hebrew text].” (P. 264) Again we note the riddle-like nature of the prophetic message.

³⁴

Where our Hebrew text has וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם, “and you (singular) did not hear them,” 1QIs^a has לוֹא שָׁמַעְתִּים, “and I did not hear them.” The other ancient witnesses agree with our Hebrew text.

North holds that **verses 6-7** are “unintelligible if written by the eighth-century Isaiah.” (P. 3)

³⁵

We take **verse 7** to be depicting YHWH, speaking through the prophet, stating that the present Divine message / prediction is brand new, novel--just created by YHWH—a message and prediction that Israel has not heard or known before.

And we ask, what message or prediction can this be? The prophet has already spoken about Cyrus, and his freeing the Israelite exiles, enabling their return to Jerusalem and the cities of Judah., holding that all of this He had long foretold.

As we read **chapters 40-55**, we wonder whether the truly new, novel thing is referring to the depiction of the suffering servant in **52:13-53:12**, YHWH’s servant, an individual who willingly suffers and dies on behalf of Israel. Instead of destroying Israel, which the nation deserves, YHWH is depicted as stating that He will send His servant to bear Israel’s sins, willingly suffering rejection and taking upon himself the Divine punishment that Israel deserved, enabling Israel to be made righteous. Who could ever have imagined that? Where has that prediction ever been made before?

What do you think **verse 7** means? What do you think the “new” prediction / message is? Can it mean that YHWH is going to use His rebellious servant Israel to fulfill His will in

(continued...)

³⁵(...continued)

spite of their disbelief and disobedience?

36

Watts comments on **verses 4-8** that “The speech turns bitter when He refers to Israel’s *stubbornness*...[Yahweh had] revealed His secrets of what He would do, which had now come to pass. As He expected, they did not even hear them...God’s bitterness shows. Israel is called a traitor (*betray*) and a *rebel*. Her present unbelieving mood had been endemic [regularly found] from her youth, a theme familiar in **Hosea** and **Ezekiel**.” (P. 177)

Oswalt comments on **verse 8** that “As **verse 7** expanded on **verse 6**, so **verse 8** expands on **verse 7**. Again the point is made that these prophecies had never been given before. In three different verbal phrases, each introduced by the particle **גַּם**, **gam** ‘moreover,’ the point is made that God is revealing something previously unheard-of...

“Thus the principle of prophecy being enunciated here is: Enough information in enough time so that it will be unmistakably clear that God is in control of history, but not enough so that people can become secure in their own foreknowledge and not need to live in dependence on God...An interesting manifestation of this in modern times is the fascination with ‘end-times prophecy.’ Despite specific biblical statements to the contrary (e.g., **Acts 1:7**), we insist on trying to know what the future holds.” (P. 268)

But is **verse 8** “enunciating a principle of prophecy”? We think not, and think that Oswalt’s comment is not very helpful for understanding the text, especially as he does not elaborate on the text’s statement that these new things had never been heard before—which goes against Oswalt’s view that the historical Isaiah had announced these things some 200 years previously.

Knight comments on **verse 8**, “How tragic that the people of God should never have cooperated with God’s plan to use them. Even their suffering in the exile and the loss of the holy city had not opened *your [Israel’s] ear* to hear the word of God as it was disclosed in events interpreted by the mouths of the prophets. Israel was completely deaf (compare **42:19**)...

“This verse contains a terrible indictment—by the living God...Israel, the only nation given the chance to hear the word, had been a rebel since birth. Her birth, by the way, is here equated in poetic parallelism with the exodus events. Thus Deutero-Isaiah is laying particular emphasis upon the giving of the covenant at Sinai, for that was the moment when God both adopted Israel as His Own, and married her as His bride (**Exodus 19:1-8**).” (P. 118)

But does this text say that Israel was “the only nation given the chance to hear” God’s word? Does not the **Book of Exodus** depict YHWH sending Moses to Egypt to declare to Egypt His word? Is not the story of the plagues that came upon Egypt the story of what happened to Egypt and Pharaoh because of their refusal to hear YHWH’s word being spoken to them by Moses and Aaron? In the light of **Psalm 19:1-6** should we not conclude that God’s

(continued...)

גַּם לֹא־שָׁמַעְתָּ

Also you (singular) did not hear;

גַּם לֹא יָדַעְתָּ

also you did not know;

³⁶(...continued)

word is being proclaimed to all the world every day?

And was not a Divine message announced to all the nations through the pre-exilic prophets? We say it was, as there are sections in the **Books of Isaiah**, and **Jeremiah**, and in the exilic prophet **Ezekiel**, and others such as **Jonah**, which depict YHWH's message to the nations other than Israel.

Again, we have to ask, is this in fact “a terrible indictment—by the living God”? For those who believe every word in the **Bible** is God's word, it will be taken that way. But obviously these are Second Isaiah's words, as he attempts to confront the exiles with what they are doing, preaching to them, scolding them in the name of God. And it seems impossible to take all of the statements in **Second Isaiah** and then **Third Isaiah** as “God's word.” If they are, then God has certainly wavered on the issues discussed, and contradicted Himself. But if they are the words of devout disciples of the historical Isaiah, doing their best to make sense of what is happening, and seeking to understand what the Divine message is for such a time and situation, then we can understand the wavering and the contradictory viewpoints expressed. What do you think?

And we ask, Is it not overstatement to say that Israel “never cooperated with God's plan to use them”? It is quite true that the history of Israel contains many depictions of Israel's failures and sins; but also contained within that history are many depictions of a faithful Israel, with Godly leaders, listening to, and doing the will of God—for example in the times of Joshua, and Deborah, and Samuel, and Hezekiah, and Josiah, and others—never perfectly or without problems, but still, not always a history of rebellion. What do you think? Compare **Psalms 78**, **105**, and **106**—all three of which are lengthy depictions of Israel's history. However, where **Psalms 78** and **106** depict Israel in a very negative light, as having a history of unbelief, **Psalms 105** depicts that history in a much more positive light, with no mention of unbelief. We think Second Isaiah has listened to **Psalms 78** and **106**, but has not paid much attention to the positive side of the story in **Psalms 105**. To say that Israel “never heard,” or was “completely deaf” is to overlook individuals like the historical Isaiah and his disciples, who certainly listened for YHWH's word, not to mention the many “heroes of faith” (see **Hebrews 11**) in the story of Israel who were open to the word of God and obedient. How will you deal with this?

גַּם מֵאִזְ לֹא־פִתְחָה אֹזְנָךְ

also from long ago you did not open³⁷ your ear.³⁸

כִּי יָדַעְתִּי בְנִגּוּד תִּבְגְּדוּר

Because I knew, you would certainly act faithlessly!

וּפִשַׁע מִבֶּטֶן קָרָא לְךָ:

And One Rebelling from (the) Womb³⁹ you were called!⁴⁰

37

Where our Hebrew text has פִּתְחָה, “she (did not) open,” 1QIs^a פתחת, “you (did not) open.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has ἡνοιξά, “I (did not) open.”

38

For this third line of **verse 8 Rahlfs** has “neither from (the) first did I open the ears of yours (singular).”

39

Oswalt states concerning the significance of *rebel from the womb* that he suspects that “no specific historical moment is in the prophet’s mind; rather, we have here simply an epigrammatic [concise, pithy] way of saying that rebelliousness is not merely a phase in Israel’s (or humanity’s) experience but part of our very nature.” (P. 268)

Compare **Psalm 51:6**,

Look--in iniquity I was brought forth by labor-pains;
and in missing-of-the-mark my mother conceived me!

Translations of **Psalm 51:6** vary:

King James, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

Tanakh, “Indeed I was born with iniquity; with sin my mother conceived me.”

New Revised Standard, “Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.”

New International, “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.”

New Jerusalem, “remember, I was born guilty, a sinner from the moment of conception.”

Rahlfs, “Look--for in lawlessnesses I was conceived, and in missings-of-the-mark the mother of mine became pregnant.”

We say, This is a good example of how the “proof-text” use of the **Bible** is so misleading. **Psalm 51:6** is not “God’s statement,” but rather, the statement of a person who is convicted of his failures, of his sinfulness, and who prays to God confessing that guilt, probably using hyperbole, for how could he have known anything concerning his conception and birth, or his spiritual condition while an infant? Had his mother or father told him this? Or is it not just a way of saying “I have always been a sinner”? Are we to take every word in every prayer

(continued...)

³⁹(...continued)

in the **Bible** as “God’s word”? We think not. To take this as a description of the “total depravity” of every baby born in the world, as Calvin did, is just as wrong as taking the story of Samuel’s birth to Hannah as the description of every baby’s birth!

40

We take **verse 8** to be YHWH’s explanation to Israel of why He didn’t make this prediction of the coming of His “suffering servant” known beforehand—it is because YHWH knew Israel was not prepared for such a revelation. Israel had not been ready to hear and know, and her ear had been closed; and YHWH knew she would act faithlessly, rebel as she was! So Second Isaiah views the situation of the exiles.

Alexander states that “Having given the perverseness of the people as a reason why they knew so much by previous revelation, He now assigns it as a reason why they knew so little. These, although at first sight inconsistent statements, are but varied aspects of the same thing. God had told them so much beforehand, lest they should ascribe the event to other causes. He had told them no more, because He knew that they would wickedly abuse His favor. In a certain sense, and to a certain extent, it was true that they had heard and known these things beforehand. In another sense, and beyond that extent, it was equally true that they had neither heard nor known them.” (P. 214)

As Slotki notes, “From national infancy Israel showed a tendency to be rebellious against God’s commands.” (P. 236) Yes, and also a tendency to refuse to listen to and heed her Divine revelations through YHWH’s spokespersons! But this is a generalization, that overlooks, or fails to mention, the many examples in Israel’s history of Israelites who listened for the Divine word, believed it, and obeyed it—for example, the historical Isaiah and his disciples, as depicted in **Isaiah 8:16-20**, not to mention Moses, Joshua, Deborah, Samuel, etc. etc. What do you think **verse 8** means?

41

Slotki comments on **verses 9-11** that “Israel, despite his transgressions, has been preserved for the sake of God’s name. By chastisement and suffering [Israel] was spiritually purified but, that the name of God not be profaned and His glory ascribed to another, he was not utterly destroyed.” (P. 236)

Oswalt states concerning these verses that “In view of God’s intimate knowledge of Israel’s stubborn tendencies to idolatry (**verse 5**) and rebellion (**verse 8**), why has He not simply abandoned them to their rightful fate? Why is He going to do these new things in deliverance? Isaiah answers with a theme that has its inception in **Exodus 34** and that reaches its ultimate expression in **Ezekiel 36:16-38**...

“When God entered into a covenant with the people of Israel, His name (His reputation) came to be inextricably associated with them. Moses presented this argument to God when God asked why He should not destroy Israel at Sinai after the golden calf incident (**Exodus 32:11-14**). The question is not one of legality or justice, but rather what the nations will think of God when the just destruction should occur. Thus the real question is not whether God is

(continued...)

⁴¹(...continued)

just, but whether He is gracious. Will the nations looking at God's justice accuse Him of capriciousness (like all their Gods)? Or will they see a God Who is unlike all the rest in His incredible patience and mercy?" (P. 269)

We understand the text as saying that Israel has been "refined" and "tested" by affliction, but we see nothing about the nation having been "spiritually purified." Rather, Israel is a nation being tolerated by YHWH and not cut off, simply for His name's sake, so that His name would not be profaned. Even though having been redeemed by YHWH (**40:1-2**), she is still a nation of traitors and apostates! If YHWH were not concerned for His reputation, He would have gone ahead and cut Israel off permanently! But because YHWH is concerned for His name / reputation, He is determined to find another way! YHWH is a God of long-suffering and forgiveness—what a reputation that makes for Him! See end-note 1.

Verse 9 depicts YHWH as holding off, refraining, deferring His anger, refusing to cut Israel off, even though, it is implied, Israel deserved destruction—all of this "for the sake of His name"!

Watts comments that this "is the opposite of the instructions given to Cyrus (**45:5**). Cyrus is to do his thing and receive his reward 'for Israel's sake.' But God moves for His Own reasons as well, whether these concern His reputation or His Own essential character. This is what the **New Testament** calls grace! Because of [this] He had held back deserved judgment. Otherwise they would have been *cut off* and destroyed long before as Ezekiel had recognized (**Ezekiel 20**)." (P. 177)

Rahfs translates **verse 9** by "For the sake of My name, I will show you (singular) My wrath; and I will bring upon you My glorious acts, so that I will not utterly destroy you!"

And we ask, What are those "glorious acts" that the Greek translator had in mind that would avert utter destruction? Can they be anything less than the coming of His "suffering servant," to bear Israel's sins, thereby making of them a nation that can fulfill the Divine mission of bringing light and justice to the nations of the earth through sacrificing themselves, rather than being an exclusive, segregated nation, intent on offering up rivers of animal blood in sacrifice for its own sins, caring nothing for the sins of the world?

Knight comments on **verse 9**, that "God's wrath is what we see of God when His love encounters sin. For the heat of His zeal must necessarily burn up and destroy that which essays to pollute His holy love. Yet the tension between God's mercy and His wrath is necessarily acute. For seven hundred years now, ever since the days of Moses, God had 'held My wrath in check,' not wanting to *cut you off* (compare **Jeremiah 13:11** [which says nothing concerning YHWH's not wanting to cut Israel off]). This He had done so as to be true to Himself—*for My name's sake...*'because of the praise due to Me'; for God's true nature is positive, creative, loving, merciful. And He had sworn to be faithful and loyal to Israel forever. That loyalty exhibits His true nature." (P. 118)

(continued...)

לְמַעַן שְׁמִי

For the sake of My name,⁴²

אֶאְרִיךְ אַפִּי

I will prolong / postpone⁴³ My anger

וּתְהַלֵּלְתִּי

and (for the sake of) My praise

אֶחְטֵם-לָךְ

I will restrain⁴⁴ (My anger) to / for / against you,⁴⁵

⁴¹(...continued)

We say Yes...but YHWH's Self-described nature in **Exodus 34:6-7** which includes steadfast-love and compassion / mercy also includes "by no means clearing the guilty, but rather punishing the iniquity of fathers on children to the third and fourth generation," which Knight conveniently does not mention.

And we observe how Knight's comment is describing God in the third person, which is certainly the case for Second Isaiah's words, and then suddenly Knight begins to quote those words as "God's words," changing from the third person to the first person. We take this to be clear indication that it is Second Isaiah's words, that Knight is quoting, not God's.

Of course, this raises the question of how much of a prophet's words are his own, and how much have come from God. We say the prophets have entered into the Divine counsel, and have heard a message from God that has transformed their lives. But still, the message that they speak is their own, in their language, and limited by their partial understanding, by their "seeing through a mirror / in an enigma" as is stated so clearly in **Numbers 12:6** and by Paul in **1 Corinthians 13:12**.

⁴²

See end-note 3 on **Isaiah 43:25** for what "for My name's sake" means, along with end-note 1 on this chapter.

⁴³

Translations of the hiphil verb אֶאְרִיךְ, vary from "will I defer," to "I control," to "I defer," to "I delay," to "I will show you My wrath."

⁴⁴

The qal imperfect, 1st person singular אֶחְטֵם, "I will restrain," occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, and as a result its definition is uncertain. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** cites Arabic and Aramaic words with these consonants which have to do with the nose-ring of camels, and the training of wild animals. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has ἐπαύξω, "I will bring upon."

(continued...)

לְבַלְתִּי הַכְרִיתְךָ:

so as not to cause your cutting off.⁴⁶

⁴⁴(...continued)

Translations of this line vary:

King James, “and for my praise will I refrain for thee”;

Tanakh, “To My own glory, I am patient with you”;

New Revised Standard, “for the sake of my praise I restrain it for you”;

Rahlfs, καὶ τὰ ἔνδοξά μου ἐπάξω ἐπὶ σοι, “and the glorious things of Mine I will bring upon you (singular).”

⁴⁵

For a similar thought, but with a slight difference, see the beautiful closing passage of **Zephaniah, 3:19-20**:

19 Look at Me—working with all your [daughter Jerusalem’s] oppressors at that time—
and I will save / deliver her who is limping,
and her who is cast out I will gather.

And I will place them—their shame—for praise, and for a name (of renown)
in all the earth!

20 At that time I will bring you (plural)--
and at the time of My gathering you together--
because I will give / make you for a name (of renown),
and for praise in / among all peoples of the land / earth,
when I return your captivity / restore your fortune before your eyes,
said YHWH!

⁴⁶

For this last line of **verse 9**, where our Hebrew text has לְבַלְתִּי הַכְרִיתְךָ, “so as not to cause your cutting off,” **Rahlfs** has “in order that I will not utterly destroy you (singular).”

Oswalt comments on **verse 9** that “At the heart of Israel’s worship is the praise of this incredible graciousness on God’s part...He must save His people, not because they deserve it, but in order for the world to know the nature of the one true God...Despite our sin, despite the richly deserved destiny of every one of us, God must [we say, ‘will’] deliver His people so that the world may know the truth.

“But if God is gracious, why did He allow Israel to undergo the terrors of siege and exile? The answer is that He was not seeking to destroy His covenant people...Judgment is never God’s intended last word. Judgment is always considered to be the means of hope, in heaven’s view. God does not want to cut off anyone. But He does hope to bring them to their senses as they experience some of the results that their rebellion deserves.” (P. 269)

And we ask Oswalt, if “judgment is always considered to be the means of hope,” then isn’t the Roman Catholic teaching concerning the Divine fire’s “purgatorial nature” justified?

(continued...)

⁴⁶(...continued)

And doesn't this line of reasoning lead to universal salvation, as the fire of God's wrath / love eventually accomplishes its purpose?

⁴⁷

Oswalt comments on **verse 10** that "This theme of discipline, not destruction, is further expanded in this verse. God did not wish to destroy the people of Israel, but to *refine* them...It is precisely because Israel is the chosen of God that He is unwilling to leave them in an unrefined state. That these tragic experiences have befallen them is not a sign they are *not* elect, but precisely that they *are* elect. They are not a sign that God does not care for them, but that He does. **Hebrews 12:5-11** expounds on **Proverbs 3:11-12** to make the same point." (Pp. 269-70)

And we ask again, does not this reasoning lead eventually to "universal salvation"? What father will exterminate his child as a part of "discipline"?

Knight comments on this same verse, "But not even the chosen people can mock God forever. So finally God had to act, as happened at the historic moment of 587 B.C.E., when Nebuchadrezzar sacked the holy city and took the cream of its population into exile. 'See how I have been refining you...testing you' (compare:

Psalm 66:10,

Because God tested us;
You refined / tested us like the silver is refined / tested!

Ezekiel 22:20-22,

20 a gathering of silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin in (the) midst of a
furnace,
to blow upon them fire to melt it--
in this way I will gather in My anger and in My wrath, and I will put you (there)
and I will melt you!
21 And I will gather (synonym) you, and I will blow upon you with (the) fire of My
wrath;
and you will be melted in its midst!
22 Like silver is melted in a furnace's midst,
so you will be melted in its midst.
And you will know that I, YHWH, poured out My wrath upon you!

God had never intended of course [what is this 'of course' based on? There are many statements that seem to say that if Israel continues in disobedience, she will suffer the Divine curse—**Leviticus 26:14-45** (which ends with a statement that this will not mean total extermination, **verses 44-45**) and **Deuteronomy 28:15-68** (which has no such statement at its end)]...

(continued...)

הִנֵּה צִרְפָּתִיךָ

Look—I refined / proved you (singular),

⁴⁷(...continued)

“For God must remain true to His side of the covenant even though Israel should break hers [but in the light of **Deuteronomy 28**, God’s side of the covenant is that a disobedient people will suffer His curse, with all sorts of punishment]. Long ago in the days of Egypt, however, He had already revealed what He would eventually have to do to Israel (**Exodus 3:2**, where Moses saw a bush that was burning, but was not consumed [but is this a picture of Israel being refined in God’s fire, but not being consumed? This is Knight’s interpretation—but the text does not make it clear that this is what the burning bush symbolized], and He had also revealed how suffering is to be understood as a fiery furnace that must be endured (**Deuteronomy 4:20** [which depicts Egypt as having been an ‘iron furnace,’ but which says nothing about all suffering to be understood in that light; here it is the period of exile in Babylon that is being described as a furnace, but ‘all suffering’?])...

“Yet now in this new testing period of the exile in Babylon, even the heat of the fire of the wrath of God had not been able to smelt out any *silver* at all [where does the text say that?]. Deutero-Isaiah is therefore declaring in this line that there existed nothing inherent in Israel herself that could be of use to God. There was in fact no vestige of intrinsic goodness in the chosen people, no silver at all. Herein we see the extraordinary paradox, that God has

chosen a people to be His servant who are in themselves intrinsically useless, and yet he is determined to use them.” (Pp. 118-19)

But is Knight right? Does God see “nothing good” in His people Israel, whom He called His “treasured possession,” and to whom He assigned the task of being a “kingdom of priests,” and a “holy nation” (**Exodus 19:5-6**)? We understand the statements concerning Israel’s being “blind” and “deaf” in **Second Isaiah**—but are we to take from those statements that there is therefore nothing good in Israel? Is there absolutely nothing in Israel that could be of use to God? Is Israel “intrinsically useless”? When the Israelite exiles in Babylon are given the name of “Zion,” and told to lift up their voice proclaiming the good news of what God is doing for them, does that not assume that “Zion” has some worth and use?

And how does Knight’s totally negative view of Israel measure up to the view of **Genesis** that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, and are assigned by God to be in charge of the earth? Has all of that completely changed because of humanity’s disobedience?

Perhaps Knight is right in his interpretation of **Second Isaiah**...But we wonder if he is not bringing in his theological ideas from elsewhere (such as **Psalms 51:6**), and reading them into the text of **Second Isaiah**.

וְלֹא בְכֶסֶף

and not with silver / money,⁴⁸

48

What does this phrase וְלֹא בְכֶסֶף, “and not in / with silver” mean?

Alexander states that “Some read בְכֶסֶף (as silver), and other take the ב itself as a particle of comparison, or bring out substantially the same sense by rendering it *with* (i.e. in company with) *silver*, or by means of the same process...The opinions of interpreters have been divided chiefly between two. The first of these explains the Prophet’s words to mean, *not for silver* (or money), but gratuitously [freely]...The other explanation...takes the sense to be, *not with silver* (i.e. pure metal) as the result of the process. This agrees well with the context, which makes the want of merit on the part of Israel continually prominent. It also corresponds exactly to the other clause, *I have chosen thee* (not in wealth, or power, or honor, but) *in the furnace of affliction*...

“It is certainly more probable, and more in keeping with the context and his whole design, to understand him as saying, I have found no merit in thee, and have chosen thee in the extreme of degradation and affliction. If the furnace of affliction was designed to have a distinct historical meaning, it probably refers not to Babylon, but Egypt, which is repeatedly called an iron furnace. This would agree exactly with the representations elsewhere made respecting the election of Israel in Egypt.” (Pp. 215-16)

North comments that “To buy for nothing seems a contradiction, but the Purchaser is Yahweh, Who, when He redeems (**Isaiah 43:1; 48:20; Psalms 74:2, 77:15^{Heb} / 16^{Eng}**) Israel, does not pay anything. Indeed, in **Isaiah 55:1** people are invited to buy grain...’without money’...But nowhere else in the **Old Testament** can the root זָרַח [which is used here, צָרַחְתִּי] ...possibly have the meaning ‘buy.’” (Pp. 178-79)

He goes on to explain that the verb means “refine” or “test,” or “assay,” and the phrase וְלֹא בְכֶסֶף should be understood as “and not for silver / money.” He states that “The meaning will then be that Yahweh has ‘assayed’ [‘tested’ ‘refined’] Israel, but not for any silver that has accrued to Him from the process! The exile has brought Him neither pleasure nor profit; Israel has been mostly ‘dross’ (**Isaiah 1:22, 25; Ezekiel 22: 18-22**).” (P. 179) He adds that two Hebrew manuscripts read the root בָּחַן, “examine,” “try,” and this is the reading of 1QIs^a. “It is an historical fact that out of the ‘dross’ that was Israel, some precious metal was extracted.” (**ibid.**)

Watts comments on **verse 10** that “God’s alternative to instant judgment was a refining process...This chapter is the last time that Yahweh addresses Israel by name in the [**Book of Isaiah**].” (P. 177)

בְּחַרְתִּיךָ

I chose / tested you,⁴⁹

בְּכֹר עֲנִי:

in a furnace of affliction!⁵⁰

49

Translations of the phrase בְּחַרְתִּיךָ, vary from “I have chosen thee,” to “I test you,” to “I have tested you,” to “I have chosen you.” The translation “test” involves changing the Hebrew text to read בְּחַנְתִּיךָ, as 1QIs^a reads. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) of **verse 10** is quite different: ἰδοὺ πέπρακά σε οὐχ ἕνεκεν ἀργυρίου ἐξειλάμην δέ σε ἐκ καμίνου πτωχείας, “Look—I have sold you (singular) not for the sake of silver / money; but then I delivered you out of a furnace of poverty.”

50

The word כֹּר, “furnace,” occurs some 9 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, at: **Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Isaiah 48:10** (here); **Jeremiah 11:4; Ezekiel 22:18, 20, 22; Proverbs 17:3 and 27:21**. Of these, three have to do specifically with the “iron furnace” which Israel experienced in Egypt, **Deuteronomy 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51**, and **Jeremiah 11:4**.

The two statements in **Proverbs** are wisdom statements, comparing YHWH’s testing of human hearts to the refining of gold (**17:3**) or the testing that comes when people are being praised (**27:21**). The passage in **Ezekiel 22:18-22** gives a much fuller picture of the furnace’s procedure:

- 18 Son of a human, Israel’s House, they have become to Me for dross;
all of them (are) bronze and tin,
and iron and lead in (the) midst of a furnace—
dross / worthless remains of silver they have become!
- 19 Therefore, in this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
Because of all of you (plural) becoming dross,
therefore look at Me—gathering you to / into Jerusalem’s midst—
- 20 a gathering of silver and bronze and iron and lead and tin in (the) midst of a
furnace,
to blow upon them fire to melt it--
in this way I will gather in My anger and in My wrath, and I will put you (there) and I will
melt you!
- 21 And I will gather (synonym) you, and I will blow upon you with (the) fire of My
wrath;
and you will be melted in its midst!
- 22 Like silver is melted in a furnace’s midst,
so you will be melted in its midst.
And you will know that I, YHWH, poured out My wrath upon you!

(continued...)

⁵⁰(...continued)

Similar to what we have learned from the **Book of Job** concerning life as a matter of Divine testing—harsh, unrelenting, excruciating testing—so here in **Isaiah 48**, the Nation of Israel is depicted as having gone through such a furnace of Divine testing! And, just as the **Book of Job** reveals at its close that the testing finally ended, and Job was richly blessed, so the **Book of Isaiah** will go on to predict wonderful blessings in the future for the Nation of Israel.

And we think that while Alexander is correct that oftentimes in the **Hebrew Bible** the furnace has reference to what happened to Israel in Egypt, in the light of Ezekiel's lengthy statement, it is obvious that the Babylonian exile is also considered a furnace of testing for Israel. And in the light of the **Book of Job**, we should also conclude that behind all of this is the teaching that life itself, for all people and nations, is a "furnace-testing." Should we not view the many biblical statements of Divine fire coming down on peoples and nations in this light, purifying gold and silver? What do you think?

At the close of **Ezekiel 16**, it is affirmed that YHWH is going to restore the fortunes of the three notorious sister-prostitute cities—Jerusalem, and Samaria, and Sodom! That is, though these sinful cities have suffered destruction by Divine fire, that does not mean there is no hope for them, but rather means that the fire of God, Who is burning love, will ultimately cleanse them, even after their destruction / death. Can you fit that into your theology? In your view, is there hope for Sodom? And if there is, is that not the basis for proclaiming good news to all the earth, concerning the nature of Israel's God and theirs?

Knight comments on **verse 11** that "The resolution of such a paradox [see his statement in footnote 43] can obviously be discovered only in the faith which Deutero-Isaiah sets forth, viz., that God's purpose and plan are to be understood in terms of grace alone [but where in Second Isaiah is this phrase to be found, 'grace alone'? It is not; but it is found in modern Lutheran theology]. Or in the actual words of Deutero-Isaiah, repeated for the sake of emphasis, '*For My Own sake, for My Own sake I have been doing this.*' Evidently refining Israel in the fire has been the only course left open for God to pursue; 'for how can (My name) continue to be profaned?' Note **Ezekiel 36:19-23** for this theme:

- 19 And I scattered them in the nations,
and they were scattered (synonym) in the lands,
according to their way, and according to deeds, I judged them!
- 20 And he (Israel) came to the nations where they came;
and they profaned My set-apart name,
when (it was) said to / of them, These (are) YHWH's people,
and from his land they went forth!
- 21 And I spared / had compassion for My set-apart name,
which they profaned—(the) House of Israel—in the nations where they
came!
- 22 Therefore, say to Israel's House, In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
Not for your sake am I acting, House of Israel—
but rather for My set-apart name which you profaned in the nations where you

(continued...)

48:11 לְמַעַנִּי לְמַעַנִּי אֶעֱשֶׂה

For My sake, for My sake I do (it),⁵¹

⁵⁰(...continued)

came!

23 And I will set-apart / consecrate My great name, the one profaned in the nations,
which you defiled in their midst.
And the nations will know that I (am) YHWH--
it is a saying of YHWH--
when I am set-apart / consecrated among / by you (plural), in their eyes.

Deutero-Isaiah would probably know this passage. On the other hand, God will never let His worthless people go, for never under any circumstances can He be faithless to the covenant [but the covenant predicts Divine curse on a disobedient Israel!] He has made with them. Consequently He does not even consider showing forth His glory by choosing and uniting Himself with any other people on the face of the earth.” (P. 119) Compare:

Isaiah 42:8,

I (am) YHWH! That (is) My name!
And My glory I will not give to another,
and My praise to the idols!

Isaiah 44:23,

Cry aloud, heavens! Because YHWH did (it) / acted!
Raise a shout, lowest parts of earth!
Break forth, mountains, (with) a ringing cry–forest, and every tree in it!
Because YHWH redeemed / acted as Next-of-Kin to Jacob,
and in Israel He will be glorified / glorify Himself.

Ezekiel 20:9,

And I acted on behalf of My name,
so as not to be polluted in (the) eyes of the nations;
who (are) in their midst–
so that I was made known to them before their eyes,
to bring them forth from Egypt-land.

⁵¹

Compare end-note 3 on **Isaiah 43:25** and end-note 1 on this chapter. YHWH is intent on living up to His name, as depicted in **Exodus 34:6-7**. We believe that Christian theologies that depict God as finally destroying the large mass of humanity in a burning, everlasting “Hell,” while saving only the small minority of orthodox Christian believers, do a great disservice to the name of God–“profaning” it, by making God to appear as basically an unforgiving, vengeful God, instead of the God of **Exodus 34:6-7**, Whose grace is thousands of times

(continued...)

כִּי אֵיךְ יִחַל

because how would it be profaned?⁵²

וְכַבֹּדִי לְאַחַר לֹא-אֶתֶּן:

And My glory, I will not give to another!⁵³

⁵¹(...continued)

greater than His punishment.

52

The Hebrew for this first line is לְמַעַנִי לְמַעַנִי אֶעֱשֶׂה כִּי אֵיךְ יִחַל, “For My sake, for My sake I will do / act, because how will it be profaned!” **Rahlfs** has “For My sake I will do / act for you (singular), because the name of Mine was profaned.”

Where our Hebrew text reads the niphal imperfect יִחַל, **yechal**, “it will / would be profaned,” with reference to “My name” in **verse 9**, 1QIs^a has אִיחַל, **eychal**, which may be an attempt to change the verb to 1st person singular, “I will / would profane (it).” Both the Syriac and Latin Vulgate appear to be translating a Hebrew text with אֶחַל, **echal**, “I will / would profane.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has τὸ ἐμὸν ὄνομα βεβηλοῦται, “My Own name is being profaned.”

But what does this mean overall? Do the first two lines of **verse 11** mean that if YHWH had not allowed Israel to go through the furnace of affliction, and had not delivered them from it, His name would have been profaned? As Slotki notes, “allowing the extermination of His people would be interpreted by the other nations as due to God’s powerlessness to save His people.” (P. 236)

Alexander comments on **verse 11** that it is “commonly restricted to the restoration of the Jews from exile; but this specific application of the promise is not made till afterwards. The terms are comprehensive, and contain a statement of the general doctrine, as the sum of the whole argument, that what [YHWH] does for His Own people, is in truth done not for any merit upon their part, but to protect His Own Divine honor.” (P. 216)

For the last line of **verse 11**, compare **Isaiah 42:8**,

I (am) YHWH! That (is) My name!

And My glory I will not give to another,
and My praise to the idols!

53

YHWH does not intend to allow the nations to conquer Israel, His people, and then proudly take credit for their Gods being more powerful than YHWH—taking His “glory” for themselves. And we ask, So how does YHWH intend to gain glory for Himself? The answer,
(continued...)

⁵³(...continued)

we think, is that He will send His messiah / anointed one Cyrus to the sinful exiles in Babylon, to release them and allow them to return to their homeland, with the finances necessary for rebuilding their center of worship of YHWH. Do you agree with this interpretation? If not, what do you suggest?

Westermann states, "God's honor, which He does not give to another, is involved in the act He now does, which is an intervention in world-history on His chosen people's behalf that is without precedent...As we know from Trito-Isaiah, the message of salvation and nothing but salvation which Deutero-Isaiah had been commissioned to declare and which Trito-Isaiah also proclaimed had additions made to it after the return in the shape of admonitions, reprimands and oracles of doom...In his day it seemed no longer possible to proclaim salvation and nothing but salvation. At the same time he wished to preserve and transmit Deutero-Isaiah's message. He therefore added charges against Israel." (Pp. 198-99)

⁵⁴

Oswalt entitles **verses 12-22** "Listen to me." He entitles **verses 12-16** "The Lord of eternity and time." He comments that "Now, after that summation of Israel's less-than-felicitous history of hearing / obeying [in **verses 1-11**], the prophet once again calls on the people to hear. The argument is not a new one; in many ways it sums up everything said in **chapters 40-47**. Since God is the sole Creator of the universe, the only One Who can declare His purpose in advance, they should not hesitate to believe His prediction of deliverance, even though it should come through the pagan emperor Cyrus (**verses 12-16**).

"**Verses 17-22** function as a conclusion, summarizing the entire chapter. First the people are reminded of what could have been if they had obeyed God in the past (**verses 17-19**). Then they are challenged to believe in Him now (**verses 20-22**)." (P. 274)

But the text, rather than labeling Cyrus a "pagan" as Oswalt does, has labeled him YHWH's messiah / anointed one (**45:1**), the instrument of His will.

North entitles **verses 12-19** "The Contemporaneity Of History." He comments that "The address is to all Israel throughout her history: 'therefore I told you long ago,' before the birth of any living Israelite. Underlying is the concept of the corporate personality of the nation in the past and in the present, so now, in **verses 18-19**, what is said is not 'If only *your fathers* had paid heed to my commandments, then your peace would have been like a river...' but 'If only *you* had paid heed.' Yahweh is contemporary with all history: 'ever since anything came to pass, there am I' (**verse 16**...) Not only so, but the present generation of Israelites is, in a sense, contemporary with Israel's history throughout its course...

"The Greeks may have been far better historians than the Hebrews, but they had no conception of any 'theology of history.' They saw 'the rhythm of the universe as a cyclical movement governed by an impersonal law...For the Hebrews, history had a beginning, in the creation (which the Greeks never really believed in), a purpose determined by God, and it would have a consummation." (Pp. 180-81)

(continued...)

שְׁמַע אֵלַי יַעֲקֹב וְיִשְׂרָאֵל מִקְרָאִי

Hear / listen to Me, Jacob, and Israel, My called one!⁵⁵

אֲנִי-הוּא

⁵⁴(...continued)

Of course, this is questionable, as there are great “histories” in the biblical materials—such as the story of David in **2 Samuel** (which we think in some ways surpasses the stories contained in Herodotus or Thucydides. But for the overall meaning of history, as a theology of history, the Hebrews far surpassed the Greeks, who so far as we know, had no such concept.

See: Bill Naason, “History: The Meaning and Role of History in Human Development” on the Internet, who does not include the **Hebrew Bible’s** contribution in his survey—where we think it can and should play a very important role in its conviction that history is the story of God’s mighty acts and teaching that leads to a world of peace and love / righteousness / self-sacrifice that conquers hatred and war.

Westermann entitles **verses 12-17** “I called you.” He comments that “The proclamation, ‘from this time forth I make you hear new things,’ is explained at greater length in **verses 12-17**...The arguments which God had adduced in the legal process with the nations in support of His Divinity—that He was the first and the last, that He was the Creator, as well as the Connection between proclamation and fulfilment, and the calling of Cyrus— He now addresses to Israel, who were then His witnesses. Why does He do this? In order that she may recognize and understand that He is at work, at work both in the prophet’s proclamation and in contemporary history...

“He makes Cyrus perform His work (**verses 14-15**) and grants him success in it. But this whole thing is done for the sake of Israel.” (P. 200)

Westermann comments on **verses 12-13** that “The summons to Israel, God’s servant, the one whom He called, to hear, links on to **verse 1**, and is at once followed by Self-predications on God’s part...Addressed as it here is to Israel, its purpose is to exalt God in His chosen people’s eyes, abased as Israel then was...

“His people have been overthrown, but He Who now appeals to them is the One Who at the beginning called heaven and earth into being. Here, at a date earlier than [the Priestly document, which Westermann believes includes **Genesis 1**] we meet with the concept of creation by the word. Thus it is earlier than **Genesis 1**, or else, in this respect, too, **Genesis 1** is based on an older tradition.” (P. 201)

55

Oswalt comments that “Following **verse 1** is the story of Israel’s failure to live as the Israel of God [**verses 2-11**]. But here [in **verse 12**] there is a challenge to remember Whose they are and to act accordingly. They have not lived what they have claimed, but if they will remember their identity, perhaps that will condition them to live out that identity.” (P. 275)

I (am) He;

אֲנִי רִאשׁוֹן אֶף אֲנִי אַחֲרֹן:

I (am) first, also I (am) last!⁵⁶

48:13 אֶף-יָדִי יִסְדָּה אֶרֶץ

Also⁵⁷ My hand established / laid the foundation (of the) earth,⁵⁸

56

Alexander states that **verse 12** is “a renewed assurance of [YHWH’s] ability and willingness to execute His promises.” (P. 216)

The verse contains another “Self-identification” by YHWH, as He is depicted speaking to His people Israel / Jacob whom He has called—and we automatically think, “called to be His servant-people.” His Self-identification is again that He is “first” and “last.” For similar Self-identifications see **Isaiah 41:4** and **44:6**.

Oswalt comments that this Divine claim to “all-inclusiveness, in both time and space,” means that “God can use a Cyrus because God encompasses all things; nothing that has happened to Israel is a surprise to God because nothing is outside His control; nothing in the realm of space and time is proof against Him, for He began all things and He will end all things.” (P. 275)

If you think of history as a line of happenings, with people and events following one after the other, this Self-identification claims that at the first of the line is YHWH, and that at the end of the line is YHWH, or, Before the “big boom” is YHWH, and at the end of history, when our galaxy’s sun burns out, is YHWH.

Oswalt states, “Not only is He the beginning of all things, He is the end [or ‘goal’] of them as well. He set all things in motion, but He is also the goal toward which all things move.” (P. 273)

See in the **New Testament, Revelation 1:8, 17; 22:13**.

Human observation is limited to dealing with what has come after the “first,” and what will happen before the “last.” Biblical theology is uniquely concerned with the truly “ultimate,” daring to speak (in symbolic language) of what happened before human history, and what will happen when human history is done, because it has come to know the God Who is first and last!

57

(continued...)

⁵⁷(...continued)

Alexander states that “The force of אֲנִי [‘also,’ with which **verse 13** begins] seems to be this, Not only am I an Eternal Being, but the Creator of the heavens.” (P. 216)

58

North comments that “The most detailed description of Hebrew cosmogony [the coming into being of the universe], apart from **Genesis 1**, is in **Psalm 104:1-9**, in which the earth is founded on pillars driven down into the abyss of subterranean waters. Compare also **Psalms 24:2; 102:25^{Heb} / 26^{Eng}; Proverbs 3:19; Job 38:4-6.**” (P. 181)

Psalm 104:1-9,

- 1 Bless [kneel in adoration to speak words of blessing] O my innermost-being,
to YHWH!
YHWH, my God, You are exceedingly great!
You are clothed (in) splendor and majesty—
- 2 wrapping light (around Yourself) like a robe,
spreading out heavens like a tent-curtain.
- 3 The One Who lays beams of his upper rooms in the waters;
the One Who places clouds (for) His chariot;
the One Who walks upon wind-clouds;
- 4 One making His messengers winds
His servants flaming fire(s).
- 5 He founded earth upon its foundations—
it will not be moved (for) long-lasting time and forever.
- 6 You covered it (with) deep ocean like a dress;
over mountains waters stood;
- 7 from Your rebuke they flee;
from Your voice’s thunder they are alarmed.
- 8 Mountains ascend; valleys descend—
to this place you established for them.
- 9 A boundary You have established—they will not cross over;
they will not return to cover the earth!

Psalm 24:1-2,

- 1 To YHWH [belongs] the earth and its fullness--
[the whole] world, and those who live in it!
- 2 For He, upon oceans He Founded it,
and upon rivers He Sets it up

Psalm 102:26^{Heb} / 25^{Eng},

Formerly, You founded the earth;
and (the) heavens—work of Your hands!

(continued...)

וַיִּמְיֵן טַפְחָהּ שָׁמַיִם

and My right hand spread out heavens;⁵⁹

קָרָא אֲנִי אֲלֵיהֶם

I (am) calling to them—⁶⁰

⁵⁸(...continued)

Proverbs 3:19,

YHWH in / by Wisdom founded earth / land,
establishing heavens in / by understanding.

Job 38:4-6,

- 4 Where were you, at My founding earth?
Declare (it), if you knew understanding!
- 5 Who placed its measurements, since you know,
or who stretched out over it a (measuring) line?
- 6 Upon what were its bases sunk?
Or who laid its corner-stone?

⁵⁹

Having just identified Himself as the “First,” YHWH claims that it was His hand that founded earth, His right hand that spread out (the) heavens.

Where our Hebrew text has טַפְחָהּ, “spread out,” **Rahlfs** has “made firm.” Alexander states that “Aben Ezra, followed by most modern writers, makes it mean *expanded*; which...is confirmed by the Syriac...and by the parallel passage in **Isaiah 51:13**, where the founding of the earth is connected with the spreading of the skies, and the latter expressed by the unambiguous word נוֹטָה, [‘stretching out’].” (P. 217)

Oswalt comments that “As elsewhere (**40:22; 42:5; 44:24; 45:12**) earth and heavens are used as polar opposites expressive of the whole: God has created the earth and the heavens and everything in between.” (P. 275)

⁶⁰

Using the present participle, YHWH is depicted as saying קָרָא אֲנִי אֲלֵיהֶם, literally, “calling I (am) to them.” That is, YHWH is actively calling to earth and heavens, assigning their functions, calling for their obedience.

Alexander comments that “in Hebrew usage, the pronoun and participle thus combined are employed to express present and continuous action, I (am) calling, i.e. I habitually call.” (P. 217)

(continued...)

יִעֲמְדוּ יַחְדָּו:

they stand up together!⁶¹

⁶⁰(...continued)

Oswalt observes that “Commentators disagree as to the specific referent of *them* in the sentence *when I call them, they stand up together*. Most...agree that creation or some aspect of it is being referred to, but there is not much agreement beyond that. [Oswalt himself thinks] that **40:22-26** should give us the clue to correct interpretation; there an extended passage on creation and history concludes with a reference to the stars (felt by the pagans to represent the Gods) appearing as they are called by God. The same point is being made here: all things in the universe, including the inexorable [unstoppable] stars, are creatures of Israel’s God, appearing and disappearing at His call...

“God calls forth the stars night after night. Which of the Gods represented by those stars has ever given a specific prediction of the future that has been specifically fulfilled, as the Lord has done? So why are the Hebrew people cowed by the idols of Babylon now and unwilling to believe what God is promising?” (Pp. 275-76)

Biblical literature as well depicts the Divine calling as coming not only to Israel, or to earth and heavens, but to all humanity as well, urging His creatures to hear His call, and fulfill His purpose in their lives. What do you think? Is there in fact a mysterious, hidden voice, speaking in the hearts of all human beings, whether believers or unbelievers, whether religious or irreligious, calling them to find their purpose, their “calling” in life? We believe there is.

For the **Hebrew Bible**, and for the **New Testament** as well, we conclude that the Divine calling is for human beings to serve others well, becoming “suffering servants” in a world gone astray--not to pull apart from the world, but to serve the world. What do you think the true purpose in life is? Is it no more than the piling up of possessions, the enjoyment of pleasures? And if God is in fact calling humanity to something higher, more important than that, will human beings ever find genuine meaning and fulfillment in anything less than obedience to that Divine call? See the **Book of Jonah!**

61

In response to that Divine on-going calling, earth and heavens “stand up”—that is, they come into being, they fulfill their Divinely given functions. And, we add, it is in response to that Divine calling that we too can stand and accomplish our God-given roles in human history. If Israel will only unstop its deaf ears, and listen for that calling, she can become YHWH’s servant, accomplishing the role He has purposed for her.

And, we add, the same thing is true for all peoples and nations, and for each individual human being. Listen for your calling! And when you hear it, Stand up! Accomplish the Divine purpose for your life!

Knight comments on **verse 13** that “Deutero-Isaiah reminds Israel that God can re-create simply on the ground that He has already created. God is still in command of the hosts of stars, and they obey His will absolutely.” (P. 119) But we ask, where in this text is anything

(continued...)

48:14⁶² הַקְבִּצוּ כְּלֶכֶם וְשִׁמְעוּ

Gather together, all of you people,⁶³ and listen!⁶⁴

⁶¹(...continued)

said about “recreating”? It seems apparent that Knight is reading this into the text. We agree that this is certainly possible, but understand the text to be describing God’s continuing creation—without mentioning recreation.

⁶²

Oswalt comments on **verses 14-16** that these verses “form the *apodosis* to the preceding *protasis* (**verses 12-13**).” (P. 276)

Conditional sentences express factual implications, or hypothetical situations and their consequences. The validity of the main clause is *conditional* on the existence of certain circumstances. A full conditional sentence (one which expresses the condition as well as its consequences) contains two clauses: the dependent clause expressing the condition, called the *protasis*; and the main clause expressing the consequence, called the *apodosis*. An example is the following: If it rains, the picnic will be cancelled. Here the condition is expressed by the clause “If it rains”, this being the *protasis*, while the consequence is expressed by “the picnic will be cancelled”, this being the *apodosis*. (Adapted from **Wikipedia**, “Conditional Sentence,” 9/2/2015)

⁶³

Where our Hebrew text reads the niphil imperative הַקְבִּצוּ כְּלֶכֶם, “be gathered, all of you,” 1QIs^a has יִקְבְּצוּ כֹּלָם, “they will gather, all of them.” **Rahlfs** has καὶ συναχθήσονται πάντες “and they will be gathered, all.”

North asks who is included in the phrase כְּלֶכֶם, “all of you (plural).” Does it mean all of the Israelites? Does it mean all of the nations? Does it mean all of the nations and their Gods? 1QIs^a “let them all assemble and hear,” and North holds that this means presumably the Gods. (P. 179)

⁶⁴

Where our Hebrew text reads the qal imperative, masculine plural, וְשִׁמְעוּ, “and hear,” 1QIs^a has וְיִשְׁמְעוּ, “and they will hear / and they heard.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) likewise has καὶ ἀκούσονται, “and they will hear.”

Slotki comments that “all of you people” means “all Israel.” We certainly think all Israel is included, but insist that this is a universal calling, to earth and heavens, and “all of you people” includes all humanity, of every race and nation. The Divine calling is to everyone—and the passage makes it explicit that whoever hears that call will be loved by YHWH and enabled to perform YHWH’s purpose—meaning specifically, we think, Cyrus the non-Jew, the Persian,

(continued...)

מִי בֵּהֶם הִגִּיד אֶת־אֱלֹהִים

Who among them⁶⁵ declared these things?⁶⁶

יְהוָה אֱהָבֵנּוּ

YHWH loved him.⁶⁷

⁶⁴(...continued)

who will be loved by YHWH and will be used to deliver the Israelite exiles from Babylon.

Alexander comments that “The object of address is Israel, according to the common supposition, but more probably the heathen.” (P. 217) His question again underlines the ambiguous / riddle-like nature of the prophetic text. What do you think?

⁶⁵

Where our Hebrew text has בֵּהֶם, “among them,” a large number of Hebrew manuscripts plus the Syriac translation and a part of the Latin Vulgate manuscripts read בְּכֶם, “among you (plural).” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has τίς αὐτοῖς ἀνήγγειλεν ταῦτα , “who announced these things to them?” Oswalt asks, “But who is *them*? Most commentators believe that the reference is to the members of the Gentile nations, as in **43:9**. Other suggestions are the Jews... and the idols...The latter seems most likely to be correct.” (P. 276)

Westermann states that “The words ‘who among them’ can only refer to the Gods of the nations...In explicitly repeating to his own nation what had had to be said against the foreign nations and their Gods Deutero-Isaiah’s purpose was so to impress them with God’s sovereign power that they would regain confidence. They are oppressed. They have been made insignificant. They are without prospects. Yet this is the very moment at which God proves Himself to be the everlasting One, and the Creator and Lord of the universe.” (P. 201)

⁶⁶

What do you think YHWH’s question in this second line of **verse 14** means? If we are correct in saying the calling includes all peoples and nations, then does this question not ask which people or nation has a God that has declared what is happening in history, or that has inspired prophets to speak about the role of kings and nations in history like YHWH has done and is doing in the present? Have the idol-Gods declared such things? Have they gotten their hands dirty with politics? The God of the **Bible** has! And we ask, has the God of the **Bible** influenced your political views and the way you vote? How so?

⁶⁷

Where our Hebrew text has יְהוָה אֱהָבֵנּוּ, “YHWH loved him,” **Rahlfs** has “loving you (singular).” 1QIs^a has אֱהָבֵנִי, “loving me.” Oswalt notes that “the versions think the referent is Israel [that is, with the singular ‘you’; but this could refer to humanity] rather than Cyrus, which most modern commentators favor.” (P. 273)

North states that the phrase is literally “Yahweh loves him; he will carry out his purpose (continued...)”

⁶⁷(...continued)

against Babylon.” But he adds, “The difficulty here is that Yahweh is in the third person, whereas in the preceding and following contexts He is the Speaker.” (Pp. 179-80) He concludes that “The best that can be done with the unrelated pronouns is to take *you* as the nations...and *them* as their Gods.” (P. 181) We think the phrase “YHWH loved him” could refer to Israel or to Cyrus, or even possibly to humanity.

Oswalt takes it as “an expression of the election of Cyrus for the task at hand...The language may have been chosen to make unmistakable God’s right to use whom He will. As Muilenburg observes, it is the climactic expression of the chosenness of Cyrus (‘My shepherd,’ **44:28**; ‘My anointed’ (**45:1**); ‘the man of My counsel’ (**46:11**).” (P. 276)

Watts likewise states, “*Yahweh has loved* Cyrus who is now doing His will toward Babylon.” (P. 178) What do you think?

Westermann simply states “God’s ‘loving’ Cyrus is a variant of the other terms which express His relationship to him, ‘My shepherd,’ ‘My anointed,’ ‘the man who fulfils My purpose.’ All these designations are simply meant to express the fact that God is with Cyrus, the fact which the Israelites found so incomprehensible and offensive.” (P. 201)

Alexander holds that this means YHWH loves Israel, but acknowledges that “Most interpreters...make the clause refer to Cyrus, and translate it in this way, ‘He whom [YHWH] loves shall do his pleasure in Babylon, and his arm (i.e. exercise his power, or execute his vengeance) on the Chaldees’...Aben Ezra refers both the suffixes to Cyrus, who is then said to do his own pleasure upon Babylon. Others refer both [suffixes] to God (His pleasure and His arm); but most interpreters take a middle course, referring one to each.” (P. 217)

In our translation, we attempt to capitalize the 3rd person masculine pronouns when we think they refer to YHWH, and to use the small case when we think they are referring to Cyrus or to other humans. But as Alexander’s comment makes clear, the text is ambiguous in this regard, and the translator / interpreter oftentimes cannot be sure. But however this may be, Second Isaiah leaves us in no doubt as to the motive behind the Divine actions—it is God’s love!

Knight comments that “It is interesting to see how Deutero-Isaiah now leaps from creation to the contemporary scene. After all, we are all more concerned about our present problems and distresses than about even the most glorious moments of the past. Deutero-Isaiah therefore turns to the vital interest of the moment: Yahweh actually *loves* Cyrus!...

“Similarly Solomon was God’s choice of king—‘And the Lord loved him’ (**2 Samuel 12:24** [יְיָהוָה אֱהָבֵנּוּ])—for he was chosen to execute God’s will in a decisive manner. Here then is the next step in the plan that has been working out since the beginning.” (P. 120)

Rahifs changes the past tense of the Hebrew to an active present participle, translating
(continued...)

יַעֲשֶׂה חִפְצוֹ בְּבָבֶל

He will accomplish His desire⁶⁸ on Babylon,

וְזָרְעוֹ כְּשַׁדְיִים:

and (on) his seed–(the) Chaldeans.⁶⁹

⁶⁷(...continued)

this line by ἀγαπῶν σε ἐποίησα τὸ θέλημά σου ἐπὶ Βαβυλῶνα τοῦ ἄραι σπέρμα Χαλδαίων, “loving you (singular) I did your will upon Babylon, to take away (the) seed of (the) Chaldeans.”

⁶⁸

Where our Hebrew text reads חִפְצוֹ, “His / his will / desire,” 1QIs^a has חִפְצִי, “My will / desire.”

In our translation of the phrase יַעֲשֶׂה חִפְצוֹ בְּבָבֶל, we have capitalized the 3rd person masculine pronoun and pronominal suffix: “He will do / accomplish His will / desire on Babylon,” taking the phrase as referring to YHWH’s action. But it is just as possible to translate by “he will do / accomplish his will / desire on Babylon,” taking the phrase as referring to Cyrus, who would be the instrument of accomplishing his plans on Babylon. Again, it is possible to translate by “he (Cyrus) will do / accomplish His (YHWH’s) will / desire on Babylon.” The phrase is tantalizingly ambiguous! And this is the nature of the prophetic message, characterized as it is by puzzling ambiguities and lack of clarity.

⁶⁹

Where our Hebrew text has וְזָרְעוֹ כְּשַׁדְיִים, “and his / His seed Chaldeans,” **Rahlf**s has τοῦ ἄραι σπέρμα Χαλδαίων, “to take up / away seed / descendants of Chaldeans.” Oswalt calls this phrase “the final piece of uncertainty in the verse,” and states that “A literal rendering of the Hebrew would be, ‘and his arm Chaldeans.’ The translation [*his arm among the Chaldeans*] is based on the fact that...*arm* parallels *will*, as *Chaldeans* parallels *Babylonians*.” (P. 277)

We take the last three lines of **verse 14** to be an answer to YHWH’s question, by pointing to one who has heard the calling and responded in obedience, thereby becoming YHWH’s “loved one.” Amazingly, it is not an Israelite, not a Jew. It is the non-Jew, Cyrus, whom YHWH loves, and who will fulfill YHWH’s purpose on Babylon, using his strength (armed power of the Persian empire) on the Chaldeans / Babylonians, conquering them, allowing their prisoners to return home.

(continued...)

48:15⁷⁰ אָנִי אָנִי דִּבַּרְתִּי

I, I, I spoke;

אֶף־קָרָאתִיו

also I called him,⁷¹

הֵבִיאתִיו

I brought him,

וְהִצְלִיחַ דְּרָכּוֹ:

and he will prosper in his way.⁷²

⁶⁹(...continued)

What do you think? Do you believe in YHWH, the God Who is calling to all humanity, and using whoever hears and responds to His call to accomplish His purposes in history, in the rise and fall of nations, in the freeing of prisoners, enabling their return to their homes? Or do you believe in a God Who is only calling to Israel or to the Church, and Who is not involved in politics, in the rise and fall of nations? And if the latter, is not your God “too small” for the biblical teaching?

We suspect that the different variant readings in **verse 14** are attempts by copyists to blunt or deflect this meaning of the text—feeling that “certainly it can’t be saying that YHWH is using the non-Jew Cyrus!”

⁷⁰

Watts comments on **verse 15** that “Yahweh stresses His personal involvement in calling Cyrus and prospering his way, just as He was personally involved with the heavens and the earth. A personal God, hearing, speaking, calling, directing history, raising up kings, giving them power and success, creating and sustaining the universe— this is the powerful theological foundation on which to base His request for recognition as Savior and Redeemer of Israel.

Because Yahweh brought him to this moment, He will prosper (וְהִצְלִיחַ), which also appears in **52:13** and **55:11**) and make his way succeed.” (P. 178)

Westermann comments that “The emphatic ‘I’ standing at the beginning of **verse 15** and continuing throughout it (compare **verses 12-13**) means this: ‘It is I, the God Who is known to you, of Whom you have had experience, Who am at work here, even if this fresh work does shatter an old concept of the old God.’” (Pp. 201-02)

⁷¹

North comments that “The repeated I, I and the four emphatic and swiftly moving verbs ...are characteristic of Deutero-Isaiah and in keeping with the momentousness of what is taking place.” (P. 181)

⁷²

(continued...)

⁷²(...continued)

Where our Hebrew text has וַיְהִי כִּי יִצְלֵחַ דְּרָכָיו, “and he / He will cause his way to prosper / be successful,” **Rahlfs** has καὶ εὐόδοῦσα τὴν ὁδὸν αὐτοῦ, “and I (YHWH) prospered the way of his,” eliminating any idea that it was Cyrus who caused his way to be successful.

Verse 15 is speech attributed to YHWH, assuring the listeners that it is indeed YHWH Who has spoken to and called Cyrus, Who has brought him to his task of delivering the Jewish exiles from Babylon, and Who will be with him in accomplishing that task.

Oswalt notes that “Long after the truth of the Cyrus prophecies had been demonstrated, the translators of [the Aramaic] targum still had difficulties with the idea, as evidenced by their making this verse refer to Abraham.” (P. 274)

He comments that “The emphasis in the Hebrew is unmistakable: *I, I have spoken; moreover, I have called him...* God is declaring to the disbelieving people of Israel in the strongest terms that the career of Cyrus will be wholly and only as a result of the hand of God at work in human history. It is neither accident nor the work of some idol-God. It is only because God has called him, just as He called Israel (**verse 12**), and just as He called the stars (**verse 13**) that Cyrus steps forward...

“Given this heavy emphasis on the active presence of God in bringing Cyrus forward, it is surprising that the final colon says he (not ‘I...’) has made his way successful...The point seems to be that whatever success Cyrus may have enjoyed, it is solely because of the calling and impulsion of the Lord. Thus the emphasis is on the reality of Divine-human cooperation. Cyrus could do nothing except as the Lord made it possible. Yet Cyrus is no mere puppet on a string; taking the possibilities that God has given, he has made a success of them.” (P. 277)

We agree with this last statement, and think that the words “wholly and only”, and the repeated “only” should be deleted from Oswalt’s comment. And it is to be borne in mind that in the **Cyrus Cylinder**, Cyrus himself attributes his success not to YHWH, but to Marduk.

Knight comments on **verse 15** that “Cyrus is about to become God’s *arm*, that is to say, the outward, tangible sign of God’s invisible and Divine will or *purpose*. Moreover, Cyrus is bound to accomplish that which pleases God; for it is the ‘I AM’ [no—it is the One Who utters ‘I, I, I...’] Who has uttered His will, and Who has been preparing for its eventual resolution in the paths of history. Yet before that moment of resolution can arrive, God sees fit to employ a period of preparation. We recall how the Roman *pax* should prevail before the final act of redemption took place in the birth and death of Christ. Similarly Deutero-Isaiah regards Cyrus as God’s instrument whom He is employing as He prepares the right conditions for the astonishing moments to follow.” (P. 120)

73

Slotki holds that beginning with **verse 16**, “the prophet is speaking.” (P. 237) We disagree, thinking that in the first two lines of **verse 16**, YHWH is still being depicted as speaking,
(continued...)

קָרְבוּ אֵלַי

Draw near to Me;

שְׁמַעוּ-זֹאת

listen to / hear this!

לֹא מֵרֵאשִׁית בְּסִתְרֵי דְבָרָתִי

From (the) first I did not speak in the secrecy.⁷⁴

⁷³(...continued)

but then in lines 3 and 4 the speaker is the prophet him self. Decisions like this are difficult, due to the fact that the prophet gets so caught up in speaking for YHWH, that a distinction between YHWH's speech and the prophet's speech is oftentimes difficult to determine.

Alexander comments that "As [YHWH] is confessedly the Speaker in the foregoing and the following context, and as similar language is expressly ascribed to Him in **chapter 45:19**, Calvin and Gesenius regard it as most natural to make these His words likewise, assuming a transition in the last clause from [YHWH] to the Prophet, who there describes himself as sent by [YHWH]...[Others] suppose the person of the Prophet and of God to be confused in both... [while others] follow some of the other Jewish writers in making the whole verse the words of Isaiah. [Still others] agree with Athanasius , Augustine, and other [Church] Fathers, who reconcile the clauses by making Christ the speaker." (P. 218) Knight evidently holds that in this verse Deutero-Isaiah speaks first, and then follows a "line of verse in which God plurally addresses the whole world." (P. 120) Do not all of these differences in interpretation demonstrate the riddle-like ambiguity of the prophetic message?

⁷⁴

Oswalt comments that "Contrary to what some Israelites might claim, God's promises have not been mystical and mysterious. He has not spoken in foggy, ambiguous generalities...This means that the truth of His promises is easily verified...God has been intimately involved in the affairs of human beings. He has not been at some distant remove, glorious in His inaccessibility. He has made Himself accessible as He revealed His will called people to act in accordance with that will, and gave Himself to make that action possible." (Pp. 277-78)

We agree that YHWH has been intimately involved in the affairs of human beings; but going beyond that, Oswalt's affirmation of the clarity of Divine speech is greatly overstated, especially as seen in the light of **Numbers 12:1-9**, where YHWH is depicted as stating that the Divine message given to His prophets would not be clear, face-to-face in nature, but rather would be "puzzling," "enigmatic," and in "visions and dreams."

And the fact is that throughout the writings of the prophets of Israel, there are numerous statements attributed to YHWH that are in fact enigmatic and ambiguous, capable of diverse interpretation—as is evident in the ambiguities we have seen in this **chapter 48** and elsewhere in the **Book of Isaiah**, not to mention such passages as **Zechariah 9-14** and **Psalms 68**.

(continued...)

מַעַת הַיּוֹתֵהָ

From (the) time of its⁷⁵ happening / becoming,

שֵׁם אֲנִי

⁷⁴(...continued)

If the Divine speech is to be found in the words of prophets like Second and Third Isaiah—in passages like this (and many others), it is still very difficult to determine who is speaking. The simplistic answer that “every word is the word of God” will certainly not work—for the entire message is filled with uncertainties and seeming outright contradictions. For example, should the temple be built, or not? Are animal sacrifices acceptable to God or not?

Many beginning students will be prone to throw up their hands in frustration facing these facts. But we insist, be patient—go slowly—pray and meditate—ask God for guidance—communicate with fellow students, listen to those who have gone before you. And as you continue, you will find guidance, and you will begin to hear the Divine message coming to you.

Did you really think you could hear God’s word apart from struggle and exasperation, apart from a life-time of blood, sweat and tears? Did you make the mistake of thinking the Divine word was a dime-store purchase, easily obtained and heard, without genuinely asking, seeking and knocking, without suffering for it?

Westermann comments on **verses 16-17** that the second part of **verse 16** “goes on to relate this fresh act to Israel’s history, her way... God speaks now as Israel’s Redeemer Who has used His sovereign power on His people’s behalf...From the beginning God had not spoken to her ‘in secret,’ which means that the preceding proclamation may be attested. ‘Ever since the prophecies became reality, ‘He has been there’; that is to say...He has shown Himself to be the One with the power to give prophecies their fulfilment’ [quoting K. Elliger].” (P. 202)

⁷⁵

Alexander comments that “Most interpreters refer the suffix (*it*) to the raising up of Cyrus and the whole series of events connected with it, which formed the subject of the prophecies in question...Those who refer the words to the Son of God specifically, make the verse substantially identical in meaning [to **Proverbs 8:27**, where Divine Wisdom states that She ‘was there’ when YHWH established the heavens]...

“Those who take the words more generally as the language of [YHWH], understand Him to declare that these events had not occurred without His knowledge or His agency; that He was present, cognizant, and active, in the whole affair. Thus far this last hypothesis must be allowed to be the simplest and most natural. The difficulties which attend it arise wholly from what follows.” (P. 218)

But we warn, what may seem “simplest” and “most natural” to us may well not be what the author is saying—which is sometimes cryptic and ambiguous—and we should be wary of the supposition that what seems simple and natural to us is in fact what the text is saying.

there I (am)!⁷⁶

וְעַתָּה אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה שְׁלַחֲנִי

And now, my Lord YHWH⁷⁷ sent me forth,⁷⁸

76

If we understand this as YHWH speaking, it is simply a repetition of what YHWH has been saying all along. He has been present throughout history, from the first; and He has been speaking, revealing Himself through His spokespersons, speaking openly and publicly, even though enigmatically—not like the secret oracles attributed to the idol-Gods.

If we understand it as the prophet speaking, it is the claim that throughout his ministry, from its beginning, he has spoken openly and publicly, not in secret, hidden oracles. He has been present throughout these present occurrences, speaking for YHWH, by YHWH's Spirit. Who do you think is speaking in **verse 16**?

North comments on the last phrase in this line as causing the statement attributed to Jesus in **John 8:58**, "Before Abraham was, I am" to come almost inevitably to mind. (P. 181)

Watts comments that "The scene turns to action on an earthly level. Someone, ostensibly a leader, claims that *Yahweh has sent him and his spirit...* **Ezra 1:2-8** tells of Cyrus's edict to the expedition under Sheshbazzar. This chapter implies the same scene. Yahweh's Spirit which was given to Cyrus also empowers and directs this leader." (P. 178) What do you think? Do you think this is a reference to Sheshbazzar? If so, it is certainly not explicit.

77

Where our Hebrew text has the phrase **יְהוָה אֲדַנִּי**, "my Lord YHWH," **Rahlf's** has simply "Lord."

78

Again Alexander comments that "Those who regard Isaiah as the speaker in the whole verse, understand this clause to mean, that as he had spoken before by Divine authority and inspiration, he did so still. Those who refer the first clause simply to [YHWH], without reference to personal distinctions, are under the necessity of here assuming a transition to the language of the Prophet himself. The third hypothesis, which makes the Son of God the Speaker, understands both clauses in their strict sense as denoting His eternity on one hand, and His mission on the other." (Pp. 218-19)

Oswalt comments that he sees "no way in which the subject of the first part of the verse could be the prophet. The things said there can be said only by God. What, then, is the meaning of the final bicolon? This is surely another case of the close identity between God and the prophet...Now, the prophet says, God is speaking again through me (the prophet) whom He (God) has inspired with His (God's) Spirit." (P. 278)

North comments that "In the **Old Testament** the spirit never sends but is always sent. The sentence is prose and the 'me' can hardly be anyone but the Prophet. But why should the Prophet interject a reference to himself into a context in which Yahweh is the Speaker? It is

(continued...)

וַיִּרְחֹם:

and His Spirit.⁷⁹

⁷⁸(...continued)

the only such reference in the prophecy, except the doubtful ‘and I said’ of **40:6**...and possibly **50:4-9**...But to say ‘Never from the beginning have I spoken in secrecy...There I am’ is Yahweh’s prerogative.” (P. 182) Compare **45:19**,

Not in the secrecy did I speak, in a place (within) a land of darkness;
I did not say to Jacob’s descendant(s), (in) chaos / confusion, seek Me.
I (am) YHWH, One speaking righteousness, declaring upright things.

We say, A text like this, with such contrasting interpretations, is typical of the prophetic message—it is characterized by enigmatic, puzzling language and by obscurities such as this. What do you think?

⁷⁹

Alexander comments that the phrase at the close of **verse 16**, וַיִּרְחֹם, “and His Spirit,” “has long been a subject of dispute whether these words belong to the subject [‘YHWH and His Spirit sent me’] or the object of the verb [‘YHWH sent me and His Spirit’]...[Some interpreters] adopt Origen’s interpretation [‘the Father sent both, the Savior and the Set-apart Spirit’] ...The exegetical question is not one of much importance...and the ambiguity may be intended to let [the different interpretations] suggest themselves...On the whole this may be fairly represented as one of the most doubtful questions of construction in the **Book [of Isaiah]**.” Alexander concludes in favor of the view that “[YHWH] had sent the person speaking and endued him with His Spirit, as a necessary preparation for the work to which he was appointed.” (P. 219)

Knight comments that “Deutero-Isaiah suddenly presents us with a striking sequence of thought. First, he declares that God has all the time *been there* in Israel’s story, or immanent, as we might say today. Then second, he declares that immanence is now being realized in a new way, even as God’s Spirit uses Deutero-Isaiah’s own mouth and mind. ‘And now the Lord Yahweh, that is to say His Spirit, has sent me’ he writes. Apart from **Isaiah 40:6**,

A voice, saying Proclaim!
And one said, What shall I proclaim?
All the flesh (is) grass,
and all its steadfast-love (is) like a blossom of the field.

only here does Deutero-Isaiah ever make mention of himself; otherwise he is wholly subservient to the voice of God.” (P. 120) Perhaps...but **40:6** does not make it clear who asks, “What shall I proclaim?”

Knight goes on to state, “The word וְעַתָּה, ‘and now,’ is Deutero-Isaiah’s choice for the
(continued...)”

⁷⁹(...continued)

contemporary moment. We have already seen that he selects the word ['head' or 'first things'] to represent the concept of 'beginning' or the first action of God in His handling of Israel in the days of Moses. Deutero-Isaiah believes that the period between has not been mere history. It has been 'sacred history,' or the history of God, for Yahweh has been immanent in it, working out His purpose for the world through His association with Israel. But Deutero-Isaiah is now keenly aware that at the very moment he is speaking, he himself is acting as the mouthpiece of God. He knows that it is God's Spirit alone and not his own human perspicacity [insight into things, shrewdness] which is enabling him to interpret events, and to be the instrument of the

[Divine] word as it is even now 'becoming flesh' in that vital moment of the world's history [meaning, in Cyrus, YHWH's chosen instrument]." (Pp. 120-21)

This is, of course, the comment of a Christian theologian, who is taking the language of **John 1** concerning the word's becoming flesh in Jesus, and applying it to the earlier time of Second Isaiah and the coming of Cyrus. But such an understanding is certainly not found or made clear in the text itself. As the text stands, it speaks of YHWH's being present in Israel's history, and of His Spirit's speaking, probably through Second Isaiah. We doubt that Cyrus being "the word of God made flesh" is anywhere near what the **Gospel of John** means by Jesus as "the word of God made flesh." What do you think?

80

Slotki comments on **verses 17-19** that "How bright and prosperous would [Israel's] condition have been if Israel had followed the guidance of the Lord, his beneficent Teacher and trustworthy Guide!" (P. 237) We agree. And in this context, the statements contrast with the Persian Cyrus, who has heard YHWH's call and obeyed.

Oswalt entitles **verses 17-22** "O, that you had listened." He comments that "These verses function as a conclusion, both to **verses 12-22** and to all of **chapter 48**. They remind the reader of what might have been if God's people had listened to Him (**verses 17-19**), and of what will be for those who will listen and believe (**verses 18-21**). The final **verse (22)** functions to make plain that blessing is not the automatic prerogative of the elect." (P. 280)

Knight comments on **verse 17** that "The word of God, which He has uttered over the years to Israel, ought to have been effective in Israel's life. God's *tsedeq*, or saving activity [our 'righteousness']...which He had poured down upon Israel, ought to have borne fruit in *tsedaqoth*, saving righteous actions, or creative acts of compassion...on Israel's part...But it had not done so thus far, because man cannot perform saving acts, or show creative compassion for others without accepting the *tsedeq* of God. Israel had not done so. It is only in fellowship with God that life can be lived 'effectively.'" (P. 121)

Perhaps...but is it in fact the case that Israel had not accepted God's *tsedeq*, saving actions at all in the past? Had Israel not ever lived in fellowship with God? We think the **Psalter** of Israel, Israel's prayer and song-book, shows that Knight's view is mistaken. **Psalms 23** by itself depicts a closeness of Israel's walk with YHWH, and the claim that goodness and

(continued...)

כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה

In this way YHWH spoke,

גְּאֻלְךָ

your Next-of-kin / Redeemer,

קָדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל

Set-apart One of Israel:

אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ

I–YHWH your God,

מִלְמַדְךָ לְהוֹעִיל

One teaching you to profit / benefit,⁸¹

⁸⁰(...continued)

mercy had followed her throughout her days. Was that **Psalm** incorrect? We think Knight's claim is that of a Christian theologian who has repeated the claim made by many Christians that Israel's religion was in fact invalid, i.e., never producing righteousness.

No doubt there had been many times in Israel's history when she failed to live up to or by the Divine revelation of God's righteousness [just as is the case in Christian history]. But to make the blanket statement that Israel had not done so, is, we think, mistaken. We say Israel had not always done so—but there were many times and individuals who had certainly done

so. What do you think? Is Knight's comment here an example of anti-Semitism? We doubt if he intended it in that way, but it can certainly be taken as being such.

81

Alexander comments that the phrase "to profit" means "to be profitable to thyself, to provide for thy own safety and prosperity...There seems to be a reference...to the unprofitableness so often charged upon false Gods and their worship." (Pp. 219-20)

North notes that "As the next verse shows, Yahweh's teaching [intended to enable Israel to profit] had been wasted on His people. It was a case of 'How often would I...!' (**Luke 13:34**). Israel's history had been a tragedy of wasted opportunities." (P. 182)

As we have stated before, for Christian interpreters to take such a statement in an absolute sense, and conclude that Israel had never profited by YHWH's teaching, is not only wrong, but in fact, anti-Semitic. Just read **Psalm 119**, with its repetitious claims of how much YHWH's **torah**, teaching / guidance had meant to and done for the psalmist. Of course, there were many in Israel, especially at different times in Israel's history, when Israel had rebelled against the Divine teaching. But it is unfair to claim that Israel had never profited from that

(continued...)

מְדַרְיָךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ תֵּלֵךְ:

causing you to walk in a way you will / should walk.⁸²

48:18⁸³

⁸¹(...continued)

teaching, and to claim as North does, that Israel's history was "a tragedy of wasted opportunities." It was...but it was also a history "of blessedness occasioned by YHWH's teaching." Such claims remind me of the teaching I received in Christian colleges that there was no forgiveness, and no salvation in the **Hebrew Bible**—which is absolutely wrong.

⁸²

This is another "Self-identification" by YHWH, as the Redeemer, Set-apart One of Israel, Israel's God, Who is teaching (a piel participle) you (singular) so as to profit Israel, guiding / leading Israel in its way.

Westermann comments that "This is the same preparing of the way as is spoken of in the prologue (**Isaiah 40:3-4**). It is the way by which the people are to travel home, and upon which the hymn which ends this chapter summons them to set foot." He adds that "**Chapter 48** makes one feature of Deutero-Isaiah's theology particularly clear...Israel must be brought to see that one part of her traditional concept of God is now shattered. God's being with Israel, as shown in the fact that He prepares the way home for her, must cease to be construed as 'opposition' in principle to the other nations. Instead, God can prepare the way for His people by granting a foreign nation and a heathen king success." (P. 202)

Watts comments that "The restoration of Jerusalem (**40:1-9**) is finally under way...This unnamed leader has Yahweh's promise to *lead him in the way that he should go*, a promise as old as Abraham, but as necessary now as then." (P. 178)

Oswalt comments that **verse 17** "explains why we should listen to God...This is not just anyone who speaks to them. It is the Lord of the exodus, the Kinsman-Redeemer Who will not leave them victims of fate or of their own bad decisions...But even beyond what these titles reveal about God's person and character is what His behavior teaches. He is characteristically a Teacher and a Guide...He has shown Himself to the human race in order to show us what we were made for and how we can return to that goal...Throughout biblical history God's leading of His people in their wanderings became an apt metaphor for His ultimate purpose of leading us to Himself and our own true selves...The only true profit in life comes when we allow God to be what He is: our only God." (P. 281)

⁸³

Westermann entitles **verses 18-19** "Then your peace would be like a river." He comments that these two verses are "a wish incorporating an admonition to keep God's commandments, and drawn up in the familiar conditional style. The utterance has a remarkably close parallel in **Psalms 81:14**^{Heb} / **13**^{Eng}, which contains the same wish as here: 'O
(continued...)

לֹא הִקְשַׁבְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתַי

If only / I wish⁸⁴ you had drawn near to My commandments,⁸⁵

⁸³(...continued)

that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways,' which is followed, again as here, by a contingent promise of blessing: 'Your happiness would last for ever...' **Psalm 81** undoubtedly reflects an act of worship. To an oracle of salvation given to the community at worship is added an admonition—no doubt by a cult prophet. This furnishes an excellent explanation of the additions in **chapter 48**." (Pp. 203-04)

Watts comments on **verse 18** that "Yahweh's soliloquy is a reminder of what Israel's stubborn rebellion and sin had cost." (P. 178)

84

The opening word of **verse 18** is לֹא, "If...", "If only...", "I wish..." It is an expression of YHWH's deepest desire for His people Israel. Watts comments, "*If only*—then Israel in the old name and shape might have survived and prospered. But that was not to be. Israel would survive, but she would be called by another name and have a different structure and role in God's purpose." (P. 179)

Alexander comments that "Nothing could well be more appropriate at the close of this division of the prophecies, than such an affecting statement of the truth, so frequently propounded in didactic form already, that Israel, although the chosen people of [YHWH], and as such secure from total ruin, was and was to be a sufferer, not from any want of faithfulness or care on God's part, but as the necessary fruit of his own imperfections and corruptions." (P. 220)

Oswalt comments on **verse 18** that "Since God is Who He is, in both nature and action, one would think that God's people would have listened carefully to His words of instruction and guidance. But that has not been the case...The prophet has castigated the people for not listening to God in the past (**verses , 4, 8**) and has called on them to listen to God's amazing new word of revelation (**verses 1, 12, 14, 16**). Now He reminds them of what might have been in the past if they had listened, and this prepares them to hear again the wonderful promise of redemption.' (P. 281)

85

The phrase הִקְשַׁבְתָּ לְמִצְוֹתַי, "you (singular) had drawn near / given attention to My commandments." That's what YHWH desired from Israel. The remainder of **verse 18** and the entirety of **verse 19** depict what would have happened to Israel if she had done this: peace / welfare / prosperity and righteousness would have overflowed Israel, with a constantly growing future!

North comments that "The reference...is to the past rather than to the future. The past is irrevocable, but there is nothing in the passage to suggest that there is no longer any hope for Israel. That would be a negation of Deutero-Isaiah's message. Indeed, **verse 19b** implies,

(continued...)

וַיְהִי כְנֶהֱרֹ שְׁלוֹמֶךָ

and your peace / prosperity⁸⁶ would be like the river,⁸⁷

וְצִדְקַתְּךָ כְּגַלֵּי הַיָּם:

and your righteousness like waves of the sea!⁸⁸

⁸⁵(...continued)

almost as a certainty, that Yahweh's promises to Abraham (compare **Genesis 13:16, 22:17**) will be fulfilled, and, if it stood alone, would contain not a condition but a promise and assurance. Divine grace is ever renewed. The sense of the whole is 'Would that you had (but you did not), and yet you still may...' (P. 182)

⁸⁶

Alexander comments that "*Peace* is here used in its wide sense of prosperity...or...in the restricted sense, is used to represent all kindred and attendant blessings. The parallel term [צִדְקַתְּךָ] 'your rightness / righteousness' adds moral good to natural, and supplies the indispensable condition without which the other cannot be enjoyed." (P. 221)

⁸⁷

North notes that the Hebrew נְהַר is a "river, perennial and smooth flowing, not a wadi (נַחַל)...Here, 'river' must be a simile of abundance and fullness." (Pp. 182-83)

And we ask, What "river" do you think is meant? We suggest it is the "river of life" depicted as flowing from Israel's temple in **Ezekiel 47:1-12**, bringing new life to the most "dead" areas in the land! However, here in **Ezekiel 47** it is a נַחַל, a "wadi," but nonetheless one that is flowing and growing until it fills the Dead Sea with life!

⁸⁸

Alexander states that "The ideas suggested by the figure of a river, are abundance, perpetuity, and freshness, to which the waves of the sea add those of vastness, depth, and continual succession." (P. 221)

Oswalt states that "Just as in **32:17**, *peace* and *righteousness* are seen to be the characteristics of the reign of God...And the comparison with **32:17** and **Amos 5:24** ('Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream'), in both of which, as here, the water imagery is strong, suggests that the normal sense of 'right behavior' is correct. General well-being is the result when all persons in a community are concerned to do what is truly right in the sight of God." (P. 282)

(continued...)

48:19 נִיְהִי כַחֹל זְרַעְךָ

And your descendant(s) would be like the sand,⁸⁹

⁸⁸(...continued)

Knight comments on **verse 18** that “How wonderful it would have been by Deutero-Isaiah’s day ‘if only you [Israel] had paid attention to My orders,’ says God. Compare **Psalm 81:14**^{Heb} / **13**^{Eng},

How I wanted / wished for My people to listen to Me,
Israel, (that) they would walk in My paths!

Then two good things would have eventuated. First, Israel herself, as the people of God, would have found her true peace, shalom [flowing like the River Euphrates]...Thus we have the peaceful picture of a gently flowing river, and we are shown how true joy comes from creating life and vitality where it has not been found before. Israel’s life would then have been a concert of saving actions (righteousness), of acts of compassionate concern, *tsedaqoth*. Compare Isaiah **11:9**,

They will not do wrong, and they will not destroy,
in all My set-apart mountain!
Because the earth has been filled with the knowledge of YHWH,
like the waters cover the oceans!

just as all those little irrigation ditches which Queen Babylon was soon to step into (**47:2**) brought life to the peasants of the land.” (P. 122)

⁸⁹

Oswalt comments that “A further benefit of having listened to God would have been the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise (**Genesis 22:17**)...The creation of a stable environment where children can mature and become productive persons is a direct concomitant of having listened to the instruction of God about the nature of human life.” (P. 282)

For occurrences of this phrase, כַּחֹל, *khachol*, “like the sand,” see:

Genesis 22:17, the Divine promise to Abraham:

Because I will certainly bless you, and I will certainly multiply your seed /
descendants,
like stars of the heavens, and like sand which is upon the sea’s shore;
and your seed / descendants will possess / inherit his enemies’ gate!

Genesis 32:13^{Heb} / **12**^{Eng}, Jacob reminds YHWH of His promise of offspring like the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered;

Genesis 41:49, Joseph stored up grain like the sand of the sea—it could not be measured;

(continued...)

וְצִאֲצֵאֵי מֵעֵד כְּמַעֲתִיּוֹ

⁸⁹(...continued)

Joshua 11:4, the troops gathered together by Jabin, king of Hazor were like the sand on the sea-shore;

Judges 7:12, the camels of the Midianites were without number, like the sand on the sea-shore;

1 Samuel 13:5, the Philistines gathered to fight Saul had thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops, “like the sand on the seashore”;

2 Samuel 17:11, Hushai counsels Absalom to gather all Israel together, like the sand by the sea;

1 Kings 4:20, in Solomon’s united kingdom, Israel and Judah were as many as the sand by the sea;

1 Kings 5:9^{Heb} / 4:29^{Eng}, Solomon’s wisdom and understanding were like the sand on the seashore;

Isaiah 10:22, though Israel is as numerous as the sand of the sea, only a remnant will return;

Isaiah 48:19 (here), If Israel has paid attention to YHWH, its offspring would have been like the sand;

Hosea 2:1^{Heb} / 1:10^{Eng}, the number of Israelites will be like the sand of the sea, innumerable;

Habakkuk 1:9, the Chaldeans gather captives like the sand.

Oswalt comments that “Although the fulfillment of all the promises had been thwarted in the past and the abundance that God had promised had not been achieved, the people had not lost their identity (their name had not been cut off).” (P. 283)

We think Oswalt is overlooking the statement in **1 Kings 4:20** that during Solomon’s reign, the promise of Abraham’s seed / descendant being as many as the sand by the sea is said to have been fulfilled. We also think that these passages show that the phrase “like the sand by the sea-shore” should not be taken literally, but is simply an expression for “innumerable,” or “too many to count.”

and your offspring from your belly⁹⁰ like its (the sand's) grains—⁹¹

לֹא־יִכָּרֵת

it would not be cut off,

וְלֹא־יִשְׁמַד שְׁמוֹ מִלְּפָנַי:

and its name⁹² would not be exterminated from before Me!⁹³

90

The phrase in our Hebrew text, מֵעֵיךְ, “from your belly” is omitted by 1QIs^a. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has τῆς κοιλίας σου, “of the belly / womb / stomach of yours (singular).”

91

The Hebrew phrase מֵעֲתִיו, translated “its grains,” is found only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, and so its definition is uncertain. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** states that the root is מָעַד, and its probable meaning is “grain (of sand).” In modern Hebrew the word means a “seed” of a watermelon.

Knight comments that the second blessing (see footnote 82 for the first) that would have been Israel's if they had only listened to His teaching, is that “the promises of God to the patriarchs would have been fulfilled by now, viz., that Israel would be as numerous as the grains of sand on the seashore (**Genesis 22:17; 32:12**; but also **Isaiah 10:22; Hosea 1:10**). Whereas the bitter reality was something wholly different. The sins of pride, apostasy, and disloyalty had now cut off Israel's *name*, or essential being, from before God's face or presence...and consequently from happy fellowship and cooperation with Him Who had chosen her as His very Own precious possession and the instrument of His saving purpose (**Exodus 19:5**).” (Pp. 122-23)

92

Where our Hebrew text reads שְׁמוֹ, “his name,” **Rahlfs** has “the name of yours,” again, we think, making sure that the reference is to Israel, not to Cyrus. Alexander comments that “name” here “is equivalent to *memory*. The excision or destruction of the name from before God is expressive of entire extermination...We may suppose that the writer, after wishing that the people had escaped the strokes provoked by their iniquities, declares that even now they shall not be entirely destroyed. This is precisely the sense given to the clause in the **Septuagint**, ‘neither shall the name of yours perish before Me.’” (P. 222)

93

Alexander states that “The explanation of the sufferings of the people as the fruit of their own sin is combined with a promise of exemption from complete destruction.” (P. 222)

However, it seems to us that the Hebrew text is in reality a Divine threat that Israel's name will be cut off if Israel continues in disobedience, in failure to hear God's word. What do you think?

Slotki comments on **verses 20-22** that “The exiles are bidden to hasten their departure from Babylon with jubilant songs of praise, recounting far and wide the wonders of their redemption and the marvels of their journey through the desert where waters flowed for them from the barren rocks.” (P. 238)

North entitles these verses “Home From Babylon!” He comments that “Deliverance is so certain and so near that the prophet cries, ‘Go out from Babylon, haste away from Chal-dea!’...**Verses 20-21** are an exquisitely wrought poem. **Verse 22** is prose and is word for word the same as **Isaiah 57:21**, except that it has ‘Yahweh’ instead of ‘my God.’” (P. 183)

Westermann entitles **verses 20-21** “Go forth from Babylon.” He comments that “The section composed of **chapters 46-48** is rounded off by this hymn of jubilation. It is at one and the same time a summons to go forth from Babylon and a call to extol the act of God whereby He redeemed His chosen people. Both anticipate the actual event itself. As things are there is no possibility of Israel’s going forth, and as things are there is no sign of Yahweh’s act of redemption. Nevertheless, the strains of jubilation at both are to be raised right away, in order that the prophet’s word of salvation (a promise of salvation in the perfect tense) may be re-echoed in the answer of the community...

“Here, however, the praise is declarative. God has already redeemed His people! This is a form of psalm found only in the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah and is the product of his prophecy. It is an ‘eschatological’ hymn of praise, since Israel’s answering exultation assumes that God’s final act has already taken place.

“In the **Psalter**, the range of those summoned to render praise tends to grow wider and wider. It is the same here; ‘send it forth to the end of the earth’...Volz draws attention to **Psalms 126:26**; there, too the praise of the redeemed is re-echoed by the wider world.

“The final verse goes beyond the release and tells of how the exiles are to be cared for on the journey through the desert...**Chapter 48** itself leaves no doubt about the complete difference in this new deliverance of the nation from the exile. The meaning is, instead, that, just as at the Exodus, the miraculous deliverance is to be accompanied by miraculous guidance and care; the God Who cared for and protected them then will also care for and protect them now.

“The final words of **verse 21** (**verse 22** in English) are an addition. What makes one sure of this is the fact that they recur in **57:21** (again at the end of a chapter). They were added by a reader in whose eyes the division into the godly and the wicked was an axiom of theology, and who was anxious to prevent the wicked from claiming such words of salvation for themselves.” (Pp. 204-05)

Oswalt comments on **verse 20** that “After the preceding injunction to listen both by reason of Who God is (**verse 17**) and the reminder of what has happened and will happen to those who do not listen (**verses 18-19**), the announcement of salvation is recapped in

(continued...)

צֵאוּ מִבָּבֶל

Go forth from Babylon!

בְּרַחוּ מִכַּשְׁדִּים

Flee from (the) Chaldeans!⁹⁵

⁹⁴(...continued)

powerful form...The people are called to allow themselves to participate by anticipation not only in the reality of the return but also in the glad announcement to the watching world of the vindication of God's character...

"The prophet does not merely call the people to accept an idea; he challenges them to become part of the reality. This explains the use of the word *flee*. They will not leave as fugitives, as **52:12** says explicitly. They will not be furtively escaping the clutches of a mighty Babylon. North suggests that the idea may be to flee the destruction coming to Babylon and not be caught up in it...There must be no hesitancy about believing God's promises. They must seize the idea that their deliverance is not a matter of question." (P. 283)

What do you think? Is it not fugitives who "flee"? How do you explain this in the light of **Isaiah 52:12**?

Because you (plural) will not go forth in hurried flight,
and in flight you will not go / walk.

Because going / walking before you people (is) YHWH,
and (the) One gathering you / acting as rear-guard (is) Israel's God!

⁹⁵

Alexander comments that "This is a prediction of the deliverance from Babylon, clothed in the form of an exhortation to escape from it...After the general reproof and promise of **verse 19**, he recurs to the great example of deliverance so often introduced before. As if he had said, Israel, notwithstanding his unworthiness, shall be preserved; even in extremity his God will not forsake him; even from Babylon he shall be delivered –and then turning in prophetic vision to the future exiles, he invites them to come forth– Flee from the Chasdim (or Chaldees)!" (P. 222)

So Alexander holds—but the passage does not sound to us like a prediction of deliverance, i.e., when the deliverance comes some two centuries later, the exiles will be commanded to flee, but rather, it is sounds very much like a command to the exiles to flee from Babylon, then and there, as the statement is being made. Instead of the prophetic vision depicting a command to future exiles, it sounds much more like a contemporary command to the exiles to flee immediately. What do you think?

North comments that "The summons [to flee] is to be interpreted in the light of **Jeremiah 51:6**: 'Flee (פָּרוּ), flee, escape) from the midst of Babylon...Do not be destroyed in her punishment' (compare **Revelation 18:4**). The exiles, if they do not make haste, will be in
(continued...)

בְּקוֹל רִנָּה תִּגְדְּרוּ

With a sound of a ringing-cry declare

הַשְׁמִיעוּ אֶת־זֶה

make this heard--

תִּזְיֵאוּהָ עַד־קֵצָה הָאָרֶץ

cause it to go forth⁹⁶ to the earth's end--

⁹⁵(...continued)

similar peril to Lot (**Genesis 19:15-17**); the destruction that is coming upon the city (**42:11**) may overtake them.” (P. 183)

Knight comments on **verse 20** that “There are scholars who remark that here we have a unique and individual oracle inserted in the text at this point for no obvious reason; for what it contains is Deutero-Isaiah’s cry to the exiles at the exciting moment when Cyrus’ armies reach the gates of Babylon...Yet these are not the words that anyone would use at such a moment. Even Deutero-Isaiah the theologian would have given more immediate and practical advice to his bewildered countrymen than the contents of **verses 20-21**...

“For **verse 18** has just expressed what might have been. **Verse 19** has gone on to declare the awful reality of the situation as it is. But **verse 20** offers the kind of surprise that God delights to give throughout the biblical revelation. Our poem suddenly takes for granted that Yahweh will save His people after all. What Deutero-Isaiah now proclaims is that God will act, not with His people’s cooperation, but despite their non-cooperation. Surely this is grace abounding. This is indeed the love that will not Israel go...

“Israel’s joy, when Cyrus should come pounding at the gate, is therefore to be no ordinary joy. *Rinnah* [רִנָּה] is a shout of joy issuing from a heart bubbling with excitement; in fact since it is a cultic word, it represents a joy that is virtually not of this world at all. The wonder of what God is doing at this crucial moment in the world’s history... must in fact be shouted to the Hebrew exiles in every land and not just to those in Babylon. And what is to be the content of the shout? Is it to be “Cyrus has set us free”? No. It is to be *The Lord has redeemed His servant Jacob*.” (P. 123)

Yes...but it is not limited to the Hebrew exiles. It is a shout for the ends of the earth to hear—every person on earth! It is the good news of YHWH’s love—for YHWH is the God of all peoples and nations! And the Cyrus Cylinder informs us that not only Hebrew exiles were freed—so also were the exiles from the other captive nations in Babylon.

96

Where our Hebrew text reads the phrase הַזְיֵאוּהָ, “cause it to go forth,” 1QIs^a completely omits the phrase.

אָמְרוּ גְּאֵל יְהוָה עֲבָדוֹ יַעֲקֹב:

say, YHWH redeemed / acted as Next-of-Kin to His servant Jacob!⁹⁷

97

Those commanded to flee from Babylon and the Chaldeans are told what they are to joyously proclaim to the ends of the earth—that גְּאֵל יְהוָה עֲבָדוֹ יַעֲקֹב, YHWH redeemed / acted as Next-of-Kin to His servant Jacob! Does that sound like a prediction made 200 years before the actual event? It sounds very much to us like words that are to be spoken after the event has occurred, in the immediate future.

Alexander states that “These are words to be uttered after the event; and the preterite [past tense] must therefore be strictly understood, as it is by most interpreters. The deliverance from Babylon is here referred to, only as one great example of the general truth that God saves His people.” (P. 229)

Do you agree with Alexander? Does this text appear to be mentioning the flight from Babylon only as an example of a general truth? But reading the Cyrus Cylinder lets us know that many other peoples and nations were involved in the release besides the Hebrew exiles.

Oswalt comments that those fleeing from Babylon “also must not keep silent about the meaning of the return. As Delitzsch says, ‘The redemption experienced by Israel is to be the gospel for all mankind’...God has shown that He alone is God, not only by predicting the exile but also by predicting the return by means of Cyrus long in advance. What does this mean? It means that history is not an accident; it means that human existence is fulfilling the plan and purpose of a single, all-powerful Creator; it means that the Creator is faithful and good; it means hope for all who will listen to Him. Should not such a message be shouted? Should it not be shouted to *the end of the earth*?...

“It is often debated whether Israel had a missionary mandate. If ‘missionary mandate’ means a commission to make converts, then there is room for debate. But if it means the obligation to declare to the world the truth of what had been revealed to them, there is no room for debate whatsoever. If Israel’s God is the only God, and if even the Cyruses serve Him, then He is the God of every person under the sun...

“What is the message to be declared? Again there is a sense of climax and summarization. *The Lord*, the God Who has challenged the very being of the Gods of Babylon, *has redeemed*, has delivered, close family members from the clutches of the Gods and restored them to health and dignity and freedom. He has redeemed *His servant Jacob*, the people who, in spite of sin and rebellion, have not been cast off, but have been delegated to be the living evidence of the incomparability of the Lord.” (Pp. 283-84)

North comments that “Even more important than that the exiles are free is the fact that it is Yahweh Who has *redeemed* them, and they are to proclaim the glad tidings to all the world. And indeed, even if this second exodus was less marvelous than the Prophet anticipated, it did excite wonder—or so the Jews persuaded them-selves—among the nations.” (P. 184) Compare **Psalm 126:1-2**,

(continued...)

48:21⁹⁸

וְלֹא צִמְאוּ בְּחַרְבוֹת הַהוֹלִיכֶם

And they did not thirst in the waste-lands (where) He led them.

מִמַּיִם מִצּוּר הִזִּיל לָמוֹ

Water from a rock He caused to flow for them;

⁹⁷(...continued)

- 1 When YHWH returned Zion's captivity / restored Zion's fortune,
we were like those dreaming.
- 2 Then our mouth was filled (with) laughter,
and our tongue with a ringing cry.
Then they will / would say among the nations,
YHWH acted mightily in deeds with these (people)!

But we must not forget that when YHWH sent Cyrus to release the Jewish exiles from their captivity, it was a release that included numerous other nations and peoples— exiles too. What YHWH was doing through Cyrus was not only on behalf of the Jewish exiles, but on behalf of all the exiles! And again we are reminded of **Amos 9:7**—which warns the reader against assuming that God's saving actions in human history are confined to the Jewish people. YHWH Who has done mighty works in the history of Israel, has also done mighty works in the history of the Philistines and the Syrians! And, the far-off Cushites / Ethiopians are precious in His eyes!

98

Watts states that in **verse 21** “An ecstatic hymn rejoices in the miracle of grace. God is marching with His people through the desert toward His land as He did before (**Exodus 17**).” (P. 179) But is this what the text says? We think it is a remembrance of what YHWH had done for Israel in the exodus from Egypt—but says nothing concerning what is happening in the present time of the text. What do you think?

Slotki comments on **verse 21** that “The description is reminiscent of the journey of the Israelites through the wilderness of Sinai (compare **Exodus 17:6; Numbers 20: 11**).” (P. 239)

Oswalt agrees, and states that “Undoubtedly, the use of such language prompted the people to expect a repetition of the events of the exodus on the return from exile. (It is probably this confusion that accounts for [**Rahlf's**] using future tenses throughout this verse.) But Isaiah had already warned them that while they were to remember the past in terms of what it taught them about the faithfulness and power of God, they were to forget it when it came to the new ways in which God was going to act (**43:18**). The rivers that God was going to cause to break forth in the wilderness (**43:19-29**) would be those that flowed out of human hearts set free from their sin by the Spirit of God (**32:15-20; 35:6-8; 44:3; 55:1; 58:11; John 7:37-39**).” (P. 284)

What do you think? Is this Oswalt's attempt to get around the failure of this prediction's being literally fulfilled during the return from Babylon?

וַיִּבְקַע-צֶוֶר וַיִּזְבוּ מַיִם:

and He split a rock, and waters bubbled forth!⁹⁹

48:22 אֵין שְׁלוֹם אָמַר יְהוָה:

There is no peace, said YHWH,

לְרָשָׁעִים:

for the wicked people!¹⁰⁰

99

Alexander comments that “There is evident reference here to the miraculous supply of water in the journey through the wilderness (**Exodus 17:6, Numbers 20:11, Psalm 78:15**)...as the great historical example of deliverance. As if he had said, Relate how God of old redeemed His servant Jacob out of Egypt, and led him through the wilderness, and slaked his thirst with water from the solid rock...Most interpreters, however, are agreed in applying the words to the deliverance from Babylon...

Unless we are prepared to assume an irrational confusion of language, setting all interpretation at defiance, our only alternative is to conclude, on the one hand, that Isaiah meant to foretell a miraculous supply of water during the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, or that the whole description is a figurative one, meaning simply that the wonders of the exodus should be renewed. Against the former is the silence of history ...against the latter, nothing but the foregone conclusion that this and other passages like it must relate exclusively to Babylon and the return from exile.” (Pp. 222-23)

We think Alexander’s either / or omits the possibility of a third understanding, that the prophet’s language predicted the new exodus in terms derived from the first exodus (from Egypt), and has enthusiastically overstated what it would be like. The fact is that only a small minority of the exiles in Babylon took advantage of Cyrus’ offer of freedom, and the desert between Babylon and Jerusalem was not transformed into a place of flowing rivers and trees. But an important portion of the exiles took advantage of the offer, and returned to Jerusalem and Judah.

Knight comments that “Getting out of the doomed city is thus to be understood in terms of what has already been done in the past when Israel fled from Egypt (**Exodus 14**). But the exodus had been more than a physical deliverance; it had been the beginning of a new life to be lived in covenant fellowship with God. At that time God had given His people water to drink; in fact, in the wilderness *He cleft the rock and the water gushed out*. If God had done this before, then He could easily do it again, and do it for a people who would have to face the desert once again on the homeward road to Zion.” (P. 123)

100

Verse 22 is a blanket statement, that the promise of peace / prosperity will certainly not apply to the wicked—whether in Israel or anywhere else! See the repetition of this statement in **Isaiah 57:21**.

(continued...)

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

Alexander states, "That [this verse] is a mere aphorism [concise statement of a principle], added to this long discourse, like a moral to an ancient fable, can only satisfy the minds of those who look upon the whole **book** as a series of detached and incoherent sentences. Vastly more rational is the opinion, now [in the 19th century] the current one among interpreters, that this verse was intended to restrict the operation of the foregoing promises to true believers, or the genuine Israel; as if he had said, All this will God accomplish for His people, but not for the wicked among them. The grand conclusion to which all tends is, that God is all and man nothing; that even the chosen people must be sufferers, because they are sinners; that peculiar favor confers no immunity to sin or exemption from responsibility, but that even in the Israel of God and the enjoyment of the most extraordinary privileges, it still remains for ever true that 'there is no peace to the wicked.'" (P. 223)

Oswalt comments that "While God's promises to Abraham and his children would be kept, and the nation would not be allowed to be wiped out, no individuals within the nation should presume on that election and believe that they could therefore sin with impunity...[The promises of this passage] should offer no comfort at all to those who showed by their wickedness that they had no intention of committing their way to God." (P. 284)

Knight asks, "What does it mean to be wicked? It means to refuse the wholeness and fullness of life, the *shalom* which it was Yahweh's will to give to His beloved servant. It means in effect to refuse to be effective. It is therefore something negative, as refusal must be, and so it belongs in the realm of *tohu* [chaos]...

"This chapter therefore concludes with a terrible utterance. We saw in **chapter 47** what the end of Babylon was to be. Equally under judgment, however, stands the chosen people, and we listen in awe as we await the sentence of God upon them. But **verse 20** has just said that the sentence is to be one of grace and mercy. **Verse 22** is no editorial comment, as some would have us to believe, written in by a pious scribe. Actually it is so important that it is quoted later by the writer of **57:21**. It is a reiteration for great effect of the subject brought forward at the beginning of the chapter in **verse 1**. For Deutero-Isaiah wants us to recognize with awed surprise that God is determined to reveal His glory in Israel, despite the fact that she has broken the covenant and departed from Him. God will in fact do so at that very point where Israel is farthest from Him in thought, intention, and cooperative faith. We are now awaiting a revelation that can be accounted for in terms of nothing other than grace." (P. 124)

Watts comments on **verse 22** that "The scene ends with a laconic [brief / concise] reminder of reality. Israel is still largely in rebellion against God's use of Cyrus. Her people have put themselves in the position of being adversaries to both Yahweh and Cyrus." (P. 179)

He explains the chapter as follows: "When Sheshbazzar, prince of Judah, started his journey to Jerusalem, he had only a small group of supporters. But he also had the Emperor's edict and the precious utensils that once had graced Solomon's temple before being taken to Babylon by Nebuchanezzar's armies. This could be viewed as a little thing (compare **Zechariah 4:10**) or it could be seen as a sign that God Who moved heaven and earth was now moving to restore Jerusalem. The [**Book of Isaiah**] views it in the latter sense. A

(continued...)

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

commission from God, Creator of heaven and earth, Lord of history and patron of Cyrus, Emperor of the world, and Israel's Savior and Redeemer, begins an expedition to Jerusalem's ruins to rebuild and restore the temple [but we ask, does the text actually say any of this? Is this not all being read into the text by Watts?].

"The completion of the task would require three Persian emperors, four Jewish leaders, and a century of time. But now God had put down earnest money on the project. Exilic Judaism was sceptical. Jerusalem was afraid. But 'mills' of God 'ground slowly on.'" (P. 179)

(continued...)

1.

YHWH's Incredible Compassion for Sinners

The adjective רַחֻם, **rachum**, “compassionate,” is related to the noun רֶחֶם, **rechem**, “womb,” and should be understood as meaning the kind of feelings a mother naturally has for the child within her body—“womb-like feelings.” It occurs some twelve times in the **Hebrew Bible**, at:

Exodus 34:6,

And YHWH crossed over before his face, and YHWH cried out / proclaimed:
YHWH, El / Supreme God, compassionate and merciful / gracious;
Long of noses / long suffering / patient, and great of steadfast-love and true-
faithfulness!

Deuteronomy 4:31,

Because a compassionate God (is) YHWH your God;
He will not abandon you; and He will not destroy you;
and He will not forget your fathers' covenant which He swore to them.
(Note that this statement of YHWH's compassion is preceded by statements that YHWH is a consuming fire, a jealous God, Who causes His disobedient people to perish, and is only merciful to those who turn their lives to Him in penitence);

Joel 2:13,

and tear your (plural) heart, and not your clothes;
and return to YHWH your God;
because gracious and compassionate (is) He,
slow to anger (literally, 'long-of-noses') and great of steadfast love;
and He [YHWH!] will repent over the evil (which He intended to inflict).
(This passage is reliant on **Exodus 34:6**, but does not quote it exactly, changing the order of the two adjectives compassionate and gracious, and adding the phrase “and He will repent over the evil (which He intended to inflict).” This Divine grace and compassion is promised only to those who return to YHWH “with all their heart” (**verse 12**). YHWH will repent if His people genuinely repent!)

Jonah 4:2b, where Jonah explains why he tried to run away to Tarshish:

because I knew that You (are) a gracious and compassionate God, f
slow to anger (literally, 'long-of-noses'), and great of steadfast love,
and He [YHWH!] will repent over the evil (which He intended to inflict)”
(same as **Joel 2:13**, reliant on **Exodus 34:5**, but changing the order of the two adjectives, and adding the phrase “and He will repent over the evil (which He planned to inflict).” As is explained in **Jonah 3:10**, this Divine compassion was given to Nineveh only when they repented, turning away from their evil ways)

Psalm 78:38,

and He (was) compassionate;

He would cover over iniquity; and He would not destroy;
and He would again and again turn back His anger;
and He would not rouse all His rage.

(But as the **Psalm** goes on to say, because of Israel's constant rebellion which aroused His jealousy, God became very angry and rejected Israel completely, **verse 59.**)

Psalm 86:15, (evidently quoting **Exodus 34:6**),

and You, my Lord—a God of compassion and gracious;
slow to anger (literally, 'long-of-noses'); and great of steadfast-love and true-faithfulness!

(There is no mention of the negative side of YHWH's character in this **Psalm**, which is the cry of a poor and needy faithful servant of YHWH who is being attacked by arrogant, ruthless people.)

Psalm 103:8,

compassionate and gracious (is) YHWH;
slow to anger (literally, 'long-of-noses') and great of steadfast-love!
(Quoting **Exodus 34:6**; mentioning the negative side of YHWH's character in **verses 9-10**, but stating that "He has not repaid us according to our iniquities")

Psalm 111:4b,

gracious and compassionate (is) YHWH
(with reverse order of the two adjectives, and acknowledging that YHWH's compassionate deeds are done for "those who tremble in awe before Him")

Psalm 112:4-5,

- 4 Light arose in the darkness for upright people;
gracious and compassionate and rightly-related;
- 5 a good man is one who is gracious and who lends;
he will sustain his words in a legal decision.
(the character of a good person is patterned after YHWH's character. Here the language of **Exodus 34:6** is adapted to apply to good people in contrast with the wicked, that is, **Exodus 34:6** is being utilized as a source for understanding human ethical behavior!)

Psalm 145:8,

gracious and compassionate (is) YHWH,
slow to anger (literally, 'long of noses') and great of steadfast love.
(again, dependent on **Exodus 34:6**, but reversing the order of the two adjectives,

and using a different adjective for “great.” This **psalm** emphasizes that the Divine goodness is “for all,” and that YHWH’s compassion is “on all He has made”; but ends with affirming that “all the wicked He will destroy”)

Nehemiah 9:17b, in spite of ancient Israel’s stubborn rebellion against YHWH, still

You, Eloah, (Who grant) abundant forgivenesses, gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger (literally ‘long-of-noses’) and great of steadfast-love;
and You did not forsake them.

(Again, this statement is related to **Exodus 34:6**, but certainly not exactly, with the addition of “Eloah of abundant forgivenesses,” and the phrase “You did not forsake them.” In this great prayer (**verses 5b-38**), Nehemiah confesses how many times Israel has been arrogant and stiff-necked, disobedient and rebellious, suffering the punishment that reflects the negative side of YHWH’s character)

Nehemiah 9:31,

and in Your many compassions, You did not make them a complete destruction;
and You did not forsake them;

because a gracious and compassionate God are You!

(The last phrase quotes **Exodus 34:6**, with the reverse order of the two adjectives)

2 Chronicles 30:9b Hezekiah invites the remnant of Israelites left in northern Israel to return to worship in the sanctuary in Jerusalem, stating:

because generous and compassionate (is) YHWH your God;
and He will not turn away (His) face from you people,
if you return to Him.”

(Hezekiah uses the language of **Exodus 34:6** in its opening phrase, reversing the order of the two adjectives, but then going its own way; YHWH’s generosity and compassion are conditioned on Israel’s returning to Him, i.e. their penitence).

What we see in these many references to YHWH’s compassion in the **Hebrew Bible** is that while the positive side of YHWH’s nature is emphasized, there is no denial of the reality of the negative side of His nature, which visits iniquity and does not clear the impenitent of their guilt. That is, the **Hebrew Bible** does not make the mistake of saying “either / or,” but rather constantly holds to a “both / and,” while emphasizing YHWH’s compassion.

