

Isaiah Chapter 49, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

49:1¹ שְׁמַעוּ אֵימִים אֵלַי

¹North comments on **chapters 49-55** that “Some of the major themes of **chapters 40-48** are missing from these chapters. There are no references to Babylon or to Cyrus, no polemics against idolatry, no summonses to assize-inquests, and no appeals to the fulfilment of former prophecies. The address is to Zion-Jerusalem rather than to Jacob-Israel. Apart from the Servant Songs, three of which are in **chapters 49-55** and only one (**42:1-4**) in **chapters 40-48**, the main concern is with the rehabilitation of Jerusalem rather than with the release from Babylon.” (P. 184)

These considerations certainly lead to the conclusion that **chapters 49-55** were composed following the release from Babylon, and reflect the problems that the returning exiles faced as they lived in Jerusalem.

North goes on to state that “There is, nevertheless, general agreement that **chapters 49-55** are from Deutero-Isaiah [with some rare exceptions among scholars]...

“That the Jerusalem Jews were in trouble with their neighbors over an attempt to rebuild the walls of the city, has long been recognized. This may have been in the reign of Xerxes I [Ahasuerus] 485-465 B.C.E.), and **Ezra 4:7-23** purports to give the text of a letter to Artaxerxes I [Longimanus] (464-424 B.C.E.) together with the king’s reply ordering that the work of rebuilding should cease...In any case, it is no matter, so far as the interpretation of **Isaiah 49-55** is concerned, whether the plight of Jerusalem was what it was at any time between 587 and 538 B.C.E., or what it was in a conjectured situation between 485 and Nehemiah’s coming to the city in 444 B.C.E.” (P. 185)

Here in **Isaiah 49:1** and following is the second of the four “Servant Songs” of **Isaiah 40-55** (the others are **42:1-9**; **50:4-9** and **52:13-53:12**). Students disagree on where this second “Song of the Servant” ends. We are taking the entire **chapter 49** as the second Song of the Servant.

North entitles **49:1-6** “The Servant Of Yahweh: His Address To The Nations.”

He comments that “In this, the second Servant Song, the speaker is the Servant himself. He addresses himself to the distant peoples, to whom he had first been commissioned (**42:1-4**). He tells them that Yahweh had designated him to His service even before he was born, then equipped and kept him—it is not said for how long—in readiness for his task...

“His major endowment is incisiveness of speech, speech that goes straight to its mark...Yahweh has given him the honorable title ‘Israel’...Between **verses 3** and **4** time must have elapsed during which the Servant says emphatically that he has labored in vain, though he has not lost faith in God or in the ultimate success of his mission...

(continued...)

¹(...continued)

“His task so far (**verse 5a**) has been to ‘bring back’ Jacob-Israel to Yahweh. Yahweh tells him that it is little matter that he should rehabilitate the tribes of Jacob. Instead, the Servant assures his audience, Yahweh has widened the scope of his mission: ‘so I make you a light to the nations, that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.’ This had been Yahweh’s original intention, compare **42:1-4**.” (P. 186)

Slotki holds that the song is contained in **verses 1-6**: “Isaiah (representing the ideal Israel), the servant of God, addresses the nations far and near on his Divine mission; his apparent failure and disappointment in the past and his final realization that he is to be not only the instrument of Israel’s salvation, but also a spiritual light to the world.” (P. 239)

Oswalt entitles **49:1-7** “The Servant’s calling,” and comments that “With this chapter a new section of the **book** begins. While the language of captivity and deliverance continues, neither Cyrus nor Babylon is mentioned again. While ‘servant’ continues to be a dominant theme, it is no longer the passive servant of **chapters 40-48**, whose mere existence is to be evidence of the helplessness of the Gods. Rather, it is that servant who was introduced at the beginning of the previous section (**42:1-9** [certainly not a passive servant!]), who will be God’s agent to bring His covenant to the people and His justice to the nations. In subtle but nevertheless clear ways the focus has shifted from the physical captivity of the Judeans to the moral and spiritual captivity of Israel and the whole world. God has said that the lives of His servants, Israel, would be the evidence to the world that He alone is the Holy One. The section **48:17-22** brings that thought to its climactic expression...

“But how is that possible? Will God simply ignore the sin that projected Israel into slavery in the first place? How will the blind, deaf, rebellious servant Israel be any different just because Cyrus has sent them home? The answer is: the servant, ideal Israel, will give himself to be for and in Israel what Israel could never be in itself. God’s mighty arm is about to be revealed (**50:2; 51:9; 52:10; 53:1**). But instead of being a jack-booted [wearing knee-length leather military boots] destroyer of the enemies of the nation, he will be a tender plant (compare **6:13; 11:1**), an apparent failure, but he will atone for the sins of the nation and of the world.” (Pp. 286-87)

Of course, this is to completely overlook the opening statement of **Isaiah 40:1-2** that God has fully forgiven His people:

- 1 Comfort! Comfort My people,
says your (plural) God!
- 2 Speak to Jerusalem’s heart,
and cry out to her,
that her warfare is complete,
that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,

(continued...)

¹(...continued)

that she received from YHWH's hand double (punishment)
for all her missings-of-the-mark!

Alexander comments on **chapter 49** that it “has for its great theme the relation of the church [meaning the people of YHWH] to the world, or of Israel to the Gentiles...

“The chapter opens with an exhibition of the messiah and his people, under one ideal person, as the great appointed Teacher, Apostle, and Restorer of the apostate nations, **verses 1-9**. This is followed by a promise of Divine protection and of glorious enlargement, attended by a joyous revolution in the state of the whole world, **verses 10-13**. The doubts and apprehensions of the church herself are twice recited under different forms, **verses 14** and **24**, and as often met and silenced, first by repeated and still stronger promises of God's unchanging love to His people and of their glorious enlargement and success, **verses 15-23**; then by an awful threatening of destruction to their enemies and His, **verses 25-16**.” (Pp. 223-24)

Christian interpreters commonly agree with Alexander in identifying the servant in this song as the Messiah, Jesus Christ, although in fact there is no mention of a messiah in the entire chapter, and the only “messiah” mentioned in **Isaiah 40-55** is Cyrus (**Isaiah 45:1**). However, it is quite obvious that the picture of Jesus and His ministry as painted in the **Synoptic Gospels, Mark, Matthew** and **Luke**, show Jesus to be just such a servant, accomplishing the work predicted for YHWH's servant.

Knight comments on **chapter 49** that “‘If only you had paid attention to My orders,’ God had said to His servant Israel at **48:18**, then you would have been effective. Yet effective to what end? We are obviously now drawing close to the heart of Deutero-Isaiah's remarkable exposition. He had eliminated more than one side issue by now. He has dealt with the question of the validity of idol worship; he has already vindicated God's action through His instrument, the Persian Cyrus; and he has more than once shown how the great ‘I AM’ [our YHWH; we think ‘I AM’ is a mistake based on the Greek translation, not the Hebrew name] has a purpose working through the events of the moment. So now he draws in his net and discloses what Israel has been meant to do and be ever since God had called her to be His servant, but a servant very different from Cyrus...

“This fresh theme, however, has led some commentators to declare that **chapter 49** introduces a new section of the **book**. Note that Cyrus is no longer mentioned in this section. Some commentators have therefore averred [stated, asserted] that we are now actually reading the work of a different author. In reply it can be pointed out that **chapter 40** offers a summary of material that appears in all that follows. Remember that Deutero-Isaiah is a theologian who is concerned [with] the אַחֲרֵי־כֵן [after-part, end; final lot, future; but note that this word does not occur in this chapter nor in **chapter 40**] of things, their eschatological [final] outcome. While his method of exposition is to

(continued...)

וְהִקְשִׁיבוּ לְאֲמִים מִרְחֹק
 יְהוָה מִבֶּטֶן קִרְאֲנִי
 מִמְעַי אֲמִי הַזְכִּיר שְׁמִי:

Listen to me, coasts / regions!²

And pay attention peoples from afar!³

¹(...continued)

begin with history, as a good theologian must do, he then proceeds to expound its meaning in the light of God's plan, and this is just what **chapters 49ff.** do." (P. 125)

Yes, but in fact the noun אַחֲרִית does not occur even once in **chapters 49ff.**, and we are suspicious of making the chief theme of a section based on a word / concept that does not once occur in that section! As a comment on **Isaiah 2:2**, וְהָיָה | בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים, "and it will happen in (the) end / latter part of the days," this would be much more appropriate. We suspect that the theme of these chapters is centered in the nature of YHWH's servant, not on eschatology!

²Alexander and Oswalt translate by "islands," and Alexander comments that this "may be considered as a poetical representative of foreign and especially of distant nations." (P. 224)

³Knight comments that "First, we hear a voice addressing itself to the whole human race. Remember that 'coasts and islands' (one word in Hebrew) come to mean 'the whole earth' in Deutero-Isaiah's idiom...Now, however, without warning, we find that it is the servant who is speaking and not God." (P. 125)

We agree with Knight that in **verses 1-2**, it is the voice of YHWH's servant speaking, and his message is addressed to all people in the world—it is not just a message for Israel to hear. He wants the world at large to know that he has a mission to and for them—for the sake of which he has been born.

Alexander states that "Here, as in **chapter 41:1**, [the prophet] turns to the Gentiles and addresses them directly." (P. 224)

Where our Hebrew text has לְאֲמִים מִרְחֹק, "peoples from afar," **Rahlf's** has διὰ χρόνου πολλοῦ στήσεται λέγει κύριος, "through much time it will stand, says (the) Lord."

(continued...)

YHWH called me from (the) womb,
from my mother's belly He remembered / mentioned my name.⁴

³(...continued)

North comments that "The Servant's audience is as wide as Yahweh's in **41:1**."
(P. 186)

Be silent before Me, coastlands!
And peoples, let them renew strength!
Let them draw near— then they will speak together!
Let us draw near for the justice / judgment / decision!

⁴The servant of YHWH has not chosen his mission for himself—rather, it is a Divine mission to which he was called from the womb, from his birth.

Slotki says that "The servant of God was predestined to undertake his mission" (p. 239); but Isaiah does not use such religious-philosophical language, which calls up theological debates over "predestination" and "freedom of will," and God's "omniscience," and "determinism"—theological ideas associated with the teaching of John Calvin.

For this matter of the servant being called from birth, compare the story of Samuel's birth in **1 Samuel 1**, with Hannah's dedication of her child from birth to the service of YHWH; also see **Jeremiah 1:4-5**,

4 And YHWH's word came to me, saying:
5 Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you!
And before you emerge(d) from (the) uterus, I set you apart!
A spokesman for the nations I have made you!"

Compare the apostle Paul's statement in **Galatians 1:15**,

but then when it pleased [the God],
the One Who set me apart / separated me from my mother's womb,
and called (me) through His grace...
(to preach among the non-Jews).

We are reminded of the **Gospel** stories of John the Immerser and Jesus, both of whom were sent on missions by God "from the womb." These are not religious-philosophical statements concerning predestination, but are simply affirmations that God is at work in human history, choosing His agents to do His work even before their births, and "from the womb."

What do you think? Do you believe the Creator of the universe is still today actively choosing people even before their birth, and calling them to be His servants?

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I have experienced the call of God in my own life, and have come to know others who have experienced a similar call, to proclaim good news to the nations—especially those who have devoted their entire lives in dangerous mission work in far-flung areas of the earth. If it is true that God calls people to His service, are you willing to listen for, and respond to that call?

Alexander translates by “[YHWH] from the womb has called me, from the bowels of my mother he has mentioned my name (or literally, caused it to be remembered).” He comments that the expression *from the womb* may be inclusive of the period before birth, or restricted to the actual vocation of the speaker to his providential work...Neither the prophets as a class, nor Isaiah as a single prophet, had been entrusted with a message to the Gentiles [This is certainly not the case. Many of the writing prophets, including Isaiah had been given specific messages to the non-Jewish nations. See our footnote at **Isaiah 42:1**, where we respond to Alexander’s earlier similar claim.].

“In favor of supposing that the speaker is Israel, the chosen people, there are various considerations, but especially the aid which this hypothesis affords in the interpretation of the third verse. At the same time, there are clear indications that the words are the words of the messiah...As in **42:1**, the ideal speaker is the messiah, considered as the head of his people and as forming with them one complex person.” (P. 224)

We suggest that these opposing views of Slotki and Alexander can be resolved by saying “Both / and,” rather than “Either / or.” That is, Israel, as YHWH’s servant, is assigned a universal task of proclamation to the nations, and Israel’s Messiah, Jesus Christ, takes up that task as His mission in life, then assigning it to His disciples in the “great commission,” which becomes the theme of the **Book of Acts** in the **New Testament**.

We see in these songs of the servant the task of bringing light and justice to the nations, just as we see in **Isaiah 55:3-5** and **chapter 66**, the depiction of the nations coming to Jerusalem bringing the scattered exiles from all across the world, and becoming part of Israel themselves. We likewise see in **Zechariah 14** the depiction of the surviving nations coming to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of booths yearly. We see in the **Book of Ruth** the non-Jewess Ruth marrying with the Jew Boaz, and thereby becoming the ancestress of King David, obviously, we think, in defiance of the prohibition of intermarriage in **Ezra-Nehemiah**. We see in the **Book of Jonah** the mandate given by YHWH to an Israeli prophet to proclaim YHWH’s command to the hated City of Nineveh—and the depiction of Nineveh repenting at Jonah’s message and being forgiven by YHWH—to Jonah’s consternation, but to the delight of YHWH.

No, this matter of light to the nations is not confined to Jesus Christ and His church, although it is certainly central to their mission.

(continued...)

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This is why we can agree with Slotki and Alexander—the servant described here is “Israel”; and the work assigned to this servant is exactly the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ and His disciples. What do you think?

Knight comments on the phrase, “The Lord called me from the womb,” that “At **49:15** Deutero-Isaiah will speak of a woman’s beloved son as *the son of her womb*. It would seem that in some sense it is God’s son who is spoken of here [but this is jumping from a woman’s beloved son to God’s son...obviously an attractive move for Christian interpreters, but not contained in the text! See Exodus 4:22 below]. Next we read that God *named my name* before birth [and ordinarily it is the father, or mother who names the child], and for Deutero-Isaiah this phrase implies selection in love. The speaker’s first words, then, are *The Lord called me*. Yahweh, the name of the covenant God, is written at the head of the sentence, the Hebrew method of showing emphasis. This is Yahweh’s act, not man’s; it is the covenant God’s not the Creator God’s, or that of the Lord of Hosts [What? Are these three different Gods? We think not! We do not think the biblical text makes this distinction!]...

“The call is the call of election. It is the call to a specific individual who can be identified by name, and that name is Israel. God had chosen Israel from the days of Abraham...and it was His son Israel whom He had rescued from the hand of Pharaoh... Moreover it was the covenant God known to Moses as Yahweh, the Lord...Who had thus called Israel to be His people, and it was with Israel alone that God had made His covenant in days of old.” (Pp. 125-26) See:

Isaiah 43:1,

But now,, in this way YHWH spoke,
your Creator, O Jacob, and your Former, O Israel:
You shall not be afraid, because I redeemed / acted as next-of-kin for you;
I called by your name; you belong to Me!
(Note that here the name is Jacob / Israel)

Isaiah 41:8,

And you, Israel, My servant,,
Jacob, whom I chose (even) you,
descendant of Abraham,
one loving Me:
(Again, the name is Israel / Jacob, not Israel alone)

Exodus 4:22, where Moses is instructed by YHWH--

And you (singular) shall speak to Pharaoh in this way:
YHWH said, My son, My first-born (is) Israel.

⁵Slotki states that **verse 2** depicts “the servant’s Divine equipment.” (P. 239)

Indeed—his mouth has been given words to speak, like a sharp sword, hidden in the hand of YHWH, ready to thrust to the heart of those hearing. He has made His servant like a finely polished arrow, concealed in His quiver—ready to be shot on its way.

North comments that the Hebrew expression “with the mouth of the sword,” for example in **Deuteronomy 13:15^{Heb} / 16^{Eng}** [where it is translated ‘edge’], and the sword that “devours,” for example in **Deuteronomy 32:42**, finds “A more expansive parallel [in] **Isaiah 11:4**, where it is said of the messianic king: ‘he will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked’...

This, however, is not to say that the Servant must be a king or a military figure... [See] **Jeremiah 23:29**, ‘Is not My word like a fire and like a forge-hammer that shatters rock?’...in a context that has to do with the prophets...The ‘sharp sword’ of the Servant is the word of a prophet rather than the edict of a king...

“The figures in this verse give us no warrant for picturing the Servant as a ‘meek and mild’ person. On the contrary, the word of the Lord is a formidable weapon, and it is because the Servant’s task is arduous and dangerous that Yahweh does not send him to it until he has been properly equipped to face it.” (P. 187)

And we are reminded of the words of **Hebrews 4:12**,

For the word of the God is alive, and powerful,
and sharper than any two-edged sword;
and penetrating as far as a division of innermost-being and spirit,
both of joints and of marrows;
and able to discern thoughts and purposes of (the) heart!
(We can certainly say this is true of the sharp words spoken by Second Isaiah in **Isaiah 40-55!**)

I know, I know—those who have never listened for, and heard YHWH’s word spoken to their hearts, will laugh at all this as nonsense and superstition. But those who have opened their hearts to the word of God, know it is the truth—it has happened in their lives—shattering former convictions and sinful ways, revolutionizing their lives, leading them out from their past into new and fruitful lives! I remember a young black student of mine in Miami, who told of his life as a drug-dealer in Overtown and Little Haiti, and how his life had been completely turned around by hearing the word of God, preached in a Baptist church in Overtown. I went with him to visit that church—and witnessed many others sharing in a dynamic ministry of reaching out to addicts, helping them to de-tox and get their lives straightened out, as we shared a delicious breakfast on an early Sunday morning. What do you think? Is this all nonsense?

(continued...)

בְּצֵל יָדוֹ הִחְבִּיאֲנִי
וַיִּשְׂמֵנִי לְחֵץ בָּרוֹר
בְּאִשְׁפֹתוֹ הִסְתִּירָנִי:

And He placed my mouth like a sharp sword;
in His hand's shadow He hid me.
And He placed me for a polished arrow;⁶
in His quiver He hid (synonym) me.⁷

⁵(...continued)

Knight asks, "What then does Israel confess that God has done for her? (Finally) He made my mouth like a sharp sword. Deutero-Isaiah himself had found that the Holy Spirit was using his mouth (**48:16**,

Draw near to Me; listen to / hear this!
From (the) first I did not speak in the secrecy.
From (the) time of its happening / becoming, there I (am)!
And now, my Lord YHWH sent me forth, and His Spirit.)

But how could Israel, a whole people, comprising old and young, male and female, rich and poor, be said to possess one mouth?

"We noted in **chapter 40** that God can address His people as one individual personality, as one 'thou'...When Israel is addressed as 'thou' in the feminine, then in God's sight she is obviously the personification of Zion or Jerusalem...This corporate personality idea was a completely natural way of thought in biblical times...Israel had to learn to be the instrument of the word, so that the word might be effective in human life. The life of man, however, is one of dungeons and darkness, and it is into such areas that the word must be carried by a willing servant." (Pp. 126-27)

⁶Alexander comments that what is called in the first line of **verse 2** "a sharp sword," is in this third line called "a polished arrow." He states that "The essential idea is of course the same, viz., that of penetrating power." (P. 225)

⁷Alexander comments that "The main idea meant to be conveyed is not protection but concealment. The archer keeps the arrow in his quiver not merely that it may be safe, but that it may be ready for use and unobserved until it is used." (P. 225)

Compare **Lamentations 3:1-18**, a passage reminiscent of Job's complaints, but now the complaint of a man in Jerusalem in the Babylonian destruction, especially **verse 13**,

(continued...)

49:3 וַיֹּאמֶר לִי עַבְדֵי־אַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל

אֲשֶׁר־בְּיָדְךָ אֶת־פָּאֵר:

And He said to me, You (singular) (are) My servant, Israel;⁸

⁷(...continued)

He brought / shot into my kidneys
His quiver's arrows.

Knight comments on the second line of **verse 2**, “in the shadow of His hand He hid me,” that it “must point to a period of quiet and undisturbed training,” as does the fourth line, “in His quiver He hid me away.” “There was a long period after the establishment of the monarchy when Jerusalem, unlike Ephraim [is he thinking of Samaria?] in the north, was undisturbed by war. A polished arrow [בְּרִירָה] is obviously an effective arrow (compare **Psalms 45:5**,

Your arrows (are) sharp ones (שִׁנּוּנִים);
people will fall beneath you,
(with those arrows ?) in (the) heart of the king's enemies!
(But does בְּרִירָה mean the same thing as שִׁנּוּנִים?)

Israel was therefore being trained by God at the time to hit the target that He had chosen for her.” (P. 127)

⁸Slotki states that this means “*Israel*. The nation; or Isaiah, as the personification of the people.” (P. 240)

There can be no doubt that Israel is called YHWH's servant in **Isaiah**. See **Isaiah 41:8-9; 43:10** (where the name Israel does not occur, but the people of Israel are being addressed); **44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3** (here) and **5**.

Ortlund states that “comparing **verses 5-6**, this servant Israel restores the nation Israel. The servant is the true embodiment of what the nation failed to be, namely, the one ‘in whom I will be glorified.’” (P. 1330)

It is true that in **verses 5-6** the task of servant Israel is to restore Jacob / Israel to Himself. We will see this same thing in **52:13-53:12**, where YHWH's servant is depicted as an individual who bears Israel's sins upon himself, and therefore can hardly be the nation of Israel itself. The fact is, there is a mystery surrounding the identity of the servant, who is identified as Israel, but also as an individual who ministers to Israel.

That the servant is the prophet himself seems to be negated by the way the prophet speaks of the servant in the third person in a number of passages; but as this

(continued...)

in whom I will be glorified!⁹

⁸(...continued)

passage continues, the prophet uses the first person pronouns and verbs, indicating that in fact he is talking about himself as “servant Israel.”

Who do you think servant Israel is, in whom YHWH will be glorified? Notice that Cyrus, the Persian king, is identified as YHWH’s “shepherd” (**44:28**), fulfilling YHWH’s purpose, and YHWH’s “messiah” (**45:1**) which we think are synonyms of “servant,” but the word servant is not used of Cyrus.

Oswalt notes that “Because of the problem of harmonization with the strongly individualistic tone of the rest of the segment, many scholars wish to delete ‘Israel’ as a gloss...But the textual evidence is not strong enough to support the deletion (the name is missing only in one medieval Hebrew manuscript).” (P. 285)

North comments that “There has been much discussion about the genuineness of ‘Israel’ here. Nearly all the protagonists [chief figures in the debate] for an individual interpretation of the servant have deleted the word...because the servant appears to be distinguished from Israel in **verses 5-6**...The [ancient] versions all have ‘Israel’ and the only Hebrew manuscript which omits it is Kennicott 96...”

“No one would ever have deleted the name were it not that it is suspect on dogmatic grounds. It must therefore be retained. Yet it needs some qualification, if ‘Israel’ has a mission to Israel...Those nineteenth-century commentators who argued for an individual servant while still retaining ‘Israel’ were accustomed to understand it in the sense of ‘the true (embodiment of) Israel.’” (P. 188)

What do you think? We say there should be little doubt that YHWH’s servant is Jacob / Israel, and at the same time an individual Israelite who takes Israel’s sins upon himself, and dies vicariously for Israel.

⁹YHWH will be glorified when Israel truly becomes His “servant”!

Knight comments on **verse 3** that “Now we have a categorical statement about who the servant is. This line in Hebrew is in three parts [we say, two parts]. (1) And He said to me, (2) ‘you are My servant, Israel,’ (3) ‘in whom I will be glorified.’ It is God Himself, then, Who calls Israel ‘My servant.’ The servant, however, is to have only a secondary function. What Deutero-Isaiah is explaining from this ‘word’ of God is that, while God is light indeed, His light cannot be reflected unless it strikes a polished surface. Israel has been created by God to be that surface, for to be it is to be the servant. A mirror is nothing in itself. It can reflect the light only when there is light to fall upon it...For God had already promised to give His glory to no nation but Israel alone. (See

42:8,

(continued...)

49:4¹⁰ וְאֲנִי אֶמְרָתִי לְרֵיִק יִגְעֵתִי

לְתַהוֹ וְהַבֵּל פְּתִי כִלְיֹתִי

⁹(...continued)

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

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

43:6-7,

6 I will say to the north, Give!

And to (the) south, You shall not withhold!

Bring My sons from afar,

and My daughters from the earth's extremity!

7 Every one, the one called by My name, and for My glory--I created him,

I formed him, indeed I made him!

46:13,

I brought near My righteousness;

it will not be far away;

and My salvation / deliverance will not tarry / linger,

and I will place salvation / deliverance in Zion,
for Israel, My beauty.

48:10-11,

10 Look--I refined / proved you (singular), and not with silver / money;

I chose / tested you, in a furnace of affliction!

11 For My sake, for My sake I do (it),

because how would it be profaned?

And My glory, I will not give to another!

But now this promise of God goes one step further. It is that He will actually reveal His splendor in His servant Israel." (Pp. 127-28) Compare **John 17:1,**

Having said these things, Jesus spoke,

and raising His eyes to the heaven, he said:

Father, the hour has come;

glorify the son of Yours,

so that the son may glorify You!

¹⁰In **verse 3**, the Speaker has been YHWH. But now, in **verse 4**, the speaker suddenly changes. Knight comments that "Israel [the servant of YHWH] is represented as ruminating [contemplating, considering] within herself." (P. 128)

אֶכֶן מִשְׁפָּטִי אֶת־יְהוָה

וּפְעַלְתִּי אֶת־אֱלֹהִי:

And I, I said,¹¹ For emptiness I toiled / grew weary;

for confusion and vapor / breath¹² I spent my strength.¹³

¹¹Evidently the speaker is Second Isaiah, the prophet / author, who embodies Israel, and who identifies himself as YHWH's servant with a sharp sword in his mouth, i.e., speaking the Divine message to Jacob / Israel.

Knight comments on **verse 4** that “The servant has just received an extraordinary call, even while she is still a pariah amongst the nations. How could the splendor of God be revealed in her? Fifty years of struggling to be faithful—more or less—in distant Babylon had made her feel that *I have spent my strength for ‘negation’ and vanity*. Her life in Babylon clearly exhibited the opposite of what she had been called to become. Obviously her life was now meaningless, *hebhel* [הֶבֶל, a vapor, breath]...the word which was so central to the thought of **Ecclesiastes** in later years. And yet surely life has a meaning for her, even in exile. Israel does not claim here to have any righteous saving deeds of her own. All she claims is that she believes that her *mishpot* [מִשְׁפָּט] is still with God.

“This word, מִשְׁפָּט, unfortunately can mean many things. Initially it signified judgment. Then it came to cover the idea of justice in general, and so could be used for our word ordinance or even for a man's legal right, and so became what we mean when we speak of custom or of an accepted manner of doing things. Then of course it was used to describe God's justice as it has been revealed to man. Since God's revelation is concerned with the whole man and with the whole of his life as it must be lived out here on earth, the word מִשְׁפָּט may even be translated by the German term *weltanschauung* [world-view]. Here we can take it to mean that whole, true, wholesome, and creative way of life which it is God's will that Israel should understand and live; in other words it is the meaning of my existence, as Israel says in this poem.” (P. 128)

¹²Where our Hebrew text has וְהֶבֶל, **wehebhel**, “and a breath / vapor,” 1QIs^a has וְלֶהֱבֵל, **welhebhel**, “and for a breath / vapor.”

¹³The speaker—Second Isaiah—has spent a long time, perhaps a life-time in fulfilling his mission as YHWH's servant, and now sees little result from his life's labor: “For emptiness I toiled / grew weary; for confusion and vapor / breath I spent my strength.”

(continued...)

Surely my judgment / justice (is) with YHWH;¹⁴
and my wages¹⁵ with my God!¹⁶

49:5¹⁷ יַעֲתָהּ | אִמַּר יְהוָה
יִצְרֵי מִבֶּטֶן לְעֵבֶד לֹא
לְשׁוֹבֵב יַעֲקֹב אֱלֹהֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל (לֹא) [לֹא] יֵאָסֵף
וְאִכְבַּד בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה

¹³(...continued)

North translates by “I have toiled to no purpose, I have exhausted my strength entirely in vain.” **Tanakh** has the second line as “I have spent my strength for empty breath.” This language reminds us of **Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes** with its use of the noun הַבָּל, “vapor,” “breath,” which so many English translations render (wrongly, we think) as “vanity.” A vapor or breath is not nothing—but it is quickly gone, “evanescent,” soon passing out of sight and remembrance.

Alexander comments that “The next verse shows that the failure here complained of is a failure to accomplish the great work before described, viz. that of converting the world.” (P. 226)

¹⁴North comments that “The best commentary on the passage is **1 Corinthians 4:1-5**, in which Paul says it is the Lord Who judges...him and that every man will receive his commendation...from God...The Servant, like the Psalmist (**Psalm 73:13-15**) has been inclined to take a despairing view of his situation, but on further reflection he thinks better of it...He is expressing his conviction that Yahweh’s verdict on his service will be a favorable one.” (Pp. 188-89)

¹⁵Knight comments on the noun here, פְּעֻלָּה, “work,” “recompence,” that if this is to be understood “in terms of God’s reward to her...then it must surely be rooted in *my God* alone.” (P. 129)

¹⁶Having failed to achieve the results he longed for through his message, he will simply trust YHWH for what he has failed to secure through his labors.

Slotki comments that “Though for a time he was despondent, he soon realized that his cause was safe under the protection of God.” (P. 240)

¹⁷Slotki comments that **verses 5-6** contain “the revelation to the servant of the great mission to Israel and the nations which had been entrusted to him.” (P. 240)

וַאֲלֵהִי הָיָה עֵינַי:

And now, YHWH spoke--

(the) One forming me from (the) womb¹⁸ for a servant to Him,
to turn back Jacob to Himself,
and Israel will be gathered to Him.¹⁹

¹⁸There should be little question that this is the servant himself speaking, as he states YHWH is the One “forming me” from the womb. For this matter of “forming from the womb” see:

Isaiah 44:2,

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

Isaiah 44:24,

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

Jeremiah 1:5,

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you!
And before you emerge(d) from (the) womb, I set you apart!
A spokesman for the nations I have made you!"

In the light of these passages, it seems legitimate to identify YHWH’s servant here in **Isaiah 49:3** with the prophet Second Isaiah (who, like Jeremiah, was formed from the womb for this task), who embodies the nation of Israel.

¹⁹The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” לֹא, **lo**), “not”; and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” לָּוּ, **lo**, “to Him.” Reading the *kethibh*, the translation is “that Israel not be gathered / removed”; reading the *qere*, the translation is “that Israel be gathered / removed to Him.” The two readings sound exactly alike in

(continued...)

And I was honored in YHWH's eyes;
and My God was my strength!²⁰

49:6 וַיֹּאמֶר נָקַל מִהֵי־וֹתֵךְ לִי

¹⁹(...continued)

spoken Hebrew, and in addition, the verb **יֹאסֵף**, **ye)aseph** is ambiguous, meaning either “be removed” or “be gathered.”

North translates with the *kethibh*: “and that Israel be not swept away,’ literally ‘gathered up’... But *qere*...’to him,’ is supported by nine Hebrew manuscripts, Aquila’s Greek translation, the Aramaic Targum and 1QIs^a. There is no substantial difference of meaning [whichever reading is chosen].” (Pp. 185-86)

²⁰Knight comments on **verse 5**: “So Yahweh is still for Israel *my God*. ‘I believe,’ Israel is virtually saying, ‘help Thou mine unbelief.’ God now seizes gladly on this little vestige of faith in His servant, and at once makes a basic statement about His purpose in Israel for the world. This comes at **verse 6**. **Verse 5** is a long parenthesis leading up to the central affirmation which follows: *and now* (וְעַתָּה), *the Lord ‘has said’*—that is, here and now in this exile situation—Yahweh’s plan will find its way. Who formed me is the same word as Potter at **45:9**. There Potter is paralleled by Creator, and is linked with the great words of redemption which are to apply even if Israel has to go through fire and water. Here Deutero-Isaiah is reminding Israel that the creative activity of the living God, ever since *He formed me from the womb to be His servant*, obviously cannot end in *tohu* [chaos]. His purpose must still be to win Jacob back to cooperation with Himself in His plan. And that Israel might be gathered to Him or brought home, that is, in poetic parallelism, ‘gathered home from exile.’

“Note that it is Israel herself who is speaking here and actually quoting what Yahweh has said. Thus Israel now confesses what God’s purpose *in* her is beginning to mean to her. It begins with the reality that the glory of God is becoming apparent on earth...The heavens are dead matter, whereas Yahweh is the living God. Deutero-Isaiah therefore has to employ anthropomorphic language to express what it means to conceive of Yahweh in personal terms. To do so, from now on he employs a great variety of [Hebrew] active participles...Creator, Fashioner, Potter, Giver, Spreader-out, Refiner, Redeemer, Carrier, Sitter, Judge, Bringer-forth, Speaker, Planner, Opener, Shutter, Shouter, Wiper-away. Such transitive, creative, purposive verbs describe the action, not primarily of One Who made the heavens with all their beauty and majestic spread, but rather of One Whose true glory can become visible only in human relationships. Moreover, those relationships are to be with Israel alone, and not with any other. *I am honored in the eyes of the Lord* therefore means something like ‘that I might bear the glory of Yahweh as He reveals Himself in action...*My God has become my strength*. For God alone, not Israel possesses strength, and His alone is the glory that is to be revealed on earth.” (Pp. 126-27)

עָבַד לְהַקִּים אֶת־שַׁבְּטֵי יַעֲקֹב
 (וְנִצְרִי) [וְנִצְוִרִי] יִשְׂרָאֵל לְהַשִּׁיב
 וְנִתְתִּיד לְאֹר גּוֹיִם
 לְהִיּוֹת יְשׁוּעָתִי עַד־קֶצֶה הָאָרֶץ:

And He said,²¹ It was too trifling for you²² to be for Me

²¹Knight comments on **verse 6** that the phrase “He has said” (in Hebrew) stands by itself. The phrase “to me” “is not required and is not stated. For what follows is a Divine fiat [proposition, decree] for all the world to hear...

“Now follows mention of the two functions assigned to the servant Israel: (1) The servant is to *raise up*, that is, to re-establish *the tribes or Jacob, and to restore Israel, now preserved* [נִצְוִרִי יִשְׂרָאֵל, ‘preserved ones of Israel’] held, in exile in Babylon. But that is too easy a thing for the servant to do, if he is the servant of a plan that is intended to embrace the whole of humanity. (2) Therefore the servant is to become a light to the nations, ‘so as to be My salvation to the end of the earth.’

Deutero-Isaiah would know the contents of **Ezekiel 37**. There we find two distinct themes. First, says Ezekiel, God is about to resurrect the corporate dead body of Israel, and to bring Israel out of her grave in the great Mesopotamian valley. He is about to breathe into the individual corpses His Own life, as He did when He first created man (**Genesis 2:7**), and so this resurrection will become a new creation. Second, God’s purpose in this resurrection is to work itself out through all the twelve tribes of Israel, and not just through Judah, that tribe which had retained the leadership of the Davidic line; it was to embrace even those tribes who had seemingly lost their identity almost two hundred years before. Thus Ezekiel looked for the promises of God, spoken as they were so long before to the patriarchs, to become flesh, so to speak, in a reconstituted Israel that was representatively the whole people of God. Here Deutero-Isaiah is speaking of the same great hope for all twelve tribes that Ezekiel had enunciated some years before in the ears of the exiles in Babylon.

“Yet we are faced with a difficulty in interpretation. If Israel is the servant, then how can Israel raise up Israel? Must not the servant be identified with someone else who has a mission to Israel, but who is not Israel himself? It is clearly only a modern, individualistic reader of Deutero-Isaiah who would think in such terms and ask such questions...**Verse 6** follows in direct sequence from **verse 3**, where there is the explicit sentence *You are My servant, Israel*. So the servant must still be Israel, difficult as that is to understand. The servant must be the whole people of God...

(continued...)

a servant²³ to raise up Jacob's tribes,
and to return those preserved²⁴ of Israel;²⁵

²¹(...continued)

"It is the *remnant*...the faithful few, the inner core, who are the first to become the vehicle of the word to others...What we have here is the servant-group Israel seeking to reestablish and restore the whole servant-people Israel to their rightful place in the plan and purpose of God...

"For without His servant God cannot act. And so it is, even as the servant witnesses by word and deed to God's salvation, that the glory of God is revealed—not in the inanimate heavens, but in the active, fashioning, giving, spreading-out, carrying, refining, speaking manner in which living man can reflect the living actions of the living God." (Pp. 129-31)

²²Oswalt notes that "1QIs^b (but not 1QIs^a) precedes [נִקְלָה, *naqel*, 'it was trifling'] with what is probably an interrogative-*he*. The Aramaic Targum supports this reading with 'Do you see it as a little thing...?' but the other versions read a declarative with the Masoretic Text. [The Greek translation], however, changes 'small' to [μέγα, *mega*] 'great.'" (P. 286)

²³Oswalt notes that the Aramaic Targum has the plural "servants," and comments that it is "possibly an attempt to support the collective understanding." We think it is more than "possible," for the typical Jewish understanding is that the servant is the people Israel.

²⁴The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, "what is written," וְנִצְיָרִי, *unetsiyrey*, "and preserved ones," a plural adjective found nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**, but which is also the reading of 1QIs^a; and second, the *qere*, "to be read," וְנִצְוָרִי, *unetsurey*, "and those guarded," a qal passive participle.

North comments that there is little difference in meaning between "kept safe," and "preserved." (P. 186)

²⁵Where our Hebrew text has Jacob first, and Israel second, 1QIs^a reverses this order, with Israel first, and Jacob second.

The text makes it clear that this "servant" is not the nation of Israel itself, but one whose task is to "raise up Jacob's tribes, and to return those preserved of Israel"—that means, the entirety of the nation.

Alexander observes that Luther translates by *that Israel may not be snatched away or carried off*; while others translate as a question, *shall not Israel be gathered?*; others by *although Israel be not gathered*; still others by *and (yet) Israel is not gathered*."

(continued...)

and I will give you (singular) for a light of nations,²⁶
to be My salvation as far as the earth's end!²⁷

²⁵(...continued)

Alexander concludes that "This last phrase may be taken as a simple prediction that they should not be gathered...The general meaning of the verse is that messiah and his people should be honored in the sight of God, although the proximate design of their mission, the salvation of the literal Israel, might seem to fail." (P. 227)

But we ask, where in this text is there any mention of "messiah"? There is not one.

²⁶Knight comments that *A light to the nations* is repeated from **42:6**...The God Who forms light is light Himself; and so He is salvation Himself; or rather He is light in action, He is saving love in action. And yet, paradoxically, the salvation that Deutero-Isaiah speaks of can be conveyed to mankind only in the body of the servant Israel." (P. 131) Compare:

Luke 2:32, where the elderly Symeon says of the baby Jesus, that he will be:

Light for revelation of nations,
and glory of Your people Israel.

Acts 13:47, where Paul and Barnabas tell the Jews of Pisidian Antioch,

For in this way the Lord commanded us,
I have placed / given you (singular) for a light of nations,
for you to be for salvation as far as the earth's end.

Knight adds that "The Qumran community undoubtedly regarded themselves as this true, inner core of Israel in their day (circa 100 B.C.E.)...Thus it is quite natural for some of the **New Testament** writers to adopt a similar exegesis of Deutero-Isaiah's lines with reference to the young Christian Church of which they were a part." (P. 131)

²⁷It is an astounding thought: having in his estimation failed in his Divine mission to Jacob / Israel, he is now commissioned to carry out the Divine mission far beyond Israel, to all the nations!

Slotki comments that "the task of the servant is greater than the restoration of Israel to his land; it has a world-wide significance." (P. 240)

Jewish interpreters commonly speak of this world-wide task as being that of making the Mosaic **Torah** known throughout the world, for, as **Psalms 119:105** and **130** points out, YHWH's **torah** is a lamp and a light and His words give light. The task as the text describes it is to be a light of nations, and YHWH's universal salvation / deliverance to the end(s) of the earth. Christian interpreters see in this much more than simp-

(continued...)

²⁷(...continued)

ly making known the Mosaic **Torah**. They interpret it to mean the mission of the followers of Jesus, to proclaim good news and bring God's light and salvation to all the peoples and nations of the earth.

North comments that "There is obvious difficulty in these words, if the Servant is the nation Israel. How can Israel 'bring back Israel'?"...

"It is quite properly argued, Israel could have a mission to Israel, very much as we say that the first mission of the Church is to the Church." (P. 189) And we are reminded of Jesus' statements concerning His having been sent "to the house of Israel" (see **Matthew 10:5-6; 15:24**), before His giving the "great commission" to His followers to go to all the nations (**Matthew 28:18-20**) following His resurrection. What do you think the text means?

I have a long-time orthodox Jewish friend whom I helped secure a position with an international university in Seoul, Korea, to teach Hebrew to Korean students (they are eager to learn Hebrew, and quick to pick it up). He went to Korea, and hadn't been on the job long before he and his wife ventured into a meat market in Seoul, where they were appalled to find dogs being butchered and sold to the people for consumption. According to the Mosaic **Torah**, this is forbidden food—and he felt it his duty to speak out against it, resulting in his dismissal from the university. Needless to say, he was unsuccessful in bringing light and salvation to Korea—where millions of Koreans have accepted the good news of Jesus Christ and found forgiveness and new life, and have become active missionaries to other nations and peoples.

What do you think? Is the light and salvation that YHWH wants His servant to bring to the nations kosher food laws, and ritually clean diets?

The apostles Paul and Barnabas are depicted in **Acts 13:46-47** as quoting this verse to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, who have rejected their message concerning forgiveness through Jesus, as justifying their turning from the Jews to take the word of God to the non-Jews / Gentiles.

Alexander comments on **verse 6** that "The meaning...is not, as some suppose, that the heathen should be given to him in exchange and compensation for the unbelieving Jews, but that his mission to the latter was, from the beginning, but a small part of his high vocation." (P. 228)

North states that "In any case, **verse 6** seems to say that the Servant is to abandon any concern he may so far have had about the...rehabilitation of Israel, and instead, address himself to the nations. There is no mention of any mission to Israel in **Isaiah 42:1-4** [while there certainly is in **52:13-53:12**]. Perhaps the Servant had come to see where his real duty lay...In any case God takes no refusal from His servants (**Exodus 3-4; Jeremiah 1**). If they complain about the difficulties of their task, instead

(continued...)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה גֹּאֵל יִשְׂרָאֵל קְדוֹשׁ 49:7²⁸

לְבֹזֵה-נַפְשׁ

לְעַבְדֵי מַשְׁלִיִּים

לְמַתְעַב גּוֹי

מִלְכִים יִרְאוּ וְקָמוּ

שָׂרִים וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ

לְמַעַן יִהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר נֶאֱמַן קִדְשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל

וַיִּבְחַרְךָ:

In this way YHWH spoke, Israel's Next-of-Kin / Redeemer, his Set-apart One,

²⁷(...continued)

of releasing them from it, He will appoint them to one wider, and, as they come to learn, more exacting.” (Pp. 189-90)

²⁸North entitles **verses 7-13** “The Reversal Of Israel’s Fortunes.”

He comments that “This passage has much the same relation to the Servant Song that precedes it as **43:5-9** has to **42:1-4**. But whereas **42:5-9** reads more like a ‘Servant’ than an ‘Israel’ passage, **49:7-13**, as it proceeds, has all the marks of an ‘Israel’ passage descriptive of the homeward journey to Palestine: compare **41:17-20**. Accordingly, **49:7-13** has been claimed as a Servant Song less often than has **42:5-9**.” (Pp. 190-91)

Knight comments on **verse 7** that Deutero-Isaiah left us at **verse 6** with a one-verse cameo [short, descriptive literary sketch] of the servant, now [in **verse 7**] clearly portrayed as one who suffers...Once more we see that the servant in himself is nothing. God is still all in all. On the other hand, the servant is needed by God. What God needs is His obedience, and that alone...Israel, we have learned, has neither strength nor native abilities to offer to her God. In consequence all that God wants and needs of her is an emptiness of self, for it is only then that God can reveal Himself in her body... Nothing else can be the medium of Divine revelation, for nothing else leaves room for it.” (P. 132)

to one despised²⁹ of innermost-being,

²⁹The Hebrew root בזה, **bzh**, “to despise,” occurs three times in the **Book of Isaiah**: here, in **49:7**, and twice in **53:3**. We take this to be an indication that the servant here in **Isaiah 49** is also the “suffering servant” of **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**—not the Nation of Israel, but YHWH’s servant who is called by YHWH to serve Israel (and humanity) through self-sacrifice / suffering.

Where our Hebrew text has לְבַזֵּה-נַפְשׁוֹ, “to despise innermost-being / life,” **Rahfs** has “the one depreciating the innermost-being / life of his.” 1QIs^a along with other witnesses has “the one depreciated of innermost-being / life,” a reading that Knight thinks “seems to make better sense than the received Hebrew text.” (P. 132)

North comments that “There are similarities between **verse 7** and the last servant song (compare **52:15, 53:3**), as there are also between it and typically ‘Israel’ passages like **48:17**. The ‘one who is deeply despised’ must either be Israel, or—on any theory that the servant is to be distinguished from Israel—the servant κατ’ ἐξοχήν [‘par excellence’].” (P. 191)

to one abhorred³⁰ (by a) nation—³¹

to a servant of rulers:

Kings will see, and will arise / stand up;

princes, and they will worship,³²

³⁰The Hebrew root **תעב**, occurs twice in the **Book of Isaiah**, here, in **49:7**, and elsewhere only at **14:19**, where it is used in the taunt song against the King of Babylon, who is cast out from his grave, “like a despised root / branch.”

The two phrases here, **לְבִזְהָה־נֶפֶשׁ**, **libhzoh-nephesh**, literally ‘to despise innermost-being / life,’ and **לְמִתְעֵב גּוֹי**, **limetha(ebh goy**, literally ‘to one abhorring a nation,’ as Alexander comments, “are exceedingly obscure and difficult.” Translations vary from:

King James, “to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth,”

Tanakh, “To the despised one, To the abhorred nations,”

New Revised Standard, “to one deeply despised, abhorred by the nations,”

New International, “to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,”

New Jerusalem, “to the one who is despised, detested by the nation,”

Rahlf, ἀγιάσατε τὸν φαυλίζοντα τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ τὸν βδελυσσόμενον ὑπὸ τῶν ἔθνῳν, “set apart / sanctify the one depreciating the innermost-being of his, the one being abhorred by the nations.” Notice that where the Hebrew has “nation,” the Greek has “nations.”

Alexander, “to the heartily despised, to the nation exciting abhorrence.”

Alexander states that “In any case it is descriptive of deep abasement and general contempt, to be exchanged hereafter for an opposite condition [of glory].” (Pp. 228-29)

³¹These two lines: **לְבִזְהָה־נֶפֶשׁ**, literally “to despise an innermost-being / life” and **לְמִתְעֵב גּוֹי**, literally, “to one abhorring a nation / by a nation” are given varying translations—see footnote 26.

If the translation is correct, “by the nation,” it is clear that the servant is not the Nation of Israel itself, but rather an individual who is despised and abhorred by the Nation of Israel—and these statements are closely related to what happens to the “suffering servant” of **52:13-53:12**.

³²Slotki holds that these lines concerning being a servant of rulers, and kings seeing and standing up, and princes worshiping, are a prediction of the Nation of Israel’s “ascent to greatness.” (P. 241)

(continued...)

because of YHWH Who was faithful, (the) Set-apart One of Israel—
and He chose you!³³

49:8³⁴ כִּהְיֶה אֲמַר יְהוָה

³²(...continued)

Knight refers to **Isaiah 52:15**,

So he will sprinkle / startle, many nations;
over him, kings will shut their mouth—
because that which was not told to them, they saw;
and that which they did not hear, they considered diligently.

He comments that “the rulers who now despise the servant will eventually make obeisance to him in the abject manner customary at the period...They will bow not to Israel, but to the Holy One of Israel, Who has chosen you, Who is now made manifest in and through the self-emptying of Israel.” (P. 132)

We think that it is in fact a prediction of the “ascent to greatness” of the individual who is sent as a servant to Israel and to the nations. The prediction is closely related to **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**, especially to **52:13** and **15**, and **53:11-12**, where it is predicted that the suffering servant will be high and lifted up and exalted, startling / sprinkling many nations, causing kings to “shut their mouths” over him, as well as predicting that the servant will be satisfied at seeing the many made righteous by his work, and dividing the spoils of a great victory that he has won by bearing iniquities.

This is a crucial text for the difference in understanding between Jews and Christians. We think the Christian understanding is true to the text. What do you think?

³³Slotki states that **verse 7** means “From the lowest depths of degradation Israel will rise to the loftiest heights of respect and honor.” (P. 240)

But is the nation of Israel the subject of this verse? We think the subject of **verse 7** is the servant who is called to serve Jacob / Israel as part of his task, but then given the much larger task of being light and salvation / deliverance to the earth’s end, and as a result rises to the loftiest heights of respect and honor, as we have held in the preceding footnote. Again, what do you think?

³⁴Slotki comments on **verses 8-12** that they depict “God’s acceptance of the prayers of the exiles, their redemption from captivity, and their safe and pleasant return to the homeland.” (P. 241)

But we think **verses 8-11** depict YHWH speaking to the servant who has been called to serve the Nation of Israel, and given the universal task of bringing light and salvation to the nations, promising that He will answer the servant’s prayers, and help him, making of him a “covenant of the people,” and announcing to the Israelite exiles their going forth from captivity.

(continued...)

בְּעֵת רְצוֹן עֲנִיתִיךָ
 וּבְיוֹם יְשׁוּעָה עֲזַרְתִּיךָ
 וְאַצְרִיךָ
 וְאַתְּנֶנְךָ לְבְרִית עִם
 לְהַקִּים אֶרֶץ
 לְהַנְחִיל נַחֲלוֹת שְׂמֻמוֹת:

In this way YHWH spoke:

At a time of acceptance³⁵ I answered you,³⁶

³⁴(...continued)

Ortlund entitles **verses 8-26** “The Restoration of Israel.”

Oswalt entitles **verses 8-13** “The Servant’s Work.”

North comments that “In **verses 8-13** Yahweh addresses one whom he has ‘answered,’ ‘helped,’ and ‘protected,’ and whose task is to resettle the land (of Palestine) and release the prisoners (now in exile). This looks very like the political task which Yahweh has said He no longer requires of the servant.” (P. 191)

He comments on **verse 8** that “The meaning is that the returning exiles are to repeople and recover the land which Yahweh gave as a possession to Israel (**Deuteronomy 4:21**). But however desirable this may have been, it seems something of an anticlimax to “I will...make you the mediator of My covenant with the peoples [42:6].” (P. 192)

³⁵Alexander holds that this phrase בְּעֵת רְצוֹן “signifies a suitable or appointed time for showing grace or favor.” (P. 229)

Knight states that “Just as the **New Testament** can use the word *καίρως*, time, with reference to Christ and speak of his ‘time’ as being *at hand*, on the point of arriving (compare **Matthew 26:18**), so Deutero-Isaiah can use the word עֵת, time...In fact, ‘D-day’ in God’s plan has now arrived...Cyrus is pounding at the gate of Babylon—or proleptically [representing something as existing before its actual occurrence] he is just about to do so...

“God then has come to do three things in one. He has come (1) to save Israel;

(continued...)

and in a day of salvation I helped you.

And I guarded you,³⁷

and I gave you for a covenant of a people,³⁸

³⁵(...continued)

(2) to save her that she might become the covenant people to mankind which He has proclaimed (**verse 6**)...(3) *to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages ...*

“That sentence must point beyond the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah. There are those who limit the function of the servant to the latter task, and who would read *land* as ‘land of Judah.’ But they are not seeing the passage in the light of Deutero-Isaiah’s great heritage of thought. For he can say of the world: God *did not create it a chaos*, ‘He fashioned it for civilized life’ (**45:18**), i.e. to be inhabited, not to lie in ruins. Deutero-Isaiah believes that this is a fallen world, and that it must therefore be raised up. That is, the whole earth must be ‘reestablished’ according to God’s initial purpose for it when He saw that it was good (**Genesis 1**). This verse is thus a mere extension of God’s promise at **49:6**, and an explanation of it. All this will eventuate when once the *tohu* [chaos] with which it is riddled is reclaimed for order and *shalom* (**45:7**)...

“Trito-Isaiah advances Deutero-Isaiah’s argument still another step; for he sees the renewed people of God themselves bound up not just with a renewed nation, but with a new heaven and a new earth as well (**65:17ff.**).” (Pp. 133-34)

See the use of this passage by Paul in **2 Corinthians 6:2**, and then Paul’s quotation of **2 Corinthians 6:6** in **Acts 13:47**, showing, we think, that Paul considered himself and the Christian movement as fulfilling the task of YHWH’s servant as depicted in the **Book of Isaiah**.

What do you think? Has the nation of Israel fulfilled this mission? Has the Christian movement fulfilled it? Which one has come closest to fulfilling it? Or, can both be seen as seeking its fulfillment, each in its own way?

³⁶The pronominal suffix is singular, just as it is in the last word of the preceding verse. The subject has not changed from the servant to Israel and the Nations, to address the Israelite exiles, as Slotki holds, but the individual servant continues to be addressed.

³⁷**Rahlfs** omits this verb. The Greek manuscript **Vaticanus** translates it by *καὶ ἐπλασά σε*, “and I formed / molded you.”

³⁸Both the Hebrew text and its Greek translation use the past tense for all of the verbs in **verse 8**, and so **King James, New Revised Standard** and **New Jerusalem** translate with the past tense. Strangely to us, **New International** changes the tense of all the verbs from past to future, while **Tanakh** translates the first two verbs by the present tense. We wonder what authority the biblical text can have when the tenses of its

(continued...)

to raise up a land,³⁹

to cause to possess devastated possessions,⁴⁰

49:9 לְאֹמֵר לְאַסְוִרִים צְאוּ

³⁸(...continued)

verbs are so casually changed.

For this matter of YHWH's servant becoming a "covenant of a people," see **Isaiah 42:6**, where YHWH's servant is depicted as a "covenant of a people" as well as "a light of nations." Slotki suggests the translation "a covenant-people" (p. 241), but this seems strange to us, since the words are spoken to the individual servant, not to the people. Alexander holds that the phrase "a covenant of people" means becoming "a negotiator between God and the people." (P. 136) But we wonder, how can "covenant" mean "negotiator"?

Oswalt comments that the Nation of Israel has "broken God's covenant again and again, so that legally speaking it is null and void. Yet God still understands Himself as bound by it and intends to offer it in a new form (**Jeremiah 31:31**). Somehow the Servant in himself will be the embodiment of God's covenant with His people." (P. 298)

We agree that the idea of "new covenant" hovers around this phrase. What do you think the phrase "a covenant of people" means?

³⁹Alexander holds that this line means "to raise up the earth or world from its present state of ruin. (P. 229). We think the constant use in Hebrew of אֶרֶץ, "land" for "land of Israel," leads to the understanding of this statement to mean "raise up the land of Israel," which had been largely depopulated and ravaged by the Babylonians in 606-586 B.C.E. But we are also impressed by Knight's argument in footnote 35 that Second Isaiah's overall thought includes or demands a much larger understanding than this.

Slotki states that the phrase "to raise up" means "to restore." (P. 241)

⁴⁰In line with our understanding of the previous line, we understand this line to mean "to cause the Israelite exiles, upon their return from Babylon, to possess their heritages that had been desolated by years of neglect and occupation by foreigners."

But Alexander, with his much more universal understanding of the passage, holds that it means "to cause to inherit...the moral wastes of heathenism." (P. 229) This is the way that Knight understands the task given to YHWH's servant (footnote 35). Perhaps we should understand the servant's task as beginning with the restoration of the land of Israel, but as not being completed until the whole world is likewise restored.

What do you think?

לְאִשֶׁר בַּחֹשֶׁךְ הִגְלוּ

עַל־דַּרְכֵי יָרְעוּ וּבְכָל־שָׂפִיִּים מְרַעִיתָם:

saying to the prisoners, Come / go forth!;⁴¹

to the ones in the darkness,⁴² Be uncovered! / Show yourselves!

Upon (the) ways⁴³ they will pasture / feed;⁴⁴ and in all bare heights (will be) their pasture.⁴⁵

⁴¹Slotki states, the “prisoners” means “the captives in Babylon.” (P. 241)

Alexander, with his “universalistic view,” is critical of this, stating that “The restriction of these figures [prisoners / those bound, sheep being led, darkness] to deliverance from Babylon, can seem natural only to those who have assumed the same hypothesis throughout the foregoing chapters.” (P. 280)

Oswalt agrees with Alexander, stating that “God declares that the Servant’s task is to make it possible for God’s people around the world (**49:12**) to return to Him. The language is that of the return from exile, but in the most general terms. The people are prisoners who are brought forth from the darkness (**verse 9**; compare **61:1**) and led as sheep on a smooth highway (**verse 9-11**; compare **35:8**.” (P. 297)

We think Oswalt’s view is best. The language is that of the return from exile of the Jewish captives in Babylon; but as is seen in **49:12**, the return from Babylonian exile is symbolic of the Divine desire to release prisoners world-wide, and call all peoples of the earth to come home to Him as is made clear in **61:1-2** (where the language of “Jubilee” occurs in the following verses).

⁴²North holds that “darkness” here means “imprisonment.” (P. 192)

⁴³Where our Hebrew text has עַל־דַּרְכֵי, (**al-derakhiym**, “upon ways,” 1QIs^a has “upon all mountains”; **Rahlfs** has “all their ways.”

⁴⁴North comments on the figure of the returning exiles as sheep that **Isaiah 40:11** and **35:7** have “the same general picture.” (P. 192)

⁴⁵Slotki comments on this line that “Provision will be made for them in the journey homewards.” (P. 241)

Alexander states that “There is here a change of figure, the delivered being represented not as prisoners or freedmen, but as flocks...as finding pasture even without going aside to seek it, and even in the most unlikely situations.” (P. 280)

Knight comments on **verse 9** that “The redemption of Israel is thus bound up with the redemption of others *through* Israel. But Israel, though a corporate body, is composed of individuals. Of course it is only individuals who can respond to God’s call

(continued...)

⁴⁵(...continued)

or who can risk their lives rescuing prisoners from dungeons...

“We know that many Israelites did not respond to this challenge and never gave up the flesh pots of Babylon for the rigors of life in ruined Jerusalem. The imagined perhaps that one can be saved without sharing in God’s great saving purpose for His whole creation. Compare

Matthew 16:25, where Jesus is quoted as addressing his disciples:

For whoever may desire to save his innermost-being / life / soul,
will lose it;
But then whoever may lose his innermost-being / life / soul from my sake,
will find it.

Matthew 27:42, where the chief priests, along with the scribes and elders say to / of the dying Jesus:

He saved others, himself he is not able to save!
He is king of Israel—
let him come down now from the cross,
and we will believe in him!

“For the saving activity of God is visible only as we see men breaking down prison bars, or venturing into the dungeons beneath the public buildings of Babylon or [elsewhere], there to meet with a stench and a filth that appals. Yet without this human action God’s purpose could not advance. Compare:

Matthew 25:35-36,

35 For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat;
I was thirsty, and you gave me drink;
I was a stranger, and you gathered me in--
36 naked, and you clothed me;
I was weak / sick, and you visited (to help) me;
I was in prison and you came to me.

“On the other hand, God takes the initiative in love. The good Shepherd, spoken of at **40:11, 29-31**,

11 Like one shepherding his flock, He will shepherd;
with / in His arm He will gather together lambs;
and in His grasp / on His chest He will carry (them);
He will guide those giving milk (to their lambs).

29 (He) gives strength to the weary one;

(continued...)

49:10⁴⁶ לֹא יִרְעֲבוּ וְלֹא יִצְמָאוּ

וְלֹא-יִכָּם שָׂרֵב וְשֹׁמֵם

כִּי-מִרְחֲמֵם יִנְהֻגִם

וְעַל-מְבוּעֵי מַיִם יִנְהַלִּם:

They will not hunger, and they will not thirst,

⁴⁵(...continued)

and to the one not having strength, He increases might.

- 30 Even young men will be weary and grow tired,
and choice young men, stumbling will fall.
- 31 And those waiting for YHWH will renew (their) strength;
they will lift up (their) wing(s) like the griffon-vultures;
they will run and will not be weary,
they will walk, and will not grow tired!

“promises that along the ways shall they feed, as they return to their promised land.”
(P. 134)

⁴⁶Knight comments on **verses 10-12** that “Deutero-Isaiah sees the exiles returning not just from Babylon, but from every point of the compass...What mattered was that these people lived at the ends of the earth, and the redemption of Israel was to reach to the ends of the earth. That is a reality which has interested the author of **Revelation** also much more than the geography of God’s activities, as we can see when we read his beautiful development of Deutero-Isaiah’s words at **Revelation 7:16-17**,

- 16 They will not hunger again, nor thirst again,
neither shall the sun fall upon / strike them,
nor any burning heat.
- 17 Because the little lamb, the one in the throne’s midst, will shepherd them,
and he will guide them to a spring of waters of life.
And the God will wipe away every tear from their eyes!

“These last lines, let us note, speak of an action of God which has nothing to do with Cyrus and Babylon. Deutero-Isaiah has thus departed from an exposition of the immediate historical situation, and has entered upon a broader theological discussion of what God’s redemption of Israel means as a thing in itself...On the one hand, Deutero-Isaiah gives us no discussion of the concept of redemption. On the other, however, he expounds the historical situation in which he and his contemporary Israelites found themselves, even as Cyrus the Persian marched upon the city that held them captive.”
(Pp. 134-35)

and burning heat⁴⁷ and sun will not strike them;⁴⁸
because the One having compassion on them will lead them,
and beside fountains of water He will guide (synonym) them!⁴⁹

49:11 וְשִׂמְתִי כָל-הָרֵי לְדֶרֶךְ
וּמִסְלְתֵי יִרְמוֹן:

And I will place / make all My mountains⁵⁰ for the way,
and My highways will be raised up.⁵¹

49:12 הִנֵּה-אֵלֶּה מִרְחֹק יִבְאוּ
וְהִנֵּה-אֵלֶּה מִצְפוֹן וּמִיָּם
וְאֵלֶּה מֵאֶרֶץ סִינַיִם:

Look—these will come from afar;

⁴⁷The noun here, שָׂרָב, **sharabh**, is defined as “burning heat” or “parched ground” by **Brown-Driver-Briggs**.

Alexander states that “it is the same word that is now universally explained in **Isaiah 35:7** to mean the *mirage*, or delusive appearance of water in the desert.” (P. 280) None of our English translations have “mirage,” and we think Alexander’s statement is questionable at best.

⁴⁸Slotki comments that “The returning captives will be spared the trials of desert travel.” (P. 242)

⁴⁹Alexander comments on **verse 10** that “The image of a flock is still continued (compare **Isaiah 40:10, 11; 41:18; 43:19**)...As He leads them onwards, He conducts them along streams of water.” (P. 280)

⁵⁰Where our Hebrew text has כָּל-הָרֵי, **kol-haray**, “all My mountains,” **Rahlfs** has παν ὄρος “every mountain.”

⁵¹Slotki comments that “All unevenness and ruggedness in the highways will be leveled. The thought is the same as in **40:4**.” (P. 242)

Alexander states that here “The image of a flock is now exchanged for that of an army on the march...[It is] an indirect assertion of God’s sovereignty and absolute control, and more especially His power to remove the greatest obstacles from the way of His people.” (P. 280) Perhaps, but we see no mention of an army instead of a flock.

and look—these from north and from west;
and these from (the) land of (the) Chinese!⁵²

⁵²As we have stated, while the immediate focus of the passage is on the return of the Israelite captives from Babylon, the passage enlarges its description of that return to include people from afar, from the north and west, and even possibly from China! See Alexander's lengthy discussion of the phrase **מֵאֶרֶץ סִינִים**, "from (the) land of Chinese," on pp. 230-36.

He comments that "There is not the least doubt as to the literal translation of [verse 12]; and yet it has been a famous subject of discordant expositions, all of which turn upon the question, what is meant by the *land of Sinim* [מֵאֶרֶץ סִינִים, **Jerets siynim**]." (P. 230)

He adds that "The discrepancy of the versions as to these concluding words is remarkable, and shows the doubt in which the subject was involved at a very early period...The Targum and Vulgate make it mean the land of the south, or southern land, assuming, no doubt, that *from afar* must mean the east, and that the south alone remained to be supplied [of the four points of the compass]...The **Septuagint** [Greek translation] puts the Land of Sinim in the east, but gives it the specific sense of Persia... Matthew Henry's notion [was] that the Land of Sinim was a Babyonian province...Adam Clarke's suggestion [was that siynim] may mean bushes or a woody country...perhaps in West Africa or America...[Other suggestions include] the Land of Sinim is the country of the Sinites spoken of in **Genesis 10:17** and **1 Chronicles 1:15**...Jerome and Jarchi ...understand the Land of Sinim to be the wilderness of Sin or the peninsula of Sinai... [others that] the land of Sinim is the land of Egypt, so called from Syene...

"The only remaining explanation...is that the Land of Sinim is China, as maintained by [numerous commentators]...The only plausible objections which are still urged against [this view are:] China was unknown to the Jews at the date of this prophecy... [and that] the name Sinim is not that used by the Chinese themselves, nor by other nations until long after the day of this prophecy...

"The universal prevalence of the name Sin, Chin, or Jin, throughout western and southern Asia from time immemorial presupposes an antiquity still more remote; and although Chinese historians themselves record that the family from which the name derives its origin, for ages before it ruled the empire ruled a province or kingdom on the western frontier, whence the name might easily have been extended to the western nations. There are in fact few cases of a name being more extensively or longer prevalent than that of China...

"A Hebrew writer would of course use the name familiar in the west of Asia. This universal name is allowed to be essentially identical with [Sinim] by the highest philological authorities. There is therefore no conclusive force in either of the arguments advanced against this explanation of the name...

(continued...)

⁵²(...continued)

“But if it means China, that extreme limit of the eastern world, that hive of nations, supposed to comprehend a third part of the human race, the enigma explains itself. Even to us there would be nothing unintelligible or absurd, however strange or novel, in the combination, north, west, south, and China.” (Pp. 231-34)

Our English translations either transliterate by “land of Sinim,” or “land of Syene,” or “land of Aswan.” D. Winton Thomas, editor of the **Book of Isaiah in Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia** suggests changing the Hebrew text from סִינִיִּים, **siyniym**, to סוּנִיִּים, **seweniym**, “inhabitants of Syene,” a city on the southern border of Egypt, observing that 1QIs^a has סוּנִיִּים, **seweniym**. But this upsets the seeming reference to the four corners of the earth, or four points on the compass (which perhaps is being read into the text).

North states that the Hebrew סִינִיִּים was once supposed to be China, and this explanation, according to R. Levy (**Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary**, Oxford, 1925), “still has a measure of probability.” But, North continues, the Greek translation has Persia, and the Latin Vulgate has *terra australis*, “south land.” He states that “There is little doubt that it was Ezekiel’s סוּנָה (**Ezekiel 29:10; 30:6**)...the *swn* of the Elephant-

ine papyri, the modern Aswan. Exactly when the Jewish garrison was first stationed there is not known, but **Jeremiah 44:1** already speaks of Jews who lived ‘in the land of Pathros’ (the Egyptian name means ‘Land of the south’).” (P. 193)

Knight comments that “We need not dwell on determining where *Sinim*...was. For no agreement has been reached whether Deutero-Isaiah meant Syene, which is Aswan in Upper Egypt (compare **Ezekiel 29:10; 30:6**), or the Sudan, or even an area of Eritrea [a country in east Africa, bordered by Sudan on the north and Ethiopia on the south]. Probably Deutero-Isaiah did not know himself, nor was he concerned to know.” (P. 134)

⁵³Slotki describes **verse 13** as “a short lyrical hymn concluding the passage.” (P. 242)

Compare **Isaiah 44:23**,

Cry aloud, heavens!

Because YHWH did (it)!

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,

(continued...)

(יִפְצְחוּ) [וַיִּפְצְחוּ] הַרִים רְנָה
 כִּי־נִתְּם יְהוָה עִמּוֹ
 וַעֲנִיו יְרַחֵם:

Cry aloud, heavens! And rejoice, earth!
 And break forth,⁵⁴ mountains, (with a) ringing-cry!
 Because YHWH comforted His people,
 and He will show mercy (to) His afflicted-poor people!⁵⁵

⁵³(...continued)
 and in Israel He will be glorified.

See also **Isaiah 42:10-12; 52:9** and **55:12-13**.

Knight comments on **verse 13**: “This little, single-verse poem becomes a generalization from the actual incident of the fall of Babylon. Moreover, the significance of the incident has now become even greater than the redemption of all the Hebrews scattered amongst the nations. God’s people, God’s afflicted, are to be found, in point of time, both before and after this particular moment that is bound up with Cyrus the Persian; whereas, in point of space, the reality of the redemption is now to obtain with respect to the whole cosmos. We dare not dismiss the call to the *earth* and the *heavens* to shout for joy as just poetry. For the Hebrews employed poetry along with the parable as a vehicle to convey truth at those moments when no prose language could do so.” (P. 135)

⁵⁴The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the **kethibh**, “what is written,” יִפְצְחוּ, **yiphtsechu**, “they will break forth,” and second, the qere, “to be read,” וַיִּפְצְחוּ, **uyiphtsechu**, “and they will break forth”—which is the reading in a large number of Hebrew manuscripts.

⁵⁵In these last two lines of **verse 13**, the first verb is the piel perfect, נִתְּם, “He comforted,” translated by the Greek as ἠλέησεν, “He had mercy,” and the second verb is in the piel imperfect or future tense, יְרַחֵם, “He will have compassion,” translated by the Greek as παρακάλεσεν, “He comforted or exhorted.” **King James** and **New Revised Standard** reflect these tenses in their translation, but **Tanakh** has both in the past tense “For the LORD has comforted His people, And has taken back His afflicted ones in love.” **New International** has a combination of present and future: “For the LORD comforts his people and will have compassion on his afflicted ones.” **New Jerusalem** has a combination of past and present tense: “For Yahweh has consoled his people, is

(continued...)

⁵⁵(...continued)

taking pity on his afflicted ones.”

Again we wonder, why do translators feel free to change the tenses of the text they are translating? Alexander explains that “This is a very common method with Isaiah of foretelling any joyful change by summoning all nature to exult in it as already realized.” (P. 236)

But if this is so, why does the author change to the future tense in the second verb? We suggest that this is the author’s depiction of YHWH’s nature. He is the God Who has comforted His people in the past, and will continue to do so in the future.

Knight states that “The words *His afflicted* force us to pause, however, and examine an important theological issue, one that is possibly the chief stumbling block at the heart of Deutero-Isaiah’s exposition. How can God use to serve His ends a people who are *His afflicted* when it is He Who has afflicted them as punishment for their apostasy? How, in other words, can a sinful nation be the instrument of the Holy God’s salvation to the rest of the world?

“Israel had received from God special revelation in the form of **Torah**. This light had then had an effect upon her which she did not realize. In a negative sense, she had rejected and failed to use the light. Positively speaking, the light had blinded her eyes, stopped her ears, hardened her heart, so that her failure surpassed the sinfulness of any other nation on earth (compare **Isaiah 6:9-12**). Yet God foreknew that this would happen. Was it fair of God to choose Israel at all, knowing as He did (1) that

Israel would necessarily fail Him, and (2) that His Own light would blind her eyes and render her even more rebellious than she would have been without it?

“The full judgment of the living God had now fallen upon Israel, and she had met with just retribution for her disloyalty. For she had failed not merely to be good, the position that all nations find themselves in; she had actually let God down as He sought to use her to save the world. Accordingly she bore the unspoken execration of all mankind as the nations of the earth dumbly sought for a salvation whose source they knew not. Deutero-Isaiah has spoken of the ugliness of sin. Now he had declared the judgment of the all-holy God upon it. For the Holy-One-of-Israel cannot tolerate union with a corrupt Israel. God must therefore reject her even when He never lets her go. So finally He did act, and Israel became what she is called here, *His afflicted* people.

“Deutero-Isaiah thus comes to the extraordinary conclusion that Israel had been chosen to become—that. She had been chosen to become the scapegoat required to carry the judgment of God upon the sins of the world. God had rendered her so by blinding her eyes still further. Yet, instead of being accursed for allowing her heart to grow hard, Israel was in fact the most highly privileged nation of all. Actually her hardness of heart was necessary for her election.

(continued...)

⁵⁵(...continued)

“Yet we are to remember that Israel had not offered herself to be the scapegoat as if that had been her own good idea and the expression of her loyalty to the covenant. Israel was in fact quite unconscious of the uniqueness of her calling. For was she not just an ordinary, despondent prisoner of war, just a pariah people that had been conquered in war?”

“Here is where Deutero-Isaiah makes a contribution to our knowledge of the ways of God with men that is without precedent. What he does is to combine two realities which, humanly speaking, seem to be total opposites. In the first place, Deutero-Isaiah acknowledges Israel’s rebellion, acknowledges that she is a worm, acknowledges that she had suffered justly for her sins. Yet at the same time Yahweh, he says, has kept asserting that even while she has been suffering justly, He has never let her go. In fact, He has been beside her in her sorrow and pain all the time. Deutero-Isaiah even dares to use the simile, following Hosea, of a loving husband sharing, even bearing, the pain that results from the folly of his wife’s disloyal ways.

“But in the second place, Deutero-Isaiah asserts that the suffering undergone by Israel, which she had so richly deserved, God has accepted as if it were suffering voluntarily undergone on Israel’s part. That is to say, God imputes to Israel the good intention she never had. God imputes to her the complete self-emptying, which she had to undergo when her *nephesh*, her person, was despised and abhorred by her conquerors. Thus in reality it is no longer she, the stiff-necked, proud, self-confident Israel of old with whom her God is dealing; all that man can now see is the mere broken body of Israel as it suffers the strokes of the lash of a terrible judgment. For Israel is no longer

‘there,’ so to speak. Rather, the place where she had once been is now taken by the word that dwells within her. For as a *nephesh* in her own right she is dead. See

40:7, It was dry—green grass; it withered—a blossom,
because YHWH’s wind / breath blew upon it.
Surely grass (is) the people!

48:8, Also you (singular) did not hear;
also you did not know;
also from long ago you did not open your ear.
Because I knew, you would certainly act faithlessly!
And One Rebelling from (the) Womb you were called!

48:18-19,

18 If only / I wish you had drawn near to My commandments,
and your peace / welfare / prosperity would be like the river,
and your righteousness like waves of the sea!
19 And your descendant(s) would be like the sand,

(continued...)

⁵⁵(...continued)

and your offspring from your belly like its (the sand's) grains—
it would not be cut off,

and its name would not be exterminated from before Me!

(YHWH's wind had blown upon Israel; she had been carried off into national death in Babylon! She had not drawn near—therefore she deserved being cut off, exterminated! Israel was “as good as dead.” These are not the passages referred to by Knight, all of which only depict Israel as YHWH's servant and assuring Israel that He will be with them— **42:6, 8; 43:2; 48:11; 49:3, 8**; surely mistaken references to Israel's being dead!)

“So her body is now merely the form through which the word becomes flesh. Therefore it is the word—a masculine noun in Hebrew—who has now borne the consequences of Israel's guilt. No wonder therefore the cry goes forth: Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth: ‘Burst into singing, you hills!’ For the Lord has comforted His people, ‘He has shown’ compassion (as the Hebrew runs) on His afflicted people.” (Pp. 135-37)

This is an intriguing comment by Knight, but one that demands clarification. The passages he refers to are obviously not appropriate—perhaps a printer's mistake. And we do not see the relevance of the “word” being a masculine noun. Knight's view certainly prepares the way for **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** with its “suffering servant.”

⁵⁶Slotki describes **verses 14-21** as “a poem of singular charm and beauty, breathing the spirit of tenderness and sympathy, in which the prophet announces the speedy return of the exiled community to Zion, the rebuilding of the city's ruins and the increase of its inhabitants.” (P. 242)

He states that in **verse 14** Zion is “represented as a deserted and forgotten wife bemoaning her lot,” and in **verses 15-21** God's answer to Zion's lament is answered, “comforting and reassuring.” (Pp. 242-43)

North entitles **verses 14-21** “The Repopulation Of Zion.”

He comments that these verses “begin with Zion's lament that Yahweh has forsaken her. This anticipates the figure of Zion as the wife of Yahweh (**50:1; 54:1-8**), though the marriage relationship is not yet explicit. But Yahweh's love for the city is even greater than that of a mother for ‘the son of her womb.’ (The double relationship of Yahweh to Israel, as Husband and as Father, appears already in **Hosea 2, 11:1-2**). His eagerness to see the city rebuilt is as great as that of any architect to see his design take shape.

“The builders (Zion's children) appear as if from nowhere...There are so many of them that the city is too small to contain them. The astonishment of the bewildered

(continued...)

וְאֶדְוִי שָׁכַחְנִי:

And Zion said, YHWH forsook me!,
and my Lord⁵⁷ forgot me!⁵⁸

49:15⁵⁹ הִתְשַׁכַּח אִשָּׁה עֹלָהּ

⁵⁶(...continued)

‘mother’ is complete: ‘Where can all these have come from?’ They must be those who have been born in all the places to which the Israelites, from the former northern and southern kingdoms, have been scattered. While the city has lain forsaken, ‘children,’ unbeknown to her, have been born to her.” (P. 194)

Westermann comments that “In **49:14-26** Zion’s lament is called in question, and countered by the proclamation of the rebuilding of the city (**verses 16-17**), the return of the exiles (**verses 18, 21ff.**), the extension of her territory (**verse 19**), and the breaking of the power of those who held Israel captive.” (P. 14)

⁵⁷Knight observes that the noun אֶדְוִי, “Lord,” normally is used for YHWH as “Lord,” “it may also be used for ‘husband,’ in the same way as the word בַּעַל, Baal, or lord, can also be used for husband.” (P. 137) We take his implication to be that YHWH is Israel’s Divine Husband, Whom Israel has betrayed by infidelity, as in **Hosea 2, 11**.

⁵⁸**Verse 14** is a depiction of Zion as complaining that these previous past tense verbs are mistaken, holding that the fact of her experience is that YHWH has forsaken and forgotten her, not remembering His past mercies and blessings.

And we add, Isn’t that typical for believers in all ages—in the light of present suffering, to forget past blessings from God?

Alexander comments that “Zion of Jerusalem is mentioned as the capital of Israel, the center of the true religion, the earthly residence of God Himself, and therefore an appropriate and natural emblem of His chosen people or the ancient [Jewish] church.” (Pp. 236-37)

Knight comments on **verse 14** that “The humanity of Israel is clearly underlined in this verse. Here she is quite unable to appreciate and understand the wonder of the gospel [good news] that Deutero-Isaiah is proclaiming to her about her God. In fact, all down the ages men have found the good news of God’s love too good to be accepted as true.” (P. 137)

⁵⁹North comments on **verse 15** that “All the commentators remark that nowhere in the **Old Testament**, except in **Jeremiah 31:20**, is the love of Yahweh for His people

(continued...)

⁵⁹(...continued)

so poignantly expressed as here. 'This love is greater than mother-love, stronger than the strongest feeling, more intimate than the closest bond of nature' (P. Volz **Isaiah II Translated and Explained** [in German], Leipzig, 1932)...

"Similarly, Jeremiah's New Covenant (**Jeremiah 31:31-34**) is with the nation, but as it becomes defined it includes, almost of necessity, individual Israelites: 'they shall all know Me.'" (P. 194)

Jeremiah 31:20,

Is Ephraim a very precious / dear son to Me?
Or a son of delight?
Because as often as My speaking against him,
I truly remember him still.
For that reason My inwards murmur / growl for him.
I will certainly have compassion on him—
(it is) a saying of YHWH!

Knight comments on **verse 15**: "The remarkable metaphor that follows is Deutero-Isaiah's way of showing still another facet of Yahweh's special relationship to Israel. For here we learn of the mother love of God..."

"The figure occurs a number of times in the **Old Testament** and serves to balance the usual masculine image of the Almighty that men have held. Thus if only the early church had fed the ordinary believer faithfully with the truths of revelation as they are given us in the **Old Testament**, as well as with those that come to us from the **New Testament**, the felt need for a mother image in the heavens might never have developed, and the Virgin Mary would not have been exalted to the position she now holds in the imagination and respect of many. For the Virgin Mary is really the representation of the feminine figure of Zion, the people of God, now fully accepting her role as handmaid (the feminine form of the masculine word 'servant,' **Luke 1:38**)..."

"The pity and compassion in God's reply can be heard in the choice of the word 'breast-fed babe' [our 'nursing child']—for that is what poor, abandoned, helpless, ridiculous Israel obviously appeared in His sight. But now, how can the omniscient One forget? Compare:

Psalm 13:2^{Heb} / **1**^{Eng}

How long, YHWH,
will You forget me (to) perpetuity?

Psalm 77:10^{Heb} / **9**^{Eng}

(continued...)

מִרְחָם בֶּן־בֶּטְנָה
גַּם־אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחַנָּה
וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא אֶשְׁכַּחֲךָ:

Will a woman forget her nursing child?

–from showing mercy (to) a son of her womb?

Even these will forget,⁶⁰

but / and I, I will not forget you!⁶¹

⁵⁹(...continued)

Has God forgotten to show mercy?

Or has He in anger shut off His compassions? Selah

Hosea 4:6,

My people were destroyed, from lack of the knowledge!

Because you rejected the knowledge,

and I will reject you from being a priest for Me!

And you forgot your God's *torah* / teaching--

I, even I will forget your children!

“But I will not forget you!” comes the emphatic *reply*—*you* being in the feminine gender and singular. Thus *you* is no longer the servant as the masculine: *you is now the beloved wife*.

⁶⁰Where our Hebrew text has גַּם־אֵלֶּה תִשְׁכַּחַנָּה, “even these will forget,”

Rahlfs has “but then if also a woman should forget these [the offspring of her womb].”

⁶¹Slotki comments on **verse 15**, asking “Is it likely that a mother’s compassion for her child should fail? Of course not! But, even if such an unnatural possibility could be imagined, God’s mindfulness of Zion is much more steadfast and enduring than the strongest of human ties of kinship.” (P. 243)

Alexander states that “The constancy of God’s affection for His people is expressed by the strongest possible comparison derived from human instincts...He first declares that He can no more forget them than a woman can forget her child; He then rises higher and declares that He is still more mindful of them than a mother...There is no need of departing from the obvious meaning of the Prophet’s language, which is not hypothetical but categorical [unconditional].” (P. 237)

49:16⁶² הֵן עַל-כַּפַּיִם חִקְתִּיךָ

חֹמְתֶיךָ נִגְדִי תָמִיד:

Look-upon (My) hands⁶³ I inscribed you;⁶⁴

⁶²Knight comments on **verse 16**: “Now we have a moving picture of Divine grace...The picture has been adapted from a practice with which Israel would [have met] in Babylon. Some of Israel’s neighbors, including the Babylonians, were in the habit of tattooing the name of the God they worshiped upon their hand, in order to remind them to Whom they belonged, and Who was the controlling power in their lives. Similarly, Israel was called to witness to God’s act in bringing her out of Egypt by wearing on her hand a reminder of that great event (**Exodus 13:9**). On that occasion God had been the sole Actor. He had done everything for Israel, and all that Israel needed to do was just to accept it in gratitude...”

“But in this picture the tables are turned, so to speak, and we are given a picture of God showing Israel that He has her name inscribed not just on one but actually on both of His hands. Moreover, although the walls of Jerusalem are now lying flat on the ground, God declares that He sees them re-erected, protecting the city that He has promised to keep forever as His Own. This can only mean that the walls shall be built; what God sees cannot be a mirage, for God sees both the beginning and the outcome of every situation in every age.” (P. 138)

⁶³We insert “My (hands),” even though the Hebrew is simply עַל-כַּפַּיִם, “upon hands.”

⁶⁴The phrase חִקְתִּיךָ, **chaqqothiik**, “I inscribed you,” uses the 2nd person feminine pronominal suffix, making it certain that the “you” is referring to Zion.

Slotki describes **verse 16** as “a bold metaphor. God, having as it were engraved Zion on both His hands, can never forget her sad plight.” (P. 243) The word for “hands” is כַּפַּיִם, **kappayim**, a “dual” noun—meaning “two hands.”

North comments that “Some kind of tattooing seems intended. The meaning is sometimes taken to be that Yahweh has tattooed the name Zion on His palms as a lover tattoos the name of his beloved. But there is no analogy for this in the **Old Testament** (not even in **44:5**...) The object of ‘engraved’ is ‘you,’ i.e. the city, and the parallel is ‘your walls.’ Yahweh’s ‘stigmata’ [used by some Christians for wounds appearing on the bodies of some believers corresponding to those inflicted on Jesus in His passion] are sketches of the city He loves and of which He is reminded whenever He looks at His hands.” (P. 195)

Your walls⁶⁵ are before Me constantly!⁶⁶

49:17⁶⁷ מְהַרְוֵנוּ בְּנֵי יָדַי

מְהַרְסֵיךָ וּמְחַרְבֵיךָ

⁶⁵Slotki holds that Zion's "walls" means "walls which are now in ruins. Others consider the imagery to refer to the plan of the rebuilt city which is engraved upon the Divine hands and so cannot be forgotten by Him." (P. 243)

⁶⁶Translations of **verse 16** vary. Our **English Bibles** have "on the palms of My hands," where the Hebrew has only "on hands," and could just as easily be translated "on (your) hands." **Rahlfs** has ἰδοὺ ἐπὶ τῶν χειρῶν μου ἐζωγράφησά σου τὰ τείχη καὶ ἐνώπιόν μου εἶ διὰ παντός, "Look-upon the hands of Mine I life-painted / wrote as living your walls, and you are before Me constantly."

Alexander, after mentioning diverse understandings of the verse, states that "The essential idea, I will not forget you, may be first expressed by saying, I will write your name upon My hands, and then by saying, I will keep your walls constantly before Me, i.e. in My sight and memory." (P. 238)

⁶⁷Slotki comments on **verses 17-21** that "The prophet in his vision already sees Zion's children returning to their mother, the rebuilding of her ruins and the multitudes crowding within her walls." (P. 243)

Knight comments on **verses 17-18** that "God in fact now sees feverish activity in progress as Zion's sons work faster at rebuilding the city than her enemies are able to destroy it (compare **Nehemiah [6]**), and all marauding desert nomads vanish in the mist. Back to their predestined home come all the sons of Mother Zion from every corner of the earth—and so not only from Babylon, as we saw before. And then comes a heartening decision from the lips of Zion's God. Beautiful as her walls and building may be, Zion's real wealth and beauty reside rather in her—and God's—sons and daughters. Unlike Queen Babylon who will soon be mourning the loss of her sons, Queen Zion, when the marriage is later renewed, as the Bride of God will possess all the children she desires (compare **Genesis 22:17** [the Divine promise to Abraham of multiplied descendants]). And while Queen Babylon will be putting on widow's weeds, Queen Zion will be attiring herself with the glory of her sons. (Note that Trito-Isaiah quotes this verse [**60:4**], but that he adds to the returning sons and daughters of Israel representatives of all nations of the earth, for they too will be among God's sons returning home to Zion.)" (Pp. 138-39)

Perhaps...but it is not clear that in **chapter 60** the foreigners who assist Israel in building her walls and the kings who come with their gifts are considered God's sons and daughters returning home to Israel.

What do you think?

מִמְנֶה יֵצְאוּ:

Your sons⁶⁸ hurried;

those tearing you down and those making you desolate,
went forth from you.⁶⁹

49:18 שְׂאֵי־סָבִיב עֵינֶיךָ וְרָאִי

כֹּלֵם נִקְבְּצוּ בְּאוֹ-לֶךְ

⁶⁸Rahlf's translates the first line of **verse 17** by “And quickly you will be built by those who took you down.”

Slotki notes that “the Targum and other ancient Versions read the word [not as בְּנֵיךָ, **banayik**, ‘your children / sons’ but] as בְּנֵיךָ, **bonayik**, ‘your builders,’” but adds that “this is not supported by **verses 20-21**.” (P. 243) 1QIs^a also reads בּוֹנֵיךָ, **bonayik**, ‘your builders.’”

North comments that if this verse is taken to mean that Jerusalem’s “sons” are her “builders,” it is in contrast with **Isaiah 45:13**,

I, I aroused him [Cyrus] in righteousness,
and I will make straight all his ways.
He will build My city, and My exiles he will send forth—
not for a price, and not for a bribe!

Of course, no one reading this text thinks that it means Cyrus will build Jerusalem by his own hands. He would be the one sending the exiles home, to do the rebuilding themselves.

⁶⁹Slotki holds that “those tearing you down and those making you desolate” refers to “The Babylonian garrison billeted upon the country. Others take the clause in a spiritual sense: the wicked men who were the cause of their people’s fall.” (P. 243)

Alexander comments that **verse 17** “is proof that God had not forsaken her [Zion]...Already had her sons begun to hasten to her, and before long her enemies should be entirely departed...The natural interpretation of the words is that which understands them as containing simply an emphatic contrast between friends and foes, the latter taking their departure, and the former coming into possession.” (P. 238)

The time of writing of this verse is apparently after Cyrus’ proclamation that the Jewish exiles could return home, and the beginning of their return, with the beginning of the departure of those who had dispossessed them from their land.

חִי־אֲנִי נְאֻם־יְהוָה

כִּי כָל־מִן־פְּעֻרֵי תְלַבְּשֵׁי

וְתִקְשְׁרֵם כַּכֶּלֶה:

Lift up your eyes all around, and see—

All of them gathered, they came to you.⁷⁰

As I live⁷¹—a saying of YHWH—

that you shall wear all of them like the ornament,⁷²

and you shall bind them on like the bride!⁷³

⁷⁰Alexander comments on the first two lines of **verse 18** that “The sons, described in **verse 17** as rapidly approaching, are now in sight, and their mother [Zion] is invited to survey them, by lifting up her eyes round about, i.e. in all directions, with allusion to their coming from the four points of the compass, as predicted in **verse 12**... *They come to you* is an inadequate translation. The true sense is that they are actually come, i.e. arrived.” (Pp. 238-39) That is, these lines go beyond the description in **verse 17**, depicting the returning children as having arrived in Zion.

⁷¹Slotki comments that the phrase “As I live” is a “Divine oath.” (P. 243)

Alexander agrees, stating that “The formula of swearing here used strictly means, *I (am) alive (or living)*, and is itself equivalent to *I swear* in English.” (P. 239)

⁷²Our Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) omits the phrase “like the ornament.”

⁷³Slotki calls these last two lines of **verse 18** “A vivid metaphor; the returning children will be like bridal ornaments.” (P. 243)

Alexander agrees, stating that “The sons are...compared to ornaments of dress, which the mother girds or binds upon her person...As a bride put on her ornaments, so you shall be adorned with your children.” (P. 239) Compare **Isaiah 61:10**,

I will certainly rejoice in the YHWH;
my innermost being will rejoice (synonym) in my God!
Because He dressed me (with) clothing of salvation / deliverance;
(with) a robe of righteousness / righteousness He covered me,
like a bridegroom acts (like) the priest (with a) turban,
and like a bride ornaments herself (with) her jewels.

49:19⁷⁴ כִּי חֲרַבְתִּיךָ וְשִׁמְמַתִּיךָ

וְאֶרֶץ חֲרָסְתִּיךָ

כִּי עַתָּה תִּצְרִי מִיּוֹשֵׁב

וְרַחֲקוּ מִבְּלַעַיִךָ:

Because your ruins and your desolations

and (the) land of⁷⁵ your destruction--

because now it will be too small / cramped for (so many) inhabitant(s).

And those swallowing you up will be far away!⁷⁶

49:20 עוֹד יֹאמְרוּ בְּאָזְנוֹךָ בְּנֵי שְׂכָלֶיךָ

צָר־לִי הַמָּקוֹם

נִשְׁה־לִּי וְאִשְׁבָּה:

Again they will say in your ears, (the) children of your bereavement,⁷⁷

⁷⁴Slotki comments on **verses 19-20** that “Zion’s present solitude will give way to a teeming population that will overcrowd the city.” (P. 244)

Knight comments on these two verses that “The same God Who had *devastated your land* was now, beyond the ‘death’ of Zion, bringing new life abundant to the city He had chosen. It is true that for a time God had had to put away His Bride, Mother Zion (compare **Hosea 1-3**; **Ezekiel 16**) because she was unclean; she had consorted with other lovers and had given her loyalty elsewhere. But God had long since sworn to give His glory to no other than His faithless Bride.” (P. 139)

⁷⁵Where our Hebrew text has the phrase **וְאֶרֶץ**, **we)erets**, “and land of,” it is omitted by our Greek translation (**Rahlfs**).

⁷⁶We take **verse 19** to mean that whereas a city being surrounded by enemies threatening to “swallow up” its inhabitants would be crowded by the masses of people fleeing the destroyers, now, with her enemies / “swallowers” gone, there would be no longer any need for such crowding, and the inhabitants would be clamoring for more living space.

⁷⁷Slotki holds that “the children of your bereavement” means “the children who were lost to Zion when they were taken into captivity. Others interpret: who were born

(continued...)

the place is (too) narrow for me,
draw near⁷⁸ to me, and I will dwell (here)!

49:21⁷⁹ וְאָמַרְתָּ בְּלִבְבֶּךָ

מִי יֵלֶד-לִי אֶת-אֱלֹהִים

וְאָנִי שְׂכֻלָּה וְגַלְמוּדָה גְּלָהּ וְסוּרָה

וְאֱלֹהִים מִי גִדֵּל

הֵן אָנִי נִשְׁאַרְתִּי לְבִדִּי

אֱלֹהִים אֵיפֹה הֵם:

And you will say in your heart,

⁷⁷(...continued)

in exile when Zion was in her bereavement.” (P. 244)

Alexander observes that “Jarchi [today generally known as Rashi, medieval French rabbi and commentator] explains *the sons of your childlessness* to mean the sons of whom you were bereaved, referring to the exiled Jews. The later writers more correctly make it mean *the sons of yours, a childless one, or your sons, O childless one*. The apparent contradiction is intentional, as appears from what follows. She who was deemed by others, and who deemed herself, a childless mother, hers the voice of her children complaining that they have not a sufficient space to dwell in...The strict translation being simply this, *the place is narrow for me*.” (P. 240)

⁷⁸The phrase גְּשָׁה-לִּי, **geshah-iliy**, is puzzling, as it seems to mean “draw near to me!”, using the qal imperative verb. But if it is a matter of overcrowding, why would this be said? **Rahlf**s has ποίησόν μου τόπον, “make a place for me,” and our translations follow suit, with “give place to me,” or “make room for me.” Compare the use of this verb in **Genesis 19:9**.

Alexander mentions the German scholar, Ernst Rosenmueller (1768-1835), who “adheres to the only sense authorized by usage, and explains the phrase to mean, *Come near to me, that there may be more room*.” (P. 240)

⁷⁹Slotki comments on **verse 20** that “Zion, bereaved and solitary for so long, cannot believe that all the returning children are really her own.” (P. 244)

Who gave birth⁸⁰ for me to these?
And I—childless and barren, exiled and put away--⁸¹
and these—who raised (them)?⁸²

⁸⁰North comments that “the verb is masculine (יָלַד) and the meaning could be ‘who has begotten?’” (P. 195)

⁸¹Where our Hebrew text has the phrase גִּלְהָהּ | וְסוּרָהּ, **golah wesurah**, “uncovered / exiled and put away / divorced,” it is omitted by our Greek translation (**Rahlf**s). 1QIs^a reads the second word in this phrase as וְסוּרָהּ, “and she went away.” The phrase is read as “and a prisoner,” by a large number of Hebrew manuscripts, as well as the Greek and Latin translations

⁸²The phrase אֵיפֹה הֵם, **eyphoh hem**, is difficult. אֵיפֹה is apparently a combination of two words, אֵי and פֹּה, “where” and “here,” which in combination may only mean “where?”, or perhaps “of what kind?” Slotki’s translation has “where were they?”, but he thinks it better to translate by “how is it with them?”, i.e., “Are they in fact my children?” Translations vary from “these, where had they been?” to “And where have these been?” to “where then have these come from?”, to οὗτοι δέ μοι ποῦ ἦσαν, “but then these to me, where were they?” Compare a similar use of אֵיפֹה in **Judges 8:18**.

Alexander comments that “With them [the returning children] the question is, where they shall dwell; with her [mother Zion, the question is], whence they came.” (P. 241)

The additional question of mother Zion is “Who has produced these for me?” Alexander states that “the general conception, so clearly and affectingly presented, [is] of a childless mother finding herself suddenly surrounded by the clamor of a multitude of children, and asking in amazement whence they came and who they are.” (P. 242)

Knight comments on **verse 21**: “Now that she had been forgiven, therefore, one of the joys of ‘setting up house’ again which the Lord would grant her was wondering where all her children had come from. So long as she remained an exile in Babylon she had not been in physical contact with Yahweh her Husband—for the temple, where Yahweh had put His name to dwell, was then in ruins. Without a Husband, who could have sired her with all these children? The only answer is that they must have been born of grace (**verse 15** [YHWH’s promise that He would never forget her]), the gift of a Husband’s love that had remained unchanged throughout the whole long period that she believed herself to be barren and a grass-widow [a woman whose husband is away often or for prolonged periods] in exile...”

(continued...)

Look—I was a remnant, by myself--

these⁸³—where did they come from?⁸⁴

⁸²(...continued)

“How daring this figure appears to us, with our Western conceptions of delicacy in matters of sex. Yet no figure conceived in an Eastern mind could express more movingly the reality of grace...The figure unashamedly includes both agape and eros in the love of God for Israel; and so if Deutero-Isaiah believes that both concepts are needed to expound the love of God, then there is no reason for us either to be ashamed to make a similar identification.” (Pp. 139-40)

In my study of the **Hebrew Bible**, I have come to reject the commonly taught idea that there is a great distinction between “*agape*-love / *ahabhah*-love,” both of which are supposed to depict a non-sexual, “Platonic” superior type of love, and “*eros*-love,” which is supposed to depict a sexual, lustful type of love. But this distinction will not hold when reading the **Bible** in both Hebrew and its Greek translation.

For example, see the story in **2 Samuel 13:15** of Amnon and Tamar, where Amnon’s “love” for his half-sister Tamar is described as אַהַבָּה, **ahabhah** in Hebrew and ἀγάπη, **agape** in Greek. In the **Song of Solomon**, some 11 times the love between the male and female lovers is depicted as **agape** in Greek, and **ahabhah** in Hebrew—see **Song of Solomon 2:4, 5, 7; 3:5, 10; 5:8; 7:7; 8:4, 6, 7, 7**, in all of which this is the case. It is very naive to say that the **Song of Solomon** is not about sexual love between a man and a woman, even though medieval rabbinic interpreters interpreted its statements as being about Divine-human love, and were followed in this by Roman Catholic exegesis.

For this whole matter, see the profound article by Ethelbert Stauffer in volume I of **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**, pp. 21-55.

⁸³Where our Hebrew text reads אֵלֶּה, “these,” a large number of Hebrew manuscripts along with the Greek, Latin, and Aramaic interpolate the conjunction “and,” “and these.”

⁸⁴Alexander comments that mother Zion “asks how it is that she was so long desolate and childless, when she sees so many children round her now...The Zion of this context is the ancient Church or chosen people [Israel], represented both in fiction and in fact by the Sanctuary and the Holy City, as its local center and appointed Symbol. Of this ideal subject, desolation, childlessness, captivity, exile, and the other varying conditions here described, may all be predicated with the same propriety...The Babylonish exile, and the state of the church at that period of her history, has no claim to be recognized as anything more than a particular exemplification of the general premise, that the church, after passing through extreme depression and attenuation [reduction in size], should be raised up and replenished like a childless mother who suddenly finds herself surrounded by a large and joyous family of children.” (P. 242)

כָּה־אָמַר אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה ^{85, 1} 49:22
 הִנֵּה אֲשָׂא אֶל־גּוֹיִם יָדַי
 וְאֶל־עַמִּים אֲרִים נְסִי
 וְהִבִּיאוּ בְנֵיךָ בְּחֶצֶן
 וּבְנִתֶיךָ עַל־כַּתֶּף תִּנְשָׂאנָה:

⁸⁵North entitles **verses 22-26** “The Turning Of The Tables.”

He comments that “Yahweh has only to signal to the nations and they will release Zion’s children and conduct them home with all ceremony. Kings and queens will be their attendants...”

“What is implied is that they kiss the feet of their one-time slaves, with something of the abandon described in **1 Kings 4:27; Matthew 28:9**, without noticing the dust that covers them. **Verse 26** is not a picture of crude cannibalism. True, it could help to inflame Jewish chauvinism in later eschatological pictures. What it means in its context is that the panic-stricken Babylonians will consume one another in internecine strife. (**Herodotus 4:63** relates—though it may not be strictly in this context—that it was a Scythian [see our end-note 1] custom for every soldier to drink the blood of the first man he killed.) But although these verses have a strong nationalistic coloring, nationalism is not the last word. The section ends, as is usual with Deutero-Isaiah, on a Theocentric [God-centered] and universalist note: ‘all mankind shall know that I am the Lord...’” (P. 196)

Slotki comments that beginning here at **verse 22**, there are “three short oracles on the restoration of exiled Israel with the aid of the highest personages of the Gentiles; a reassurance that God will champion their cause; and a reaffirmation of the covenant relation between Him and His people...The Gentiles, the common people as well as their kings and queens, in response to a Divine signal, will assist in the restoration of Israel and at the same time pay him the highest marks of homage.” (Pp. 244-45)

It seems obvious that with this language, the vision of the prophet concerning the restoration of Israel from Babylonian captivity goes far beyond that historical occurrence to speak of a much larger and multi-national restoration of Israel, involving kings and queens of other nations than simply Cyrus and Persia.

Knight comments on **verse 22** that ‘Nothing now can stop the outworking of God’s [purpose] or plan. Deutero-Isaiah here refers to a daring saying of Moses as [he] expostulates [expresses strong disapproval or disagreement] to God: ‘Did I conceive all this people? Did I bring them forth, that You should say to me, ‘Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries the sucking child?’ (**Numbers 11:12**).’” (P. 140)

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:

Look—I will lift up My hand to (the) nations,
and to peoples I will raise My signal;⁸⁶
and they will bring your sons in (their) embrace,
and your daughters they will carry upon (their) shoulder.⁸⁷

49:23⁸⁸ וְהָיוּ מַלְכֵי אֲמֹנִיָּה

⁸⁶Alexander comments that “The idea expressed by the figures of [lines two and three] is that of summoning the nations to perform their part in this great work. The figures themselves are the same as in **13:2**, that is, the shaking or waving of the hand and the erection of a banner, pole, or other signal, with distinct reference perhaps to persons at a distance and at hand.” (Pp. 242-43)

North comments that the **ס**, “signal,” means “an ensign or rallying-flag of some kind, generally set conspicuously on a hill.” (P. 196) Compare **Isaiah 13:2; 18:3; 30:17**.

⁸⁷The use of the two phrases, “in their embrace,” and “upon their shoulder” point to the “tenderness and care” with which the foreigners care for the returning exiles of both sexes.

Alexander comments that “The effect of that compliance [to the Divine call] is described...as the bringing home of Zion’s sons and daughters, with all the tender care which is wont to be lavished upon infants by their parents or their nurses.” (P. 243)

He adds that those who restrict the promise to the exiled Jews in Babylon are under the necessity of making this a restoration, which is not only perfectly gratuitous but inconsistent with the preceding verse, where these same children are described as appearing for the first time, and thereby exciting the surprise of the forsaken mother.” (P. 243)

We think this is overstatement, and that the language could be well applied to the return from Babylon. But still, the return depicted seems to be more than that of only returning from Babylon—it is apparently depicting a return from the four corners of the globe, with the help of kings and queens from various nations—not just Persia. See the next verse.

⁸⁸Slotki comments on **verse 23** that “Kings and queens of foreign nations will look after the welfare of God’s people.” (P. 245)

Alexander states that “The same promise [as that in **verse 22**] is repeated in substance [in **verse 23**] with a change of form. Instead of the nations, we have now their kings and queens; and instead of Zion’s sons and daughters, Zion herself... [Alexander explains,] between the Zion of this passage and her children there is no

(continued...)

⁸⁸(...continued)

essential difference...because [mother Zion is] really as much in need of sustenance and care as those before called her sons and daughters, or rather because she is but another figure for the same thing.” (P. 243)

Knight comments on **verse 23** that “In fact, Deutero-Isaiah’s language could easily be and has often been misconstrued. His expression *Kings...and queens...with their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet* has led expositors to exclaim with disgust that what is portrayed here is a highly undesirable trait in the nature of the chosen people. But this is to misunderstand the *etsah* [purpose / plan] of God.

“Isaiah of Jerusalem has a long poem on the haughtiness both of man and nature, in which he describes how all human and nature’s pride must be brought low. For God is all in all, *so that the Lord alone will be exalted in that day (Isaiah 2:9-11, 12-19)*. Deutero-Isaiah, whose works are included in the ‘**Book of Isaiah**,’ would know this passage well. Therefore we are not in order if we read into **verses 22-23** any suggestion that here Israel is preening herself as the ‘chosen people,’ chosen to lord it over the nations of the earth [but this is to claim that every word in **Second Isaiah** must be entirely in accord with every statement in the earlier writings of the historical Isaiah—the untenable claim made so often by those holding to the view of an infallible **Bible** which can have no contradictions or disagreements! Knight goes into an elaborate explanation in order to avoid the appearance of such a contradiction, which we think is unworthy of his scholarship]. This misinformed view of Israel’s election has bedevilled Jewish-Christian relations all down the centuries.

“Deutero-Isaiah’s meaning, however, is to be found only when we wrestle with the text in its context (of which we saw the need at **45:14-15**). In the phrase *lick the dust of your feet*, ‘your’ is still in the feminine singular. It can therefore refer only to Israel as the Bride of God (see **50:1**). Israel is that people in whom God hides Himself. Thus, if kings and queens *bring your sons in their bosom and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders*, and if, *with their faces in the dust they shall bow down to you, and lick the dust of your feet*, then they are in fact bowing down to God-in-Israel (**verse 7** [but does this verse say God is in Israel?]), the Husband of the Bride. Since they bow down to *you* (feminine singular) and lick the dust of *your* feet (again feminine singular), evidently Deutero-Isaiah is not thinking of Israel now as ‘Jacob’ (masculine) but as the Bride of God. For the Bride is the sacramentally visible aspect of the Presence of God in this world. Then *you* (feminine singular) will know that I AM YAHWEH, the Lord Who is utterly faithful to His covenant partner.” (Pp. 140-41)

Such an explanation of a difficulty in the text is reminiscent of medieval Jewish expositors in the **Babylonian Talmud** who find ways to explain away any seeming contradiction or problem in the text. We say the text shows the tables turned on Israel’s former enemies—who for far too long have humiliated Israel, and made of the Israelites their slaves, bowing at their feet—to the new situation of Israel and her people being the

(continued...)

וְשָׂרֵי־מַלְכוּתָם מִיְּנִיקוּתֶיךָ
 אַפַּיִם אֶרֶץ יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לָךְ
 וְעַפְרַת רַגְלֶיךָ יִלְחָכוּ
 וַיִּדְעוּתָּ כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִבְשׁוּ קִנְיִי:

And kings will be your foster-fathers,⁸⁹
 and their princesses / queens your nursing-mothers.⁹⁰
 (With) faces (to) earth, they will worship you
 and (the) dust of your feet they will lick.⁹¹

⁸⁸(...continued)

ones to whom the former rulers now bow in obeisance, licking the dust of their feet, as they come bringing Israelites home. Why should we try and explain this away?

⁸⁹The phrase אֲמִנִיךָ, **omnayik** is made up of a qal masculine plural participle, with a 2nd person feminine singular pronominal suffix. We understand this as referring to the foreign kings—masculine plural—who are functioning as “foster-fathers,” nourishing, supporting mother Zion, feminine singular, standing for her children.

⁹⁰The phrase מִיְּנִיקוּתֶיךָ, **meyniyqothayik** is made up of a feminine plural noun, with a 2nd person feminine singular pronominal suffix. We understand this as referring to the foreign princesses / queens who are nursing / breast-feeding “you”—again meaning mother Zion, standing for her children.

⁹¹Slotki holds that these two lines mean the foreign kings and queens will “pay homage” to the children of mother Zion and “will display abject self-humiliation in Oriental fashion.” (P. 245)

Alexander describes it as “a poetical description of complete and compulsory prostration.” (P. 244) Compare:

Micah 7:16-17,

- 16 Nations shall see and be ashamed of all their might;
 they will place a hand over (their) mouth;
 their ears will be silent / deaf.
- 17 They will lick dust like the serpent,

(continued...)

And you will know that I (am) YHWH,
those waiting (for) Me will not be put to shame!

49:24⁹² תִּיקַח מִגְבוּרַת מַלְקוּת־

⁹¹(...continued)

like crawling things of earth they will (come) trembl(ing) from their
fastnesses,
to YHWH our God they will be in dread,
and they will be afraid of you!

Psalm 72:8-11, speaking about Israel's anointed king,

- 8 And he reigned / may he reign from sea to sea,
and from River / Euphrates to ends of earth!
9 Before him may desert-dwellers bow down,
and may his enemies lick (the) dust!
10 May kings of Tarshish and coastlands / islands return offering(s)!
Kings of Sheba and Seba bring near gift(s)!
11 And may all kings fall down to him,
all nations serve him!

⁹²Slotki comments on **verses 24-26** that "God will fight for the liberation of Israel against the all-powerful nations who oppressed him [Israel]." (P. 245)

Knight states that in these three verses, "Deutero-Isaiah now allays a final doubt that Yahweh may not be strong enough to effect His purpose. Yahweh, he says, is surely stronger than any human dictator, for He has made them all. See **Isaiah 45:9**,

How sad / woe (to) one quarreling with his Potter / Fashioner,
a clay vessel, along with clay vessels of (the) ground!
Will (the) clay say to its potter / fashioner,
What will you make?
and Your work has no handles / hands?

In fact He could effect the terrible picture drawn in **verse 26**; and yet even if He were to do these things, they would represent even less than justice for the evil in the thoughts and plans of the nations. For God, being the living, active God, must do something, no matter how shocking that something may be [How does Knight know this? Is not this statement akin to the statements of Job's friends, who think they know what God must do? Is God really subject to our theological conclusions? Can we say 'God must'?). Then all flesh, mankind, shall know that I am the Lord your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob...This last word is the old poetic name for Yahweh that Isaiah

of Jerusalem had used (**1:24**, [אַבִּירִי, 'Strong One,' made plural in the Greek translation, οἱ ἰσχύοντες Ἰσραηλ, 'the strong ones of Israel']), and which was employed by the

(continued...)

וְאִם־שְׂבִי צְדִיק יִמָּלֵט:

Will booty / prey be taken from a mighty man?

And will captivity / captives⁹³ of a rightly-related person⁹⁴ escape?

49:25 כִּי־כָה | אָמַר יְהוָה

גַּם־שְׂבִי גְבוּר יִקָּח

וּמִלְקוֹחַ עֲרִיץ יִמָּלֵט

⁹²(...continued)

narrator of Jacob's story in **Genesis 49:24**...By using this word Deutero-Isaiah is declaring that God's purpose and plan, now about to be revealed to the nations, are rooted in the far distant past of the patriarchal period." (P. 141)

⁹³Alexander comments that מִלְקוֹחַ [malqoach, "booty," "prey"] and שְׂבִי [sheb-hiy, "captivity," "captives"] are combined elsewhere to describe whatever can be taken in war, including prisoners and booty (**Numbers 31:11, 12, 2, 32**). שְׂבִי, though properly an abstract, is continually used as a collective term for captives." (P. 244)

⁹⁴The Hebrew adjective is צְדִיק, tsaddiyq, "righteous / just person." Translations vary from "the lawful (captive)," to "a victor," to "a tyrant," to "the fierce," to ἀδίκως, "unjustly." And we wonder, Why all of these odd translations of a simple adjective, the meaning of which is obvious? The answer is that 1QIsa, along with the Syriac and Latin translations read עֲרִיץ, "a terror-striking person," instead of צְדִיק, "a righteous person." This noun, עֲרִיץ, "a terror-striking person," is found in the next verse.

Alexander weighs a number of proposed translations, and concludes that 'The simplest and most obvious construction of the words is that which makes them mean the captives of a righteous conqueror. The argument may then be stated thus: Shall the captives even of a righteous conqueror be freed in such a case? How much more the captives of an unjust oppressor!' (P. 244)

Oswalt observes that some scholars have proposed that צְדִיק, tsaddiyq was a graphic error for עֲרִיץ, (ariyts, 'fierce warrior,' which appears in...**verse 25**. 1QIs^a now supports that reading...In spite of some question about 1QIs^a's evidence, however, since it is almost impossible to make sense of the Masoretic Text...and given 1QIs^a's support by the Syriac and Latin Vulgate, that reading seems best." (P. 312)

Oswalt thinks other proposed translations have not gained majority support, but he does not mention Alexander's proposal, which seems much better to us.

וְאֶת־יְרִיבֶךָ אֲנֹכִי אֲרִיב

וְאֶת־בְּנֵיךָ אֲנֹכִי אוֹשִׁיעַ:

Because in this way YHWH spoke:

Even captivity / captives of a mighty man will be taken,
and booty of an awe-inspiring / terror-striking person will escape.

And I will contend with those contending with you;⁹⁵
and your children, I, I will save / deliver!⁹⁶

49:26⁹⁷ וְהֶאֱכַלְתִּי אֶת־מוֹנְיָךְ אֶת־בְּשָׂרָם

וְכַעֲסִים דָּמָם יִשְׁכְּרוּן

וַיִּדְעוּ כָּל־בָּשָׂר כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מוֹשִׁיעַךְ

וְגִאֲלֶךָ אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב:

⁹⁵Where our Hebrew text reads יְרִיבֶךָ, **yeribhek**, “your opponent / adversary,” a large number of Hebrew manuscripts along with the Latin Vulgate יְרִיבֵיךָ, **yeribhek**, “your opponents / adversaries.” Compare the Syriac translation which points with two vowels under the one consonant.

⁹⁶Alexander holds that the general sense of **verse 25** “is clear, as a solemn declaration that the power of the captor can oppose no real obstacle to the fulfilment of the promise of deliverance. The same idea is expressed in the last clause in more general and literal terms.” (P. 245)

His translation of the verse is: “For thus saith [YHWH], also (or ‘even’) the captivity (or ‘captives’) of the mighty shall be taken, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered, and with thy strivers will I strive, and thy sons will I save.” (**Ibid.**)

⁹⁷Slotki comments on **verse 26** that Israel’s oppressors “will be annihilated in their own mutually destructive feuds.” (P. 246)

Compare **Zechariah 11:9**,

And I said, I will not shepherd you people!

The one dying, let him die!

And the one being hidden, let him be hidden!

And the ones remaining, let them each one eat his fellow’s flesh!

And I will cause your oppressors to eat their (own) flesh,⁹⁸
and they will get drunk with their (own) blood, like sweet wine!⁹⁹
And all flesh will know that I (am) YHWH, your Savior,
and your Redeemer / Next-of-Kin, Mighty One of Jacob!¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸North states that “flesh” here means “near of kin,” and translates by “devour their own kin.” (P. 197)

⁹⁹North explains that “The first juice, squeezed from the grapes by their own weight, was reckoned better than the second yield extracted by the press. But the choice of what was an unusual word [עֹסֵף, ‘sweet wine,’ ‘pressed out juice’; occurs elsewhere at **Joel 1:5; 4:18; Amos 9:13** and **Song of Solomon 8:2**] was probably determined by the fact that the ‘new wine’...was the blood of men newly slain.” (P. 197)

¹⁰⁰Alexander comments that **verse 26** “winds up this part of the prophecy by the usual return to the great theme of the whole **book**, the relation of [YHWH] to His people, as their Savior, Redeemer, and Protector, Self-existent, eternal, and almighty in Himself, yet condescending to be called the Mighty One of Jacob.”

1. **The Scythians, Wikipedia Article (2/21/2016)**

“The Scythians; from Greek Σκύθης, Σκύθοι, were a large group of Iranian / Eurasian nomads who were mentioned by the literate peoples surrounding them as inhabiting large areas in the central Eurasian steppes from about the 9th century B.C.E. until about the 1st century B.C.E. The Scythian languages belonged to the Eastern branch of the Iranian languages. The "classical Scythians" known to ancient Greek historians were located in the northern Black Sea and fore-Caucasus region. Other Scythian groups documented by Assyrian, Achaemenid and Chinese sources show that they also existed in Central Asia, where they were referred to as the *Iskuzai* /*Askuzai*, *Saka* (Old Persian: *Sakā*; Greek: Σάκαι...

“The relationships between the peoples living in these widely separated regions remains unclear. The term "Scythian" is used by modern scholars in an archaeological context for finds perceived to display attributes of the "Scytho-Siberian" culture, usually without implying an ethnic or linguistic connotation. The term Scythic may also be used in a similar way, "to describe a special phase that followed the widespread diffusion of mounted nomadism, characterized by the presence of special weapons, horse gear, and animal art...Their westernmost territories during the Iron Age were known to classical Greek sources as Scythia.

“The Scythians were among the earliest peoples to master mounted warfare. In the 8th century B.C.E. they possibly raided Zhou China. Soon after they expanded westwards and dislodged the Cimmerians from power on the Pontic Steppe [an area of some 383,800 square miles, extending from the northern shores of the Black Sea eastward to northwest Kazakhstan].

“At their peak, Scythians came to dominate the entire steppe zone, stretching from the Carpathian Mountains [a range of mountains forming an arc roughly 932 miles long across Central Europe, making them the second-longest mountain range in Europe (after the Scandinavian Mountains, 1,056 miles). They provide the habitat for the largest European populations of brown bears, wolves, chamois and lynxes, with the highest concentration in Romania, as well as over one third of all European plant species. The Carpathians and their foothills also have many thermal and mineral waters, with Romania having one-third of the European total. Romania is likewise home to the largest surface of virgin forests in Europe (excluding Russia)...constituting Europe’s largest unfragmented forested area.

“The Carpathian Mountains stretch in an arc from the Czech Republic (3%) in the northwest through Slovakia (17%), Poland (10%), Hungary (4%) and Ukraine (11%) to Romania (53%) in the east and on to the Iron Gates on the River Danube between Romania and Serbia (2%) in the south.

“Based in what is modern-day Ukraine, Southern European Russia, and Crimea, the western Scythians were ruled by a wealthy class known as the Royal Scyths. The Scythians established and controlled a vast trade network connecting Greece, Persia, India and China, perhaps contributing to the contemporary flourishing of those civilizations.”

