

Isaiah Chapter 5, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes
Israel, the Divine Vineyard with Rotten Fruit–
No Justice or Righteousness--
and the Consequences: Exile, and Destruction by Foreign Nations--
A Powerful Statement of Prophetic Ethics!

5:1' אֲשִׁירָה נָא לִידֵיָי

¹There are three end-notes at the close of **chapter 5**: “Passages Where the Root כָּרֶךְ, “Beloved,” “Love,” “Uncle” Occurs”; “**New Testament** Passages Reflecting Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard”; and “Leviticus 26:14-20; Deuteronomy 28:15-35; Micah 6:12-16.”

Slotki states that “By means of [the imagery of the Divine vineyard in **verses 1-7**] the prophet subtly and effectively brings home to the people God’s mercy and kindness towards them, which they repaid by ingratitude and disobedience. Dire retribution is threatened.” (P. 22) He adds that **verses 8-25** are “an indictment under six counts each beginning with the exclamation woe. Each of the first two is followed by a description of the inevitable punishment while the last four are grouped together, the threatened retribution following the last count.” (P. 23)

Oswalt entitles **chapter 5** “A Harvest of Wild Grapes,” and then entitles **verses 1-7** “The Song of the Vineyard.”

He comments that “**Chapter 5** brings the introductory oracles to a close. If **chapter 1** introduced the reader to the **book** as a whole, and **chapters 2-4** laid bare the enormous conflict between what Israel was called to be and what, in fact, she was, **chapter 5** brings us back to the realities of Israel’s condition at the moment of Isaiah’s speaking. Whatever the future might hold, however redemption might occur, the plain fact was that somehow present sin must be faced and dealt with. No future hope, such as that contained in **4:2-6**, could ever obscure or obviate present evil...

“The parable of the vineyard (**verses 1-7**) sets the stage for the rest of the chapter, which includes a discussion of six conditions (wild grapes [worthless, stinking things]) that exist in the people and are contrary to God’s expectations for them (**verses 8-25**), and an announcement of coming destruction (compare **verses 5, 6**) at the hand of Gentile armies...

“**Verses 1-7**, perhaps because their artistry is so widely acclaimed, have come in for intensive study...The general sense is very clear, as it must have been to its first hearers: Israel (as typified in Judah and Jerusalem, **verse 3**) is compared to a vineyard whose owner has lavished a great deal of care upon it only to discover that the vineyard does not produce good grapes...Isaiah sets his hearers up to judge themselves: God

(continued...)

¹(...continued)

has cared for them like a vineyard, yet the fruits of their lives are bitter and sour. Is not God more than justified if He decides to remove His protection from them?

“The passage can be divided into four segments, the first three containing two verses each (**1-2, 3-4, 5-6**) and the last segment one verse (**7**). **Verses 1** and **2** explain the setting; **verses 3** and **4** ask the hearers for a verdict; **verses 5** and **6** announce the owner’s decision; and **verse 7** makes the specific application to Israel...

“Although the song has sometimes been considered an allegory...the text offers little reason to do so. The final application, as well as **verses 2** and **4**, emphasize merely the comparison of Israel’s unrighteousness in view of God’s care. This stress upon a single point more aptly fits the accepted definition of parable.” (Pp. 151-52)

Watts entitles **chapter five** “Requiem [‘mass for a deceased person’] for Israel.” He states that “The six-fold וי or ‘woe’ is the sign that this is a giant funeral. The opening ‘song’ is an explanation of the tragic event. Woven into the ‘woe’ speeches are others which tie the scene to the larger judgment scene which preceded.

Episode A: My Friend’s Song for His Vineyard (5:1-7)...The funeral scene recites the events that led up to it in the song (**verses 1-2**), the response of the owner (**verses 3-4**) and of Yahweh (**verses 5-6**). **Verse 7** identifies the corpses to be buried as ‘the house of Israel’ and ‘men of Judah’ and states the basis for judgment and death.

Episode B: Therefore My People Are Exiled (5:8-25). The ‘woes’ are laments over the persons who have died, interspersed with comments about the meaning of the event. The dead are illustrative of the elements that had to be purged from the city and the country.

Episode C: Signal to a Distant Nation (5:26-30). The chapter that begins with a doleful song of opportunities missed and of death closes with a realistic picture of the foreign invader who serves as executioner. (Pp. 52ff.)

Motyer entitles **5:1-30** “Sin and grace,” and comments that “In this last, grimmest section of his preface, Isaiah faces the seeming inevitability of Divine judgment...The vineyard is the place where total destruction must be pronounced (**verses 1-7**). The future seems like a great question mark, for even the Lord has come to the point where He asks what more is there that can be done (**verse 4**)...Now sin takes even hope away and nothing is left but the gathering darkness (**verse 30**).

“The verses fall into two sections: the Song of the Vineyard (**verses 1-7**) and the bitter crop produced (**verses 8-30**).” (P. 67)

(continued...)

¹(...continued)

Motyer entitles **5:1-7** “The vineyard: a total work, a total loss,” and comments that here Isaiah skillfully “draws his hearers on to the point where they can only utter a condemnation and discover that they have condemned themselves.” (P. 68)

Alexander comments that **chapter 5** “contains a description of the prevalent iniquities of Judah, and of the judgments which, in consequence of these, had been or were to be inflicted on the people. The form of the prophecy is peculiar, consisting of a parable and a commentary on it...

“The parable sets forth the peculiar privileges, obligations, guilt, and doom of Israel, under the figure of a highly favored vineyard which, instead of good fruit, brings forth only wild grapes, and is therefore given up to desolation, **verses 1-6**. The application is expressly made by the Prophet himself, **verse 7**.

“In the remainder of the chapter, he enumerates the sins which were included in the general expressions of **verse 7**, and describes their punishment. In doing this, he first gives a catalogue of sins with their appropriate punishments annexed, **verses 8-24**. He then describes the means used to inflict them, and the final issue, **verses 25-30**.” (P. 126)

Gray states that “This chapter is in no sense a continuation of **chapter 4**: from the Messianic hopes at the end of **chapters 2-4** we return here to announcements of judgments in three very distinct and unconnected poems...

“In the Hebrew text the poem is articulated as follows: **verse 1a, b**, introduction; **verses 1c-2**, the prophet’s description of the vineyard; **verses 3-6**, the speech of the owner of the vineyard which towards its close (**verse 6c, d**) somewhat clearly reveals the speaker to be Yahweh; **verse 7**, the prophet’s interpretation of the parable. In the Greek text, **verses 1b, 2** also belong to the speech of the owner.

“The vineyard which has received all the care that any vineyard could receive is Judah; its Owner, Yahweh; the fruit if should have yielded, righteousness and justice; the fruit actually yielded, violence and inhumanity. With great rhetorical effectiveness the ultimate conclusion is left for the audience to draw for themselves—Yahweh will abandon Judah to destruction.” (P. 81)

Kaiser simply states that “The so-called ‘Song of the Vineyard’ is one of the poetic masterpieces of the **Old Testament**...

“To begin with all his attention is occupied with his practical knowledge as a peasant-farmer or vineyard owner. Only from the sound of the tragic, limping rhythm derived from the funeral dirge can he recognize that the song is not being sung here in jest, but in earnest. He cannot even satisfy his curiosity as to who is represented by the

(continued...)

שִׁירַת דּוֹדִי לְכַרְמֹו
כֶּרֶם הִיָּה לְיַדַי
בְּקֶרֶן בֶּן-שָׁמֹן:

I will sing now to my beloved,²
a song³ of my beloved to his vineyard:⁴

¹(...continued)
singer's friend. He has to wait and listen to the story being told until it solves the mystery by itself." (P. 90)

²Slotki immediately identifies "my beloved" as referring to God. As the parable unfolds, it will become clear that this is the case—but it does not become obvious until **verse 6**, when the owner of the vineyard says that He will command the rain to cease.

Such "jumping of the gun" in interpretation eliminates the element of mystery contained in the parable, which calls on its readers to question, and interpret for themselves. And in fact, the parable of the vineyard can easily be applied to many other situations than just Jerusalem and Judah—for example the United States of America, that has been so gifted and blessed by God, but...

³Watts comments that "*Song* is an unlikely description for the real form and intention of the passage. This is intentional. It begins as a harmless piece of entertainment which becomes a strong accusation of the hearers." (P. 55)

Alexander states that the parable "is introduced in such a manner as to secure a favorable hearing from those whose conduct it condemns, and in some measure to conceal its drift until the application. The Prophet proposes to sing a song, that is, to utter a rhythmical and figurative narrative, relating to a friend of his, his friend's own song indeed about his vineyard...It is first called a song concerning him, but then his own song." (P. 127)

⁴Motyer comments that "A *song* / 'my beloved's song' is the song of which he is himself the singer: Isaiah the singer is the minister of another's words." (P. 68)

Perhaps—but the Hebrew is not all that clear: נָא לְיַדַי שִׁירַת דּוֹדִי
אֲשִׁירָה, "I will sing now for my beloved a song of my beloved."

Translations of the slightly longer phrase vary:

King James, "Now will I sing to my well beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard...."

(continued...)

There was a vineyard⁵ belonging to my beloved,^{6, 1}

⁴(...continued)

Tanakh, “Let me sing for my beloved A song of my lover about his vineyard...”

New Revised Standard, “Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard...”

New International, “I will sing for the one I love a song about his vineyard...”

New Jerusalem, “Let me sing my beloved the song of my friend for his vineyard...”

Rahfs, “I will sing now to the beloved a song of the beloved for the vineyard of mine.”
(Note the change from “his vineyard” to “my vineyard.”)

Kaiser, “I will sing for my friend a song of my love for his vineyard.”

Alexander comments that “The cognate words יְדִידִי and דֹדִי are referred to by some to different subjects; but their identity is plain from the possession of the vineyard being ascribed to both...The Prophet must be understood as speaking of a human friend until he explains himself.” (Pp. 127-28)

⁵Watts comments that “vineyard” is “a designation that brings to mind the land of Canaan, ‘flowing with milk and honey,’ a startling contrast to the desert or the fields frequented by herdsmen.” (P. 55)

⁶Oswalt comments that “The presence of יְדִידִי and דֹדִי, both meaning *beloved*, as well as the use of *vineyard*, which has sexual overtones in [The Song of Solomon] as well as in extrabiblical sources, has led some to conjecture that this was actually a love song from the grape harvest, sung either by the lover or the lover’s *beloved* in Isaiah’s reference to God. But...the song is more an accusation than a love ballad...”

“As for the likelihood of Isaiah calling God ‘his Beloved,’ there is no reason to think that just because Isaiah recognized God’s awesome holiness and power, he could not have been deeply enamored of Him. [Like Bernard of Clairvaux’s passionate affection for God] Isaiah...is the ‘Prince of the Prophets’ not merely because he saw God high and lifted up, but also because he learned that the high God lived in delight with the humble (**Isaiah 30:18; 57:15**). Such a God could be truly adored. In this light, that Israel could fail to respond to Isaiah’s beloved would only make her defection more culpable in the prophet’s eyes (compare **2:9**.” (Pp. 152-53)

Watts has a different view, holding that the passage “calls itself שִׁירַת דֹדִי, ‘Song of my friend.’ It is often translated ‘song of my beloved.’ But the דֹדִי in both word and implication is a male friend...[Compare:] ὁ δὲ φίλος τοῦ νυμφίου (**John 3:29**), the intermediary who negotiates the marriage contract, שׁוֹשְׁבֵין of the rabbis... In that case the vineyard is symbolic of the bride in the song which in turn is a symbol for Israel as the bride of Yahweh.” (Pp. 53-54)

(continued...)

on a hill,⁷ a very fertile one.

⁶(...continued)

For passages in the **Hebrew Bible** where the noun **רֵוַח** occurs see our end-note 1, where we conclude that the root is ambiguous in this passage, **Isaiah 5:1**, possibly meaning “male beloved,” or “Beloved,” referring to God, or “uncle.”

Watts holds that “the original genre [of **5:1-7**] is complaint or, better, an accusation. The setting is that of a court of justice dealing with family matters...In **verse 5** the spokesman for plaintiff becomes the judge...

“So the passage develops in four stages:

- I. The Song of the Bridegroom’s Friend, **verses 1-2**, containing an accusation against the bride (The **רֵוַח** or **רֵוַח** ‘friend’ is the bridegroom, husband, owner in this song.)
- II. The Demand for Judgment by the Husband (owner), **verses 3-4**
- III. The Announcement of Divorce by Yahweh, **verses 5-6**
- IV. The Explanation by the Prophet, identifying Yahweh as the owner-husband, the House of Israel / Man of Judah as the accused, **verse 8**

“As in the first two cycles, this one begins with a statement of judgment on **בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל** ‘the house of Israel.’ The generation of Uzziah sealed the fate of Israel, left it defenseless before the onslaught of Assyria and its marauding neighbors. Two decades later Samaria would fall and symbolize for all history the collapse. Judeans are included in the judgment, but, significantly, neither Jerusalem nor the house of Judah is included.” (P. 54)

Perhaps, but the use of “Israel” is ambiguous, and may well include Judah as well as Northern Israel.

⁷Watts comments on the Hebrew noun here, **קַרְנֵי**, “horn,” that it “normally means a ‘horn.’ Only here in the **Old Testament** does it describe a piece of land.” (P. 55)

Motyer comments on the phrase **בְּקַרְנֵי בֶן-שֶׁמֶן**, “on a horn, son of oil, that “A fertile hillside / ‘a horn, son of oil’ is a naturally rich and fertile projection.” (P. 68)

We think this is probably correct, but Isaiah’s language here is rather enigmatic, calling for interpretation. Compare the usage in other languages of “horn” for mountains, e.g., Matterhorn, Schreckhorn and Wetterhorn in Switzerland.

Alexander comments that “The preposition **בְּ** does not properly mean ‘on’ but ‘in,’ implying that the vineyard only occupied a part, and that this was not the summit,

(continued...)

⁷(...continued)

but the acclivity [an upward slope] exposed to the sun, which is the best situation for a vineyard.” (P. 128)

In fact, Hebrew prepositions are oftentimes used interchangeably, and it is unwise to hold to an exact meaning in cases like this.

⁸Oswalt comments that **verse 2** “describes the activities of the farmer preparing his vineyard. Having chosen an exposed hillside which gives every evidence of high fertility, he now digs up the ground and carries off the stones. Removing the stones is an essential task in a land where the limestone out-croppings help to produce the fertile *terra rosa* soil [Terra rossa (Italian for ‘red soil’) is a type of red clay soil produced by the weathering of limestone. When limestone weathers, the clay contained in the rocks is left behind, along with any other non-soluble rock material. Under oxidizing conditions, when the soil rocks are above the water table, iron oxide (rust) forms in the clay. This gives it a characteristic red to orange color.” **Wikipedia**, 5/30/2014], but also produce untold numbers of surface rocks...

“These stones would be piled about the perimeter of the field as a wall to keep out marauding animals. Those left over from the wall could be used later to build a watchtower, if the owner possessed enough energy and interest. Before building the tower, however, the vines would be planted...

“Although the exact meaning of שִׁזְבִּי, which is used to describe the vines, is not known, it is evident that they were more than ordinary ones. Once the vines were planted, then there would be an interval of two years before grapes would be produced. During this time of waiting and anticipation, the wall could be strengthened, the watchtower built, and the facilities for pressing and gathering the juice completed...

“These facilities usually consisted of two vats hewn out of the hillside, one above the other, and connected by a shallow trough. The upper one would be used for pressing the grapes and the lower one as a settling basin for the juice which had run down the trough from the press...

“What the prophet is emphasizing here is the farmer’s prior commitment. He has done all this back-breaking work in the expectation (קוּהוּ, ‘wait expectantly, hope’) of receiving a crop of good grapes. The result was bitter, both in fact and in spirit, for the grapes were worthless. All the hard work had been to no purpose; all the hope had been in vain.” (P. 153)

Motyer warns that “The details here are not to be allegorized, making each act represent something in the Lord’s care of His people. Rather, they paint the picture of a total work, leaving nothing undone.” (P. 68)

וַיִּטַּעְהוּ שִׁרְק
וַיִּבֶן מִגְדָּל בְּתוֹכּוֹ
וְגַם־יָקַב חֲצֵב בּוֹ
וַיִּקְוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲנָבִים
וַיַּעַשׂ בְּאֲשִׁים:

And He dug⁹ about it, and He cleared it of stones;¹⁰

⁹Watts comments that the root עִזַּק, “dig,” occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, making it difficult to determine its meaning. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** states that it means “dig about,” but also “to surround,” “to enclose.” The Aramaic עִזְקָתָא, means “ring,” and אֶקְאָא means “cleave or furrow the earth with an implement.” **Rahlfs** translates by καὶ φραγμὸν περιέθηκα, “and a wall / fence he placed around (it).”

Watts states that here it means “the first deep breaking of the hard ground that is necessary to prepare it to receive the young and tender plants.” (P. 55)

¹⁰The Hebrew phrase וַיִּסְקְלֵהוּ is literally “and he stoned it,” which can mean either “he threw stones at it” (see **2 Samuel 16:6, 13**), or “he de-stoned it,” i.e., removed the stones from it—which is obviously the meaning here and at **Isaiah 62:10**,

Cross over, cross over in the gates,
clear a way (for) the people;
raise up, raise up the highway,
get rid of (the) stone(s);
raise up a signal over the peoples!

Watts comments that “The next step in rocky Palestine was to *clear the ground* of stones...These were thrown in the road or piled up to form a wall.” (P. 55)

Where our Hebrew text has וַיַּעַזְקֵהוּ וַיִּסְקְלֵהוּ, “and he dug about it and cleared it of stones,” **Rahlfs** has “and a wall / fence / hedge he placed around (it), and provided (it) with stakes [for the individual vines?]. Alexander translates the last verb in the Greek by “walled it.” (P. 128)

and He planted it (with) a choice vine.¹¹
And He built a tower in its midst,
and also He hewed out a wine-vat in it.¹²

¹¹Watts comments that “The first stage is complete with the planting of the choice vines (שֵׁרֶק).” (P. 55)

This rare noun occurs only three times in the **Hebrew Bible**, at **Judges 16:4** where it is the name of the valley where Sampson’s lover Delilah lived, here, **Isaiah 5:2**, where it is the name of a type of grape-vine, and at **Jeremiah 2:21**, which we think may well have been influenced by this passage in **Isaiah**:

2:21 And I (YHWH), I planted you a **soreq** / grape-vine,
all of it true / faithful seed—
and how did you change for Me,
turning aside (into) the foreign grapevine?

[Translations vary:

King James, “Yet I had planted thee a noble vine, wholly a right seed: how then art thou turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?”

Tanakh, “I planted you with noble vines, All with choicest seed; Alas, I find you changed Into a base, an alien vine!”

New Revised Standard, “Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?”

New International, “I had planted you like a choice vine of sound and reliable stock. How then did you turn against me into a corrupt, wild vine?”

New Jerusalem, “Yet I had planted you, a red vine of completely sound stock. How is it you have turned into seedlings of a vine that is alien to me?”

Rahfs, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐφύτευσά σε ἄμπελον καρποφόρον πᾶσαν ἀληθινὴν πῶς ἐστράφης εἰς πικρίαν ἢ ἄμπελος ἢ ἀλλοτρία “But then I, I planted you, a fruit-bearing vine, all true; how did you turn into a bitter one, the vine, the foreign one?”

¹²Watts comments that “The owner went on to build first-class installations. He installed a *watchtower* (מגדל). Some kind of shelter for the necessary watchman was needed, usually an elevated shelter covered with palm branches like that mentioned in **1:8** (סכה or מלו). A tower is built of stone, stands higher, and is, of course, much better...Then, as a final touch, he dug out a wine-press (יֶקֶב).” (P. 55)

Motyer agrees, stating that the watchtower is ‘a solid residence as for one intending to live permanently there.’ (P. 68) Alexander in like manner states that the tower “was partly for protection from men and beasts, and partly for the pleasure and convenience of the owner.” (P. 128)

(continued...)

And He waited for (it) to produce grapes,¹³
and it produced worthless grapes!¹⁴

5:3¹⁵ יַעֲתָהּ יוֹשֵׁב יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה

¹²(...continued)

Kaiser states that this extra work shows that “the owner of the vineyard envisaged using the field as a vineyard on a permanent basis...for instead of the temporary booths which otherwise would be put up specially for the harvest...he built a permanent watch-tower.” (P. 91)

¹³For the phrase לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲנָבִים, “to make / produce grapes,” compare **2 Kings 19:30**, Isaiah’s message from YHWH to Sennacherib:

And an escaped remnant of Judah’s house, the one remaining, will add root downwards,
and will make / produce fruit upwards.

Watts comments that “Having done all that can be done, the builder / owner waited (יָקוּ) for the vines to produce their famous grapes (עֲנָבִים).” (P. 55) Slotki observes that the verb קוֹדֵה is literally “he hoped.” (P. 22)

It is, we think, in the final interpretation of the parable, a depiction of the freedom that God gives to His human creatures. He creates / plants / disciplines “in hope”—but He does not determine the future on His Own. The future is determined by what His creatures / plants accomplish. He does not “micro-manage,” force His creatures / plants to fulfill His hopes for them. What do you think? How will you interpret this parable?

¹⁴Watts comments that the vines did produce—“But the first fruit was a shocking disappointment.” (P. 55)

Translations of what was produced by the vineyard, בְּאֲשֵׁים, vary, from “wild grapes,” to “bad fruit,” to “worthless grapes,” to “stinking things.” This is the only place in the **Hebrew Bible** where this noun occurs, and as a result its meaning is unclear.

Rahfs has ἀκάνθας, “thorns.” The Latin Vulgate has *labruscas*, “wild vines.” At any rate, the product was not what the owner expected, or wanted.

¹⁵Kaiser states that in **verse 3** “The song now takes a new turn. The story-teller fades into the background, and instead the owner of the vineyard himself begins to speak.” (P. 91)

(continued...)

שִׁפְטוֹ-נָא בֵּינִי וּבֵין כְּרָמִי:

And now,¹⁶ inhabitant of Jerusalem, and man of Judah,¹⁷

¹⁵(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verses 3-4** that “Everyone who heard Isaiah could empathize with the farmer’s hard work and anxious expectation. Likewise, everyone of them could feel the shock and disgust over the bitter [worthless] fruit. When the singer asked what more he could have done to ensure good grapes, given the degree of audience participation common in that part of the world, it is likely that some shouted ‘nothing!’ while others announced what they would do with such a disappointing investment.” (P. 154)

Watts comments that here “the owner turns to the audience for support. The setting is in Jerusalem. The hearers are Judeans, perhaps having vineyards of their own. What went wrong? In what was the owner at fault?” (P. 55)

Alexander comments on **verse 3** that “Having described the advantageous situation, soil, and culture of the vineyard, and its failure to produce good fruit, he submits the case to the decision of his hearers...They are...called upon to judge between a stranger and his vineyard, simply as such, unaware that they are thereby passing judgment on themselves...”

“The meaning and design of the appeal are perfectly illustrated by that which Christ makes (**Matthew 21:40**) in a parable analogous to this and founded upon it.” (P. 129)

See our end-note 2, and compare also Nathan’s use of a similar parable in his convincing king David of his guilt (**2 Samuel 13**).

¹⁶Watts comments that this opening phrase of **verse 5**, וְעַתָּה, “and now” (**verses 3, 5**), “marks turning points in the account.” (P. 56)

¹⁷Isaiah’s question is directed to the individual--יְהוּדָה וְאִישׁ יְרוּשָׁלַם, “dweller of Jerusalem and man of Judah.”

But translations commonly use the plural: “dwellers,” “inhabitants,” “citizens” and “men / people of Judah.” **Rahifs** has the singular for the first, but then the plural for the second: “man / person of the Judah, and the ones dwelling / inhabiting Jerusalem.”

We think the Hebrew singular nouns should be retained in translation, emphasizing that each person must answer for himself / herself.

Slotki comments that “The Hebrew uses the singular in both cases to denote the people collectively.” (P. 22) Yes, but we think, emphasizing the individual’s

(continued...)

judge now between Me and My vineyard!¹⁸

5:4 מִה־לַעֲשׂוֹת עוֹד לְכַרְמִי
וְלֹא עָשִׂיתִי בּוֹ
מִדּוֹעַ קִנִּיתִי לַעֲשׂוֹת עֲנָבִים
וַיַּעַשׂ בְּאֲשִׁים:

What more (is there) to do for my vineyard
and I did not do for it?

For what reason did I wait (hopefully for it) to produce grapes,

¹⁷(...continued)
responsibility.

¹⁸Isaiah depicts YHWH as claiming the vineyard as His Own, and He asks the inhabitant of Jerusalem and the man of Judah to act as judge in His case against His people—that is, let the individual be his or her own judge!

Again, we are reminded of what YHWH asked in **Isaiah 1:18**, “Come, let us be reproved by one another,” let us present our cases, and debate this matter that has come between us! Here, He says, “You yourself be the judge!”

Gray comments that “He asks for their judgment on the vineyard, i.e. on themselves. Like David (**2 Samuel 12**), they are driven to self-condemnation; for they can only avoid self-condemnation by denying the applicability of the parable, i.e. by denying Yahweh’s care (**verses 7a. b**), or the present prevalence in Israel of violence and unrighteousness (**7c. d**).” (P. 86)

Motyer appropriately asks, “What can now be done for the people of God when a total work of grace has been lavished on them and yet they remain as if grace had never touched them?...

“He adds that “The mask begins to slip. Isaiah begins, in true prophetic fashion, to speak in the person of his beloved...’What possible ground was there?’ This is the mid-point climax of the song. No conceivable blame can attach to the owner; it must lie elsewhere.” (Pp. 68-69)

But is Motyer right in describing what has happened as “a total work of grace”? Is there not a great deal of hard work done by the farmer included in this matter? We think Motyer’s theological convictions have intruded into his interpretation of this story.

and it produced¹⁹ stinking / worthless things?²⁰

5:5²¹ וַעֲתָהּ אֹדְיָעָה-נָא אֶתְכֶם

¹⁹Where our Hebrew text reads וַיַּעַשׂ, “and it made / produced,” 1QIs^a has וַיִּשָּׂה or וַיִּשְׂה—but we are uncertain as to its meaning. It may come from the root נָשָׂא, meaning “He lifted up.”

²⁰The Hebrew noun בְּאֲשִׁים means literally “stinking or worthless things,” i.e., “sour grapes,” grapes unfit for consumption.

Gray comments that “After this verse [4], before the first *and now* of **verse 5** (compare **verse 3**), a pause may be assumed in which the audience silently allow that the owner had done all that was required for the vineyard, and that for the vineyard itself no excuse can be offered.” (P. 86)

²¹Oswalt comments on **verses 5-6** that “Whatever may have been his hearers’ responses, Isaiah wants them to have no doubt as to what the owner will do. He will not merely abandon his worthless vineyard, he will also assist in its destruction. He will take down the *hedge*, which probably refers to the thorns which have grown up on top of the wall; he will break the wall down and, as a result, leave the vines unprotected from animals, either grazing of wild ones. If the vineyard can produce only wild grapes, then there is no use cultivating it. It may as well return to a wild state. So intense is the husbandman’s anger at the useless plot of ground that he even enjoins the clouds from raining upon it.” (P. 154)

Gray states that “**Verse 5** fills in fresh features of the picture. The vineyard had been protected by a hedge such as those hedges of the prickly pear which form so efficient a protection to the gardens of modern Palestine—around Beirut [Lebanon] or Gaza and elsewhere, and by a wall, perhaps of stone (compare **Numbers 22:24**). Hedge and wall will be removed, so that cattle and wild beasts will be no longer hindered from coming in to depasture [denude by grazing] and trample down.” (P. 86)

Motyer comments that “Fruitfulness and security belong together. If only the vineyard had been true to the beloved’s intention no hand could have touched it...Had they been fruitful no...danger could have arisen.” (P. 69)

Alexander states that in these two verses, the owner of the vineyard “now proceeds to answer his own question, in a tone of pungent irony, almost amounting to a sarcasm. The reply which might naturally have been looked for was a statement of some new care, some neglected precaution, some untried mode of culture; but instead of this he threatens to destroy the vineyard...[To this threat] he adds...that of desolation arising from neglect of culture...By adding to the other threats, which any human vine-dresser might have reasonably uttered, one which only God could execute, the parable at one stroke is brought to a conclusion.” (P. 130)

את אשר-אני עשה לכרמי
הסר משוכתו והיה לבער
פרץ גדרו והיה למרמס:

And now I will make known to you, please,
what I am doing / about to do²² to My vineyard:
to take away²³ its hedge,²⁴ and it will be for burning;
to break through its wall,²⁵ and it will be for trampling!

5:6²⁶ ואשיתהו בתה לא יזמר ולא יעד

ועלה שמיר ושית
ועל העבים אצוה מהמטיר עליו מטר:

And I will make it a waste; it will not be pruned, and it will not be hoed.
And thorn(s) and thorn-bush(es) will grow up;

²²Slotki comments that “the use of the Hebrew present [אני עשה], the present participle, ‘I am doing’] implies irrevocable decision and prompt action.” (P. 22)

Oftentimes in Hebrew, the present participle is used to indicate a soon-coming future, that is, depicting it as already having begun.

²³Where our Hebrew text reads the hiphil infinitive הסר, “to take away / remove,” 1QIs^a reads the hiphil imperfect אסיר, “I will take away / remove.”

²⁴Slotki comments, “Of thorns.” (P. 23)

²⁵Slotki comments “Of stones,” and adds that “A valued vineyard is protected against trespass by both thorn-hedge and a more substantially constructed fence. The prophet hints at a pending invasion of the country.” (P. 23)

²⁶Gray comments on **verse 6** that “All that the site, henceforth unpruned and untilled, will yield will be thorns and briars. Even rain will be withheld from it by command of the Owner.” (P. 86)

and I will command over the clouds, for rain not to be rained²⁷ upon it.²⁸

5:7²⁹ כִּי כָרַם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאִישׁ יְהוּדָה
נֹטַע שְׁעֵשׂוּעֵיו
וַיִּקַּו לְמִשְׁפָּט
וְהָנָה מִשְׁפָּח
לְצַדִּיקָה

²⁷The Hebrew phrase is מִיָּמֵה מִטִּיר, literally “from to cause rain.” Watts notes that the preposition מִן placed before the infinitive construct “is used to negate the verb.” (P. 53)

²⁸Motyer comments that “The mask has now slipped away completely: only the Lord can withhold rain. Isaiah’s beloved is Israel’s God.” (P. 69)

²⁹Slotki comments that **verse 7** contains the “application of the parable in **verses 1-6.**” (P. 23)

Oswalt says, “It is possible...that some or most of Isaiah’s audience had not yet understood the application of his parable to themselves. The prophet does not leave them in doubt...He unveils and drives home the awful portent of his parable. The vineyard is Israel, the source of God’s delight and the object of His desire (**Isaiah 60:21; 61:3**). Yet the fruit of God’s labor is not the justice and righteousness He had worked for, but instead oppression and violence.” (P. 154)

Alexander states that “The startling question at the close of **verse 6** would naturally prompt the question, Who is this that assumes power over clouds and rain, and what is the vineyard which he thus denounces?...

“To this tacit question we have here the answer. As if he had said, do not wonder that this owner of the vineyard should thus speak, for the vineyard of [Yahweh] of Hosts is the House of Israel...considered as a whole, and the man of Judah is the plant of His pleasures, or His favorite plant. And He waited for judgment, practical justice, as in **chapter 1:17**, and behold bloodshed, for righteousness and behold a cry...the cry of the oppressed.” (P. 131)

וְהֵנָּה צַעֲקָה:

Because YHWH of Armies' vineyard—

(is the) House of Israel,³⁰ and man of Judah.³¹

He planted His delight,

and He waited (hopefully) for *mishpot* / justice,

and look—*mishpeh* / bloodshed;

(He waited) for *tsedaqah* / righteousness,

and look—*tse(aqah)* / a cry of distress!^{32, 2}

³⁰Gray comments that “the house of Israel” either “refers (whether exclusively or inclusively) to the northern kingdom...or...it is a synonym for Judah, as Israel perhaps is in 1:3...but this usage, though frequent enough later, was certainly, and naturally, rare before the fall of Samaria.” (P. 87)

³¹Motyer comments on Isaiah's combination of the House of Israel with the man of Judah, that “Before the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.E. *the house of Israel* meant either the whole divided nation or its northern component...Isaiah thus specifically addresses the whole nation and then narrows his vision to the specially privileged *men of Judah* [we insist, ‘man of Judah’], who *are the garden of His delight* / ‘the plant of His intense pleasure.’” (P. 69)

³²What YHWH wanted from Israel was מִשְׁפָּט [mishpot] ‘justice’ and צְדָקָה [tsedaqah] ‘righteousness,’ the same qualities of life mentioned in 1:21-26, and constantly demanded from YHWH's people throughout the **Hebrew Bible**.

But instead of justice, YHWH found מִשְׁפָּח [mishpach] ‘bloodshed’ in His vineyard, and צַעֲקָה, [tse(aqah)] ‘a cry of distress.’

מִשְׁפָּח [mishpach] is another word that occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, making its definition uncertain. **Rahlf**s translates by ἀνομίαν, “lawlessness,” and the Latin Vulgate has *iniquitas*, “iniquity.” **Brown-Driver-Briggs** has “bloodshed.” The Hebrew involves word-play by its similar sounding words: Instead of **mishpot**, **mishpach**; instead of **tsedaqah**, **tse(aqah)**.

For this noun צַעֲקָה, “outcry,” compare:

Genesis 27:34,

(continued...)

³²(...continued)

As / when Esau heard his father's words,
and he cried out a great and exceedingly bitter cry of distress;
and he said to his father, Bless me also, my father!

Psalm 9:13,

Because One seeking / avenging (spilled) blood remembered them;
He did not forget (the) dry of distress of poor people.

Motyer comments that "Isaiah's mastery of language produces rhyming pairs... *Justice* is the righting of wrongs while bloodshed is the inflicting of wrongs. *Righteousness* is right living and right relationships while to *cry* (... 'scream') indicates wrong relationships and the anguish of the oppressed. Yet the facade was maintained; all was apparently what it was meant to be—why, the words are hardly different!" (P. 69)

Kaiser states that the song of the vineyard, meant as a parable concerning Judah and its relationship to God, raises the question, "namely, why an ungrateful people had faithlessly refused to obey its God." (P. 92)

Watts explains **5:1-7** by stating that "For the fourth time in the [**Book of Isaiah**], judgment on Israel (the Northern Kingdom) is described and justified (**1:2-3; 2:6-8; 3:13-14** [now, **5:1-7**]). The clear tones of the indictment in each case are mixed with a question. Why have things gone so terribly wrong?..."

"The listeners from Jerusalem and Judah have no suggestions about the problem. The owner [of the vineyard] announces his decision to dismantle the protective tower and walls and abandon all care of the plants. It will grow weeds and thistles. It will be eaten and trampled by cattle. It will even be burnt and dried for lack of rain. The owner is unmasked in this speech. He is Yahweh...The vineyard is also identified as Israel and the Judeans. The contrast between wine-quality grapes and 'stinkers' [our 'stinking, worthless things'] is now spelled out: instead of justice, bloodshed; instead of righteousness, a cry. The 'song' with its application opens the 'woes' of **chapter 5**. It gives a setting for the funeral of a nation and its people who had once held such great promise as the chosen and nurtured people of God. But their fruit was a bitter disappointment which finally necessitated God's withdrawing His protection and support..."

"Three times (**verses 2, 4, 7**) the word קָוָה 'wait' appears. God's patience is stressed. Like Nathan before David (**2 Samuel 12**), the singer asks the hearers to first render judgment and then to accept the judgment as applicable to themselves. The figure here fits the **Book of Isaiah's** stress on God's careful and patient planning for Israel and the world...Planting a vineyard takes time and patient endurance, as does the raising of a son (**1:2-3**) and the cultivation of a people (**2:5-8**). God's

(continued...)

³²(...continued)

disappointment in the failure of the enterprise is clear in each case. The 'woes' of mourning that follow are fitting and understandable." (Pp. 56-57)

³³Motyer entitles **5:8-30** 'The 'stink-fruit': the crop produced, the harvest to come." He states that "Item by item, Isaiah penetrates the facade and gathers the offensive fruit from the Lord's vine and pronounces a woe on each in turn (**verses 8, 11, 18, 20-22**)..."

"At the center of Isaiah's 'anatomy of Judah' lies his exposure of sin and the reversal of moral values (**verses 18-20**). When life consists of the following--of sin, denial of the living God and rewriting the moral code, there is no stopping-place short of complete devotion to self-pleasing." P. 70)

Oswalt entitles **verses 8-25** "Woe to the Wild Grapes," and then entitles **verses 8-17** "Greed and Indulgence."

He comments that "In this section Isaiah specifies the 'wild grapes' which Israel has produced. They include greed (**verses 8-10**), debauchery [excessive indulgence in sensual pleasures] (**verses 11-12**), arrogance (**verses 18, 19**), perversion (**verses 20, 21**), and injustice (**verses 22-23**). All of these are introduced by the word הוֹי, conventionally translated 'Woe'...The term introduces a lament as much as a threat. The prophet is not merely angry and denunciatory. He is also grief-stricken over the sins of his people..."

"The problem which Isaiah is addressing in **verses 8-17** is the emergence of a wealthy landed class which turned its attention more and more to pleasure and indulgence. The northern state of Israel had experienced the same trend earlier in the eighth century B.C.E. as witnessed by **Amos (3:15-4:3; 6:1-8)**...What [George Adam] Smith calls the twin instincts of gathering and squandering have never been the sole possessions of Judah or Israel. Around the world people are driven by the desire to possess more and more and then to spend what they possess more and more lavishly, but only to please themselves. Isaiah's response to this can be summed up in the words of another, 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' (**Matthew 16:26**)." (Pp. 157-58)

Compare **Amos 3:15-4:3**,

3:15 And I will strike the autumn house, in addition to the summer house!

And the ivory houses will perish;
and they will sweep away many houses!

It is a saying of YHWH!

4:1 You people listen to this word--

you cows of the (fertile lands of) Bashan,

(continued...)

³³(...continued)

who are in Samaria's mountain,
you who oppress poor people.
you who crush needy people;
you who say to their husbands,
Bring, and we will drink!

4:2 My Lord YHWH has sworn by His set-apart Nature, that,
Look--days are coming upon you people!

And He will lift you up with (meat-) hooks,
and your rear-ends with fish hooks!

4:3 And you will go out (through) breaks (in the walls),
one woman before another!

And you will be cast out towards the Harmon!
It is a saying of YHWH!

Amos 6:1-8,

6:1 Woe! to those who are at ease in Zion,
to those who put their confidence in Samaria's mountain!
distinguished leaders of (the) "beginning / first of the nations"
to whom Israel's household will come.

6:2 Cross over (to) Calneh, and look!
And go from there (to) Great Fortress!
And go down to Gath of the Philistines!
Are they any better than these kingdoms?
Or is their territory greater than your territory?

6:3 (Woe to) the ones who carelessly dismiss (the) evil day,
and you brought near the seat of violence!

6:4 (Woe to) you people who lie down on ivory (inlaid) beds,
and who sprawl upon their couches!
And (woe to) those who eat lambs from the flock,
and calves from the stall!

6:5 (Woe to) those who sing tunes to the sound of the guitar--
like David they invent for themselves instruments of music!

6:6 (Woe to) those who drink wine from bowls,
and they anoint with the finest of oils--
and they are not made sick by Joseph's brokenness!

6:7 Therefore now they will go into exile at the head of the captives!
And the cry of revelry of those sprawled (upon their couches)
will be turned aside!

6:8 My Lord YHWH has sworn by His innermost being--
It is a saying of YHWH, God of Armies:
I, I abhor Jacob's pride!
And his palaces I hate!
And I will deliver up (the) city and everything in it!

(continued...)

³³(...continued)

Alexander states that “The two catalogues of sins and judgments comprehends two series of woes or denunciations. In the first, each sin is followed by its punishments, **verses 8-17**. In the second the sins follow one another in uninterrupted succession, and the punishment is reserved until the close, **verses 18-24**.

“In the former series, the first woe is uttered against avaricious and ambitious grasping after lands and houses, to be punished by sterility and desolation, **verses 8-10**. The second woe is uttered against drunkenness, untimely mirth, and disregard of providential warnings, appropriately punished by captivity, hunger, thirst, and general mortality, **verses 11-14**. To these two woes are added a general declaration of their purpose and effect, to humble man and exalt God, and a repeated threatening of general desolation as a punishment of both the sins just mentioned, **verses 15-17**.

“The sins denounced in the second series of woes are presumptuous and incredulous defiance of God’s judgments, the deliberate confounding of moral distinctions, undue reliance upon human wisdom, and drunkenness, considered as a vice of judges, and as causing the perversion of justice, **verses 18-23**. To these he adds a general threatening of destruction as a necessary consequence of their forsaking God, **verse 24**...

“Two distinct stages or degrees of punishment [are set before us]. The first, which is briefly and figuratively represented as a violent and destructive stroke of God’s hand, is described as ineffectual, **verse 25**. To complete the work, another is provided in the shape of an invading enemy, before whom, after a brief fluctuation, Israel disappears in total darkness, **verses 26-30**...

“This chapter, like the first, is applicable not to one event, exclusively, but to a sequence of events which was repeated more than once, although its terms were never fully realized until the closing period of the Jewish history, after the true Messiah was rejected, when one ray of hope was quenched after another, until all grew dark forever in the skies of Israel.” (Pp. 126-27)

That is, according to Alexander, Isaiah’s prediction of coming judgment is not to be understood as applying to only one specific time of judgment, but rather to the continuing series of judgments that would fall upon the disobedient people.

Oswalt comments on **verse 8** that “According to the **Torah** all the land belonged to God, and while He allowed families to possess parcels of that land, it was never theirs to dispose of as they wished...[but the fact is that] those who possessed the means were dispossessing the poor and reducing them to servitude on their own land. While this may have been perfectly legal, that did not make it morally defensible. Isaiah accuses the land-grabbers of wanting to possess everything in sight until they could live by themselves in their own little world. It is hardly accidental that the final commandment in the [**Ten Commandments**] deals with covetousness, or that Paul

(continued...)

שָׂדֵה בְּשָׂדֵה יִקְרִיבוּ

עַד אִפְסֵי מָקוֹם

וְהוֹשַׁבְתֶּם לְבַדְכֶם בְּקִרְבֵי הָאָרֶץ:

Woe (to) those joining house on house,³⁴

field on field they drew near,
until a ceasing of place(s for others),

³³(...continued)

sees covetousness as being at the heart of idolatry—the placing of ultimate value in this world.” (Pp. 158-59)

Compare **Isaiah 57:17**,

With the guilt of his unjust gain I was angry,
and I struck him, hiding (Myself), and I was angry.
And he went on, turning away, in his heart’s way.

Watts entitles **5:8-25** “Therefore My People Are Exiled.” He comments that “The use of הוֹי ‘woe’ puts the series [of woes] into the setting of a funeral, the words into a lament over the dead...These are *not* threats concerning future judgment. They recognize the present deed and their past deeds.

“The ‘woes’ continue the theme of a funeral...which was begun with the Song of the Vineyard. They mourn the announced death of the Northern Kingdom and its people and men of Judah (**5:7**)...The ‘woes’ single out groups among the people who experience the punishment and travail of the invasion and exile.” (P. 60)

Motyer comments that “Israelite law saw *the land* as the gift of God (**Leviticus 25:23-24**), and following the original allocation the assumption was that each holding would remain within the family (**Leviticus 25; Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-12; Ruth 4:1-4**). But by the time of Isaiah...the day of the land-speculation had dawned.” (P. 70)

³⁴Motyer comments that this matter of adding house to house means “cause house to touch house,” which means “acquiring a house and adding to it to create a ‘big house’ in a huge estate from which all the others have been evicted so that the new ‘squire’ lives *alone in the middle of the land*.” (P. 70)

In the middle ages, squires were trainees to a knight; but later the name was used for a leader in an English village or the “lord of the manor” might also be called a squire. (**Wikipedia**, 6/22/14)

and you people are made to dwell³⁵ by yourselves in the land's midst!³⁶

³⁵Watts notes that “הוֹשַׁבְתֶּם” is a hophal perfect ‘you were made to dwell.’ (P. 59)

If the *waw* preceding the verb is read as conversive / consecutive, the translation is “you will be made to dwell.” Their practice of land-grabbing has resulted, or will result in their being alienated from their neighbors, and instead of knowing and being able to love their neighbors, they become strangers, who no longer know or understand one another, and their wealth is spent on their selfish desires, rather than helping to care for the needy.

Think of what this criticism of ancient Israel means in terms of our modern world, where the wealthy move out of their old neighborhoods, to live in larger dwelling-places in gated communities, and the needs of the inner-city are soon forgotten, or become a far-off problem rather than a present concern.

³⁶Watts comments that “Ancient Israel was taught that the tribe’s inheritance was a sacred right which guaranteed its members land to work and fruit to harvest. **1 Kings 21** [the story of Naboth’s vineyard, which Ahab obtained through judicial murder] speaks of these rights as does **Leviticus 25:33** with its prohibition against selling these rights. When these ordinances gave way to the greed of speculators, it created a class of landless unemployed without home, livelihood, or civil rights...This explains *to dwell by yourself alone in the open country*.” (P. 60)

Kaiser comments on **verse 8** that “The very first woe envisages the practice of increasing one’s own house and land by exploiting economic strength, taking advantage of the distress of small farmers and craftsmen which may have been caused by sickness, crop-failure, inflation or excessive taxation. Such people would be offered a loan; and if they were unable to pay it back at a later date, their movable possessions would be pawned, their children would be taken in payment and thus be made slaves, and finally their house and land would be seized (compare **Nehemiah 5:1ff.**, and for an illustration, **2 Kings 4:1ff.**)...

“Such a procedure first offended against the conviction that Yahweh is the real Owner of the land and that its inhabitants have received it from Him on loan, like tenants (**Leviticus 25:23** [‘The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is Mine (YHWH’s). For you are strangers and sojourners with Me!]), and secondly against the ideal preserved from the earliest days of the people that the land was to remain in the possession of the clan and thus sustain its economic strength and provide the basis for life...

“The attempt of religious legislation to prevent the decimation of free peasant families by means of a remission of debts to be effective every seven years (**Deuteronomy 15:1ff.**), or a year of remission to take place every fifty years, in which all property pledged or sold would return to its original owner (**Leviticus 25:13ff.**), has

(continued...)

5:9³⁷, ³ באזני יהוה צבאות

אם־לא בתים רבים לשמה יהיו

גדלים וטובים

מאין יושב:

In my ears,³⁸ YHWH of Armies (swore:)³⁹

³⁶(...continued)

left behind no trace in the **Old Testament** period and must therefore be regarded as utopian [having impossibly ideal conditions]...

“According to this woe, what is regarded in economic practice as an unavoidable development and as a necessary consequence of human inequality nevertheless does not fall out of the hand of God, Who loves justice and by that understands the right of even the weakest member of the community to live and sustain that life.” (Pp. 100-01)

³⁷Oswalt comments, “But covetousness is always self-defeating in the final analysis. To acquire is to lose, to give is to get. That is the paradox of biblical teaching (**Matthew 16:25**, ‘For whoever desires to save his innermost-being, will lose it; but then whoever loses his innermost-being for my sake, will find it’]. So the great houses that were built after all the smaller ones had been bought and razed will be themselves abandoned and desolate...

“Not only will the great mansions be empty, but the land so assiduously acquired will be infertile. While this may look forward to the postexilic time when the long-abandoned land had become unproductive, it may also refer to those periodic droughts or blights which undercut all our human self-sufficiency...So the land which required ten yoke of oxen to plow it in a day would only produce about eight gallons of wine ([in Hebrew], a *bath*), while ten *ephahs* ([in Hebrew] a *homer*, about 3 pecks) of grain. The land belongs to God and to treat it as my own to do with it as I wish is inevitably to remove its capacity to bless me (compare **Leviticus 26:14-20**; **Deuteronomy 28:15-35**; **Micah 6:12-16**).” (P. 159) For these passages, see our end-note 3.

Watts comments on **verses 9-10** that “Yahweh’s judgment oath against those who violated covenant ordinances in this way calls down economic chaos on the land: vacant villages, fruitless fields.” (P. 60)

³⁸Where our Hebrew text reads the phrase באזני, “In my ears,” **Rahlfs** has ἠκούσθη γὰρ εἰς τὰ ὦτα κυρίου σαβαωθ, “For it was heard in the ears of Lord

(continued...)

Many houses will become a devastation--
great ones and good ones,
from lack of an inhabitant!⁴⁰

³⁸(...continued)

Sabaoth,” reflecting a Hebrew text beginning with כִּי נִשְׁמָע, “because it was heard...”

³⁹Watts comments that “In **verse 9** one reports hearing Yahweh’s oath of judgment...The אִם-לֹא ‘if not’ formula presumes the full form ‘May Yahweh do so to me and more also’ which prefaces a human’s oath.” (P. 60)

For occurrences of this phrase, אִם-לֹא “if not,” which occurs some 150 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, sometimes as an introduction to, or part of an oath, see:

Leviticus 26:14-17; Numbers 14:35; 33:55; Deuteronomy 28:15; Joshua 7:12; 14:9; 1 Samuel 2:16; 1 Samuel 12:15; 2 Samuel 19:14; 2 Kings 9:26; Isaiah 5:9 (here); Isaiah 7:9; 8:20; 14:24; Jeremiah 12:17; 17:27; 22:5, 6; 26:4-6; 38:17-18; 42:5; 49:20; 50:45; Ezekiel 3:6; 5:11; 17:16, 19; 20:23; 33:27; 34:8-10; 35:6; 36:5-7; 38:19; Malachi 2:2.

⁴⁰What a powerful ethical statement! It is a Divine oath, sworn over housing conditions in Judah and Jerusalem! YHWH cannot endure the thought of people being deprived of their homes because of the selfish greed of others who want to pile up possessions for themselves!

We are reminded of Jesus’ denunciation of the scribes / religious experts of His day who sought to appear religious in their dress, and to sit in the best seats in the synagogues and at feasts, and to make long prayers--but who at the same time “devoured widows’ houses”! (**Mark 12:39-40**) YHWH and Jesus care about Housing and Urban Development!

Gray comments, “But Yahweh has sworn, and Isaiah heard the oath, that these men who trust in the greatness of their estates, purchased, perhaps, with money gained in trade...will find in them the cause of their own ruin. Deprived by Yahweh of its fertility, the land will yield no return, and will therefore swallow up the money spent on working it.” (P. 91)

Alexander comments that “the valuable houses which they coveted, and gained by fraud or violence, shall one day be left empty, an event implying the death, captivity, or degradation of their owners. ‘In my ears [Yahweh] of Hosts is saying,’ as if His voice were still ringing in the Prophet’s ears.” (P. 132)

Rahfs has “For it was heard in the ears of Lord Sabaoth.” Compare:

(continued...)

5:10 כִּי עֲשֶׂרֶת צְמֵדֵי-כָרֶם

יַעֲשׂוּ בֵּית אֶחָת

וְזָרַע חֲמֹר

יַעֲשֶׂה אֵיפָה:

Because ten spans / acres of vineyard⁴¹
will produce one⁴² measure (of grapes);⁴³
and seed—a dry measure,
will produce a measure.⁴⁴

⁴⁰(...continued)

Isaiah 22:14,

And it was uncovered in my ears
(an oath by) YHWH of Armies:
This iniquity will not be covered over for you
until you die!
—said my Lord YHWH of Armies.

Amos 3:7,

Because my Lord YHWH will not do anything,
unless He revealed His counsel to His slaves, the prophets!

⁴¹Slotki explains that the phrase עֲשֶׂרֶת צְמֵדֵי-כָרֶם is literally “ten yokes of land,” meaning “a plot that can be ploughed in a day by a pair of oxen.” (P. 24)

Brown-Driver-Briggs states that it is “a measure of land (only square measure in **the Old Testament**) like ‘acre’; originally apparently what a span [pair of oxen] can plough in a day.”

⁴²Where our Hebrew text has אֶחָת, “one,” 1QIs^a has אֶחָד, “one.”

⁴³Kaiser translates these first two lines of **verse 10** by “For ten acres of vineyard shall only yield one bucket-full.”

⁴⁴Kaiser translates these last two lines of **verse 10** by “and an ass’s load of seed shall yield only a bushel.”

(continued...)

⁴⁴(...continued)

He comments that “What we must imagine is that the conquest envisaged in **3:25ff.**; **10:3** was followed by substantial crop failures which finished off the survivors who remained behind in the city and in the country...What will men and animals live on if the seed is reduced to a tenth of its quantity, instead of increasing between thirty and a hundredfold (**Mark 4:8**)?” (P. 105)

Motyer explains that “A *bath* was about six gallons [Slotki says ten gallons, p. 24], presumably a meager yield for ten acres or ‘yokes,’ usually understood as the area ten oxen could plough in a day. A *homer* was the equivalent of ten *ephahs*, therefore the crop was only a tenth of the seed sown...

“There is a moral vitality in the environment whereby the character and conduct of the owners cause a retrenchment [act of cutting down or reduction] of what the created world is prepared to do for them. This is the opposite of the Messianic plenty (compare...**4:2**). The land-hungry end by being hungry, despite all their land.” (P. 71)

⁴⁵Oswalt comments on **verses 11-12** that “These verses introduce the second cause for Isaiah’s lament. It seems likely that he is continuing to address the wealthy who, by virtue of their abundance, can spend the entire day, from early morning until latest night, pursuing their own pleasure, particularly in drinking. It is important to notice the reason why the prophet opposes these practices. He does not oppose them because they are wrong in themselves, but because they have become all-absorbing to the point where spiritual sensitivity has become dimmed...

“The revelers no longer have any interest in or ability to recognize how God is at work in the world. When the passion for pleasure has become uppermost in a person’s life, passion for God and His truth and His ways is squeezed out...

“Calvin says that to become addicted to good food and drink is to bear the reproach of becoming voluntarily like brute beasts, not directing the mind toward God, the Author of life.” (Pp. 159-60)

Watts comments on **verses 11-12** that “The *woe* identified some of those who are dead.” (P. 61) That is, such a “life” is not life at all, but is a living death!

Motyer states that “Nothing could express more vividly the pursuit of intoxication (**11-12a**) or make a plainer link between sensual indulgence and loss of spiritual perception (**12b**).” (P. 71)

Alexander adds that “The description of the sin is contained in **verses 11, 12**, and first that of drunkenness, considered not as an occasional excess, but as a daily business, diligently prosecuted with a devotion, such as would ensure success in any laudable or lawful occupation.” (P. 133)

שֶׁכֶר יִרְדְּפוּ
מֵאַחַר־י בְּנֹשֶׁף
יֵין יִדְלִיקָם:

Woe—to those rising early in the morning
they pursue strong drink;⁴⁶
who tarry in the twilight,⁴⁷

⁴⁶Slotki comments that the noun שֶׁכֶר “denotes an alcoholic beverage made of raisins, dates, honey or barley and the like.” (P. 24) **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines the noun as meaning “intoxicating drink,” “strong drink.”

⁴⁷Alexander states that “The allusion is not so much to their disgracefulness of drinking in the morning...as to their spending day and night in drinking, rising early and sitting up late.” (P. 133)

Kaiser comments that “In the circles of the wise it was natural to paint a deterrent picture of the dangers of drunkenness and excessive wine-drinking: wine clouds the senses and involves the alcoholic in trouble and suffering...makes him an object of contempt...destroys his well-being and hinders success. If the ruler is in his cups early in the morning, things bode ill for his subjects ” (P. 101) Compare:

Proverbs 21:17,

A man / person of poverty—one loving joy;
one loving wine and oil, will not get rich!

Proverbs 23:20-21,

- 20 You shall not be among guzzlers of wine,
among those squandering flesh for themselves!
21 Because a guzzler and a squanderer will become impoverished,
and rags you will wear--of stupor!

Proverbs 23:29-35,

- 29 Who has woe!?
Who has ‘O boy!’?
Who has contentions?
Who has complaints?
Who has bruises for nothing?
Who has dullness of eyes?

(continued...)

wine inflames them!⁴⁸

5:12⁴⁹ וְהָיָה כְּנֹזֵר וְנִבֵּל תֵּף וְחִלְלִיל וַיֵּין מִשְׁתִּיָּהֶם

⁴⁷(...continued)

- 30 (They belong) to those who stay up late over the wine,
to those who come to search for mixed drinks!
- 31 You (singular) shall not watch wine when it turns red,
when it gives its look [sparkles?] in the cup--
(when) it walks in upright-ways.
- 32 Its result--like a serpent it bites,
and like a viper it stings!
- 33 Your eyes will see strange things;
and your heart will speak perverse things.
- 34 And you will become like one who sleeps in the heart of the sea,
and like one sleeping on top of a mast [?].
- 35 They struck me, I am not hurt!
They hammered me, I didn't know [it]!
How long [until] I awake?
I will add [to my problems], I will seek it again!

Ecclesiastes 10:17,

Blessed (are) you, land, when your king (is) a son of nobles,
and your princes eat at the time,
for strength, and not for the drinking-bout!

⁴⁸Watts comments that “*Morning* and *twilight* are the cool times of the day when leisure can be pleasant. Musical instruments provide entertainment...The concentration on drink and pleasure precludes any notice of **פַּעַל יְהוָה** or **מַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו** ‘the doing of Yahweh...the work of His hand’... [Isaiah combines these references to God’s work with His plan (**עֲצָדָה**) for history]. Israel’s inability to recognize these is judged her greatest failure (**1:3; 6:9-10**, etc.) The [**Book of Isaiah**] contends that the historical events from Uzziah’s reign to the post-exilic era were ‘God’s work,’ that they all conform to ‘His plan’ and thus move toward His goal for His people.” (P. 61)

We think that this is still the truth in our 21st century America—our inability, our failure, to see the work of God in the present, the working out of the Divine purpose in the maelstrom of conflicting events.

What do you think? Do you see the unfolding of a great, overall Divine purpose in what is happening in your life, and your world? Does it have the element of a Divine test, which you sense you are failing?

⁴⁹Alexander comments on **verse 12** that “This verse completes the picture begun in **verse 11**, by adding riotous mirth to drunkenness. To express this idea, music is

(continued...)

וְאֵת פְּעֵל יְהוָה לֹא יִבְיטוּ

וּמַעֲשֵׂה יָדָיו לֹא רָאוּ:

And there was stringed instrument and guitar, tambourine and flute and wine—at their drinking banquets.

And YHWH's work they did not observe,
and (the) deed of His hands they did not see!⁵⁰

5:13⁵¹ לְכֹן גְּלָה עַמִּי מִבְּלִי-דַעַת

⁴⁹(...continued)

joined with wine as the source of their social enjoyment...

The general idea of music is expressed by naming several instruments belonging to the three great classes of stringed, wind, and [vibrating]. The precise form and use of each cannot be ascertained, and is of no importance to the meaning of the sentence.” (P. 133)

⁵⁰The people of Jerusalem and Judah, by their devotion to selfish acquisition and strong drink, have become spiritually blind. They see nothing but their own possessions; they feel nothing but their own appetites.

Is this not the truth about too many of us in our modern world? Are we not devoted to acquiring wealth and possessions, bigger and better houses, eager to satisfy our sensual appetites, but ignorant, blind to spiritual reality all around us, with no understanding of God and His purposes for us and our world, with little recognition of the feelings of those who suffer?

⁵¹Oswalt asks concerning **verses 13-14**, “What will be the result of this arduous pursuit of property and pleasure? A sad irony: My people must leave My land.” (P. 160) Compare **Hosea 1:9**:

And He said, Call his name Not My People;
because you people (are) not My people;
and I, I will not belong to you!

Oswalt continues, “Surely what the prophet is saying is that these drunken people simply do not perceive what God is about in His world, and what He is about includes the establishment of justice, righteousness, and love...as much as it does retribution upon recalcitrant human arrogance (**verses 15-16**).

“As a result of their lack of perception, the honorable as well as the rabble will be deprived of the necessities for life, and death will swallow them all up together. There is no distinction of rank and no place for pomposity in the nether world (compare **chapter**

(continued...)

וְכַבְּדוּ מִתֵּי רָעַב

וְהִמּוֹנּוּ צָחָה צִמָּא:

Therefore My people went into exile⁵² from lack of knowledge⁵³

⁵¹(...continued)

14). All attempts to gain pride of place and power reach the same level in the grave.” (Pp. 160-61)

⁵²Slotki observes that “this is the only specific mention of the exile in **Isaiah**.” (P. 25)

Note that instead of the future tense, the qal perfect (“past tense”) is used, “My people went into exile.” Oswald notes that the verb here, הִלָּךְ, ‘go into exile,’ is in the perfect tense, indicating that for the prophet it is an already accomplished fact.” (P. 160)

Gray states that this is an instance of “the perfect used with reference to a future irrevocably fixed.” (P. 92)

Slotki states that “The Hebrew has the prophetic perfect, i.e. the event though in the future is depicted as having happened.” (P.25)

Kaiser translates by “Therefore my people goes away.”

If this is not a “prophetic perfect,” the use of the past tense implies that the writer is looking back at a fact of history, and is therefore being written in post-exilic time. What do you think?

Gray states that the irrevocably fixed exile is “for lack of the knowledge of God (compare **1:3**), which the leaders ought to have given, but had not [and as a result,] the whole people is doomed: a general captivity is imminent.” (P. 92)

Watts states that “Yahweh’s word sees *exile* as [the] direct result deriving ultimately from this *lack of knowledge*.” (P. 61) Compare **Amos 6:7**,

Therefore now they will go into exile at the head of the captives!
And the cry of revelry of those sprawled (on couches) will be turned aside!

⁵³Compare **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!

(continued...)

and its glory—men⁵⁴ of famine,
and its multitude parched (with) thirst!

5:14⁵⁵ לִכְן הִרְחִיבָה שְׂאוּל נִפְשָׁהּ

וּפְעָרָה פִּיהָ לְבַל־יִחַק

וַיִּרְדּוּ הַדְּרָה וְהַמוֹנָה

וּשְׂאוּנָה וְעֵלֶז בָּהּ:

Therefore *sheol*⁵⁶ enlarged her appetite,⁵⁷

⁵³(...continued)

And you forgot your God's *torah* / teaching--
I, even I will forget your children!

⁵⁴Where our Hebrew text reads מֹתֵי, “men of (famine),” two Hebrew manuscripts along with the ancient versions read מֵתֵי, “dead men (from famine).”

Rahlfs has πληθος ἐγενήθη νεκρῶν διὰ λιμὸν καὶ δίψαν ὕδατος, “(My people) became a multitude of dead people through famine and thirst for water.”

Slotki says the phrase מֹתֵי רָעֵב, literally “men of famine,” means “famished.” (P. 25)

⁵⁵Slotki comments on **verses 14-17** that “For the sins of the people the capital will be destroyed.” (P. 25)

Motyer comments on these verses that “This first long ‘therefore’ section describes how the party is over (**verse 14**) and pride has come to an end (**verse 15**). Judgment is total and it is the act of God (**verse 16**), resulting in an emptied, desolate land...(**verse 17**).” (P. 71)

Alexander comments on **verse 14**: “As the effect of the preceding judgments, the Prophet now describes a general mortality, under the figure of the grave, as a ravenous monster, gaping to devour the thoughtless revelers. Here, as in **verse 13**, he seems to be speaking of events already past.” (P. 135)

⁵⁶Alexander states that the noun שְׂאוּל has been thought to have come from a root שָׂא, supposedly synonymous with שָׂעַל, “to be hollow.” “Hence the noun would mean an excavation and in particular a grave...The German *Hoelle*...and the old

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

English *Hell*, corresponds almost exactly to the Hebrew word; but the idea of a place of torment, which is included in the present meaning, is derived from the peculiar use of ᾗδης (the nearest Greek equivalent) in the **Book of Revelation**, and belongs to the Hebrew word only by implication.” (P. 135)

See the article on this noun in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament** XIV, pp. 239-48, by L. Waechter, that shows the many other suggestions that have been made concerning the etymology of this noun, and where it is concluded that none of the scholarly proposals have been widely accepted, and that the noun should be treated “as a word *sui generis* [of its own kind, unique in its characteristics].

The noun occurs some 65-66 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, 16 times in **Psalms**, 8 in **Job**, 9 in **Proverbs**, and 1 each in **Song of Solomon** and **Ecclesiastes** (that is, in the Wisdom literature). It occurs 10 times in **Isaiah**, 5 times in **Ezekiel**, 5 times in the **Minor Prophets**, not once in **Jeremiah**; 4 times in **Genesis**, 2 times in **Numbers**, once in **Deuteronomy**, twice in **1 Kings** and once each in **1** and **2 Samuel**.

Rahfs almost always translates by ᾗδης, “Hades” (some 60 times), 3 times by θάνατος, “death,” and once by βόθρος, “a hollowed out area in the ground,” “hole,” “pit,” “trench.”

Waechter states that “Like other people in antiquity, from the Greeks to the Babylonians, the **Old Testament** Israelites conceived the world of the dead as a great space in the depths, as an underworld...a realm of darkness...and silence...closed off with locks and gates...from which there is no return.” (Pp. 241-42; the remainder of his article is very informative.)

But if there is in fact “no return,” how can you explain **Ezekiel 16:53-58**, where YHWH is depicted as stating that the three prostitute cities, Samaria, Sodom, and worst of all, Jerusalem, will all have their “fortunes restored”?

Oswalt notes that *sheol* was conceived of in the **Hebrew Bible** as “a shadowy place where all alike went in death (**Psalms 6:6**^{Heb} / **5**^{Eng}; **88:4-7**^{Heb} / **4-6**^{Eng}; **141:7**.” (P. 161)

Watts states that “The funeral reference is supported by the reference to large numbers of dead (Sheol has enlarged her appetite)...Israel’s best and finest are in the grave. They have gone to their death with a mistaken sense of *jubilation* and bravado.” (P. 61)

Motyer comments that “to satisfy their appetites was all they lived for (**verses 11-12**) but in the end only one appetite is met, only one *mouth* filled”—that of *sheol*, the grave! Motyer observes that “*Their* in each case is a feminine singular suffix, [literally] ‘her.’ In its original setting this section must have spoken of Jerusalem.” (Pp. 71-72)

(continued...)

and opened her mouth wide beyond measure.⁵⁸

And her splendor went down, and her multitude,
and her noisy crowd and jubilant (people) with it.⁵⁹

5:15 וַיִּשְׁחַ אָדָם וַיִּשְׁפַּל-אִישׁ

וְעֵינֵי גְבוּהִים תִּשְׁפַּלְנָה:

And humanity was cast down,⁶⁰ and each one was abased;

⁵⁶(...continued)

Alexander holds that since **Habakkuk 2:5** uses the same language for Nebuchadnezzar, “who enlarged his desire as the grave, and was like death, and could not be satisfied,” it seems obvious that the noun נִפְשׁ should be understood as appetite, and that the suffix in נִפְשֶׁיהָ, “her appetite,” must refer to שְׂאוֹל, which is a feminine noun. (P. 135)

⁵⁷Slotki states that the “appetite” mentioned is the grave’s / abode of the dead’s hunger “to swallow those killed by the invader.” (P. 25)

⁵⁸Kaiser describes this language as poetic, “in depicting how the underworld, like a violent animal, opens its jaws so wide that their limits cannot be seen, so as to be able to swallow up all the pomp and tumult which fills Jerusalem, with its uproar and its unrestrained noise, when all that ‘descends’ to it...”

“What is a certainty for all men, that one day they will be added to the domain of the powerful and constantly growing lord of the dead, will become the ultimate fate of Jerusalem...to be left bereft of inhabitants.” (P. 107)

⁵⁹We take the four third person singular, female pronominal suffixes as follows: the first two as referring to sheol / the grave, the second two as referring to the City of Jerusalem.

⁶⁰Watts comments that **verse 15** “resumes the comment of **2:9** that mankind is disgraced by Israel’s behavior.” (P. 61) In fact, the Hebrew text of the first two lines here is identical to that of **2:9**:

2:9 And humanity was cast down / humbled,
and each one was abased,
and you shall not lift up for them / forgive to them!

5:15 And humanity was cast down,
and each one was abased;
and eyes of haughty people
will be abased.

(continued...)

and eyes of haughty people⁶¹ will be abased.

5:16⁶² וַיִּגְבַּהּ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת בְּמִשְׁפָּט

וְהָאֵל הַקְדוֹשׁ נִקְדָּשׁ בְּצִדְקָה:

And YHWH of Armies was exalted in the judgment / justice,

and the El / Supreme God,⁶³ the Set-apart One, was set apart⁶⁴ in righteousness.⁶⁵

⁶⁰(...continued)

Alexander comments that “To the description of the punishment [in **verse 14**] the Prophet now adds that of its design and ultimate effect, to wit, the humiliation of man and the exaltation of God (**verses 15, 16**)...That the verse at least includes a reference to the future, is clear from the future form of the third verb...The sense is that the pride of man shall be brought low.” (Pp. 135-36)

⁶¹Oswalt comments that “It is pride which drives a person to possess more, and it is pride which drives a person to seek more and more exotic entertainments which will set one off from the ‘madding crowd.’ The drinking feasts described in **verse 12** are the diversions not of the poor but of the mighty. And because the mighty give themselves to these pursuits rather than to the knowledge of God, the whole nation will go down to the grave together.” (P. 162)

⁶²Watts comments that **verse 16** “notes that the events of judgment, while they humble mankind, actually *exalt* Yahweh of Hosts. They prove the integrity of His justice and righteousness. The Holy God is sanctified by it. The second line repeats קדש ‘holy’ to make the point...The semantic spheres of ‘holiness’ and righteousness’ are very different...The [**Book of Isaiah**] insists on merging them to define Yahweh’s character and to understand how His acts of ‘righteousness’ relate to His ‘holy’ nature.” (P. 61)

Gray likewise states that “The holiness of God is revealed through His righteousness, His righteousness through His judgment on His Own people and city (**verse 14**), who have violated His demands for justice and humanity.” (P. 93) Compare **Isaiah 1:27**,

Zion with justice will be ransomed,
and her returnees with righteousness.

⁶³Isaiah’s use of the Divine name אֵל, **El**, “Supreme God,” reminds us of the **Book of Job**, where it is used over and over along with Eloah, Shaddai, Elohim, and with YHWH. It is the Divine name of the Highest God in the Canaanite pantheon, and

(continued...)

⁶³(...continued)

Isaiah here applies it to YHWH of Israel. It is something like a modern Christian speaking of God as “Allah.” What do you think?

⁶⁴Where our Hebrew text spells נִקְדָּשׁ, “was set apart,” a large number of Hebrew manuscripts and editions of the **Hebrew Bible** spell נִקְדָּשׁ, with no difference in meaning (using a short a-vowel rather than the long-a vowel).

⁶⁵Oswalt comments on **verse 16** that “This verse is of great theological importance, for it expresses the truth that what makes God truly God, what set Him off as Divine, is neither His overwhelming power nor His mysterious numinousness. Rather, what marks Him as God is His essential justice and righteousness. [We suspect Oswalt is guilty of an ‘Either / Or’ here, where we ought to think in terms of ‘Both / And.’] These characteristics are what must eventually humiliate all human beings in His presence...

“Finally, it is not our limited intelligence, limited power, or limited life span that drags us down to humiliation before God. It is our inability to love justice and to do rightly that makes a mockery of all our pretensions to have ultimate meaning in ourselves (compare **6:3-5**)... What was truly unique to the God Who had revealed Himself to them as the only God was His moral nature. Thus God’s holiness is best attested in the self-denying choice of a just and upright life (**Micah 6:6-8**).” (P. 162)

Motyer, in similar fashion, holds that “*Holy* (קִדְּוֶה) is the Divine nature in itself ...What made Israel’s God *holy* was His moral purity...This was His ‘separatedness.’ *Righteousness* is holiness expressed in moral principles; *justice* is the application of the principles of righteousness...Both *justice* and *righteousness* are the outshining of holiness.” (P. 72) And so, by enunciating these moral principles found in the **Bible**, we have an exact depiction of God and His character!

But we have learned from the **Book of Job** how faulty it is to attempt to put God in a box of our human understanding, here one of “justice and righteousness.” Try to apply those criteria to the depiction of YHWH’s world in **Job 38-41**—where “survival of the fittest / most adaptable” and “might makes right” certainly apply. We say, They just won’t fit in YHWH’s larger world; but they are the will of God for His human creatures--and it is our God-given responsibility to establish them in our human world. What do you think?

YHWH, Who is free to create and act in any way He sees fit, to forgive or not forgive, whomever and whenever He pleases; Who is free to test His creatures in ways that humans think is unfair and unreasonable, is depicted in the **Hebrew Bible** as having placed the responsibility for justice and righteousness in the hands of humans, who thereby act as little “Gods” in human history, setting up and defending such ethical

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

characteristics that YHWH requires from human beings, just as Job depicts himself as having done in his life before his devastating trial of suffering.

But to think, like Job's three friends, that we have an exact and full understanding of God, having cleared up all that is mysterious, and are able to say exactly what God is doing or will do is impossible. Justice and righteousness are highly important—they are the Divine assignment for human beings to install and defend in our world of humanity. But the God of the jungle and of the galaxies cannot be confined to or limited by our human understanding of morality. What do you think?

⁶⁶Alexander comments on **verse 17** that “Having paused, as it were, to show the ultimate effect of these judgments, [the Prophet] now completes the description of the judgments themselves, by predicting the conversion of the lands possessed by the ungodly Jews into a vast pasture-ground, occupied only by the flocks of wandering shepherds from the neighboring deserts...”

“The explanation of this verse as a promise...is scarcely consistent with the context, which contains an unbroken series of threatenings. The modern interpreters, who follow Aben Ezra in making this a threatening likewise, apply it either figuratively to the subjection of the Holy Land to the Gentiles...or the entrance of the poor on the possessions of the rich...or literally to the desolation of the land itself...”

“Most writers make [the masculine plural participle] וְרַעוּ [‘those sojourning,’ ‘those being temporary residents’] a synonym of וְגֵרִים...‘strangers’...but the verb should...be taken in its usual sense of sojourning, reside for a time [as temporary residents], in reference either to the shepherds or the sheep.” (Pp. 136-37)

Oswalt notes that “**Verse 17**, insofar as it can be understood, functions as a graphic summary of the ultimate results of self-aggrandizement. As such, it stands somewhat independently and captures the meaning of all the verses which precede it, beginning with **verse 9**...”

“The sense of the verse is generally clear, but the textual problems are severe enough to render dogmatic interpretation impossible. The sense is that flocks will soon graze on the ruins of Judah, ruins which will of course include the fine houses and banquet halls upon which so much attention had been lavished (**verses 9, 12**).” (Pp. 161-62)

Motyer states that **verse 17** presents “a fair scene of pastoral peace until we realize that the flocks are roaming free among the ruins of a prosperity devastated by Divine judgment. The animals have made the formerly well-tended lawns their own, and (literally) ‘tramps eat in the ruins of the well-fed.’” (P. 72)

וְחֶרְבוֹת מֵחַיִּים גְּרִים יֹאכְלוּ:

And lambs will graze like (in) their pasture;

and desolated places of fat ones, temporary residents will eat.⁶⁷

5:18⁶⁸ הוּי מִשְׁכֵּי הָעוֹן בְּחֶבְלֵי הַשּׂוֹא

⁶⁷Translations of **verse 17** vary:

King James, “Then shall the lambs feed after their manner, and the waste places of the fat ones shall strangers eat.”

Tanakh, “Then lambs shall graze As in their meadows, And strangers shall feed On the ruins of the stout.”

New Revised Standard, “Then the lambs shall graze as in their pasture, fatlings and kids shall feed among the ruins.”

New International, “Then sheep will graze as in their own pasture; lambs will feed among the ruins of the rich.”

New Jerusalem, “Now the lambs will graze in their old pastures, and the fields laid waste by fat cattle will feed the kids.”

Rahfs, “And those that were plundered thoroughly will be grazed like oxen; and the desolate places of those who were taken away, lambs will eat.”

Watts comments that “The *lambs* and *sojourners* [our ‘temporary residents,’ Motyer’s ‘tramps,’ Slotki’s ‘nomadic shepherds’] give a sense of tranquility that belies the wasted and emptied land.” (P. 62)

⁶⁸Oswalt entitles **verses 18-25** “Cynicism and Perversion,” and comments that “In this segment, the bitterness of the wild grapes is revealed even more powerfully than in **verses 8-17**, for here the prophet exposes the underlying cynicism which is responsible for the people’s refusal to live in obedience to God’s nature. They doubt that God really is active in the world and they imagine that they are better able to determine what is really right and wrong than He is. The result is a perversion where values are reversed: debauchery is more honorable than courage, drunkenness is preferable to sobriety, the wicked are pronounced innocent, while the righteous are condemned. For such a vineyard, destruction is the only open course, and in another double ‘therefore’ (as in **verses 13-14**), that destruction is promised.” (P. 164)

Gray sums up the meaning of **verses 18-19** as “Woe to those who give themselves up to sin in the belief that Yahweh will not punish them.” (P. 94)

Oswalt comments on **verses 18-19** that “These verses very possibly deal with the people’s response to **verse 12**. There Isaiah had charged them with being so intoxicated with the quest for pleasure that they had become insensitive to God’s workings in the world. Far from being convicted by that charge, they call out in a mocking fashion for Isaiah’s God to hurry up and get His work out where they can see it...

(continued...)

וְכַעְבוֹת הַעֲגֵלָה חַטָּאָה:

Woe to those who draw / pull the iniquity with cords⁶⁹ of the emptiness / vanity,

⁶⁸(...continued)

“If the work referred to is the coming judgment, as some believe, then the effrontery is the more brazen. They are daring God to punish them. Their use of Isaiah’s epithet *the Holy One of Israel*, as in **30:11**, is hardly an acceptance of what the title means, but rather a way of taunting Isaiah and deriding what they considered his pietistic excess...

“To this Isaiah responds with a further ‘woe.’ They are sinning with a ‘high hand’ and not out of mistake or ignorance. They are pulling the iniquity to themselves with ropes. They have not fallen into it. They are consciously choosing evil and exerting concerted effort to make that choice. This is the tragedy of sin: what was once done somewhat innocently, or at least naively, becomes something we must do, at whatever cost, even though in order to continue it we must explain away God and His moral law.” (P. 164)

Alexander states that in **verses 18-23** “The series of woes is now resumed and continued without any interruption...Even the description of the punishment, instead of being added directly to that of the sin, as in **verses 9** and **13**, is postponed until the catalogue of sins is closed, and then subjoined in a general form, **verse 24**...

“This **verse [18]** contains the third woe, having reference to presumptuous sinners who defy God’s judgments. They are here represented...as laboriously drawing [sin] to them by soliciting temptation, drawing it out by obstinate persistency in evil and contempt of Divine threats.” (P. 137)

Motyer states that in **verses 18-19** “the picture is of a beast harnessed to and dragging a cart with cords of deceit (שׁוֹא, ‘falsehood’). By holding on to what is false they bind themselves in bondage to sin, and what starts as *cords* becomes *cart ropes*, unbreakable bondage...The progressive nature of sin (from *cords* to *cart ropes*) leads to the arrogance which demands that God prove Himself, the scepticism which doubts that He is active in the world and the blindness which cannot see Him at work.” (P. 72)

Do you see Motyer’s description of the “progressive nature of sin” in this text? We think the “cords” and “cart ropes” are simply parallel expressions, that have nothing to do with “progression.” And we also think the things being drawn or pulled, הָעֲוֹן, “the iniquity,” and חַטָּאָה, “sin,” are synonyms, not differing acts expressing progression. What do you think?

⁶⁹Where our Hebrew text reads בְּחַבְלֵי הַשּׁוֹא, “with cords of the emptiness / vanity,” **Rahlf**s has ὡς σχοινίω μακρῶ, “as with a long cord / rope.”

(continued...)

and like the ropes of the cart, the missing-of-the-mark!⁷⁰

5:19⁷¹ הַאֲמָרִים יִמְהָרוּ יִתְיַשְׁהוּ לְמַעַן נִרְאֶה

⁶⁹(...continued)

What do you think “cords of the emptiness / vanity” means? Translations vary from “vanity” to “falsehood” to “deceit” to “duplicity.”

⁷⁰Where our Hebrew text reads וְכַעֲבוֹת הָעֲגָלָה חֲטָאָה, “and like the ropes of the cart, a missing-of-the-mark!” **Rahlf**s has “and like a strap of a yoke of a young cow, the lawlessness.”

Watts comments on **verse 18** that “The use of the definite article on הָעוֹן ‘the iniquity’ and הָעֲגָלָה ‘the (ropes of) the cart’ calls for explanation. Can it be that these are references to a diabolical Deity or an idol that cannot be named, whose cult, like that of India’s Juggernaut, pulls its decorated cart through the streets? Or is the verse to be taken at face value to figuratively picture those who strain to further the cause of evil and tirelessly work to promote sin? Or is the phrase *the cords of nothingness* a reference to knotted cords used in magic to effect curses on enemies...? The woe hints at much more than it says.” (P. 62)

Wikipedia (5/28/2014) states that “Every year, in mid-summer, Lord Jagganath, with his elder brother Balabhadra and sister Subhadra, goes on vacation, traveling on grand chariots, from his temple in Puri, to his garden palace in the countryside. This belief of the Hindus has given rise to one of the biggest religious festivals in India—the Rath Yatra or the Chariot Festival. This is also the etymological origin of the English word ‘Juggernaut.’”

⁷¹Alexander comments on **verse 19** that “The degree of their presumption and depravity is now evinced [shown clearly, demonstrated] by a citation of their language with respect to God’s threatened judgments, an ironical expression of impatience to behold them, and an implied refusal to believe without experience.” (P. 138) Compare:

Jeremiah 17:15,

Look—they are saying to me, Where (is) YHWH’s word?
Let it come now!

Isaiah 30:10-11,

10 Who said to the seers, Do not see!
And to the visionaries, Do not give visions for us!
Speak straight-forward thing to us,
smooth things envision deceptions!

(continued...)

וּתְקַרְבַּ וְתִבְּוֹאָה עֲצַת קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְנִדְעָהּ:

The ones who are saying, Let His work hasten, let it hurry, so that we may see (it);
and let it draw near, let it come, Set-apart One of Israel's counsel / purpose, and we
will know (it)!⁷²

⁷¹(...continued)

11 Turn aside from (the) way!
Incline from a path!
Cause to cease / remove from our faces
(the) Set-apart One of Israel!

2 Peter 3:4, which warns there are cynical skeptics who among other things,

also (are) saying,
Where is the promise of His appearance / being present?
For since the fathers fell asleep / died,
all things continue just as they are,
from creation's beginning!

⁷²Translations of **verse 19** vary:

Tanakh, "Who say, 'Let Him speed, let Him hasten His purpose, If we are to give thought; Let the plans of the Holy One of Israel Be quickly fulfilled, If we are to give heed.'"

New Jerusalem, "to those who say, 'Why doesn't he do his work quickly so that we can see it; why doesn't the Holy One of Israel's design hurry up and come true so that we can experience it?'"

Rahifs, "the ones saying, The speed, let it draw near what things He will do, in order that we may see; and let the counsel of the Set-apart One of Israel come, so that we may know!"

Gray says that this is "scepticism with regard not to God's existence, but [with regard to] the reality of His moral government." (P. 94)

Watts comments that "Prophetic announcements like these in the first chapters [of **Isaiah**] or those of **Hosea** and **Amos** have always brought derisive rejoinders from the onlookers. The references here are very relevant to the [**Book of Isaiah's**] announcement of the 'work of Yahweh' and 'the plan of Yahweh.' They [the derisive onlookers], too, are counted with the 'dead' mourned in this chapter." (P. 62)
Compare:

Psalms 10:3-6,

(continued...)

⁷²(...continued)

- 3 Because a wicked person heaped praise upon his innermost desire;
and he pronounced blessing upon violent robbers--
he has despised YHWH!
- 4 A wicked person, as his anger grows,
will not seek [God]--
There is no God--
(is) all his practices / purposes!
- 5 His ways are crooked at all times;
Your judgments are too exalted for him to understand!
All his opponents, he snorts against them!
- 6 He said in his heart,
I shall not be moved!
From generation to generation--
none that is not [filled] with evil!

Psalm 36:2-5^{Heb} / **1-4**^{Eng}

- 2/1 A saying of transgression to the wicked, in his heart's midst;
there is no fear / reverent awe of God before his eyes.
- 3/2 Because he deals smoothly with himself in his eyes--
to find his iniquity, to hate.
(Translations of verse 3/2 vary:
King James, "For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful."
Tanakh, "because its speech is seductive to him till his iniquity be found out and he be hated."
New Revised Standard, "For they flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated."
New International, "For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin."
New Jerusalem, "He sees himself with too flattering an eye to detect and detest his guilt";
Rahfs, ὅτι ἐδόλωσεν ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ τοῦ εὐρεῖν τὴν ἀνομίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ μισῆσαι "Because he falsified before himself to find his lawlessness and to hate.")
- 4/3 Words of his mouth--trouble and deception;
he ceased to be prudent and to do good.
- 5/4 He thinks / devises trouble upon his bed;
he sets himself upon a way (that is) not good;
He does not reject evil.

⁷³Oswalt comments on **verses 20-21** that "Here Isaiah continues his denunciation of those who mock God's ways. In order to justify their own behavior, they
(continued...)

⁷³(...continued)

must, in the most sophisticated reasonings possible, demonstrate that their evil behavior is good, their darkness is light, and their bitterness sweet...

“Only a prior commitment to the revealed wisdom of God and a commitment to call good good, despite the reasonings of the wise of this world, can make possible genuine long-lasting righteousness both in individuals and in society.” (Pp. 164-65)
See:

Proverbs 1:7,

Trembling awe before / fear of YHWH--beginning of knowledge!
Wisdom and discipline--foolish people despise!

Proverbs 3:7,

You shall not be wise in your (own) eyes--
revere YHWH, and turn away from evil!

Proverbs 9:10,

(The) beginning of wisdom--trembling awe of YHWH!
And knowledge of set-apart people--understanding.

(Note: these passages from **Proverbs** do not speak of ‘the revealed wisdom of God,’ as if it was contained in a book, but rather speak of ‘fear / trembling awe of YHWH’ as the source of wisdom.

And we say, Oswalt’s comment is anachronistic, reflecting a much later time in Israel’s history, with a “canonical” view of the **Book of Proverbs**—which did not come about until after the advent of Christianity with its competing sacred books. Such a view is not evidenced in the **Book of Proverbs** itself nor in later Wisdom literature such as **Ecclesiastes**, or **Job**, or **The Wisdom of Ben Sirach** or **The Wisdom of Solomon**, none of which view **Proverbs** as the authoritative, exclusive source of wisdom!)

The fact of history is that commitment to follow the **Book of Proverbs**, while certainly helpful, is an inadequate guide to long-lasting righteousness in individuals and in society. It will certainly not stop human slavery, or help to raise women’s rights and the proper treatment of wives, or proper discipline in the raising of children, or a host of problems that have confronted humanity since the publication of the **Book of Proverbs**, or of the entire **Bible**. All of those problems must be dealt with in humble reverence for our Creator, as **Proverbs** insists, but we must continually be open to new learnings, and understandings, and to the guidance of the Divine Spirit in our own lives and times!

(continued...)

שָׁמַיִם חֹשֶׁךְ לְאֹרֶךְ וְאֹרֶךְ לְחֹשֶׁךְ

שָׁמַיִם מָרָ לְמֵתוּק וּמֵתוּק לְמָרָ:

Woe to the ones saying to the bad, Good! And to the good, Bad!--

Putting darkness for light, and light for darkness;

putting bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!⁷⁴

⁷³(...continued)

Do you agree with Oswalt at this point? We think his view is a mark of “biblicism,” not of genuine fear / reverence—the same charge we have made against the commentaries of Waltke on **Proverbs**. When you hold a copy of the **Book of Proverbs** in your hand, you are not holding the “Wisdom of God” in your hand, even though there is much wisdom from Israel’s wisdom teachers contained in it. The subsequent writers of wisdom literature in Israel, in **Ecclesiastes**, **Job**, **Ben Sirach** and **Wisdom of Solomon**, did not treat the **Book of Proverbs** as if it were the, or even a final, authoritative word in wisdom, almost never quoting it (we have found only one possible direct quotation of **Proverbs** in these later wisdom writings!).

A rigid quoting of the **Bible** will not prevent calling evil good and good evil—as was demonstrated in America’s south with its **Bible**-believing and **Bible**-quoting plantation owners who justified their infliction of 70 lashes on their disobedient slaves, and did terrible evil to fellow human beings on the basis of the **Bible**, in similar fashion to the Jews who justified their murder of Amalekites and Canaanites by quoting what they believed were the very words of YHWH; or, we may add, the orthodox Christian believers who murdered fellow-Christians (“Monophysites”) on the basis of what they believed the **New Testament** teaches concerning the Deity of Christ; or again, the call of the Roman Catholic Pope in the year 1,096 for Christians to go on crusade, or later ordering inquisitions in Spain and Portugal, leading to the murder of thousands of Jews and Muslims in the name of Christ, calling it good, even “love.”

Modern Islamist terrorists who become suicide bombers, do so on the basis of quotations from their holy book—but that does not make their murders any less evil, despite their calling them good! What do you think?

⁷⁴Watts comments that “The devaluation of words is a mark of civilization’s corruption and has often been a tool for false propaganda in any age. Truth, accuracy, and integrity are moral terms that are necessary ingredients of a society’s health. The ones mourned include those who reversed such meanings, who ‘stood things on their heads.’” (P. 62)

Compare **Isaiah 32:5**, where it said concerning the reign of the coming king / Messiah:

(continued...)

5:21⁷⁵ הוֹי חֲכָמִים בְּעֵינֵיהֶם

וְנָגַד פְּנֵיהֶם נְבוֹנִים:

Woe to wise people in their (own) eyes,
and in their own sight understanding ones!⁷⁶

⁷⁴(...continued)

It will not be called again to a foolish person, Noble;
and to a rascal it will not be said, **Shoa** / Bountiful.

⁷⁵Alexander comments that “Here (**verse 21**), as in the foregoing verse, one sin follows another without any intervening description of punishment...As presumptuous sin, such as **verses 18-19** describe, implies a perversion of the moral sense, such as **verse 20** describes, so the latter may be said to presuppose an undue reliance upon human reason, which is elsewhere contrasted with the fear of God...and is indeed incompatible with it...

“The sin reproved, as Calvin well observes, is not mere frivolous self-conceit, but that delusive estimate of human wisdom...which may coexist with modesty of manners and a high degree of real intellectual merit.” (P. 138)

But we insist, biblical teachings must be evaluated by our human reason, in trembling awe of God and His will—or we can be led into taking time-bound, cultural statements as the eternal will of God for all times and cultures—such as the Divine demand for exterminating the Amalekites, or such as was done by the defenders of human slavery; or as is continuing to be done by those who refuse to let women speak in church assemblies, or to follow the Divine call to ministry, etc. What do you think?

⁷⁶Watts comments that “חֲכָם ‘wise’ and נְבוֹן ‘prudent’ are qualities expected in the greatest of men from Joseph (**Genesis 41:38-29**) to David (**1 Samuel 16:18**) and to the Davidic king (**Isaiah 11:2**). They are gifts from God which are recognized as needed for the good of all. For these to be used for self-aggrandizement is a perversion of values.” (P. 62)

We agree. But we would also insist that to fail to use the Divine gifts of wisdom and prudence in evaluating biblical teachings is likewise a perversion of values.

Kaiser comments that “For those who know that the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom...to regard oneself as wise is a sign of folly. That is why the arrogant have met their down-fall...and this is also the meaning of the present woe.” (P. 103) See:

Proverbs 1:7,

(continued...)

⁷⁶(...continued)

Trembling awe before / fear of YHWH--beginning of knowledge!
Wisdom and discipline--foolish people despise!

Proverbs 3:7,

You shall not be wise in your (own) eyes--
revere YHWH, and turn away from evil!

Proverbs 16:18,

Before a crash--pride / exaltation;
and before a stumbling, height / haughtiness of spirit.

Proverbs 26:12,

You saw a man wise in his (own) eyes?
Hope for a foolish person, more than (for) him!

Motyer asks, "Where does it all start? With humankind's insistence on autonomy." (P. 72) But what Motyer offers in contrast to "autonomy" is a biblicism, that pretends God is in charge of those who believe in and guide their lives by an infallible, inerrant **Bible**, as did the **Bible**-believing slave-owners in America's southland before the Civil War, quoting biblical passages to justify their treatment of slaves.

We think this is mistaken, and that the alternative to autonomy is not biblicism, but reverent awe / trembling fear of God Who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ--seeking His guidance in all of life, seeking to treat other human beings in the way Jesus treated them, using our God-given wisdom to distinguish between those teachings in the **Bible** that are of lasting relevance, and those that are no longer relevant or expressive of God's will.

Such reverent awe will study the **Bible** seriously, seeking to find and live by its basic truths--just as Jesus did--making His life and example (the "word made flesh") of genuine loving ministry authoritative for life, not allowing canonized statements of nationalism and racial / gender superiority and limited, outdated, mistaken human laws justify murder and hatred, calling it love, as the Roman Catholic inquisitors did in the Spanish Inquisition. What do you think?

⁷⁷Oswalt comments on **verses 22-23** that they are "a graphic summary of points made in **verses 8-21** (as **3:16-4:1** are of **2:6-3:15**). Here are pictured the great men of the nation, who are only great behind a bar. The terms used refer to military heroes and champions, but these are only champion drink-mixers. When these national leaders are called upon to judge a case, they can be depended upon to free the guilty

(continued...)

וְאֲנָשֵׁי-חַיִל לְמִסְךְ שֵׁכָר:

Woe (to) mighty-men in drinking wine,
and men of strength in mixing strong drink(s)!⁷⁸

5:23⁷⁹ מִצְדִּיקֵי רָשָׁע עֵקֶב שֹׁחַד

⁷⁷(...continued)

and convict the innocent—if the price is right. What is this but a picture of what the prophet has been condemning? Courage, honor, and bravery mean nothing. What matters is how many beers a man can hold before going under the table. Innocent and guilty? Who can tell the difference? Who *cares* if there is a difference in a society where serving oneself is all that matters? This is a vineyard gone completely wrong. The grapes are all bitter and human sophistry cannot make them sweet.” (P. 165)

Motyer asks, “So what is life like on the basis of unaided human wisdom [in our language, apart from reverence for God, apart from imitation of the ‘Word made flesh’]? First, success is measured by the degree of self-satisfaction achieved and indulgence enjoyed.” (P. 72)

Alexander comments on **verse 22** that “The sixth woe, like the second, is directed against drunkards, but with special reference to drunken judges, **verses 22-23**. The tone of this verse is sarcastic, from its using terms which commonly express not only strength and courage and heroic spirit, in application to exploits of drunkenness... Of such it may be said, their God is their belly and they glory in their shame [**Philippians 3:19**].” (P. 139)

⁷⁸Kaiser comments that “This woe focuses on men who boast of their capacity for drink and their skill in mixing alcoholic drinks. Anyone who is a hero only at drinking merely shows a regrettable lack of insight and self-control rather than his courage. And anyone who can boast only of knowing how to mix an intoxicating drink from honey and concentrated beer extract, without being concerned for the well-being and salvation of his people, is a prime example of the fool who thinks himself wise and necessarily falls under the woe that is pronounced on such men.” (Pp. 103-04)

⁷⁹Alexander comments that “This is a continuation of the woe begun in the preceding verse...which he now describes as leading to injustice, and therefore as a vice peculiarly disgraceful in a magistrate. The effect here ascribed to drunkenness is not merely that of incapacitating judges for the discharge of their official functions, but that of tempting them to make a trade of justice, with a view to the indulgence of this appetite. Justifying (i.e. acquitting, clearing, a forensic term) the guilty (not simply the wicked in a general sense, but the wrong-doer in a judicial sense) for the sake (literally as the result) of a bribe, and the righteousness of the righteous (i.e. the right of the innocent or injured party, or his character as such they will take from him (i.e. they do and will do so still).” (P. 139)

וְצַדִּיקַת צְדִיקִים יִסִּירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ:

(Woe to) those justifying wickedness as a consequence of a bribe,

and (the) right of rightly-related people⁸⁰ they turn aside from them!⁸¹

5:24⁸² לִכֵּן כִּאֲכֹל קֶשׁ לְשׁוֹן אִישׁ

⁸⁰Where our Hebrew text has the plural, צְדִיקִים, “righteous people,” one Hebrew manuscript plus the Greek translation and the Latin Vulgate have the singular צְדִיק, “a righteous person.”

Many self-proclaimed “biblical theologians” do not tire of quoting biblical statements concerning “there is none righteous, no not one!”, but easily overlook numerous statements in the **Bible** concerning there being “righteous people” such as Noah and Job, and the mother and father of John the Baptist, or Jesus’ saying that He did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” **Verse 23** here affirms in similar manner that in the midst of all the evil in the people of Judah, there were those who were “righteous.”

⁸¹Slotki comments on **verse 23** that “Having received a bribe, the venal [willing to do dishonest things in return for money] judges pronounce a verdict in favor of the guilty party.” (P. 27)

Kaiser states that this woe is directed against unprincipled covetousness...The author was particularly concerned with the corruptibility of the judges, which is the misuse which he attacks...Instead of doing their duty by discovering the truth with their hearings and judgments, finding out the guilty and acquitting the innocent, venal judges in a partisan way twist the truth in their own interest...The judge who allows his freedom in coming to a decision to be affected by a gift, or has any other kind of personal advantage in view, has himself become a party in the case..So underlying [this woe] is the basic conviction that Yahweh punishes those who misuse their office or their calling for their own advantage and to the detriment of those who have no protection and no help.

“Nothing shakes confidence in state and society more deeply than the public corruption of justice and the removal of the certainty of fair treatment...It is the supreme duty of every judge and every politician to refute this charge [of corruption and injustice] ...There is the conviction here that those who enrich themselves unjustly will come to no good, as will the society which does not guard against injustice.” (Pp. 102-03)

⁸²Oswalt comments on **verses 24-25** that “These verses conclude not only **verses 18-25**, but also **verses 8-25**...

“There is nothing to be done with the vineyard except to destroy it...The whole issue is whether God’s law and word will be obeyed in the face of our human desires for

(continued...)

וַחֲשֵׁשׁ לְהִבֶּה יִרְפָּה
שְׂרָשָׁם כַּמֶּקֶ יִהְיֶה
וּפְרָחֵם כְּאֵבֶק יֵעֵל
כִּי מֵאֲסוֹ אֵת תּוֹרַת יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
וְאֵת אִמְרַת קְדוֹשׁ־יִשְׂרָאֵל נֶאֱצְוּ׃

Therefore, like a tongue of fire devouring stubble,

⁸²(...continued)

self-service. If not, then the life drains out of the human enterprise and all our attainments become dust and ashes. We are reduced to stubble in the face of devouring flame, because we have abstracted ourselves from the only source of life, namely, God.” (Pp. 165-66)

Motyer comments on how “the second ‘therefore’ section describes how punishment fits the crime. They invited the Lord to hasten (**verse 19**) and now judgment will be swift as *fire* in stubble (**verse 24a**). They made themselves the ready slaves of sin (**verses 18, 20**) and now they will be like the *dry grass* which falls helplessly into the fire (**verse 24b**). They proclaimed autonomy (**verse 21**) and now their *roots* will be exposed as rotten (**verse 24c**). They produced the fruit of unrighteousness (**verses 22-23**) and now their blossom will vanish (**verse 24d**).” (P. 72)

Alexander comments on **verse 24** that “To the series of sins enumerated in the six preceding verses there is now added a general description of their punishment. In the first clause, the Prophet represents the Divine visitation, with its sudden, rapid, irresistible effect, by the familiar figure of chaff and dry grass sinking in the flames...

“In the second clause he passes from simile to metaphor, and speaks of the people as a tree whose root is rotten and its growth above ground pulverized...

“In the third, he drops both figures, and in literal expressions summarily states the cause of their destruction...*For they have rejected the law of [Yahweh] of Hosts, and the word (the revealed will) of the Holy One of Israel they have treated with contempt.*” (P. 139)

Gray states that “Quickly as chaff and stubble catch fire and are reduced to ashes, will judgment fall on those who have neglected to comply with Yahweh’s expressed will.” (Pp. 94-5)

and chaff—a flame⁸³ will sink down / shrivel (in its burning);
their root like the rottenness will be,⁸⁴
and their sprout⁸⁵ like the dust will go up.⁸⁶

⁸³Where our Hebrew text reads **וַחֲשַׁשׁ לַהֲבֵה**, “and a flame will sink,” 1QIs^a reads **וַאֲשׁ לִוְחַהֲבַת**, evidently meaning “a fire to flames,” but we are unsure as to its meaning.

⁸⁴For this statement concerning their root, compare:

Amos 2:9,

And I, I destroyed the Amorite(s) from before them,
whose height (was) like (the) height of cedars,
and he (was) strong like the oaks.
And I, I destroyed his fruit from above,
and his roots from beneath.

Hosea 9:16,

Ephraim is stricken;
their root dried up;
they will not bear fruit.
Even if they give birth,
and I will put to death (the) delights of their womb!

Malachi 3:19^{Heb} / **4:1**^{Eng}

Because look—the day is coming, burning like the oven;
and all presumptuous / insolent people and everyone doing evil will be
chaff;
and the day that is coming will set them ablaze—
said YHWH of Armies,
Who will not leave for them root and branch!

⁸⁵Where our Hebrew text reads **פְּרִיחָם**, “their bud / sprout,” **Rahlfs** has *ἄνθος*, “blossom,” “flower.”

⁸⁶Oswalt comments that “The prophet mixes his figures of speech as he tries to show the impermanence of those who reject God’s law. Strict logic cannot be applied to the statement *a tongue of flame devours stubble...their roots will become like mold*, but the point is plain. No plant is ultimate in itself. Its life is derived and when the conditions for life are not present, destruction and decay are all that are left to it.” (P. 166)

(continued...)

Because they rejected YHWH of Armies' teaching,
and (the) Set-apart One of Israel's word they despised!⁸⁷

5:25⁸⁸ עַל-כֵּן חָרָה אֶת-יְהוָה בְּעֵמוֹ

⁸⁶(...continued)

Watts states that this description of conditions in Judah shows “how vulnerable the people had become. They were like stubble, hay. Even their roots were dried like rot and sprouts that should have been green were dry as dust.” (P. 62)

⁸⁷Watts comments that the people of Judah “had lost contact with the Source of life and strength. By rejecting and spurning the word of God (here not the Scriptures, but the words of the prophets and the tradition taught by the priests) they had cut themselves off from His vitality and strength.” (Pp. 62-3)

⁸⁸Gray entitles **verses 25-30** “The Final Destruction of Ephraim,” holding that this passage is totally out of place here in **chapter 5**, as it contains the conclusion to **Isaiah 9:8-10:4**^{Heb} / **9:7-10:4**^{Eng}. (P. 95) We do not like rearranging the biblical texts, but have to admit that Gray may be correct here.

Slotki comments on **verse 25** that “The use of the perfect and consecutive [‘conversive’] imperfect tenses may be regarded as prophetic perfects.” (P. 27) Compare footnote 52.

Oswalt states that in **verse 25** “the prophet moves from figure of speech to a more specific announcement. It is because Israel has rejected God’s law and the word of her Holy One that God has already begun to act in judgment. They have felt His outstretched hand already and that hand is still outstretched. The hedge is about to be taken away and the animals summoned to come in and trample the vines.” (P. 166)

Motyer observes that this is the second long “therefore” section, unified by its beginning and ending, “with an earthquake in **verse 25** and the lion and the storm in **verses 29-30**. This display of the ‘natural’ forces at the Lord’s disposal brackets a description of yet another force He commands (**verses 26-29**), the irresistible invader. Like the long ‘therefore’ in **verses 14-17**, God acts in total judgment.” (P. 73)

Alexander comments on **verse 25** that “Having declared in the foregoing verse what should be, he recalls to mind what has already been. As if he had said, God will visit you for these things; nay, He has done so already, but without reclaiming you or satisfying His Own justice, for which purpose further strokes are still required...

“The previous inflictions here referred to are described as a stroke from [Jehovah’s] out-stretched hand, so violent as to shake the mountains, and so destructive as to fill the streets with corpses...In all this (i.e. even after all this, or notwithstanding all this) His anger has not turned back (abandoned its object, or regarded it as already gained), and still His hand is stretched out (to inflict new judgments)...

(continued...)

וַיֵּט יָדוֹ עָלָיו וַיִּכֶהוּ
 וַיִּרְגְּזוּ הַהָרִים
 וַתְּהִי נִבְלָתָם כַּסּוּחָה בְּקִרְבַּי חוּצוֹת
 בְּכָל-זֹאת לֹא-שָׁב אָפוּ

⁸⁸(...continued)

“If this verse is not descriptive of the past, as distinguished from the present and the future, the Hebrew language is incapable of making any such distinction...It is not necessary to suppose, although it is most probable, that what is here described had actually taken place before the Prophet wrote.” (P. 140)

Kaiser thinks that the passage has obviously been written in post-exilic times, following the destruction of Jerusalem: “We should think of those slain by the enemy when they entered the cities of Judah and the capital, Jerusalem, whose bodies lay unheeded in the streets.” (P. 111) Compare:

Jeremiah 16:4, where Jeremiah is predicting the coming fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians:

Deaths by diseases they will die;
 they will not be mourned and will not be buried.
 For dung / excrement upon the face of the ground they will be,
 and by the sword and by the famine they will be finished.
 And their corpses will be for food to the heavens' bird(s),
 and to the earth's / land's animal(s).

Lamentations 2:21,

They lay on the ground—streets—youth and elderly;
 my young women / virgins and choice young men fell by the sword;
 You murdered in a day of Your anger,
 You slaughtered, You did not spare!

Kaiser continues: “The [post-exilic] editor means it to be understood that the woes have found their fulfilment in the catastrophe of the year 587, and the wrath of Yahweh has still not come to an end. Rather, He will unburden Himself in a last blow, the attack of the army of the nations against Jerusalem and Judah.” (**Ibid.**)

What do you think? Does it depreciate the value of the **Book of Isaiah** to think that it has statements within it coming from a later time than the historical Isaiah—for example from a disciple of Isaiah's who following the fall of Jerusalem two centuries later saw in it a fulfillment of Isaiah's warning, and who spoke in Isaiah's name?

וְעוֹד יָדוֹ נִטְוִיָּה:

For this reason YHWH's anger burned against His people,

and He stretched out His hand against him, and struck him!⁸⁹

And the mountains quaked,⁹⁰

and their carcass(es) became like the animal organ(s) in (the) middle of the streets.

With all this, His anger did not turn back,

and still His hand was stretched out!⁹¹

⁸⁹Watts comments that "So God, like the vineyard owner of 'the song,' took action to eliminate the vines that produced only 'stinking things.' His upraised hand signaled the removal of the protective fences and the guard tower, the beginning of the trampling of the vineyard (5:5-6)." (P. 63)

⁹⁰Motyer comments that "The created world, in all the complexity, splendor and ferocity of its powers, is a controlled tool in the hand of the Creator, serving His righteous purposes." (P. 73)

We are reminded of YHWH's speeches in **Job 38-41**, which depicts YHWH's world, including so much more than Job's narrow world-view, with its mountain goats, griffon vultures, war-horses, ostriches, hippopotami and crocodiles, as well as the thunder-storms—all of which are integral parts of His creation, but none of which are subject to the narrow dogmatism of Job's friends.

⁹¹The refrain contained in these last two lines of **verse 25** is repeated four times in **chapters 9-10 (9:12, 17, 21; 10:4)**. As Watts states, "The events of **chapter 5** (prior to the death of Uzziah, **6:1**) are continued in **9:8-10:23** (in the reign of Ahaz) until Israel and most of Judah have indeed become a 'trampling place' (5:5-6)." (P. 63)

Watts explains the overall meaning of the section **5:8-25** by stating that "The fourfold woes with interspersed conclusions drawn from them continue the funeral scene over Israel and much of Judah that was begun by the Song of the Vineyard (5:1-7). They show that the generation who died and were exiled consisted of those 'stinking grapes' (**verses 2 and 4**) who are identified by the mourners as the unscrupulous exploiters of the land (**verse 8**); the drunkards (**verses 11-12**); the deceivers and scornful (**verses 18-19**); those who deliberately confuse the issues (**verse 20**); the conceited (**verse 21**); those whose heroics are only found in alcohol and who have no honor (**verse 22**).

"The entire passage supports God's decisions announced in **chapter 1** and **2:6-8** and confirmed again in **10:4, 22b-23**. The Assyrian invasion is only a *coup de grace* [death blow] to the self-inflicted agonies that marked the last years of Israel.

(continued...)

⁹¹(...continued)

“Social crimes and degradation are symbols of their ‘lack of knowledge’ (**verse 13**) and their ‘rejection of the instruction of Yahweh of Hosts’ (**verse 24**). Ultimately this spiritual insensitivity and moral rebellion account for God’s ‘anger’ (**verse 25**). This anger and rejection in turn account for the loss of political, social, and economic cohesion and the stability that marked the last three decades of the Kingdom of Israel. This passage in the [**Book of Isaiah**] precedes the announcement of the death of Uzziah (**6:1**) and describes conditions in the decade before 740 B.C. It will be continued (‘His’ hand was stretched out still’ **5:25**) with the use of that refrain in the reign of Ahaz (**9:8-10:23**) for the last decade of Samaria’s existence.” (P. 63) Remember Gray’s view as stated in footnote 88.

⁹²Slotki states concerning **verses 26-30** that they depict “A martial nation (probably the Assyrians), equipped, disciplined, powerful and swift [that] is called from the end of the earth to complete the punishment of Israel for the sins enumerated [in the preceding verses].” (P. 27)

Oswalt entitles these verses “Coming Destruction,” and comments that “As he has detailed the wild grapes (**verses 8-25**), so Isaiah has alluded to the coming destruction of the vineyard (**verses 13-17, 24, 25**). Now he makes that allusion explicit in a powerful piece of poetry. The wild animals are called and now come to trample the vineyard. They come quickly but also insistently. Those who mocked Isaiah asked for God to hurry His work. Isaiah now assures them that God’s plan is coming to sudden fruition, more sudden than they can imagine. It is likely that he has Assyria in mind [but if he includes the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, he must have Babylon in mind as well!]...

“For Isaiah at [this] point, it was not so important to specify who the destroyers would be as it was to indicate the imminent, irresistible, and wholly-to-be-expected nature of what lay ahead.” (P. 168)

Oswalt comments on **verse 26** that “Isaiah here introduces the theme which will be amplified later (especially **10:5-34**): the nations are but an instrument in the Lord’s hands. The great imperial armies sweeping the world in the ninth to the fifth centuries B.C.E. were not the shapers of the world’s destiny but were themselves shaped by the One Who holds all things (compare **40:21-24; 45:1-9**). It is upon His signal that they rise and move; at His whistle they come out of their hive like bees to do His bidding.” (P. 169)

Watts entitles **verses 26-30** “Signal to a Distant Nation,” and comments that “At regular intervals the [**Book of Isaiah**] reminds its readers (hearers) of God’s ‘work’ in the period. **3:1** identified His removal of responsible leaders in Jerusalem...Here ‘His anger’ takes concrete form in an invader, ‘a distant nation from the end of the earth.’ The nation will be identified in **chapter 7** as Assyria...Tiglath-Pileser III was already

(continued...)

וְשָׂרַק לּוֹ מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ
וְהֵנָּה מִהֵרָה קֵל יְבוֹא:

And He will lift up a signal⁹³ for the nations⁹⁴ from afar,⁹⁵

⁹²(...continued)

known in Palestine. Menahem and possibly Uzziah were involved in stopping his invasion of the West in 738 B.C... **Verse 26** identifies Yahweh as the Initiator of the invasion. **Verses 27-29** is a graphic poetic description of the army. **Verse 30** returns to Yahweh as subject in documenting the dark fate ahead.” (Pp. 64-5)

Motyer comments that “If **verse 25** teaches how to understand our environment, these verses teach how to understand history (compare **10:5-15**). God is sovereign over the whole world (*distant nations...ends of the earth*) so that He only needs to raise His *banner* and whistle for even the nations to come *swiftly and speedily* without question.” (P. 73)

Alexander comments on **verse 26** that “The former stroke having been insufficient, a more effectual one is now impending, in predicting which the prophet does not confine himself to figurative language, but presents the approaching judgment in its proper form, as the invasion and ultimate subjection of the country by a formidable enemy, **verses 26-30**...

“In this **verse (26)** he describes the approach of those figures...a signal-pole or flag...*And he raises a signal to the nations from afar, and hisses (or whistles) for him from the ends of the earth; and behold in haste, swift he shall come...*

“The nation meant has been...variously explained to be the Romans...the Babylonians...and the Assyrians...But this very disagreement, or rather the indefinite expressions which occasion it, show that the terms of the description were designed to be more comprehensive...The terms are most emphatically applicable to the Romans...but the common and more probable opinion is that it alludes to the ancient mode of swarming bees...In the last clause a substantive meaning haste, and an adjective meaning light, are both used adverbially in the sense of swiftly.” (P. 141)

⁹³Oswalt notes that the noun here, **סֵּנִי**, standard, ensign, signal, sign, “is a favorite term of Isaiah’s. God will not only raise a flag to call the destroyers (**13:2; 18:3; 31: 9**), He will also raise one to call His children home (**11:10, 12; 49:22; 62:10**).” (P. 167)

Watts states that “The Assyrians carried elaborate symbols on poles, as their inscriptions show. These may be placed on raised ground with high visibility (**13:2;**

(continued...)

and He will whistle for it from the earth's end / extremity.⁹⁶
And look—speedily, quickly it will come!⁹⁷

⁹³(...continued)

30:17). The emphasis here is on God's participation and direction. The armies respond promptly and with alacrity [brisk and cheerful readiness]." (P. 65)

⁹⁴Watts notes that "The first reference is to גוֹיִם 'nations' while the second and third, לוֹ 'to him' and יָבוֹא 'he comes,' are singular." (P. 64)

⁹⁵Compare **Jeremiah 4:16**,

Cause to be remembered to the nations;
look—cause to be heard in Jerusalem:
blockaders / guards (are) coming from a land, the one far off;
and they will give their voice / shout against Judah's cities!

Jeremiah 5:15,

Look at Me—bringing against you people a nation from afar, House of Israel—
a saying of YHWH—
a nation, it is enduring;
a nation from long distant time, it (is);
a nation, whose tongue / language you will not know,
and you will not hear / understand what it says.

Watts comments that "The *distant nation* and *from the ends of the earth* are parallel phrases in much of Hebrew poetry (compare **Deuteronomy 28:49**...)" (P. 65) We think "in much of Hebrew poetry" is overstatement.

⁹⁶For this "whistling" for an enemy to come, compare **Isaiah 7:18**,

And it will happen in that day,
YHWH will whistle for the fly
which is in in (the) end of Egypt's canals,
and for the bee which is in Assyria's land.

Watts comments that **verse 26** "pictures a concrete event in terms of God's direct intervention in the historical process. The subject of נָשָׂא 'raise' is understood to be Yahweh. His visual and audible signals direct the foreign armies." (P. 65)

⁹⁷Watts comments that "The great distance is matched by the speed with which the army responds. The Assyrians prided themselves on their maneuverability and quickness." (P. 65)

5:27⁹⁸ אֵין-עֵיף וְאֵין-כּוֹשֵׁל בּוֹ

לֹא יָנוּם וְלֹא יִישָׁן

וְלֹא נִפְתַּח אֲזוּר חֲלָצָיו

וְלֹא נִתַּק שְׂרוּף נַעֲלָיו:

There is no one fainting, and there is no one stumbling in it;

there is no one drowsy and no one sleeping;

and there is not a loosened belt of its loins;

and not a strap of its sandals is torn (loose);

5:28⁹⁹ אֲשֶׁר חֲצָיו שְׁנוּנִים וְכָל-קִשְׁתֵּיהֶם דְּרָכוֹת

⁹⁸Oswalt comments on **verses 27-29** that “In these verses a succession of terse phrases, which actually begins with **verse 26c**, lends support to the picture of the rapid and remorseless onslaught of the enemy army...There is no laggard, stumbling and sleepy. Neither is there anyone half-prepared, with broken sandal-thong or slack equipment belt. Instead, everyone is intent on the task, with arrows sharpened and bow already strung. The horses’ hooves are hard as flint, so they will not break down on the journey, and the chariot wheels are turning so fast that they blur like a whirlwind (**Isaiah 66:15; Jeremiah 4:13**). The sound of the onrushing horde is like the roar of a lion at the moment of its spring. Like the lion, once this army has seized its prey and begun to drag it off, there will be no one to deliver Israel from its mouth.” (P. 169)

Watts comments on these verses that “The physical condition of the troops is excellent in spite of the forced-marches over great distances. Their equipment is in excellent condition and chosen for the kind of warfare that is needed...The condition of horses and wagons / chariots is excellent, belying the reported distance they have traveled...The picture closes with an analogy to a lion...The metaphor emphasizes the terror inspired by the determined successes of the army.” (P. 65)

Alexander comments on **verse 27** that “The enemy, whose approach was just foretold, is now described as not only prompt and rapid, but complete in his equipments, firm and vigorous, ever wakeful, impeded neither by the accidents of the way nor by defective preparation.” (P. 141)

⁹⁹Alexander comments on **verse 28** that “The description is continued, but with special reference to their weapons and their means of conveyance. For the former, bows and arrows are here put; and for the latter, horses and chariots...

“The bows being trod upon has reference to the ancient mode of stringing, or rather of shooting, the bow being large, and made of metal or hard wood. Arrian [a

(continued...)

פְּרָסוֹת סוּסָיו כְּצֶרֶךְ נֶחְשָׁבוּ

וְגַלְגָּלָיו כְּסוּפָה:

whose arrows (are) sharp, and all their bows bent / strung;

his horses' hoofs seemed like the flint,¹⁰⁰

and his (chariot-) wheels like the whirlwind / storm!¹⁰¹

⁹⁹(...continued)

Greek historian from Nicomedia in Asia Minor about 86-160 A.D.] says expressly, in describing the use of the bow by the Indian infantry 'placing it on the ground, and stepping on it with the left foot, so they shoot, drawing the string back to a great distance.'" (P. 142)

We think Isaiah means their bows were "strung," not that they were shooting them as they came.

¹⁰⁰Where our Hebrew text reads כְּצֶרֶךְ, "like the flint," 1QIs^a reads כְּצוֹר, "like the rock," or possibly "like the flint." **Rahlf**s has στερεὰ πέτρα, "hard rock."

¹⁰¹Motyer comments that "In **verses 27-28** the power of this sovereign God is appreciated by observing the power of the nations at His command: progress is unimpeded by either natural failure (*tired, stumbles, slumbers, sleeps*) or enforced delay (*loosened, broken*). Their equipment is effective (*sharp*) and at the ready (*strung*); *like flint* it is not subject to wear and is capable of great speed (*whirlwind*)." (P. 73)

For this comparison to the whirlwind / storm, compare:

Jeremiah 4:13, speaking of the coming of the Babylonian army against Jerusalem:

Look—like clouds it comes up,
and like the storm / whirlwind its chariots;
Its horses were swifter than griffon-vultures / eagles--
woe to us, because we were destroyed!

Isaiah 66:15,

Because look—YHWH will come with the fire,
and like a storm / whirlwind, His chariots,
to return with rage His anger,
and His rebuke in flames of fire!

5:29¹⁰² שֶׁאֵגָה לוֹ כְּלִבְיָא

(וְשֶׁאֵג) [וְשֶׁאֵג] כְּכַפִּירִים וְיִנְהֵם

וַיֵּאָחֵז טָרֶף

וַיִּפְלֵט וַאֲיִן מִצֵּיל:

He has a roar like the lion;

he roars¹⁰³ like the young lions,

and he growls and took hold of prey

and he escaped, and there is no one delivering.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰²Motyer comments on **verses 29-30** that “These verses present a double picture of helplessness: the prey before the lion (**verse 29**) and the storm-bound sailor with shelter on neither sea nor land (**verse 30**)...The message of the lion-picture is that no-one can help; that of the storm-picture is that ‘there is no help.’” (P. 73)

Alexander comments on **verse 29** that “By a sudden transition, the enemy are here represented as lions, roaring, growling, seizing their prey, and carrying it off without resistance...[expressing] the boldness, fierceness, quickness, and success of the attack here threatened...Here the future is alone used...Having told what the enemy is, he now tells what he will do.” (Pp. 142-43)

¹⁰³The Masoretes offer two readings, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” וְשֶׁאֵג, “and he will roar,” and the *qere*, “to be read,” וַיֵּשֶׁאֵג, “he will roar.”

¹⁰⁴Gray comments on **verses 26-29** that it “describes the final destruction of Ephraim: a nation from the end of the earth is depicted advancing swiftly, irresistibly on the doomed nation; Ephraim will resemble the prey of a lion whereof nothing is rescued ...It will perish utterly, and none will remain to provoke Yahweh’s anger further.” (P. 96) Compare **Amos 3:12**,

In this way YHWH spoke:

Just like the shepherd snatches away from the lion’s mouth two legs, or a piece of an ear—

so shall the Children of Israel be snatched away—

those who live in Samaria on (the) corner of a couch,
and on a Damascus divan!

Gray adds that “It has been commonly supposed that Isaiah without naming them refers to the Assyrians...the only people on his horizon that satisfy the terms

(continued...)

5:30¹⁰⁵ וַיִּנְהָם עָלָיו בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא כְּנִהַמֵּתִים

וְנִבַּט לָאָרֶץ וְהִנֵּה חֹשֶׁךְ צָר

וְאֹר חֹשֶׁךְ בְּעֵרִיפִיהָ:

¹⁰⁴(...continued)

used...It is true that there is nothing distinctive in the description that it might not have been applied by later writers to other invaders—Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, or Romans; but this is not strange in a brief *poetical* description of an expected invasion.” (P. 96)

¹⁰⁵Oswalt comments on **verse 30** that “The army’s rumble is not only like the lion’s roar, it is also like the steady crash of [ocean] breakers...There would be only darkness and distress, the light of day being obscured by the clouds of battle.” (P. 170)

Watts holds that in this final verse, “In a manner familiar from **chapter 1**, the metaphorical theme is continued with a very different meaning. The ‘growl’ of the lion / enemy [becomes] the growl of Yahweh, the Divine Warrior, Whose appearance on that fearful day brings gloom to all.” (P. 65)

Watts explains **5:26-30** by stating that “The Vision contends that God’s strategy controls and directs historical events. His signals start the army’s advance. His movements keep the action moving or bring it to an end. His upraised hand signals His continued displeasure with Israel (**verse 25**). He will not protect her. He has disavowed her. It is the counterpart of the vineyard owner’s removal of fence and guard towers in **verse 5**. In **verse 26** He raises a banner and sounds a signal for invading armies...

“Neither Yahweh nor the invading enemy is named in this section...But the implication is clear. What is here implicit will be made explicit in **7:17**. The light of God’s countenance is denied Israel in this time; **2:6** had already confirmed that. No amount of optimism can conceal it. The theme is confirmed in the vision of **chapter 6** and continued in **9:7^{Heb} / 8^{Eng} -10:20** after a section dealing with Jerusalem (**7:1-9:6^{Heb} / 7^{Eng}**).” (Pp. 65-66)

Alexander states that “The roaring of the lion suggests the roaring of the sea, and thus a beautiful transition is effected from the one figure to the other, in describing the catastrophe of all these judgments. Israel is threatened by a raging sea, and looking landward, sees it growing dark there, until, after a brief fluctuation, the darkness becomes total...

”The Prophet speaks of the vast multitude that was coming up, as a sea. On that side there was no safety. It was natural to speak of the other direction as the *land* or *shore*, and to say that the people would look there for safety. But, says he, there would be no safety there; all would be darkness [quoting Barnes].” (P. 143)

And He growled against him in that day, like a sea's growling;
and he / one looked to the land / earth, and look—darkness of an enemy;
and light was / grew dark in its clouds.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶Gray comments that “The growl, and the unrelieved darkness on which the eyes of the prey rest, imply the doom of Israel.” (P. 98)

Motyer sums up the meaning of **chapters 1-5** by stating that “The message of the first two sections (**1:2-31; 2:1-4:6**) is that human sin cannot ultimately frustrate God’s purposes and that, in God, mercy triumphs over wrath. But the third section (**5:1-30**) poses a shattering question: When the Lord has done all (**5:4**), must the darkness of Divine wrath close in and the light flicker and fade? This was the day of crisis in which Isaiah ministered: a crisis for humankind, for the day of wrath has come and a crisis for God: can mercy be exhausted and defeated?” (P. 73)

Kaiser states that the vision of **5:25-30** is “an uncanny [odd, mysterious, unexpected, that makes you feel uneasy] vision, underlying which is another no less uncanny event: the annihilation of the kingdom of Judah and the deportation of its upper classes by the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar (compare **2 Kings 25**). It sought to impress upon the survivors and those suffering under slavery and dispersion that here was a demonstration not of the helplessness but of the power of Yahweh, and...also invited them in their apparently hopeless situation to trust and to hearken, because the God Who controls the nations also has the power to save His people.” (P. 113)

1. **Passages Where the Root ׀׀׀, “Beloved,” “Love,” “Uncle” Occurs**

1. Passages where the Hebrew root ׀׀׀ means “uncle”:

Leviticus 10:4, עֲזִיֶּאֱלִי ׀ֶדֶר אֶהֱרֹן, Uzziel, uncle of Aaron;

Leviticus 20:20, a man having sex with his uncle’s wife;

Leviticus 25:49 (twice), an uncle can redeem one sold into slavery;

1 Samuel 10:14, 15, 16; 14:50, Saul’s uncle;

2 Kings 24:17, Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle;

Jeremiah 32:7, 8, 9, 12, Jeremiah’s uncle;

Amos 6:10, an uncle who comes to bury his relative;

Esther 2:7, Mordecai was bringing up Hadassah, the daughter of ׀ֶדֶר׀, “his (Mordecai’s) uncle. **Esther 2:15**, same;

1 Chronicles 27:32, a man named Jonathan was ׀ֶדֶר־׀ֶדֶר׀, “David’s uncle.”

3. Passages where the Hebrew root ׀׀׀ refers to the people of Israel, or God’s “loved ones”:

Psalm 60:7^{Heb} / **5**^{Eng}

So that Your beloved [people] may be delivered,
let Your right hand save, and answer me / us!

Psalm 108:7^{Heb} / **6**^{Eng}, almost identical:

So that Your beloved [people] may be delivered,
let Your right hand save, and answer me!

Psalm 127:2,

(It is) vanity / emptiness for you being early to rise,
being late to rest,
eating bread / food of those toiling hard;
in this way He will give sleep to His beloved.

(Translations of **verse 2** vary:

King James, “*It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows: for so he giveth his beloved sleep.*”

Tanakh, “In vain do you rise early and stay up late, you who toil for the bread you eat; He provides as much for His loved ones while they sleep.”

New Revised Standard, “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives sleep to his beloved.”

New International, “In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat--for he grants sleep to those he loves.”

New Jerusalem, “In vain you get up earlier, and put off going to bed, sweating to make a living, since it is he who provides for his beloved as they sleep.

Rahfs, “It is to no end to rise up early, to get up after sitting, the ones eating bread of pain / sorrow, when He may give to his beloved ones sleep.”

3. Passages where the Hebrew root **אָהַב** means sexual “love,” “love-making,” or “lover (both male and female)”:

Ezekiel 16:8, **עַתָּה הֵרִים**, a time of loves—YHWH’s adopted daughter has grown into sexual maturity, and her time for making love with a husband has come.

Ezekiel 23:17, Oholibah (Jerusalem) has sexual intercourse with her lovers, the Babylonians, in a **מִשְׁכַּב הֵרִים**, a bed / lying-place of loves;

Jeremiah 11:15, speaking of Jerusalem and its people:

What belongs to my beloved in my house,
(with) her doing the many (evil) purposes?

And set-apart flesh they caused to pass over from upon you,
because your evil then will you exult?

Translations of **verse 15** vary:

King James, “What hath my beloved to do in mine house, *seeing* she hath wrought lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from thee? when thou doest evil, then thou rejoicest.”

Tanakh, “Why should My beloved be in My House, Who executes so many vile designs? The sacral flesh will pass away from you, For you exult while performing your evil deeds.”

New Revised Standard, “What right has my beloved in my house, when she has done vile deeds? Can vows and sacrificial flesh avert your doom? Can you then exult?”

New International, “What is my beloved doing in my temple as she works out her evil schemes with many? Can consecrated meat avert *your punishment*? When you engage in your wickedness, then you rejoice.”

New Jerusalem, “What is my beloved doing in my house? She has achieved her wicked plans. Can vows and consecrated meat turn disaster from you for you to be so happy?”

Rahfs, “Why (is) the beloved one (feminine) in my house? She did an abomination. Shall prayers and set-apart meats take away from you the evils of yours, or by these will you escape?”

Proverbs 7:18, an adulterous wife entices the foolish young man, saying

Come, we will drink our fill of loves / love-making, until the morning;
we will delight ourselves with loves (synonym)!

Song of Solomon 1:2, the female lover says:

Let him kiss me with (the) kisses of his mouth,
because your loves are better than wine!

Song of Solomon 1:4, the female lover says:

Draw me after you—let us run!
The king brought me (into) his chambers;
Let us rejoice and be glad in you,
because your loves are better than wine!

Song of Solomon 1:13, the female lover says:

My beloved (is) to me a bundle of myrrh;
let him spend the night between my breasts!

Song of Solomon 1:14, the female lover says:

My beloved (is) to me a cluster of henna-flowers,
in (the) vineyards of Ein-Gedi!

Song of Solomon 1:16, the female lover says:

Look at you!
My beloved (is) beautiful!
Yes, delightful!
Yes, our bed (is) luxuriant!

Song of Solomon 2:3, the female lover says:

Like an apple-tree among trees of the forest,
so (is) my beloved between the sons / young men!
In his shadow I delighted greatly and I dwelt;
and his fruit—sweet to my mouth / taste!

Song of Solomon 2:8, the female lover says:

My beloved's voice!
Look—this one (is) coming,
leaping over the mountains,
springing over the hills!

Song of Solomon 2:9, the female lover says:

My beloved is like a gazelle,
or a young stag of the deer.

Look at this one—standing behind our wall,
gazing from the windows,
looking from the lattices!

Song of Solomon 2:10, the female lover says:

My beloved answered and he said to me,
Arouse yourself,
my companion, my beautiful one,
and get yourself going!

Song of Solomon 2:16, the female lover says:

My beloved is mine, and I am his,
the one who is pasturing among the lilies.

Song of Solomon 2:17, the female lover says:

Until the day breathes,
and the shadows flee,
come around—make yourself like, my beloved, the gazelle,
or like a young stag of the deer,
upon mountains' height!

Song of Solomon 4:10 (twice), the male lover says:

How beautiful your loves, my sister, bride!
How good your loves—more than wine!
And (the) scent of your oils than all spices!

Song of Solomon 4:16, the male lover says:

Awaken, north wind, and come, south wind,
breathe (into) my garden,
cause its spices to flow!
Let my beloved come into his garden,
and let him eat (the) fruit of its excellence!

Song of Solomon 5:1, the male lover says:

I came to my garden, my sister, bride--
I gathered my myrrh with my spice(s);
I ate my honey-comb with my honey;
I drank my wine with my milk!
Eat, friends; drink!
And get intoxicated (with) loves!

Song of Solomon 5:2, the female lover says:

I slept (feminine singular) and my heart rousing itself;
a voice—my beloved, knocking!
Open to me, my sister, my companion,
my dove, my perfect one—
since my head is filled / covered with dew,
my locks (with) drops of night!
I drank my wine with my milk!
Eat, friends; drink!
And get intoxicated (with) loves!

Song of Solomon 5:4, the female lover says:

My beloved sent forth his hand from / at the hole,
and my insides growled (with excitement) over him / it.
Translations of **verse 5** vary:
King James, “My beloved put in his hand by the hole *of the door*, and my bowels
were moved for him.”
Tanakh, “My beloved took his hand off the latch, And my heart was stirred for
him.”
New Revised Standard, “My beloved thrust his hand into the opening, and my
inmost being yearned for him.”
New International, “My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my
heart began to pound for him.”
New Jerusalem, “My love thrust his hand through the hole in the door; I
trembled to the core of my being.”
Rahfs “My brother / loved one sent forth his hand from the opening / hole, and
my belly was inwardly aroused over it / him.”

Song of Solomon 5:5 the female lover says:

I, I arose to open for my beloved,
and my hands were dripping myrrh,
and my fingers (with) myrrh,
crossing over upon hands / handles of the bolt.

Song of Solomon 5:6 (twice), the female lover says:

I, I opened for my beloved,
and my beloved turned, he crossed over.
My innermost-being went forth at his speaking;
I sought him, and I didn't find him;
I cried out, and he did not answer me.

Song of Solomon 5:8, the female lover says:

I call upon you to swear, daughters of Jerusalem,
if you should find my beloved, what you will declare to him--
that I am sick with love!

Song of Solomon 5:9 (four times), the daughters of Jerusalem answer with two questions:

What (is) your beloved, more than a beloved,
(you) the beautiful one among women?
What (is) your beloved, more than a beloved,
concerning whom you called us to swear like this?

Song of Solomon 5:10, the female lover says:

My beloved—radiant and ruddy;
looked upon out of ten thousand!
Translations of **verse 10** vary:
King James, “My beloved *is* white and ruddy, the chiefest among ten thousand.”
Tanakh, “My beloved is clear-skinned and ruddy, Preeminent among ten thousand.”
New Revised Standard, “My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.”
New International, “My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand.”
New Jerusalem, “BELOVED: My love is fresh and ruddy, to be known among ten thousand.”
Rahfs, My brother / beloved (is) white and red / ruddy, having been chosen from ten thousands!”)

Song of Solomon 5:16, the female lover says:

His mouth (is) sweetness, and all of him desirable--
this (is) my beloved, and this (is) my friend,
daughters of Jerusalem!

Song of Solomon 6:1 (twice), the daughters of Jerusalem speak to the female lover:

Your beloved went (away), (you) the beautiful one among the women;
where did your beloved turn?
And we will seek him with you.

Song of Solomon 6:2, the female lover says:

My beloved went down to his garden,
to the garden-bed of the spice(s),
to shepherd among the gardens,
and to pick / gather lilies.

Song of Solomon 6:3 (twice), the female lover says:

I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine,
the one who shepherds among the lilies.

Song of Solomon 7:10, the female lover says:

And your mouth—like the good wine,
going to my beloved for uprightness,
gliding (over) lips (and) teeth.

Song of Solomon 7:11, the female lover says:

I am my beloved's,
and his desire (is) upon / for me!

Song of Solomon 7:12, the female lover says:

Go / come my beloved,
we will go forth (into) the field,
we will spend the night in the villages.

Song of Solomon 7:13, the female lover says:

We will get up early to / in the villages;
we will see whether the grape-vine budded,
the grape-blossom opened,
whether the pomegranates blossomed;
there I will give you my loves.

Song of Solomon 7:14, the female lover says:

The (aphrodisiac / food or drink that stimulates sexual desire) mandrakes gave
(their) scent;
and beside our door-ways (are) all (the) choice fruits.
new ones, also old ones, my beloved--
I stored (them) up for you!

Song of Solomon 8:5, an unidentified voice speaks:

Who (is) this, going / coming up from the wilderness,
supporting herself upon her beloved?
Beneath the apple-tree I aroused you;
there your mother was in labor-pains (with) you;
there she was in labor-pains, she gave birth to you!

Song of Solomon 8:14, the female lover says:

Hurry, my beloved!
And make yourself like a gazelle,
or (like) a young stag of the deer,
upon mountains of spices!

5. A passage in which the root **רנן** is ambiguous:

Isaiah 5:1,

I will sing now for my beloved / Beloved
a song of my beloved / uncle for his vineyard.
My beloved / Beloved had a vineyard,
on a horn / hill-top, a son of oil / richly fertile.

2. New Testament Passages Reflecting Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard

Mark 12:1-11,

- 1 And he began to speak to them in comparisons:
A person planted a vineyard,
and he placed a wall around (it),
and dug a wine-trough,
and he built a tower;
and he was leasing it out to tenant-farmers,
and went abroad on a journey.
- 2 And he sent a slave to the tenant-farmers, at the time (of harvest),
in order that he might receive from the tenant-farmers some of the fruits of
the vineyard.
- 3 And taking him, they beat (him),
and sent (him) away empty-handed.
- 4 And again he sent to them another slave;
and that one they struck on the head and dishonored.
- 5 And he sent another,
and they killed that one;
and many others,
some of whom indeed beating,
but others of whom killing.
- 6 He still was having one, a beloved son.
He sent him last to them, saying that
They will respect the son of mine.
- 7 But then those tenant-farmers said to themselves that,
This one is the inheritor;
come, let us kill him,
and the inheritance will be ours.
- 8 And taking (him), they killed him;
and they threw him out, outside of the vineyard.
- 9 What [therefore] will the lord of the vineyard do?
He will come, and he will destroy the tenant-farmers;
and he will give the vineyard to others.
- 10 Did you not even read the scripture, this one:
A stone which the builders rejected,
this one has been made into a corner-stone?
- 11 This happened through (the) Lord,
and it is marvelous in our eyes.
And they were seeking to take hold of him;
and they feared the crowd.
For they knew that he spoke the comparison concerning them.
And leaving him, they departed.

Matthew 21:33-41,

- 33 Hear another parable / comparison:
 A man was being a house-manager who planted a vineyard,
 and put around it a wall,
 and dug in it a wine-press,
 and built a tower,
 and rented it to (tenant-) farmers,
 and went away.
- 34 So then when the time of the fruits drew near,
 he sent his servants to the (tenant-) farmers, to receive his fruits.
- 35 And the (tenant-) farmers, receiving his servants,
 beat one, and then killed one,
 and then another they stoned.
- 36 Again he sent other servants, more than the first ones,
 and they did to them in the same way.
- 37 And then later he sent to them his son, saying,
 They will respect my son.
- 38 But then the (tenant-) farmers, seeing the son, said to themselves,
 This one is the inheritor;
 come, let us kill him and we will have his inheritance!
- 39 And taking him, they threw hm out,
 outside of the vineyard and killed (him).
- 40 When, therefore the lord of the vineyard comes,
 what will he do to those (tenant-) farmers?
- 41 They say to Him, wicked men, he will wickedly destroy;
 and he will rent the vineyard to other (tenant-) farmers,
 who will give back to him the fruits in their seasons!

Luke 20:9-19,

- 9 Then He began to speak to the people, this comparison / parable:
 a [certain] person planted a vineyard;
 and he rented it to (tenant-) farmers;
 and he traveled for long times.
- 10 And in season, he sent to the (tenant-) farmers a servant,
 so that they wouls give to him some of the fruit of the vineyard.
 But then the (tenant-) farmers sent him away, having beaten (him), empty
 (-handed).
- 11 And he again sent another servant;
 but then also that one, having beaten and treated shamefully,
 they sent away empty(-handed).
- 12 And he again sent a third (servant);
 but then also having injured this one,
 they threw (him) out.
- 13 So then the lord of the vineyard said, What shall I do?
 I will send the son of mine, the loved one;
 perhaps they will respect this one.
- 14 But then the (tenant-) farmers, having seen him,
 were reasoning with one another, saying,

- This one is the inheritor;
let us kill him, so that the inheritance may become ours!
- 15 And having thrown him outside of the vineyard,
they killed (him).
What therefore will the lord of the vineyard do to them?
- 16 He will come and he will destroy these (tenant-) farmers;
and he will give the vineyard to others.
So then they, having heard, said, Let it not happen!

Luke 13:6-9,

- 6 But then He was speaking this comparison / parable:
A certain person had a fig-tree which had been planted in the vineyard of
his;
and he came, seeking fruit in it, and did not find (any).
- 7 So then he said to the vineyard-keeper,
Look--(it has been) three years since I am coming seeking fruit in this fig-
tree, and I am not finding (any);
[therefore] cut it out--
for what reason should it also waste the ground?
- 8 Then he, answering, says to him,
Master, leave it this year also,
until (the time) when I can dig around it,
and throw (in) manure;
- 9 and perhaps indeed it will make fruit for the coming (year);
but then if not, indeed, you will cut it out.

3. **Leviticus 26:14-20; Deuteronomy 28:15-35; Micah 6:12-16**

Leviticus 26:14-20,

- 14 And if you will not listen to Me,
and will not do all these, My commandments;
- 15 and if you reject My statutes;
and if your innermost being loathes My commandments,
so as not to do all My commandments,
to break My covenant;
- 16 also I, I will do this to you people;
and I will cause to visit upon you sudden terror,
the wasting disease and the fever,
consuming (your) eyes
and causing (your) innermost-being to waste away;
and you will plant your seed for nothing;
and your enemies will eat it.
- 17 And I will set My face against you people;
and you will be struck (dead) before your enemies;
and those who hate you will chase after you;
and you will run away—
and there is no one chasing after you.
- 18 And if (having gone) as far as (experiencing) these things,
you will not listen to Me;
and I will continue to discipline you people,
seven-fold for your missings-of-the-mark.
- 19 And I will shatter your strength's pride;
and I will make your heavens like the iron,
and your land like the bronze;
- 20 and your power will end in nothing;
and your land will not give its produce;
and the land's tree(s) will not yield their fruit.

Deuteronomy 28:15-35

- 15 And it will happen, if you (singular) will not listen to YHWH your God's voice,
to keep for doing all His commandments and His statutes
which I am commanding you today—
and all these curses will come upon you,
and they will overtake you:
- 16 Cursed (are) you in the city,
and cursed (are) you in the field!
- 17 Cursed (is) your basket
and your kneading-bowl!
- 18 Cursed (is the) fruit of your womb,
and (the) fruit of your ground,
offspring of you cattle,
and lambs of your flock!

19 Cursed (are) you in your coming in,
 and cursed (are) you in your going out!
 20 YHWH will send forth against you the curse,
 the confusion, and the frustration,
 in every sending-forth of your hand which you will do,
 until you are exterminated,
 and until your being destroyed quickly
 before (the) evilness of your deeds
 by which you forsook Me!
 21 YHWH will cause the pestilence to stick to you,
 until His finishing you from upon the ground
 which you are coming to possess / dispossess.
 22 YHWH will strike you with the wasting disease
 and with the fever and with the inflammation
 and with the violent heat
 and with the sword
 and with the blight (of your crops)
 and with the mildew;
 and they will pursue you until your destruction!
 23 And your heavens which (are) over your head will become bronze;
 and the earth which is beneath you, iron!
 24 YHWH will make your land's rain powder and dust;
 from the heavens it will come down upon you,
 until you are exterminated!
 25 YHWH will make you (to be) defeated before your enemies;
 by one way you shall go forth to (meet) him;
 and by seven ways you shall flee before him;
 and you shall be for an object of terror
 to all kingdoms of the earth.
 26 And your carcass will be for food
 for every bird of the heavens,
 and for beast(s) of the earth;
 and there is none frightening (them away).
 27 YHWH will strike you with boil(s) of Egypt,
 and with the tumors
 and with the scab(s) and with eruptive disease
 which you will not be able to heal.
 28 YHWH will strike you with madness
 and with blindness
 and with bewilderment of heart.
 29 And you will be groping at the noon-time,
 just like the blind person gropes in the darkness;
 and you will not cause your ways to prosper.
 And you will be surely oppressed and robbed, all the days;
 and there is no deliverer.
 30 You will become engaged to a woman,
 and another man will ravish / sleep with her;
 you will build a house,

- and you will not live in it;
you shall plant a vineyard,
and will not begin (to eat its fruit)!
- 31 Your ox (will be) slaughtered before your eyes,
and you will not eat from it(s meat);
your donkey will be seized from before you,
and it will not return to you;
your flock(s will be) given to your enemies;
and there is no savior / deliverer for you!
- 32 Your sons and your daughters (will be) sold to another people,
and your eyes (will be) seeing and failing for them all the day;
and there is no strength for (the) God of your hand.
- 33 Your land's fruit and (the produce) of all your labor;
another people that you did not know will eat
and you shall be only oppressed and crushed,
all the days!
- 34 And you will be maddened
from (the) sight of your eyes which you shall see.
- 35 YHWH will strike you with severe eruption
upon your knees and upon the legs,
which you will not be able to heal,
from the sole of your foot
and as far as your head's crown!

Micah 6:12-16, where YHWH speaks to Samaria through Micah:

- 12 (The city) whose wealthy people were filled with violence
and her inhabitants spoke falsehood
and their tongue (is) deceitful in their mouth!
- 13 And also I, I made you sick, striking you,
making you desolate over your missings-of-the-mark.
- 14 You will eat we will not be satisfied,
and your hunger (?) in your stomach;
and you will remove (valuables), and you will not preserve (them);
and what you do preserve, I will give to the sword.
- 15 You shall sow, and you will not reap / harvest;
you will tread olive(s), and will not anoint (yourselves with) (olive-) oil;
and (you will tread grapes for their) new wine,
and you will not drink wine.
- 16 And he kept for himself Omri's statutes,
and every deed of Ahab's house;
and you (plural) walked by their counsels—
so that I might give you over for a waste / desolation,
and her inhabitants for (an object of) hissing,
and My people's reproach you will bear!

