

Isaiah Chapter 50
YHWH Has Divorced His People Because of Their Sin–
But Not Because of Any Divine Weakness--
He Is the All-Powerful Creator!
YHWH's Servant Welcomes Divine Instruction
and Is Not Rebellious, But Willingly Suffers for YHWH.
The Servant Will Guide Those in Darkness Into the Light–
But All Human Lights Will Fail

50:1¹

1

Alexander states concerning **chapter 50** that it “contains no entirely new element, but a fresh view of several which have already been repeatedly exhibited. The first of these is the great truth, that the sufferings of God’s people are the necessary fruit of their own sins, **verse 1**. The second is the power of [YHWH] to accomplish their deliverance, **verses 2-3**. The third is the servant of [YHWH], his mission, his qualifications for it, his endurance of reproach and opposition on account of it, **verses 4-9**. The fourth is the way of salvation and the certain doom of those who neglect it, **verses 10-11**.” (P. 245)

North entitles **verses 1-3** “Separation, Not Divorce.” He comments that “In this passage the theme of the relationship between Yahweh and His people as that of Husband and wife (see **Isaiah 49:14-21**) comes into clear focus. The ‘mother’ is Zion and Yahweh’s address is to her children...They might suppose that their plight was due to one of the other of two causes: (1) Either Yahweh had formally divorced their mother, or (2) He had sold the children to some creditor. Neither of these suppositions had the slightest reason...

“(1) According to the Deuteronomic law, a husband might divorce his wife at will. But so that he might not divorce her in a fit of temper or without due deliberation—once she had been married to another man he could never remarry her—he had to write her a certificate of divorce (**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**; compare **Jeremiah 3:1**; **Mark 10:2-4**). The question, *Where, pray, is your mother’s writ of divorce?* Is rhetorical and expects the answer, ‘There never was one!’ Yahweh had not divorced Zion, though He had broken off relations with her (compare **Hosea 3:3**).

“(2) If a man was distrained [his property taken in order to pay a debt] by his creditors, he might...sell his children as slaves [to pay the debt] (compare **Exodus 21:7**; **Nehemiah 5:1-5**; **Matthew 18:25**), or, if he died, a creditor might take his children as slaves (**2 Kings 4:1**). There is a note of reproof in the question *which of My creditors is it to whom I sold you?* Any suggestion that Yahweh had ‘creditors’ is preposterous. The reason for the exile was His people’s *iniquities* and *flagrant disobedience* (literally ‘rebellions’), not any cooling of affection or straitened circumstances on His part...

(continued...)

¹(...continued)

“The only thing that now stands in the way of Zion’s restoration is her own want of faith. When Yahweh sends His prophet with the message of pardon [see **Isaiah 40:1-2**; compare **43:25; 44:22**] He meets with no response. **Verse 2** doubtless reflects the experience of the Prophet and is a good example of the ‘word of the Lord’ which is also a word of the prophet.” (Pp. 198-99)

Slotki comments on **verses 1-3** that “Israel need not fear that his exile had created a permanent break in his covenant relation with God. Though he was banished, no bill of divorcement was ever written; and though long oppressed by his enemies, no bill of sale was ever made out. Israel, in expiation for his sins, was only temporarily sold and banished, and God will surely redeem him when the appointed time comes.” (P. 246)

Oswalt states that “**50:1-3** seems to continue the thought of **49:14-26** closely, functioning as a conclusion to the two points being made there: God’s desire and His ability to save the Israelites from their sin...In [these three verses], God again addresses the claim that He has arbitrarily rejected His people, making their situation hopeless (compare **40:27; 49:14**). He declares that what happened to them was brought on them by their own rebellion (**verse 1**)...

“Then He addresses a second issue; why does no one respond to His invitation to believe in His grace and power (**verse 2a**)? Finally, He testifies to that power in language with apparent allusions to the exodus (**verses 2b-3**).” (P. 317)

He also states that in **verse 1**, “God now puts a rhetorical question of His Own to His people...One can understand the portent of the question in two possible ways. One is to say that even though the people feel that they have been divorced and sold, they have not—they are still God’s family...Thus there was no certificate of divorce. Furthermore, since God had no creditors, the Hebrew people had not been sold to satisfy any debt of God.

The flaw in this argument is that the latter part of the verse says specifically that the mother was put away and the children were sold. Furthermore, the claim that the certificate of divorce was given only when no fault could be shown is directly contradicted by **Jeremiah 3:8**, which says that Samaria was given a certificate of divorce and sent away because of her adulteries. Thus the idea that the verse offers hope to the people because they had never been formally divorced and had not been sold to satisfy a debt seems fatally flawed.

“The other interpretation is this: the people are saying that it is God’s fault that they are in captivity: God had arbitrarily rejected them and, at the same time, had been forced to give them up by His stronger competitors, who could make him ‘pay up.’ God tells them to produce the certificate of divorce, on which they will see that it was because of their rebellions that God had put away their *mother*, Zion. Furthermore, He calls them to show any creditor who could have forced him to sell them against His will. No, it is their fault (*for your sins*) that they have been put away and sold, not God’s...

(continued...)

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

In this way YHWH spoke:

¹(...continued)

“Thus the issue is not whether God is at fault for their situation; it is how can the iniquities and rebellions that they have committed be atoned for so that they can return to Him?” (Pp. 317-18)

But we repeat—the fact is that God has already completely forgiven them—as the Divine message has announced in **40:1-2**. We do not understand why Oswald does not see this—except for his conviction that forgiveness will only come to Israel through the work of the suffering servant, Jesus Christ, that blinds his eyes to the good news of **Second Isaiah**. What do you think?

Westermann entitles **50:1-3** “Where is you mother’s bill of divorcement?” He states that it is a trial-speech, “in which there is confrontation between Yahweh and Israel, Yahweh being the Defendant.” Compare **42:18-25** [?]; **43:22-28**; **50:1-3**. (P. 223)

He comments on **verse 1** that “As is often the case with Deutero-Isaiah’s trial speeches, the opening leads straight into the legal process...The charge made by the plaintiff stands at the head. Israel accuses God of having repudiated her, in spite of the fact of having bound Himself to her in the covenant. This charge is contained in the two metaphors in verse 1a, b...

“The first metaphor is found in a community lament in **Jeremiah 14:19**: ‘Have You utterly rejected Judah? Does Your soul loathe Zion?’ The second [is found] in **Psalms 44:13**^{Heb} / **12**^{Eng}: ‘You have sold Your people for a trifle.’ **Verse 10** gives the rejoinder to the charge...I was obliged so to act—because of Israel’s transgression. This is exactly the same as **43:28**...It is the sins of Israel as a nation, and not those of the present generation of Israelites, that were the cause of the Divine judgment.” (P. 224)

Knight comments on **chapter 50:1** that “Our chapter divisions are of course artificial. Deutero-Isaiah is here proceeding with the question of estrangement between Mother Zion and her Husband which occupied his attention in the previous chapter...What God is saying here to Zion’s children—in the plural—is this: ‘I didn’t divorce your mother (when I sent Zion into exile), and the proof of that is that she can show no certificate to that effect.’ Such a certificate was necessary by the Law of Moses (**Deuteronomy 24:1-4**; compare **Jeremiah 3:8**, where the Northern Kingdom is given such a certificate, but not Zion)...

“Within Israel it was only the husband who could divorce his wife. All that the woman could do was to be unfaithful [what does this statement mean? We say, all that the woman had to do was to displease her husband!]. No divorce...became legal unless the husband presented his wife with such a certificate. ‘I had to deal with you in some way for your transgressions,’ God explains. ‘It was not that I was bankrupt of love. Yet I had to make a plan. My plan was to allow you to leave home, and so to let you suffer a just punishment (**40:2**) for your unfaithfulness, but I vowed to have you back thereafter.’” (P. 143)

אֵיזָה סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת אִמְכֶם

Where (is) this² certificate of divorce³ of your (plural) mother,⁴

אֲשֶׁר שְׁלַחְתִּיהָ

with which I sent her away?⁵

2

The opening interrogative phrase of YHWH's question is אֵיזָה, "Where this?" Oswalt notes that "The combination of אֵי with אֵיזָה at the beginning of the question is something like 'Where, then,' or 'Where, I wonder.'" (P. 315; quoting Waltke-O'Connor, **Syntax**)

3

Alexander translates the phrase סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת ['scroll / writing / document of cutting-off] by *the bill of divorcement*, and states that it means literally "the writing of excision or repudiation, translated in the **Septuagint** by τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ ἀποστασίου [the document of abandonment / notice of divorce], which form is retained in the **New Testament (Matthew 5:31)**. The Hebrew phrase denotes the legal instrument by which the Mosaic law allowed a husband to repudiate his wife (**Deuteronomy 24:1-3**)." (P. 246)

4

The phrase "of your mother" refers to the nation of Israel, of which the people of Israel were its "children." Alexander comments that "The persons addressed are individual members of the church or nation; their mother is the church or nation itself." (P. 246)

5

Slotki states that "The answer expected is 'Nowhere.' Never was such a bill [of divorce] written. There has been separation, but not a divorce." (P. 246)

North holds the same view: "Clearly, the mother has been 'sent away'...But she has not been formally divorced," adding that "The regulative [ruling procedure] term is 'the writ of divorce' (סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת) and the plain sense of the rhetorical question is that no such writ was ever executed." (Pp. 198-99)

Slotki and North's view flies in the face of **Jeremiah 3:8a**, in which YHWH is depicted as saying,

And I saw that for all (these) causes which back-turning Israel was sexually
immoral,
I sent her away;
and I gave a writing of cutting-off / divorce (סֵפֶר כְּרִיתוֹת) to her...

Obviously there is a difference between **Jeremiah** and **Second Isaiah** on this. Knight claims that "Israel" in **Jeremiah 3:8a** is referring to northern Israel, not to Judah--see footnote

(continued...)

אוּ מִי מִנוֹשֵׁי

Or who (is it) from among My creditors

אֲשֶׁר-מָכַרְתִּי אֶתְכֶם לּוֹ

to whom I sold you people?⁶

⁵(...continued)

1. This sounds like getting around the problem rather than solving it. It sounds to us like Second Isaiah includes northern and southern Israel together as one in his view of the nation, just like Ezekiel does in his **chapter 37**. In **Jeremiah 2-3** both northern Israel and southern Israel (Judah) are placed under indictment—and while the metaphor of divorce is applied specifically to northern Israel, which has been “sent away” into Assyrian exile because of her unfaithfulness to YHWH, the same charge of unfaithfulness is raised against southern Israel as well, with the threat of eventual exile, which has occurred in the time of Second Isaiah. Thus, in terms of the metaphor, southern Israel / Judah has likewise been divorced by YHWH. Of course, there was never a literal divorce decree given by YHWH to either northern or southern Israel—it is only a prophetic metaphor, used to help the Israelites understand what has happened to them.

6

Slotki comments that “A father, driven by poverty, had sometimes to sell his children to his cruel creditors (compare **2 Kings 4:1**; **Nehemiah 5:5**); but God has no creditors. Israel, therefore, was never sold.” (P. 246)

But of course! The analogy / metaphor of God being subject to Israel’s traditional procedures of marriage and divorce, of His having to write a “bill of divorce” in order to separate Himself from Israel is only an analogy / metaphor, that should never be taken literally. In the same way, for YHWH to speak of His “creditors” is another analogy / metaphor that should not be understood literally. And as the passage goes on to depict YHWH as saying, it was not YHWH Who divorced Israel, but Israel itself, who by her iniquities and transgressions caused the separation from YHWH that is being depicted analogically and metaphorically as “divorce.” Under the analogy / metaphor, it is the children of the marriage that have caused the breakup of their Father and mother!

What do you think? Do you believe that these statements concerning Divine divorce and selling to Divine creditors should be taken literally? We are reminded of the way Christians have understood the death of Jesus in terms of God paying Satan a ransom in order for human sins to be forgiven.

“Essentially, this theory claimed that Adam and Eve sold humanity over to the Devil at the time of the Fall; hence, justice required that God pay the Devil a ransom to free us from the Devil's clutches. God, however, tricked the Devil into accepting Christ's death as a ransom, for the Devil did not realize that Christ could not be held in the bonds of death. Once the Devil accepted Christ's death as a ransom, this theory concluded, justice was satisfied and

(continued...)

הֵן בְּעֹנֹתֵיכֶם נִמְכַרְתֶּם

Look⁷—by / for the iniquities of yours you were sold;

וּבַפְּשָׁעֵיכֶם שְׁלַחַת אִמְּכֶם:

and by / for your transgressions your mother was sent away!⁸

50:2⁹

⁶(...continued)

God was able to free us from Satan's grip.” Robin Collins, **Understanding Atonement: A New and Orthodox Theory** (Grantham, Messiah College) from **Wikipedia** (6/26/2015)

Alexander emphasizes “the figurative nature of the passage. If [YHWH’s] casting off His people might be likened to a Jewish husband’s repudiation of his wife, then the same thing might be likened to a Jewish debtor’s sale of himself or his children to his creditors, without any greater incongruity or contradiction in the one case than the other. The general idea of rejection is twice clothed in a figurative dress, first by emblems borrowed from the law and custom of divorce, and then by emblems borrowed from the law and custom of imprisonment for debt.” (P. 248)

7

North translates הִנֵּה, normally “lo!” or “behold”, by “Nay!” as “distinct from the normal הִנֵּה... generally calls attention to some fact on which action is taken, or a conclusion is based.” (Pp. 199-200)

8

That is, Don’t blame YHWH for what has happened to you—accept your own responsibility for what has happened! You are the ones who didn’t want to live in YHWH’s loving care and demanding presence; you are the ones who rebelled! You are the ones who broke up the family!

9

Oswalt comments on **verses 2-3** that “Instead of trying to fix the blame on God and resigning themselves to their hopeless situation, the people should be committing themselves to the power and grace of their Creator / Redeemer. This thought is expressed by a second question that God addresses to them. Why, when He had come to them, and called to them, had no one come forward to meet Him or answer His call?... He is more than ready to help them, to restore them to Himself, if they will only admit their guilt and receive the deliverance that His mighty hand has procured for them.” (P. 319)

We agree with Oswalt, and think that this is true to the entire **Book of Isaiah**, which depicts YHWH coming to His people, calling to them, inviting them to enter into dialogue with Himself, to “reason” with Him, and promising that if they will just do that, their sins will be forgiven. The Almighty God can do just that—see **Isaiah 1:18**, and **55:1-3**. The opening statement of **Second Isaiah** is that God has completely forgiven His exiled people (**40:1-2**). It

(continued...)

⁹(...continued)

is only their lack of faith and trust in Him, that keeps them from seeing this, and living by its life-giving reality.

Oswalt adds that although the powerful hand of YHWH will be seen in His “suffering servant” (**52:13-53:12**), “that is one of the ways in which God comes with His offer of reconciliation, but it is by no means the only one. Isaiah’s own message from start to finish has been an appeal for the people to take hold of God’s outstretched hands, but over and over only a small remnant responded. Nor was this Isaiah’s experience alone; it was that of all the prophets. Thus this verse is talking of the revealing, beckoning character of God as that character has been revealed since the beginning of time...and will be until the end of time. Jesus Christ as the servant is the apex of that activity, but He is not the sum total of it..

“God lacks neither the desire nor the power to deliver His people. The only issue is whether they will step forward in repentance and faith to meet Him when He comes and answer when He calls.” (Pp. 319-20) We say the only issue is whether they will believe the good news of His total forgiveness and live by its light. What do you say?

Watts comments on **verses 2-3** that “Yahweh’s charge that they had been unresponsive reflects a major motif through the entire [**Book of Isaiah**] (compare **29:16; 30:12-18; 63:5; 65:1-5**). It is Yahweh’s turn to show unbelief. He cannot believe that anyone would think that past events of judgment and exile meant that He was important to do anything about them. He cites His mighty acts of old to refute any such suggestion.” (P. 193)

Watts explains the overall meaning of **49:22-50:3**: “The scene focuses on Yahweh and Jerusalem. It picks up both Yahweh’s determination to move ahead with restoration and Jerusalem’s skepticism that this is possible. She shows neither faith nor knowledge—no sign that she has heard or understood anything about God’s plan for her redemption.

“The Lord of all the earth and all history finds little or no faith among His Own people in His Own city. Jesus encountered a similar situation centuries later (**Luke 18:8**).” (P. 193)

Knight comments on **verse 2** that “What Zion did not realize when she went a-whoring after other lovers (compare **Hosea 1-3**) was how much she hurt her Lord by so doing. In love He ‘came in to her,’ but she had gone; when ‘He called, no one answered.’ In this one line we are shown the pathos of the empty home, the loneliness of God’s heart, the pain at the center of the universe. Yet here we get only a glimpse of that pain, for this is only a foretaste of a later theme. Instead, God asks at this point whether Israel realizes that, as the Almighty, He could compel His wife to return home to Him if He so decided. The Almighty could do anything. He ‘could dry up the sea,’ and thus reverse the order of creation (**Genesis 1:9**). He ‘could turn rivers into a desert,’ leaving death and devastation behind Him.” (P. 143)

Westermann comments on **verse 2** that “After God’s rejoinder...the plaintiff remains silent. This is shown by **verse 2a**...[‘For what reason did I come, and there was not a man? I called, and there was no one answering?'] This decides the case. **Verse 2b** is an expansion of the rejoinder. As in **40:12-14**, its presupposition is the other aspect of Israel’s charge, that

(continued...)

מִדּוּעַ בָּאתִי

For what reason did I come,

וְאִין אִישׁ

and there was not a man?

קָרָאתִי וְאִין עֹנֶה

I called, and there was no one answering?¹⁰

⁹(...continued)

God no longer had the power to help her. Here, too, Deutero-Isaiah refers to a community lament, e.g., **Jeremiah 14:9**, ‘like a mighty man who cannot save’...

“What is to overcome this doubt about God’s might is His all-embracing power as Creator...God is the One Who in every quarter, even the most remote, has power to effect mighty transformations: at a spot where, from time immemorial, there was the sea or a stream, He can violently intervene all of a sudden, and make it into a desert. **Psalms 107** is a striking example of this...

“Israel can rest assured that this God Who effects such violent transformations in His creation can deliver and release her by the might of His arm.” (Pp. 224-25)

10

Alexander translates these first two lines of **verse 2** by “Why did I come, and there is no man? (Why) did I call, and there was no one answering,” and then gives a lengthier translation to clarify the thought: “Why, when I came, was there no one (to receive me), and, when I called, no one to answer me?” He comments that “In themselves, the words imply nothing more than that God had come near to the people, by His word and providence, but without any suitable response on their part...The general truth which it teaches us is, that God has never, and will never put away His people even for a time, without preceding disobedience and alienation upon their part.” (P. 248)

We add that the statement attributed to YHWH is overstatement. When YHWH came, there were some, even if only a tiny group, that did hear and respond—for example, the Prophet Isaiah’s response as depicted in **chapter 6**. Along with Isaiah came a group of his disciples, described by Isaiah as “signs and portents in Israel from YHWH of Armies”—see **8:16-18**. And, we believe, all of those who chose to answer YHWH’s call, received His blessing of forgiveness as described in **1:18**, and as **Isaiah 6** states concerning Isaiah himself. By far the majority did not so respond; but those who did became those disciples of Isaiah who witnessed to the truth of Isaiah’s message—just as did the later Second and Third Isaiah.

הַקְצֹר קְצָרָה יְרִי מִפְּדוּת

Was My hand indeed shortened¹¹ so as not to be able to ransom / redeem?¹²

11

With regard to the question concerning YHWH's hand being "shortened," North states that No prophet would ever have committed himself to the sentiment of the psalmist, in **Psalm 77:10**. (P. 200)

And I said, It is my sickness / weakness--
Years of (the) Most High's right hand.

New Jerusalem translates by:

And I said, 'This is what wounds me,
the right hand of the Most High has lost its strength.'

Moffatt translates by:

This is my grief,
that the Most High no longer has the strength He had!

Alexander comments that "Shortness of hand or arm is a common oriental figure for defect [lack] of power." (P. 248) See:

Isaiah 59:1,

Look—YHWH's hand was not short,
so as not to save / deliver;
and His ear was not heavy,
so as not to listen / hear!

Numbers 11:23,

And YHWH said to Moses, Will YHWH's hand be short?
Now you will see whether My word will encounter you or not!

12

The noun פְּדוּת, **pedhuth**, "ransom / redemption," occurs only here in the **Book of Isaiah**. It is from the root פָּדָה, which means "to redeem," "to ransom," and which occurs in the **Book of Isaiah** at **1:27**; **29:22**; **35:10** and here, **51:11**.

North comments that "Although in commercial transactions 'ransom' was accomplished by the payment of an assessed [evaluated] price] (**Exodus 13:13**), when God ransoms Israel, any such thought is entirely absent. Yahweh paid nothing to the Egyptians when He 'ransomed' His people from them (**Deuteronomy 7:8**)." (P. 200)

(continued...)

וְאִם־אֵינֶנְךָ לְהַצִּיל

And was there not in Me strength to deliver?¹³

תֵּן בְּנִעְרָתִי אַחֲרֵיב יָם

Look—by My rebuke I will dry up a sea,¹⁴

¹²(...continued)

We wish that Christian theologians had paid attention to this fact that YHWH can ransom without having to pay anyone—and not gone into their lengthy explanations of how God had to pay the devil the ransom of Jesus in order to save people!

13

YHWH is depicted as questioning the people of Israel why they had not responded to His coming to them. Was it because they believed He didn't have the power to redeem / deliver them? And immediately YHWH begins to point to His power over nature in the remainder of this **verse 2**, and in **verse 3**, calling upon Israel to observe the powerful Divine acts in nature—similar to what is found in the **Book of Job**, for example in Elihu's speech in **chapter 37**, and especially in the Divine speech to Job in **chapters 38-41**. There is no lack of power in YHWH!

North translates the infinitive verb לְהַצִּיל, our “to deliver,” by “to set (you) at liberty,” and comments that it is “a mild translation of a verb...which commonly expresses forcible capture, snatching away (**Genesis 31:9**; **1 Samuel 17:35**; **Amos 3:12**).” (P. 200)

14

North comments on this line, continuing through **verse 3**, that they mean “Yahweh, Whose power over nature is absolute, is fully capable of delivering His people...There are two interpretations of **verses 2b-3**. Some think that the rebuking of the sea refers to the stilling of the ‘deep’ (תְּהוֹם) at the creation (**Genesis 1:2**), or to Yahweh's universal control of nature; others that the reference is to the crossing of the Red Sea at the exodus (compare **Exodus 14:21**; **15:8**)...The obvious interpretation is that the passage—like **51:9-10**...and **Psalms 74:12-17**—has in mind creation, command of nature, *and* redemption (the exodus)...

“Similarly, **verse 3** well describes sandstorms such as the exiles in Babylonia must have seen, storms which may darken the sky more completely than an eclipse of the sun, and be reminiscent also of the plague of darkness (**Exodus 10:21-23**)...The assurance conveyed by the passage is that present deliverance of His people is no more difficult for Yahweh to accomplish than His deliverance of them in the past, or, for that matter, His disposition of universal nature in the present.” (P. 199)

Compare **Psalms 106:9**,

And He (YHWH) rebuked (the) Sea of Reeds, and it dried up,
and He led them in the depths [בְּתֵהוֹמוֹת] like the desert.

אֲשִׁים נְהַרֹּת מִדְּבָר

I will make rivers (in the) desert;

תִּבְאֵשׁ דְּגַתָּם מֵאֵין מַיִם

their fish will stink¹⁵ from lack of water,

וְתָמַת בְּצַמָּא:

and will die from thirst!

50:3 אֶלְבִּישׁ שָׁמַיִם קִרְרוֹת

I will clothe heavens (with) darkness;¹⁶

וְשָׂק אֲשִׁים כְּסוּתָם:

and I will place sack-cloth (for) their covering.¹⁷

50:4¹⁸

15

Where our Hebrew text reads the verb תִּבְאֵשׁ, “will stink,” **Rahlfs** translates by “they will dry up.” 1QIs^a agrees with the Greek, reading תִּיבֵשׁ, “it will dry up.”

16

The noun קִרְרוֹת, “darkness,” “gloom,” occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, but the related verb קָרַר, occurs many times with reference to “becoming dark.” See, for example, **1 Kings 18:45** and **Jeremiah 4:28**.

17

Knight comments on **verse 3** that God “could even produce the blackness of chaos and thus reverse His gracious purpose of creative redemption. But that way of redeeming the world is unthinkable. For God is not like that. His method is to use a servant who is wholly dedicated to his mission.” (Pp. 143-44)

18

Watts entitles **50:4-51:8** “A Student’s Tongue.”

Slotki comments on **verses 4-9** that they depict “The servant’s suffering and perseverance, and his trust in God’s protection. The word ‘servant’ does not occur in this passage, but the description of his characteristics is strikingly similar to those of the servant in **42:1-4; 49:1-6, 52:13-53:12**. The servant is said to be Isaiah himself, but others regard him as the personification of the saintly minority of Israel, the faithful remnant.” (P. 247)

(continued...)

¹⁸(...continued)

North entitles **verses 4-9** "The Gethsemane Of The Servant." He comments that "**Verses 4-9** of this passage sound like a soliloquy...It seems clear that **verses 10-11** are intended as a follow-up to **verses 4-9**, but they have little or no literary affinity either with the generally recognized 'Servant Songs' or with the proph-ecy as a whole...

"The speaker in **verses 4-9** begins by saying that Yahweh has given him a disciplined tongue and ear, and he asserts that he has not been disobedient to his Divine commission. He has been subjected to physical violence and insult. He expects that renewed and even more severe trials await him, but he is confident that his Vindicator (Yahweh) will justify him and that his adversaries will come to naught.

"Many of the older (pre-Duhm [B. Duhm, **The Book of Isaiah Translated and Explained** German, Goettingen, 1892, 4th edition 1922] commentators thought that **verses 4-9** were autobiographical, that the speaker in them was the prophet (Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah) ...This view has naturally been revived by those who think that the servant of Yahweh was the prophet himself. But whether or not the prophet was the servant, the passage almost certainly embodies something of the prophet's experience, and there is reason to believe that Deutero-Isaiah encountered opposition." (P. 202) North refers to **Isaiah 45:9-13**, but we see nothing in that passage concerning opposition to the prophet—only statements concerning pots criticizing their potter, i.e., criticism of YHWH the great Potter.

Westermann entitles **50:4-9** "The Third Servant Song." He comments that "Of all Deutero-Isaiah's servant songs this is probably the easiest to understand...The form which serves as base for **50:4-9** is not the individual lament, but the individual psalm of confidence. **Verses 7-9** are a broad development of the two motifs of such a psalm, the confession of confidence and the certainty of being answered...

"The **Old Testament** contains laments on the part of a mediator, whose subject is suffering in consequence of the office of being a mediator (Moses, Elijah and Jeremiah)...

"The background of **verses 5b-6** is grievous assaults that had been made on the servant. The equivalent in **Jeremiah** is his complaints about his enemies, **11:19, 21; 18:18; 20:10**...[Jeremiah's complaints] bring us very close to the servant songs. Both tell of commissioning with the word of God which involves its recipients in loneliness and suffering...

The one who in **verses 5b-9** confesses his unshakeable confidence in God is a man commissioned with an office of the word; he says so in **verses 4-5a**...**Verses 4-9** represent the confession of confidence spoken by a mediator of the word." (Pp. 227-28)

Knight comments on **verse 4** that "This ideal, wholly dedicated servant now speaks. And his first word is 'Yahweh,' not 'self,' and his second is *has given*. The servant thus witnesses to Yahweh alone and to His acts of grace." (P. 144)

Westermann comments that "The whole of **verse 4** (together with the first clause of **verse 5**) is the utterance of a man whose being is governed by hearing and speaking. In both

(continued...)

אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה

My Lord YHWH¹⁹

נָתַן לִי לְשׁוֹן לְמוֹדִים

gave to me²⁰ a tongue of those taught / disciples,²¹

¹⁸(...continued)

respects he is 'like a disciple,' which means that in both his hearing and his speaking he is concentrated on God, and that these have God as their source...The servant has to be awakened, aroused, in order to hear the word. The word which he has to pass on is addressed to the weary, the prostrate. As such, Israel is not in a position to hear the word. Therefore, like the servant, she, too, must be aroused before she can hear the word that applies to her case...

“**Verses 4-5a**...are, every single word of them, an exact description of prophecy in Israel...The prophetic office can be described in just the way in which it is summed up here, as hearing and speaking 'like a disciple'...The special characteristic of the prophetic office is the very fact that the prophet wakens his ear 'morning by morning,' and must continually allow it to be opened by God, in order to have 'an answer to give to the weary'...

“Elsewhere in the **Old Testament** לְמוֹד, **limmud** only designates the disciple of a human master or teacher...Its use here to describe the reception of God's word directly from Himself points to the unique way in which precisely the prophets of the eighth century speak of the word which they receive and have to transmit...This is absolutely the same prophetic office as we find in the case of the writing prophets before Deutero-Isaiah...God's servant is here described as God's 'disciple'...This expresses the most important feature in the picture of the servant. But it is not the complete picture. The servant is more than a *limmud*.” (Pp. 228-29)

¹⁹

Whereas Deutero-Isaiah usually has simply YHWH, here in **chapter 50** he uses the longer phrase אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה, “my Lord YHWH” four times, in **verses 4, 5, 7 and 9**. This longer phrase is also found in **Deutero-Isaiah** at **40:10; 48:16; 49:22 and 52:4**.

Watts notes that “Those who pronounce ‘Yahweh’ as *Adonai* ‘my Lord’ have a problem here and in **verses 5, 7 and 9** with the repetition. Some Greek manuscripts repeat κύριος κύριος ‘Lord Lord’ as did Luther.” (P. 195)

²⁰

Whereas the prophet has been telling what YHWH said to him (see **50:1**), here in **verse 4** the language is the prophet's own.

²¹

Levy and North translate by “an expert tongue.” Knight states that “*The tongue of those who are taught*, or disciples’ language reveals that the speaker is aware of the need to learn,

(continued...)

לְדַעַת לְעוֹת אֶת־יַעֲף דְבַר

to know to help / sustain²² (the) weary (with) a word.²³

²¹(...continued)

and has the humility to confess that need...

“This word for disciples, לְמוֹדִיִּים, **limmudiyim**, occurs substantivally only in the **Book of Isaiah**. Its first occurrence is at **8:16-17**. There the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem declares:

16 Bind up a testimony;

seal *torah* / teaching בְּלִמּוּדֵי, among my students.

17 And I will wait for the YHWH,

the One hiding His face / appearance from Jacob’s house;
and I will wait for Him.

“Then the word does not occur again until here, except for two occurrences in **Jeremiah**, where it is virtually an adjective, and where it must be translated by ‘trained’ or ‘accustomed.’ Some suggest that Isaiah of Jerusalem really coined a new and special term in this word, and sought to demonstrate by means of it that it was his own disciples who were eventually to be the ‘remnant’ that ‘will return’ (**Isaiah 10:21**). For Isaiah evidently did not think that the time was then opportune for the full scale prophetic word of redemption to enter into the life of Israel. That was why he had to seal it among his disciples until God’s good time.

If these scholars are right, then Deutero-Isaiah believed himself to be the second Isaiah, and as such authorized by God to declare that the time had come at last when the seal could be broken. If this is so, then Deutero-Isaiah believed that the seed of Isaiah’s disciples was now to be identified with the whole (remnant) servant people of God; for, as he declares later at **54:13** ‘All your sons will be Yahweh’s disciples,’ in this sense of the word.” (P. 144)

22

This is the only place in the **Hebrew Bible** where this verb, לְעוֹת, **la(uth)** occurs, and its exact meaning is therefore dubious. Translations vary from “to speak a word in season,” to “to speak timely words,” to “to sustain...with a word,” to “to give a word of comfort,” to ἐν καιρῷ, literally “in time / season,” evidently reading לְעֵת, “for a time.” **Brown-Driver-Briggs** suggests that לְעוֹת is an Aramaism meaning “to help.” Slotki suggests “to fortify, encourage.”

23

Watts observes that “דְבַר ‘a word’ stands alone in the sentence without connection. It is best understood as an adverbial usage, ‘with or by a word.’” (P. 196) The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) resolves the problem by interpolating a phrase before it: ἡνίκα δεῖ εἰπεῖν λόγον, “when it is necessary to speak a word.”

(continued...)

יַעֲרֵר בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר

He rouses / wakes up morning by morning,²⁴

יַעֲרֵר לִי אָזְנוֹ

He rouses / wakes up for me an ear,

לְשִׁמְעַת כָּל־מוֹדֵדִים:

to hear like those who are taught.²⁵

50:5 אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה פָּתַח־לִי אָזְנוֹ

My Lord YHWH opened an ear for me,

וְאֲנֹכִי לֹא מְרִיתִי

and I, I was not disobedient;

אֲחֹר לֹא נִסְוֵגְתִּי:

I did not turn away.²⁶

²³(...continued)

Knight comments that “the servant does not learn merely for the sake of learning, but in order to *know how to* preach a *word* to—or possibly ‘help’—*the weary* ‘to waken them up.’ For the servant has learned from Yahweh, learning it in fact day after day, to be compassionate towards his *weary* fellow men to the point of searching out those who are sleeping the sleep of death.” (P. 144) This last phrase, “sleeping the sleep of death” is not in the text, but is Knight’s theological addition to the text.

²⁴

The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) omits the second “morning” in the Hebrew phrase בְּבֹקֶר בְּבֹקֶר, “in the morning, in the morning,” meaning we think, “every morning” (so, **Brown-Driver-Briggs**). North holds that “The meaning of ‘in the morning’ is ‘as soon as it begins to be light.’ Compare **Genesis 29:25; 44:3** [where the Hebrew has הַבֹּקֶר אֹר, ‘the morning light’]; **1 Kings 3:21**. The servant is no laggard [a person who makes slow progress].” (P. 203)

²⁵

Slotki thinks the meaning is “after the manner of disciples,” and comments that “The servant is God’s disciple.” (P. 247) North translates by “so that I am skilled.” (P. 203)

²⁶

Slotki comments on **verses 5 and 6** that the servant “implicitly obeyed...He boldly delivered God’s message to the misguided people, though he incurred thereby persecution

(continued...)

50:6 גוֹי־נִתַּתִּי לְמוֹכִים

My back I gave to those striking / flogging,²⁷

²⁶(...continued)

and humiliation...The servant readily acquiesces in the sufferings and disgrace inflicted upon him in the course of the performance of his mission.” (P. 248)

North translates לֹא נִסּוּגְתִי at the close of **verse 5** by “nor have I turned back,” stating that this means “(not) been apostate” or “treacherously unfaithful.” (P. 203)

Knight comments on **verse 5** that “Once again the servant emphasizes that *the Lord God* is doing this, not he. His task could possibly have rendered him *rebellious* or refractory [stubborn, unmanageable], or frightened him enough to make him run away; but he had withstood the temptation.” (P. 144)

Westermann comments that “**50:4-9** resembles a psalm of confidence...while the lament is still there in the background, it is no longer uttered, because what it complains about has been allayed...The servant avers that, in spite of all attacks and abuse, he has been true to his task...Here the cry of the mediator so passionately and wildly voiced by Jeremiah is silenced...The lament of the mediator who is attacked and defamed because of his task here develops, for the first time, into assent to and acceptance of this suffering...In spite of the attacks and abuse, the servant has not rebelled against receiving the word from God nor has he shrunk from coming forward with it to those for whom it was designed...

“These two lines in **Isaiah 50:6** are truly revolutionary in their importance, not only in the history of Israel, but in the ancient world in general, because in terms of that world’s thought what the servant here says of himself, that he allowed himself to be smitten, means that he regards the attacks, blows and insults as justified.” (Pp. 229-30)

Do you agree with Westermann at this point? We say, Perhaps..but we think he is overstating his case concerning the “revolutionary” nature of these lines. Those to whom YHWH has revealed Himself throughout the ages have faced opposition—attacks, blows, and insults—and have not turned back. We think of the story of Joseph, or Moses, or Jeremiah. But, as Westermann notes, the laments of Jeremiah are noticeably absent in Deutero-Isaiah.

27

We note that whereas the verb נִכַּחַ, “to strike” oftentimes means a fatal blow, “to kill,” here it does not mean fatal striking, but harsh, painful striking.

וְלַחְיֵי לְמֹרְטִים פְּנֵי

and my cheeks to those pulling out²⁸ (the beard of) my face.²⁹

28

The Hebrew phrase here, לְמֹרְטִים, **lemoretiym**, means literally “to those making bare.” Compare a similar usage at **Nehemiah 13:25**,

And I contended with them;
and I cursed them;
and I struck some of their men,
and I made them bald / pulled out their hair;
and I caused them to swear by the God
they would not give their daughters to their sons;
and they would not take up some of their daughters
for your sons, and for yourselves!

29

Slotki comments that what is meant is the hair of the servant’s beard. “Forcible removal [pulling out by the roots] of the beard was regarded as one of the worst forms of degradation.” (P. 248) Compare:

Isaiah 7:20,

In that day, my Lord will shave
with the razor hired in regions across (the) Euphrates,
with Assyria’s king—
the head and pubic hair,
and also the beard will be swept away.

2 Samuel 10:4, the story of Hanun’s shaving off the beards of David’s emissaries, and cutting of their trousers, to embarrass them.

Ezra 9:3, where Ezra tells how, upon hearing of the intermarriages of the exiles with foreign wives:

And as I heard this word / report, I tore my garment and my robe;
and I pulled out some hair of my head, and my beard--and sat (there),
appalled!

Nehemiah 13:25, where Nehemiah tells how he reacted to the intermarriages:

And I contended with them; and I cursed them; and I struck some of their men,
and I made them bald / pulled out their hair;
and I caused them to swear by the God
they would not give their daughters to their sons;

(continued...)

לֹא הִסְתַּרְתִּי מִכְּלָמוֹת וָרֶק:

I did not hide³⁰ from insults and spit.³¹

²⁹(...continued)

and they would not take up some of their daughters
for your sons, and for your people!

We wonder, in the light of these statements in **Ezra / Nehemiah**, whether the servant of YHWH who speaks here in **chapter 50** is one of those returned exiles whose beard was being pulled out by these orthodox Jews demanding the exiles to conform to their interpretation of the Mosaic teaching and separate from their non-orthodox wives and children. What do you think?

North comments that **verse 6**, “however we may account for it, is a startling anticipation of the maltreatment of Christ on the morning of the crucifixion...**Psalm 129:1-3** is often quoted by those who see in the servant the nation Israel, as an illustration of the way in which a community can be personified as an individual.” (P. 203)

- 1 Greatly did they show me hostility from my youth!
Let Israel now say,
- 2 Greatly did they show me hostility from my youth!
Moreover, they did not prevail over me!
- 3 Upon my back ploughers plowed;
they lengthened their furrows / ploughing grounds!

³⁰

The Hebrew phrase here, לֹא הִסְתַּרְתִּי, “I did not hide,” is different in 1QIs^a which has לֹא הִסִּירוֹתִי, “I did not turn away.” The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has οὐκ ἀπέστρεψα, “I did not turn away.”

³¹

For the **New Testament's** depiction of the suffering inflicted on Jesus in His crucifixion, see **Mark 10:34; Matthew 26:67; 27:30** (where the spitting in His face is mentioned, but nothing about pulling out His beard). In addition, see **Matthew 5:39**, where Jesus teaches His followers that when anyone strikes them on the cheek, to turn to them the other cheek. There is no quotation of, or explicit reference to, **Isaiah 50:6** in the **New Testament**. For the act of spitting as a gesture of contempt, see:

Deuteronomy 25:9, which states concerning the man who refuses to take his deceased brother's wife and raise up children for his brother:

And his brother's wife shall draw near to him,
in the eyes of the officials / elders;
and she shall take off his sandal from upon his foot;
and she shall spit in his face;

(continued...)

³¹(...continued)

and she shall answer, and she shall say,
Like this may it be done to the man
who will not build up his brother's house!

Job 30:10,

They abhor me;
they got far from me;
and from my face
they did not withhold spit.

North comments that "Since Duhm (see footnote 17) it has been usual to regard **verses 4-9** as the third cycle of four Servant Songs. It differs from the other three in that the word 'servant' does not occur in it [and its meter differs], but these are not serious objections. We need some middle term between **49:1-6** and **52:13-53:12** if we are to understand how the situation in the latter has come about." (P. 202)

We say, Perhaps...But **49:1-6** is followed by **verse 7** which is apparently addressed to the servant of **verses 1-6**, as one "deeply despised, abhorred by the nation, indicating, we think, that the servant of YHWH confronts opposition and radical hatred because of his mission and ministry—just the sort of thing that is continued to be described even more vividly here in **50:6**.

Knight comments on **verse 6** that "Far from taking this ignominious [deserving or causing public disgrace or shame] course [we assume, being rebellious], the servant had actually tried a new thing in the face of the world's violence—obviously again as taught by Yahweh...The vast majority of peoples in all ages of the world have known only one answer to the problem of commanding obedience—strike your servant and compel him to obey. However, this servant had learned from Yahweh neither to run away nor to rebel, not even to hit back, but instead to bare his back to the *smiters'* lash..."

"The most telling insult that the East could perpetrate on a man in order to insult him and so to render him inferior, or even just to put him in his place, was to pluck the hairs from his beard (compare **Nehemiah 13:25**). But the servant had now learned to turn the other cheek. He had never even tried to escape from the insulting spittle (compare **Numbers 12:14; Deuteronomy 25:9; Matthew 26:67**) of a world that could only show its inverted [turned upside down] inferiority complex by mean and ugly acts—instead he quietly accepted them..."

"Why did he do all this? We are not told as yet. Deutero-Isaiah's brilliant psychological understanding of his reader's mind prompts him to withhold that secret till the moment of the great denouement [the final part of a narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together and explained] that he plans for later on..."

(continued...)

50:7 וְאֲדַנִּי יְהוָה יַעֲזֹר-לִי

And my Lord YHWH will help me;

עַל-כֵּן לֹא נִכְלַמְתִּי

therefore I was not humiliated;³²

³¹(...continued)

“Now how did Deutero-Isaiah conceive of this extraordinary new approach to the problem of man’s inhumanity to man? Of course it is utterly new. He did not find it in the Tammuz ideology that some expositors have adduced [see our end-note 1 on **Isaiah 44**]. As one of a vast concourse, he may well have stood and watched the Babylonian high priest ceremonially strike his monarch on the face. The latter then symbolically fell dead. For the king of course had to die and be raised to life again: such an act of sympathetic magic would make the world of nature come alive again with the advent of the autumn rain. Though such a ceremony was undoubtedly a very ancient one among the Canaanite people, we are not as certain today as scholars were a generation ago that the king in Babylon every underwent such an indignity...

“But if he did, he accepted it as a staged ceremonial act, knowing that the eyes of all men were upon him—Deutero-Isaiah’s included, perhaps. This act may indeed have set our prophet thinking and reasoning. But Deutero-Isaiah’s portrait here of the servant as he humbly accepts the obloquy [strong public criticism or verbal abuse] of a vicious-minded humanity belongs in the sphere of Divine revelation—for no human being had ever yet consistently acted in this way since the world began.” (P. 145)

32

Slotki explains that this means “by the complexity of the problems and doubts which his undeserved insults and suffering had called forth. Why should the servant of God be subjected to ill-treatment? Why should persecution be the reward of doing good? Why should the wicked domineer the righteous?” (P. 248)

Westermann comments that “The words say something that is strictly impossible [we think this is overstatement]—the servant is certain that God is on his side, although his own conduct as expressed in **verse 6** apparently indicated the reverse [we do not see this]. This is the start of the new factor—his conviction that God Himself wills his servant’s suffering and its acceptance. The glaring contradiction between **verse 6** and **verse 7** extends even to the words used [we see no ‘glaring contradiction’—do you?]....

“What is emphasized is that God is to bring the past and present acts of hostility and abuse into constructive connection with the servant’s justification [?]. The latter accepts them because he knows that this is God’s will for him.” (Pp. 230-31)

עַל־כֵּן שָׂמֵתִי פָנַי כְּחַלְמִישׁ

therefore I placed / set my face like the flint-rock,³³

וְיָדַעַתְּ כִּי־לֹא אֶבּוֹשׁ:

and I knew that I will / would not be ashamed.³⁴

50:8³⁵

33

Slotki explains that this points to the servant's "unbreakable determination." (P. 248)

Westermann states that "in the case of the servant the hardness (or power of resistance) derives from his acceptance of the blows and shameful treatment with which he meets. It is this complete acceptance, and it alone, that enables him to make his face hard as flint." (P. 231)

34

Knight comments on **verse 7** that "We are not told *why* the servant acts this way—except that Yahweh had taught him so—but we are told *how* he can face the pain and obloquy spoken of in **verse 6**. He can do so because *the Lord God helps me*." (P. 146) YHWH's servant has the deep conviction that standing for the truth, regardless of the opposition and suffering that it may call forth, will in the long run be victorious.

It has been my experience that many a young aspiring minister, reading these passages in **Isaiah 40-55** concerning the "servant of YHWH," has been given great courage to stand up for truth in the face of unrelenting opposition, because of just such expressions as this. This was my own experience when working in an interracial congregation in the 1960's and 70's in North Carolina, where I faced strong opposition and threats for reaching out to the black community, but refused to let it intimidate me.

35

North comments on **verse 8** that "The language in this and the next verse is unmistakably that of the law-court." (P. 203) We say that **verses 8-9** are a challenge to anyone who wishes to challenge the speaker—let them come forward, let them take issue with him—and with YHWH, his Helper! The speaker is totally confident that YHWH will prevail in any such confrontation, especially with the adversaries who will soon fade away!

Knight comments on these two verses that "Yahweh is in fact *with* His servant in a very potent manner. He stands beside him as his Advocate in court...It would take the accusers so long to stand and make their case that they would *wear out like a garment*... Now a new picture of the servant is building up. At **verse 5** we saw that he could be God's completely willing servant. But as such his obedience is not to be construed as merely passive. His response to evil is that of God Himself, viz., positive and recreative. **Verse 7** confirmed this view, for here we read that with God's help he is able actively to turn the other cheek toward wicked men. Finally, at **verse 9** we discover that the servant's secret is an inner spring of joy and assurance." (P. 146)

(continued...)

קְרוֹב מִצְדִּיקַי

One pronouncing me just³⁶ (is) near;

מִי־יִרִיב אִתִּי

who will contend with me?³⁷

³⁵(...continued)

Westermann comments on **verses 8-9a** that “The certainty that God is on his side (corresponding to the ‘certainty of being answered’ in the **Psalms**) is now expressed in a different, and very forceful, way, by means of terms taken from a legal process. The same form was used by Paul in a similar situation to express the same conviction (**Romans 8:31-33**)...**Verse 8** is a challenge to take part in a legal contest. The servant summons those who oppose him—the same people as smite him and shame him and spit upon him—to come into court, for he is convinced that God justified him and that no one can condemn him...

“This is only comprehensible if the situation is seen from the opponents’ point of view. In their eyes, the contest is already decided, the servant’s case is lost, and he had admitted defeat by the acceptance of the blows and acts of shame. In the opponents’ view there is nothing left to settle. Seen in this light, a special significance attaches to the words which express the servant’s certainty at the beginning of **verse 7** and reappear at the end in **verse 9a**, ‘the Lord Yahweh helps me.’ How is this to come about?

“In such a situation, is there the slightest possibility of any justification or rehabilitation for the servant? In **50:4-9** the question is left open. The last line (**verse 9b**) expressing the servant’s conviction that his opponents who can now mock and smite him with impunity will perish, is after all no real answer to the question...The question is left open and points forward to the final servant song [meaning **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**].” (Pp. 231-2)

We do not follow Westermann in this. We do not think “the question is left open.” Rather, we think the question is answered in the conviction of the servant that YHWH will be his helper, and he will win the contest. What do you think?

³⁶

The hiphil participle מִצְדִּיקַי means “one who pronounces one righteous,” “who vindicates,” “a vindicator.” North comments that “The servant anticipates that he may be the victim of an unjust accusation. But YHWH will be at his hand, not only to conduct his case, but to secure, and pronounce, his acquittal.” (P. 204)

³⁷

The question means, Who is willing to go before the judges in the city gate, and argue their case against Me? Or, Who is willing to go before the court, and answer my charges, or respond to my defense? Evidently the servant has been charged with a crime—perhaps that of associating with unclean people, or intermarriage with a foreign wife, and is being threatened because of it.

נַעֲמֵדָה יַחַד

Let us stand up together!³⁸

מִי־בַעַל מִשְׁפָּטִי

Who is master of my justice / my adversary?³⁹

יָגֵשׁ אֵלַי:

Let him draw near to me!⁴⁰

50:9 הֲנִי אֲדַנִּי יְהוָה יַעֲזֹר־לִי

Look—my Lord YHWH will help me;⁴¹

38

North comments that this means, “Let us take our stand together, i.e., before the judgment seat [we say the court of elders sitting in the city gate], as the daughters of Zelophehad did before Moses, Eleazar and the rulers (**Numbers 27:2, 5**).” (P. 204)

39

The phrase here is **בַּעַל מִשְׁפָּטִי**, “baal / owner / husband / lord of my justice / legal decision.” North holds that this means “my opponent.” He comments that “It could presumably mean ‘my legal adviser,’ had there been any such in **Old Testament** times. But quite obviously it means ‘my antagonist’ or ‘my accuser.’” (P. 204) That is, someone who “owns’ or has a legal case against me.”

40

The servant of YHWH is not shy, and is not seeking to avoid confrontation with anyone bringing charges against him. He challenges any such person to draw near. Compare:

Isaiah 41:1b,

Let them draw near—then they will speak together!
Let us draw near for the justice / judgment / decision!

41

Compare:

Isaiah 41:10,

You shall not be afraid, because I (am) with you!
You shall not be dismayed, because I (am) your God;
I will strengthen you, surely I will help you,,
surely I will support you, with My right hand of My righteousness!

Isaiah 41:13-14,

(continued...)

מִי־הוּא יִרְשִׁיעַנִי

who (is) he (who) will condemn me?⁴²

הֵן כָּלֶם כְּבִגְדֵי יִבְלוּ

Look—all of them like the garment will wear out;⁴³

⁴¹(...continued)

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

42

The Hebrew phrase is מִי־הוּא יִרְשִׁיעַנִי, “Who (is) he (who) will condemn me?” North translates by “win a verdict against me,” and suggests “have me condemned as guilty.” He comments that “we are not necessarily to think of the servant as charged with a breach of the moral law. The verb can be used of civil relations (**Exodus 22:9**^{Heb} / **8**^{Eng}) or even of a trumped-up charge (**Job 34:17**; **Psalms 94:21**; **Proverbs 17:15**) of the kind brought against Jesus...That such perversions of justice could be common enough is clear from **Amos 5:12**,

Because I knew your many transgressions,
and your mighty missings-of-the-mark--
you who show hostility to a person in right-relationship,
who take a bribe
and they thrust aside needy people in the gate!

“Again, the Servant is not describing a situation in which he actually finds himself. He is using forensic language to describe a situation he anticipates, or imagines, for himself. He expresses confidence that Yahweh will deliver him.” (P. 204)

We see no reason why the servant cannot be describing an actual situation in which he found himself, especially if he was married to a foreign woman, and was the father of “children of foreignness,” who were being charged by the **Ezra / Nehemiah** group of orthodox (early Pharisaic) Jewish leaders with violation of Mosaic law. If this is a matter that prepares the way for the description of the servant in **52:13-53:12**, it is not just something imaginary. It is real!

43

For this matter of “wearing out like garment, compare:

Isaiah 51:6,

Lift up to the heavens your eyes,
and look to earth below!

(continued...)

עֵשׂ יֹאכְלֵם:

a moth will devour them!⁴⁴

50:10⁴⁵

⁴³(...continued)

Because heavens like smoke are dissipated / dispersed in fragments;
and the earth like the garment wears out,
and its inhabitants like a gnat / in like manner will die.

And My salvation / deliverance will be for long-lasting time,
and My right-relationship will not be dismayed!

Psalm 102:27, contrasting the physical universe with YHWH, states:

They will perish, and You will remain!
And all of them like the garment will wear out,
like the clothes You will change them,
and they will pass away.

⁴⁴

For this matter of a moth devouring, compare:

Isaiah 51:8,

Because like the garment a moth will devour them,
and like the wool a moth (synonym) will devour them!
And My right-relationship will be to long-lasting time,
and My salvation / deliverance to all generations!

Job 13:28, where Job is deploring his terrible situation:

And he [a human being], like rotteness wears out,
like a garment a moth ate.

⁴⁵

Slotki comments on **verses 10-11** that they are “an addendum [supplement] to the passage on the servant, bringing assurance and encouragement to the faithful and threats and a warning to the Godless.” (P. 249)

Knight comments on **verse 10** that “Because of his total obedience, the servant actually empties out his own self. In this way he leaves room for God to act through him, without any block or hindrance. He who *fears the Lord*—the most representative **Old Testament** expression for our modern phrase ‘being religious’—now has the chance to know the Lord’s will. This is because Yahweh’s will has been materialized, so to speak, in *the voice of His servant*. In obeying the servant, the God-fearer will now find that he *relies*, or literally *leans upon* his God, directly! In obeying the servant’s voice, he will *trust* not in the servant but *in the name of the Lord*.” (P. 146)

(continued...)

מִי בְּכֶם יִרָא יְהוָה

Who among you people (is) a fearer / reverer of YHWH,⁴⁶

שֹׁמֵעַ בְּקוֹל עַבְדּוֹ

One listening⁴⁷ to His servant's voice?

אֲשֶׁר הִלְךְ חַשְׁכִּים

Who walked (in the) darkness,

וְאֵין נֹגַהּ לּוֹ

and there is no brightness for him;

יִבְטַח בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה

he will trust in YHWH's name,

וַיִּשָּׁעַן בְּאֱלֹהָיו

and he will lean on his God.⁴⁸

⁴⁵(...continued)

Watts states that in **verses 10-11** “Darius appears to vindicate him [evidently referring to YHWH’s ‘teacher’], appealing to all who trust Yahweh that he, Darius, was Yahweh’s choice (compare **49:5-7**) and threatening rebels with a dose of their own medicine.” (P. 197)

⁴⁶

Westermann holds that “those who fear God” are those who will later be called “proselytes.” “These are the proselytes, in **51:4-6** the heathen.” (P. 234)

⁴⁷

Where our Hebrew text has the qal masculine singular active participle שֹׁמֵעַ, “hearing,” or “listening,” the Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has the aorist imperative ἀκουσάτω, “let him hear!”

⁴⁸

North states that in **verse 10** “we have...a description of ‘Anyone who fears the Lord, obeying the word of His servant, who (nevertheless) gropes in darkness and has no glimmer of light’...To this there follows the admonition, ‘Let him trust in the name of the Lord...’ This is exactly what the Servant has done in a similar distressful situation, and the verse is an admirable summary, and application, of **verses 4-9**.” (P. 205)

We understand the verse to be a sort of “invitation” of YHWH’s servant to others who truly believe in YHWH, and want to follow the servant as YHWH’s spokesperson, who is

(continued...)

50:11 הֵן כְּלַכְּם קִדְחֵי אֵשׁ

Look—all of you people kindling a fire,

מֵאֲזֵרֵי זִיקוֹת

equipping / girding yourselves⁴⁹ with torches—

⁴⁸(...continued)

calling them to a life of faithfulness in the midst of darkness, to a life that may well face extreme opposition from those who are opposed to the servant and his teaching.

We think the servant may well be Deutero-Isaiah himself, who is leading in the fight against the much more powerful legalistic, segregationist party, later to be headed by **Ezra / Nehemiah** in a program of segregation and casting-off of those who have intermarried with foreigners, and who have children whom that program rejects as “unclean” and “unworthy” of fellowship in the religious community. It is the same fight that Jesus had to fight throughout His ministry, as the Pharisees constantly questioned and condemned Him for His loving acceptance of those they considered unclean and unworthy of entrance into the religious community, a fight that ended in His brutal crucifixion and death.

Knight comments that “Both Yahweh and the servant are here [in **verse 10**] spoken of in the third person. This verse is therefore Deutero-Isaiah’s own note appended to the direct speech of the servant that precedes it. In this note, moreover, he makes an extraordinary equation: the voice (i.e. words) of the servant *is* the word of God; he who obeys the voice of the servant finds himself leaning upon *God*. The servant thus enables those who walk in darkness and have no light of their own (**verse 11**) to find their way to God Who is the light Himself (compare **Isaiah 9:2**), there to lean on Him in utter dependence...

“This word of Deutero-Isaiah’s is therefore much more than a historical note about the Israelites in the darkness of Babylonian prisons (compare **49:25**). It is a theological utterance, based indeed upon the contemporary historical situation, but one which thereafter has repercussions throughout the whole of biblical revelation.” (Pp. 146-47)

Westermann comments that “The people addressed are those who ‘walk in darkness,’ for the reason that as yet they do not know the light of salvation...The promise (**verse 10b**) is made to the one who pursues salvation and seeks Yahweh. For the present he can trust in the name of Yahweh and rely on Him as his God. A similar promise to proselytes is to be found in **Isaiah 56:3-8**.” (Pp. 234-35)

49

The Hebrew piel construct masculine plural participle מֵאֲזֵרֵי, **me)azzerey** means “girding themselves,” from the root אָזַר. But how do you gird yourself “with torches”? We take it in the sense of “equipping yourselves.” Some suggest changing to מֵאֲזֵרֵי, “giving

(continued...)

לְכוּ בְאֵוֶר אֶשְׁכֶם

Walk in the light of your fire,

וּבְזִיקוֹת בְּעֵרְתֶם

and with torches you lit!⁵⁰

⁴⁹(...continued)

light,” from the root אָוַר. The Greek translation (**Rahlfs**) has κατασχύετε, “you (plural) strengthen (flames). Is this another mark of the enigmatic nature of the prophetic message?

⁵⁰

North comments on **verse 11** that “The picture in this verse is a vivid one, of those who start a fire by means of friction or flint...The fire gets out of control and rings them round so that they cannot escape from it.” (P. 205) But we see nothing in the verse concerning the fire getting out of control and creating a circle of fire around them from which they cannot escape. Do you?

Rather, we understand YHWH’s servant to be telling people to light their torches, and to walk in their light. The people are viewed as being in darkness, and as being told to do what it takes to bring light into the darkness.

What do you think? Is this correct? Or does their lighting of individual torches mean that they will fail to walk in the light of YHWH’s word through the servant, walking instead in their own light that they have created? Is the servant being cynical in telling them to light their own torches?

Westermann comments on **verse 11** that “In contrast to the promise made to those who fear Yahweh and obey His servant’s voice, the transgressors have judgment proclaimed to them. The way in which this is put is difficult and obscure [Yes! This is the nature of the prophetic message; it is characterized by obscurity and puzzling enigmas!], but one can gather its gist. It is addressed to those who ‘kindle fire and set brands alight.’ As the **Psalms** show us, these are metaphors to describe the action of the transgressors against the righteous [see **Psalm 47:5-6**^{Heb} / **4-5**^{Eng}]...

“Walk into the glow of your fire and into the brand which you set alight’...is to say, they are to perish by means of the weapons they had used against the righteous. **Verse 11c** expressly adds that this retribution comes from Yahweh and leads to the transgressors’ death.

“Those who come from the dark and seek salvation are promised that they will obtain it in the name of Yahweh, but the transgressors are threatened with destruction by their own weapons, those that they had used against the righteous.” (P. 235)

מִיָּדִי הִיָּתְהָ-זֹאת לָכֶם

This has happened to you from my / My hand,⁵¹

לְמַעַצְבָּה תִּשְׁכַּבּוּן:

in a place of pain you will lie down!⁵²

51

It is difficult to determine the speaker—is this still the language of the prophet, or is it YHWH’s language? The fact seems to be that the prophet is so caught up in the Divine message that we have to say “both / and,” rather than either / or in statements like this. The same thing continues in **chapter 51**, where it is sometimes obvious that YHWH is depicted as speaking, and at other times the language is apparently the prophet’s.

If it is the servant of YHWH’s voice, we take it to mean that their following the voice / instructions of the servant has gotten them into the situation they are facing, in which they must light their torches / lamps. And if it is YHWH’s voice, it contains the assurance that even though they are in such darkness, with the need to light their torches, they do not need to be afraid, for they are following YHWH’s will, and He will provide for their future, even if it means facing not only darkness, but also death. What do you think?

52

This line in Hebrew is לְמַעַצְבָּה תִּשְׁכַּבּוּן, literally “to a place of pain (so, **Brown-Driver-Briggs**) / torment (**Holladay**) you (plural) will lie down / die.” Translations vary:

King James, “ye shall lie down in sorrow.”

Tanakh, “You shall lie down in pain.”

New Revised Standard, “you shall lie down in torment.” Similarly, **New International** and **New Jerusalem**.

Rahfs, ἐν λύπῃ κοιμηθήσεσθε, “in pain you will lie down / die.”

North, “you shall die and go to a place of torment.”

North defends his translation stating that “The construction of the sentence is pregnant and its closest analogies are:

Isaiah 51:14,

One bowed down made haste to be released;
and he will not die in the pit,
and he will not lack (for) his bread!

Job 7:21, where Job asks Shaddai / Eloah (both ancient Semitic names for God),

And why will You not pardon my transgression,
and cause my guilt to pass over?

(continued...)

⁵²(...continued)

Because now, I will sleep in the dust;
and You will seek for me, and I am not.

“In the present context **מַעַצְבָּה** means ‘a place of (fiery) torment,’ very nearly ‘Gehenna’ [see **Isaiah 66:24** and **Mark 9:47-48**]...**Verse 10**, then, is a commentary on the security of those who fear Yahweh and obey His Servant; **verse 11** is a commentary on the fate of those who are recalcitrant [obstinately uncooperative].” (P. 206)

We think this is reading a great deal into the phrase, which may only mean lying down in death. At any rate, there can be no doubt that the servant of YHWH is telling those who are willing to follow his voice that they will be faced with darkness, and may well lie down in death as they follow him. **Chapter 51**, by contrast, assures those following the servant that they will nonetheless be victorious, even if they have to face darkness and death in following him! What do you think?

Knight comments on **verse 11** that “Finally Deutero-Isaiah turns and addresses the pagan world, Babylonians and all others [but we ask, where is there any indication in this text that he has changed audiences, any indication that he is not still speaking to his fellow Israelites?]. Probably he includes even the Persians because of their interest in fire worship [and, we ask, where is there anything said about ‘fire worship’? We see none]. How stupid it is to worship a fire which you yourselves have kindled, he says. Compare **44:16**, [where he is speaking of the other half of the wood from which he has formed an idol:

Half of it he burned in a fire;
over half of it he eats flesh.
He roasts a roast and is satisfied;
also he is warm, and he says,
Aha! I warmed myself; I saw a flame!
(But this says nothing about worshiping the flame!)]

For Yahweh is the true light, and so Yahweh is the source of all fire, not Ahura Mazda nor any other...Deutero-Isaiah thus connects the concept of the true light available to those who trust in Yahweh (**verse 10**) with a terrible reality also connected with light and fire. That reality is that fire destroys as well as gives light. Deutero-Isaiah is therefore saying to the heathen world the kind of thing that we today might put in a proverb, such as ‘He who plays with fire will get burned’ or ‘Be sure you sin will find you out’...

“There is a law of life that ensures that in the end evil devours those who worship it. And if such is in fact a law of life, then it comes from God. This truth Deutero-Isaiah now expresses pictorially. For along with Isaiah his predecessor, Deutero-Isaiah knows that it is God Who is the real furnace, so that to enter the fire is to meet with God. See:

Isaiah 30:33,

(continued...)

⁵²(...continued)

Because a Topheth / burning-place is prepared from earlier time;
also it has been made ready for the king, made deep, made wide;
its pile of fire-wood and numerous trees—
YHWH's breath like a wadi of brimstone / sulphur burning in it!

Isaiah 31:9,

And his rocky-cliff will pass away from fear;
and his princes will be dismayed by / from a standard / signal—
a saying of YHWH,
Who has a fire in Zion,
and has a furnace in Jerusalem!

Isaiah 42:25,

And He poured out upon him (the) heat of His anger,
and (the) strength / fierceness of battle.
And it set him on fire all around,
and he didn't know (it);
and it burned him,
and he did not take (it) to heart.

Isaiah 47:14,

Look—they were like stubble / chaff—a fire burned them up.
They will not deliver their own livess from (the) power of a flame!
There are no hot coals for warming them, a flame to sit near.

Isaiah 66:24,

And they will go out, and they will look on (the) corpses of the men, the ones
transgressing against Me—
because their worm will not die, and their fire will not be quenched;
and they will be an abhorrence to all flesh.

“The doctrine of hell is just as integral to the **Old Testament** revelation as it is to the **New**. For the God of Whom Paul can say, ‘Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap’ (**Galatians 6:7**), is the same God Deutero-Isaiah came to know and trust in the days of the Babylonian exile, and Whom he found to both light and fire at once.” (P. 147)

But in fact there is no such word as “hell” in the **Hebrew Bible** or in the **Greek New Testament**. We would change Knight's statement to “The doctrine of fiery Divine punishment is just as integral to the **Old Testament** as it is to the **New**.” What do you think?