

## Isaiah Chapter 54, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

54:1<sup>1</sup> רְנִי עֲקְרָה לֹא יִלְדָה

<sup>1</sup>Motyer comments on **chapter 54** and **55** that “Response is the[ir] keynote. Many Divine acts are spoken of but the only human acts envisaged are responses: to sing (**54:1**), to enlarge the tent (**54:2**), to come to the banquet (**55:1**), to seek the Lord (**55:6**). The general relationship with **52:13-53:12** is clear [we ask, How so? The servant of YHWH is not so much as mentioned in these two chapters!] In his saving work, the servant has done everything, removing sin, establishing in righteousness, creating a family [Motyer describes the act of the servant as having happened in the past; but his view is that the servant is none other than Jesus Christ, who in terms of the **Book of Isaiah** is some seven or five centuries in the future]. The way is therefore open for response, pure and simple: to sing over what someone else has accomplished (**54:1**), to enjoy a feast for which someone else has paid (**55:1**).” (P. 444)

But this is not at all clear. If Motyer’s interpretation of the suffering servant is correct, it has to do with something that will only happen in the far future when Jesus the messiah-servant comes—which has little relevance for the Israelite returnees in their situation. What these chapters are based on is YHWH’s act already completed—which **Isaiah 40:1-2** has declared as good news. YHWH has forgiven the Israelites, and reclaimed them as His people—this is the resounding message that Second Isaiah proclaims, and this is what they are being called on in these two chapters to respond to—not to something far off in the future when the Christian messiah has come.

Slotki entitles **chapter 54** “Vision of Zion Restored.” He comments that “Zion’s suffering and humiliation will be forgotten in her glorious future.” He states that **verses 1-3** depict “The return of the exiles to mother Zion,” the “desolate city.” (P. 265)

North entitles **verses 1-10** “Zion Restored and Repeopled.” He comments that this passage is “A summons to one who had lately borne no children, to rejoice in expectation of, and to make preparations for, a renewal of her wifeness and motherhood. The ‘barren one’ is Zion, though she is not actually named. In the coming days she will bear more children than she did before her temporary separation from Yahweh her husband. Yahweh lays Himself under obligation as solemn as when He declared to Noah that never again will He be severe with His restored and compassionated Zion.

“The theme of the passage is similar to that of **44:1-5, 49:14-21; 50:1; 51:1-3**; but the emphasis is upon the increase of Zion’s children *in*, rather than upon the return of her exiled children *to*, the homeland...

“**Verse 1** is quoted in **Galatians 4:27**, but allegorically of the heavenly Jerusalem; a striking example of the way in which the **New Testament** sometimes interprets the **Old Testament**...

“The ‘deserted’ wife is a figure for Zion during the exile, the ‘married’ is the city before the exile. In **verse 2** the figure is that of a nomad tent-dweller who must enlarge

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her tent and lengthen the ropes and strengthen the stakes that keep it erect and taut. The population of the city will spread (פָּרַץ, literally 'burst,' compare **Genesis 28:14; Exodus 1:12; Job 1:10**) outwards to her deserted daughter towns (compare **40:9**)... The resettlement will be effected without hindrance. Once more Zion is to 'have no fear' (**41:10, 13-14; 43:1, 5; 44:2**). She will forget the shameful conduct (compare **Jeremiah 2:25-26; 3:25**) of her youth before the exile, and remember no more the disgrace of her 'widowhood' in exile (**verse 4**). Her Husband is none other than her Maker, Yahweh of hosts (see...**44:6**), and her Redeemer (see...**41:14**) is the Holy One of Israel." (Pp. 247-48)

Westermann entitles **54:1-10** "Sing, O Barren One!"

He comments that "This poem is an exceptionally impressive example of Deutero-Isaiah's poetic art. Yet, it is proclamation throughout, and what gives the utterance its brilliant tone is the perfect unity achieved between poetry and proclamation. But to appreciate it fully, we must be familiar with the whole of **Deutero-Isaiah**. A whole range of motifs is here fused into something quite new: a hymn of praise ('sing, O barren one'), a promise of salvation ('fear not') and a proclamation of salvation ('my grace shall not depart from you'), are made into a unified whole...

"In the last analysis the reason for this change is God Himself: His wrath is changed into fresh compassion which is now permanent and everlasting...The expansion (**verses 9-10**) is in harmony with the exceptional nature of **chapter 54** as compared with all that precedes it—the thing proclaimed is not God's act of deliverance, but the new state of salvation to which this gives rise...In this final proclamation, Israel's lamentation is turned into a shout of joy." (Pp. 270-71)

Knight states concerning **chapter 54** that "By setting the figure of the perfect servant alongside the reality before his eyes, that is, the sinful, empirical servant Israel, now bemoaning her fate as she is in Babylon, Deutero-Isaiah reveals with clarity the grace of Israel's God. For Israel now knows exactly what she has been called to do and be and must recognize at once that she is in fact totally unlike what she is meant to be...

"Even as the consciousness of this unlikeness enters her soul, God stoops, not to point the finger of scorn, but to show pity and to comfort His chosen one in her vexation of soul. So Deutero-Isaiah is here reiterating—but now with deepened content—the call to believe and proclaim the good news with which he began his narrative (**40:1ff.**). At **40:6** he himself had asked *What shall I cry?* He has his answer at last. The new, deeper content of his message arises from the fact that Yahweh still loves Zion, not only when her failure has been shown up in relief, but also now that the perfect servant has been delineated." (P. 181)

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Westermann comments on **verses 1-2** that “The various summonses at the start, ‘Sing...break forth into singing and cry aloud,’ correspond to the hymns of praise comprised by **44:23, 49:13** and **52:9**...

“This is designed to bring out the cry which changes Israel’s suffering, the cry that God has now again turned towards her in favor, must awaken joy and evoke loud exultation. In **44:23** and **49:13** it was the whole of creation that was summoned thus to sing because of God’s saving act towards Israel. Here it is Israel herself...The one here summoned to rejoice is the ‘barren one who did not bear...who had not been in travail.’ Here the age-old lament of the childless woman...is transferred to a corporate body, the city bereft of its inhabitants or its male population, as in **Lamentations 1:1**, ‘how lonely sits the city’...

“[Deutero-Isaiah] takes up words and metaphors from laments in actual use at the time and familiar to his hearers from the services of lamentation held by the exilic community. Deutero-Isaiah takes up the metaphor only to change it completely...

“How could a barren woman be summoned to sing? This was both meaningless and pitiless. But these are the exact feelings of shock which Deutero-Isaiah wishes his metaphor to evoke, for he has something undreamt of and quite incredible to proclaim... The barren one is to be given many children. But in its hearers’ ears this...no longer suggests the impossible, for in their services they sang the praises of that very God Who ‘makes the barren and the childless one the joyous mother of children’ (**Psalms 113**). This is a good example of the way in which Deutero-Isaiah’s proclamation echoes not only laments, but motifs from the hymns of praise as well.” (P. 271-72)

**Psalms 113:7-9**, which praises YHWH because of His deeds:

7 Who raises up (the) weak / poor from (the) dust,  
Who lifts up (the) needy from ash-heaps,  
8 to cause to sit with nobles,  
with nobles of his people;  
9 causing a barren woman to sit (in) the house,  
a joyful mother of the children.  
You people, praise Yah!

Motyer comments that “Two keywords from **52:13-53:12** appear here: ‘the many’ (**52:14-15; 53:11-12**) are now the ‘many (*more*) sons of the barren (**verse 1**); and the ‘seed’ (**53:10**, ‘offspring’) of the servant are now the ‘seed’ (**verse 3**, *descendants*) of Zion. In other words, we see the results of the servant’s work taking shape before our eyes.” (P. 445)

But in fact, the phrase “the many” occurs only in **53:11-12**, where it is said that YHWH’s servant will make the many righteous, and that he bore the iniquity / guilt of the

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פְּצְחֵי רִנָּה וְצִהְלֵי לֹא-חֵלָה  
כִּי-רַבִּים בְּנֵי-שׁוֹמְמָה מִבְּנֵי בְּעוּלָה  
אָמַר יְהוָה:

Give a ringing cry, barren woman—she (who) did not give birth;<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>(...continued)

many. But this phrase “the many” does not occur in either **chapters 54** or **55**, nor does the word “many” without the definite article.

It is true that the Hebrew word זֶרַע, “seed” or “descendant” occurs in **54:3**, where Israel is told that its “seed” will inherit nations. It also occurs in **55:10**, where it is said that the rain and the snow water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, “giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater.” In **53:10** the word זֶרַע occurs in the statement that the servant of YHWH, in spite of having died “will see his seed / descendant(s). But this is quite different from its usage in **chapters 54** and **55**. Motyer is having to stretch to make this correlation, assuming that the “seed of Israel” and the “seed of the servant” are identical.

Neither “the many” nor “seed” are “keywords” in these chapters! But on this very shaky basis, Motyer goes on to claim that “The picture is that of the normative state of the community of the redeemed, the people of God, the church. They have been brought into being by supernatural birth (**verse 1**), designed for growth (**verses 2-3**) and are secure in the loving care of the Lord (**verses 4-5**).” (P. 445)

And we ask, where in **verse 1** is anything said about “supernatural birth”? Motyer states that “The picture of Sarah, the barren woman who was to bear the miracle child and become the mother of a family more numerous than the stars, provides background...The church, the Lord’s people, are created by supernatural birth.” (P. 445)

The only “miracle” involved in the birth of Isaac was that his parents were beyond the normal age of giving birth (but the story goes on to tell of Abraham’s remarriage subsequent to Sarah’s death, and his bearing some six additional sons—see **Genesis 25:1-2**). The biblical text does not call Isaac’s birth a “miracle,” nor a “supernatural birth.” These statements of Motyer cause us to distrust his guidance as to the meaning of this text, and cause us to not respect Christians who interpret the **Hebrew Bible** from the standpoint of their Christian faith, reading all sorts of extraneous / erroneous ideas into the ancient text!

<sup>2</sup>Slotki notes that the barren city that has not given birth is “the depopulated Jerusalem which is like a childless woman.” (P. 265)

break forth a ringing shout,<sup>3</sup> and cry out, (you who) did not have labor-pains!  
Because more (are the) children of her who is desolate,<sup>4</sup> than the married woman's  
children!<sup>5</sup>

YHWH said (it)!<sup>6</sup>

54:27 הִרְתִּיבִי מִקּוֹם אֱהִלֶּךָ וַיִּרְיעוֹת מִשְׁכַּנּוֹתֶיךָ

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<sup>3</sup>Knight comments that “No wonder Zion is to jump for joy, and even cheer...*Cry aloud* really means to neigh! Here too the joy of Yahweh that sinful Israel can share is so strange an experience that only strange words can seek to describe it...

The occasion of Israel's joy is the revelation of the coming successful effect of God's action in the servant. We read of it in **53:10**: *he [the servant] shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days* (into the future). ‘The masses’ whom the servant is to receive as his people, we remember, are to be his own children. These are to be born from the reunion of Yahweh and Israel; for Yahweh has now brought home His bride in triumphant love.” (Pp. 181-82)

We take the past tense verbs to be “prophetic perfects,” since the actual return of the exiles has not yet occurred as Second Isaiah writes. It is because YHWH has said it, that Israel can rejoice as if the return has already happened.

<sup>4</sup>Slotki notes that this means “the exiled Judeans returning to the devastated homeland.” (P. 265)

<sup>5</sup>Slotki holds that the “married wife” is “Jerusalem before the exile, when she was, so to speak, ‘married’ to God. The population of the new Jerusalem will be more numerous than that of the old.” (P. 265) Yes, and the new Jerusalem will be truly “married” to God!

<sup>6</sup>The prophet affirms that this good news is not something he has dreamed up on his own—rather, YHWH said it! That is why he can describe it in past tense verbs. If God has said it is going to happen, then it is as good as already having happened!

<sup>7</sup>Knight comments on **verse 2** that “Zion is to make more and more room for her children yet unborn. ‘Don’t stop making room,’ says God, ‘but do with faith what Elisha commanded the widow to do when pouring out her oil’ (**1 Kings 17:14**).” (P. 182)

Westermann comments on **verses 2-3** that “they are the substantiation of [what makes real, gives substance to] the summons to sing—‘Yes, I mean it. You can sing. For you will soon require to enlarge your habitations, so greatly are you to grow again’...

“What here reappears in all its pristine freshness—the range of Deutero-Isaiah’s topics and of his theology leaves us marveling—is the old promise of increase so well known from the stories of the patriarchs [Abraham, Isaac and Jacob].” (P. 272)

יִטּוּ אֶל-תַּחֲשֻׁכֶי

הָאֲרֵיכֵי מִיִּתְרֵיךָ וַיִּתְדַתְּיךָ חֲזָקִי:

Enlarge / extend / widen your tent's place, and your dwelling-places' curtains!

Spread out—don't hold back!<sup>8</sup>

Lengthen your cords, and strengthen your tent-pegs!<sup>9</sup>

54:3 כִּי-יֵמִין וּשְׂמֹאל תִּפְרָצֵי

וַיִּזְרַעְךָ גּוֹיִם יִירָשׁ

וְעַרְיִם נִשְׂמֹות יוֹשִׁיבוּ:

Because (to the) right and (to the) left you will spread out;

and your descendants will possess nations!<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>North translates this line by “no need to be sparing!”

<sup>9</sup>The returning exiles are urged to enlarge their tents / dwelling-places in order to accommodate the increased population of Jerusalem upon their return.

Slotki holds that the phrase **מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ**, **mishkenothayik**, “your (singular) dwelling-places (plural),” means “the other cities of the Holy Land.” (P. 265) We think he is reading this into the text, which may not mean anything more than the tents-dwelling-places in Jerusalem. The other cities of Judea will be spoken of in the next verse.

North comments that “A nomad tent had many separate parts, and more amenities than an igloo. All these instructions are given to the woman Zion, and it is worth nothing that all work to do with making and erecting tents was, and still is in Arabia, women's work.” (P. 249)

<sup>10</sup>For this phrase, “your seed / descendant(s) will possess / dispossess” see the passages in **Genesis** where similar statements are made concerning the descendants of the patriarchs: **Genesis 22:17** (Abraham's descendants will possess / dispossess the gate of its enemies); **24:60** (Rebekah's family wishes for her that her descendant will possess / dispossess the gate of those who hate him).

For “possessing nations,” see **Exodus 34:24** (where the Hebrew has **כִּי־** **אֶרְיִשׁ גּוֹיִם מִפְּנֶיךָ**, “because I will dispossess nations from before you,” commonly

(continued...)

And desolated cities they will inhabit!<sup>11</sup>

54:4<sup>12</sup> אֶל-תִּירָאֵי כִּי-לֹא תִבּוֹשִׁי

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<sup>10</sup>(...continued)

translated by “I will drive out”); **Deuteronomy 9:1; 11:23; Joshua 23:9** (similar to **Exodus 34:24**); **Psalm 2:8**.

Motyer observes that in this way, **Isaiah 54:3** “in a very few words...brings together the great promises (Abraham) and moments (Canaan) of the past and the brightest hopes for the future.” (P. 446)

Knight comments that this promise “includes within it the miracle of the masses of the world sharing in the benefits of the servant’s self-offering...No wonder Jerusalem is not just to grow larger quietly and naturally; she is to ‘burst forth’ *to the right and to the left* as her population explosion forces her children to find their homes far afield. The promise made to the patriarchs thus continues to be valid.” (P. 182)

<sup>11</sup>The returning exiles will not only increase the population of Jerusalem beyond what it was before the exile, they will also expand beyond Jerusalem to the south and to the north, even into other nations, occupying desolated cities.

North comments that “For Jacob’s descendants ‘breaking out’ to all four points of the compass, see **Genesis 28:14**,

And your seed / descendant(s) will be like the dust of the land / earth;  
and you shall spread out westward and eastward and northward and  
southward;  
and in you all clans of the ground will be blessed, and in your descendants.

“Notwithstanding Deutero-Isaiah’s universalism (**45:20-25**) there is a note of nationalism, even of revanchism [recovering of lost territory], in this passage...This irredentism [a political or popular movement intended to reclaim and reoccupy a lost homeland]—it was never a dream of world-empire—is a legacy from the (much idealized!) accounts of the conquest of the promised land.” (P. 249)

But, we ask, Are there not also notes of a dream of world-empire in **First, Second and Third Isaiah**, beginning with **Isaiah 2:2-4**?

<sup>12</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 4-6** that “Israel, returning to God like a deserted wife to her husband, will forget the shame of the past in the love and joy of the reunion.” (P. 265)

Westermann comments on these same verses that “Along with the removal of Israel’s suffering goes the removal of the shame of it...We must remember that, with Israel and the nations surrounding her, suffering and shame went together as the outside and the inside of the same phenomenon...

(continued...)

וְאַל-תִּכְלַמֵּי כִּי לֹא תִחַפְּיֶרֶי  
כִּי בָשַׁת עַל-וַיְמִיךְ תִּשְׁכַּחֵי  
וְחִרְפַּת אֱלִמְנוּתֶיךָ לֹא תִזְכְּרֵי-עוֹד:

Do not be afraid, because you will not be put to shame;  
and you will not be humiliated--because you will not be caused shame!<sup>13</sup>  
Because your youth's shame,<sup>14</sup> you will forget,  
and (the) reproach of your widowhood<sup>15</sup> you will not remember again!<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>(...continued)

“The turn to salvation in **verses 5-6** takes up the metaphor of **verses 1-3**. It again stresses the new state of salvation—God takes the woman forsaken and grieved in spirit back again, and she once more has a husband. The state of forsakenness, loneliness and shame is past, and she who was solitary is given back the happiness and honor of the married state and status.” (P. 273)

<sup>13</sup>Motyer observes that “Shame...disgrace...and humiliation...are synonymous and are heaped up to rule out every possibility of disappointment or shamefacedness in the future.” (P. 446)

<sup>14</sup>Slotki comments that this is referring to “The backsliding and chastisement of the earlier days, probably the Egyptian slavery.” (P. 266)

We are much more prone to think of the depiction of Jerusalem in **Ezekiel 16** as YHWH's faithless bride, who prostituted herself to foreign lovers, and related passages in both **Ezekiel** and **Jeremiah**, which have nothing to do with Egyptian slavery.

<sup>15</sup>Slotki thinks that this “widowhood” is referring to “the former lonely state of the nation; Israel's years in the Babylonian exile when he [we say ‘she’] seemed to be cast off by God.” (P. 266)

We think the “shame of your youth” may well be referring to the sins which the the people of Jerusalem committed, causing them to go into exile, and “the widowhood”

may be referring to the half a century they spent in exile. All of this, the returning exiles can now forget, as the next line emphatically states!

<sup>16</sup>North comments that “the whole **verse [4]**, like so many in **Deutero-Isaiah**, is full of delicate alliterations, without being in the least artificial.” (P. 249) This alliteration can only be seen by the reader of the verse in Hebrew, as it disappears in English translation.

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54:5 כִּי בַעֲלִיךָ עֲשִׂיךָ

יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת שְׁמוֹ

וְגֹאֲלֶיךָ קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל

אֱלֹהֵי כָל-הָאָרֶץ יִקְרָא:

Because (the) One marrying you<sup>17</sup> (is) your Maker--

YHWH of Armies (is) His name;

and your Next-of-Kin / Redeemer (is) Israel's Set-apart One--

“God all the earth” He will be called!<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>(...continued)

Knight states that the wife Zion's “recollection of her sins can now affect her not with a sense of guilt but only with a deep knowledge of the grace and love of her faithful God.” (Pp. 182-83)

<sup>17</sup>The Hebrew here is remarkable, as it identifies YHWH as בַּעֲלִיךָ, **bhoalayik**, “Ones marrying you,” with the root בָּעַל, to marry, rule over, possess, especially a wife or concubine. That is, YHWH is depicted as acting like a **baal**, the name of the Canaanite God. Knight claims that the plural noun is used here because of the plural nature of the Hebrew Elohiym—see footnote 18.

<sup>18</sup>Israel's God is the God of all the earth! Slotki comments on **verse 5** that “Israel need have no doubts of the fulfillment of a promise made by the Lord of hosts, the God of all the earth...Who will take [the exiles] back and put an end to the separation.” (P. 266)

Knight comments on **verses 5 and 6** that Israel's “whole existence depends upon Who her Husband is. Yahweh is no God such as the heathen worship, one Who exhibits all the vices and failings of mortal man. Who is He then? In awed wonder and adoration Deutero-Isaiah now applies to Yahweh four transcendental names that no heathen God could ever bear. Husband and Maker are both written in the plural to show that they refer to אֱלֹהִים, [Elohiym], the Hebrew plural word for God. This all-holy One had actually claimed Israel as His bride when she was an attractive young woman in the days of the wilderness wanderings (**Hosea 2:14; Jeremiah 2:2**). What honorable husband could ever forget the girl he had loved when they were both young together, *a wife of youth*? Then how much more will Yahweh love Israel if she is deserted and broken hearted, and thus all the more in need of the love and loyalty of her Husband.” (P. 183)

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<sup>18</sup>(...continued)

Knight counts four “transcendental” [relating to a non-physical, or spiritual realm] names. He specifically gives two of those names,

- (1) בַּעֲלֵיךְ, “Your (feminine singular) Ones Marrying You,” or Your Baals (in the plural), meaning “Your Husbands”;
- (2) עֲשִׂיךְ, “Your Ones Making You (feminine singular),” (also in the plural).

The other two names, we assume, are:

- (3) יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת, “YHWH of Armies,” followed by שְׁמוֹ, “His name”;
- (4) גֹּאֲלֶיךָ, “Your (feminine singular) Redeemer / Next-of-Kin”;

and we would add to these:

- (5) קָדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל, “Set-apart One of Israel”;
- (6) אֱלֹהֵי כָל־הָאָרֶץ, “Gods (plural construct) of all the land / earth,” followed by יִקְרָא, “He will be called.”

What do you think? Is Knight correct that the first two names are plural because the Divine name אֱלֹהִים is plural? But when this plural Divine name is used of YHWH, it is almost always followed by singular verbs.

<sup>19</sup>Slotki comments on **verse 6** that “Israel holds a permanent place in God’s love like a wife married in one’s youth who, despite temporary estrangement, continues to occupy a warm corner in her husband’s heart.” (P. 266)

Translations of **verse 6** vary:

**King James**, “For the LORD hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth, when thou wast refused, saith thy God.”

**Tanakh**, “The LORD has called you back As a wife forlorn and forsaken. Can one cast off the wife of his youth? -- said your God.”

**New Revised Standard**, “For the LORD has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man's youth when she is cast off, says your God.”

**New International**, “The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit-- a wife who married young, only to be rejected,” says your

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וְאִשְׁתׁ נְעוּרַיִם כִּי תִמְאַס׃

אָמַר אֱלֹהֶיךָ׃

Because like a forsaken woman and pained of spirit,<sup>20</sup> YHWH called you,  
and a wife (married in) youth that will be rejected,<sup>21</sup>  
said your God.

54:7<sup>22</sup> בְּרַגְעַ קָטָן עֲזַבְתִּיךָ׃

<sup>19</sup>(...continued)  
God.”

**New Jerusalem**, “Yes, Yahweh has called you back like a forsaken, grief-stricken wife, like the repudiated wife of his youth, says your God.”

**Rahifs**, “Not as a wife having been left behind and faint-hearted (the) Lord has called you; not as a wife from youth having been hated, said the God of yours.”

North states that **verse 6** is “the most difficult verse in the passage.” (P. 248) He comments that “What the English versions intend to convey by this verse is obscure. (P. 249) We disagree. The English translations that we are using seem clear enough—certainly not “obscure,” just because there is a question as to the time when YHWH called her, whether in the distant past, or just now, in Babylonian captivity.

<sup>20</sup>Motyer comments that “the background in **50:1-3** points to a wife justly left but consequently sad at heart.” (P. 447)

<sup>21</sup>Motyer comments that “‘a wife of youth’ suggests all the passionate devotion of a young married couple with the bright hopes of their early married life—can all this ultimately mean nothing? **Jeremiah 2:1-3** again provides background, as does **Hosea 3:1**...The Lord’s early love is the model of His undying love, a passionate devotion to His people which cannot ever come to count for nothing.” (P. 447)

<sup>22</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 7-8** that “God’s anger is momentary, His love everlasting.” (P. 266)

Westermann comments that “It is to be noticed that the metaphor which plays the leading part in **verses 1-6** fails to re-appear in **verses 7-10**. In **verses 7-8**, which point out the real reason for the great change, Deutero-Isaiah speaks directly, without metaphor. Nevertheless the subject is the same. **Verses 1-6** expressed it by contrasting two states; **verses 7-8** do so again by using a motif taken from the **Psalms**, and **verses 9-10** by means of the comparison with the covenant with Noah.” (P. 273)

Knight comments on **verse 7** that “For centuries she [Israel, God’s ‘bride’] had played fast and loose with her Divine Husband. But now at last she knew His love for her as never before. In His wisdom God had made her taste the death of separation

(continued...)

## וּבְרַחֲמִים גְּדֹלִים אֶקְבֹּץ:

For a small moment I forsook you;

and with great compassions I will gather you together!<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>(...continued)

from Him [see **Ezekiel 37**], though only *for a brief moment*. This had been essential if Israel was ever to learn that God Almighty was in earnest about her election.” (P. 183)

<sup>23</sup>Slotki comments on **verse 7** that “Compared with the long period of Israel’s glory and happiness, the exile will seem but a brief space of time.” (P. 266)

North translates the phrase אֶקְבֹּץ, literally “I will gather you,” by “I will gather you home.”

He comments that “Here the thought shifts momentarily from ‘taking back’ Zion, to the gathering of her scattered children (compare **49:18**), pictured as so many members of YHWH’s flock (**40:11**; **Jeremiah 31:10**; **Micah 2:12**).” (P. 250)

Westermann comments that “In the psalms of praise the exultation of a person who has been delivered may be expressed as follows: as he looks back at the distress, this now seems to have lasted but a little, while the life restored to him by the deliverance seems to stretch far out into a future free from trouble. See **Psalms 30:6** <sup>Heb</sup> / **5** <sup>Eng</sup>:

For His anger is but for a moment,  
but His favor is for a lifetime.  
Weeping may come in the evening,  
but in the morning there is joy.

This is the very same motif as Deutero-Isaiah takes up here, the only difference being that he makes God the speaker: ‘for a brief moment I forsook you...but with everlasting love I have compassion upon you.’ This, too, corresponds to a motif in the psalms of praise, ‘for His favor endures for ever.’” (Pp. 273-74)

We agree with Westermann, and are impressed by the way he has shown the deep influence of the **Psalter** on Second Isaiah’s message.

Westermann goes on to observe that “Here we have the heart of the matter, the basic factor in Deutero-Isaiah’s proclamation—with God Himself and in God Himself the change has already taken place, and therefore everything must alter. A change has come over God. He ceases from wrath, and again shows Israel mercy. This makes everything all right again. This is clearly a re-echoing of the words of the prologue.” (P. 274) **See Isaiah 40:1-2:**

1 Comfort! Comfort My people,

(continued...)

54:8 בַּשֶּׁפֶף קִצְף הִסְתַּרְתִּי פָנַי רְגַע מִמֶּךָ  
 וּבַחֶסֶד עוֹלָם רַחֲמֶיךָ

אָמַר גְּאֻלְךָ יְהוָה:

In a flood of wrath<sup>24</sup> I hid My face from you (for) a moment;

<sup>23</sup>(...continued)

- says your (plural) God!  
 2 Speak to Jerusalem's heart,  
 and cry out to her,,  
 that her warfare is complete,  
 that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,  
 that she received from YHWH's hand double (punishment)  
 for all her sins / missings-of-the-mark!

“These verses [Isaiah 54:1-8], the climax of the last great poem in **Deutero-Isaiah**, show how largely his proclamation is couched in the diction of the **Psalms**.” (Pp. 274-74)

Motyer comments that “Graciously the sins for which the ‘wife’ was ‘left’ are not mentioned.” (P. 448)

<sup>24</sup>The Hebrew phrase **בַּשֶּׁפֶף קִצְף**, is given varying translations, from “In a little wrath,” to “In slight anger,” to “In overflowing wrath,” to “In a surge of anger,” to “In a flood of anger,” to “in a little wrath.” The problem here is that while the noun **קִצְף** means “wrath,” the word **שֶׁפֶף**, **shetseph**, occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, and therefore its meaning is uncertain, resulting in these varying translations. Slotki holds that it can mean either “in a little wrath,” or “in an outbreak of wrath.” (Pp. 266-67)

Knight comments that “the words [*in overflowing wrath*, his translation] are highly onomatopoeic [the formation of a word, like ‘cuckoo,’ ‘meow,’ ‘honk,’ or ‘boom,’ by imitation of a sound made by or associated with its referent; here, *shetseph qetseph*] in the original Hebrew. Could we say that God allowed the dam to burst that held back

the wrath He eternally feels toward the evil in the world? Was His beloved bride then suddenly overwhelmed in the great waters over which He rules? See **Psalms 46:1-3**,

- 1 God (is) for us a Refuge and Strength,  
 a Help, found especially in troubles.  
 2 Therefore we will not be afraid when earth changes,  
 and when mountains shake in (the) heart of the seas!

(continued...)

but with long-lasting steadfast-love I had compassion on you!<sup>25</sup>  
said your Next of Kin / Redeemer, YHWH!

54:9<sup>26</sup> כִּי־מִי נָחַ זָאת לִי

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<sup>24</sup>(...continued)

3 Their waters roar, they foam up;  
mountains quake in their pride.

Yet His wrath is but a necessary expression of the everlasting covenant-love, *chesedh* which He had laid upon Israel at the marriage which He had covenanted with her at Sinai (see Knight's comment on **49:20**). Even within the covenant, Israel had had to experience alienation from God before reconciliation could be possible. Satan must first lead Job to the dunghill, where he curses his day, before Job can understand the joy of life in God.

“But God’s love never changes even when His wrath flows as a flood. So, as when the time of the flood was past, says the Divine Husband, so ‘I have had compassion on you’...The physical passion that is the basis of true love between man and woman Deutero-Isaiah actually regards as the basis of the transcendent love of Him Who is the Holy One of Israel and Whose nature is utterly other than that of mortal man.” (Pp. 183-84)

<sup>25</sup>Motyer comments that the message is “there was anger, real and justified, but it was transient. Other realities, compassion and love, have taken over permanently.” And then he quotes with approval the words of Westermann that we have given in footnote 22.

Yes indeed. It is not something that the messiah / servant Jesus will accomplish seven centuries later, but something that God Himself has brought about in His compassion and love—that’s the message of Second Isaiah! Not “I will have compassion on you when the messiah comes in later centuries,” but “with long-lasting steadfast-love I had compassion on you”!

Motyer adds that “The emphasis in **verse 7** is on the greatness of the compassion which was exercised; in **verse 8** on the endlessness of the love which has replaced wrath; and in **verse 9** on the permanence of the resulting situation.” (P. 448)

<sup>26</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 9-10** that “God’s new covenant of peace and mercy with Israel will be eternal, like the covenant He made with mankind after the flood in the days of Noah, more permanent than the apparently everlasting mountains and hills.” (P. 267)

Westermann states that “The comparison with the covenant with Noah is a separate utterance...

(continued...)

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<sup>26</sup>(...continued)

“For the thought or the theology of the **Old Testament** this comparison represents a bold advance. As Deutero-Isaiah looks back into the past in search of a turning-point comparable with the one which now confronts Israel, he finds none in the history of Israel herself. He has to go further back to that turning-point in primaeval [the earliest ages in the history of the world] times which marked the end of catastrophic events involving the whole human race!...

“There is no place in **Deutero-Isaiah** which indicates more clearly—though this is not said in so many words—that the turning-point which he had to proclaim had a significance which far transcended Israel herself, and affected the whole world...

“Without any doubt the promise of salvation contained in **verses 9-10** is the promise of something that is to continue, a new condition of things. This could scarcely have been more clearly expressed than by means of the comparison of the covenant with Noah, for it is just this very element of continuance and permanence that God promised to the world after the flood, **Genesis 8:22**...

“The counterpart of this continuing element is the term בְּרִית שְׁלוֹמִי, ‘covenant of My peace,’ in **verse 10**. שְׁלוֹם is a term denoting a condition and belongs to the vocabulary connected with blessing; properly speaking, it denotes the well-being of a community. The two verbs, ‘not depart,’ ‘not remove,’ correspond to the new salvation. This is also the context in which we have to take the term ‘covenant,’ both here and again in **55:3**. It occurs in **Deutero-Isaiah** only in these two places—**chapters 54 and 55**. Thus, he uses it when, and only when, he speaks of God’s salvation as a condition of things, something permanent...These two passages in **Deutero-Isaiah** make it perfectly clear that what the covenant does is confirm the new relationship established between God and the chosen people...

“This idea of the covenant, the making of an event into a permanent condition, is expressed in **55:3** by describing it as an ‘everlasting covenant,’ and in **54:9** by the repetition of the verb ‘to swear’...If God here swears to cease from His wrath against Israel and not to vent it any more, and also promises that now His grace is not to depart from Israel, and that peace, well-being, are to continue for ever—this promise goes far beyond the actual facts of history. We have to admit quite freely that it was never fulfilled in the post-exilic period. But it also goes far beyond the fulfilment in Christ. Deutero-Isaiah’s promise of an [un]interrupted condition of salvation points far beyond history,

or far beyond the path trodden by God’s people on their journey through history.” (Pp. 274-76)

What do you make of this comment by Westermann? We think it is undoubtedly correct. Do you? And if it is, does this mean Deutero-Isaiah is simply mistaken con-

(continued...)

אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מִעֵבֶר מִי־נִחַ עוֹד עַל־הָאָרֶץ

כִּן נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי מִקְצֶף עֲלֶיךָ וּמִגֶּעֶר־בְּךָ:

Because this<sup>27</sup> is to Me (like the) waters of Noah,

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<sup>26</sup>(...continued)

cerning the hope-filled future to which he points, along with so many other biblical prophets?

Our answer is that if we evaluate these promises of hope simply on the basis of human history, then they are in fact mistaken and misleading. But if YHWH has a “heavenly future” prepared for His people, these promises may be taken as the actual truth. Far beyond this earth, and finite history, in the heavenly kingdom that knows no end, there is such a future, guaranteed by the infinite mercy and love of God for His people.

Do you dare to believe in such a thing? Jesus certainly did. See the words attributed to Jesus, addressed to the dying thief at his side, who asked Jesus to remember him in his kingdom, Jesus said (in **Luke 23:43**), “Truly I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

<sup>27</sup>Slotki holds that “this” refers to “the exile and the redemption. The sufferings of the exile are compared to the flood and the glories of the redemption to the subsequent covenant.” (P. 267) Knight agrees (p. 184).

And we wonder—If Slotki and Knight are correct, then hasn’t this Divine prediction been falsified by history, and the predictions of this chapter shown to be little more than an empty dream of the prophet? Did eternal peace and absence of war follow the return from Babylon? Was not the Israel of the returnees subjected to constant subjugation and war with the Greeks / Seleucids, and then overwhelmed and sent into worldwide dispersion by the Romans? And if it is held that only in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has this prediction of lasting peace and absence of war begun to be fulfilled, we say the tiny Nation of Israel that has emerged has been in a constant state of war with her neighbors, threatened with extinction from her Arab neighbors till today.

What do you think? How do you explain the glorious predictions of this chapter? If you claim, as Alexander does, that the predictions have to do with the Church, the spiritual Israel, still have those predictions not failed? Has not Christianity been persecuted by the Romans for its first three centuries, and then been subject to internal wars

throughout its history? When are we supposed to see this “covenant of peace” as having begun?

(continued...)



which waters of Noah I swore would not pass over the earth again--  
so I swore, not to be angry against you (singular), and not to rebuke you.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>(...continued)

Alexander seeks to rescue the passage by stating, “That this is not a general promise of security, is plain from the fact that the church has always been subjected to vicissitudes and fluctuations. Nor is there any period in her history to which it can be properly applied in a specific sense, except the change of dispensations, which was made once and for all, and can never be repeated. That the church shall never be again brought under the restrictive institutions of the ceremonial law, is neither a matter of course nor a matter of indifference, but a glorious promise altogether worthy of the solemn oath by which it is attested here.” (P. 315)

And so, Alexander wants the reader of **Isaiah** to believe that **chapter 54** is “not a general promise of security”—which it obviously is—and to believe instead that it is a prediction of a “change of dispensations,” the change from humanity’s being subject to the ceremonial law of Moses, and set free under the New Covenant of Jesus Christ, in which the ceremonial law of Moses is no longer binding—laws concerning circumcision and the constant offering of animal sacrifices. But is this in fact what **chapter 54** is describing, or promising? We think not!

What do you think **chapter 54** is promising? To whom is it making this promise? Is it not to the exiles returning from Babylon? Is it to them, and also to Christianity, even to all humanity, that YHWH’s steadfast-love and covenant of peace will never forsake them, that YHWH has a wondrous future in store for them, that judgment and punishment are not the final word, but steadfast-love and peace and never-ending hope? We take it in this way, and once again as in many other passages in the **Book of Isaiah**, our heart begins to “sing the song of Isaiah,” praising the God of joy-giving hope!

<sup>28</sup>Second Isaiah reminds the reader of the story of YHWH’s “repentance” following the world-wide flood in which the world’s inhabitants are snuffed out with only Noah and his family being saved. YHWH is depicted as being sorry for having created the human race, and then depicts Him as vowing to never again do such a thing (see **Genesis 6-9**, especially **chapter 6:5-8 and 9:8-18**).

Here in **Isaiah 54**, a similar thing occurs. YHWH vows to never again deal with His people so harshly (with “anger and rebuking”) as He had done in sending them into Babylonian captivity.

And we ask, with hindsight, did this Divine vow stop YHWH from allowing the Roman forces to conquer Jerusalem and destroy its temple in 70 C.E., or from scattering the Israelites throughout the world for the almost twenty centuries after that destruction? Did it stop YHWH from allowing the Nazi “holocaust” of the Jews in the twentieth century? We think the Roman and the Nazi holocausts were far more extreme than the Babylonian! What do you think? Can we still “sing the song of Isaiah”

(continued...)

כִּי הַהָרִים יִמוּשוּ וְהַגְּבָעוֹת תִּמוּטְנָה 54:10

וְחֶסְדִּי מֵאַתָּךְ לֹא-יִמוּשׁ

וּבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי לֹא תִמוּט

אָמַר מִרְחֲמֶךָ יְהוָה:

Because<sup>29</sup> the mountains will depart, and the hills will totter--<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>(...continued)

in the light of these terrifying facts of history?

<sup>29</sup>Slotki's translation is "for the mountains...but My kindness." He suggests reading "though the mountain...My kindness." (P. 267)

<sup>30</sup>Knight comments that "Mountains and hills were naturally the most permanent things that Israel knew. But someday, Deutero-Isaiah declares for Yahweh, those are going to be removed and depart. On the other hand, Yahweh's *chesedh* [our 'steadfast-love'] or covenant-love will remain...

"That experience which Israel thinks of as physical death will never be able to end the covenant relationship or disrupt the marriage which Yahweh has sworn to uphold to all eternity [we do not find this phrase 'to all eternity,' but do find the phrase 'to long-lasting time']. This is now the second time (compare **40:8**) that Deutero-Isaiah has made use of this particular argument to claim the reality of the life beyond. It is the same argument that Jesus used in discussion with the Sadducees (**Mark 12:18-27** [we say, Not the same argument, but a similar argument, based on the nature of God]).

"The Lord is a God Who likes making covenants. He made one with Noah and then with the patriarchs. He made the 'ancient' (rather than 'old') covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. This meaning of 'old' leaves God room to update His ancient covenant as He wills when new circumstances arise. Of course He will never rescind it (**Romans 9-11**). At **Jeremiah 31:31-34** we read of Jeremiah's expectation of just such an updating and fulfilment of the ancient covenant. Deutero-Isaiah would know this passage. Again, when Jeremiah's covenant is referred to in the **New Testament**, it is described by the Greek word *καινός* for 'new.' *Καινός* means newness in the sense of refurbishing and completion of the old. There is a second word for 'new' in Greek, viz. *νέος*. But *νέος* means new in the sense of 'different.'" (Pp. 184-85)

Yes...but we think Knight has probably overstated this distinction between *kainos* and *neos* as these words become almost interchangeable in the **New Testament**, and

(continued...)

but My steadfast love will not depart from you,<sup>31</sup>  
and My covenant of peace<sup>32</sup> will not totter,

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<sup>30</sup>(...continued)

*kainos* can be understood sometimes as meaning both “new and different.” See Johannes Behm’s article on this word in **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** III, pp. 447-50, where he states that “καλιός is the epitome of the wholly different and miraculous thing which is brought by the time of salvation...It is the perfect counterpart of its predecessor, which has now been superseded and is doomed to perish [referring to its usage in the **Book of Hebrews**]...The parables of the new which cannot be mixed with the old (**Mark 2:21-22** and parallels) point to the *totaliter aliter* [‘of its own kind,’ ‘unique’] of the content of the message of Jesus.” (Pp. 449, 50) Nonetheless, with this criticism made, we think Knight’s view is profoundly true to **Jeremiah 31**, and important for our understanding of this key theological idea in **Second Isaiah**. What do you think?

<sup>31</sup>In the phrase מֵאַתָּה, literally “from with you,” the “you” is 2<sup>nd</sup> person feminine singular. Who do you think is meant? We think it is Zion, YHWH’s “wife,” the “mother” of God’s children. Do you agree?

And what a word of comfort this is for Zion! It is the transcendent God swearing / promising His people that His steadfast-love will never depart from them! What greater promise / oath from God could His people ever hope to receive?

<sup>32</sup>While the word “covenant” occurs some twelve times in the **Book of Isaiah**, this is the only occurrence of the phrase “covenant of peace.” We think it is obvious that YHWH’s “covenant of peace” is referring to what YHWH has done on behalf of the captive Israelite exiles, as He sent them His messenger declaring the good news of **Isaiah 40:1-2**,

- 1 Comfort! Comfort My people,  
says your (plural) God!
- 2 Speak to Jerusalem’s heart,  
and cry out to her,,  
that her warfare is complete,  
that her iniquity / guilt was accepted / forgiven,  
that she received from YHWH’s hand double (punishment)  
for all her sins / missings-of-the-mark!

That YHWH has told Jerusalem that “her warfare is complete,” means that peace has come. The exiled Jerusalem has been forgiven, all her sins have been fully done away with! It is this message of peace that **Isaiah 52:7** speaks of:

How beautiful upon the mountains (are the) feet of one announcing good news!  
One causing Peace! to be heard,

(continued...)

said YHWH, your Comforter!<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>(...continued)

one announcing good news of good!

One causing salvation / deliverance to be heard,  
one saying to Zion, Your God reigned!

This is the message that Second Isaiah proclaimed to the exiles in Babylon. It was YHWH's doing—declaring their warfare ended, causing the good news of “Peace!” to be heard, the kind of peace that only God could announce and bring into being.

Motyer again insists that “This new situation is summed up as a *covenant of peace* (**verse 10**) which refers back to the making of peace by the punishment which fell on the servant (**Isaiah 53:5**.” (P. 447)

But according to Motyer, the servant's making peace is a depiction of something that will happen in the future, long after the Israelite exiles have returned to Jerusalem—how can that be the “covenant of peace” that is being announced as good news to the exiles in Babylon in the sixth century B.C.E.? We say this is a covenant that YHWH has made with those exiles then and there, in their condition of captivity, long before the coming of the messiah, Jesus.

Motyer admits in a footnote that “Commentaries urge that it cannot be proved that *peace* here has any connection with ‘peace’ in **53:5**. What would constitute proof? For that matter, neither can it be disproved!” (P. 447)

Motyer's argumen is silly and childish. If Motyer claims that this is what it means, he is the one who must offer proof. All it would take to constitute proof is for the text to say something like “the suffering servant's peace.” But the servant is not as much as mentioned in **chapters 54-55**, only the plural “servants” in **54:17**, which states that the Israelites' ability to confute every tongue that speaks against them is the heritage of the servants of YHWH. Motyer's interpretation is indefensible in our estimation.

The same criticism applies to Knight's comment that “Parallel with *My steadfast* (or ‘covenant’) *love, hesedh*, we meet the phrase *My covenant of peace, shalom*...Here ‘My covenant of *shalom*’ presumably means something like ‘My all-embracing covenant offering you wholeness of life, prosperity and peace’...For this promise of God that we meet with here is made only after, and in fact out of, the pain, sorrow and final death of the servant; so that it is really one with God's promise that the servant would see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied (**53:11**.” (P. 185)

Again, we say, The good news of peace with God has already been proclaimed to the Israelite exiles, before Second Isaiah has made any mention of the suffering servant. This “covenant of peace” has already been made with Israel, and the promise of this text is that it will never depart from Israel—not that one day in the distant centuries, it will be made and then never depart!

<sup>33</sup>It is a beautiful Divine promise and oath—mountains will depart, and hills will totter, but YHWH’s steadfast-love will not depart, and His covenant of peace will never totter! It is another statement of what “the good times coming” hold for YHWH’s beloved people, a future that they are already participating in as YHWH sends Cyrus to free them from their exiled condition.

We are reminded of the Isaianic vision of **chapter 25**, with its promise of a Divine feast to which all humanity is invited, and death is swallowed up forever. In spite of the dark and tragic circumstances that surround Israel’s and our life here on earth, constantly testing us, even putting us to death, our Creator has compassion on us, deeply loves us, and has an unbelievably blessed future with unending peace awaiting us!

We are also reminded of the “rainbow covenant” made with Noah and his family in **Genesis 9:8-17**, where the sign of the covenant is the rainbow—a war-bow that is pointed away from the earth—assuring humanity that God is at peace with the world, with all humanity (Noah and his descendants).

Do you dare to believe such a promise accompanied by the Divine oath? Do you see why we say, Learn to sing the song of Isaiah?

<sup>34</sup>North entitles **45:11-17** “Zion Resplendent.”

He comments that “Yahweh assures inconsolable Zion that His purpose is to make her a city of outstanding beauty (**verses 12-13**) The concluding verses (**15-17**) are a promise that the city shall be free from molestation. By comparison they are ragged and inconsequential, but since **verse 14** forms a good bridge to them, there is insufficient reason to deny their genuineness...

“The section begins abruptly, without introductory formula. Instead, there is a concluding ‘This is the word of the Lord’...It is, for more reasons than one, a passage of remarkable interest. It is obviously the original of the description of the New Jerusalem in the **Apocalypse [Book of Revelation]** (see especially **Revelation 21:10-21**). Equally obviously, the picture of the city ablaze with precious stones goes back to stories of a mythological paradise in the primeval past, of which a description is still extant in **Ezekiel 28:13-14** (compare also **Genesis 2:11-12**). In other words, this passage is a link between the mythical paradise in the primeval past and the equally ‘mythological’ paradise of the age to come. A difference is that the first paradise is a garden (**Genesis 2:8; Ezekiel 28:13**), this and the last are cities (**Revelation 21:2**)...It must suffice to say that the gospel is set for the redemption of all human activity. God will save the city.” (Pp. 251-52)

Without going into detail in discussing this beautiful passage, we note that this is the same thing **Isaiah 66:17-25** is referring to. YHWH God is continuing His new creation, building His new Jerusalem out of the barren and the desolate, the forsaken and

(continued...)

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<sup>34</sup>(...continued)

rejected, the storm-driven, in spite of their former shame and reproach, preparing His people for long-lasting blessedness beyond literal description!

Slotki comments on **verses 11-12** that they depict “the external splendor and beauty of Zion in her restored state.” (P. 267) Westermann entitles **verses 11-17** “The New Salvation.” Motyer entitles **verses 11-17** “The city of righteousness.”

Motyer comments that “The city theme is integral to the Isaianic literature: the Davidic city (**1:26-27**); the ideal world center (**2:2-4**); the city cleansed (**4:2-6**) and joyous (**12:1-6**); the destroyed city (**24:10**); the universal (**25:1-9**), strong (**27:1-3**) and redeemed (**35:10**) city; the fallen city (**47:1**) and the raised city (**52:1**); the comforted city (**66:10-12**). **Isaiah’s book** rests on a strong contrast between the city humankind builds without God, which ends in destruction, and the city of God in all its eternal glory.” (P. 449) Yes—this is one of the most important themes of the **Book of Isaiah**, occurring in all three sections!

What do you think? Does this “glorious future,” “external splendor and beauty” accurately describe the future of the returning exiles from Babylon? And if so, was it ever fulfilled? Does it describe the future of Christianity, the “spiritual Israel”? And if so, has it ever been fulfilled?

Or is such a future describing what the author, Second Isaiah, believes YHWH has purposed for His people beyond this life, in His eternal presence, symbolized by the precious stones, where all His people are nurtured in lasting peace and righteousness? If it is meant concerning the returnees to Jerusalem, and their rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, it was sadly unfulfilled. If it is meant concerning Christianity, that is, after the coming of Jesus Christ, the suffering servant, as Motyer and Knight claim, it likewise has sadly gone unfulfilled. But if it is meant concerning the blessedness that YHWH holds in store for His people, beyond this earthly life with all its trials, including all those created in His image, our faith in God assures us that it has been and will be fulfilled!

How do you interpret **Isaiah 54**? One thing we can be sure of. The **Hebrew Bible**, time and again calls its readers to “stand on tip-toe,” looking forward to a blessed future its authors believe is certainly coming, in spite of conditions or Divine judgments and trials here on earth!

Knight comments that “Our eyes have newly been directed to the ultimate outcome—beyond the age of the hills—of God’s covenantal love (**verse 10**). So the Jerusalem that Deutero-Isaiah paints for us here is no longer the poor, ruined capital city of Judah on her forlorn hilltop...

“The motif that is in this picture of the new Jerusalem is what scholars of Near Eastern thought have called ‘*Urzeit = Endzeit*, ‘The beginning of time = the end of time.’ The belief of many ancient peoples was that in the beginning the ultimate pur-

(continued...)

# הִנֵּה אֲנֹכִי מִרְבִּיץ בַּפּוֹךְ אֲבָנֶיךָ

## וַיִּסְדֹּתֶיךָ בַּסִּפִּירִים:

Poor woman, storm-driven, one not comforted,<sup>35</sup>

look—I (am) laying down with the mortar<sup>36</sup> your precious stones

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<sup>34</sup>(...continued)

pose of 'God' had been expressed in a perfect creation. Israel too believed this and described that perfection in terms of the precious stones of the earth (compare **Genesis 2:11-12**). But Deutero-Isaiah has now asked us to lift our eyes, not to the beginning this time, but rather to the end of the city of Jerusalem." (Pp. 185-86)

<sup>35</sup>Slotki holds that here "Zion is addressed." (P. 267) That is, the Zion that has been in Babylonian exile, storm-driven, not comforted. Now, YHWH is depicted as saying, this deplorable condition is going to be completely changed for the better!

Westermann observes that **verses 11-13a** are "akin to **51:21-23**...The address is reminiscent of the lament made by Jerusalem after she had been destroyed. Not only is she promised restoration (as, e.g. in **49:8b**), but she is also to be raised up in supernatural splendor...The sole thing of importance is that the accent falls on the city's splendor, and on it alone...The New Jerusalem is God's city in a completely new way, and its glittering splendor points directly to the Divine majesty." (Pp. 277-78)

<sup>36</sup>The statement is that YHWH is "laying down בַּפּוֹךְ, **bappuk**, "in / with the mortar / antimony, stibium [black mineral powder, for increasing brilliance of eyes by darkening edges of lids]. The fact that the mortar for the precious stones being laid in the new Zion is "eye-shadow," used to beautify women, shows clearly that the language of **verses 11-12** is meant symbolically, not literally.

North translates by "black cosmetic," and comments that it is "a dark mineral powder...perhaps sulphide of lead, used as eye-pigment." He mentions that Jezebel made up her eyes with it (**2 Kings 9:30**), and compares **Jeremiah 4:30**, where Jeremiah charges the city of Jerusalem with having enlarged her eyes with it.

North states that "The only parallel—and that only a partial one—for its use in building is in **1 Chronicles 29:2**, which lists 'stones of (i.e. set in) **puk** among accessory adornments of the temple...

"In this verse the profile of Zion, Yahweh's bride, 'made up' with eye-paint, shines through the picture of her as a city (compare **Revelation 21:2**)."

He adds that "Sex metaphors can be carried to extravagant lengths by mystical writers. But the **Old Testament** attitude to sex is frank and healthy. The **Bible** is never

(continued...)

and I will built your foundations with the sapphire-stones!<sup>37</sup>

54:12 וְשִׁמְתִי כֶּכֶד שְׁמֹשֶׁתֶיךָ  
וְשַׁעֲרֶיךָ לְאַבְנֵי אֶקֶדָח  
וְכָל-גְּבוּלֶךָ לְאַבְנֵי-חַפְצִים:

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<sup>36</sup>(...continued)

prudish.” (P. 252) Yes, but as those who have grown up in fundamentalist churches can testify, many of its interpreters are!

<sup>37</sup>Instead of this present deplorable condition, YHWH is laying the foundation for a future, totally different condition, one that can only be described symbolically as building with beautified stones and precious jewels!

Knight comments that “The precious stones therefore are just the ordinary limestone blocks in Jerusalem’s walls, yet now glorified to be the precious stones of the new Jerusalem glinting in the sunshine of the love of God (compare **Revelation 21:2, 18-21**). The coming of the new Jerusalem is of course a miracle; but that miracle is only consequent upon the still greater miracle of the resurrection of the servant, which in the sequence of Deutero-Isaiah’s argument is now a future certainty.” (P. 186)

What do you make of this Divine promise / oath? It was certainly not fulfilled in Zion’s return to the earthly city of Jerusalem, where the returning exiles were surrounded by the signs of destruction, and by opponents, and the city and temple they finally succeeded in building were nothing like the present description. It has not been fulfilled in Christian history, where the followers of Jesus have likewise constantly been faced with persecution, opposition, and internal division and religious wars, even though they have succeeded in building huge and beautiful cathedrals all around the world (none of which have used eye-shadow for mortar!).

We say it can only be understood in terms of YHWH’s plans of a wondrous future for all His people, beyond their earthly pilgrimages, in a heavenly reality that far surpasses all earthly realities, and that can only be described in symbolical terms, something closely akin to the vision in **Isaiah 25**, where God is depicted as welcoming all humanity to a sumptuous feast, and death and tears are swallowed up forever.

Is this a realistic interpretation of this passage? We think it is the only interpretation that makes sense, and we think that both Motyer’s and Knight’s insistence that it is a reality that will follow the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, has been proven untrue by history. What do you think?



And I will place your pinnacles<sup>38</sup> like the precious-stone (synonym),  
and your gates for sparkling-stones,  
and all your boundaries for stones-of delight!<sup>39</sup>

54:13<sup>40</sup> וְכָל-בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי יְהוָה

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<sup>38</sup>Slotki comments that the Hebrew שְׂמֹשֶׁתֶיךָ, means “your pinnacles.” The Hebrew noun “denotes something that sparkles in the sun, שֶׁמֶשׁ, **shemesh**.” (Pp. 267-68)

<sup>39</sup>Motyer comments on **verses 11b-12** that “The afflicted / ‘humbled’ one becomes beautified...The one *lashed by storms* / ‘buffeted’ (i.e. by life’s circumstances and hostilities) becomes secure on the foundation of *righteousness* (**verses 13-17a**); and the one *not comforted* (i.e. by the Lord) stands before Him, a servant [plural in Hebrew] robed in righteousness (**verse 17b**).” (P. 449)

Yes, the clothing of the city of righteousness is just that—“righteousness.” See **chapter 58** for a description of what such righteousness looks like. It is not a picture of pious people who have been forgiven, “made right with God”—but rather, a picture of the people of God breaking the yokes that weigh upon and tie others down, reaching out to their fellows in loving, self-sacrificing service, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, etc., as well as worshiping YHWH through Sabbath-observance. That is the way the city of righteousness can be built—and we affirm, in no other way! Not through legalistic observance of 613 commandments such as the Pharisees, heirs of the Ezra / Nehemiah program insisted on, nor through pious claims to “having been circumcised / immersed / saved,” etc. etc.

Motyer observes that “By words and pictures, Isaiah creates an impression of dazzling splendor, reaching from the unseen foundations upwards to walls, gates and battlements.” (P. 450) Yes, but the foundations of righteousness, if understood in terms of **Isaiah 58**, can be clearly seen and observed by all!

<sup>40</sup>Slotki comments that **verses 13-14** depict “the inner splendor of Zion: learning, peace, righteousness and security.” (P. 268)

Westermann holds that in **verses 13b-17**, the prophet uses a “fixed form, which certainly had some particular act of worship as its basis. There are instances of it in **Psalms 91** and **121** and in **Job 5:17-26**, and suggestions of it in other places as well. **Verse 14b** corresponds to **Psalms 91:5a, 10** and to **Job 5:9b; 54:13b** is similar to **Job 5:25**...

“This is the one occasion on which it is used by Deutero-Isaiah, and the one occasion when its reference is to Israel—only here in **chapter 54**, throughout which the subject is the condition of things in the era of salvation...

(continued...)

## וְרַב שְׁלוֹם בְּנֵי־ךָ:

And all your children—learners of YHWH;<sup>41</sup>

and great peace / prosperity (for) your children!<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>(...continued)

**Verses 14a** and **13b** are general assurances of well-being for those addressed and their children. **Verse 14b** promises safety from all oppression and terror. **Verses 15** and **17** explain this—anyone who attacks is to fail (**verse 15**)...**Verse 17a** resumes **verse 14b**; no weapon or word that rises in judgment is to succeed in harming those addressed (similarly **Job 5:23**). **Verse 17b** rounds it all off: ‘this is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh’...

“It is impossible to interpret the various things said in this promise of blessing to Israel as referring to her present situation or to her situation in the immediate future. Deutero-Isaiah has taken the promise of blessing used in worship and, with hardly any, or even no change, adapted it to the nation in order to say that God’s new turning towards her (**54:7-8**) means not only the removal of her extremity, but a new era of Divine blessing...

“As we look back over **chapter 54**...in this chapter Deutero-Isaiah...wants to say that with and through the deliverance comes a new era of salvation for Israel. The renewed turning of God’s grace towards her (**verse 8**) means the introduction of a new condition of things which is to be a permanent one...The climax of it all is quite plainly the proclamation in **verses 7-8**--for Israel the new salvation means that God turns towards her in mercy.” (Pp. 278-79)

<sup>41</sup>North translates by “taught,” and says this means “taught their craft.” (P. 253)

Motyer says that “*Taught by the Lord* brings to the fore one of the core themes of this section: that the citizens of the city are like the servant of the Lord. *Taught* (לְמוֹדִים) is as in **50:4**, where the tongue and ear of the servant are characteristic of ‘those who are taught’ / ‘disciples’...Isaiah does not say how this promise is to be fulfilled (compare **Jeremiah 31:34**). The people of the Lord have always been set apart by the one great fact that they possess the word of the Lord.” (P. 450)

We agree with Motyer at this point, concerning the people of YHWH being “like the servant of the Lord.” We believe that Second Isaiah, in his descriptions of the “servant of YHWH,” means those descriptions to apply to Jerusalem / Israel, as the Divine ideal of what His servant Jacob / Israel should look like and do.

<sup>42</sup>As Slotki notes, **Isaiah 54:13** is quoted at the close of the first tractate of the **Babylonian Talmud, Berakoth 64a** (p. 404): “Rabbi Eleazar said in the name of Rabbi Chanina: The disciples of the wise increase peace in the world, as it says, ‘And all your

(continued...)

54:14 בְּצִדְקָה תְּכֹנְנֵי

רַחֲמֵי מַעֲשֶׂק

כִּי־לֹא תִירָאֵי וּמִמְחַתָּה

כִּי לֹא־תִקְרַב אֵלֶיךָ:

In righteousness you (feminine singular) will be established.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>(...continued)

children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children. Read not *banayik* [your children] but *bonayik* [your builders].” (P. 268)

Knight follows this reading, stating that Deutero-Isaiah “declares that Jerusalem’s ‘builders’ will be taught by the Lord...**Revised Standard Version’s** *sons* employs the same consonants in Hebrew as ‘builders.’ It is not possible to declare which reading Deutero-Isaiah had in mind, for vowels were not known or used in his day. But in the next line it seems quite appropriate to translate with the **Revised Standard Version** *and great shall be the prosperity, shalom, of your sons*, as this follows from **verse 10**. This too, of course will be a miracle of grace.” (Pp. 187-87)

<sup>43</sup>Slotki comments that “The life of an individual, like the existence of a state, can rest on sure foundations only if it is upheld by right conduct.” (P. 268)

Knight likewise states that “But along with privilege goes responsibility. Righteousness here is that feminine noun *tsedaqah* which we have seen describes the creative love and compassion of God which Israel must pass on to others. Then, and only then, you shall be far from oppression...and from terror.” (P. 187)

North translates by “you shall be built on a foundation of righteousness,” and comments that “It is likely that the present passage is reminiscent of **Isaiah 28:16-17**, where Yahweh announces His intention to ‘lay in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a precious corner stone for a firm foundation...and I will make justice...your standard of measure, and righteousness...your standard of weight.’” (P. 253)

For a depiction of what genuine “righteousness” looks like, see **Isaiah 58**.

Motyer states that “*Righteousness* is the rock foundation on which the city is built ...Undergirding the foundations, is a righteousness of God, according to **53:11** the righteousness of the servant.” (Pp. 450-51)

We agree with this statement, although we disagree with what Motyer means by it. He means an invisible transaction with God, in which YHWH, on the basis of the messiah, Jesus Christ’s death, forgives sin. We say that the suffering servant’s right-

(continued...)

Keep yourself far away<sup>44</sup> from oppression / tyranny.<sup>45</sup>

Because you will not be afraid, even of terror,  
because it will not draw near to you!<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>(...continued)

eousness was visible for all to see—it was his willingness to sacrifice his life on behalf of others. It was “love in action”—and it was the kind of righteousness that YHWH desires from His servant-people Israel / Jacob. If the returnees from Babylon will become the embodiment of the suffering servant, who practice the kind of righteousness depicted in **chapter 58**, they will in fact become a beautiful city, that will be the light of the world. If not, their light will go out.

<sup>44</sup>The Hebrew **רָחֲקִי** is the qal imperative feminine singular, “make distant,” “keep far away,” being commanded to the female city, Jerusalem. Translations of the verb vary, from “Thou shalt be far from oppression,” to “You shall be safe from oppression,” to “Tyranny will be far from you,” to “you will be...free from oppression,” to “be distant from injustice!”

<sup>45</sup>Slotki thinks this means the righteous will be far “from the Chaldeans who oppressed you.” (P. 268) We think it means the righteous are to keep themselves far from oppressing others. What do you think?

Motyer comments that “*Tyranny* (**עֲשֵׂק**) is a general word (found fifteen times in the **Old Testament**; in **Isaiah** at **30:12**; **54:14**; **59:13**) for the internal disruption of society. By contrast, *terror* (**מַחֲתָה**) represents assault from outside.” (P. 451)

<sup>46</sup>We are reminded of **Psalm 91**, especially **verses 5-7**, where similar promises occur that no harm can come to those who put their trust in YHWH. Again we observe how deeply influenced the **Psalter** has been on the language of **Second Isaiah**!

But we ask, both of this passage in **Second Isaiah**, and of **Psalm 91**, When, if ever, has this Divine promise proven true? It was certainly not true in the experience of Job, and it has certainly has not proven true in Jerusalem’s history, or in Israel’s history. Nor was it proven true in the experience of Jesus Christ, whose life came to a violent end at the hand of cruelty and oppression.

Knight comments that “As we have clearly see in chapter 53, oppression can come unprovoked, for man is quarrelsome by nature. So Deutero-Isaiah asks Israel not to put the blame on God for the iniquities of man.” (P. 187) But he says nothing concerning the truth or falsity of this promise. What do you say concerning it?

As a beginning minister, serving my first full-time church, in my first year in Cisco, Texas, on New Year’s eve, eight of the young people from our church were killed in a blinding head-on automobile crash, and I was called on to identify their bodies—an

(continued...)

54:15 תֵּן גֹּזֵר יִגְוֶר

אִפְסֵּ מֵאוֹתַי  
מִי־גֵר אֶתְךָ  
עַל־יָדְךָ יִפּוֹל:

Look—to stir up strife will temporarily reside--  
a ceasing from Me.

Whoever (is) a temporary resident with you,  
against you will fall.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>(...continued)

experience I cannot forget or erase from my mind. Then, just a few short months after that, my closest minister-friend and fellow student, who had finished his PhD at the University of Toronto, came to Fort Worth to visit with us—and on the trip back to Toronto was killed in a head-on crash with an automobile with a drunk driver, something inexplicable that left me astounded and bewildered. No harm will come to us who put our trust in YHWH? I am reminded of the movie, **Raid on Entebbe**, in which Jonathan Netanyahu (the Israeli Prime Minister's younger brother) is depicted with the other Israeli commandos singing **Psalms 91** on their way to Entebbe, with its assurance that no harm will come to them. But then, having successfully freed the hostages held in the Uganda airport, Jonathan, the last of the commandos returning to their plane, was shot in the back and killed. How do you explain all of this? See our footnote 50 for a possible explanation.

<sup>47</sup>This difficult **verse 15** has been given many varying translations:

**King James**, “Behold, they shall surely gather together, *but* not by me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake.”

**Tanakh**, “Surely no harm can be done Without My consent: Whoever would harm you Shall fall because of you.”

**New Revised Standard**, “If anyone stirs up strife, it is not from me; whoever stirs up strife with you shall fall because of you.”

**New International**, “If anyone does attack you, it will not be my doing; whoever attacks you will surrender to you.”

**New Jerusalem**, “Should anyone attack you, that will not be my doing, and whoever does attack you, for your sake will fall.”

**Rahfs**, ἰδοὺ προσήλυτοι προσελεύσονται σοι δι’ ἐμοῦ καὶ ἐπὶ σὲ καταφεύξονται, “Behold, proselytes / converts will come to you because of Me, and to you they will flee.”

(continued...)

54:16<sup>48</sup> (הוּ) [הִנֵּה] אֲנִי בְרַאתִי חֹרֵשׁ

נִפְתָּהּ בְּאֵשׁ פְּחָם

וּמוֹצִיא כְּלִי לְמַעֲשָׂהּ

וְאֲנִי בְרַאתִי מַשְׁחִית לְחַבֵּל:

Look<sup>49</sup>—I, I created (the) metal-worker, who blows on a fire—its coals,  
and who brings forth an instrument for His work;  
and I, I created, ruin / destruction for destroying!<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>(...continued)

Alexander comments that the meaning of the verse is “If enemies should be assembled, it will not be by Divine command...and they shall end by coming over to the side of those whom they assail.” He adds that “This, on the whole, appears to be the meaning, although every expression has received a different explanation.” (P. 319)

And we wonder. We have oftentimes heard it claimed that for the **Hebrew Bible**, everything that happens in human history is to be ultimately traced back to God. But if this is true for the **Hebrew Bible** as a whole, it seems to be rejected by this statement in **Second Isaiah**. What do you think?

Knight comments that “Deutero-Isaiah asks Israel not to put the blame on God for the iniquities of man.” (P. 187)

<sup>48</sup>Slotki comments on **verses 16-17** that they mean “Neither violent action nor malicious speech will be effective against Israel because his Protector is God, the Creator of both the maker of the instrument of destruction and the man who uses it; neither can act against His will.” (P. 268)

If this is in fact what these verses teach, hasn't the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 C.E., and the Nazi holocaust of the Jews in the twentieth century proven it to be untrue? Do you think Hitler and his henchmen were acting according to the will of God? How will you explain this?

<sup>49</sup>The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” הוּ, “lo!,” or “behold!”, and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” הִנֵּה, with the same meaning. This last is more widely used in biblical Hebrew than the first, shorter form.

<sup>50</sup>Alexander translates **verse 16** by “Lo, I have created the smith, blowing into the fire of coal, and bringing out a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy.” He comments that “The general meaning evidently is, that God can certainly

(continued...)

54:17 כָּל-כְּלֵי יוֹצֵר עֲלֵיךָ לֹא יִצְלַח

וְכָל-לְשׁוֹן תִּקְוִים-אֶתְךָ לְמִשְׁפַּט תְּרַשְׁעֵי

זֹאת נִחַלְתָּ עִבְדֵי יְהוָה

וְצַדִּיקְתֶּם מֵאֵתִי

נְאֻם-יְהוָה:

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<sup>50</sup>(...continued)

redeem His pledge, because all instruments and agents are alike at His disposal and under His control. He is not only the Maker of the weapons of war, but the Maker of their maker, as well as of the warrior who wields them.” (P. 320)

North notes that the verb used here, בָּרָאתִי, “I created,” is for “Yahweh’s action in contemporary history as well as in the original creation. God creates the smith (44:12) who produces weapons, and also the man who uses them, and He can, at will, nullify the endeavors of both.” (P. 254)

Motyer comments on **verse 16** that “This verse is enfolded by the verb ‘to create’ and is one of the great biblical statements of the sovereignty which this verb attributes to the Creator...On sovereignty working in history see 10:5-15. Here [Isaiah 54:16], human skill (*blacksmith*), mechanical device (*weapon*), evil purpose (*destroyer*) and outcome (*prevail*) are all within the sovereign disposal of the Creator.” (P. 451)

Knight comments that here in **verse 16** “we are reminded of Deutero-Isaiah’s categorical statement in 45:7 about the nature of God: I form light and create darkness, I make weal (*shalom*) and create woe (*ra*). His illustration now of the blacksmith is interesting, for by it he is again showing that God is ultimately responsible for evil, that is, God is responsible if people make weapons of destruction: fire, sword, or, in our day, the nuclear bomb.” (P. 187)

Of course, this all seems very naive and false, if we judge happenings simply on the basis of our human history, without taking into account God’s eternal realm, and His promise of life beyond death. Can we not, with that higher realm and God’s promise taken into account, believe that even when tragedy and death strike God’s people, that is not their final end—and there is eternal blessedness that welcomes them? What do you think?

But if God and His heavenly home are real—as the **Bible** claims over and over again, what may appear as tragic defeat on a human level, can be understood as a glorious victory and entry into life on the Divine level. Do you agree? Does not **chapter 53**, with its story of the suffering servant who willingly goes to his death, but lives beyond death, point to this kind of conclusion?

Every weapon being formed against you will not prosper.

And every tongue (that) will stand up with you for the judgment, you will show to be evil.

This (is the) inheritance of YHWH's servants,<sup>51</sup>

and their righteousness (is) from Me.<sup>52</sup> A saying of YHWH.

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<sup>51</sup>Motyer comments that "All the blessings the poem has described (the city and its strength and the incontestable right to citizenship) now belong to *the servants of the Lord*. Up to this point Isaiah has used 'servant' only in the singular but from now on it is used only in the plural. The saving work of the servant creates *servants*." (P. 451)

We believe that the "Songs of the Servant" depict what it is that YHWH wants His people Israel—specifically, the returnees from Babylon—to be and to do. They as a people, and they as individuals, are to be YHWH's servants in this world, willingly suffering on behalf of their sinful fellow human beings. Having depicted the "ideal servant" in **chapter 53**, now the text begins to speak of how that depiction of the servant is to become reality—in the people of Israel, YHWH's "servant / servants."

Knight comments that the fact that YHWH has created the forger of weapons and those who use the weapons, "does not mean that God is responsible for the sin in the heart of man, leading him to oppress his brother with the sword that he has made. In fact, it is the way of the servants of the Lord that wins in the end, not the sword..."

"If Israel, then, the people of God were to be the 'form' of the servant, as Deuteronomy-Isaiah declares they are called to be, then it will be their heritage, their 'share,' even their Divine calling, to accept the oppression of violent men. These they need never fear, however, for the creative love that they are to show has its source in [YHWH]." (P. 187)

This is made emphatically clear by the following words—"A saying of YHWH."

<sup>52</sup>Slotki comments on **verse 17** that it means "Israel's future safety is, therefore assured." (P. 269) Yes, if Israel will truly be YHWH's servants!

Alexander, in conformity to his overall view that **Isaiah** is predicting the ultimate victory of Christ and the Church, states that "In all these varied forms of strife it is predicted that the church shall be victorious. (Compare **Romans 8:37** and **2 Corinthians 2:14**.) And this security is represented as her heritage or lawful possession and as her right, i.e. what is due to her from God, as the Judge of the whole earth Who must do right." (P. 322)

What do you think? Do you imagine that Israel's safety following the return from Babylonian captivity was assured? Israel's history certainly doesn't reveal any such thing! And have the followers of Jesus Christ always been victorious? The history of

(continued...)



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<sup>52</sup>(...continued)

Christianity is riddled with long periods of persecution and division and religious wars. “Always victorious”?

But if human history is viewed from the religious conviction that God takes His people from the sufferings and hardships and struggles of this earthly life into His eternal presence, to sit at His table, and share in His glory, then we can agree both with this promise in **Isaiah 54** and with Paul’s conviction as expressed in **Romans 8:37** and **2 Corinthians 2:14**. How does your personal theology fit into all of this?

Oswalt comments that “The conclusion of **verses 15-16** is this: whoever attempts to use weapon or tongue against the people of God will not succeed, because God is not sending that trouble and all things must eventually serve His purposes. They may be able to injure God’s people, even to the extent of appearing to destroy them, but in fact they will not be able to do so. God’s people will survive, and will survive when the destroyers are long gone. Thus it has been in our own time: the 1000-year empire of Nazism, whose centerpiece was its vendetta against Judaism, survived little more than 10 years, and the main result of its vendetta was the establishment of the Jewish state, which had not existed for 2000 years previously.” (Pp. 430-31)

But when Oswalt claims that “God is not sending that trouble,” he is overlooking the statements made by Isaiah that God Himself sent both the Assyrians and the Babylonians as His “tool” or “weapons of His indignation” to conquer Northern Israel and Judah, and carry them into exile. See **Isaiah 13**.

North comments that “Yahweh’s guarantee to Zion is of a ‘prosperity’...modest enough. Again, no promises of world empire...’The servants of the Lord’ are not even promised life free from anxieties. We may compare **John 16:33**, ‘I have told you all this that in me you may find peace. In the world you will have trouble. But courage! The victory is mine.’ (**New English Bible**) Deutero-Isaiah was more concerned with the spiritual than the material welfare of ‘the servants of the Lord’ (quoting Volz).” (P. 254)