

Isaiah Chapter 55, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

55:1' הָיִי כָּל-צִמָּא לְכוּ לַמַּיִם

¹Slotki entitles **chapter 55** “Summons to Enjoy the New Era.”

He comments on **verses 1-5** that they depict “The prosperity and blessings of Jerusalem when restored.” He also comments on **verses 1-2** that “Rich and poor are invited to the spiritual feast, the metaphorical *water, wine* and *milk*.” (P. 269)

Alexander, as we have come to expect, holds that **chapter 55** is speaking about the church (meaning the faithful Jewish remnant and the Christian believers): “By the removal of the old restrictions, the church is, for the first time, open to the whole world, as a source or medium of the richest spiritual blessings, **verse 1**. It is only here that real nourishment can be obtained, **verse 2**. Life is made sure by an oath and covenant, **verse 3**. The messiah is a witness of the truth and a commander of the nations, **verse 4**. As such he will be recognized by many nations who before knew nothing of the true religion, **verse 5**. These are now addressed directly, and exhorted to embrace the offered opportunity, **verse 6**. To this there is every encouragement afforded in the Divine mercy, **verse 7**. The infinite disparity between God and man should have the same effect, instead of hindering it, **verses 8** and **9**. The commands and promises of God must be fulfilled, **verses 10** and **11**. Nothing, therefore, can prevent a glorious change in the condition of the world under the dispensation of the Spirit, **verse 12**. This blessed renovation, being directly promotive of God’s glory, shall endure for ever, **verse 13**.” (P. 322)

Of course, the word “church” does not appear in the text, nor the phrase “dispensation of the Spirit,” nor is “the messiah” so much as mentioned, nor “true religion.” All of this is being read into the text, not being genuinely found there. And the result of such an interpretation is to separate the text from its context, which is the Jewish exiles in Babylon being invited to share in the great blessings that are imminent on their release from captivity and their return to their homeland.

Oswalt entitles **chapter 55** “Seek the Lord.”

He comments that “**Chapter 55** is the second part of Isaiah’s celebration of the work of the servant. In the first part (**chapter 54**), he rehearsed the effects of that work as Israel’s estrangement from her husband is healed and as her spiritual poverty and despair are replaced by the glorious city of righteousness. Now he moves from the descriptive mode to the prescriptive mode, calling Israel to receive what is now hers to have. **Verses 1-7** have 12 imperative or jussive verbs, by means of which the prophet implores Israel not to miss what God has for her, even if what God has said is not entirely understandable (**verses 8-11**). The celebration closes with a promise (**verses 12-13**), utilizing the language of restoration from exile but also the language of nature’s rejoicing that has typically accompanied passages about the servant and his work (**42: 10; 44:23; 49:13**)...

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“The first section [**verses 1-5**] calls the people to listen to and receive God’s wonderful promise of a new covenant based on the earlier Davidic one. Part of the wonder is that it is free. Whereas the Gods of this world require a high price for what is ultimately dust and ashes, the Lord offers for free a relationship that will never end and that has universal implications.

“The second section [**verses 6-13**] is linked to the first by the continuation of the imperative mode...It may seem that God should be unable to offer restoration to wicked people and that it would be futile to seek the Lord as the prophet is urging, but he says we should do it anyway (**verses 6-7**) because (1) our understanding is not the measure of what God can do (**verses 8-9**); (2) God’s word is absolutely dependable (**verses 10-11**); and (3) God promises wonderful results (**verses 12-13**)...

“In terms of the structure of thought in the **book**, something has happened that has completely changed the picture. If they will, God’s people can see a face of God that is welcoming and approving. They can receive a certain word from God that does not have to do with the inescapability of destruction, but with the assurance of a bright future. What has happened to account for this shift in tone? One thing only: the announcement of the work of the servant. Because of what he has done, God’s face toward His people is not stormy but sunny. The ‘arm of the Lord’ has been revealed against what has separated them from God: their unatoned-for sin. The only thing that they must do is to accept the sin offering that the servant has made (in prospect) and receive the mercy of God that it entails. If they do this, they are indeed able to be the servants of God in the world, a position toward which the **book** has been looking at least since **chapter 2**.” (Pp. 433-35)

But while this lengthy statement seems impressive, it is filled with assumptions that are mistaken. There is nothing said in either **chapter 54** or **55** about “celebrating the work of the servant.” In fact the singular “servant” does not occur in either chapter; only the plural in **54:17**, which speaks about the “heritage of the servants of YHWH.” Nor is there anything said about “their unatoned-for sin.”

Oswalt refers to the work of the servant as having given the exiles forgiveness, but the good news of Second Isaiah is that YHWH had already freely and fully forgiven the exiles—see **Isaiah 42:1-2**, before any mention of the servant. It is not forgiveness “in prospect” as Oswalt states, but it is forgiveness already accomplished! The “something that has happened” is not what the suffering servant has accomplished (which, according to Oswalt, would only happen centuries later!), but what YHWH has accomplished in forgiving His exiled people—which forms the basis for Second Isaiah’s message! We can only conclude that Oswalt is basically mistaken in this comment.

North entitles **55:1-5**, “Come, Everything Is Now Ready.” He comments that “This passage is the **Old Testament** equivalent to the parable of the Great Supper

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וַאֲשֶׁר אֵין-לֹו כֶסֶף לְכֹו שְׁבֵרוּ וְאֹכְלוּ
וּלְכֹו שְׁבֵרוּ בְּלוֹא-כֶסֶף וּבְלוֹא מַחִיר יֵין וְחֶלֶב:

Ahoy,² everyone who is thirsty!³ Come to the waters!⁴

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(**Luke 14:15-24**; compare also **John 7:37-38**; **Revelation 22:17**. [But an invitation to a supper / feast is not a matter of buying food and drink!])...

“To understand it we should remember that in the East water is still sold in the streets, and that a man wishing to be philanthropic will buy up the stock of a water-carrier or baker, and order him to distribute it gratis (so Volz, German **Commentary on Second Isaiah**, Leipzig, 1932)...

“But the bounty of the Divine Donor goes beyond the bare necessities of bread and water, to include the luxuries of wine and milk. All are symbols of the true bread, ‘the real bread from heaven’ (**John 6:27, 32**), as contrasted with the perishable for which men expend toil and money...The sum of the matter is that God offers men spiritual food gratis. This is **Old Testament** as well as **New Testament** doctrine.” (P. 255)

Westermann entitles **verses 1-5** “Come, all you that thirst.” He comments that “**Chapters 54 and 55** are closely akin; thus the imperatives in **verses 1-3a** follow on those of **54:1** and **4**...There is an unusual accumulation of imperatives here (**verses 1-2**, come and buy, **verses 2b-3a**, come and hear), and what they serve to introduce is a proclamation of salvation (**verse 3b**). This is expanded by means of a twofold ‘behold.’ The first, in **verse 4**, looks back to the old covenant with David, the second, in **verse 5a**, makes a contrast between this and the new covenant in which the ‘graces bestowed on David’ are now promised to Israel.” (Pp. 280-81)

Motyer entitles **55:1-13** “Invitation to come: the world renewed and a universal call to free, full and covenanted pardon.”

Knight comments on **chapter 55** that “We now reach the climax of Deutero-Isaiah’s great thesis...In this last chapter the outcome of God’s purpose in the servant is at last revealed. That purpose is the redemption not only of Israel herself but of all mankind, including even the earth on which mankind takes his stand. That surely is good news and the climax to all that Deutero-Isaiah has to say.” (P. 189)

²North translates by the double “Attend! Attend!” He comments that the Hebrew הָוִי, more often than not introduces a lamentation...or a declaration of judgment...Here ...it is meant to rouse attention, rather like the (usually) thrice-repeated ‘Oyez!’ of the medieval town-crier.” (P. 256) See Westermann’s comment in footnote 9.

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Oswalt states that הוֹי “is the same word translated elsewhere as ‘Woe!’ or ‘Alas!’...Its presence here along with the five imperatives in this verse gives a strong sense of urgency and importance to what follows...

“Speaking both for God and as God, the prophet issues a sweeping invitation: every thirsty person is invited to come to the water. Elsewhere in this **book**, water is associated with the giving of the Spirit of God, poured on the ground that has been parched by sin and disobedience (**Isaiah 32:15; 44:3**). In those places this spiritual water is a promise. Now, everyone is invited to come and receive it. The call brings to mind Jesus’ comments to the Samaritan woman (**John 4:10-14**) and his shouted invitation in the temple (**John 7:37-38**)...The point is that a general invitation is extended to persons who have no resources to receive freely the things they desperately need.” (P. 435)

Yes. And we observe that Jesus offered free and full forgiveness throughout his ministry, before his dying as the “suffering servant.” He never told anyone that they would be forgiven when he died on their behalf—he simply pronounced them forgiven—closely similar to what Second Isaiah does with his proclamation that God has fully forgiven the Israelites, and is inviting them to enter into this new era of salvation, long before the coming of the Christian suffering servant!

³Slotki says that the “thirst” intended is “for the word of God,” and that the “water” is “figurative for the **Torah**,” probably meaning the “Five Books of Moses,” or perhaps, the Divine teaching / direction. (P. 269)

⁴Motyer states that “*Come to the waters* highlights the existence of the need and the adequacy of the provision of water for the thirsty.” (P. 452)

Knight comments that “This message takes the form of a gracious invitation. As such the speaker does not compel his hearers to come. He respects their personality and leaves them room to refuse...

“Just as the land of Canaan had been God’s free gift to Israel, with its milk and honey, so now Israel is invited to sup, for free, on bread and wine and milk with the Lord of the land of Canaan, viz. Yahweh, in a sense that went beyond the eating of material food...It was the bread of ‘life’...that she is here invited to come and get and eat and live ...It is the water of life (compare **Isaiah 12:3** [‘with joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation in that day’] that Israel is summoned to come and drink, that water of which Ezekiel too in days of exile had spoken and which he had described as the river of life (**Ezekiel 47:1-12**; compare **John 4:10; 7:37-38**)...

“The imagery which Deutero-Isaiah uses here then is that of a banquet spread by Yahweh Himself to which He invites His bride, the sinful Israel. For we have learned that Yahweh loves her still, and that she has now been brought back, proleptically [in

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And whoever has no silver / money, come, buy⁵ and eat!
And come—buy⁶ without silver / money and without a price,⁷ wine and milk!⁸

⁴(...continued)
anticipation, as if it already had been accomplished], to where she belongs in her Divine Husband's home. It is from this and similar verses that so much of the later imagery of the **Bible** is taken, where Israel's hope for the future is pictured." (Pp. 189-90) See:

Isaiah 25:6,

And YHWH of Armies will make for all the peoples,
on this mountain,
a drinking-banquet of fatness,
a drinking-banquet of aged / matured wine—
fatness full of marrow,
(and) refined wines.

Matthew 22:2-4,

- 2 The Kingdom of the heavens is likened to a man, a king,
who made / prepared wedding feasts for his son;
3 and he sent forth the servants of his to call the ones having been called / invited
to the wedding feasts
and they were not willing to come.

Revelation 19:9, which describes an unidentified voice that came to John:

And it says to me, Write!
Blessed (are) those having been called / invited to the supper of the
wedding-feast of the Little Lamb!
And it says to me,
These words are true (and) of / from the God.

Knight adds that "The Qumran community, even before the advent of Christ, evidently understood their own sacred meal partly in the light of this passage." (P. 190)

⁵Slotki notes that the verb used here, שָׁבַר, usually means "buy corn" (compare **Genesis 42:2**), while the noun from the same root means "grain, corn." (P. 269)

Motyer comments that "This is a purchase which is somehow free to the purchaser. Poverty is no barrier, indeed the person with no money is a welcome customer who will eat according to need." (P. 453)

⁶Motyer observes that "Yet alongside this emphasis on freeness, the verb *buy* is repeated. The thought of purchase is not set aside; this is no soup-kitchen, even if the

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לָמָּה תִשְׁקָלוּ-כֶסֶף בְּלוֹא-לֶחֶם 55:2⁹

וַיִּגְיַעְכֶּם בְּלוֹא לֶשֶׁבֶעָה

שָׁמְעוּ שְׂמוֹעַ אֵלַי וְאֶכְלוּ-טוֹב

וְתִתְעַנְּגוּ בְדָשָׁן נַפְשְׁכֶם:

For what reason will you people spend silver / money on what is not food / bread?¹⁰

⁶(...continued)

clients are beggars. There is a purchase and a price, though not theirs to pay. They bring their poverty to a transaction already completed. Contextually, this is another allusion to the work of the [suffering] servant.” (P. 453)

But there is no mention of the servant, and Motyer is using the language of this verse to bring in his Christian theology of atonement as satisfaction, Christ’s payment of humanity’s debt (see Anselm of Canterbury in **Wikipedia**). We say, that while the water and bread / wine is given freely to those who have no money, there is still a price

to be paid—accepting these gifts means responding with our lives, giving back our lives as servants of the Giver.

⁷Oswalt states, “Shockingly, Isaiah says that it [spiritual sustenance] may be acquired, bought, without price. What merchant would ever think of selling his wares free of charge? But God does! How can He do it? Perhaps someone else has already paid the price? In any case, we can have everything necessary to life—for free. Why wait to accept the invitation?” (P. 436)

Yes, “free of charge”! Not because someone else has paid the price—as Oswalt suggest, and states clearly in his theology of the Messiah paying the price for humanity’s sins. We say God in His generosity gives salvation, completely free of charge. Do you agree?

⁸Alexander comments concerning “the seeming incongruity of buying without money or any other price,” that “This apparent contradiction was intended by the writer to express in the strongest manner the gratuitous [given free of charge] nature of the purchase...The images of this verse are essentially the same with those in chapters **12:3; 25:6, 62:8, 9; 65:13; John 4:13, 7:37; Revelation 22:17.**”

⁹Motyer comments on **verses 2-3b** that “The figure of commerce is continued (**verse 2a,b**) with the buyer lacking discernment...to make wise purchases.” (P. 453)

¹⁰Oswalt comments that **verse 2** “continues the thought of **verse 1** by means of contrast: When people could have rich spiritual life for nothing, why would they weigh

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And your product / property¹¹ for what is not satisfying?¹²

¹⁰(...continued)

out silver for what is not bread?...This contrast between working for nothing and receiving for nothing is at the heart of the Christian understanding...

“Commentators who believe firmly in the hypothesis of ‘Deutero-Isaiah’ are hard pressed to make this passage fit into the supposed historical setting of the exile. They hypothesize that people who had grown comfortable with the material possessions of Babylon are being encouraged to abandon those in hope of getting greater spiritual satisfaction by returning home. It requires less conjecture to understand that the prophet is not confining himself to a single historical setting. Although he uses the exile as a primary source of his imagery, he is talking about the perennial condition of the human heart in all historical settings.” (P. 436)

But the fact is, the exile in Babylon is *the* historical setting of the text—not a number of historical settings. And the Jews in Babylon faced the common temptation of making material things their highest goal, rather than spiritual things, especially as their faith and memories grew weaker. That is exactly the reason, we believe, that so few of the exiles immediately accepted Cyrus’ invitation for them to return to their homeland. No one is “hard pressed” to make such an application of the text. And we remember Second Isaiah’s strong criticism of the idol-maker—that he “fed on ashes” (**Isaiah 44:20**), spending his money on what ultimately would not satisfy.

Knight comments that “Unless [anyone] eats this spiritual bread, [his] life is vain. Getting and spending we lay waste our powers, that is to say our *labor*, or energy *for that which does not satisfy*. Normally man seeks to live on what the Hebrew calls here ‘non-food,’ that is, the gratification of his own selfish desires. The result is that in the end he is left hungry and unsatisfied. Why should man be such a fool?” (P. 191)

¹¹North translates by “your riches,” while admitting that it is properly “your toil.” But, he comments, “just as פֶּעֶלָה, (‘work’) comes to be used of the wages earned by work...so it is with this word [יְגִיעֵכֶם], with some emphasis on its quantity as ‘wealth’... Such wealth would usually be ‘in kind’ [in the same way, with something similar]...as it still is in farming communities. Or we might translate ‘or toil for what does not satisfy?’” (P. 256)

Slotki comments that “The Hebrew noun [פֶּעֶלָה] means ‘labor’ as well as ‘gain,’ the proceeds of labor.” (P. 270)

¹²Slotki comments that “Worldly pursuits involve the spending of money and labor without satisfying the soul that craves for the spiritual life.” (P. 270) Yes, indeed!

Alexander comments in his typical fashion, “The gratuitous blessings offered by Messiah are contrasted with the costly and unprofitable labors of mankind to gain the

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Truly listen to Me,¹³ and eat (what is) good,¹⁴
and let your innermost-being¹⁵ enjoy itself in the rich food!¹⁶

¹²(...continued)

same end in another way.” (P. 324) But again we ask, Where is any mention of the messiah?

¹³The Hebrew is שְׁמַעוּ שְׁמוּעָה, an imperative verb followed by the infinitive absolute, which is a common Hebrew way of providing emphasis. Motyer translates by “listen persistently.” (P. 453)

¹⁴Second Isaiah says, “Get off the junk food! Eat only the food that will give you genuine nourishment. Get a diet that will feed and satisfy your innermost-being!”

¹⁵This is the often used noun נַפְשָׁם, with the plural pronominal suffix, נַפְשֵׁיכֶם, “your (plural) innermost-being.” The noun has many meanings, including “soul,” “living being,” “life,” “self,” “person,” “desire,” “appetite,” “emotion,” and “passion” (**Brown-Driver-Briggs**).

Slotki states that “The Hebrew noun נַפֵּשׁ here means ‘desire,’ ‘appetite.’” (P. 270)

Alexander states that “the mention of the soul admits of two explanations. We may give the Hebrew word its frequent sense of *appetite*, exactly as the appetite is said in common parlance to be gratified, indulged, pampered, mortified, & etc. This is a good sense in itself, but less in keeping with the rest of the description than another which may be obtained by supposing that the soul is mentioned for the purpose of showing that the hunger and the food referred to are not bodily but spiritual.” (P. 325)

¹⁶Slotki translates the noun דֶּשֶׁן by “fatness,” and explains that it means “the most nourishing and wholesome food, figurative for ethical and spiritual satisfaction.” (P. 270)

Brown-Driver-Briggs states that the noun means “*fatness*,” “abundance,” “luxuriance,” “oil,” which in passages like this (compare **Psalm 36:9**) passes over into the figurative meaning of “spiritual blessing.”

Knight likewise explains that “To delight yourselves in fatness meant enjoying what, to the easterner, was the best of the meat, the fatty parts of the fatted calf or sheep, or else any food that has been cooked in olive oil. For these were both considered the greatest delicacies of which a humble farm worker or artisan could hope to partake.” (P. 191)

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North comments on **verses 1-2** that they “can be read as an utterance of the Prophet speaking *in propria persona* [in his or her own person]. The language is of the kind he might use in the bazaar in the name of the God Who commissions him...But it is impossible to disjoin **verses 1-2** from what follows, in which the speaker is Yahweh. This implies that **verses 1-2** are also words of Yahweh. The whole is an example of the way in which a prophet could not only speak *for* God but also *as* God. A similar passage is **Isaiah 5:1-7**. The word of the prophet is the word of God, His indignation God’s indignation, his sorrow God’s sorrow. It is pre-eminently in this that we have in the **Old Testament** anticipations of the Incarnation, of the Word become flesh.” (P. 255)

Westermann comments on **verses 1-3** that “The thing to which men are here called is not primarily the saving event, but the new condition of salvation...Begriff gives an excellent explanation of the form of the first verses which sheds a great deal of light upon them:

In respect of form, **55:1-5** is an invitation on the part of Wisdom to be guests at her table. She begins with the characteristic public invitation to the hungry and thirsty to come (**Proverbs 9:5; Ben Sirach 24:19**) and partake of food and drink at her table, where both can be had without money...Notice that, as in **Proverbs 9:11**, this invitation culminates in a promise of life. [Westermann gives no reference here. But we observe that **Second Isaiah** is not part of Israel’s “wisdom literature,” and there is no indication of Wisdom speaking here.]

“While I have no wish to challenge this explanation, I...ask whether these cries in **verse 2a** might not have as good, or even better, a prototype, in the cries of water-sellers and others who shouted their wares in the market—these certainly had a fixed form and were familiar to everyone...The repetition of the imperatives ‘come’ and buy’ would be perfectly deliberate, in imitation of the cries of the vendors...There is in actual fact a difference between a cry of the vendor in the market and an invitation to a banquet.

“What is the meaning of this loud ‘market-place’ invitation?...The translation suggested by North, ‘that you may have life in its fullness,’ seems to point in the right direction. What Deutero-Isaiah had previously proclaimed in the discharge of his task was in the main the deliverance from Babylon and the return home. He now adds to this words to the effect that life in its fullness is awaiting you! As well as delivering you, God gives you blessing. This fullness of this blessing that God works for you is awaiting you if you now close with the invitation given in His word of salvation.” (Pp. 281-82)

We think the invitation is to listen to Second Isaiah’s words, and become the “servant / servants of YHWH,” giving their lives in loving, self-sacrificing service to others, taking their sins and failures upon themselves, being willing to die on their behalf as YHWH’s “suffering servant / servants”! What do you think?

¹⁷Slotki comments on **verses 3-5** that “The reward of a return to God and His **Torah** will be a new and everlasting covenant, Israel’s supremacy and influence and the fulfilment of the hopes centered in the Davidic dynasty.” (P. 270)

Westermann comments on **verses 3b-5** that “We now arrive at the proclamation ...With His chosen people God intends to make a lasting (or permanent) covenant, the content of which is defined in the words that follow, the steadfast, sure tokens of grace vouchsafed [given in a gracious manner] to David (**2 Samuel 7:8-16; 23:5; Psalm 89:28-38**^{Heb} / **27-37**^{Eng}). The tokens of grace which the prophecy of Nathan conferred on David and his house [our ‘household’] are now promised to Israel...

“[As Volz has stated,] the promise to David is transferred to the nation Israel.’ The theological significance of this is emphasized by von Rad [Westermann’s mentor]. ‘He does not, however, interpret...in the traditional way, for he understands them (the promises) to have been made not to David but to the whole nation. It is, therefore, for all Israel that the promises made to David are to be realized.’ (**Old Testament Theology**, II, Edinburgh and London, 1965, p. 240)...

“As well as **2 Samuel 7:8-16** and **1 Kings 8:23-26** and **2 Samuel 23:5, Psalm 89** is particularly important for the understanding of the present passage...

“There [in **Psalm 89**] the actual subject of a community lament (probably composed during the exile) is the breach of the Divine promises made—and that by oath—to David. **Psalm 89** itself shows how greatly this breach disturbed Israel. It called everything in question (compare also **Lamentations 4**). It gave rise to two entirely different new hopes or proclamations. The first was that a new and completely different king would come into being from the house[hold] of David (the ‘shoot,’ the messiah). The second was this transformation of the old prophecy [**2 Samuel 7:8-16** by] Deutero-Isaiah. We have to take it that laments such that contained in **Psalm 89** were known to our prophet, and also that the great disturbance caused by the breach of the old promise to David formed part of the misery, to counter which he had to speak his message of comfort. Because of this, an utterance on the subject was indispensable. And what he does say is extremely bold. Unlike the messianic predictions, he does not take as the way of comforting his people telling them of some supernatural king who is to come at some time in the future and effect their salvation. Instead, he is daring enough to proclaim that, with the imminent Divine act of the release [from Babylonian captivity], the tokens of grace vouchsafed to David are transferred to Israel...

“Bearing **Psalm 89** in mind, we see that this is the reason for what is so much emphasized in the proclamation in **verse 3b**, a *lasting covenant* (בְּרִית עוֹלָם), the *reliable* (or, sure and steadfast) tokens of grace vouchsafed to David. These words are a direct refutation of the lament at the breach of the covenant with David. This once again makes it perfectly plain that what **chapters 54-55** are concerned with is the element of continuance and permanence, the enduring. This is also the reason for the

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שִׁמְעוּ וּתְחִי נַפְשְׁכֶם
 וְאַכְרַתְהָ לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם
 חֲסֵדֵי דוֹד הַנְּאֻמְנִים:

Incline your (plural) ear,¹⁸ and come to Me!¹⁹

Listen—and your (plural) innermost-being will live!²⁰

¹⁷(...continued)

mention of the covenants with Noah and David, both of which involve promises of blessing.” (Pp. 283-84)

Knight comments on **verse 3** that “If a man then will but come to Me and eat this bread and drink this cup, he will live in the sense that only Divine food can enable a man to live. Moreover, God’s will is not that men should just eat and drink once only and then return to their old and stupid ways. His will is that this new experience of fullness of life should remain as man’s eternal heritage. Consequently, God now offers to pledge this eternal life to Israel within the bonds of the covenant, that is to say to an Israel that has now tasted the bitterness of death and the descent into hell [old English for hades, the grave, underworld].” (P. 191) See **Ezekiel 37**, for this metaphorical description of the exile as death, and the return to Israel as “resurrection from the dead.”

¹⁸Slotki notes that “God is addressing Israel.” (P. 270) We think this is correct, but in fact the text is not explicit about who is being addressed. What do you think? Is it only Israel, or is the invitation addressed to a wider audience, to anyone who will respond?

¹⁹It is again a Divine invitation, to those hearing the voice—“Come to Me!” YHWH has forgiven all of Israel’s sins (**42:1-2**), and has declared their time of service ended. But still, Israel must respond. If Israel doesn’t come to YHWH, they will not enter into the “era of salvation.” It is not, as Westermann holds, an “unconditional” salvation. Israel must “come to YHWH.”

We are reminded of the many times reported especially in the **Gospel of John** when Jesus speaks of “coming to him” in order to receive his gifts.

Motyer comments that “What was metaphor, come to the waters (**verse 1**), is now reality, come to Me. The Lord Himself is the feast.” (P. 453) Or, should it not be said, “the Lord is the Giver of the feast,” the One Who can cut / make the kind of covenant that will endure throughout time, a covenant based on love, and that will give life to the innermost-being of humanity?

²⁰North translates by “that you may have life in its fullness,” and comments that “The Hebrew is ‘that your soul (נַפְשְׁךָ) may live’...There is no emphasis on the ‘soul’ as

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And I will cut for you people a long-lasting covenant—²¹

²⁰(...continued)

distinct from the body...though there is probably some intended contrast between נפש here and נפש ('appetite') in the preceding verse." (P. 256)

Oswalt comments that "This has nothing to do with returning to Israel and eating food there. It has to do with renouncing unbelief and rebellion, and accepting God's provisions for life with Him through the sacrifice of the servant." (P. 437)

Yes, but Oswalt is reading "through the sacrifice of the servant" into the text, as do others, including Knight. And we add that it may also have to do with renouncing despair and loss of faith on the part of the Israelite exiles, who had become convinced that their situation was hopeless, as far as ever returning to their homeland was concerned. Oswalt himself goes on to say that "The people may feel that the destruction of their homeland and the exile are signs that God has forgotten His covenant, but here He asserts that He will never do so." (P. 437)

²¹Oswalt comments that "As David experienced God's certain mercies (utterly dependable acts of covenant love-- רחמים, in the plural), so Israel could participate in them as well." (P. 438)

Indeed, YHWH's forgiveness of David's adultery and murder without sacrifice or temple ritual, but only an humble confession and request for forgiveness, was a great sign of "steadfast-love"! This is the kind of care for Israel that Second Isaiah is announcing, and calling upon Israel to respond to and enjoy. This statement identifies the covenant with just that—"steadfast-loves," "faithful ones." YHWH's covenant is a covenant consisting of steadfast-love for His people!

Motyer comments that **Psalm 89** is "vital for our understanding of this plural word [רחמים; here in construct form, רחמי]." (P. 453) We agree, and add, also see **Psalms 45:7^{Heb} / 6^{Eng}** and **61:7-8^{Heb} / 6-7^{Eng}** and **2 Samuel 7:16** for the Divine promises made to David.

steadfast loves²² of David,^{1, 2} the true-faithful²³ ones!

²²North translates by “the manifestations of My love for David,” holding that it means literally “the deeds of [My] אֲהַבָּהּ to David”...There is not the slightest doubt that a distinction grew up between the singular אֲהַבָּהּ and the plural אֲהַבָּהִים, here in the construct form אֲהַבָּהֶם, ‘deeds (i.e. expressions / evidences / manifestations) of אֲהַבָּהּ [‘steadfast-love’].” (P. 257)

Slotki translates by “the sure mercies of David,” and states that this is what was promised David in **2 Samuel 7:8-16**. (P. 270) See our end-note 1 for a translation of this important passage from **2 Samuel**.

Alexander states that the phrase “mercies of David” can be given three interpretations:

1. Favors, like those which were enjoyed by David;
2. Favors like those enjoyed by the household / descendants of David;
3. The mercies promised to David in **2 Samuel 7:8-16**.

Alexander states with regards to the third interpretation, “Thus understood, the text contains a solemn assurance that the promise made to David should be faithfully performed in its original import and intent,” and adds that “As the main theme of this promise was a perpetual succession on the throne of David, it was fulfilled in Christ, to whom it is applied in **Acts 13:34**.” (P. 326)

But was this “perpetual succession”? We think not, since from the exile to the first century C.E. there was no Davidic dynasty on the throne of Israel. See North’s comment below.

When Alexander mentions favors enjoyed by David, we automatically think of how YHWH had shown David unbelievable grace and forgiveness in his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband by royal decree, without any animal sacrifice, and without any priestly liturgy—only the prophet Nathan pronouncing him forgiven. The commentary literature we have read makes little or no mention of this with regard to the “sure mercies of David,” but we think this should not be forgotten or omitted. It was the kind of unmerited grace and forgiveness by YHWH that Second Isaiah was proclaiming as good news to the Israelite exiles.

Concerning the Davidic dynasty, and its “perpetual succession on the throne of David,” which many claim to be what this passage is talking about, North states that “The monarchy during the exile was discredited. Since then the only Jewish kings have been Levite Hasmoneans [that is, not from the line of David, but rather from the line of the Maccabees].” That is hardly “perpetual succession.” See our end-note 2 for a quotation from **Wikipedia** concerning the Hasmoneans.

(continued...)

²²(...continued)

North goes on to state that “the text reads as if Deutero-Isaiah accepted the situation and saw the covenant and its accompanying evidences of Yahweh’s love for David transferred from the monarchy to the people...The final gaze of Deutero-Isaiah was to the suffering servant, not to a revival of the Davidic monarchy.” (P. 258)

But we hold that if **Second Isaiah** means the throne has been given to the nation of Israel, and the suffering servant is a depiction of what YHWH wants His servant Israel / Jacob to be and do, these two themes come together. YHWH wants Israel to truly be a “royal servant,” or in **1 Peter 2:9’s** language, a “royal priesthood,” serving the world in just the way Jesus, the suffering servant, served and died for those rejected by orthodox Pharisaic Judaism. It is the suffering servant who wears the crown! Do you agree?

Knight comments that “The content, as well as the meaning and purpose of the old covenant which God had made with David (and in consequence with all Israel) and to which God had been absolutely loyal, God was now promising to continue with the new Israel whom He had ‘resurrected’ from their grave in Babylon. God had appointed David to be a witness to the peoples. But God had told His servant people to be His witnesses. Consequently, it would seem that the new Israel was to be God’s expositor to the world, for God’s Spirit now rested on the servant people (**42:1; 44:3; 48:16**; and compare **Numbers 11:29**). Israel, then, was now being called in covenant to be God’s teacher to the nations and to be the one who gave God’s *mishpot* [our ‘justice’], or the words of the revelation in the **Torah**, to the world (**42:4**; compare **Matthew 16:19**). In a word, the basic reason for the very existence of the new covenant that God was now offering was one of mission, and that alone.” (P. 193)

Matthew 16:19, where Jesus is depicted as saying to Peter:

δώσω σοι τὰς κλεῖδας τῆς βασιλείας τῶν οὐρανῶν,
καὶ ὃ ἂν δήσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,
καὶ ὃ ἂν λύσῃς ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένον ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.
I will give to you (singular) the keys of the kingdom of the heavens;
and whatever you may bind upon the earth will be having been bound in
the heavens,
and whatever you may loose upon the earth will be having been loosed in the
heavens.

Matthew 18:18, where Jesus is depicted as making almost the same thing to a larger group of His disciples:

Ἀμὴν λέγω ὑμῖν·
ὅσα ἂν δήσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται δεδεμένα ἐν οὐρανῷ,
καὶ ὅσα ἂν λύσητε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἔσται λελυμένα ἐν οὐρανῷ.
Truly I say to you (plural):

(continued...)

²²(...continued)

Whatever things you may bind upon the earth will be having been bound in heaven,
and whatever things you may loose upon the earth will be having been loosed in heaven.

“Binding and loosing is originally a Jewish phrase appearing in the **New Testament**, as well as in the **Aramaic Targum**. In usage, *to bind* and *to loose* simply means *to forbid by an indisputable authority*, and *to permit by an indisputable authority*. The Targum to a particular **Psalm [Psalm 58:5 / 6]** implies that these actions were considered to be as effectual as the spell of an enchanter.

“The *poseks* [Hebrew פוסק, **poseq**, singular] is the term in Jewish law for “decisor”—a legal scholar who decides the Halakha [legal decision] in cases of law where previous authorities are inconclusive or in those situations where no halakhic precedent exists.

“The decision of a *posek* is known as a *psak din* or *psak halakha* (“ruling of law”; or simply a “psak.” In Hebrew, פסק is the root implying to “stop” or “cease”—the *posek* brings the process of legal debate to finality.”

“The *poseqs* had, by virtue of their ordination, the power of deciding disputes relating to Jewish law. Hence the difference between the two main schools of thought in early classical Judaism were summed up by the phrase *the school of Shammai binds; the school of Hillel looses*.

“Theoretically, however, the authority of the *poseks* proceeded from the Sanhedrin, and there is therefore a Talmudic statement that there were three decisions made by the *lower house of judgment* (the Sanhedrin) to which the *upper house of judgment* (the heavenly one) gave its *supreme sanction*. [**Babylonian Talmud, Massoth, 23b**]

“The claim that *whatsoever [a disciple] bind[s] or loose[s] on earth shall be bound or loosed in heaven*, which the **Gospel of Matthew [18:18]** attributes to Jesus is probably therefore just an adoption of a phrase popular at the time.

“This is also the meaning of the phrase when it is applied in the text to Simon Peter and the other apostles in particular [**Matthew 16:19**] when they are invested with the power to bind and loose by Christ.

“This also serves as the scriptural and traditional foundation for the Catholic Church's conception of papal authority, stemming from such an investiture of St. Peter, since, according to Roman Catholic doctrine, the Popes are the Successors of St. Peter.” (**Wikipedia**, 5/19/2016)

(continued...)

55:4²⁴ הֵן עַד לְאֻמִּים נִתְּתִיו

נִגִּיד וּמִצְוָה לְאֻמִּים:

Look—a witness of / to peoples I placed him,

²²(...continued)

Compare the statement attributed to Jesus in **Matthew 23:2**,

ἐπὶ τῆς Μωϋσέως καθέδρας ἐκάθισαν οἱ γραμματεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι.

“Upon the seat / chair of Moses the religious experts / scribes and the Pharisees sat.”

(Now, among the followers of Christ, his disciples will play the role of the rabbinic *poseks*.)

²³North translates the Hebrew נִאֲמָנִים by “dependable,” and comments that “A peg could be driven into a ‘secure’ (נִאֲמָנִי) place (**Isaiah 22:23-24**); a stream be ‘perennial’ (**Jeremiah 15:18**); a priest ‘trustworthy’ (**1 Samuel 2:35**); Samuel ‘vested with authority’ as a prophet (**1 Samuel 3:20**); Yahweh’s declaration ‘irrevocable’ (**Hosea 5:9**), [all using this same niphil participle, נִאֲמָנִי].” (P. 257)

²⁴Oswalt comments on **verses 4-5** that “These two verses, both of which begin with the call to attention, *Behold*, describe two ministries. The first, in **verse 4**, seems to be that of the historical David. The referent of the second is less certain. Most recent commentators...have taken it to be Israel...

“In the earlier verses where the reference to Israel seems unmistakable, the number is plural. But in **verse 5** it is everywhere singular...The possibility that God is addressing the Davidic messiah fits well with such passages as **50:10**...To be sure, insofar as Israel accepts the servant and identifies itself with him, the statements of **verse 5** would apply to it as well, but the primary referent would be the servant / messiah, who makes such a call possible.” (P. 439)

And so, once again, Oswalt introduces both the servant and the messiah into a passage which does not mention either! Motyer’s interpretation is similar to Oswalt’s, as he concludes that “The servant is this David who is to come, through whose dying and living again the blessings of David’s rule, the ‘sure mercies,’ will be available.” (P. 455)

a leader / prince²⁵ and commander of peoples.²⁶

55:5 הֵן גּוֹי לֹא־תִדְעֶה תִקְרָא
וּגּוֹי לֹא־יִדְעוּךָ אֵלֶיךָ יִרְוּצוּ
לְמַעַן יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְלִקְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל
כִּי פִאֲרָךְ:

Look²⁷—a nation you (singular) will not know, you will call;
and a nation—they did not know you, they will run to you,²⁸

²⁵Slotki notes that “The Hebrew word נָגִיד, a prince, is used of David in **2 Samuel 7:8**.” (P. 270)

Alexander states that word נָגִיד “is properly the one in front, the foremost, and is therefore naturally used to signify a chief or leader. This title is expressly applied to the messiah by **Daniel (9:25)**, and the corresponding titles ἄρχων [ruler] and ἀρχηγός [leader, first in a series] (are applied) to the messiah in the **New Testament (Acts 3:15; Hebrews 2:10; Revelation 1:5)**, considered both as an example and a leader.” (P. 327)

²⁶North comments that “Opinion is divided on the interpretation of **verses 3b-4**. Is the meaning that there is to be a revival of the Davidic monarchy...or that the covenant with David is now to be transferred to the theocratic community...? The view taken here is that the second is the right interpretation.” (P. 255)

We say that it is the mercies shown to David that are to characterize the theocratic community—not his role as king, but rather his role as recipient of and witness to Divine forgiveness / mercy. The theocratic community is to be filled with just that Divine forgiveness and mercy shown to King David, for all other sinners in the world! That is exactly what characterized the life and ministry of Jesus, and what He commands from his followers!

²⁷The opening word in this verse is also the opening word of the next verse. North translates by “As...so...” He comments that “Not only is there parallelism between the two stichs [lines of verse] in **verses 4** and **5a**, but **4** and **5a** are in effect parallel to each other.” (P. 258)

²⁸Where our Hebrew text of these first two lines has

Look—a nation you will not know, you will call,
and a nation, they will not know you, to you will run...

(continued...)

for the sake of YHWH your God, and to (the) Set-apart One of Israel,
because He beautified you!²⁹

²⁸(...continued)

Rahifs: Nations who did not know you will call upon you,
and peoples who do not understand you, upon you will flee for refuge...

Alexander states that “The question which has chiefly divided interpreters, in reference to this verse, is whether the object of address is the messiah or the church... The most natural supposition is, that after speaking of the messiah, he now turns to him and addresses him directly...Although the messiah is the main subject of the verse, the church is not entirely excluded.” (P. 328)

For us, this is a strange comment—since neither the messiah nor the church are mentioned in the text, and it is only Alexander’s overall view of **chapters 40-66** as depicting the “new dispensation” and the Christian movement that enables him to draw such conclusions. We think the text is Second Isaiah’s depiction of foreigners running to the returned exiles, who now understand themselves as “suffering servants,” open to and willing to accept and serve others, rather than building a wall to keep foreigners out, and refusing to have contact with them, as Jewish legalists among the exiles doubtlessly insisted, and as the Ezra / Nehemiah party would insist upon their return to Jerusalem (460-440 B.C.E.).

But in partial agreement with Alexander, the ultimate fulfillment of this would only come with Jesus the messiah and his followers, as they reached out beyond the confines of orthodox Judaism / Pharisaism, to welcome not only the “lost sheep of the House of Israel,” but also reached out to the nations, being willing to suffer and die on their behalf, as the followers of Jesus “took up their crosses” and followed in his footsteps as “suffering servants,” spreading the steadfast-love and forgiveness of God throughout the Roman world of the first century.

Compare especially **1 Peter 2:18-25**, along with the rest of **1 Peter** which is basically a call to Christians to be willing to suffer as Jesus did.

²⁹Westermann comments that “One point, and it alone, is brought out in connection with the transfer of God’s tokens of grace from king (David) to the nation...God made David ‘a leader and commander of nations’ (**Psalm 18:44**^{Heb} / **43**^{Eng})...Israel is to become a witness to God among the nations: ‘you call people that you know not...they run to you’...An invitation and its acceptance now extend beyond Israel to distant and foreign peoples—in entire agreement with **45:20-25** and **44:5**...

“What is promised to the nation once it is delivered from Babylon are not new victories or the subjugation of foreign nations [as characterized David’s reign], but increase in numbers because of the distant and foreign people who come to Israel and want to belong to her because of the God of Israel [and in response to the invitation of

(continued...)

²⁹(...continued)
Israel].” (Pp. 284-85)

He adds that “**Verse 5b** brings this section to its end...There is no suggestion of Israel’s being laid under any obligation. In it ‘the Holy One of Israel’ is at work (**44:5; 45:19; 49:7**), and by this means He glorifies Himself through His people...The idea that in all that is done God intends to glorify Israel (and this for His Own sake) is particularly emphasized...The glory envisaged is not the same as that which had once accrued to Israel because of David’s dominion and his victories. The promise is taken out of the political sphere and the sphere of kingship and is transferred to the nation. It is to prove itself true in this—in an entirely new way there is an increase from abroad in Israel’s numbers, and to the rest of the nations she becomes a witness to the miraculous workings of her God.” (Pp. 285-86)

In this, we are reminded of the depiction of the church, the people of God, as a “royal priesthood” in **1 Peter 2:9**,

But then you (plural)—a chosen race,
a kingly / royal priesthood,
a set-apart nation,
a people for possession—[quoting Exodus 19:6]
so that you might proclaim the virtues of the one calling you out of darkness into
His marvelous light! (Compare footnote 17)

We think that the reason Second Isaiah believes the foreigners will come to Israel is that they will see in Israel the evidence of God’s presence, His steadfast love and merciful forgiveness—it is His presence that will make the nation “beautiful.” And how is that? If Israel responds positively to the Divine call through Second Isaiah, the nations will see the love and forgiveness of God being manifested there, as the nation embodies its role of “suffering servant” (**Isaiah 52:13-53:12**), embodying God’s acceptance of and mercy for sinners. That was, according to Second Isaiah, the Divine purpose for the returned exiles.

But sadly, as history would show, Israel would not be responsive to the Divine call through Second (and Third) Isaiah, but rather would listen to the call enunciated by Ezra-Nehemiah, to build a wall of segregation between themselves and “sinners,” and to concentrate on a legalistic fulfillment of the 613 commandments of the Mosaic **Torah**, keeping themselves pure and avoiding the defilement of sinners, refusing to embody YHWH’s love and righteousness.

It would only be with the coming of Jesus the suffering servant / messiah and his ministry, that this dream of Second Isaiah for Israel would be embodied and witnessed to. But sadly, the officialdom of Israel would decisively reject Jesus and his ministry, calling for his death at the hands of the Romans! Nonetheless, Jesus would be resurrected from the dead, just as Second Isaiah had said concerning the suffering servant, and would send his followers out to fulfill Second Isaiah’s dream of calling the nations

(continued...)

²⁹(...continued)

into the forgiveness and love of God.

³⁰Slotki calls **verses 6-7** “A call to repentance.”

Westermann entitles **55:6-11** “The word that goes forth from My mouth.” He comments that “While the **book [Isaiah 40-55]** ends with a prophecy (**verses 12-13**), this section is in fact the tail-piece [a part added to the end of a writing]. It might even be called an epilogue [section at the end of a book that serves as a comment on, or a conclusion to, what has happened], for, as many editors have pointed out, its close connections with the prologue, especially with **Isaiah 40:6-9**, are obvious...

“To counter the questions asked by Israel now reduced to doubt, **verses 8-9** substantiate the promise by reference to the loftiness of the thoughts and ways of God, while **verses 10-11** do the same by saying that there can be no doubt that the saving word which God speaks to Israel will prosper...That **55:6-11** are in the nature of a conclusion and summary also comes out in the fact that the terms used are those of a summary.” (Pp. 286-87)

Westermann comments on **verse 6** that the prophet is saying, “Now, at this present moment, you Israel, are given the offer of salvation. God’s turning towards you, the return home, and the new life! He can be found now, now is He near!” (P. 287)

North entitles **55:6-13** “Home-Coming.”

He comments that “These familiar verses, with their emphasis on ‘Do not delay!’ may well make one poem with the preceding paragraph. Delay in responding to the Divine invitation may be fatal. Divine grace is no excuse for human complacency (**Psalms 95:7-11; Romans 6:1; Hebrews 2:3; 3:7-19**). Let the wicked man abandon his way of life and return to the God Whose forgiveness is ‘abundant’ (יְרַבֶּה), Whose thoughts and ways are as much higher than man’s ways and thoughts as heaven is higher than the earth. That Yahweh’s ‘word’ will accomplish His purpose is as sure as that the rain makes the earth fruitful. The concluding **verses (12-13)** recur to the theme of the second exodus through the transformed wilderness (**41:18-19; 43:19-20**).

“There is, appropriately, an expansiveness about these concluding verses such as we do not often find in Hebrew poetry. It is as if the river, as it finishes its course, broadens into an estuary [the tidal mouth of a large river, where the tide meets the stream] open to the tides of comprehensive revelation.” (Pp. 259-60)

Oswalt entitles these verses “My word will not return empty.” He sums them up by stating that “Those who seek the Lord and receive His abundant pardon will indeed

(continued...)

קראתו בהיותו קרוב:

³⁰(...continued)

go out in joy, and their deliverance will be a name for the Lord.” (P. 442)

Knight comments on **verses 6-7** that “Though to incline your ear, and come to Me (verse 3) is only the first step in God’s plan for sinful humanity, yet it is basic to all else...

“In the Garden of Eden story...we read that God takes fallen man even as he is in all his pitiable emptiness, and with compassionate love gives him clothes to cover his nakedness. Deutero-Isaiah’s gospel is that God offers forgiveness to man at the very moment when man is committing the fundamental sin from which all others issue. God will forgive him completely (‘multiply to forgive,’ literally, *abundantly pardon*), because such full and total forgiveness is the expression of a love which is willing to empty out its nephesh, its total personality, even unto death. The ‘arm’ of God that has now been revealed is His forgiving and renewing love.” (P. 195)

Seek (plural imperative) YHWH while / when³¹ He is being found;³²
call (to) Him while / when He is being near!³³

³¹In this line and the next, where we have translated “while,” Westermann translates by “since,” implying that the opportunity for finding YHWH and YHWH’s being near is continuous, in this new era of salvation. It is certainly possible to translate in this way but it is not at all necessary. Oswalt translates by “when.”

Oswalt comments that “The Lord has come near His people, not only in the work of the servant [but Oswalt holds that the servant is Jesus messiah, who will only come after many centuries in the future—how can that be described in the past tense, ‘has come near’?] that has been predicted, but also in the preaching of the prophet throughout the book, especially from **chapter 40** onward. It is plain that He is more than ready to be found (compare also **65:1** [‘I (YHWH) said **הִנְנִי הִנְנִי**, look at Me, look at Me!]). He wants to comfort the despairing, forgive the sinner, and deliver the bound. What remains for these blessings to be experienced? Only one thing: we must seek Him, call on Him...Isaiah tells his people that it is not information that they should seek from God, but His presence and His character, gifts that He longs to give to them.” (Pp. 442-43)

We say, the meaning is not that “centuries from now I will come near in Jesus the messiah,” but rather, “I have already come near; I have forgiven all your sins (as **Isaiah 40:1-2** proclaims powerfully)! You don’t have to wait for a future coming—I am present with you, here and now!”

That God would come to humanity in Jesus in the distant future is no reason to hold that He didn’t come to the Jewish exiles in Babylon, speaking His word of forgiveness and acceptance through His prophet Second Isaiah!

³²Where our Hebrew text has **בְּהִנְצֵאוֹ**, literally “in His being found,” **Rahlf’s** has **καὶ ἐν τῷ εὐρίσκειν αὐτὸν**, literally “and in the finding Him,” translated by NETS as “and when you find him,” as does the Syriac translation. The Aramaic Targum has “while you are still living.” Both **1QIsa** and the Latin Vulgate agree with our Hebrew text.

³³Where our Hebrew text has **בְּהִיּוֹתוֹ קָרוֹב**, literally “in His being near.” **Rahlf’s** has “whenever then He should draw near to you (plural).” The Aramaic Targum has “while you are still alive.”

North comments on these two lines that “Man must not presume upon God’s patience.” (P. 260) Compare **Amos 8:11-12**,

11 Look—days are coming!--
it is a saying of of my Lord, YHWH--
And I will send a famine upon the land--

(continued...)

³³(...continued)

not a famine for bread,
and not a thirst for water;
but instead, for hearing the words of YHWH!
12 And they will stagger from sea to sea,
and from north to east they shall run to and fro,
to seek YHWH's word--
and they will not find it!

Slotki states that “In the ‘acceptable time’ in the ‘day of salvation’ [means] when the sinner humbles himself, forsakes his evil ways and returns to the Lord.” (P. 271)

Alexander holds that “By a sudden apostrophe [the writer detaches himself from the flow of thought, and addresses an imaginary character] he turns from the messiah to those whom he had come to save, and exhorts them to embrace this great salvation, to be reconciled with God.” (P. 329)

But we hold that Second Isaiah has been addressing the exiles in Babylon, announcing YHWH’s forgiveness and His soon coming to release them; and here he exhorts the same addresses to respond to the good news by seeking YHWH and calling upon Him--with no need for introducing the literary figure of “apostrophe.”

³⁴Because of his view that in the era of salvation being depicted by **Second Isaiah** there are no conditions placed on Israel for sharing in YHWH’s salvation, Westermann says that he has to reject **verse 7**: “We must therefore regard **verse 7** as an addition made by a reader, either suggested by the words ‘thoughts and ways’ in **verse 6**, or as an expansion of **verse 6**, which he took as a general exhortation.” (P. 288)

In spite of our appreciation for Westermann’s work on **Isaiah 40-66**, we have to disagree with him here. We think it obvious that in the era of salvation, the demand for repentance still holds, if we are to believe Second Isaiah’s words. What do you think? Should we change the text to make it fit our views?

And since Jesus takes up the message of both **Second** and **Third Isaiah**, and makes it his own (see his quotation of **Isaiah 61:1-2** as the basis for his ministry according to **Luke 4:16-21**; and remembering that Jesus fulfilled the role of “suffering servant” as depicted in **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**), should we conclude that Jesus did not call for repentance? Compare **Mark 1:14-15**, where the demand for repentance is joined to belief in the good news. The fact that God’s love and forgiveness is given freely to human beings does not in any way detract from the necessity responding to that message through deep-seated and genuine repentance!

Oswalt comments on **verse 7** that “Any question about the import of the previous verse is settled by this verse. It is as they forsake wickedness and turn to the Lord that they will be truly seeking Him and calling on Him...Thus Isaiah reminds us all exactly

(continued...)

וְאִישׁ אֲוֹן מִחֲשָׁבוֹתָיו
וַיָּשָׁב אֶל־יְהוָה וַיִּרְחַמֵּהוּ
וְאֶל־אֱלֹהֵינוּ כִּי־יִרְבֶּה לְסִלּוֹחַ:

Let a wicked person forsake his way,
and a man of wickedness his plans;³⁵
and let him return to YHWH and He will have compassion on him,³⁶
and to his God, because He will multiply forgiveness!³⁷

³⁴(...continued)

what it takes for us to ‘seek the Lord’: turning away from our wickedness and iniquity.” (P. 443)

³⁵Slotki notes that “Penitence to be effective must be complete, in thought as well as in deed.” (P. 271)

Oswalt notes that the Hebrew plural noun מִחֲשָׁבוֹת, “thoughts,” “frequently has a negative connotation, e.g., ‘plots’ or ‘schemes’ (compare **59:7**; **65:2**; **Jeremiah 11:9**). But the parallel with the Lord’s ‘thoughts’ in **verse 8**, unless it is ironic, suggests that the more neutral sense is intended here.” (P. 441)

³⁶Where our Hebrew text has וַיִּרְחַמֵּהוּ, literally “and He will (have) compassion (on) him,” **Rahlfs** has καὶ ἐλεηθήσεται, literally “and He will be mercied,” or “and He will have mercy.”

³⁷Oswalt comments that “When the *wicked one* and the *man of iniquity* turn to the Lord, the thing that they will find is not righteous anger and retributive justice [a system of criminal justice based on the punishment of offenders rather than on rehabilitation]. Instead, they will find compassion and multiplied pardon. How can this be? The position of this chapter subsequent to **chapter 53**, as well as the marked change in tone of **chapters 54-55**...suggests that it is because of the work of the servant.” (P. 444)

We agree fully with Oswalt’s statement that sinners will find compassion and multiplied pardon. But we disagree with his view that this is because of the work of the servant. According to Oswalt’s interpretation of **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**, the suffering servant is Jesus Christ, whose suffering, according to Oswalt’s dating of the passage, lies seven centuries in the future. But Second Isaiah insists that YHWH has already forgiven the exiles, and has set them free from the consequences of their sins—see **40:1-2**. YHWH has already announced their forgiveness—and all that remains is for them to seek YHWH and call on Him—and He will abundantly pardon them—there and then, not centuries in the future!

(continued...)

55:8³⁸ כִּי לֹא מִחְשְׁבוֹתַי מִחְשְׁבוֹתֵיכֶם

וְלֹא דַרְכֵיכֶם דַּרְכֵי נְאֻם יְהוָה:

Because My thoughts / purposes are not your thoughts / purposes;³⁹
and your ways are not My ways--(it is) a saying of YHWH!⁴⁰

³⁷(...continued)

The phrase לְסַלֵּחַ יְרַבֶּה, literally, “He will multiply to forgive,” is given varying translations, from “he will abundantly pardon,” to “he freely forgives,” to “he is rich in forgiveness,” to “upon much he will forgive the sins of yours (plural).”

North translates by “he is always ready to forgive,” and comments that it is literally “does much (יְרַבֶּה) in respect of forgiving’...The particular verb used for ‘forgive’ here (סַלַּח) is only used with God as the subject.” (P. 260)

Those who claim, as my **Bible** professors in Christian Colleges did, that there is no forgiveness in the **Hebrew Bible**, need to reexamine their view in the light of this passage, and the many others that depict gracious and full forgiveness by YHWH to sinners. And I wonder—how could we have been so blind as not to see this taught so often and so powerfully in the **Hebrew Bible / Old Testament**?

³⁸Slotki comments on **verses 8-9** that “The two verses stress the transcendence [existence or experience beyond the normal or physical level] of God’s thoughts and ways.” (P. 271)

Oswalt comments on these verses that “the parallelism of *ways* and *thoughts* is significant....A person’s ways are one’s patterns of behavior...Genuine change of behavior without an accompanying change of values and perceptions is impossible. Sin is ultimately a matter of attitude.” (P. 444)

³⁹Knight comments that “In fact, man cannot even begin to comprehend the depths and heights of the love of God and of His plans of salvation that embrace the whole of creation.” (P. 196)

⁴⁰Alexander comments that “Clear and simple as these words are in themselves, they have occasioned much dispute among interpreters, in reference to their nexus [connection] with what goes before. The earliest commentators, Jews and Christians, seem to have understood them as intended to meet an objection to the promise, arising from its vastness and its freeness, by assuring us that such forgiveness, however foreign from the feelings and practices of men, is not beyond the reach of the Divine compassion. As if He had said, ‘to you such forgiveness may appear impossible; but My

(continued...)

55:9 כִּי־גָבְהוּ שָׁמַיִם מֵאָרֶץ

כֵּן גָבְהוּ דַרְכֵי מִדְרָכֵיכֶם

וּמַחְשַׁבְתֵי מִמְחַשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם:

Because heavens were greater than (the) earth--

in this way My ways were greater than your ways,⁴¹

⁴⁰(...continued)

thoughts are not your thoughts, neither your ways My ways.” (P. 330)

We agree with that early interpretation—do you?

Both Alexander and Oswalt want to go beyond that interpretation, insisting that the best interpretation has to do with the necessity for human beings to turn from their sinful ways and thoughts because they are not God’s ways and thoughts.

We say, Of course, that is true. But in the context of **Second Isaiah**, and its astounding message of forgiveness and acceptance by YHWH of the Israelite exiles, offered to them centuries in advance of the coming of Jesus Christ, in spite of their sinfulness that has led to the destruction of their homeland and their captivity, that earliest interpretation is still the most relevant and best.

Just because you can’t find it in your heart and in your life to forgive like that, don’t try to limit God’s freedom by your own limitations and narrowness! Accept the gracious forgiveness and goodness of God for your own life, and learn to live by it as you deal with others, especially as you return to your homeland and live side by side with the mixed population that now inhabits Jerusalem and its environs! God has created a new day for you, and wants you to live in it with joy, creating the same kind of new day for others! Be willing to become suffering servants of YHWH! Is that no Second Isaiah’s message?

⁴¹For the thought of these first two lines of **verse 9**, compare **Psalms 103:11**,

For as the heavens tower over the earth,
His steadfast-love was mighty over those revering Him!

Knight comments that “The emphasis is that God’s purposes, which transcend what any human being could ever have thought out—‘My plans are not your plans’—have now been revealed. In fact they are now in process of becoming ‘flesh’ through the ideal of self-offering of the servant.” (P. 196) And, we add, that servant is Jacob / Israel, whom YHWH has pardoned, and claimed as His Own!

and My thoughts / purposes than your thoughts / purposes!⁴²

55:10⁴³ כִּי כַּאֲשֶׁר יֵרֵד הַגִּזְּמִים וְהַשְּׁלֵג מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם

⁴²Westermann comments that “By pointing to the boundless horizons of God’s designs and ways, immeasurably greater than men can think them to be, he gives his hearers confidence. Though they are no longer able to believe it, all things are possible with God.” (P. 289)

God has broken through the barriers that separate between His people and Himself. He has freely and fully forgiven their past. He is on the verge of releasing them from their captivity in a foreign land. He wants the former exiles to be His servant(s), living in the light of this astounding message of grace and forgiveness and renewal, and embodying it in their everyday actions. Even though this will mean their suffering, even dying for the sins of others surrounding them as they return to their homeland, their attitudes and their lives will be a beautiful message of hope and newness of life that will draw foreigners to its light.

That’s God’s thought and way. Have the courage to live by it, even if it goes against, and is contradicted by many of your own leaders who will deny its truth. They will do all in their power to get you to build walls, both physical and theological, between yourselves and the people of the land. They will call upon you to isolate yourselves in a narrow Jewish enclave, devoting all your efforts to making yourselves pure by keeping the Mosaic traditions and practices. They will demand that you refuse to have anything to do with foreigners. They will call on you to get rid of your non-orthodox, half-breed wives and children, leaving them as single mothers trying to raise your children.

Don’t listen to them! Live by the love and forgiveness of God! God’s way will be a difficult way—it will demand sacrificial love, even death—but it is the only way to new life in God’s kingdom, and joyous hope for the future!

Centuries later, this is exactly how Jesus understood these texts from **Isaiah**, and how he lived and died as God’s suffering servant!

⁴³**Verses 10-11**, with their “single sentence of unusual length in Hebrew composition” (Alexander, p. 332), inform Israel that this demanding word from YHWH offers hope for the future, precisely because it is YHWH Own word! As Slotki notes, these verses depict “the efficacy [effectiveness, potency] of God’s word.” (P. 271)

Westermann comments that these verses state that “the word of salvation now being spoken to Israel, on which people can depend...is a word that does things. When God speaks, something comes about...”

“The word of salvation spoken to Israel, the primary concern here, does not work automatically. It is spoken to men who have the power to accept it or refuse it. It is

(continued...)

וְשִׁמָּה לֹא יָשׁוּב כִּי אִם־הִרְוָה אֶת־הָאָרֶץ

וְהוֹלִידָה וְהִצְמִיחָה

וְנָתַן זֶרַע לְזֶרַע וְלֶחֶם לְאֹכְלִי:

Because just as the rain comes down, and the snow from the heavens,
and there, it will not return, unless it saturated the earth,

⁴³(...continued)

always an entirely personal word in which something happens between two persons. God's word does not magically call a new state of salvation into being. The only way by which it effects what God designs it to do is the hearkening to, and acceptance of the message of salvation." (Pp. 289-90)

It is in this light that we say **verse 7** belongs in **chapter 55**. It is only as those hearing the message repent, and turn to YHWH, that the message becomes effective. See our footnote 29.

Westermann states concerning Second Isaiah's word of hope and the new era of acceptance, that "while he proclaims, he is not a foreteller...A great deal of what was said by Deutero-Isaiah, which means a great deal of what he proclaimed as the word of God, was not fulfilled in the way in which he said it would be. Israel's return home was no triumphal procession through a desert transformed into a garden [perhaps this was excited metaphor on Second Isaiah's part]. In the matter of many of his utterances one can point a finger and say that this is not in fact what actually took place. [He fails to mention that the people failed to live by Second Isaiah's message, especially that they refused to become the 'suffering servants' and 'light to the world' that he claimed YHWH wanted them to become, but instead followed the legalistic leadership of those who, like Ezra and Nehemiah, were seeking to build the new nation on a narrow, self-centered foundation of legalism and exclusivism].

"But this makes no difference to what he said in **50:10ff.** about the word of God and its efficacy...Ever and always are God's thoughts and ways higher than those of men—as much higher as heaven is in relation to the earth. This holds true also of the fulfilment of His promises [the fulfilment of His promises demands repentance and obedience—otherwise, there will no fulfilment]. When ascertainment of it is possible, the fulfilment may well be different, very different even, from what the prophet led the people to expect [especially if the people refuse to live by that word!]. The only thing that is absolutely certain is that prophecy inevitably results in fulfilment [yes—ultimately, Jesus of Nazareth, will dare to obey, taking up God's thoughts and ways, to live as His servant, His suffering servant, dying for Israel and for others, planting the seed that would spring up to new life in a world-wide mission of suffering servanthood]. The word

never returns void. But the God Who fulfils His promises is always One Whose thoughts and ways are immeasurably greater than those of men." (Pp. 290-91)

and causes it to give birth, and causes it to sprout,

and it will give seed for the one sowing, and bread / food for the one eating--⁴⁴

55:11 כֵּן יִהְיֶה דְבַרִּי אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִפִּי

לְאִישׁוֹב אֵלֵי רִיקָם

כִּי אִם־עָשָׂה אֶת־אֲשֶׁר חִפְצָתִי

וְהִצְלִיחַ אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַחְתִּיו:

so My word will be, which will go forth from My mouth--

⁴⁴Where our Hebrew text has וְלֶחֶם לְאֹכֵל, “and bread for the one eating,” 1QIs^a supplies the vowel, וְלֶחֶם לְאוֹכֵל, which can be read as the same as our text, or can be read as “and bread to eat” (so, Oswalt). This is simply a matter of pointing (supplying vowels), and the unpointed text can be read either way.

Motley comments on **verses 10-11** that “There is a gift which comes from heaven; it is absolutely given (it does *not return*), effectively brings life (*making it bud and flourish*) and provides totally for human need (*seed and bread*). The parallel between the life agency of rain and the effective word is exact. Each has a heavenly origin and power of effectiveness and neither fails.” (P. 457)

Knight comments that “A vital element in the good news is that God’s way of salvation will win in the end over the sordid ways of men. In fact this is inevitable. This verse contains the longest sustained simile that Deutero-Isaiah employs. In it we are reminded that God is in full control of the processes of nature...

“Thus the food that grows out of the ground is the inevitable outcome of the movement of God’s loving purpose for man in the processes of nature. Moreover, this movement cannot reverse itself. It must go forward according to the pattern that God has first created, a good pattern, for it is a pattern that reveals a purpose of love. In other words, it is an effective pattern, for it results in the fulfillment of the Divine plan.” (P. 197)

Yes, the rain and the snow that fall to the ground enable the ground to produce food to feed human beings. It is a mysterious Divine process that humanity must learn to cooperate with and take advantage of in order to sustain and strengthen life. And just as God’s laws govern that physical process, so His laws govern human life and its

purposes. Those Divine laws are communicated to humanity through His word, spoken by prophets such as Second Isaiah. That word is powerful, and creative; it is a Divine “seed” which will bear blessed fruit wherever it is welcomed and obeyed. We are fools if we fail to see this truth!

it will not return to Me empty,
unless⁴⁵ it did what I desired,
and caused to prosper that for which I sent it forth!⁴⁶

⁴⁵Alexander comments that the phrase here in Hebrew, אֵין כִּי, “indicates the *sine qua non* [the absolutely necessary], condition without which the event expressed by the future cannot take place.” (P. 332)

⁴⁶This last line is translated by **Rahlf**s as καὶ εὐοδώσω τὰς ὁδοὺς σου καὶ τὰ ἐντάλματά μου, “and I will prosper the ways of yours (singular), and the commandments of Mine.” All other ancient versions support our Hebrew text.

North comments that “The word which God ‘swears,’ and which ‘goes forth from His mouth’ (**45:23**), is irrevocable, like an arrow which must find its mark. Having done that, it does not return to God.” (P. 261)

And so it is with the word of God that comes to us from heaven. That word, received by fallible human messengers, in a foreign language, more than two thousand years ago, and translated into our language by fallible human beings, is not by any means easy to identify or understand. The human bearers of that word get in its way, and all too often get it mixed up with their own limited human insights and opinions. Nonetheless, as we hear and read their messages, and enter into dialogue with them constantly seeking God in prayer, seeking earnestly to discern the Divine message, we get caught up in it, and in time, deep in our hearts we hear the Divine voice speaking to us, calling us to repentance, showing the way in which we should walk. It is a powerful word that convicts and reproves and guides us, imparting wisdom and courage, giving us undying hope for the future. As that word sinks deep into our hearts, our lives are changed with purpose and mission.

So it is with the message of Second Isaiah. If we will let it work in our minds and hearts, it will bring forth its fruit in our lives, just as it did in the life of Jesus. As this text promises, that word will not return to God empty.

The God Who has spoken His word through the prophets is the God Who will enable that word to accomplish what God has intended for it—nothing less than a new world of steadfast-love and forgiveness and peace! God will cause His word to prosper in accomplishing that Divine goal!

What do you think? Did the Divine word through Second Isaiah return void? The promise of release from Babylon certainly did not prove empty or void—within a few years of Second Isaiah’s delivering the message to the exiles, YHWH’s messiah Cyrus came, and having conquered Babylon, called upon all the captives in Babylon to return to their homelands, supplying them with the funds and the encouragement to rebuild their fallen temples—including the Jewish exiles, who began to return to Jerusalem.

(continued...)

⁴⁶(...continued)

But Second Isaiah's Divine message, calling upon the exiles to become lights to the world, and suffering servants for their own nation and others, spoken through Second (and Third) Isaiah, seemingly fell on deaf ears and unresponsive hearts. Rather than becoming lights to the foreigners occupying their homeland, and being willing to suffer, even die for those "sinners," the returnees, under the influence of other leaders—specifically Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zerubbabel and Joshua—were persuaded to turn their back on foreigners and to build a wall of segregation, becoming the founders of what developed into the Pharisaism with which Jesus contended throughout his ministry. Like the prophet Jonah, the majority of the returnees quickly rejected Second Isaiah's call to mission to foreigners (like Nineveh). Instead of becoming lights to the world, and suffering servants on behalf of their sinful world, their light was hidden under the blanket of legalism and concern for their own purity.

As a result, foreigners saw little to be desired in Jerusalem and Israel. Until, that is, some four or five centuries later, when Jesus took up that message, becoming a bright and shining light to all of Israel, minister to the outcasts and foreigners in its midst, calling on Israel in the first century C.E. to become the kind of light-bearing, suffering servants that Second Isaiah had proclaimed. Jesus himself led the way as the suffering servant who actually died fulfilling that mission, but who arose from death and sent his followers out on a world-wide mission of light and hope. It took centuries, but the Divine word did not ultimately fail. As North says, like an arrow that Divine word found its mark!

⁴⁷Slotki notes that **verses 12-13** depict "the peaceful and joyful return from exile which is the purpose of God's word spoken of in the previous verses." (P. 272)

Westermann entitles **verses 12-13** "You shall go out in joy."

He comments that "On what is properly the final passage of the prophecy, the epilogue in **55:6-11**, ensues--the simple, direct proclamation of the departure from Babylon and the return home...Deutero-Isaiah's purpose in so doing is to say that 'this is what all that I had to say was driving at--the hour of departure, the joy of the way back home.'

"The singing is to be the one, and necessary reaction on the part of the people now setting forth for home. It is the joy of a man who has for long been in a foreign country and now steps out on the way back home...The whole of creation, the universe, shares in the joy of those set free. Hence the possibility of using the magnificent, if exaggerated, picture, 'the trees shall clap their hands.' This is exactly what we find in the **Psalms** [see **Psalms 98:8**, where the rivers clap their hands], where the singing of the redeemed goes on to summon the whole of creation to render praise. The terms are exaggerated. None the less, they are based on the belief that holds true for the

(continued...)

וּבְשִׁלּוֹם הַיּוֹבֵלִין
הַהָרִים וְהַגְּבוּעוֹת יִפְצְחוּ לְפָנֵיכֶם רִנָּה

⁴⁷(...continued)

whole of the **Bible**—in the mind of God, creation and history are a unity and can never be separated.” (Pp. 291-92)

Oswalt states that “It appears that the two **verses** [12-13] function as a lyrical conclusion to the entire division constituted by **chapters 40-55**. The elevated language is reminiscent of such passages as **41:18-20; 43:19-21; 44:1-5; 48:20-21; 49:9-11** and **52:11-12**, as well as the nature songs of **42:10-11; 44:23** and **49:13**.” In this light, Oswalt concludes that “the verses function as both the conclusion to **verses 6-13** and the conclusion of **chapters 40-55**.” (P. 447)

Notice that this comes from an ardent opponent of designating **chapters 40-55** a separate document from the rest of the **Book of Isaiah**!

Oswalt adds that “Without doubt, as pointed out throughout [his commentary on] **chapters 49-55**, the return from exile provides the central image for the poet...But it has also been maintained throughout, as is especially apparent in **chapters 54-55** and again in the final segment, that the chief concern in this subdivision (**chapters 54-55**) is for restoration to fellowship with God...

“Not even the most starry-eyed prophetic imagination expected the mountains literally to burst forth with a shout or for the trees literally to clap their hands when the exiles were led forth for home. Neither did he expect that the thornbush would magically change to cypress as the exiles passed. The prophet is not talking about the literal return...This is imagery from start to finish, and it is imagery to express the joy of all creation at the possibility of sinners [like the exiles in Babylon, who have suffered under the Divine judgment] being made holy through the word of God. To be sure, the return from exile is a part of that work of the word, but the return only makes any sense in the light of the deeper, greater work.” (Pp. 447-48)

We say that deeper, greater work, is that the forgiven exiles should become lights to the world, serving through suffering on behalf of a sinful world.

Oswalt states, “God does not abandon those who may fail to trust in Him. He will find a way to deliver them from the consequences of their rebellion, if only they will receive it. And this work of redemption will stand for all eternity as a witness to the nature of our God (compare also **Isaiah 66:19**).” (P. 448)

וְכָל-עֵצֵי הַשָּׂדֶה יִמְחֹאוּ-כָף;

Because in gladness you people shall go forth;⁴⁸

and in peace you shall be borne along;⁴⁹

the mountains and the hills will break forth before you (with) a ringing-cry;⁵⁰

and all trees of the field will clap (their) hand(s)!”

55:13⁵¹ תַּחַת הַנְּעֻצִים יַעֲלֶה בְרוֹשׁ

⁴⁸Alexander comments that “The expression *go forth* is eagerly seized upon by some interpreters as justifying the restriction of the passage to the restoration from the Babylonish exile. But the real allusion in such cases is to the deliverance from Egypt, which is constantly referred to as a type of deliverance in general, so that every signal restoration or deliverance is represented as a spiritual exodus.” (P. 332)

But this is just another attempt by Alexander to get around the obvious context in which **Second Isaiah** is written, the soon-coming deliverance of the Jewish exiles from Babylon. Second Isaiah is not addressed to “just anyone,” or to “generations to come,” but to the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

⁴⁹Where our Hebrew text has the hophal imperfect וּבְשָׁלוֹם תִּבְלֹוּ, “and in peace you (plural) will be borne along,” 1QIs^a has “and in joy you (plural) will walk / go,” and **Rahlf**s has ἐν χαρᾷ διδασθήσεσθε, “in joy you (plural) will be taught.”

⁵⁰North translates by “the mountains and the hills shall break out,” etc., and notes that “for the ‘sympathy’ of inanimate nature with God’s redemptive activity, compare **Isaiah 44:23**.”

Cry aloud, heavens! Because YHWH did (it) / acted!

Raise a shout, lowest parts of earth!

Break forth, mountains, (with) a ringing cry–forest, and every tree in it!

Because YHWH redeemed / acted as Next-of-Kin to Jacob,

and in Israel He will be glorified / glorify Himself.

⁵¹Slotki notes that **verse 13** depicts “the transformation of nature, evident on the road from Babylon to Zion,” and claims that the transformation “will remain as an everlasting memorial to the marvelous deeds God had wrought for His people.” (P. 272)

Of course, if this is taken as a literal prediction of geological and climactic change to immediately accompany the return of the exiles, and to remain in that transformed condition throughout the future, the prediction was proven false. The Arabian / Syrian desert still stands as an insurmountable barrier between Babylon and Jerusalem. We take the statement as enthusiastic metaphor, not to be understood literally. What do you think?

(תַּחַת) [וְתַחַת] הַסְרִפָּד יַעֲלֶה הָרֶם
וְהָיָה לִיהוָה לְשֵׁם לְאוֹת עוֹלָם
לֹא יִכָּרֵת:

Instead of the thorn-bush,⁵² a cypress / fir shall grow up;
and instead of⁵³ the desert-plant, a myrtle (tree) shall grow up.⁵⁴
And it will be for the YHWH for a name, for a long-lasting sign--⁵⁵
it will not be cut off!⁵⁶

⁵²The only other place where this word, תִּנְעֻזִים occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** is at **Isaiah 7:19**, where it occurs in the plural without the definite article. **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines it as “thorn-bush.” **Holladay** defines it as “camel-thorn.”

⁵³The Masoretes offer two readings: the first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” is תַּחַת, “under,” or “instead of”; the second, the *qere*, “to be read,” is וְתַחַת, “and under,” or “and instead of.” Both 1QIs^a and 1QIs^b read the conjunction, i.e., the *qere*.

⁵⁴The word here is הַסְרִפָּד, which occurs nowhere else in the **Hebrew Bible**, and therefore its meaning is impossible to determine exactly—only that it is some plant that is the opposite of the myrtle tree. **Rahfs** translates by *κονύζης*, which means some type of dandelion. Oswalt states that the Latin Vulgate has “nettle.” (P. 442)

Alexander comments that while it may not be possible to determine exactly what desert-plant is being mentioned, “All that is essential to the writer’s purpose is, that it be understood to signify a mean and useless plant, and thus to form a contrast with the myrtle, as the thorn does with the cypress.” (P. 333)

Yes, but many plants that were formerly considered “mean and useless” have later been found to be valuable and useful for medicinal purposes.

⁵⁵North translates by “and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, for a lasting inscription which shall never be effaced.” He comments that “for this sense of Hebrew שֵׁם [‘name’] compare **Isaiah 56:5**: ‘And I will give to them in My house and within My walls a monument and a name’ (יָד וְשֵׁם, literally ‘a hand and a name’).” (P. 261)

1QIsa reverses the order of “name...sign,” having “sign...name.”

⁵⁶North comments on the phrase לֹא יִכָּרֵת, “that will not be cut off,” to compare **Ruth 4:10**, where Levitical marriage is given so that “the name of the dead

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

man may not be erased [וְלֹא־יִכָּרֵת] from among his kindred and from the gate of his (native) place.”

He adds that “It might be supposed that once the exiles had completed their journey, the way would revert to its former desert condition; they were not to live there permanently. But no! The transformed desert will be kept in perpetuity as a commemorative park...”

“On the question whether the Prophet meant this quite literally, we know enough about the century following the liberation edict of Cyrus to say that nothing happened commensurate with his glowing expectations, even allowing that he may not have intended them to be taken quite literally. If he did, he was mistaken. But even if he was

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

mistaken, the word of God of which he was the herald will assuredly 'stand for ever' (**Isaiah 40:8**)." (Pp. 261-62)

Westermann comments that "The book's final words point away from the redemption to the Redeemer. In the last analysis, whatever comes about comes about for God's honor, just as all creation exists in order to render Him praise." (P. 292)

Knight closes his commentary by stating that "Deutero-Isaiah is clearly the greatest theologian that has ever arisen. Paul was his humble disciple. For Deutero-Isaiah did not deal with metaphysical [having to do with the first principles of things, including abstract concepts such as being, knowing, substance, cause identity, time and space—see the article on 'Metaphysics' in **Wikipedia**] speculation like Plato, or the philosophers of Islam, or the medieval disputants, or the Neo-Platonists of the present day. He dealt with facts. In these 16 chapters he has given us a total theology of God's redemptive plan for His world, and he has done so basing his statements wholly upon history. He has handled

- (1) the fact of Israel;
- (2) the fact of the exodus in the days of Moses;
- (3) the fact of the **Torah**, the revelation teaching of God to be found in the **Pentateuch [Five Books of Moses—Genesis through Deuteronomy]**;
- (4) the fact of the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.E.;
- (5) the fact of the exile in Babylon with all its accompanying horrors;
- (6) the fact of the rise of king Cyrus of Persia.

"But there was one more fact of history that eventuated only after Deutero-Isaiah's death. He looked forward to it in faith, building his certainty upon the reliability of God and the nature of God's covenant-love. This was

- (7) the fact that Cyrus issued an edict in 538 B.C.E. which permitted the displaced persons of Israel to return home to Zion, and thus to repossess their land. Moreover, armed with this certainty of the one action of God still to come, he could express his absolute certainty of all that God was doing in and through Israel.

"Out of these factual events of history Deutero-Isaiah has produced a thesis which he believe is rooted in eternity, that is completely true as revelatory writing (**55:13b**). He believes God has given it to him to 'mediate' (**43:27**) for mankind. Using history as the structure of his argument, he has produced a theology of the creative and redemptive love of God. God has used the body of Israel to that end as a whole. But

(continued...)

⁵⁶(...continued)

He also invites individuals to share in His redemptive task with Him in covenant. Deutero-Isaiah believes in what he has written (and remember it is all in poetry, like the words of Milton and Dante) because it has come to him through the Spirit of God **(48:16)**.” (Pp. 198-99)

And we add, that while Second Isaiah’s vision of the future was not fulfilled as he envisioned it (so it is with the prophetic vision—always “through a mirror darkly,” “enigmatic” in nature), it was his vision that engaged and challenged Jesus of Nazareth, who through his life’s ministry and sacrificial death, followed by his resurrection and world-wide commission to his followers, has brought that vision into historical reality, a reality that still challenges us today with its optimistic hope for our world.

1. **Translation of 2 Samuel 7:8-16**

- 7:8 And now, in this way you shall speak to My servant, to David,
In this way YHWH of Armies spoke:
I, I took you from the sheep-meadow, from (following) after the sheep / flock,
to be / become a leader / ruler / prince over My people, over Israel.
- 7:9 And I was with you, in every place where you walked / went;
And I cut off every one of your enemies from before you.
And I will make for you a great name,
like (the) name of the great ones which (are) in the land / earth.
- 7:10 And I will set / establish a place for My people, for Israel;
and I will plant him, and he will dwell beneath it (that name?);
and he will not be agitated / disturbed again;
and unjust people will not again (synonym) humble / afflict him, like at the
first;
- 7:11 and from the day when I commanded judges over My people Israel.
And I will give you (singular) rest from all your enemies.
And I YHWH will declare to you, that He, YHWH will build a household for you
(singular)!
- 7:12 When your days are fulfilled, and you shall lie down with your fathers,
and I will raise up your seed / descendant after you, who will go forth from
your body,
and I will establish his kingdom.
- 7:13 He will build a house / temple for My name,
and I will establish (synonym) his kingdom's throne until long-lasting time.
- 7:14 I will be to him for a Father; and he will be to Me for a son;
who, when he commits iniquity—and I will reprove him with a rod of men /
people,
and with strokes / plagues of human children.
- 7:15 But/ and My steadfast-love will not depart from him,
just as I removed (it) from being with Saul,
whom I removed from before you.
- 7:16 And your house and your kingdom (will be) confirmed / established to long-
lasting time
before you;
your throne will be established (synonym) to long-lasting time.

2.

Wikipedia Article on the “Hasmoneans”

The Hasmonean dynasty was “the ruling dynasty of Judea and surrounding regions during Classical antiquity. Between c. 140 and c. 116 B.C.E., the dynasty ruled semi-autonomously from the Seleucids in the region of Judea. From 110 B.C.E., with the Seleucid empire disintegrating, the dynasty became fully independent, expanded into the neighbouring regions of Samaria, Galilee, Iturea, Perea, and Idumea, and took the title “basileus” [“king”]. Some modern scholars refer to this period as an independent kingdom of Israel. In 63 B.C.E., the kingdom was conquered by the Roman Republic, broken up and set up as a Roman client state. The Kingdom had survived for 103 years before yielding to the Herodian Dynasty in 37 B.C.E. Even then, Herod the Great tried to bolster the legitimacy of his reign by marrying a Hasmonean princess, Mariamne, and planning to drown the last male Hasmonean heir at his Jericho palace.

“The dynasty was established under the leadership of Simon Maccabaeus, two decades after his brother Judas the Maccabee defeated the Seleucid army during the Maccabean Revolt. According to historical sources, including **1 Maccabees** and **2 Maccabees** and the first book of **The Jewish War** by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus (C.E. 37–c. 100), after Antiochus IV's successful invasion of Ptolemaic Egypt was turned back by the intervention of the Roman Republic, Antiochus instead moved to assert strict control over the Seleucid satrapy [province with a governor, adapted from the Persians] of Coele Syria and Phoenicia, sacking Jerusalem and its Temple, suppressing Jewish and Samaritan religious and cultural observances, and imposing Hellenistic practices. The ensuing revolt by the Jews (167 B.C.E.) began a twenty-five-year period of Jewish independence potentiated by the steady collapse of the Seleucid Empire under attacks from the rising powers of the Roman Republic and the Parthian Empire.

“However, the same power vacuum that enabled the Jewish state to be recognized by the Roman Senate c. 139 B.C.E. was later exploited by the Romans themselves. Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II, Simon's great-grandsons, became pawns in a proxy war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great. The deaths of Pompey (48 B.C.E.), Caesar (44 B.C.E.), and the related Roman civil wars temporarily relaxed Rome's grip on Israel, allowing a very brief Hasmonean resurgence backed by the Parthian Empire. This short independence was rapidly crushed by the Romans under Mark Antony and Octavian. The installation of Herod the Great (an Idumean) as king in 37 B.C.E. made Israel a Roman client state and marked the end of the Hasmonean dynasty. In C. E. 6, Rome joined Judea proper, Samaria and Idumea (biblical Edom) into the Roman province of Iudaea. In C.E. 44, Rome installed the rule of a Roman procurator side by side with the rule of the Herodian kings (specifically Agrippa I C.E. 41–44 and Agrippa II C.E. 50–100).” 3/16/2016

