

Isaiah 56, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

56:1¹ כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

¹1QIs^a interpolates the word כִּי at the very beginning of this sentence, but 1QIs^b and all of the ancient versions read like our Hebrew text.

Oswalt discusses the structure of **chapters 56-66** on pp. 461-65. He asks, “What is the return to the homeland all about? Surely, it is an opportunity to revel in the exclusive election of God, and to draw clear lines between those who are descendants of Abraham and those who are not [is this not exactly the program of **Ezra / Nehemiah**, with their demand for divorce of foreign wives?]. But God [is depicted as saying] that would be precisely the wrong lesson to draw from the exile and the return. The lesson that should be taught by those experiences is that the grace of God is available to all who will turn to Him in repentance and willingness to follow His ways. The true servants of God...are not those who immerse themselves in the cultic...righteousness of their religion [that is, in the rigid observance of the 613 commandments, and the Levitical sacrifices]...but those who so demonstrate the righteousness of God in their ethical behavior...that all nations are drawn to Him...

“The encapsulation in this last division of the **book** of this message is of the universal mission of God’s people confirms that this mission and Israel’s servanthood in its performance are central for the present **Book of Isaiah**...It is surely to say that the central issue for God’s people is not eschatological hope, as real as that is, but the hard issues of the necessity of ethical righteousness.” (Pp. 463-64)

We certainly agree with this comment by Oswalt! But we do not see Oswalt following through the implications of this view—that it is directly contrary to the Judaism / Pharisaism that would emerge among the returnees under the teaching of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Slotki states that **verses 1-8** depict “The reward in store for all who keep justice, righteousness and observance of the Sabbath, irrespective of whether they are Israelites, eunuchs, foreigners or proselytes.” (P. 273)

That is, the chapter introduces a much broader definition of who the people of YHWH are, than we find taught by **Ezra / Nehemiah**, with their insistence on segregation from foreign wives, and their demand for obedience to the legalistic regulations found in the Five Books of Moses (what we call the beginnings of Pharisaism).

Elizabeth Achtemeier in her commentary, **The Community and Message of Isaiah 56-66** (Augsburg Publishing House, Minneapolis, 1982), describes **verses 1-8** as “a salvation oracle.”

“It reiterates one of the two great motifs of salvation promised by **Second Isaiah**. That prophet had proclaimed that the exiles would return to Palestine, experiencing a new exodus-redemption and guidance through the wilderness more glorious than those that Israel had known when Yahweh first redeemed her out of Egypt (compare **Isaiah 43:14-21; 51:9-11; 52:3-12; 41:17-20**)...

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“His most important good news was that Yahweh would return to His people. For a brief moment forsaken by God for her sin (**54:4-8**), Judah would nevertheless be able to lift up her eyes and to peer out over the desert and see Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, coming once again to dwell in her midst, bringing her exiled children with Him as He came (**40:9-11; 52:8**). That was finally the meaning of ‘salvation’ for Israel--the return of Yahweh to be with her (compare **41:10, 13-14; 43:5; 51:12-17; 52:6**)—because when Yahweh is present, there is nothing to be afraid of...

“This is the salvation that commands the attention of **Third Isaiah**—the presence of Yahweh with His people. Obviously some of the exiles have already returned to Judah, but that does not mean that **Second Isaiah**’s message has been fulfilled...Salvation can be had only in the company of God...Unless He reestablishes the covenant bond, life on earth remains a living death, no matter what its circumstances. The rebuilding of the ruined temple and city and land are not the most important for **Third-Isaiah**, but rather God’s rebuilding of Israel’s broken relationship with Him...

“Yahweh is coming. The question therefore is, ‘To whom will He come?’ And the answer is twofold in **verse 1**. First, Yahweh will come to those who are stewards of justice...Second, Yahweh will come to those who are righteous, that is, faithful to their relationship with God in all their dealings.” (Pp. 33-34)

We think that “righteous” and “righteousness” mean much more than simply being faithful in one’s relationship with God. As **chapter 58** will make clear, “righteousness” is a matter of loving care for fellow human beings, especially those in need! And only such “righteousness” can enable the returnees from exile to be the “servant” people that YHWH wants them to be.

Oswalt states that “**56:1-8** provides an excellent transition between **chapters 40-55** and **56-66**. The earlier chapters spoke of the Servant’s ministry to bring justice to the nations, and the ministry of the servants to be the living evidence (witnesses, **43:10**, etc.) to the nations of the salvation of God. Now the prophet begins to work out the implications of all of that. Because of the two ministries, all the nations will flow to Jerusalem to learn the **Torah** [‘teaching’] of God (**51:4**; compare **56:1**, where מִשְׁפּוֹת, **mishpot**, is the functional equivalent of **Torah**)...The covenant is not primarily a performance but a relationship, a point that **56:1-8** makes clear right at the outset by means of its shocking references to eunuchs and foreigners. Who is especially pleasing to God? Those who carry the bloodline of Abraham and pass it on to succeeding generations of covenant people? No! His people are those who manifest a living relationship with Him by living His life. Though they never knew Abraham and die childless, it is still these who are truly the children of God. It is not genealogy but character that marks the servants of God.” (Pp. 454-55)

We basically agree with this comment, but ask, are not “a living relationship” and “living His life” and demonstrating God’s “character” by their lives, in fact a matter of performance? We think they are, and that what YHWH wants from His people, the “new, forgiven Israel,” is the character of His “servant(s),” such as Second Isaiah has depicted in the four “Songs of the Servant,” which includes becoming suffering servants, willing to die for sinful people!

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George A. E. Knight, in his International Theological Commentary, **Isaiah 56-66, The New Israel** (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., Grand Rapids, 1985) comments on **verses 1-2a** that “This third part of the **Book of Isaiah** begins with Trito-Isaiah [who he says, was among the first returnees to Jerusalem about 538-536 B.C.E.] actually putting into the mouth of God a declaration of what God expects of His ‘resurrected’ and forgiven people, as they take up their new life in the ruins of their old city. God’s expectation of them is to be lived out within the context of the social situation that prevailed in the decade 538-530 or so, a period which was very different in quality both from life in old Jerusalem before 586 and from their experience of life in the Babylonian exile.

“God’s word to the returnees is expressed in a compact utterance: ‘Keep justice, and do righteousness.’ This had, of course, long since been expressed as God’s word in the **Torah**, the **Five Books of Moses**. But now the basic content of God’s word is summarized in these terms in face of a wholly new historical situation...

“‘Keep’ (or better, ‘guard’) ‘justice’ is God’s first requirement...The pietists amongst Trito-Isaiah’s hearers may well have been disappointed at hearing how the first requirement laid upon the returned community was to learn that membership in the covenant demanded social responsibility...Later in his address we discover to whom justice is to be given. It is not to be confined to one’s own inner circle of family and friends. It is to be ‘guarded’ and thus valued as God’s will, and is to be extended to all people everywhere...

“[The second requirement, righteousness] expresses what they in their turn are to do to uphold their side of the covenant in the new situation...Israel is to do what God does, that is, they are to ‘do righteousness...that creative, loving activity between persons that has been inspired and empowered by God’s initial act of [righteousness, i.e., freeing and forgiving the exiles, giving them a new life]...For those who had returned to Zion, and for those in turn who lived there after them, the word צדקה [righteousness] described something you do unto others as God has already done unto you. It becomes, first, an act of compassionate love, such as...giving a cup of cold water to a thirsty person. But second, since it is God’s צדקה, though done by humans, the word describes any creative activity by which a covenant member can woo a sinner out of his or her folly into commitment to Yahweh.” (P. 3)

We agree with Knight up to this last sentence. We do not find anything said in **Isaiah 56-66** about “wooing sinners out of their folly into commitment to Yahweh.” What we do find is the powerful statement in **Isaiah 58** concerning righteousness--that it worships YHWH by loosing the bonds that tie others down, setting the oppressed free; that shares its bread with the hungry, brings the homeless into one’s own home, clothing the naked, and stopping work one day in seven in order to give “ordinary people, the masses of humanity, a complete day of rest” (Knight, pp. 4-5). That’s the kind of “righteousness” that Trito-Isaiah demands from the people of YHWH! And, we may add, that’s the kind of life-style that is depicted in **Matthew 25:31-46** as the crucial factor in the judgment of the nations!

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שְׁמְרוּ מִשְׁפַּט וְעֲשׂוּ צְדָקָה
 כִּי־קְרוֹבָה יְשׁוּעָתִי לָבוֹא
 וְצְדַקְתִּי לְהַגְלוֹת:

In this way YHWH spoke:²

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Knight adds that “God’s saving love is not a mere theological idea, but is something that is true only when it comes to fruition, or only when we see God’s deliverance being acted out by those who have accepted it in their own lives.” (P. 4)

²**Third Isaiah** insists three times in **Isaiah 56** that the message that is being proclaimed comes from YHWH—“in this way YHWH spoke” (**verses 1, 4**); “it is a saying of YHWH” (**verse 8**). This is the authority of the biblical teaching—it is the claim that the message has not been thought up by the spokespersons, “out of the clear blue,” but that it has been given to them by YHWH! These authors, like Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, and the other genuine spokespersons of Israel, have entered into the Divine council, listening for YHWH’s Word. They do not dare to speak their own message, but only speak for YHWH!

But of course, this raises the question of how seriously this claim to Divine authorship should be taken—when in the various parts of **Isaiah 56-66** conflicting, even contradictory statements are attributed to YHWH, and we wonder if YHWH in fact actually entered into conversations like this. It is a matter that arises especially concerning the conflicting view of **Jeremiah 7** plus **Isaiah 66** concerning the temple and its sacrifices as being unnecessary and outdated, over against the books of **Ezekiel, Ezra** and **Nehemiah**, along with **Haggai** and **Zechariah**, which insist that the returning exiles from Babylon are under Divine command to rebuild the altar and the temple, and to resume the Levitical sacrifices. Alongside this, there is the related issue concerning racial / religious segregation which is insisted on in **Deuteronomy 23:1-6**^{Eng} and continued in **Ezra-Nehemiah**, with their dogmatic insistence that Judean men married to foreign wives must divorce themselves from their wives--over against the passages in **Isaiah 56-66** which call for acceptance of all peoples and nations, including the children of foreigners, and those specifically excluded from YHWH’s assembly in **Deuteronomy 23**.

Alexander calls it a “shallow and erroneous view” to understand **Isaiah 56** as “virtually
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repealing the law of Moses contained in **Deuteronomy 23:2-8**, as Gesenius, the world-renowned Hebrew grammarian and commentator on **Isaiah** had claimed.” (P. 334) In order to sustain his view, Alexander has to consider **Isaiah 56** as not having been addressed to the Jewish returnees from Babylon, but rather as simply a general religious statement, with no particular application. But how would that avoid contradicting or virtually repealing **Deuteronomy 23**? See footnote 5 for this view of Alexander, and our footnote 22, with its treatment of **Deuteronomy 23**.

Achtemeier states that “In answer to these very serious questions, we must realize that they arise not only from a study of **Third-Isaiah [Isaiah 56-66]**, but every time we study the **Bible**. The canon is shot through with contradictory theological positions and writings produced by sinful human beings and promises of a salvation that seemingly has never come [see, for example, **Psalms 89!**]...”

“It is not difficult to find other portions of the **Old Testament** and of the **New** for that matter, that have contradictory theological views. For example, one portion of **1 Samuel** sees the Davidic kingship as a gift from God, while another part views the institution of the monarchy as an act of apostasy on Israel’s part. Or Hosea and Jeremiah consider the wilderness time to have been the time of purest relation between Yahweh and Israel, while Ezekiel understands it as a time of Israel’s utter rebellion and as a prefigurement of the final eschatological judgment. The examples of such contradictory views could be multiplied almost endlessly.

“The amazing fact, however, is that the final editors of the canon included all of these opposing views in our **Bible**. If the priestly writers [who centered their ministry and lives in the temple and its sacrifices] edited the **Old Testament**, they nevertheless did not exclude **Third-Isaiah**, despite its virulent attack upon them. They honored **Third-Isaiah’s** views. They let them stand. They affirmed, ‘Yes, this too is the Word of God, and therefore it must be included along with His other words to us.’ In short, the Priestly editors found that these words of **Third-Isaiah**, which so judged their cultic ways, also mediated to them the truth of God and sustained their life in relation to Him. They therefore were willing to be corrected and judged by **Third-Isaiah** for the sake of their relationship with God. [Achtemeier is thinking of the formation of the ‘canon’ of the **Jewish Bible**, the ‘Old Testament.’]

“Whenever we read the **Bible**, we must approach it in the same manner. We may find much in the **Bible**, especially in the **Old Testament**, that we do not like. We may encounter many passages that level awful judgment upon us and upon our ways. We may find views in the **Old Testament** that we think are contradictory to the views of the **New Testament**. But all such discoveries should not thereby be discarded. Rather, we should emulate the Priestly writers and preserve all the traditions, keeping them and pondering them in our hearts. Across the centuries, the church has found in its experience that these words of God in our canon give a true revelation of God and sustain us in our relationship with Him. For the sake of that relationship, we must be willing to listen to the total canon [We ask, is that all we should listen to? Should we not listen as well to Israel’s other literature, the so-called “Pseudepigrapha,” and should we not listen to the

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voices of other religions, who claim to have heard a Divine message? Should we not listen to the voice of modern science and culture, the voice of poets and philosophers and “rap” artists? Why should we exclude any voice?], for in that relationship alone can we have abundant and eternal life...

“We should have no illusions about the writers of the **Bible**. Like us, every single one of them was a sinful human being. There were no pure and undefiled authors of our Scriptures, writing Divine words dictated from heaven and untouched by human folly. There were only communities in a people called Israel, which found itself visited by the living God [We ask, were

there not other communities, such as Syria and Philistia and Ethiopia, that found themselves visited by the living God? See **Amos 9:7**. And we ask, have not generations of Native Americans claimed to have heard the voice of God?]-communities of faithful folk who heard God speaking to them, who saw God at work in their midst, and who passed their testimonies to that working and speaking on to the next generations, until finally the Word has come down to us in the form of our canon...

“Despite all our sin and shortcomings, and despite those of the biblical writers, God’s Word that He speaks through the Scriptures is nevertheless so powerful that it truly mediates His Presence and activity to all of us who open our hearts to it in faith.” (Pp. 154-56)

Yes, in a marvelous way, when we take up the **Bible**, the entire **Bible**, and study it seriously, listening to its divergent, sometimes contradictory, sometimes questioning, sometimes doubting, sometimes mistaken voices, we “enter the theological circle,” and begin a dialogue with the writers of scripture, and with our own hearts, and with our God--learning to prayerfully ask serious questions, being led to form ever deeper and more faithful views, growing in our relationship with the living God, learning to say “both / and” where we have formerly dogmatically said “either / or.”

We are deeply thankful for Achtemeier’s powerful and honest statement concerning our use of the **Bible**! Only, we would change her statement from “until finally the Word has come down to us in the form of our canon” to “until finally the Word has come down to us in the form of Jesus Christ,” the fact of faith that the **New Testament** documents announce and celebrate.

We insist that the formation of a “canon” of Scripture was a post-biblical phenomenon, led by Constantine the Great as a political strategy, attempting to silence the voice of “heretics” and thereby unite all Christian believers as one unified body under Roman control.

We say, in opposition to the voices of “thought control,” Let the heretics speak! Listen to them, learn from them, correct them where they are wrong if you can, but love them as fellow worshipers and seekers. Whatever you do, don’t follow the lead of the Roman bishops to whom Constantine gave the power of the sword to kill dissenting voices of “Monophysite” Christians--all across Syria, Israel and Egypt, opening the door to the later rise of Islam among the Arabians who had witnessed the murder of Arabian-Christians and Jews by the followers of the Roman bishops.

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Maintain³ justice,
and practice righteousness!⁴

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What do you say? Do you believe in burning books, silencing dissident voices? Or do you believe in an “open market-place for religious convictions”? If not, why not? Are you afraid that your view cannot stand in the face of differing views? In fact, the writings of Second Isaiah and Third Isaiah were the voices of a minority in Israel who strongly disagreed with the orthodox views of the majority of Judaism’s leaders. We should be deeply thankful that their writings were not burned for that reason!

³Achtemeier translates by “be stewards of (guard / keep).”

⁴Achtemeier translates by “faithfulness,” but points out that the word is literally “righteousness.”

It is a powerful summing up of YHWH’s demand on His people: Not, “keep 613 commandments of the legalistic Jews, the followers of Ezra, and later the Pharisees,” but “Maintain justice!” And “Practice righteousness!” That is, be committed to building a society in which there is justice—equal justice—genuine justice—for every person. See to it that no one slips through the cracks! And along with that, practice righteousness—which means a right relationship with God (of humility and obedience to the Divine voice), and a right relationship with your fellow human beings, a relationship of loving care, not of judgmental, condemning attitudes towards them, resulting in segregation from and rejection of them. That is what YHWH wants from His people—that’s “righteousness”! It is a universal commandment, that can be obeyed by people throughout the earth, who know nothing of Judaism and its 613 commandments. And the assumption of the command is that it is possible for the people of God to do just that!

There are, of course, many slightly different ways of summing up the Divine demand, such as Jesus’ summing it all up by the two commandments, Love God and love your neighbor as yourself (**Mark 12:28-34**). **Isaiah 56’s** phrase of summation is closely related to such passages as:

Micah 6:6-8,

- 6 With what shall I come before YHWH,
and bow down before the exalted God?
Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
- 7 Will YHWH be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousand rivers of oil?
Shall I offer my first-born for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my innermost being?
- 8 He has showed you, O man, what is good.
And what does YHWH require of you?
To act justly [that’s justice!]

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and to love mercy [that is a right relationship with your neighbor!]
and to walk humbly with your God [that is the right relationship with God!]
(Micah's assumption is that humanity ('O man') can do this!)

Amos 5:21-24,

21 I hate, I despise your religious feasts.
I cannot stand your assemblies (your church-meetings)!

22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings,
I will not accept them...

23 Away with the noise of your songs!
I will not listen to the music of your harps.

24 But let justice roll on like a river,
righteousness like a never-failing stream!
(There they are, justice and righteousness, within the capability of God's people to perform!)

Isaiah 1:16-17,

16 Wash, and make yourselves clean!
Take your evil deeds out of My sight!
Stop doing wrong,

17 learn to do right!
Seek justice,
encourage the oppressed!
Defend the cause of the fatherless,
plead the case of the widow!
(Once again, justice and righteousness are considered within the capability of God's people!)

Deuteronomy 6:5

Love YHWH your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your strength!
(The assumption of the commandment is that such a whole-hearted love for God is within the capability of God's people.)

Isaiah 56 joins its voice with these passages, showing that the person who wants to do the will of God, must be concerned with justice for all people, and with righteousness between themselves and all others, and between themselves and God! That's what YHWH God wants from His people! There can be no substitutes! See especially **Isaiah 58** for its definition of "righteousness."

And we think **Third Isaiah** means, Not the 613 commandments, with its exclusion of foreigners and the physically impaired, along with a legalistic concern for proper Levitical sacri-
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Because My salvation is near to come,⁵

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figures, such as **Ezra / Nehemiah** would soon be advocating on their return from Babylon and Persia—but “justice and righteousness,” or “sabbath days of rest for every worker, and avoidance of evil”!

In **Matthew 23:23**, Jesus told the religious leaders of His day that the most important matters of the law are “justice, mercy, and faithfulness”—that is, justice, and righteousness with other human beings (“mercy”) and righteousness with God (“faithfulness”).

Jesus taught that there are “heavy” commandments and “light” commandments—and He agreed with these passages from their **Bible** that the most important commandments have to do with justice for all people, especially the little people like widows and orphans and immigrants, and with righteousness, which He named as “mercy” and “true faithfulness.” The only time that He is recorded as telling people to study a scripture is found in **Matthew 9:13**, where He tells the Jewish scribes, “Go and learn what this means, I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,” i.e., **Hosea 6:6**.

Rabbi Judah the Prince / Patriarch, who lived in Sepphoris, some four miles west from Nazareth, finished the work of his father, Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel, of gathering together the authoritative opinions of the Tannaim (direct transmitters of uncodified oral traditions of the Jews) on legal, ritual, ethical and related matters, publishing them either orally or in writing about 200 C.E. He is recorded as stating, “And be careful with a light precept as with a grave one, for you do not know the grant of reward [for the fulfillment] of precepts,” acknowledging the difference between light and heavy / grave commandments, but warning that one may well be mistaken as to which precept is of the most importance / reward. (**Babylonian Talmud, Aboth 2:1**)

Jesus is much more explicit, assuming that His disciples are capable of determining the difference between important / heavy commandments and “light ones,” and able to fulfill those “heavy” commandments.

Oswalt comments that “keeping justice and doing righteousness” is “a dash of cold water in the face after the glowing promises of **chapters 54 and 55**. Reveling in the unconditional acceptance that those words convey, one would easily believe that the grace of God carries no obligations with it...”

“Obedience is to be lived out as a response to salvation [we add, it is the bringing of salvation / deliverance to others]. It is precisely because of the gracious work of God in deliverance (*My righteousness*) that we humans are expected to live righteous lives...Because God will do what He alone can do, the people will be enabled to do what they in freedom must do. Here is the key to the entire division: the righteousness that **chapters 1-39** called for, but that the people could not produce, can be produced by means of the righteousness of God that **chapters 40-55** revealed (compare **53:1**).” (P. 455)

⁵Compare:

Isaiah 46:13,

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I am bringing My righteousness near, it is not far away;
and My salvation will not be delayed...!

Isaiah 51:4-5,

...The law will go out from Me;
My justice will become a light to the nations.

My righteousness draws near speedily,
My salvation is on the way,
and My arm will bring justice to the nations!

Yes, YHWH's righteousness and salvation are near. It is a ringing message of hope that is heard throughout the **Bible**, again and again, both in the **Hebrew Bible**, centuries before the coming of Jesus Christ, and in the **New Testament** as well. It is the message that Jesus proclaimed—“the time has come, and the Kingdom of God has drawn near!” See **Mark 1:14-15**.

Achtemeier comments that “The passage picks up the announcement of **Second Isaiah** before it, and renews the promise: Yahweh's salvation of His people is near...! To those who have returned to a ruined Jerusalem after 538 B.C.E. and to those who shortly will return, to those who see nothing but devastation all around them, to those who are struggling to make ends meet and to find some reason for living, even under the hand of the Persian conqueror, **Third Isaiah** sets **verse 1** like a banner over its whole pronouncement: the Word of God still stands; deliverance is very near. “ (P. 32) Compare **Isaiah 55:10-11**,

10 Because just as the rain comes down,
and the snow from the heavens,
and there, it will not return,
unless it saturated the earth,
and causes it to give birth,
and causes it to sprout,
and it will give seed for the one sowing,
and bread / food for one eating--
11 so My Word will be,
which will go forth from My mouth--
it will not return to Me empty,
unless it did what I desired,
and caused to prosper that for which I sent it forth!

But, we ask, if YHWH's salvation was “near,” how near was it? When did it come? Did it come in the life-times of those who heard **Third-Isaiah's** message? We say it could have, if the returnees to Jerusalem had lived by the Divine demand as YHWH's suffering servant(s). Many Christian interpreters claim that it only came in Jesus Christ—some four or six centuries away.

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and My righteous deeds to be revealed!⁶

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Was that “near”? And shouldn’t **Third-Isaiah** have said something like “In time to come, it will happen” if that is what he meant?

We are reminded of statements in the **New Testament** that the kingdom of God is “at hand,” along with other statements that the kingdom of God is in their midst. Is this not a spiritual kingdom, that is always near as possibility, and that always comes whenever people open their hearts to God and His presence?

We say Yes! God’s kingdom is as near as human decision to open the heart to God and His guidance! We suspect that there were some humble returnees from exile who took this message of **Third Isaiah** seriously, and entered into that kingdom / salvation, practicing self-giving love to their neighbors, learning to live in God’s coming kingdom—doing righteousness and justice, observing one day out of seven as a day of rest for themselves and for all their workers, and not doing evil, willing to become suffering servants in obedience to the Divine call.

What do you think? Do you think this word of **Third-Isaiah** returned to YHWH empty as far as the people addressed were concerned? Or do you believe that people anywhere, anytime, can experience the salvation of God, no matter their circumstances, if they will only turn to God in humble trust and obedience, for example by observing one day in seven as a rest-day, refraining from doing evil, and practicing the righteousness of **Isaiah 58**? See **verse 2**.

Alexander comments on **verse 1** that “We can only regard [this verse] as a statement of the general laws which govern the Divine dispensation towards the chosen people, and the world at large. The reference is not merely to the ancient Israel, much less to the Jews of the captivity, still less to the Christian Church of any one period. The doctrine of the passage is simply this, that they who enjoy extraordinary favors, are under corresponding obligations to do the will of God; and moreover, that the nearer the manifestation of God’s mercy, whether in time or in eternity, the louder the call to righteousness of life. These truths are of no restricted application, but may be applied wherever the relation of a church or chosen people can be recognized...” (P. 334)

That is, Alexander holds this passage is a general statement made to ancient Israel, but not related to any particular time or place. We hold that **Third Isaiah** is addressed to the returnees from Babylonian exile, and is related to their specific time and place, even though the language “man” and “son of a human” certainly points to its broader application. And we wonder what Alexander means by “the Divine dispensation towards the chosen people”? Is that “dispensation” an eternal dispensation, which was true at the time of **Third Isaiah**—just as much as it was with the coming of Christ? This is quite different from what we understand is commonly meant by “dispensational theology.”

⁶YHWH Himself practices justice and righteousness through bringing salvation to the lost, and through His righteous deeds, His powerful acts in history whereby the wicked are punished (that’s “justice”!) and those who are oppressed and helpless are delivered, saved (that’s genuine “righteousness”!). This is exactly what YHWH had done for the Jewish exiles in Babylon.

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This is the great truth that Martin Luther learned. God’s “righteousness” does not condemn the sinner, but comes to the sinner with saving power, to deliver and to save. That’s “righteousness”!

Slotki holds that God’s favor / righteousness comes ‘to those who act justly and practice righteousness.’ (P. 273). But we ask, Is that the extent of it? Is there no good news for those who know their sinfulness, their lack of righteousness?

Achtemeier notes that “Righteousness’ is, in the **Bible**, always the fulfillment of the demands of a relationship, and in His deliverance [or ‘salvation’] of His chosen people, Yahweh fulfills His covenant with them.” (P. 32)

What YHWH demands from those who worship Him is צְדָקָה, **tsedhaqah**, “righteousness.” What YHWH had done in releasing the captives צְדָקָתִי, **tsidhqathiy**, “My righteousness.” YHWH demands what He gives, and gives what He demands!

Knight is right when he states, “To maintain the covenant, Israel is to do what God does, that is, they are to ‘do righteousness’...That’s a creative, loving activity between persons that has been inspired and empowered by God’s initial act, something you do unto others as God has already done unto you.” (P. 3)

This is what the future holds for YHWH’s people—salvation, and righteous deeds! When the biblical authors try to spell out the details of what that future holds, they cannot accurately or consistently do so. Their vision of the future is cloudy, filled with puzzling enigmas. As Paul puts it, including himself and his own vision of the future, they “see only partially, only through a mirror darkly.” But the “sure word of prophecy” is not misleading, just because it can’t draw an exact road-map of the future, or set calendar-dates, or draw up a chronology. The hope it inspires in the human heart is trustworthy, and will not lead astray!

This is God’s world, and God holds the future in His mighty hands, and that future is filled with salvation, through the mighty, righteous deeds of our God, and the righteous deeds of His people! Those who listen faithfully to the message of God’s servants, the prophets, learn to stand on tip-toe, looking out expectantly for the coming salvation of God, that will soon be revealed, even though the exact details are not made known to them, and even though its coming seems delayed. The details of the coming future may not be known, but the demand for the present is sure—it is justice and righteousness, and the people of God are called upon to practice them, here and now! The coming of that blessed future may well hinge on their obedience to the Divine demand!

⁷Achtemeier comments on **verse 2** that “Special emphasis is here put upon Sabbath observance because such observance had become, along with circumcision, a mark of the faithful Jew living among the heathen after the fall of Judah...

(continued...)

וּבֶן־אָדָם יִחְזֶק בָּהּ
 שֹׁמֵר שַׁבָּת מִחֻלְלוֹ
 וְשֹׁמֵר יָדוֹ מִמַּעֲשוֹת כָּל־רָע:

How blessed a man (who) will do / practice this,⁸

and⁹ a son of humanity¹⁰ (who) will lay strong hold on it—¹¹

⁷(...continued)

“That means much more than legalistic obedience to the law however. Throughout this poem, the persons to be saved are those who ‘hold fast’ faithfulness to Yahweh (**verses 2, 4, 6**), who ‘join’ themselves to the Lord (**verses 3, 6**), who ‘choose’ those things that Yahweh desires (**verse 4**), who ‘love’ His name (**verse 6**). **Third-Isaiah** reflects here the inward nature of covenant faithfulness, so important also in **Deuteronomy**. Such faithfulness is a matter of the heart and will; of conscious, ethical, daily wrestling to follow God’s ways; of total and willing love for the God Who has first loved Israel; of cleaving to God, holding Him fast, in a fellowship unbroken by any circumstances (compare **Deuteronomy 6:4-9; 10:12-21**, and throughout **Deuteronomy**). Any person who so loves God and is faithful to Him, says **Third Isaiah** in the wisdom formula of **verse 2**, is the person who will have life in its fullness, i.e., who will be ‘blessed,’ because God will be present with him.” (P. 34)

⁸Motyer comments that “The word for *man* is אָדָם, man in his ordinary humanity with all its weakness.” (P. 464) Watts states that this word, combined with the following phrase אָדָם בֶּן־, **ben-)adham**, “a son of a human,” “speaks of persons in the most basic and universal sense possible... What distinguishes one person from another is whether one keeps justice or not, whether one does right or not. It has nothing to do with ethnic origins, economic power, or political status.” (P. 248)

Do you agree with Watts? Is this not in fact a “universal” view, quite distinct from narrow, exclusivist views such as the claim that Israel is the chosen of God, and only those in Israel or who convert to Judaism can be blessed?

⁹Knight entitles **verses 2b-8** “The Sabbath an Instrument of Mission.”

He comments that “In the **Torah** we find the sabbath was God’s gift to His covenant people. As **verse 4** puts it, they are ‘My sabbaths,’ not Israel’s. Persians, Babylonians, Canaanites, Egyptians, Greeks—none of these ever thought of ‘stopping’ work (as the word [sabbath] means literally) one day in seven so as to give ordinary people, the masses of humanity, a complete day of rest. Keeping *God’s* sabbath meant, moreover, that those same common folk might be taught to possess a God-centered theology, one in which every seemingly unimportant human being could become God’s instrument for human happiness and success...

(continued...)

⁹(...continued)

“Trito-Isaiah makes no reference here to the keeping of the Ten Commandments. What he does emphasize is obedience to God’s will with its issue in practical love...

“Trito-Isaiah had now lived through a new ‘moment’ of revelation in God’s saving plan for the world. For God had now redeemed Israel while they themselves were still unclean and while living in a foreign, and therefore unclean, land...

“The new revelation, then, that had now come to ‘unclean’ Israel meant that they had to learn to do for the unclean foreigner [Hebrew, ‘son of foreignness’] as much as God had done for them. Israel was to remember that ‘a wandering Aramean was my father’ (**Deuteronomy 26:5**), ‘an Amorite [Jerusalem’s father] a Hittite [Jerusalem’s mother], **Ezekiel 16:3**...so that they are as much a ‘Gentile’ as any other people. Then, from being a mere גֵּר, a squatter, in the world of humanity, God had made them into citizens of Zion, where He had granted them an everlasting identity (‘name’) that would not be ‘cut off’ ...

“Israel is enjoined particularly to welcome ‘home’ the eunuch. From now on even such as he...was to have as his new name ‘Yahwehson,’ in the same was as we build names today like Adamson or Richardson...To do so, Trito-Isaiah had first to reinterpret **Deuteronomy 23:1-6** [English]...

“Thus when Israel began to act in the power of God’s צְדָקָה [righteousness] ‘foreigners’ would then actually ask to be allowed to ‘join themselves to the Lord.’” (Pp. 4-7)

Knight adds that “Trito-Isaiah’s preaching takes the form of a new **torah** for the postexilic age. We can contrast his wide views with the ‘fundamentalism’ of Ezra some generations later. Ezra did not find Trito-Isaiah’s exegesis of **Torah** acceptable. But basic to Trito-Isaiah’s new **torah** is his belief that, because of a historical situation brought about by God through His ‘messiah’ [Cyrus, the Persian], God had now thrown open the covenant fellowship to all people of all races, nations, tongues, and moralities, along with their children.” (P. 8) See **Ezekiel 47:22-23**, where the future division of the land of Israel is depicted:

- 22 And it will happen—you people will cause it to fall as an inheritance for yourselves,
and for the temporary residents, the ones living temporarily in your midst,
who gave birth to children in your midst.
And they shall be to you people like a native-born among Israel’s children;
with you they will cause (it) to fall as an inheritance,
in (the) midst of Israel’s tribes.
- 23 And it will happen—in the tribe where the temporary resident lives temporarily within it,
there you (plural) will give his inheritance!
(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH!

Knight adds that “This was to be so even if they were physically deformed or, we might add today, mentally handicapped...God Himself now ‘gives’ (**verse 5**) to the unmarried woman, the
(continued...)

observing a Rest-day,¹² avoiding profaning it,¹³

⁹(...continued)

bachelor, the widow, the homosexual an equally valid and eschatologically significant place in the covenant, even though these folk are unable to form a link in the historical chain of human life... The eunuch was not even to be an 'ordinary member' of Israel; he was to be a 'monument' (**verse 5**) or a pillar...Moreover, the misfit was, by grace alone, to receive a 'name,' an individual identity, within the whole People of God that would render him or her, as an individual, of eternal value to God...From such a passage as this, then, we can understand how the prayer of the foreign thief at **Luke 23:42** 'will be accepted on My altar' (**Isaiah 56:7**) as truly as that of any 'righteous' Israelite." (Pp. 8-9)

¹⁰Motyer states that the phrase here, "a son of a human," means "the one who shares in the common humanity of all. Gone are the old boundaries of descent and privilege. Such thinking...is inherent in Zion theology." (P. 464) See:

Isaiah 2:2-4, Jerusalem will be lifted up above the hills; all nations will flow into it, resulting in destroying the weapons of war, and turning them into instruments of plenty for all;

Psalms 47, God is King of all the earth, He reigns over the nations; the nobles of the nations assemble as the people of the God of Abraham; the kings of the earth belong to God!

Psalms 87, YHWH will acknowledge Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre and Cush as all having been born in Zion, included in the register of the peoples.

Motyer states that this Zion theology has its ultimate root in the Abrahamic promise of universal blessing. See **Genesis 12:3**, all peoples on earth will be blessed through Abraham.

Slotki, the Jewish commentator, agrees, stating that "a son of a human" means "human beings generally, not only Israelites." (P. 273)

¹¹In these first two lines of **verse two**, we wonder what the author means by "this" and "it." Is he pointing to the earlier basic, two-fold requirement of "maintaining justice, and practicing righteousness"? Or is he pointing to his further statement in this verse concerning observing Rest-days and not doing evil? Or does he include everything that is mentioned in **verses 1-8**? The passage is ambiguous, but we take it to be referring to everything in this section.

¹²The Hebrew noun שַׁבָּת, "Sabbath" [our "Rest-Day"] "is a feminine noun, but the modifiers of it here in the Masoretic Text are masculine, perhaps because the writer is thinking of it in terms of 'the Sabbath day' ('day' is masculine). 1QIs^a has feminine modifiers." (See Oswalt, p. 449) We think the Qumran copyist is correcting what he assumes is a grammatical mistake in the manuscript he is copying.

¹³Motyer comments that "Nothing would be a clearer outward demonstration of leaving the 'world' and joining the Lord's people than the adoption of an institution [observance of Rest-days] which necessitated the wholesale reorganizing of life around the requirements and worship of
(continued...)

and restraining his hand,¹⁴ avoiding doing anything evil.¹⁵

56:3¹⁶ וְאֵל-יְאֹמֵר בֶּן-הַיְנֹכַח

¹³(...continued)

Israel's God." (P. 465) That's not a once-for-all observance, but an on-going, lifetime of observances!

Alexander comments that "A great variety of reasons have been given for the special mention of the Sabbath here...Some suppose the Sabbath is to be here put for the whole Mosaic system of religious services, as being the most ancient, and, in some sort, the foundation of the rest. According to Gesenius, it is specified because it was the only part of the Mosaic institutions which could be perpetuated through the exile, that which was merely ceremonial and restricted to the temple being necessarily suspended...The true explanation is afforded by a reference to the primary and secondary ends of the Sabbatical institution, and the belief involved in its observance..."

"It implied a recognition of [YHWH] as the omnipotent Creator of the universe (**Exodus 20:11; 31:17**)...as the Sanctifier of His people (**Exodus 31:13; Ezekiel 20:12**)...as the Savior of this chosen people from the bondage of Egypt (**Deuteronomy 5:15**). Of these great truths, the Sabbath was a weekly remembrancer and its observance by the people a perpetual recognition and profession, besides the practical advantages accruing to the maintenance of a religious spirit by the weekly recurrence of a day of rest." (Pp. 334-35)

¹⁴1QIs^a reads the plural "hands" where the Masoretic Text has the singular "hand."

¹⁵These two religious actions—observing one day in seven as a Rest-day, not working, but spending the day in family enjoyment and spiritual meditation, and then daily restraining one's hand from doing anything evil—are actions fully possible for any and every person on earth, whether Jew or non-Jew, whether native Israelite or foreigner, whether having access to the sanctuary in Jerusalem or not having access. YHWH is depicted as calling the person "blessed" who does these things! It may be that the reference is to the earlier "maintaining justice and practicing right relationships," and if so, it is obvious that both of these are fully capable of being practiced universally—without any temple, or any animal sacrifices.

¹⁶Motyer comments on **verses 3-7** that "The *foreigner* and the *eunuch* are offered as striking cases in point of the all-embracing inclusiveness of **verse 2**. The **Old Testament** was never exclusivist on a nationalistic basis. **Deuteronomy 23:3ff.** dealt with specific matters requiring special treatment [we think it is obvious that **Deuteronomy 23:3ff.** is in fact 'exclusivist' on a nationalistic basis, and cannot be simply dismissed as irrelevant, or only dealing with 'special matters'—see footnote 22], but **Exodus 12:48-49** [an alien, גֵּר, **ger**, one living in Israel who wants to observe the Passover may do so, but only if all males in the household are circumcised; also see **Numbers 15:14-16** [If a resident foreigner (גֵּר, **ger**) is living with you—or whoever is among you in future generations—and prepares an offering made by fire as a pleasing aroma to YHWH, he must do it the same way you are to do it. One statute must apply to you who belong to the congregation and to the resident foreigner who is living among you, as a permanent
(continued...)]

¹⁶(...continued)

statute for your future generations. You and the resident foreigner will be alike before the YHWH. One law and one custom must apply to you and to the resident foreigner who lives alongside you.] expresses the general position that the ‘stranger’ was always a welcome convert...

“**Ezra and Nehemiah** have been sadly misunderstood as if their motive was exclusivism. Their problem was to preserve the identity and purity of the people of God at a time when these things were under threat. This is a vital task, for if the people of God lose distinctiveness there is nothing for anyone to join nor any good reason for seeking to do so! An inclusive objective requires a distinctive base of operation. Their position was no different from that of Isaiah in his combating of foreign political entanglements, and indeed the glorious universalism which he preached was not to be worked out in terms of unconditional inclusion, as this present passage shows.” (Pp. 467-68)

We are impressed with these passages from the **Torah** that insist גֵּרִים, **geriym**, aliens, or immigrants must be welcomed rather than excluded. However, we do not think Motyer’s treatment of **Deuteronomy 23** is correct. See footnote 22 for translation and commentary on that passage. And we think it is naive of Motyer to say Ezra and Nehemiah were not exclusivist. Granted that they would allow a proselyte to share in Israel’s worship—but their building of a wall to separate them from their fellow countrymen, and their demand for divorce of half-breed or foreign wives, and their insistence on obedience to the 613 commandments of the Mosaic **Torah**, all of which became the roots from which the Pharisaism of Jesus’ day grew, was certainly “exclusivist.”

Achtemeier comments on **verses 3-7** that “**Third-Isaiah** knows of the plans being formulated among the priestly groups in exile—plans to reconstitute the new post-exilic Israel on the basis of exclusive cultic purity, under the stipulations of the Priestly Code. Under the Priestly Code, the service at the altar would be limited to an elite Zadokite priestly hierarchy (compare **Numbers 18:6-7; 3:5-10; 8:19; Ezekiel 40:45-56**), while sections of **Ezekiel 40-48** would exclude foreigners from even worshiping in the temple (**Ezekiel 44:6-9**)...Indeed, in contradiction to the words of **Jeremiah (chapter 29)**, those in exile were claiming that they alone remained faithful to God, while those in the land were idolatrous and had been rejected by the Lord (compare **Ezekiel 11:14-23; Ezra 6:21**)...

“In a daring reformulation of the teaching of **Deuteronomy 23:1-8**, **Third-Isaiah** therefore proclaims that all faithful people who love Yahweh and cling to Him will be welcomed in the rebuilt temple, and may themselves, in a priesthood of all believers (compare **Exodus 19:6**), offer their sacrifices upon Yahweh’s altar. Holiness before the Lord is not a matter of exclusivistic and ritualistic purity, as the Zadokite [priestly] hierarchy would maintain, but a matter of holding fast to the covenant God. And it is not the priests alone who are holy, but all of Yahweh’s covenant people, in accordance with the teachings of **Deuteronomy** (compare **7:6; 26:19; 28:8; Jeremiah 2:3**). By including even eunuchs among those to be welcomed into Yahweh’s house (compare **Acts 8:22-38**), **Third-Isaiah** reinterprets **Deuteronomy 23:1** to apply to his new situation [see footnote 22].

(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)

“It was not unusual for a prophet to reinterpret the law, despite the stipulations of **Deuteronomy 4:2** and **12:32**. On the basis of a new Word from God, Isaiah of Jerusalem had earlier reinterpreted cultic law (**1:10-17**), and he had extended the first commandment to apply to foreign alliances and military weapons (**31:1**), just as later, Jesus of Nazareth radically reinterpreted many legal prescriptions (compare **Matthew 5:17-48**).

“In its reinterpretation of the law, **Third-Isaiah** was not, however, introducing totally new thoughts. It spoke out of the universalism of **Deutero-Isaiah** (compare **42:1-4; 44:5; 49:7; 45:22-23**) and of the Isaianic school (compare **2:2-4; 14:1; 19:19-25**). And indeed, preexilic Israel had never excluded the worshiping foreigner from the temple—i.e., one who was not a resident alien but a stranger in the land (compare **Exodus 12:48-49; Numbers 15:14-16**). From the beginning, Israel’s faith looked toward the blessing of all the families of the earth (**Genesis 12:3**), and the Suffering Servant of **Second Isaiah**, i.e., Israel itself, was called to give its life for the sake of foreign nations (**52:13-53:12**). Yahweh wished to restore all peoples to the good life that He had intended for them in the creation of the earth; such had always been Israel’s understanding of the plan of God...

“The question in **Third-Isaiah’s** time, however, was how to accomplish that plan. The Zadokite priestly hierarchy maintained that the way to its realization lay through Israel’s exclusivity. Thus, in the fifth century B.C.E., after the time of **Third-Isaiah**, the priestly law was put into effect, all marriages with foreigners were forbidden, and Israel withdrew into itself as an exclusive and legalistic community (compare **Nehemiah 10:28-31; chapter 13; Ezra 9-10; 2 Chronicles 13:10-12**)...

“But in the time between 538 and 515 B.C.E., **Third-Isaiah** announced a wideness of the mercy of God which would welcome all outcasts (**verse 8**), all foreigners, all rejected peoples to His house, the temple, which was to be called a house of prayer for all peoples (compare **Mark 11:17** and parallels).

“One response was asked: that Yahweh be loved as He had loved them, in faithfulness and ethical obedience. Then the eunuch who could have no children to perpetuate his name—the only form of immortality known in Israel—would be given a place in Yahweh’s temple when it was rebuilt; and his name would be remembered there forever among the ranks of the faithful...Then the foreigner without a home would find himself no longer a stranger, but a member of a holy community rejoicing ‘before the Lord’ on Zion’s holy hill. Yahweh was gradually gathering the ‘outcasts,’ His chosen people to Him (compare **Isaiah 11:12**). He would gather many more who heretofore had never dreamed they could be included, but who would nevertheless become His, because they loved Him and held fast to His covenant will for their lives (compare **John 10:16**)...

“Such was the broad mercy and undimmed hope **Third-Isaiah** announced to those living in the midst of Judah’s ruins, and to those of mixed background who were straggling toward Palestine, not sure of what awaited them.” (Pp. 35-37)

(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verses 3-8** that “Now the prophet sharpens his focus further. In **verse 2** he defined ‘justice’ and ‘righteousness’ more closely, but how he uses a dramatic example to drive the point home with unmistakable firmness...If the very people who have been excluded from covenant fellowship do justice and righteousness as they are defined here, they will be among God’s children.

“It is fairly common among recent commentators (e.g., Achtemeier) to say that these words are a minority opinion expressed by ‘Second Isaiah’s’ disciples in protest against the exclusivism of Ezekiel’s disciples, who had achieved dominance. Such commentators see this exclusivism as a lamentable feature that ‘Third-Isaiah’ was unfortunately unable to prevent...

“But this interpretation is based on a false dichotomy that must be corrected. There is no difference between what is proposed here and what Ezekiel and Ezra called for. The passages that are usually quoted as examples of narrow Jewish exclusivism [are:

Ezekiel 44:6-9,

- 6 And you shall say to (the) rebellion, to (the) House of Israel,
In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
(It is) enough for you—of all your abominations, House of Israel!
- 7 When you bring children of foreignness, uncircumcised of heart, and uncircumcised of
flesh,
to be in My sanctuary, to profane it--My house / temple!
When you bring near My bread / food—fat and blood,
and they broke My covenant (in addition) to all your abominations!
- 8 And you did not keep charge of My set-apart things!
And you placed (them) as keepers of My charge in My sanctuary, for yourselves!
- 9 In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
Every son of foreignness, uncircumcised of heart, and uncircumcised of flesh,
shall not come to My sanctuary!
(This applies) to every son of foreignness who is in Israel’s children’s midst!

Ezra 4:1-3,

- 1 And the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard,
that (the) children of the exile were building a temple to the YHWH, God of Israel.
- 2 And they drew near to Zerubbabel and to (the) heads of the fathers’ (house-holds), and
they said to them:
We will build with you—because like you, we will seek your God.
And we have not (*kethibh*) / have been (*qere*) offering sacrifice to Him since (the) day of
Esar-Chaddon, King of Assyria, the one bringing us up here.
- 3 And Zerubbabel and Yeshua and (the) rest of (the) heads of the fathers’ (households)
belonging to Israel said:
(It is) not for you and for us to build a house / temple for our God!

(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)

For we alone will build for the YHWH, God of Israel—
just as the King Cyrus, King of Persia commanded us!

“[But these passages] are not aimed at the kind of people being talked about here. What Ezekiel and Ezra were alarmed about is the same thing Isaiah is alarmed about in **57:3-13** and later: pagans (‘uncircumcised in heart and flesh,’ **Ezekiel 44:7**; ‘daughters of a foreign God,’ (**Malachi 2:11**) who are either open in their unbelief or are masquerading as believers, and whose effect, if not intent, is to undermine the distinctive revelation of God that has been committed to the Jews. **Isaiah 56:1-8** says nothing against that kind of exclusivism, and **57:3-13** and **65:1-7** actively support it. The people whom Isaiah wants to include are those like Ruth who have abandoned their false Gods and wholeheartedly joined themselves to the God of Israel. Whatever else may have been the case of Judaism as it eventually developed, nothing in the canonical texts of **Ezekiel** or **Ezra** suggests that such persons should be excluded. (**Nehemiah 13:1-3** could be speaking of genuine believers who were simply of Ammonite or Moabite descent, but that is not clear).” (Pp. 456-57)

Nehemiah 13:1-3,

- 1 On that day, it was read in (the) scroll of Moses in (the) ears of the people;
and it was found written in it that an Ammonite and a Moabite will not enter into
(the) assembly of the God to long-distant-time.
- 2 Because they did not meet Israel’s children with the bread / food and with the water;
and he hired against him (Israel) Balaam to curse him.
And our God turned the curse into a blessing.
- 3 And it happened as they heard the **torah** / teaching,
and they separated every person of mixed race from Israel.

Nehemiah 13 once again introduces the very difficult problem of Jewish exclusiveness, specifically with reference to intermarriage with non-Jews. Compare **Ezra 9-10**. The whole question of Israel's relationship to the "nations" is raised to the burning-point here, and this passage (along with that in **Ezra**) has been used as a justification for religious and racial exclusiveness across the centuries, not only by Jews, but also by Christians who have claimed to be the "New Israel." As becomes clear in this chapter, this whole matter is rooted in the **Torah**, specifically in **Deuteronomy 23:1-7**^{Eng} (see footnote 22). We agree with Oswalt regarding the relationship of the **Book of Ruth** to this problem--as it pictures a Moabitess, Ruth, who marries an ancestor of King David--but who also accepts his God as her God.

It is a very difficult, controversial matter. But it is obvious in the midst of our considerations that for Israel, relationship with YHWH God is primary over all other human relationships--and Israel cannot allow any cultural practices that will undermine or destroy that basic covenant relationship with her God.

Thus the **Jewish Bible** gives an ambiguous teaching concerning intermarriage with non-Jews. Such passages as this (**Nehemiah 13** and **Ezra 9-10**) can be appropriately referred
(continued...)

¹⁶(...continued)

to as justifying Jewish exclusiveness; such passages as **Isaiah 56** and the **Book of Ruth** can be referred to as rejecting such exclusiveness. None of these passages can be referred to as belittling or minimizing the primary importance of humanity's relationship with YHWH God!

An interesting commentary on this whole matter is to be found in the life-experience and teaching of the widely known and respected German theologian and biblical scholar, Gerhard Kittel, who was the editor of the now famous **Theological Dictionary of the New Testament**. Kittel supported Adolph Hitler, and wrote and spoke constantly on the "Jewish Problem." He held that the practice of intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews was responsible for the "decadence" of the German Jews of the 1930's, and argued biblically for the separation of Jews as "guests" in Germany without rights of citizenship. We all know how those views, taken up in the hands of the Nazis, became pretexts for murder and genocide.

Here in America, especially in the South, we have heard both **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** quoted in justification of racial exclusiveness, and their teachings have become pretexts for the Ku Klux Klan to work its hate-filled and murderous schemes on Blacks for 200 years.

We agree with Oswalt that all of the biblical materials involved in this matter agree on the acceptance of proselytes into Israel's community—as long as they were circumcised and served YHWH. But for Oswalt to say or imply that these texts are all in agreement, that there is no real disagreement among them is simply wrong in our opinion.

Ezekiel believes that the water that flows from the Jewish temple will bring life to the deadest places on earth (**chapter 47**). But that water will flow from a walled-in temple that allows no one but the descendants of Tsadoq to serve as high priests, offering up sacrifices, not even the Levites. Proselytes can be accepted into the temple worship, but they can never become priests, ministering to YHWH. This is very similar to the program advocated by **Ezra-Nehemiah**, in which walls of segregation and division are to be built, foreign wives with their half-breed children are to be divorced, and Israel is to be governed by a rigid adherence to the "letter of the law," meaning the laws of **Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers** and **Deuteronomy**, and all foreigners except full converts to this program are to be rejected.

Included in those laws is **Deuteronomy 23:1-7**^{Eng}, which demands exclusion of eunuchs and half-breed children (with the exception of the third generation of children with an Edomite or Egyptian parent), as well as Ammonites and Moabites. See footnote 22.

Oswalt speaks of "whatever may have been the case in Judaism as it eventually developed"—but we insist that what eventually developed in Judaism was rooted deeply and firmly in the program set forth by **Ezra-Nehemiah**, where we think the roots of Pharisaism are to be found. Those roots are being opposed by Jeremiah, with his temple-sermon in **chapter 7**, holding that the temple and its animal sacrifices are no longer (if they ever were) the will of YHWH for His people, and his insistence that a new day and new covenant are coming, in which the will of God will be written on human hearts, instead of on tablets of stone (**Jeremiah 31:1-4**)—a view carried forward in the "broad grace and inclusivism" of **Second** and **Third Isaiah** (see especially **Isaiah**

(continued...)

הַנְּלוּהָ אֶל־יְהוָה לֵאמֹר
הַבְּדֵל יִבְדִּילֵנִי יְהוָה מֵעַל עַמּוֹ
וְאֶל־יֹאמְרֵי הַסֵּרִיס
הֵן אֲנִי עֵץ יִבְנֶשׁ:

¹⁶(...continued)

66:1-3, with its rejection of the very idea of a walled-in, exclusive temple built by human hands for YHWH to dwell in, and its universalistic affirmation that YHWH's temple is in the heart of the humble and contrite who tremble at His Word, wherever they may be!).

What do you think? Oswalt sees no difference in the texts involved; we see a great difference—the same difference we see between Jesus and the Pharisees in the **New Testament**.

And¹⁷ the foreigner's child,¹⁸ the one joined to YHWH,¹⁹

¹⁷1QIs^a, along with the Greek and Syriac translations omit the conjunction at the beginning of this verse in the Masoretic Text. 1QIs^b, along with the Aramaic Targum and Latin Vulgate all read the conjunction.

¹⁸We wonder who is meant by בֶּן־תֵּינָכָר, literally “son of the foreignness”? Does it simply mean “a foreigner”? Or is it possible that this is referring to the child of a Judean married to a woman who is not a Jew—such as Ezra and Nehemiah were so concerned to get the Judean men to divorce? And when Judean men followed their demands, what was to happen to their children? Is **Third-Isaiah's** message directed to them in this statement? We think this is certainly possible.

¹⁹This phrase, תֵּינָכָר אֶל־יְהוָה, **hannilwah)el-YHWH**, “the one joined to YHWH,” as Watts notes, “came to be known in Judaism as a proselyte, a member of the synagogue who was not a Jew by birth. The position of the proselyte was a controversial one in Judaism. Not all Jews were prepared to grant them full covenant rights. Such openness to receiving Gentiles who would commit themselves to Yahweh was actively resisted by some...In this passage Yahweh assures those who voluntarily seek to join themselves to Yahweh, i.e., to the covenant community of worship, of full acceptance [even though a ‘foreigner’ by birth].” (P. 248)

Slotki holds that the phrase “joined himself to the Lord” means “became a proselyte and observed the commandments enjoined upon Israel” (p. 273), that is the 613 commandments found in the **Five Books of Moses** by Jewish scholars.

For occurrences of this verb לָוָה, **lawah** in the **Hebrew Bible**, see **Genesis 29:34** (the name “Levi” comes from this verb); **Exodus 22:24** (the hiphil form of the verb means “to lend”; in the qal, it means “to borrow”); **Numbers 18:2, 4** (the Levites will join with the priests in performing the duties of the sanctuary); **Deuteronomy 28:12** (lending money), **44** (aliens will lend to Israelites);

Isaiah 14:1 (aliens will join Israel and unite with the house of Jacob); **24:2, 2** (lenders); **56:3** (here, of a “son of foreignness joining himself to YHWH), **6** (same, but in the plural); **Jeremiah 50:5** (the people of Israel and Judah will bind themselves to a long-term covenant with YHWH); **Zechariah 2:15** (**verse 11** in English) (many nations will be joined to YHWH and become His people);

Psalms 37:21 (the wicked borrow but do not repay), **26** (the righteous lend freely); **83:9** (Assyria is joined in an alliance against Israel); **112:5** (good will comes to the one who lends freely); **Proverbs 19:17** (he who is kind to the poor lends to YHWH); **22:7, 7** (the borrower is servant to the lender); **Ecclesiastes 8:15** (joining with one's labor); **Esther 9:27** (the Jews along with all who join them will observe Purim); **Daniel 11:34** (people who join with the wise, but not
(continued...)

shall not speak, saying,
“YHWH will certainly separate me from His people!”²⁰

¹⁹(...continued)
sincerely) and **Nehemiah 5:4** (borrowing money to pay taxes).

The relevant passages are **Zechariah 2:15**^{Heb} / 11^{Eng} and **Esther 9:27**.

²⁰This line, **הַבְּדִיל יְבַדִּילֵנִי יְהוָה מֵעַל עַמּוֹ**, literally, “separating, YHWH will separate me from upon His people,” emphasizes (by this combination of the infinitive absolute with the imperfect verb) that YHWH will certainly separate him from His people, that is, cause him to be excommunicated / disfellowshipped by Israel. Compare:

Leviticus 20:22-24,

- 22 And you (plural) shall keep all My statutes, and all My judicial decisions, and you shall do them;
and the land will not vomit you out—
(the land) where I am bringing you, to dwell in it.
- 23 And you shall not walk by (the) statutes of the nation which I am sending forth from before you;
because all of these things they did, and I abhorred them.
- 24 And I said to you, You shall possess / dispossess their ground,
and I, I will give it to you to possess / dispossess it,
a land flowing milke and honey.
I (am) YHWH your God, Who separated you from the peoples!
(That is, YHWH has separated the people of Israel from the peoples of the land, and they must not live in the way of those peoples.)

Ezra 6:21, where at the celebration of the Passover by those returning from Babylon, it is said:

And Israel’s children ate, those returning from the exile,
and everyone who had separated himself from (the) the uncleanness (of the) people
of the land to (belong to) them,

to seek the YHWH, God of Israel.

(This means that the returnees welcomed into their community those who still lived in the land of Israel, if they separated themselves from the uncleanness of the land, to seek YHWH—i.e., if they became “proselytes” to legalistic Judaism. Otherwise, they would be considered unclean, and would not be allowed to participate in Israel’s religious rituals / celebrations. McConville comments that “Remarkably, the returning Jews are joined by every one who had...separated himself from the uncleanness of the people of the land to worship the Lord. This shows that the community was essentially religious, rather than based merely on physical birth and lineage, and that outsiders could convert into it.” [P. 814])

Still, we wonder who exactly is meant by this **בֶּן־הַנִּזְכָּר הַנִּלְוָה אֶל־יְהוָה**, “son of the
(continued...)

And the eunuch / castrated man²¹ will not say,

²⁰(...continued)

foreignness, the one who was joined to YHWH”? Can this be referring to the child of a Judean father and a woman of the land, the child of one of the mixed marriages against which Ezra and Nehemiah were so vehement? Is this “son of foreignness” saying that in spite of his Judean father and his being in relationship with (“joined to”) YHWH, he is going to be excommunicated / disfellowshipped under the program of divorce demanded by those two leaders of the returnees? We think this may well be the case, and that **Third-Isaiah** is saying such a practice is wrong, totally against the will of YHWH.

²¹For some 42 occurrences of this noun עֲרֵי־סָרִיס, **saris**, “eunuch,” “castrated man,” in the **Hebrew Bible**, see: **Genesis 37:36; 39:1; 40:2, 7** (all concerning Joseph’s master, a “eunuch” of Pharaoh, who was nevertheless married); **1 Samuel 8:15** (Samuel predicts that the kings that Israel wants to reign over them will have eunuchs under them); **1 Kings 22:9** (a eunuch official of the King of Northern Israel); **2 Kings 8:6** (similar); **9:32** (eunuchs, officials in Northern Israel in Ahab’s palace in Jezreel); **20:18** (Isaiah tells King Hezekiah of Judah that some of his descendants will be taken to Babylon, where they will be made eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon); **23:11** (in the time of Josiah, there is a eunuch named Nathan-Melech with a room in the temple in Jerusalem); **24:12, 15** (Jehoiachin has eunuchs serving him in Jerusalem); **25:19** (the Babylonians take the eunuch officer in charge of the war for Israel, and takes him to Riblah where he is put to death along with other Jewish leaders); **Isaiah 39:7** (same as **2 Kings 20:18**); **56:3, 4** (here; both the same); **Jeremiah 29:2** (eunuchs, court officials under Jehoiachin; compare **2 Kings 24:12, 15**); **34:19** (eunuchs, court officials in Judah); **38:7** (the Ethiopian, Ebed-Melech, a eunuch official in Jerusalem); **41:16** (eunuch officials included among those escaping the Babylonians to Egypt); **52:25** (same as **2 Kings 25:19**);

Esther 1:10, 12, 15; 2:3, 14, 15, 21; 4:4, 5; 6:2, 14; 7:9 (all with reference to eunuchs / officials of the King of Persia, serving in his court and overseeing the women in his harem); **Daniel 1:3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 18** (all with reference to eunuch officials of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon); **1 Chronicles 28:1** (eunuch palace officials under David) and **2 Chronicles 18:8** (same as **1 Kings 22:9**).

Watts comments that “Eunuchs were used in eastern courts in many capacities (compare **Esther** [throughout]...and **Daniel 1:3-18**). They were used in Jerusalem and Samaria, as references in **1** and **2 Kings** show. An early convert to Christianity was such an Ethiopian official (**Acts 8:27-37**)...They were prominent at court, but forbidden to enter the temple. That prohibition is now removed on Yahweh’s authority.” (P. 249)

Oswalt comments that “Significantly, the message concerns the outcast persons: *the son of a foreigner* and *the eunuch*. This in itself should give these persons a sense of dignity and worth. They are told not to depreciate themselves. Others might do it, but they are not to acquiesce in it. God will not cut them off; they are not lifeless and fruitless...

(continued...)

²¹(...continued)

“These words are a concrete expression of the limitless grace of God. Those who seek Him (**55:6**) in sincerity as indicated by turning from their own wicked ways and thoughts (**55:7**) to the blessed ways and thoughts of God (**55:10-11**) will find themselves included no matter who they are...

“But how are we to understand the principle of biblical interpretation that is operative here? **Deuteronomy 23:1-8** is explicit on these points: neither eunuchs nor Ammonites nor Moabites are to have any place in the congregation [for this passage, see the next footnote]. Even if we grant that the prophet is speaking under Divine inspiration, how can one scripture so flatly contradict another?...

“The practice of Jesus is instructive here, and we may wonder if His interpretive method was not shaped by His study of this **Old Testament Book** along with others. The issue is: What is the point of this law in the first place? Is it that the condition of emasculation, or being an Ammonite or a Moabite, is intrinsically evil? Hardly. It is to make a theological point (as the ceremonial laws did)...

“With respect to the eunuch, the purpose of the prohibition is clearly to teach the goodness of nature as we find it in creation. Sexuality is a good part of God’s creation, and while we are not to worship it, neither are we to condone its destruction. When one understands and incorporates that point into one’s thinking, one should not use the law to crush people under its weight...

“Similarly with the Ammonites and Moabites a point about historical responsibility was being made. We must not forget that actions have consequences, especially when those actions are in opposition to God’s plan to bring His salvation into the world. But again, once the point has been made, a greater point can take precedence: God intends to ‘make a feast for all peoples’ in

which ‘the covering that is cast over the peoples’ will be destroyed (**Isaiah 25:6-7**). And ‘all peoples’ includes even Ammonites and Moabites; they will not be cut off by God.” (Pp. 457-58)

What a strange comment! Are we to conclude that the laws given in the **Torah** are for the purpose of making “theological points”? Does Oswalt think that for centuries this law was not used to “crush people under its weight”? We insist that the laws of the **Torah** were not given to “make theological points” with theologians, but rather, were intended to be enforced and lived by—by all Israelites! And some of those laws were indeed oppressive and crushing in nature—not good laws (see the next footnote)!

And what a strange use of **Isaiah 25:6-7**, taking “the covering that is cast over the peoples” to be referring to such legislation as **Deuteronomy 23:1-7** ^{Eng} instead of the “death-shroud,” the “veil” that was placed over the face of the dead, and YHWH’s intention to “swallow up death” forever! Oswalt himself, in his commentary on **25:7-8** states that “Although some commentators believe this refers to the veil of ignorance which prevents Gentiles from understanding and accepting God’s revelation...most are agreed, in the light of **verse 8**, that the reference is to the shroud of death...God will swallow—not merely remove, but envelop in such a way as to destroy—

(continued...)

“Look—I (am) a dried up tree!”²²

²¹(...continued)
that shroud.” (P. 464)

When biblical scholars have to go to such lengths in “explaining away” passages that go against their views, it quickly becomes obvious that their views on those passages are questionable at the very least!

²²Anyone reading these two statements made by the child of a foreigner (“YHWH will certainly separate me from His people!”), and by a man who has been castrated, or whose sexual organs have been crushed or severely damaged (“Look—I am a dried up tree!”—i.e., “I can have no descendants”—a very low self-estimate!), must ask, “Why would they make such statements?”

And the answer is that according to **Deuteronomy 23:2-4^{Heb} / 1-3^{Eng}**, castrated men and those with damaged genitals, along with certain foreigners, were very specifically excluded from the assembly of Israel in the **Torah**:

²^{Heb} ¹^{Eng} A man with wounded, crushed (testicles) or castrated penis will not enter into YHWH’s assembly.

³^{Heb} ²^{Eng} A child born outside wedlock will not enter into YHWH’s assembly—even (to) a tenth generation of his will not enter into YHWH’s assembly.

⁴^{Heb} ³^{Eng} An Ammonite and a Moabite will not enter into YHWH’s assembly; even (to) a tenth generation of theirs, (one) will not enter into YHWH’s assembly—for long-lasting time.

We cannot enter into detailed discussion concerning the reasons for this legislation, as the nation of Israel, with its combination of church and state, attempted to draw boundary lines for its membership. See also **Leviticus 21:16-23**, where no descendant of Aaron with any physical defect, including a crushed testicle, is to be allowed to participate in offering up sacrifices in the temple. They are allowed to eat from the sacrifices, but not to share in making the offerings.

No claim is made in **Deuteronomy 23:1-4^{Eng}** (as is made in **Leviticus 21:16-23**) that it is Divinely given, a “Word of YHWH”—rather, it is stated in **Deuteronomy 27:1** that the commands were given by Moses with the backing of the officials in Israel, and it seems obvious that many of the accompanying laws in **Deuteronomy** are the result of cases that arose in Israel, in which Moses and his assistant judges gave their decisions. We wonder how big a part the all-too-human desire for exclusiveness, and self-righteousness may have played in this legislation, especially in the light of its emphatic rejection in **Isaiah 56** in the name of YHWH, and also in the teaching of **Ruth**—where a Moabitess was welcomed into Bethlehem, Israel, to become an ancestress of King David, and the many evidences throughout the **Jewish Bible** concerning YHWH’s desire for inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness (i.e., the **Book of Jonah**).

For one specific example, see **Ezekiel 47:21-23**, where this spokesperson / priest states, “This is how you will divide this land for yourselves among the tribes of Israel. You must allot it as an inheritance among yourselves and for the foreigners who reside among you, who have father-
(continued...)

²²(...continued)

ed sons among you. You must treat them as native-born among the people of Israel; they will be allotted an inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe the foreigner resides, there you will give him his inheritance, declares my Lord YHWH.” This is a far cry from the exclusivism that can easily be read from **Deuteronomy 23**, and which would exclude even Ruth from participating in the Divine assembly in Jerusalem.

There can be little doubt as to the meaning of this legislation in **Deuteronomy 23:1-4**^{Eng}. Men with damaged genitals, were to be excluded from the assembly of YHWH, just as were people of foreign origin, specifically Ammonites and Moabites. This is the legislation that lies behind the statements made in **Isaiah 56:3**, and that is depicted in this passage as being contrary to YHWH’s desire. And we wonder, as we sense the conflict between **Deuteronomy 23** and **Isaiah 56**, can this be one of the laws that is in mind at **Ezekiel 20:25**, where YHWH declares,

And also I, I gave to them statutes (that were) not good,
and judgments—they will not live by them!

What should we make of this? Should **Bible** students dare to say that some of the laws given by YHWH to Israel were “not good”? Or should they, as the **New International Version** does, change the reading of the text to “I gave them over to statutes that were not good...”? Should they be willing to say that Israel (let alone non-Jews) should not, or could not live by them? What statutes do you think YHWH means? What judgments?

Walther Eichrodt holds that the “not good” commandment being referred to is that of **Exodus 22:28**, “the first-born of all your sons you shall give to Me,” which had been taken as a justification for the sacrificial offering of their sons by fire in the Valley of Hinnom—not paying attention to the further commandment in **Exodus 34:19-20**, which states that the sons of humans were to be redeemed, and not offered in sacrifice (see his commentary on **Ezekiel**, pp. 270-72).

But what about the commandments in **Deuteronomy 23**? Can we not with certainty say that according to **Isaiah 56**, those commandments excluding the physically deformed and foreigners from YHWH’s house of prayer were “not good”? What do you think? What do you think Jesus thought about those commandments?

It may have been deemed necessary by leaders in Israel to have legislation excluding these people in Israel’s past history, as **Deuteronomy 23:1-4**^{Eng} demonstrates); but those laws were not what YHWH wants, according to **Isaiah 56**. And we ask, Does YHWH change His mind? Does He at one time exclude eunuchs and foreigners from His assembly, and at another time welcome them?

Earlier, in **Isaiah 45:22**, YHWH is quoted as commanding, “Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!” In **Isaiah 49:6** YHWH is quoted as saying that Israel is to be His servant, “a light to the non-Jews,” so that Israel “may bring YHWH’s salvation to the ends of the earth.”

What do you think? Do you believe that YHWH’s will is for all the nations of the earth to be
(continued...)

²²(...continued)

saved, or that He wants Israel alone to be His people, with people who have less than perfect sexual organs excluded, refused entrance into YHWH's assembly, along with Ammonites and Moabites, and along with some modern churches that exclude gays and lesbians?

The very conservative commentator, Motyer, comments that according to this passage in **Isaiah 56**, "No-one is excluded from membership of God's people, either by nation or ancestry (the *foreigner*), accident of birth, parental or personal former affiliation to another God, falling below the creational standards of God or deep and fundamental personal defect (the *eunuch*). Middle walls of partition have come tumbling down between people and between the people and the Lord." (P. 466)

Compare **Ephesians 2:14**, where Motyer got his language, and where Jesus is described as "our peace, Who has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility," making Jews and Gentiles one new humanity in Himself, fulfilling exactly what **Isaiah 56** proclaims to be YHWH's desire!

But is Motyer right in saying that those middle walls of partition had come tumbling down among the returning exiles according to this text in **Isaiah 56**? Perhaps what happened is that some of the returnees followed the teaching of Second and Third Isaiah, tearing down the middle walls of partition, and this is why **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** upon their return made such vehement demands for the returnees to divorce of foreign wives. These two leaders, along with others, wanted to restore those walls of partition, and in the long run, they were successful, turning the returned community into a "Pharisaic" community, not the open community desired by Second and Third Isaiah.

Alexander sums up the meaning of **verse 3** by stating, "The essential meaning...is, that all external disabilities shall be abolished, whether personal or national...The meaning is that all restrictions, even such as still affected proselytes, should be abolished." (P. 335) We believe Alexander is right—this teaching has to do with allowing far more people to enter the Jewish community than just proselytes!

²³Oswalt comments on **verses 4-7** that "The prophet now explains why these two groups of people who have been accustomed to think of themselves as outcasts need no longer do so. He introduces his explanation with the solemn messenger formula, *For thus says the Lord...*

"In each case...there is a detailed description of the behavior of the person, and then a statement of what God will do for them. Here it is not important that these persons cannot engender children. What matters is that they *keep My sabbaths, choose that in which I delight, and lay hold of My covenant...*

"These people are on God's side (**Exodus 32:26**). They love what He loves, hate what He hates, wants what He wants. They do not keep the Sabbaths because they must or they will be destroyed. They keep them because they are the Lord's Sabbaths. Their behavior is an expression of a relationship. This is what God longs for in His people, and if anyone will do this,
(continued...)

לְסָרִיסִים אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְרוּ אֶת־שַׁבְּתוֹתַי

וּבַחֲרוּ בְּאֲשֶׁר חָפְצָתִי

וַיִּמְחַזְּקִים בְּבְרִיתִי:

Because in this way YHWH spoke:

to the castrated men / eunuchs who observes My Rest-days,
and who chooses²⁴ that in which I took pleasure,²⁵
and who takes²⁶ strong hold of My covenant--²⁷

²³(...continued)

their parentage or their body has nothing to do with their acceptability.” (P. 458)

²⁴Motyer comments, we think correctly, that the two imperfect verbs in **verse 4**, יִשְׁמְרוּ, **yishmeru**, “they will keep,” and וּבַחֲרוּ, **ubhacharu**, “and they will choose,” are “imperfects of habitual action, denoting persistence in conformity to the Sabbath-code and in personal commitment to the Lord’s will.” (P. 466)

²⁵Alexander, on p. 336 comments that “What it is that God delights in, may be learned from”:

Jeremiah 9:23^{Heb} / **24**^{Eng},

But rather, in this the one boasting shall boast:
to understand, and to know Me!

Because I, YHWH—One doing steadfast love, justice, and right relationship in the earth;
because with these I was pleased—a saying of YHWH!

Hosea 6:6,

Because I delighted in steadfast love, and not slaughter-for-sacrifice;
and knowledge of God, more than offerings up!

²⁶וַיִּמְחַזְּקִים, **umachazyiqym**, “and are taking strong hold,” is the masculine plural hipnil participle, indicating continuing action in a similar fashion to the preceding imperfect verbs. Motyer comments that this means “taking up His promises seriously so as to hold to them by faith through thick and thin.” (P. 466)

²⁷It is not just any castrated man, or “eunuch,” that is being described. Rather, it is only one who is deeply religious, and who demonstrates that religious commitment by observance of the Rest-days, that is, taking one day in seven as a day of rest, not working on that day, and regulating his life’s schedule by that practice. It is a person who deliberately chooses to only do things that are pleasing to YHWH God, and who enters into a strong covenant relationship with
(continued...)

56:5 וְנָתַתִּי לָהֶם בְּבֵיתִי וּבְחֹמֹתַי יָד

וְשֵׁם טוֹב מִבְּנִים וּמִבְּנוֹת

שֵׁם עוֹלָם אֶתֶן-לּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא יִכָּרֵת:

and I will give to them in My house / temple, and within My walls a memorial,²⁸

²⁷(...continued)

YHWH. This is not the kind of person who refuses to legislate his life by religious standards and practices, but one who is deeply religious, firmly committed to serving YHWH in all of life.

The same thing is true of the “child of foreignness”—it is not just any foreigner’s child, but rather it is one who is “joined to YHWH,” i.e., who is deeply committed to a lasting relationship with YHWH as their God. All are welcome—but all must “produce fruit in keeping with repentance”! See **Matthew 3:8**; compare **Luke 3:7-14**, where the requirements announced by John are those of justice and righteousness.

²⁸Westermann comments that “The promise made to the eunuchs, ‘I give him in my house a monument (literally ‘hand’) and a name,’ is explained by reference to **2 Samuel 18:18** [‘Absalom had set up a monument and dedicated it to himself in the King’s Valley, reasoning, I have no son who will carry on my name. He named the monument after himself, and to this day it is known as Absalom’s Memorial (literally, ‘Hand’)].”

“The monument, מִצְבֵּה, **matstsebah** which Absalom had set up to keep himself in remembrance, since he was childless, was called [in Hebrew] ‘Absalom’s hand [יָד], **yadh**] since a monument looks like a ‘hand’ reaching up out of the ground.’ The excavations at Hazor brought to light a sanctuary with steles [‘upright stone slabs’] symbolizing the members of the royal family. It is a memorial of this nature that is here designated as ‘hand’... The name of the person concerned is preserved for the generations to come in the monument erected to him within the precincts of the temple: it is continuously in the mind of the community that speaks of its ancestors and remembers them.” (P. 314)

Perhaps—but we doubt that a literal memorial-stone is meant. We think YHWH means the eunuch, without children, would become a member of YHWH’s eternal household or family, with untold brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, and would share in the (eternal) life of YHWH Himself! What do you think?

Motyer states that “It is hard to think that any eunuch would have felt rising excitement for [Duhm’s, or Westermann’s] view that the promise here is of a memorial tablet within the precincts [of the temple]!” (P. 466)

Oswalt comments on **verse 5** that “God now tells what He will do for this kind of eunuch.
(continued...)

and the name, better than sons and daughters—
a long-lasting name I will give to him,²⁹ which will not be cut off.³⁰

56:6³¹ וּבְנֵי הַנְּזָרִים עַל־יְהוָה

²⁸(...continued)

They may think that they will soon be forgotten in the community since they have neither sons nor daughters to carry on their lives and names after they have died. But God says a most shocking thing...He will give a eunuch *an eternal name, which will not be cut off* ...He will share His eternity with that person who above all has no hope of posterity whatsoever.” (P. 459) It seems apparent that Oswalt is reading Christian / Greek philosophical ideas into **Third-Isaiah’s** language here, turning the Hebrew word עוֹלָם, (**olam**, which means “long-lasting-time” or “long duration” into “eternity.”

Slotki states that “Under the law of **Deuteronomy 23:1**^{Heb} / **2**^{Eng} the eunuch *shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord*; here it is asserted that he will not be excluded from God’s blessings” (p. 273), implying that there is no contradiction between the two statements. But **Isaiah 56** is talking about a memorial in the temple, and continues to talk about those formerly excluded being joyful in YHWH’s “house of prayer for all people,” as well as performing priestly ministry, offering sacrifices at YHWH’s altar!

²⁹Where our Hebrew text has לוֹ, “to him,” our Greek text has αὐτοῖς, “to them,” along with 1QIs^a and the other ancient versions.

³⁰Instead of being rejected and excluded from the assembly of YHWH, as **Deuteronomy 23:1-3** demands, these very people—the eunuchs and the children of foreigners—are included and welcomed by YHWH into His house (i.e., the temple in Jerusalem). YHWH, instead of wanting them to be excluded, promises to give them “a hand (‘memorial’) and the name”—this is the phrase taken by modern Israel as the name of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Jerusalem, “**Yad va Shem**,” “Hand and Name.” YHWH promises to provide the eunuchs, who can never have children, with something better than sons and daughters!

Motyer comments that “Each is there in his own person (*name*) and is enriched with blessings far beyond those which even an earthly family (*sons and daughters*) might have brought.” (P. 466)

³¹Oswalt comments on **verses 6-7** that “Following the same pattern as with the eunuch[s], the prophet now describes what God will do for the foreigners who ‘keep justice and do righteousness.’ **Verse 6** describes their character, and **verse 7** announces God’s promises to them...

“These persons are characterized by three behaviors. First, they *have joined themselves to the Lord* (compare **verse 3**). But that joining is further defined by three [parallel] infinitives... They have joined themselves to God in order *to minister to Him, to love His name, and to become His servants*...The first phrase increases the shock value of this passage because the word used,
(continued...)

³¹(...continued)

שָׂרָת, minister, refers typically to cultic [priestly] service:

60:7, where even foreign animals serve YHWH:

Every flock of Qedar—they will be gathered to you;
rams of Nebayoth will serve You.
They will go up acceptably on My altar,
and (the) temple of My beauty I will beautify.

60:10,

And children of foreignness will build your walls,
and their kings will serve you.
Because in My wrath I struck you;
and in My favor, I had compassion on you!

61:6,

And you (plural) will be called Priests of YHWH;
Ministers of our God, it will be said to you.
Wealth of nations you shall eat,
and in their abundance you shall boast.

“The idea of foreigners performing such service seems to have been so repugnant to the scribe of 1QIs^a that he omitted it. But it is the same point that is made again at the end of the **book**:

66:21,

And also from them [foreigners bringing Israel’s sons home] I will take (some) for the
priests,
for the Levites, said YHWH.

“The priesthood may have been a place of honor, but its fundamental function was to be a servant, and it takes no special bloodlines to be that.” (Pp. 459-60)

In some of these passages, especially the last, it is not clear whether it is the foreigners doing the cultic service, or the sons of Israel whom the foreigners are bringing home.

Alexander comments on p. 336 that “The verb שָׂרָת, **sharath**, although strictly a generic term, is specially appropriated to the official service of the priests and Levites. Some interpreters accordingly suppose it to be here said that the heathen shall partake of the sacerdotal honors elsewhere promised to the church (see **Isaiah 61:6; Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:6**)...

(continued...)

לְשָׂרְתוֹ וְלֵאֲהַבָהּ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה
 לְהִיּוֹת לוֹ לְעֹבְדִים
 וּמְחַזְּקִים בְּבְרִיתִי:

And the foreigner's children, who have joined (themselves) to YHWH,
 to serve Him,³² and to love³³ YHWH's name,³⁴

³¹(...continued)

“The general promise is the same as that in **Malachi 1:11**,

Because from sun's rising and as far as its setting My name (is) great among the nations!
 And in every place incense is brought near to / for My name, and a pure gift /
 offering—
 because My name (is) great among the nations!—said YHWH of Armies.

Alexander, along with many others, holds that **Malachi 1:11** should be understood as a future promise, only to be fulfilled with the coming of Christ. That is, where we have interpolated the verb “is,” they hold that the future verb “will be” should be interpolated. We doubt that this is the case, and think the statement should be understood as affirming the greatness of YHWH's name among the nations in post-exilic times, as well as YHWH's worship among the nations during those centuries before the coming of Christ. See our commentary on **Malachi**.

³²The piel infinitive לְשָׂרְתוֹ, **lesharetho**, means to “minister to Him,” and is used especially for the ministry of the Levitical priests in the temple, including the sons of Tsadoq. The foreigners are not just being admitted into the outer courts of Israel's temple, but are accepted into its center of worship, to act as leaders in that worship! It is not a “token integration,” but a full acceptance into Israel's midst! This exact phrase, לְשָׂרְתוֹ, is found elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** at:

Deuteronomy 10:8,

At that time, YHWH separated the Levite tribe
 to carry YHWH's covenant chest,
 (and) to stand before YHWH to minister (to) Him
 and to bless in His name, until this day.

Deuteronomy 21:5,

And the priests, sons of Levi shall draw near—

(continued...)

³²(...continued)

because YHWH your God chose them to minister
and to bless by YHWH's name;
and according to their mouth every dispute and every wound (will be decided).

1 Chronicles 23:13,

Sons of Amran: Aaron and Moses.

And Aaron was separated to set-apart / dedicate (the) most set-apart things,
he and his sons until long-lasting-time;
to make sacrifices before YHWH—to minister to Him,
and to bless in His name until long-lasting-time.

2 Chronicles 29:11, where Hezekiah speaks to the Levites:

My sons, now you shall not be negligent,
because YHWH chose you—
to stand before Him, to minister to Him,
and to be ministers for Him and offerers of sacrifices.

Ezekiel 40:46,

And the chamber, which faces the north way,
for the priests, (the) ones keeping charge of the altar—
they (are) sons of Tsadoq, the ones drawing near from Levi's sons,
to YHWH, to minister to Him.

³³1QIs^a reads “to bless” instead of our Hebrew text's “to love.”

Oswalt quotes E. Kutscher (**The Language and Linguistic Background of the Isaiah Scroll 1QIsa**, Leiden: Brill, 1974) as stating, “‘bless the name of the Lord’ was important in Jewish liturgy. The scroll also transposes the entire phrase after the following one. As a result of this change and the previous one, the verse reads, ‘... themselves to the Lord to become servants of Him and to bless the name fo the Lord, all who are...’” (P. 451)

³⁴Achtemeier emphasizes that **Isaiah 56** “reflects here the inward nature of covenant faithfulness, so important also in **Deuteronomy**. Such faithfulness is a matter of the heart and will; of conscious, ethical, daily wrestling to follow God's ways; of total and willing love for the God Who has first loved Israel; of cleaving to God, holding Him fast, in a fellowship unbroken by any circumstances.” (P. 34) Compare:

Deuteronomy 6:4....,

Hear, O Israel: YHWH our God is one YHWH.
Love YHWH your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your
strength...

(continued...)

to belong to Him as slaves / servants,³⁵

everyone who observes a Rest-day, not profaning it,
and who takes strong hold on My covenant--³⁶

³⁴(...continued)

Deuteronomy 10:12...

And now, O Israel, what does YHWH your God ask of you,
but to fear / reverence YHWH your God,
to walk in all His ways,
to love Him,
to serve YHWH your God with all your heart...
Circumcise your hearts...

Love the immigrant...

(Note how love for YHWH is combined with love for the immigrant / foreigner in **Deuteronomy**, which leads Achtemeier to conclude that **Third-Isaiah** is “Deuteronomic” in nature. Perhaps— but **Third-Isaiah** is certainly at odds with **Deuteronomy 23:1-4!**)

Oswalt comments that “The second and third characteristics of the foreigners whom God blesses are reiterations of the description of the eunuchs (**verse 4**). These persons demonstrate the sincerity of their relationship with God by taking a day of their time and reminding themselves that in reality all their time is God’s time, coming as a precious gift from Him. Once every seven days they reset their compasses, remembering that they are not the center of the universe, but God is.” (P. 460)

³⁵Motyer comments that “personal decision is involved:

Ruth 1:16-18 your people will be my people, your God my God.

Ruth 2:11-12 Ruth left her family and her people.

2 Samuel 15:19-22 Ittai, the foreigner, vows to always stay with David

“...Foreigners had to make costly decisions...‘to *serve*, typically used of the Levites; to *love* the name of YHWH...personal devotion to the Lord in all that He has revealed Himself to be; devotion to a person, resting on revealed truth.” (P. 467)

This last phrase, “resting on revealed truth” is not found in the text, but is an expression from Motyer’s basic theological conviction.

³⁶A great change in the criteria for membership in the assembly of YHWH is evident here. Now, membership is based on choice, on covenant loyalty and obedience, and the purely physical things, such as birth from Jewish parents, or physical wholeness, are no longer deciding factors. There is the new possibility of being accepted by YHWH, and living as active participants in

(continued...)

56:7 וְהֵבִיאוּתֵימ אֶל־הַר קְדְשִׁי

וְשִׂמְחָתֵימ בְּבַיִת תְּפִלָּתִי

עוֹלֹתֵיהֶם וְזִבְחֵיהֶם לְרִצּוֹן עַל־מִזְבְּחִי

כִּי בַיִתִּי בַיִת־תְּפִלָּה יִקְרָא לְכָל־הָעַמִּים:

and I will bring them to (the) mountain of My set-apartness;

and I will cause them to rejoice in My house of prayer;

their offerings and their sacrifices (will be)³⁷ acceptable upon My altar--³⁸

because My house will be called A house of prayer for all the peoples!³⁹

³⁶(...continued)

YHWH's assembly, even becoming priests, in spite of physical deformity or foreign birth. Is this not what John the Immerser, and then Jesus after Him, taught and practiced?

³⁷Where we interpolate the phrase "will be," 1QIs^a interpolates the phrase "will go up."

³⁸It is not some condescending, partial acceptance that YHWH is extending to the eunuchs, and to the children of foreigners—it is total, full acceptance, with full participation in YHWH's worship in the temple in Jerusalem! Their commitment to YHWH is complete—observance of the Rest-days, full entrance into the covenant, love for YHWH, joining of their lives with YHWH—and because of that, they will be welcomed as full participants in Israel's worship! They are no longer excluded—they are fully included, with their offerings being fully accepted upon YHWH's altar.

As Motyer states, "The eunuch is welcome 'in My house—yes, right inside My walls,' not just vaguely within the precincts but right into the very Divine presence!" (P. 466)

Again Motyer notes, "They are welcome to the place where the Lord is to be found (*My holy mountain*), into His presence and family (*My house of prayer*), and to those ordinances which effect and guarantee acceptance and fellowship (*My altar*)." (P. 467)

Oswalt likewise comments, asking "What are the benefits that God offers to foreigners such as these? He will bring them to His holy mountain (**2:3; 11:9; 25:6; 57:13; 65:11, 25; 66:20**). Not only will they be permitted to come, but the Holy God Himself will conduct them, just as He brought His Own people back from the land of exile. There He will treat them just as He would any believing Israelite." (P. 460)

³⁹This is the Divine intention for the temple in Jerusalem. YHWH does not want His house to be exclusive, rejecting certain people because of their physical condition, or because of their
(continued...)

56:8 נָאִם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה

מִקְבֵּץ נִדְחֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

³⁹(...continued)

ancestry or nationality. He wants all people, from all nations, regardless of physical deformity, to be able to come to Him in prayer, and enter into His worship. YHWH does not want an exclusive, but an inclusive community, made up of all those who seek YHWH's face in prayer!

Watts comments that **1 Kings 8:27-30** shows that prayer was understood to be the purpose of the temple at the time of its building by Solomon. (P. 249)

In this passage, Solomon prays as follows:

“For is it true—God will dwell upon the earth? Look—the heavens and heavens of the heavens will not contain You—how much less this, the house which I have built! And will You turn toward Your slave’s prayer, and toward my request for favor, YHWH my God? —to listen to the ringing cry, and to the prayer which Your slave is praying before You today? —Your eyes to be open to this house, night and day, to the place which You said, “My name will be there”? —to listen to the prayer which Your slave will pray, to this place? And will You listen to Your slave’s request for favor, and Your people Israel’s, who will pray towards this place? And You, will You listen towards Your dwelling-place, towards the heavens—and will You listen and forgive?”

Motyer comments that “The welcome extended to foreigners and eunuchs is not a concession but a fulfilment; this is what the Lord’s house was always meant to be (**1 Kings 8:41-43** [where Solomon prays, ‘And also to the foreigner, who is not from Your people Israel; and he will come from a land far away, because of Your name. Because they will hear Your great name, and Your strong hand, and Your stretched-out arm; and he will come, and he will pray to this house. You, will You hear in the heavens, foundation of Your dwelling, and will You act according to all that the foreigner will call to You, so that they will know, all peoples of the earth, Your name—to tremble in awe before You, like Your people Israel, and to know that Your name is called over this house which I built?’]” (P. 467)

These two passages from **1 Kings 8** show conclusively that the temple in Jerusalem was intended to be a “house of prayer,” and that foreigners were to be welcomed there. The exclusion of foreigners [and others] from the temple, such as is commanded in **Deuteronomy 23:1-3** (see

footnote 22) is nothing less than a perversion of YHWH’s intention! It is certainly not the way forward in the fulfillment of YHWH’s plan for His world!

Oswalt states that “All of Israel’s separation from the world was in order to keep Israel from being absorbed into the world and thus losing the ability to call the world out of itself into the blessings of God. But should Israel ever come to believe that its separation was so that Israel could keep her God and His blessings to herself, then all was lost. It is precisely this attitude that infuriated Jesus (**Matthew 21:13** [where Jesus quotes this very passage from Third-Isaiah]) and that Isaiah is countering [here].” (P. 461)

עוֹד אֶקְבֹּץ עָלָיו לְנִקְבְּצָיו:

(It is) a saying of my Lord YHWH--⁴⁰

He Who gathers Israel's outcasts:

"I will again gather to (Israel), to His gathered ones!"⁴¹

⁴⁰In 1QIs^a there are three dots above the word "My Lord," indicating some question as to its genuineness.

Compare **Isaiah 1:24** where this identical phrase stands at the beginning of an oracle.

Slotki states that "It should be noted that this phrase, which usually follows the statement to which it relates, here precedes it." (P. 275)

⁴¹Slotki's translation of the last half of **verse 8** is "Yet will I gather others to him, beside those of him that are gathered." He comments that this is "an allusion to Gentiles who will offer themselves as proselytes." (P. 275) However, there is not a word in the text concerning "proselytes."

Oswalt comments that "The participial construction *Who gathers the outcasts of Israel* is the same as those throughout **chapters 40-55** that describe God as Creator (compare **40:23-26**) and Savior (compare **46:9-11**). God is 'the Gatherer,' and it is important that those who read this passage not forget it. He made humanity; He has redeemed humanity; and He intends to gather as much of it to Himself as possible. All who will love His name, lay hold of His covenant, keep His Sabbaths, and become His servants may be among that gathered band...

"In addition to those already gathered, God will add still more. What is unclear is precisely who the additional persons are. Is it other Israelites (compare **11:11, 16**) or is it other nations (**66:18**). The phrase itself does not specify to whom it refers. But the solemn nature of the pronouncement coming at the end of this particular passage that speaks of the unexpected members of the true Israel [this phrase, 'the true Israel,' is not in the text] argues that the phrase refers to a worldwide expansion of the gathering work of God. This is hardly a new idea in the **book**, and should not be surprising here." (P. 461) See:

Isaiah 19:24-25,

24 In that day,
Israel will be a third one to Egypt and to Assyria—
a blessing in the earth's midst,
25 which YHWH of Armies will bless, saying
Blessed (is) My people Egypt,
and product of My hands, Assyria,
and My inheritance, Israel!

Isaiah 49:6,

(continued...)

⁴¹(...continued)

And He said, It was too trifling for you to be for Me
a servant to raise up Jacob's tribes,
and to return those preserved of Israel;
and I will give you (singular) for a light of nations,
to be My deliverance / salvation as far as the earth's end!

Isaiah 51:5,

My righteousness (is) near;
My salvation / deliverance went forth.
And My arm will judge peoples!
For me coastlands wait,
and for My arm they hope.

Isaiah 55:5,

Look—a nation you (singular) will not know, you will call;
and a nation—they did not know you, they will run to you--
for the sake of YHWH your God, and to (the) Set-apart One of Israel,
because He beautified you!

⁴²Slotki comments on **verses 9-12** that “A new section begins with denunciation of the greedy, sensual and incompetent leaders.” (P. 275)

Achtemeier calls these verses a “prophetic oracle of judgment,” and states that it “has so many similarities to invectives found in **First Isaiah (5:11-12, 20-23; 28:7-10; 29:9-12)**, **Micah (3:5-8, 9-12)**, **Jeremiah (6:13-15; 12:7-13)**, and **Ezekiel (34:1-10)**, as well as to conditions pictured in the time of **Nehemiah (5:1-13, 15; 13:4-9)**, that it and its companion piece in **57:1-13** has been dated as belonging ‘certainly’ (Westermann) in preexilic times or equally as certainly, late in postexilic times. But the situation reflected here is probably that found in Judah shortly after the return of the first exiles under the leadership of Sheshbazzar, who came...to begin the restoration of the temple (**Ezra 1:2-11; 6:3-5**)...

“It is framed by the imperative ‘come,’ in **verses 9** and **12**. Yahweh speaks in **verse 9**; the leaders of the community speak in **verse 12**, and the contrast between Yahweh's speech and that of the leaders yields the main motif of the poem, namely, the difference between Yahweh's ways and those of the returnees.” (P. 38)

Oswalt entitles **56:9-57:2** “Sheep Without a Shepherd.”

He comments on **56:9-11** that “In language reminiscent of that of **chapter 5**, and closely paralleling that of **Jeremiah (12:9)** and **Ezekiel (34:5, 8)**, Isaiah pronounces judgment on people who were complacent in their election [that is, in their having been ‘chosen’ by God]. Just because God had designated them as His vineyard did not mean He would not tear down the
(continued...)

⁴²(...continued)

walls and call in the wild animals if they did not keep His covenant (compare **5:5, 26-30**)...

“If drunken leaders call one another to ‘come’ to debauch themselves, God is calling the *beasts* of history, the enemy nations, to ‘come’ and devour the flock that the leaders should be guarding.” (P. 468)

Compare the story in **Daniel 5**, with Belshazzar and his court enjoying a drunken feast, on the very night in which he would be killed, and his kingdom give to Darius the Mede.

Knight entitles **verses 9-12** “The Actual Situation.”

He comments that “**Chapters 56-66** point to the existence of a number of parties now clustered in Jerusalem—we might even call them sects—each of whom probably believed that it alone was ‘right’...[These divisions within the community were] caused by disagreements on the observance or nonobservance of the Mosaic laws. And then, of course, there were various groups of pagan foreigners living right in the same street as members of each of these sects. This all means that although the ‘resurrection’ of Israel had now taken place, the kingdom of God certainly had not yet come!

“At **1 Corinthians 11:19** Paul suggests that heresies are useful, in that they force believers to take their orthodoxy seriously. Here, then, Trito-Isaiah feels compelled to show up the sheer secularism to which some of the returnees had succumbed, the paganism and hedonism that was evidently rife amongst ‘the people of the land’...These intruders had taken over the Jerusalem heights ‘with wholehearted joy and utter contempt’ (**verses 5-8**). Trito-Isaiah, however, actually preaches ‘good news’ to those foreign settlers. He shows how God’s wrath at their activities was to become the instrument of their salvation. It was to take place in two steps. Israel was first to

consolidate itself before it could become God’s instrument of mission. At **Isaiah 49:6** Deutero-Isaiah had said that the ‘servant’ element within Israel must first ‘restore the preserved of Israel’...

“Only then, and second, could God fulfil His promise that ‘I will give (or ‘make’) you to be the light of the nations, to become My salvation to the end of the earth’...

“In a sermon, well-remembered by his hearers, our prophet invites the beasts of the field and of the forest to ‘come to devour’ (**56:9**) those who ought to have been the responsible leaders of the mixed population now struggling to recreate a civilized community in ruinous Jerusalem... They ‘have no understanding’ of God’s plan for the new nation. For them, he says, the situation had no ‘meaning.’ All they were interested in was their own hedonistic pleasure.

“Using the language of **Ezekiel 33:1-9** Trito-Isaiah accuses the leadership of being watchmen who are blind to their duties (**Isaiah 56:10**). This leadership must have included some clergy. Then Trito-Isaiah adds a new simile of his own: the ruined city would be full of skinny dogs that foraged for and fought over any available scraps of food (**verse 11**). These dogs did not even have the will left to bark when a stranger approached. Such then were the people’s leaders!

(continued...)

אֲתִיּוֹ לֶאֱכֹל

כָּל-חַיֵּיתוֹ בַּיַּעַר:

Every wild field animal--⁴³

come⁴⁴ to eat!

—every wild animal in the forest!⁴⁵

⁴²(...continued)

They had lost all sense of reality, including the joy of living and of rebuilding, that is, recreating a broken society...

“Here then is a portrait of a society of uncouth, spiritless people...Such self-centered, sensuous people are now squatting in the holy city! **Psalm 85** seems to illustrate this situation.” (Pp. 9-10)

⁴³The form חַיֵּיתוֹ, **chayetho**, is commonly understood to be an archaic nominative form of the noun חַיִּיהָ, **chayyah**, “living thing,” “animal.” 1QIs^a reads חַיִּיִּים, “living things,” “animals.”

⁴⁴The verb here, אֲתִיּוֹ is the qal imperative masculine plural, “Come!”

⁴⁵Slotki comments on **verse 9** that “In irony and bitterness of heart the prophet invites the wild beasts leisurely to devour the defenseless sheep, because they were left unprotected by their shepherds. [It is] a scathing satire against the slothful leaders of the people. Similar imagery is used in **Jeremiah 12:9** and **Ezekiel 34:8**.” (P. 275)

Jeremiah 12:9-10,

- 9 Is My heritage a multi-colored bird of prey to Me?
Is a multi-colored bird around, upon it?
Come! Gather every wild animal of the field!
Let them bring (others) to devour!
- 10 Many shepherds spoiled / ruined My vineyard;
they trampled down My portion.
They made My portion, My delight into a devastated wilderness.

Ezekiel 34:8,

As I live--it is a saying of my Lord, YHWH--
Because My sheep have become an object of plunder,
and My sheep have become food for every beast of the field,
because of not having a shepherd,
and My shepherds have not searched for My sheep;

(continued...)

56:10 (צָפוּ) [צִפְיֹן] עֹרְרִים כָּלָם

לֹא יָדְעוּ כָּלָם

כָּל־בָּיִם אֱלֹמִים לֹא יִוְכְּלוּ לַנְּבִיחַ

הַזִּים שְׂכָנִים אֶתְבִּי לָנוּם:

His watchmen⁴⁶—blind people, all of them!⁴⁷

⁴⁵(...continued)

and the shepherds have shepherded themselves,
but My flock / sheep they have not shepherded;

Alexander comments that **verse 9** “is an invitation to the enemies of Israel to destroy it. The people being represented in the following verses as a flock, their destroyers are naturally represented here as wild beasts...

“We have here simply one of those alternations and transitions which are not only frequent in this book, but one of its characteristics, and indeed essential to the writer’s purpose of exhibiting God’s dealing with His church, both in wrath and mercy...

“From the foregoing promises of growth, he now reverts to intervening judgment, and their causes...With the metaphors of this verse compare **Exodus 23:29; Ezekiel 34:5-8; Jeremiah 12:9; 7:33; 50:17.**” (Pp. 337-38)

⁴⁶The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” צָפוּ, “they kept watch,” and second, the *qere*, “to be read,” צִפְיֹן, “his watchmen,” which is also the reading of 1QIs^a.

⁴⁷Slotki holds that the “watchmen” are “the people’s spiritual guides.” (P. 275)

Achtemeier comments that “The ‘watchmen’ in the poem are prophets who accompanied the returnees (compare **Jeremiah 6:17; Ezekiel 3:17; 33:1-9; Jeremiah 29:1, 15, 20-23.**)” (P. 38)

Oswalt likewise comments that “The watchmen of Israel were especially the prophets, those who were designated to see what was coming and prepare the people to meet it...If these ‘seers’ were blind, the likelihood that the people would choose the right way and avoid sin was greatly reduced. Especially is this true if *all* of the watchmen are blind. And what is the nature of the leaders’ blindness? Three times in [verses 10-11] it is said that *they do not know*....They do not understand the critical nature of their task, they do not know the desperate nature of the times, they do not know the nature of their people, they do not know their own failings...They are
(continued...)

They did not know⁴⁸—all of them!

Voiceless dogs—they were not able to bark!

dreaming / raving lying down⁴⁹—they love to rest / slumber!⁵⁰

56:11⁵¹ וְהַכְּלָבִים עֵי-נֶפֶשׁ לֹא יָדְעוּ שְׂבֵעָה

וְהָמָה רְעִים לֹא יָדְעוּ הַבֵּין

כָּלֵם לְדַרְכָּם פָּנוּ

אִישׁ לְבַצְעוֹ מִקְצָתוֹ:

And the dogs (have) mighty appetite(s); they did not know satisfaction.

⁴⁷(...continued)

like watchdogs...that cannot bark, utterly useless for the task they have been given. Instead of staying alert watching for the approach of the enemy, the dogs are fast asleep...

“What a tragic description for watchmen to have: ‘lovers of sleep’...Because these leaders of the community have allowed their sense of calling to become dim, laziness has overtaken them and destroyed them for their critical task.” (P. 468)

⁴⁸Where our Hebrew text has simply לֹא יָדְעוּ, “they did not know,” our Greek translation has οὐκ ἔγινωσκον φρονῆσαι, “they did not know to think.”

Achtemeier comments that “Three times it is emphasized of the leaders that ‘they do not know’ (**verses 10b, 11b, 11d**).” (P. 38)

⁴⁹The Hebrew qal active participle הֹזִים, “dreaming,” occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**. 1QIs^a has הֹמָה הֹזִים, “they are seeing (as in a vision).”

⁵⁰Alexander comments that “The dogs particularly meant are shepherds’ dogs (**Job 30:1**), whose task it was to watch the flock, and by their barking give notice of approaching danger. But these are dumb [mute] dogs which cannot even bark, and therefore wholly useless. They are also negligent and lazy. Far from averting peril or announcing it, they do not see it. What is before expressed by the figure of a blind watchman, is here expressed by that of a shepherd’s dog asleep.” (Pp. 338-39)

⁵¹Oswalt comments on **verse 11** that “The problem with these leaders is not merely idleness and sloth. The problem is more active than that; it is unbridled desire...These people have wide-open throats that cannot be filled, no matter how much they swallow...In an ironic parallel, these people who do not do their task, who do not know what they are about, *do not know satiation*. Having forsaken the real meaning of their lives for gratification of desire, they find no satisfaction there either.” (P. 469)

And they (are) shepherds,⁵² they did not know understanding!⁵³
 All of them turned away to they (own) way;⁵⁴
 each one to his profit from his end / one and all!⁵⁵

56:12⁵⁶ אֶתְּיֹ אֶקְחָה־יְי וְנִסְבָּאָה שֹׁכֵר

⁵²Where our Hebrew text reads רְעִים, “ones shepherding,” our Greek translation has ποιητοῖς, “evil ones.” The Hebrew word for “evil ones” is רְעִים, which, in an unpointed text, cannot be distinguished from “shepherds.”

Achtemeier comments that “The ‘shepherds’ are Sheshbazzar and his officials (compare **Jeremiah 10:21; 23:1; Nahum 3:18; Ezekiel 34:1-10**), including some priests (compare **Ezra 1:5**.” (P. 38)

⁵³Oswalt comments that “In an impassioned aside, the prophet bursts forth with yet a third figure of speech, *But they are the shepherds!* These are the persons who are supposed to be foregoing their own pleasures and desires for the good of the flock.” (P. 469)

⁵⁴Slotki states that this means they “seek their own interests without caring for the welfare of the people.” (P. 276)

⁵⁵Oswalt holds that the Hebrew phrase מִקְצֵהוּ, “from its end,” probably means “in its entirety,” or “without exception.” (P. 466) Slotki says it means “from end to end, without exception.” (P. 276)

Achtemeier comments that “The indictment against [the leaders] (**verses 10-11**) reaches its climax in verse **11e**: ‘all of them to their own paths have turned.’ This turning is then further defined in terms of selfish gain (**11f**), with the indictment made inclusive by the constant emphasis on ‘all’ (**10b, 10c, 11e**) and the final ‘one and all’ (**11f**)...

“In short, **Third-Isaiah** is here stating a variation on **Isaiah 55:8-9**: ‘My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways...’ And the prophet emphasizes this disparity between the leaders’ thoughts and Yahweh’s by contrasting their sayings; even while Yahweh calls for the beasts to devour the unguarded flock, the leaders call for strong drink, imagining that they are now in control of Judah and that things can only get better.” (Pp. 38-39)

⁵⁶Slotki states that **verse 12** is “A quotation from an invitation which one of the degenerate leaders might address to his fellows.” (P. 276)

Oswalt comments on **verse 12** that “All this is summed up in a typically Isaianic device...The speaker announces that he is going to get wine and invites others to join him, not merely in drinking beer but in drinking it in great amounts...The second colon [line] underlines this thought: tomorrow will be more of the same, only much more...This is the voice of bodily desire: if a little pleasure, stimulation, and comfort is good, then more is better, and much more is better still...The desires drive us on and on, with rising expenditures of time, money, and energy, and
 (continued...)

וְהָיָה כְּזֶה יוֹם מִחָר גְּדוֹל יֵתֵר מְאֹד:

Come, you people, I will take wine;⁵⁷ and we will imbibe strong drink!

And it will be like this tomorrow—great,⁵⁸ (with) exceeding excess!⁵⁹

⁵⁶(...continued)

with proportionately diminishing returns. The end is slavery in its grossest forms.

“These, says Isaiah, are Israel’s watchmen, those on whose shoulders the well-being of the nation rests. But having lost that sense of spiritual direction and duty that could have given meaning to their lives, they have settled for what always comes rushing in to fill a spiritual vacuum: the desires, or, as the **New Testament** calls it, the flesh...The end is **verse 12**; they are slaves at the wheel, forced to perform the same monotonous task over and over. ‘We’ll do tomorrow what we did today, only more, and more, and more...’” (Pp. 469-70)

⁵⁷1QIs^a has “we will take, while 1QIs^b has “I will take.”

Achtemeier comments that “There is a reflection of **Isaiah 55:1** in the call for wine...Through the preaching of **Second Isaiah**, Yahweh offered the good life without money and without price. These faithless prophets and priests and civic leaders spend their money for an illusion. Their wine leads to drunkenness, Yahweh’s to abundant living. Their efforts at restoration will come to naught, Yahweh’s to salvation...

“It is this of which the faithless ‘watchmen’ have failed to warn the inhabitants of Judah, and the comparison of them to watch dogs, which lie around sleeping instead of barking, is a figure of the deepest scorn...These prophetic ‘dogs’ are simply telling the people what they want to hear, in order to line their own pockets with payment for their oracles (compare **Jeremiah 6:13-14; 23:16-17**), just as the ‘shepherds’ are not looking out for the people’s interests, but are instead enjoying themselves in revelry (compare **Amos 4:1; Isaiah 5:11-12; 28:1, 7-8; Micah 2:11**), singing drinking songs (such is **verse 12**; compare **22:13; 1 Corinthians 2:11**), and imagining that they have Israel’s future under control.” (P. 39)

⁵⁸In 1QIs^a the original text omitted the word גְּדוֹל, “great,” but a later hand has added it in above the line.

⁵⁹Translations of **verse 12** vary:

King James, “Come ye, say *they*, I will fetch wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and to morrow shall be as this day, *and* much more abundant.”

Tanakh, “Come, I’ll get some wine; Let us swill liquor. And tomorrow will be just the same, Or even much grander!”

New Revised Standard, “Come,” they say, “let us get wine; let us fill ourselves with strong drink. And tomorrow will be like today, great beyond measure.”

New International, “Come,” each one cries, “let me get wine! Let us drink our fill of beer! And tomorrow will be like today, or even far better.”

(continued...)

⁵⁹(...continued)

New Jerusalem, “Come, let me fetch wine; we will get drunk on strong drink, tomorrow will be just as wonderful as today and even more so!”

Rahlfs omits the verse, since it is not found in the three major uncial manuscripts, Vaticanus, Sinaiticus, and Alexandrinus; but later Greek translations have: δεῦτε λάβωμεν οἶνον καὶ οἶνοφλυγῆσωμεν μέθη καὶ ἔσται τοιαύτη ἡμέρα αὐριον μεγαλῆ περισσῶς σφόδρα. “Come, let us take wine and let us get drunk (with) strong drink! And it will be this way tomorrow, abundantly exceedingly!”