

Isaiah 57, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

57:1¹ הַצְדִּיק אֲבָד וְאִין אִישׁ שָׁם עַל-לֵב

¹Slotki states that “the theme of **56:9-12** is continued in this **chapter 57...Verses 1-2** depict how the righteous and Godly [literally, ‘men of kindness’] are perishing under the misrule and apathy of the nation’s leaders, but no one pays heed.” (P. 276)

Achtemeier calls **57:1-13** an “oracle of judgment,” and states that it “has caused enormous difficulties for commentators, because it is so similar to condemnations of idolatry found in the writings of the pre-exilic prophets. It could easily belong to Hosea or Jeremiah, and the sins it details are those repeatedly condemned in the seventh century B.C.E. **Deuteronomy**. If the oracle belongs in the time of **Third-Isaiah**, one wonders who is being attacked in it. Have all of these idolatrous practices continued in ruined Judah? Who, then, is the king referred to in **verse 9**, to whom envoys are sent? Who are the ‘cohorts’ in **verse 13**? And who is attacking the ‘righteous,’ in **verses 1 and 2**?” (P. 42)

Achtemeier nonetheless holds that “This oracle belongs firmly among the oracles of **Third-Isaiah**.” She states that “It has been joined to **56:9-12**, because of the theme of ‘no understanding’ in both **56:11** and **57:1** (compare **42:25; 47:11**). But in **verse 8**, this poem also picks up the motif of ‘love’ for God or the Gods, reflecting **57:6**, as well as the ‘place’ of **56:5**. **Verse 12** ironically contrasts ‘righteousness’ with that called for in **56:1**. And both **56:7** and **57:13** are concerned with Yahweh’s ‘holy mountain’...

“The situation in which the oracle was delivered also can be made clear. The first exiles returned under Sheshbazzar and work was begun on the temple in accordance with the program of the Zadokite priestly hierarchy. Many of those who had remained in Judah during the years of the Babylonian exile sided with this program, and it is to them that this oracle is addressed. The oracle further reveals that apparently before the first return, they sent envoys with gifts to the Persian king, and **Third Isaiah** borrows the figure of **Isaiah 28:14-22** of a bargain with Sheol to characterize that trip...

“As a result, and with the blessing of the Persian government, the returning Zadokite party, along with their sympathizers in Judah, began the restoration work. But this meant that the Levitical-Deuteronomistic party was shoved out of its place of leadership in the ruined land, apparently sometimes violently (**verses 1-2**), certainly acrimoniously (**verse 4**). The Levitical-prophetic party became an object of scorn and of attack, was divested of all leadership, and was promised no place in the temple service before the altar. The power struggle was begun anew, and the Levitical-prophetic party was the loser.” (Pp. 42-43)

Neither Alexander nor Oswalt [but see Oswalt’s admission in footnote 64] see any indication of conflict among the returnees in this passage, a conflict which Achtemeier has made pivotal for her entire commentary. We side with Achtemeier. It is a conflict between the “righteous / people of steadfast-love” and those who are seeking and accomplishing their removal. We think this is most important for understanding

(continued...)

וְאִנְשֵׁי־חֶסֶד נֶאֱסָפִים בְּאֵין מִבֵּין

כִּי־מִפְּנֵי הָרָעָה נֶאֱסַף הַצְּדִיק:

The righteous person² perished, and there is no man (who) placed (it) to heart.

¹(...continued)

Third Isaiah—it embodies a conflict between those returnees who humbly lived by righteousness and love, reaching out to and welcoming non-Jews and foreigners, and those who later, under the leadership of **Ezra-Nehemiah** sought to segregate from “people of the land,” and turn the community into a legalistic group, seeking to fulfill the 613 commandments of the Mosaic **Torah**, a movement that eventually became the “Pharisees” of the 1st century. What do you think?

Knight entitles **chapter 57** “Can This Be The New Israel?”

He comments that in **verses 1-2**, Trito Isaiah probes the eternal question, ‘Why do the righteous suffer?...He is seeking a new **torah** on the issue...[as] it became apparent that the restored community of Trito-Isaiah’s day was not uniformly ‘renewed’ in faith and practice...

“Now that the second exodus had taken place, Trito-Isaiah had to ask himself if his contemporaries were really a new people at all...The state of affairs in Jerusalem is much worse than what was depicted at **Isaiah 56:9-12**. The loyal Yahweh worshipers, it seems, were actually being persecuted; some were even ‘disappearing’—a situation only too well known in a number of countries today. Yet even then, says Trito-Isaiah, God was looking after His loyal covenanters and ensuring that they slept in peace.” (Pp. 11-12)

²Alexander comments that the phrase הַצְּדִיק, “the righteous person,” “is used generically for a whole class elsewhere, for example:

Ecclesiastes 3:17,

I, I said in my heart,
The God will judge the righteous / righteous and the wicked;
because--a time for every delight,
and for everything that is done there.

Ezekiel 18:20,

The innermost-being / person, the one missing-the-mark, he shall die;
a son shall not carry / lift up in the iniquity of the father;
and a father shall not carry / lift up in the iniquity of the son;

(continued...)

And men of steadfast-love were being removed, while there is no one
understanding--
because from before the evil, the righteous person was removed.³

²(...continued)

rightness of the righteous person upon him will be,
and wickedness of the wicked person upon him will be.

Psalm 37:12,

A wicked person plots / devises against the righteous / righteous person,
and grinds / gnashes his teeth against him.

Under the influence of Pauline theology (see **Romans 3**), many theologians have concluded that in fact there is no such thing as “a righteous person.” In so concluding, they have to explain away or deny such statements as these—and many others that could be quoted from both the **Hebrew Bible** and the **Greek New Testament**.

³Slotki says that this means “so that [the righteous person] may escape the approaching catastrophe.” (P. 276)

Achtemeier comments that “For **Third-Isaiah**, this situation is one of greatest irony, for in its view, those faithful to the covenant are the Levitical-prophetic party members who are being rejected (**verse 1**). It is they who have cherished Yahweh and His commandments in their hearts (compare **verse 11**), cleaving to Him with that love called for in the Deuteronomic law, while those in Judah who have sympathized with the Zadokite cause have continued in that syncretistic worship and idolatry for which Judah was sent into exile in the first place (compare **Jeremiah 44**)...

“It is not the Zadokites themselves who are condemned in this oracle, however, but their Judean sympathizers, who have, in fact, continued in their idolatrous ways in the land of Judah throughout the period of the exile. And it is this group of Judean idolaters who now scorn and attack the Levitical-prophetic party, jeering at them (**verse 4**) and even bringing sentences of death upon them (**verses 1-2**; for the figure of **verse 2**, compare **Job 3:13**.” (P. 43)

The text does not make the identity of these righteous persons nearly as clear as Achtemeier does.

Oswalt comments that the verse depicts evil as having become “rampant in the society and its end is so near that God in His mercy is removing the righteous from it. Thus the disappearance of the righteous from the society should be a signal to everyone that the critical stage has arrived and that the moment for drastic corrective action is at hand. But this sign too passes unnoticed, and the wild beasts range ever closer.” (Pp. 470-71)

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57:2 יבוא שלום

ינחמו על-משכבותם

הלך נכחו:

He enters (into) peace;

they rest upon their beds.

Walking (in) his straightness.⁴

³(...continued)

Alexander states that “The terms of this **verse (1)** are specifically applicable neither to violent nor natural death...but are appropriate to either.” (P. 340) He holds that the verb “gather” is here used of “gathering to one’s fathers or one’s people; an expression frequently applied in the **Old Testament** to death, and especially to that of Godly men.” (Pp. 340-41)

⁴Where our Hebrew text has the phrase הלך נכחו, literally “walking his uprightness,” 1QIs^a has הלוך נכחו with a ן written above the second word, implying a correction to הלוך ונכחו, “walking and his uprightness.”

For this matter of walking “in straightness,” compare **Proverbs 4:25-27**,

- 25 Let your eyes look straight forward,
and your eye-lids / gaze make a straight way before you!
26 Weigh / make level your foot’s track / pathway,
and let all your ways be established!
27 You shall not incline right and left--
turn aside your foot from evil!

Slotki holds that the “enters into peace” means that “In the contrast with the troubled time in store for the wicked and the ungodly,” the righteous and Godly person enters into peace—“the peace is that of death.” He also holds that in the phrase “they rest upon their beds” “the beds are their graves (compare **Ezekiel 32:25**) which have no terrors for them. Death is but a peaceful transform-ation for the upright man.” (P. 276)

Alexander states that “The peace and rest here meant are those of the body in the grave, and of the soul in heaven.” (P. 341) This is obviously a Christian understanding of the text.

Oswalt states that in this difficult **verse 2**, “The first colon [line] could be translated ‘Peace will come’ (so the Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations), or ‘He will enter (a state of) peace,’ or ‘He will go in peace.’ Either of the last two seems more likely than

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the first in view of the apparent reference of the second and third clauses to the righteous. The righteous will be taken away from the fragmented and evil society in which they live to a condition of harmony, serenity, and completeness. They will *rest on their beds*...It appears that the prophet thinks of those who have been righteous and faithful as being taken from this world to a better place where the unnoticed lives they lived here will be rewarded.

“Thus we have the introductory picture: the leaders go on their own ways using their positions to secure for themselves increasing comfort and pleasure with decreasing satisfaction, while all around them the flock is being devoured, and one by one the righteous disappear, not to be replaced. This was not God’s design when He said that His people would be His servants.” (P. 471)

⁵Knight entitles **verses 3-13** “The Courage to Speak Out.”

He comments that “In this rather lengthy oracle our prophet exhibits the courage of an Amos and the pictorial powers of an Isaiah...Trito-Isaiah addresses [his audience]: ‘You followers of witchcraft, you brats of prostitution and whores’ (one scholar’s translation). While this language may reflect the frequently prophetic idiom of going ‘a whoring after other Gods’ (**Judges 2:17, King James**), it could also be taken literally...Trito-Isaiah continues: ‘You inflame yourselves with sexual passion by the sacred oaks (**verse 5**) and under every green tree’...

“Hosea, writing two centuries earlier, had described how some Israelites had put their faith in the teachings of just such a religious sect (**Hosea 2:5**)...God thus accuses His bride, His spouse Israel (**54:5-6**), of this kind of terrible disloyalty. Israel is the adulteress still (**Ezekiel 16**), even after her ‘resurrection’ now from the grave [see **Ezekiel 37**], and after her vindication by her God (**Isaiah 56 [40:1-2]**). Thus in Trito-Isaiah’s sermons we are constantly reminded of Luther’s famous dictum: that the Christian man is still a sinner even though he has been redeemed.

“You slay your children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks,’ sacrificing your own babies to the God Molech (compare **Leviticus 20:4; 2 Kings 23:10**) in order to save your own health of mind and soul. This is surely the most complete perversion of religious faith (see **Jeremiah 7:31; Micah 6:7**), for children are the gift of God. It is our responsibility to hand on to them the covenant, which they in their turn are to pass on to the next generation again. But, of course, their willingness to destroy their own children was a sign of their deep desire for atonement with some power other than Yahweh. They remind us of those who, neglecting their family, go in search of enlightenment and peace of mind at the feet of a guru—the ultimate selfishness that a person could commit. Or again, in those old days abortion was too dangerous for the woman’s health, so society just waited for the birth. Then it appeased the Gods by making the destruction of the new baby into a rite!

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“At **verse 6** appears some other pagan cult connected with nature worship, through which offerings were made to the natural forces that had already been set aside for Yahweh. God had given Israel the holy land as their ‘portion’ (**Joshua 22:25**). In contrast, by their unbelief all that those pagans had as their portion was the stony bed of a dried-up wadi.” (Pp. 13-14)

Slotki comments on **verses 3-13** that they are “a scathing denunciation of the men who indulged in idolatrous rites and pagan practices.” (P. 277)

Oswalt comments that “In this passage the prophet expands on the condition of the nation that considers itself to be the elect of God, a nation that sees ‘righteousness’ as a matter of correct cultic behavior...The author seems to put together in a ‘collection’ (compare **verse 13**) all the worst features of pagan religion. He speaks of its grosser fertility aspects (**verses 5a, 7-8**) of its child sacrifice (**verse 5b**), of its animism (**verse 6**), and of its ceaseless demands (**verses 9-10**). All of this sums up the end results of a religion of works, in which the worshiper by...performance tries to manipulate the world in order to secure its blessings. Even those who did not practice this kind of blatant idolatry, but did stake their eternal future [there is nothing to this effect in the text] on ritual and birthright instead of on humble, ethical obedience, were in the same group, according to Isaiah (compare **65:2-7, 11; 66:2-4**)...

“Through all of history Israel has been possessed of what **Hosea** called a spirit of prostitution (**Hosea 4:12**), something that makes it choose form over substance, control over surrender (compare **Hosea 4:6** [which says nothing to this effect!]). Isaiah knows that a profound experience of the grace of God can change that, but will not do so automatically. Thus he deals at length with the need of the people to live out the servanthood that has been graciously given to them. A eunuch who obeys the covenant for love is more truly an Israelite than a purebred Jew who, depending on his birthright, treats that covenant in a formal, and ultimately, pagan way.

“**Verses 3-4** are an announcement of Divine judgment against such people. Then **verses 5-10** describe their behavior. Finally, in **verses 11-13**, God addresses them, questioning the causes of their behavior and showing the consequences of continuing in it. (This passage should certainly settle whether **56:1-8** is teaching a shapeless kind of inclusivism where all roads of ‘faith’ lead to God.)” (P. 475)

When Oswalt describes what is being denounced as a “religion of works,” he obviously is speaking from his Christian viewpoint, and the conflicting views of Paul and Jacob / James. But this is foreign to **Third-Isaiah**, which depicts genuine righteousness as a matter of works—especially in **chapter 58**.

Achtemeier comments on **verses 3-4** that “In reply to these attacks, the prophetic voice summons the scorners to a court trial, **verse 3a** (compare **Isaiah 41:1; 45:20**

(continued...)

זרע מנאף ותזנה:

And you (plural)--draw near here,
children of a [palm-reading] spiritualist,⁶
you descendant of an adulterer--and she prostituted (herself)!⁷

⁵(...continued)

for the form). It addresses them in the most insulting terms possible, as children of witches, adulterers, and whores (**verse 3bc**; compare **Isaiah 1:4**)." (P. 44)

⁶Translations vary between "sorceress" and "witch." **Rahfs** has υἱοὶ ἄνομοι, "lawless sons / children."

⁷The last phrase of **verse 3** is ותזנה, "and she prostituted (herself)," has the 3rd person feminine singular verb. Here Third Isaiah introduces the matter of female prostitution, and we think perhaps sacred prostitution, depicted so luridly through the first line of **verse 13**.

Oswalt comments on **verses 3-4** that the opening phrase "But you" introduces "a strong contrast with 'the righteous' of the preceding verses. God calls this group of people to stand in front of Him for judgment. The description of their behavior in **verse 4** calls to mind pictures of crowd behavior that are all too vivid, whether it is of German soldiers taunting an elderly orthodox Jew, or a lynch mob in the United States cavorting around the body of a black man, or children in a school yard mocking a new child who dresses strangely. These are the people in control, people of power and position, and all that is demonic in us bursts forth as we collectively seek to exorcise our own fear of being powerless, outcast, and alone. Here it seems likely that they have been mocking the righteous (**57:1-2**): odd people on the margins of society, silently drifting toward oblivion. [Why not reminding us of the Jewish Sanhedrin with it High Priests condemning Jesus to death, and their shouts before Pilate?]

"[In a footnote, Oswalt expresses his disagreement with Hanson's (and Achtemeier's) division of conflicting groups in Israel between followers of **Second Isaiah** and followers of Ezekiel. Still, he states that], **chapters 56-66** do depict two groups within Israel. Broadly speaking, they seem to be identified here as those who are committed to keeping the covenant in both form and intention as an expression of an intimate relationship with God (compare **56:6**), and those who see their religion as a privilege extended to them as a means of furthering their own ends in the world. These are not the followers of Ezekiel.]" (P. 476)

We appreciate Oswalt's admission that two groups within Israel are being depicted in **Isaiah 56-66**. But it seems to us that we can be much more specific than this vague description of the groups.

(continued...)

57:4 עַל־מִי תִתְעַנְּגוּ

עַל־מִי תִרְחִיבוּ פֶה

תִּפְתָּחוּ לִשׁוֹן

הַלֹּא־אַתֶּם יְלִדֵי־פֶשַׁע

זֶרַע שִׁקְרָה:

Against whom will you (plural) mock?⁸

Against whom will you open wide (your) mouth,

⁷(...continued)

We remember **Isaiah 1's** depiction of YHWH's disgust with Israel's temple religion, with its animal sacrifices, closely related to **Jeremiah 7's** "temple sermon," stating that the temple and its animal sacrifices were going to be destroyed, to be replaced with a new covenant, and a quite different style of religion that is internal, not external—all of which fits hand-in-glove with **Third Isaiah's** teaching, which likewise denounces such temple-religion.

Over against them, we remember Ezra and Nehemiah's emphasis on rebuilding the temple and renewing its sacrifices, and building walls to segregate the orthodox from unbelieving foreigners, along with the new temple envisioned by **Ezekiel 40-48** with its exclusive priesthood of the Tsadoqites, in spite of Isaiah and Jeremiah's insistence that these were relics of the past, no longer to be seen as the will of YHWH for His people. It seems clear to us that **Second Isaiah (chapters 40-55)** and **Third Isaiah (chapters 56-66)** are calling for a much more open, less exclusivist religion than that of **Ezra-Nehemiah-Ezekiel**, a religion that will make the temple a house of prayer for all peoples, where even eunuchs and the children of foreigners can not only worship and make sacrifices, but even serve as priests; and where the gates of the temple will be open to the nations of the earth.

We recognize the danger of painting this picture too sharply, but still think it is real—made tangible by the life and death of Jesus Christ over against the exclusivist Jewish High Priests and the Pharisees (the descendants of Ezra / Nehemiah). It is true that the Judaism of Jesus' day would allow access of proselytes into Jewish worship—but that was a far cry from the open acceptance of sinners and those considered unclean and untouchable and foreigners such as Roman soldiers by Jesus, reaching out to them with cleansing and healing and forgiveness—resulting in His being condemned to death by the Jewish High Priest and Sanhedrin. What do you think?

⁸The verb תִּתְעַנְּגוּ is hithpael imperfect, 2nd person masculine plural, "you (plural) will mock." The two other verbs in this verse are also 2nd person masculine plural.

stick out a tongue?⁹

Are you people not children of¹⁰ transgression,

⁹Oswalt comments that “To widen the mouth and lengthen the tongue” is a description of “facial contortions that many societies use in one form or another to register contempt and abuse.” (P. 472) Compare:

Isaiah 37:23,

Whom have you reproached, and reviled?
And against Whom have you raised (your) voice?
And you lifted your eyes on high,
against Israel's Set-apart One!

2 Chronicles 36:16,

And they were jesting (with the) messengers of the God,
and despising His words, and mocking His prophets,
until YHWH wrath arose against His people,
until there was no healing / remedy!

Psalm 22:8^{Heb} / 7^{Eng},

All who see me mock me;
they snarl with (their) lips, they wag (their) heads.

Psalm 35:21,

And they opened wide their mouth against me;
they said, Aha! Aha!
Our eyes saw!

Lamentations 2:16,

All your enemies opened their mouth against you (feminine singular);
they hissed, and ground (their) teeth;
they said, We swallowed (her)!
Surely this (is) the day we waited for!
We have found (it); we have seen (it)!

¹⁰Where our Hebrew text has יְלִדֵי, “children of,” a later hand has written the letter ך above the line in 1QIs^a, causing the text to read יְלוּדֵי, “those born of.”

descendant(s) of falsehood?¹¹

57:5¹² הַנְּחָמִים בְּאֱלִים תַּחַת כָּל-עֵץ רַעֲנָן

שְׁחָטֵי הַיְלָדִים בְּנִחְלָיִם תַּחַת סְעֵפֵי הַסְּלָעִים:

¹¹Oswalt comments that “According to God, their real ancestry is not faithful Abraham and Sarah (**51:2**). Their mother is a *sorceress* or witch and a prostitute, and their father is an adulterer...If these people want to make a big point of their lineage, they should look back on the behavior of their parents and tremble. In fact, the author says, it is people like themselves they should be mocking, people whose history is replete with rebellion and the persistent worship of falsehood.” (P. 476)

¹²Slotki comments that **verses 5-9** contain “a description of the abominable rites practiced.” (P. 277)

Achtemeier states that in **verses 5-10**, “The case against the scorners is then laid out, and here the words of **Isaiah 40:1** are echoed. Yahweh there promised to comfort or have compassion on His people [was the statement of **40:1** only a promise? Was it not a Divine command for the one hearing, probably the prophet himself, to comfort His people then and there by his comforting message?], but the false Judeans have sought their comfort from the Gods of the Canaanites instead (**verse 5a**). They have worshiped the Gods of fertility in the groves (‘under every green tree’), in the valley (**verse 6a**), upon the high places (**verse 7**), engaging in sacred prostitution (**verses 7b, 8d, 8f**), sacrificing to false Deities, apparently worshiping phallic symbols (**verse 6a**), even practicing the awful rites of child sacrifice (**verse 5cd**), known in earlier times (compare **Jeremiah 7:31; 29:5; 2 Kings 3:27; 16:3**). ‘Should I comfort them because of these practices?’ Yahweh asks in dismay (**verse 6e**).

“Yahweh will give a place in His temple to those who truly love Him (**56:5**). But the Judeans have loved the Baal Gods (**verse 8f**); they have chosen their own place (**verse 8g**). They have pretended to love Yahweh, writing His Word on their doors and doorposts, as commanded in **Deuteronomy 6:4-9**, but in reality departing totally from Him and the comfort and healing which He would bring them (**verse 8abc**). Yahweh had always been the ‘portion’ of Israel (compare **Jeremiah 10:16; Psalm 16:5; 142:5**), the One from Whom Israel lived and had its future; but because the faithless Judeans have chosen to worship idols, Yahweh will give them over to their choice: the idols will be their portion. Let them get life from them! That is the initial verdict in the court case.” (P. 44)

Oswalt comments on **verse 5** that “The prophet now proceeds to describe the behavior of these ‘children of falsehood.’ He depicts the two facets of Canaanite religion that never ceased to horrify the prophets: fertility worship and child sacrifice.” (P. 476)

(Are you not) the ones inflaming themselves¹³ among the terebinths,¹⁴ beneath every luxuriant tree,

sacrificing the children in the wadis,¹⁵ beneath clefts of the rocks?¹⁶

57:6 בְּחִלְקֵי־נַחַל חִלְקֶךָ הֵם הֵם גּוֹרְלֶךָ
גַּם־לָהֶם שִׁפְכֶתָּ נֶסֶךְ הָעֵלִית מִנְחָה
הָעֵל אֵלֶּה אֲנַחֶם:

Among the smooth things / stones of a ravine is your portion;¹⁷ they, they are your lot!

¹³The Hebrew phrase is הַנְּחַמִּים, the definite article with a plural niphil participle from the root חָמַם, “be or become warm,” and in the niphil apparently meaning “inflaming yourselves,” “keeping yourselves warm”—but there are no other instances of the niphil of this root in the **Hebrew Bible**. Rahlfs has οἱ παρακαλοῦντες ἐπὶ τὰ εἰδωλα, “the ones calling upon the idols (for help),” and other ancient versions have “serving” (Aramaic Targum) or “comforting yourselves” (Syriac and Latin Vulgate).

¹⁴This phrase in Hebrew is ambiguous: בְּאֵלִים, which can mean “in / among the Gods,” or “in / among the oak-trees.”

¹⁵Oswalt comments that “Not only were the trees places of worship, so were the wadis, the precipitous dry gullies down which water could thunder from a rainstorm in the hills.” (P. 477)

¹⁶For the phrase, סַעֲפֵי הַסְּלָעִים, “branches / clefts of the crags / cliffs,” see **Isaiah 2:21**, its only other occurrence in the **Hebrew Bible**, where it refers to hiding-places from the terror of YHWH.

Oswalt notes that for child sacrifice “which seems to have come into particular prominence in Israel during the reigns of Ahaz, Manasseh, and Amon, see **2 Kings 3:27; 16:3; 17:17, 31; 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31; 19:5; 32:35; Ezekiel 16:20, 36; 23:37, 39**. The definitive study is A. Green, **The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East...**(Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1975).” Oswalt states that “archaeology, both in Israel and at Carthage, has confirmed the impression given by the **Bible** that [child sacrifice] was widely practiced.” (P. 377)

¹⁷The suffix of the noun חִלְקֶךָ, “your portion,” in **verse 6** is 2nd person feminine singular, as is the suffix of גּוֹרְלֶךָ, “your lot,” in the next line. As Slotki states, “The

(continued...)

Also to them you have poured¹⁸ out a drink offering, and offered up a grain offering.

¹⁷(...continued)

worthless stones are contrasted with the greatness of God, the *lot* of loyal Israel.” (P. 278)

Where our Hebrew text has בְּחִלְקֵי-נַחַל חִלְקֵךְ הֵם הֵם גּוֹרְלֶיךָ, “Among the smooth things / stones of a ravine is your portion; they, they are your lot!”, **Rahlf**s has ἐκείνη σου ἢ μερίς οὐτός σου ὁ κλῆρος, literally, “That one–yours the part / lot; this one, yours the lot / portion.” The Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations are similar, but the Aramaic Targum has “smooth stones.”

Oswalt notes that “The Masoretic Text’s vocalization is חִלְקֵי, ‘smooth things,’ which is a wordplay with חֶלֶק, [‘portion,’ ‘tract,’ ‘territory’] following...

“The point is that the people have chosen the wadis and what is in them as their portion instead of the living God.” (P. 473)

The pronominal suffix here on the noun חִלְקֵךְ is 2nd person feminine singular, and the same feminine suffixes continue through **verse 12**. Oswalt thinks this is “because of the sexual imagery.” (P. 472) 1QIs^a is not consistent, having both feminine and masculine suffixes, and also changing between 2nd person and 3rd person.

Slotki notes that “One of the rites in primitive heathendom, particularly among the Semites, was the worship in the wadis or water-courses of upright stones, water-worn and smoothed by the winter floods, upon which was poured or smeared the blood or oil of sacrificial offerings to the Deity the stones represented.” (Pp. 277-78)

But the description here in **Isaiah 57** is not that of an archaeological find—it is a shocking description of the people of Israel’s engagement in just such “primitive heathendom worship,” still in the post-exilic period! We have seen such worship being engaged in by Israel’s leaders prior to the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the temple, and we have thought, Surely such revolting religious practices will never be engaged in again by Israel. But such a thought was mistaken—once again Israel’s worship according to the text has become saturated by sacred prostitution and infant sacrifice and the fertility religious practices of her neighbors!

¹⁸The verb שִׁפַּכְתְּ, in **verse 6**, “you poured out,” is 2nd person feminine singular, as is the verb in the next line, הֵעַלְתְּ, “you brought up.” There can be no doubt that **Third Isaiah** is addressing a woman who is prostituting herself, as a “sacred prostitute.” The 2nd person feminine singular verbs continue through the first line of **verse 13**.

In the light of these things, should I relent?"¹⁹

¹⁹Translations of this last line of **verse 6** vary:

King James, "Should I receive comfort in these?"

Tanakh, "Should I relent in the face of this?"

New Revised Standard, "Shall I be appeased for these things?"

New International, "In view of all this, should I relent?"

New Jerusalem, "Can all this appease me?"

Rahfs, ἐπὶ τούτοις οὖν οὐκ ὀργισθήσομαι, "upon / for these things, therefore, will I not be angered?" (The Aramaic Targum is similar.)

Oswalt comments the "The sense...is not entirely clear because of the possible double meaning of [the root **נחם**], in the niph'al]. Its basic meaning, as frequently in this **book**, is to encourage, or offer support ['comfort']. But in one instance...**1:24**...a niph'al form like the one here has the sense of to comfort oneself by taking vengeance...The people are being very religious, offering their sacrifices under the trees, in the wadis, and on the mountaintops. This religiousness probably reflects the paganization of Yahwism that Ezekiel, as well, protests (**Ezekiel 23:37-39**). Is God supposed to take pleasure in this corruption? He is certainly not doing so!" (P. 478)

Ezekiel 23:37-39,

- 37 Because they were sexually immoral, and blood (is) on their hands,
and with their idol-Gods they were sexually immoral.
And also their children whom they bore for Me,
they caused to pass through (the fire) to them for food!
- 38 Still this they did to Me—
they defiled My sanctuary of that (same) day,
and My days-of-rest they profaned!
- 39 And when they slaughtered their children for their idols,
and they came into My sanctuary on that (same) day to profane it!
And look—in this way they did in the midst of My house / temple!

When we think about opposing groups in post-exilic Israel, here is a group that continues to worship in the rebuilt temple, but at the very same time are participating in the sexual immoralities of the fertility religions surrounding them.

From reading the **Book of Ezekiel**, we assume that this apostasy was being done with the approval of the temple authorities—meaning the Tsadoqite High Priests. See **Ezekiel 22:23-31**, where prophets, priests and princes—those in authority—are all held responsible for the apostasy in Israel before the destruction of the temple in 538 B.C.E. And from **Third-Isaiah**, we conclude that this same kind of leadership was continuing in post-exilic times, with the rebuilding of the temple. Do you agree?

(continued...)

עַל הַר־גְּבוּהַּ וְנִשְׂאָ שְׁמֵת מִשְׁכַּבְךָ 57:7²⁰

גַּם־שָׁם עָלִית לְזִבְחַ לְזִבְחַ:

Upon a mountain high and lifted up you placed your bed,
also there you went up to offer a sacrifice.²¹

וְאַחַר הַדָּלַת וְהַמְזוּזָה שְׁמֵת זְכוֹרֹנְךָ 57:8

כִּי מֵאֵתִי גָלִית וְתַעֲלֵי הַרְתַּבַּת מִשְׁכַּבְךָ

וְתִכְרַת־לְךָ מֵהֶם

אֶהְבֶּת מִשְׁכַּבְּךָ יַד חֲזוּת:

And behind the door and the doorpost you placed your memorial;²²

¹⁹(...continued)

Slotki comments that the expected answer to this rhetorical question “is that no appeasement is possible. Such revolting worship demands not pacification but condign [fitting and deserved] punishment.” (P. 278)

²⁰Oswalt comments on **verses 7-8** that “Now the prophet shifts from the depths of the wadis to the heights of the mountains...He returns now to the imagery of prostitution. When Israel reverts to the religion of magic and ritual, she has left her covenant husband, the Lord, and gone whoring after other Lords...The heavily sexual orientation of the Canaanite religion meant that ritual prostitution was a fundamental part of worship. Thus it is not merely imagery when it is said that those who went to the high places to offer their sacrifices placed their bed there.” (P. 478)

²¹Slotki comments that “The mountains, like the valleys in the preceding verse, were also places of worship to false Deities.” He states that “bed” is here used for “an altar or site for pagan worship and sacrifice. The image of the bed is suggested by the close relationship between idolatry and immorality.” (P. 278)

It is shocking to the mind of a believer in YHWH! Imagine Christian worship leaders using the communion table in their sanctuary as a bed upon which to engage in sexual intercourse with prostitutes!

²²Slotki holds that these are the doors and door-posts “of private houses or sanctuaries where household Gods and patron Deities were kept.” (P. 278)

We are reminded of the story of Micah and the Levite in **Judges 17**, in which Micah is described in **verse 5**:

(continued...)

²²(...continued)

And the man Micah has a house / temple of God / Gods;
and he made an ephodh / priestly garment and Teraphim / household
Gods;
and he appointed / ordained (literally 'filled the hand') one of his sons,
and he became a priest for him.

As the author of **Judges** notes, that was in the days when Israel had no king,
and everyone did what was right in his own eyes. The situation of the returnees from
Babylon as depicted here in **Isaiah 57** is apparently very similar!

For occurrences in the **Hebrew Bible** of the noun זָכָרוֹן, **zikkaron**, "memorial,"
see:

- Exodus 12:14**, the Passover is a "memorial day";
Exodus 13:9, eating unleavened bread is a "memorial between your eyes" (!);
Exodus 17:14, a written memorial in a book, to wage unending war against
Amalek;
Exodus 28:12, 12, engraved stones on the shoulders of the High Priest's ephod;
Exodus 28:29, the names of Israel's sons, written on the High Priest's breastpiece;
39:7, same;
Exodus 30:16, the atonement money to bring Israel's people to remembrance
before YHWH;
Leviticus 23:24, the pilgrimage-festival of trumpets as a memorial;
Numbers 5:15, a grain offering in a test for adultery as a memorial; **5:18**, same;
Numbers 10:10, silver trumpets blown on special days as memorials for Israel
before YHWH;
Numbers 17:5^{Heb} / 16:40^{Eng}, bronze censers, hammered into a metal covering of the
altar, as a memorial to the rebellion of Korah;
Numbers 31:54, gold offering from Israel's military as a memorial for Israel's people
before YHWH;
Joshua 4:7, twelve stones take from the midst of the Jordan as a memorial;
Isaiah 57:8 (here), a memorial set up in private shrine as memorial to foreign God (?);
Zechariah 6:14, a golden crown to be placed on a man named "Branch," that is, the
Messiah; it will be placed in the temple as a memorial;
Malachi 3:16, a book written as a memorial of YHWH's faithful people—to remind
YHWH of who they are?;
Job 13:12, Job tells his three friends that their memorials are "proverbs of
ashes";
Ecclesiastes 1:11, 11, there is no memorial for the former or the latter things;
Ecclesiastes 2:16, for the wise as for the fool there is no memorial;
Esther 6:1, the Persian emperor Ahasuerus has a "book of memorials" telling
the history of his kingdom;

(continued...)

because away from Me you uncovered and you went up--you enlarged your bed,
and you cut (a covenant) for yourself from / with them.²³

You loved their bed; you gazed at a hand / penis!²⁴

²²(...continued)

Nehemiah 2:20, Nehemiah tells Sanballat and Tobiah that they have no memorial in Israel.

²³Obviously from this language, the participation in sacred prostitution was the equivalent of entering into a covenant with the fertility Gods--probably Baal and Asherah.

²⁴All of the verbs in **verse 8** are 2nd person feminine singular. Translations of **verse 8** vary:

King James, "Behind the doors also and the posts hast thou set up thy remembrance: for thou hast discovered *thyself to another* than me, and art gone up; thou hast enlarged thy bed, and made thee *a covenant* with them; thou lovedst their bed where thou sawest *it*."

Tanakh, "Behind the door and doorpost You have directed your thoughts; Abandoning Me, you have gone up On the couch you made so wide. You have made a covenant with them, You have loved bedding with them; You have chosen lust."

New Revised Standard, "Behind the door and the doorpost you have set up your symbol; for, in deserting me, you have uncovered your bed, you have gone up to it, you have made it wide; and you have made a bargain for yourself with them, you have loved their bed, you have gazed on their nakedness."

New International, "Behind your doors and your doorposts you have put your pagan symbols. Forsaking me, you uncovered your bed, you climbed into it and opened it wide; you made a pact with those whose beds you love, and you looked with lust on their naked bodies."

New Jerusalem, "Behind door and doorpost you have set your reminder. Yes, far from me, you exposed yourself, climbed on to your bed, and made the most of it. You struck a profitable bargain with those whose bed you love, whoring with them often, with your eyes on the sacred symbol."

Rahfs, "And behind the posts of your door you (singular) placed your memorials. You supposed that if you should depart from Me, you would have something better. You loved those sleeping with you."

Slotki, "And behind the doors and the posts Hast thou set up thy symbol; For thou hast uncovered, and art gone up from Me, Thou has enlarged thy bed, And chosen thee of them Whose bed thou lovedst, Whose hand thou sawest."

The reasons for these differences, we suppose, is that the translators can hardly believe what they are reading / translating, with its graphic depiction of sexual immorality. And we wonder, How would you explain this verse to a class of young people with their inquiring minds?

(continued...)

57:9²⁵ וַתֵּשְׂרִי לְמֶלֶךְ בְּשֵׁמֶן

וַתֵּרְבֵי רִקְחָיִךְ

וַתִּשְׁלַחֵי צְרִיף עַד-מִרְחֹק

וַתִּשְׁפִּילֵי עַד-שְׂאוּל:

And you traveled to the King²⁶ with the oil,

²⁴(...continued)

Oswalt agrees with our translation, stating that “It does seem likely that the suggestion first put forward by J. C. Doederlein that ‘hand’ is a euphemism for ‘penis’ is correct. ‘Hand’ is used in this way in Egyptian, and it appears to be in Ugaritic as well. A similarly explicit (but even cruder) statement is made in **Ezekiel 23:20**. The point is that Israel has become so infatuated with her idol lovers that she has lost all sense of restraint. Moreover, the relationship has become one that is fixated on the physical aspects.” (P. 480)

Ezekiel 23:19-20,

- 19 And she multiplied her prostitutions,
to remember (the) days of her youth,
when she prostituted in (the) land of Egypt.
- 20 And she lusted after their concubines,
whose flesh / penis (was) flesh / penis of donkeys,
and their issue / orgasm, an issue / orgasm of horses!

We are reminded of a statement attributed to Madalyn Murray O’Hair that the **Bible** ought to be categorized as X-rated—was it because of passages such as this?

²⁵Oswalt comments on **verses 9-10** that “Now the prophet adds foreign Gods to the idol collection. The people have gone to the trees, the wadis, and the mountains looking for lovers with which to prostitute themselves, but that was not enough. They must seek out lovers from far away. This is also a theme of **Ezekiel 23**.” (P. 480)

Slotki comments on **verse 9** that “They sent missions and gifts of oil and perfume to the shrines of the foreign Deities, even to those of the nether-world.” (P. 279)

²⁶Oswalt comments that “As the text stands, Israel is said to have journeyed to *the king*. This may be a reference to the various Assyrian and Babylonian emperors with whom Israel tried to make alliances over the years. It is also possible that it is a reference to a Canaanite God Melek (usually vocalized by the Hebrew writers with the vowels for the word shame, *bosheth*, thus Molekh...The main objection to this reading is

(continued...)

and you enlarged your perfumeries;²⁷
and you sent forth your messengers far away;²⁸
and you were made low—as far as (the) grave / underworld!²⁹

²⁶(...continued)
that one would not have to travel far to worship Molekh.” (P. 480)

²⁷Oswalt comments that “The references to oil and perfumes have been taken in two ways, either as trade items or as adornment for the foreign lovers. **Ezekiel 23:41**, as well as the general use of imagery throughout this poem, seems to support the latter. Israel, gorgeously dressed and richly perfumed, minces [walks with an affected delicacy, takes short, quick steps] toward her chosen lovers unaware that they will strip her bare and violate her. But one lover is not enough; having become fixated on desire for desire’s sake, she must have more and more lovers (compare **Isaiah 56:12**).” (P. 480)

Ezekiel 23:40-41,

40 And also, when they send for the men coming from afar,
whose messenger was sent to them--
and look, they came to the one who--
you bathed, you painted your eyes, and you adorned (yourself with)
ornaments.
41 And you sat upon a glorious bed,
and a prepared / spread table before it;
and you placed My incense and My fat / oil upon it.

Isaiah 56:12,

Come, you people, I will take wine; and we will imbibe strong drink!
And it will be like this tomorrow—great, (with) exceeding excess!

²⁸Slotki’s translation has “ambassadors” he comments that this means ambassadors were sent to distant shrines. “Where they could not go themselves they sent their representatives.” (P. 279)

²⁹All of the verbs and suffixes in **verse 9** are 2nd person feminine singular.

Verse 9, like **verse 8**, is given varying translations:

King James, “And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase *thyself even* unto hell.”

Tanakh, “You have approached the king with oil, You have provided many perfumes. And you have sent your envoys afar, Even down to the netherworld.”

(continued...)

57:10³⁰ בָּרַב דְּרִכְךָ יִגְעַתְּ

לֹא אִמְרַתְּ נוֹאֵשׁ

חַיַּית יַדְּךָ מִצָּאת

עַל-כֵּן לֹא חָלִיתְּ:

By (the) greatness / length of your way,³¹ you grew weary.³²

²⁹(...continued)

New Revised Standard, “You journeyed to Molech with oil, and multiplied your perfumes; you sent your envoys far away, and sent down even to Sheol.”

New International, “You went to Molek with olive oil and increased your perfumes. You sent your ambassadors far away; you descended to the very realm of the dead!”

New Jerusalem, “You went to Molech with oil, you were prodigal with your perfumes; you sent your envoys far afield, down to Sheol itself.

Rahifs, “And you increased / multiplied your sexual immorality with them; and you made many—those far from you; and you sent older men / officials on behalf of your boundaries; and you turned away, and you were humbled as far as hades / the grave / world of the dead.

Oswalt comments that “Thus [the prostitute Israel] sends her envoys farther and farther, even to Sheol [the grave / world of the dead], to find other Gods she can pay to come and take her.” (P. 480) Slotki likewise that the ambassadors were sent “to the nether world” “for the purpose of consulting the dead through the art of necromancy.” (P. 279)

Compare **Isaiah 8:19**,

And when they shall say to you people,
Seek to those who communicate with the dead,
and to those familiar with spirits (of the dead),
those who chirp, and those who murmur / mutter--
should not a people seek to its God / Gods,
on behalf of the living to the dead?

³⁰Slotki comments on **verses 10-11** that “While they were pursuing and practicing the heathen idolatries, they never remembered or thought of the true God Who alone gave them life and strength.” (P. 279)

³¹Slotki explains that the phrase “length of you way” refers to the way “to the shrines of the foreign Gods.” (P. 279) Alexander suggests “the abundance of (your)

(continued...)

You did not say, I am in despair / was despaired.

You found your hand's / sexual organ's live animal / strength.³³

Therefore you were not weak.³⁴

57:11³⁵ וְאֶת־מִי דָּאַגְתָּ וְתִירָאִי כִּי תִכְזָּבִי

³¹(...continued)
travel.” (P. 346)

³²Oswalt comments that “The constant quest for new Gods with which to prostitute oneself is exhausting; the way is very long (compare **30:6-7** for a similar kind of expression). But an addiction has been created. Having refused the only One Who can really satisfy, and having replaced Him with the creation, an insatiable thirst has been aroused. To say *It is useless* is not possible. As with any addiction, the memory of former gratification drives one on, even when the gratification grows steadily less and less. To admit that the quest is hopeless would be to drive one back into the arms of God.” (P. 481)

³³Oswalt comments that “Again, an enigmatic phrase appears: *life in your hand you found*. There seem to be two possibilities, both closely related. The more overtly sexual one is to read *hand* euphemistically, as in **verse 8**. Thus a person whose potency is flagging manages to find some new stimulation [viagra / cialis!] and go for another round. The major argument against this is that the subject is feminine [Oswalt wrote before “the pink pill for women”!]...Thus it seems best to take it as a more general reference to strength...The sense would be much the same, but less specifically sexual.” (P. 481)

³⁴All of the verbs and suffixes in **verse 10** are 2nd person feminine singular.

The last two lines of **verse 10** are given varying translations:

King James, “Finding your strength revive, you never gave up.” **New Jerusalem**, same.

Tanakh, “You found gratification for your lust, And so you never cared.”

New Revised Standard, “You found your desire rekindled, and so you did not weaken.”

New International, “You found renewal of your strength, and so you did not faint.”

Rahlfs, ὅτι ἔπραξας ταῦτα διὰ τοῦτο οὐ κατεδέηθης μου, “because you did these things, because of this you were not bound (?) By Me.”

Slotki comments on the phrase “a renewal of strength,” which he says is literally ‘the life of thine hand,’ means “the restoration of vigor. The Israelite idolaters deluded themselves that their worship of the false Deities was helpful to them.” (P. 279)

³⁵Achtemeier comments on **verses 11-13** that “The final declaration of Yahweh the Judge is set forth in **verses 11e-13e**. Yahweh has remained silent about all of these offenses for a long time, hoping that the people would repent (**verse 11cd**). But

(continued...)

³⁵(...continued)

now He utters His judgment on the whole Zadokite enterprise, which has taken these idolatrous rebels into its cause. Yahweh had called for faithfulness (**56:1**), but they all have been utterly faithless (**verse 12**). They are therefore on their own (**verse 13a**). Yahweh will not help them, and so it is inevitable that they can have no lasting good life in the land (compare **Deuteronomy 30:15-20**). Instead, the faithful, the trusting, the obedient will inherit the land and have permanent place in the temple on Zion (**56:7; Psalm 37:3, 9**).

“We see here that prophetic viewpoint on which Jesus drew when He declared, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth’ (**Matthew 5:5**). Yahweh’s comforting and healing Presence, and a good life in this world, cannot be guaranteed simply by building a temple and going through religious rites. Such salvation is given by God only to those who rely on Him, who love Him as their sole Helper, and who are therefore obedient to His commandments.” (Pp. 44-45)

Oswalt comments on these same **verses** that “Finally God calls the people to account. He begins by asking them what could possibly have motivated them to be untrue to Him. They expressed this unfaithfulness in three ways: they *lied*, they *did not remember Me*, and they *did not take it to heart*...God asks what could possibly have motivated such behavior. The question is probably ironic. Surely, to turn these people away from their covenant Lord, the Creator of the universe, some terrible, monumental threat must have been mounted against them. Of course, that is not the case at all. To be sure, fear is involved in apostasy, the fear of what others think of us, fear of what they may do to us, fear of losing control of our lives, fear of having to do something unpleasant...

“Why do they not fear God, the only Being in the universe Who deserves fear? The answer is given in another rhetorical question. Is it not because God has been silent about their sins? Perhaps if God meted out instant justice on sinners we would pay more attention to Him. Of course, the world would be quickly depopulated, so that is not really an option for a loving God (see **Exodus 32:11-14; Numbers 14:13-19**). Nevertheless, the mercy of God can be a cause for His people’s taking Him for granted and beginning all too soon to be more concerned about what the world can do to us than about pleasing God.” (Pp 481-82)

What do you think about this comment? Oswalt is a biblical literalist, who thinks every word in the **Bible** is the word of God. What then is he to do with the **Genesis 6-9** story of Noah and the world-wide flood, that depopulated the earth, all except for six human beings, at one time, a world-wide mass Divine extermination / genocide? Was YHWH not a loving God at that time?

Such problems constantly confront biblical literalists with their insistence on every word in the **Bible** being the word of God. The fact is, the **Bible** presents its readers with all kinds of stories and statements about God—and the serious student of

(continued...)

וְאוֹתֵי לֹא זָכַרְתָּ
 לֹא-שָׁמַתָּ עַל-לִבְךָ
 הֲלֹא אֲנִי מִחֹשֶׁה וּמֵעַלָּם
 וְאוֹתֵי לֹא תִירָאִי:

And whom were you anxious about, and feared,³⁶ so that you would lie?

And Me, you did not remember,
 you did not place it upon your heart.

Have I not been holding silence,³⁷ and / even for a long time?³⁸

³⁵(...continued)

the **Bible** has to weigh those stories, refusing to give simple answers to difficult theological questions (simple answers such as atheism, or mindless belief), but entering into a life-time of seeking to know the truth of God and His Word, believing that through such study and honest questions, the true and living God will reveal Himself.

We agree with Oswalt concerning the passages **Exodus 32** and **Numbers 14**, which emphasize God's steadfast love and grace far above His judgment—but which still maintain that humans must be obedient to the Divine voice. It is unbelievable, marvelous grace—but not cheap grace that can be taken for granted or treated flippantly.

³⁶Slotki states that “The answer implied is: certainly not of Me. There was nothing to deter them from pursuing their evil course, since no fear of God stood in the way.” (P. 279)

³⁷Slotki comments that “God did not intervene to put an end to their evil conduct by the affliction of punishment; so they believed that there was no reason to fear His retribution.” (P. 280)

³⁸The last two lines of **verse 11** are given varying translations:

King James, “Was I not silent for a long time? So you cannot have been afraid of me.”
New Jerusalem, same.

Tanakh, “It is because I have stood idly by so long That you have no fear of Me.”

New Revised Standard, “Have I not kept silent and closed my eyes, and so you do not fear me?”

New International, “Is it not because I have long been silent that you do not fear me?”

Rahlf's, κάγω σε ἰδὼν παρορῶ καὶ ἐμὲ οὐκ ἐφοβήθης, “And I, seeing you, overlook (you), and Me, you did not fear.”

Slotki, “Have not I held My peace even of long time? Therefore thou fearest Me not.”

And you would not fear / reverence Me!³⁹

57:12⁴⁰ אֲנִי אֲנִיד צְדָקָתְךָ וְאֶת־מַעֲשֵׂיֶיךָ

וְלֹא יוֹעִילוּךָ:

I, I will declare your⁴¹ righteousness⁴² and your deeds,
and they will not profit you.⁴³

57:13⁴⁴ בְּזַעֲקֶךָ יִצְלַחַּךְ קְבוּצוֹתֶיךָ

³⁹Except for the Divine statements in lines 3, 5 and 6, all of the verbs and suffixes in **verse 11** are 2nd person feminine singular.

⁴⁰Slotki comments on **verses 12-13** that “God’s apparent indifference to their way of life is now ended and He is proceeding to pronounce judgment.” (P. 280)

⁴¹The Syriac translation has “My” instead of the Hebrew’s “your.”

⁴²/Slotki comments that “your righteousness” is “ironical for ‘pretended righteousness.’” (P. 280)

Alexander, noting the many differing interpretations that have been given to this statement, states that “the simplest and most obvious construction is in all respects the most satisfactory. *I will declare thy righteousness*, i.e. I will show clearly whether thou art righteous, and in order to do this I must declare *thy works*; and if this is done, *they cannot profit thee*, because, instead of justifying, they will condemn thee.” (P. 347)

⁴³All of the suffixes in **verse 12** are 2nd person feminine singular.

Oswalt comments on **verse 12** by asking, “So what will God do? There will come a time when He will no longer keep silent...All their pseudo-righteous works will be of no value when judgment comes.” (P. 482)

⁴⁴Oswalt continues his comment on **verse 12** by asking with regard to **verse 13**, “Why is this? Because no matter how large the collection of this world’s Gods may become, whether they are of trees, wadis, mountains, or far countries, in the end they are of no substance. In comparison to the glory (the weight, the reality, the significance) of God that fills the earth (**Isaiah 6:3**), there is nothing to these things. They are a chimera, a vapor, an imagination of human minds that have rejected the truth. In the final glare of unveiled reality, they will vanish on the wind like the chaff they are. Nothing more than a breath will be needed to whisk them away.” (Pp. 482-83)

Isaiah 57:6-13 is, we think, addressed to a sacred prostitute—notorious in the **Hebrew Bible** for turning Israel away from YHWH to the worship of the Canaanite Gods, Baal and Anath / Asherah, with its “sacred” sexual intercourse between male worshippers and cult prostitutes, that involved the ritual murder of innocent children. It is

(continued...)

וְאֶת־כָּל־יִשְׂאֲרוּתָּ יִקַּח־הַבֵּל
וְהַחֹסֶה בִּי יִנְחַל־אֶרֶץ
וַיִּירָשׁ הַר־קְדָּשִׁי:

When you cry out, let your heap (of non-Gods)⁴⁵ deliver you!⁴⁶

And all of them, a wind will lift up, a breath / vapor⁴⁷ will take (them)!⁴⁸

And the one taking refuge in Me will inherit earth,

⁴⁴(...continued)

to just such a notoriously sinful person, the sacred prostitute, along with others, that these words of **verse 16** are addressed. YHWH opposes their sacred prostitution, and the murder of children—but his contention / quarrel / law-suit will not continue for long-lasting time; His anger will come to an end. He realizes that these notoriously sinful people are His creatures, His children; they breathe His רִיחַ, Spirit / spirit; it is His נְשְׁמוֹת, breaths, that are in their lungs. He still cares for them as a loving Father!

⁴⁵The Hebrew phrase is קְבוּצֵיךָ, “your heap / collection.” Ibn Ezra states that “collection” is referring to all that a person can gather together by personal strength in this life, and on which one can depend.” We think it more likely that the phrase is referring to the collection of idol-Gods upon which these people were depending. Do not the things we collect / hoard up reveal what we place our trust in? Slotki states that it refers to “the varied collections of their idols.” (P. 280)

⁴⁶All of the suffixes in this first line of **verse 13** are 2nd person feminine singular.

⁴⁷For Third-Isaiah’s use of the noun הַבֵּל, “vapor,” “breath,” here, we are reminded of the **Book of Qoheleth / Ecclesiastes**, with its insistence that everything is **hebhel**, a breath or vapor. We think Qoheleth would say Amen! in response to **verse 13**.

⁴⁸That is, their whole collection of idols amounts to nothing—a wind, even a vapor / breath will carry them all away!

In 1QIs^a there is a gap left in the text between “a breath / vapor will take (them)!” and the words “And the one taking refuge in Me...” Whether this simply indicates a change in subject, or the loss of a phrase is uncertain.

and will possess My set-apart mountain!⁴⁹

⁴⁹The empty non-God's cannot save / deliver even themselves—but as **Third-Isaiah** goes on to say, there is a Source of genuine refuge / inheritance / possession—it is YHWH!

Oswalt comments that “It is never too late to abandon the worthless protection of those creations of human pride and fear. It is always possible to face reality and hurl oneself under the shelter of the Rock (**17:10; 26:4; 30:29; 44:8**)...

“This is surely the meaning of Jesus’ statement, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth’ (**Matthew 5:5**). The meek are those who have surrendered their power and their attempts to make the world serve them. The meek are those who have admitted they are not God, and who have thrown themselves beneath the protection of the One Who is God...They are the heirs of God’s holy mountain, which is much more than the earthly Jerusalem. It is indeed the city of God [where there is no wrong, the earth is filled with the knowledge of God, and death is swallowed up forever] (compare **11:9; 65:25; 24:23; 25:6-8; 66:20**).” (P. 483)

Isaiah 11:9,

They will not do wrong, and they will not destroy,
in all My set-apart mountain!
Because the earth has been filled with the knowledge of YHWH,
like the waters cover the oceans!

Isaiah 65:25,

Wolf and lamb will feed as one;
and lion like the ox will eat straw;
and a snake—dust (will be) its food.
They will not do evil, and they will not destroy
in all My set-apart mountain. YHWH said!

Isaiah 24:23,

And the white one / moon will be ashamed
and the hot one / sun will be embarrassed (synonym);
because YHWH of Armies reigned on Mount Zion,
and in Jerusalem,
and before His officials / elders, glory / honor!

Isaiah 25:6-8,

6 And YHWH of Armies will make for all the peoples, on this mountain,
a drinking-banquet of fatness, a drinking-banquet of aged / matured wine—

(continued...)

⁴⁹(...continued)

- fatness full of marrow, (and) refined wines.
- 7 And He will swallow up on this mountain the appearances of the shroud
that shrouds over all the peoples,
and the mourning-veil that is woven over all the nations.
- 8 He swallowed up the death for long-lasting time.
And my Lord YHWH will wipe out tear(s) from upon all faces.
And He will remove His people's reproach from upon all the earth,
because YHWH said (it)!

Isaiah 66:20,

And they will bring all your brothers from all the nations,
the gift to the YHWH,
on the horses and in the chariot(s)
and on the litters and on the mules and on the dromedary camels,
to My set-apart mountain, Jerusalem
—said YHWH—
just as Israel's children will bring the gift(s) in a clean vessel
(to the) house of YHWH.

What a promise this is! The one taking refuge in YHWH will inherit the earth and His set-apart mountain! In the midst of Israel's idolatry and self-condemnation, still the individual can reach out to YHWH, taking refuge in Him. And there could not be a greater promise—the earth, and YHWH's mountain, what we can call “the heavenly Zion” will be his!

The individual Israelite is told, You don't have to share in the fate of your idolatrous fellow Israelites. You can relate your life to YHWH, you can make Him your “hiding-place”—and he will give you both the earth (this life) and the heavenly Zion (the world to come), where death is swallowed up forever!

Alexander comments that “Those who restrict the passage to the Babylonish exile must of course explain the promise as relating merely to the restoration [to the Land of Israel and Jerusalem / Zion]; but the context and the usage of the Scriptures is in favor of a wider explanation, in which the possession of the land is an appointed symbol of the highest blessings which are in reserve for true believers, here and hereafter.” (P. 348)

We agree with the author of the **New Testament Book of Hebrews in 12:22a**, who understands Jerusalem / Zion symbolically, and tells believers that by their faith “you (plural) have come to Zion mountain, and to a city of a living God, to a heavenly Jerusalem...”

⁵⁰Slotki comments on **verses 14-21** that “In elegant diction and flowing periods [statements?], the penitent sufferers returning to God are promised relief from their oppressors and Divine comforts and peace. The passage stands in remarkable contrast with the scathing denunciations and heavy style of the preceding.” (P. 280) Surely Slotki does not mean to include the last two lines of **verse 13!**

Oswalt entitles **verses 14-21** “The Holy and the Humble.”

He comments that “The servants of God who are called to demonstrate the righteousness of God in their behavior are not doing so. What is to be done? That is what this...section is about. The people are helpless, so God must act. The centrality of God’s action is seen in the recurrence of the 1st person pronouns referring to God. God promises to revive, lead, heal and encourage His people, doing in them what they cannot do in themselves.” (Pp. 485-86)

But where in this passage is it said that “the people are helpless”? We think Oswalt is reading this into the text, from a theological position of total hereditary depravity—it is not found here! Who is the “righteous man” of **57:1a** and **e**? Who are the “devout men” of **57:1c**, who according to **57:2a** “enter into peace”? Who are those “who walk in their uprightness” in **57:2c**? Who is the one who takes refuge in YHWH in **57:13d** and **e**? Who is the one who is contrite and of a lowly spirit in **57:15 d, e** and **f**? We think these are individuals who are in fact demonstrating the righteousness of God in their behavior, and that they are among the returnees from Babylon, now in the land of Israel, being hated, even put to death by their opponents. What do you think?

Achtemeier calls **verses 14-21** another “oracle of salvation,” and holds that it is “tied inextricably” to **57:1-13**, with both oracles addressed “to the same group—namely, to those in Judah who are followers of the Zadokite priestly party.

“Yahweh’s court sentence of judgment has been pronounced on the idolatrous, even murderous, ways of the Zadokite sympathizers in **57:1-13**. But Yahweh’s judgment is never His last Word, not even in the face of the heinous sins detailed in **57:1-13**. Nothing and no one stand outside of His mercy...

“So it is that Yahweh here commands that the stumbling block of judgment also be removed; that the merciful invitation to return once more be extended; that the promise of healing and guidance and comfort once more be made, in the hope that the Judeans—and we—will accept His saving fellowship.” (Pp. 46-47)

But is it the “stumbling block of YHWH’s judgment” that is commanded to be removed? The text does not say this, and may be understood as referring to anything that stood between people and returning to YHWH—perhaps their idolatry, perhaps the proud exclusiveness of the temple priests, saying that ordinary people were unclean and had no access to YHWH. What do you think the “stumbling-block” is?

(continued...)

הָרִימוּ מִכְשׁוֹל מִדֶּרֶךְ עַמִּי:

And He will say,⁵¹ Build up, build up,⁵² make clear a way!

Lift up (any) hindrance / obstacle⁵³ from My people's⁵⁴ way!⁵⁵

⁵⁰(...continued)

Oswalt comments on **verse 14** that “As in the two other places (**40:3**; **62:10**) where this kind of call to prepare the way appears, the one who is to speak is not identified...The general and increasing indefiniteness suggests that it is the message that is to be given prominence, not the messenger. [We think it is a general call, addressed to any in Israel who will hear it. What do you think?]”

“That message speaks of making it possible for the people to return to God. Whatever prevents them from coming to Him and taking refuge in Him is to be taken out of the way [we agree!]...There is no great difference between the use of the imagery here and in **chapters 40-55**. Both combine the physical and spiritual returns to different degrees in differing places, because it is the settled understanding of the **book** that return to the land without a corresponding return to God will be a recipe for disaster.” (P. 486)

⁵¹Where our Hebrew text reads וְאָמַר, “And He will say,” **Rahlfs** has καὶ ἐροῦσιν, “And they will say,” and the Latin Vulgate has “I will say.” 1QIs^a has “And he said.” What do you say? Who is the speaker here? We take it to be YHWH.

⁵²1QIs^a interpolates the noun הַמִּסְלָה, “the highway.”

⁵³Oswalt translates by “stumbling-block,” and comments that its use here is significant, “because of its use in **8:14**. There it is God Who is the ‘stumbling-block’ to those who refuse to give Him the place of the Holy One in their lives...Here the context is not dissimilar. God is the Holy One (**verse 15**), and there is a stumbling-block in the people’s way. But the tone is much different. There Isaiah is to leave ‘this people’ (**8:11**) to their blind and stumbling ways, and seal up the testimony (**8:16**), while God hides His face (**8:17**). Here the prophet is empowered to speak to “My people’ and to let them hear the command to remove every stumbling-block from their way so that God can stop hiding from them (**verse 17**) and heal them (compare **6:10**)...”

“What could have made the difference? Above everything else the announcement of the ministry of the servant has intervened. God’s righteous anger has been satisfied and His love can be proclaimed. Because the servant has been crushed (**53:10**), God can sit in the dust with those who have been crushed (**verse 15**). Those who will humble themselves to dwell with the Holy One can find a perfectly smooth road to that reality.” (Pp. 486-87)

But God is not the stumbling-block in this passage, where it is God Who is calling for the stumbling-block to be removed! And nothing is said in this text concerning

(continued...)

⁵³(...continued)

“God’s righteous anger being satisfied,” or anything about the role of the suffering servant. Oswalt is reading all of this into the text based on his Christian belief in the “satisfaction theory of the atonement” in which the justice of God has to be “satisfied.” As **Theopedia** on the Internet explains, this theory was formulated by the medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 C.E.), in his book **Cur Deus Homo** (literally, ‘Why the God Man’). In his view, God’s offended honor and dignity could only be satisfied by the sacrifice of the God-man, Jesus Christ.”

But Oswalt’s view that forgiveness could only be granted by God following the death of the suffering servant overlooks the fact that Isaiah himself had been forgiven (**6:7**, “your guilt is taken away, and your sin atoned for”), and that full forgiveness had already been offered in **Isaiah 1:18**, long before the mention of the suffering servant. Oswalt’s view overlooks the statement in **Isaiah 40:1-2** that Israel’s iniquity had been forgiven and that she had paid double for all her sins, long before any mention of the suffering servant. All such theories of atonement cannot do justice to the teaching of the **Hebrew Bible** concerning the love of God that never fails, and the proclamation of full forgiveness in that love—for example, **Psalms 103**.

As we have said many times, Jesus Christ is the embodiment of that love, not the beginning of it! What do you think?

⁵⁴Achtemeier comments that “The call goes forth from Yahweh to prepare a way for ‘My people’—sinners can still be His! The language of the verse is very similar to that of **Isaiah 40:3**, but here the way is no longer one on which Yahweh will return to His people, bringing the exiles with Him (**40:3-11**). The way is now a spiritual way on which the Judeans may return to Yahweh. The great heart of mercy is here pleading for repentance (compare **Mark 1:2-3** and parallels; **John 1:23**).” (P. 47)

⁵⁵Slotki holds that the way in **verse 14** “is to be understood as the spiritual approach to God by the people who had hitherto strayed from Him.” (P. 280)

We understand the text to mean that those who are humble, lowly, contrite of heart, have direct access to YHWH—and His command to whoever will hear is to remove anything that stands in the way of such people, preventing them from coming to Him—for as the text goes on to say, their hearts make a perfect dwelling-place for YHWH!

⁵⁶Oswalt comments on **verse 15** that “This verse explains why God makes the kind of gracious proclamation found in **verse 14**. It is because...of Who He is.” (P. 487) Yes—not because of what the suffering servant is going to accomplish (see the preceding footnote), but simply because it is God’s nature!

(continued...)

שֶׁכֶן עַד וְקָדוֹשׁ שְׁמוֹ
מְרוֹם וְקָדוֹשׁ אֲשֶׁכּוֹן
וְאֶת־דִּכְאֹ וְשִׁפְלֵ-רוּחַ
לְהַחְיֹת רוּחַ שְׁפָלִים
וְלְהַחְיֹת לֵב נִדְכָּאִים:

Because in this way He spoke⁵⁷—One being high and being lifted up,⁵⁸
Who dwells forever,⁵⁹ and Set-apart (is) His name:

⁵⁶(...continued)

Oswalt states that **verse 15** makes three points: “the utter transcendence of God...God’s transcendence does not rule out His dwelling with the crushed and low-spirited...[God enlivens] the spirit of the lowly...”

“The Holy One is with us (7:14) for our deliverance. This is the good news of salvation.” (Pp. 487-88)

⁵⁷Where our Hebrew text has אָמַר, “He said,” 1QIsa has אָנִי, “I,” making this another Divine Self-predication.

⁵⁸For this phrase, “being high and being lifted up,” compare its earlier usage in **Isaiah 6:1**,

(It was) in (the) year of the King Uzziah’s death;
and I saw my Lord,
sitting upon a throne, being high and being lifted up.
And His robes / skirts were filling the temple.

Isaiah’s vision of YHWH, high and lifted up, overwhelmed Isaiah, and resulted in his being called to speak for YHWH.

Here, YHWH affirms of Himself what Isaiah had seen long before. He is what the ancient Semites entitled אֵל עֶלְיוֹן, “God Most High,” or “Highest God” (Melchizedek, **Genesis 14:20**).

⁵⁹Translations of this phrase, שֶׁכֶן עַד vary, from “who lives eternally,” to “Forever dwells,” to “who inhabits eternity,” to “he who lives forever,” to “the one in heights dwelling the ages.”

(In the) height, and (in the) set-apart (place) I will dwell,⁶⁰
and with a contrite / crushed person, and lowly of spirit,
to bring alive (the) spirit of lowly people,
and to bring alive (the) heart of contrite / crushed people!⁶¹

⁶⁰Where our Hebrew text has אֲשִׁכֹּן, “I will dwell / settle,” **Rahfs** has the present participle, “inhabiting,” while the Aramaic Targum and Syriac have “is His habitation.”

⁶¹Translations of **verse 15** vary somewhat:

King James, “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

Tanakh, “For thus said He who high aloft Forever dwells, whose name is holy: I dwell on high, in holiness; Yet with the contrite and the lowly in spirit -- Reviving the spirits of the lowly, Reviving the hearts of the contrite.”

New Revised Standard, “For thus says the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with those who are contrite and humble in spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite.”

Rahfs, “But then these things says Lord—the Highest, the One in heights dwelling (in) the ages, Set-apart among set-apart ones, a name to Him, Lord, the Highest, in set-apart places / set-apart ones resting, and giving to faint-hearted / discouraged patience, and giving life to those whose heart is crushed.”

Slotki comments on **verse 15** that “God is high and lofty, far above all human eminence, and at the same time He is near to the contrite and humble. His exaltation and condescension are neither identical nor mutually exclusive, but two different manifestations of His inscrutable [enigmatic, mysterious] nature.” He holds that “the high and holy place” means “heaven.” (P. 281)

Achtemeier comments that “Yahweh makes this plea on the basis of His Self-description in **verse 15**...He is the ‘high and lofty One,’ the absolutely transcendent God (compare **Isaiah 6:1**), Who dwells in heaven (compare **Isaiah 33:5**...), far above His creation (compare **Isaiah 40:22**)...And yet, this transcendent, holy God deigns to lower Himself and to dwell with the humble, the meek, the helpless, and all those who have been crushed and dispirited by the adversities of human life.” (P. 47) Compare:

Isaiah 66:2b,

And to this (person) I will look--
to a poor / afflicted person, and (with a) broken spirit,

(continued...)

⁶¹(...continued)

and one who trembles at My word.

Psalm 34:19^{Heb} / **18**^{Eng},

YHWH (is) near to those (with a) broken heart,
and those crushed (in) spirit, He saves / delivers!

Psalm 147:3, YHWH is the One--

Who heals the broken-hearted ones,
and Who binds up their wounds.

Matthew 5:3,

How blessed are those who are poor in spirit,
because theirs is the kingdom of the heavens!

Achtemeier continues: "There is a wide range of meaning in the phrase, 'contrite and low in spirit,' **verse 15d**. First of all, it refers to all sufferers who have been battered by the exigencies [urgent needs, demands] of living day by day...But there is more meaning to 'contrite and low in spirit.' It refers also to humility before the holy God, to openness and willingness to accept His saving presence (compare **Matthew 9:12–13**). God will have nothing to do with the proud (compare **Isaiah 2:6-22; Psalm 138:6**), with those who think they can make it on their own and who therefore set about to formulate their own plans and write their own laws and depend on their own wisdom and strength quite apart from their Creator...

"The message of **Third-Isaiah** is that Yahweh comes and dwells...with the humble, with those who cleave to Him in heart-felt love and obedient faithfulness and total dependence (compare **verse 13**). Moreover, when Yahweh comes, He gives to the humble, life (**verse 15ef**)...It is that life which is here offered, in free mercy, even to the opponents of the Levitical-prophetic party." (Pp. 47-48)

And we add, there is nothing in this statement concerning YHWH's dwelling-place being Jewish, or belonging to an "orthodox party." The only qualification mentioned is that of being contrite, lowly of spirit—a universal possibility and reality for all people, even for those who have committed horrifying crimes—the context here. They do not have to be orthodox Jews, doing everything in their power to fulfill the 613 commandments of the **Torah**, as the followers of **Ezra/Nehemiah's** program would insist. Their only qualification is to be broken and contrite of spirit!

The Greek translation completely omits the phrase וְאִתְּדַכָּא וְשִׁפְלֵ-רוּחַ, "and with a contrite / crushed person, and lowly of spirit," saying instead "in set-

(continued...)

כִּי לֹא לְעוֹלָם אֲרִיב 57:16⁶²

וְלֹא לְנֶצַח אֶקְצוֹף

כִּי־רוּחַ מִלְּפָנַי יַעֲטוֹף

וְנִשְׁמוֹת אֲנִי עֹשִׂיתִי:

Because not to long-lasting time will I contend;
and I will not be angry to perpetuity!⁶³

⁶¹(...continued)

apart ones resting, and giving to faint-hearted people patience, and giving life to the those whose heart is broken / crushed.”

Knight comments that “God is the Creator and Re-creator, as Deutero-Isaiah had affirmed some sixteen times. In the beginning God had created man by breathing ‘into his nostrils the breath of life’ (**Genesis 2:7**). Now He had ‘come down’ in order to dwell with humble human beings, ‘to revive the spirit of the humble’ by breathing new life into them (compare **Psalms 34:18**). What a God this is, then, of Whom our preacher proclaims in the midst of the ruins of the city and amongst the broken personalities of that city’s inhabitants. For to ‘revive the heart’ means to recreate the seat of the personality so as to receive a new nature, so as to become a new person.” (P. 17)

⁶²Slotki comments on **verse 16** that it “explains why God is near to the contrite [feeling remorse or penitence] in spirit. Divine anger lasts only for a time, until chastisement has produced the desired purification and humility of spirit. Long continuance of His wrath and judgment would have utterly destroyed the souls He had created.” (P. 281)

It is on this kind of thinking that the Roman Catholic doctrine of “Purgatory” has been based. We think **Ezekiel 16:53-38** supports such a conclusion, with its affirmation that in the future, the prostitute cities of Samaria, Sodom, and worst of all, Jerusalem, will have their fortunes restored. How can that be, if they have suffered destruction by YHWH’s fire? Can it be that the Divine fire has finally cleansed them? Also, see **1 Peter 4-5**, in which Jesus is depicted as descending into the underworld in death, and there going to the spirits in prison who were disobedient in the days of Noah, and proclaiming the gospel to them.

⁶³Achtemeier comments “This offer of life is further reinforced by a promise. In **57:3**, Yahweh had taken the sinful idolaters to court, and in **57:13**, judgment had been pronounced upon them. But here in **verse 16** the promise is made that Yahweh will not go to court and condemn them forever (compare **54:8-10; Psalm 103:9; Micah 7:18**). Ours is a Father Who has a hard time remaining angry with His children (compare **Hosea 11:8-9; Jeremiah 31:20**). The reason given, in **16cd**, is that He has made us

(continued...)

Because (the human) spirit would be feeble from before Me,⁶⁴
and breaths I, I made.⁶⁵

⁶³(...continued)

(clothed us with flesh, compare **Job 10:11**) and has no desire to destroy His handiwork. He tenderly recalls our frailty (compare **Psalm 78:38-39**), and pities us as a Father pities His children (**Psalm 103:13-14**).” (P. 49)

Oswalt comments that God’s anger “has a terminating point, His wrath an ending. God *becomes angry*, but He *is* love (**Psalm 30:6**^{Heb} / **5**^{Eng})...He takes no joy in the destruction of the wicked, because, as He says, they are among *the lives I myself made*...

“If He could not find a way of abating His just anger, then the human spirits that He had made would faint away before Him. But how can He not punish sin and still be the just God of all creation (**Genesis 18:17-19**)? That He can here state that His anger will abate and will not be eternal is a witness to the fact that a sin offering has been made and that justice has been satisfied with regard to human sin (compare **Isaiah 53:10-12**). The only issue remaining is whether humans will haughtily continue to insist that they either do not need a sin offering, or that they can take care of their problems in a better way through their efforts than in God’s way (compare **verses 19-21**). (Pp. 488-89)

This is a strange comment. Oswalt contends in chapters **52:13-53:12** that the suffering servant is Jesus Christ, Who will come centuries later from the time of the **Book of Isaiah**. But here, in the seventh century B.C.E. according to him, he says that “a sin offering has been made and...justice has been satisfied with regard to human sin.”

We say that the biblical picture of God is that of One Who although becoming angry with human sinfulness, still loves His human creatures, and Whose anger abates, as He forgives the guilty because of His love—for example, His anger with Israel at its creation of a hand-made golden bull-God, that was followed by His forgiveness of Israel—see **Exodus 32-34**.

We certainly believe that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of that Divine love and forgiveness, but insist that the forgiveness of sin did not begin with Jesus and His cross, as can be demonstrated by many passages throughout the **Hebrew Bible**, including the **Book of Isaiah**.

⁶⁴Oswalt asks, “Since the human spirit has come from God, how can God remain angry forever, for then He will be forever estranged from that which came from Himself?” (P. 484)

⁶⁵It is a universal statement of the nature of human beings. Every human being has רִיחַ, “breath,” “wind,” “spirit.” Every human being has נְשָׁמָה, “breath.” The Hebrew phrase אֲנִי עָשִׂיתִי, literally, “I, I made,” emphasizes the 1st person subject.

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

Third-Isaiah's statement here reminds us of the second creation story in **Genesis 2:7**,

And YHWH God formed (like a Potter) the human, dust from the ground;
and He blew into his nostrils (the) breath of life;
and the human became a living innermost-being.
(We are reminded that the creation stories of **Genesis** know nothing of races or nationalities; they only know of humanity.)

Compare:

Isaiah 2:22,

Cease for yourselves from (thinking too highly of) the human-being,
whose breath (is) in his nose!
Because with what (is) he thought (to be)?

Isaiah 42:5,

In this way the God YHWH spoke--
One creating the heavens and stretching them out,
One beating out the earth and its produce,
One giving breath to the people upon it,
and spirit to the ones walking in it.

Job 10:11-12,

11 You dress me--(with) skin and flesh,
and with the bones and sinews you weave me.
12 Life and steadfast love You made for me;
and Your visitation guarded my breath.

Psalm 78:38-39,

38 And He (is) compassionate;
He covers over guilt / iniquity;
and He will not destroy;
and He will greatly turn back His anger,
and He will not stir up all His wrath.
39 And He remembered that they (are) flesh,
A wind going, and will not return.

Psalm 103:13-14,

(continued...)

57:17⁶⁶ בַּעֲוֹן בְּצַעְוֵי קַצְבָּתַי

וְאַכְהוּ הַסֹּתֵר וְאַקְצָף

וַיִּלֶּךְ שׁוֹבֵב בְּדַרְךְ לְבוֹ:

With the guilt / iniquity of his violence / unjust gain⁶⁷ I was angry,⁶⁸

⁶⁵(...continued)

- 13 As a father has tender compassion for [his] children,
YHWH had tender compassion for those revering Him!
14 For He knew our forming / framing / molding / creation / purpose;
(it is) remembered that we are dust.

⁶⁶Slotki comments on **verses 17-18** that “God’s estrangement, anger and punishment are the fruits of the people’s iniquity; but after the discipline come healing and comfort.” (P. 281)

⁶⁷Slotki translates בְּצַעְוֵי by “his covetousness,” and comments that it was Israel’s covetousness “which led to the exploitation of the poor and weak.” (P. 281). Our English translations all agree with this (see footnote 71). However, we see no justification for such a translation, and there is nothing in **chapter 57** about exploitation of the poor and weak.

Brown-Driver-Briggs defines the noun by “gain made by violence, unjust gain, profit,” and Holladay says the noun means “(illegal) profit.” We think the text is describing Israel’s involvement in the sacred prostitution of fertility religion as doing “violence” to her relationship with YHWH, her “husband,” thereby lying to Him about her love for Him, in an attempt to gain fertility for themselves and their nation in a totally unjust way. And not only was that “violence” done to her relationship with YHWH, it also involved them in the violent murder of newborn children!

⁶⁸Oswalt comments on **verse 17** that “God now proceeds to describe the situation in which His anger had been provoked and what the results had been. He sums up their sin in the striking phrase *the iniquity of his unjust gain*...This line could presumably be taken in two ways: that the lust for ‘unjust gain’ is the worst of the people’s sins, or that it somehow sums up all their sins...

“The proud, unbridled self wishes to make the universe center on itself, to draw all things inward to itself, confident that if it can amass enough of the power, comfort, security, and pleasure that money and possessions signify it will be secure.” (P. 489)

We think Oswalt is not taking the context of Israel’s involvement in fertility religion seriously. We assume that the Israelites, while continuing to worship YHWH in the

(continued...)

and I struck him, hiding (Myself),⁶⁹ and I was angry.⁷⁰
And he went on, turning away, in his heart's way.⁷¹

⁶⁸(...continued)

temple, were engaging in sacred prostitution and the murder of children in order to increase their Gross National Profit through such involvement.

What do you think?

⁶⁹The Hebrew phrase is וַאֲפָהוּ הִסְתַּר וְאִקְצַף, literally, “and I struck him hiding and I was angry.” But what does the hiphil infinitive absolute הִסְתַּר, “hiding,” mean? Does it mean YHWH was “hiding His face” from Israel, or from what was happening?

Slotki says the phrase is literally “hiding and being wrath,” that is, repeatedly. “As often as the people were guilty of covetousness God hid Himself and was wrath.” (P. 281)

Compare **Deuteronomy 31:18**,

And I, hiding I will hide / I will surely hide My face on that day,
over all the evil which he did.
Because he turned to other Gods.

⁷⁰Oswalt comments that “As a result of this attitude and behavior among His people, God became angry and refused to be of any aid to them (*hiding Myself*) and the conditions of **Isaiah 1:4-8** became descriptive of them. Yet it seemed that the more God spoke to them and brought the effects of their sin on them the more they went away from Him (**30:8-14**; compare **Hosea 5:13**; **11:2**.)” (Pp. 489-90)

⁷¹Translations of **verse 17** vary somewhat:

King James, “For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart.”

Tanakh, “For their sinful greed I was angry; I struck them and turned away in My wrath. Though stubborn, they follow the way of their hearts.”

New Revised Standard, “Because of their wicked covetousness I was angry; I struck them, I hid and was angry; but they kept turning back to their own ways.”

New International, “I was enraged by their sinful greed; I punished them, and hid my face in anger, yet they kept on in their willful ways.”

New Jerusalem, “I was enraged by their sinful greed; I punished them, and hid my face in anger, yet they kept on in their willful ways.”

Rahfs, “Because of sin, (for) a little (while) I grieved I him, and I struck him; and I turned My face away from him; and he was grieved, and he went gloomy on his ways.”

(continued...)

57:18 דַּרְכָיו רָאִיתִי וְאַרְפָּאתִי

וְאַנְחֵהוּ וְאַשְׁלֵם נַחֲמִים לוֹ וְלֹאֲבָלָיו:

I saw his (back-sliding) ways,⁷² but I will heal him;⁷³

and I will lead him,⁷⁴ and I will have complete compassions⁷⁵ for him and for his

⁷¹(...continued)

Oswalt comments that “It is certainly a theological tenet [main principle of belief] of this **book** that the announcement of the word of God will produce hardening of heart, not repentance (6:9-10).” (P. 490)

⁷²Slotki comments that what God had seen was “either his [Israel’s] sufferings or his penitence.” (P. 281) We think it much more likely that the text means “Israel’s back-sliding ways,” Israel’s terrifying sinfulness in spite of having been delivered from Babylonian captivity. What do you think?

⁷³This phrase, “I will heal him,” is repeated at the end of **verse 19**.

Knight comments that “Just because Israel’s spirit is weak...in My presence says God, I seize the opportunity to show him grace! ‘I have seen his ways’; just because of that, ‘I will heal him’ and comfort him. So God is the Good Physician in a manner and to a degree unknown outside the Scriptures. For God uses our sins as occasions for the outpouring of His grace...The Hebrew...means ‘But I will fill him full with comfort’—I will pay him back with love!” (Pp. 18-19)

⁷⁴Oswalt notes that the Greek and Syriac translations “have apparently read...‘I will comfort him,’ for the Masoretic Text’s...‘I will lead’...A different vocalization yields...‘I will give him rest.’” (P. 485)

⁷⁵What is YHWH’s nature? This text answers, He is the Healer, the Leader, the God of compassions for His terribly sinful people! That’s the kind of God sinful humanity can gladly serve!

We would say that **chapter 57** of **Isaiah** presents the darkest picture of Israel’s morality that could possibly be found. Yet in this same chapter is found these marvelously intriguing pictures of Divine grace—healing, leadership, compassion offered to sexually immoral, sinful Israel of the returned exiles.

We remember the equally dark picture of Jerusalem painted in **Ezekiel 16**, where Jerusalem is depicted as YHWH’s adopted daughter and wife who has become a prostitute --who pays her male lovers to come to her, and who therefore deserves the death sentence for her crimes—death by strangling, burning, and by sword. But in spite of that situation, **Ezekiel 16** depicts YHWH’s decision not to execute the deserved punishment, but rather, to remarry His wife who has so terribly gone astray, forming a “new covenant” of marriage with her, restoring her fortune—just as He promises to do for

(continued...)

⁷⁵(...continued)

Jerusalem's sister-cities, Samaria and Sodom!

We have called that chapter “the triumph of grace in the theology of **Ezekiel**,” and in that light, should likewise call **Isaiah 57** “the triumph of grace in **Third-Isaiah**”! Although in the past He has hidden Himself from them, now, instead of separating Himself from His people because of their failure, He comes to be with them, offering them His healing, guidance, and compassion. Compare with this promise of undeserved forgiveness:

Isaiah 43:25,

I, I (am) He Who wipes out your transgressions, for My sake,
and your sins I will not remember!

Isaiah 48:9,

For the sake of My name, I will prolong / defer My anger
and (for the sake of) My praise I will restrain (My anger) for you,
so as not to cause your cutting off.

⁷⁶Oswalt comments on **verse 18**, beginning with a question: “What then is God to do?...If God is not to be angry forever, what is He to do? He cannot wait for the people to be reconciled to Him. Somehow He must reconcile Himself to them. In fact, that is just what He has announced He will do through the ministry of the servant (compare **2 Corinthians 5:18-19**). So then, He can declare that having seen their sinful ways, He will take steps to heal them. They are helpless to heal themselves; they are wandering in thick darkness, looking to mediums and wizards, and the only hope is for God to break through with His Own light (compare **Isaiah 8:19-23**^{Heb} / **19:9:1**^{Eng})...”

“In the context here, the prophet addresses those who think they are guaranteed a place in God’s economy because of their birthright, but find themselves unable to live the righteousness that such a birthright calls for. God has seen their ways and He will come in His grace to empower them for that kind of living. The offer of grace is more likely to motivate sinners to turn to God, providing they know their need, than the threat of destruction, and God makes just such an offer. To those who have been crushed by their sin and its effects, whose spirits are broken, the God Who dwells with them offers healing without condition, and comfort without repayment. What a motive to turn to Him! Of course, the arrogant and the proud will have no need of God’s healing, leadership, and strengthening. This is why the verse ends with the explicative *and to his mourners*. God will restore comfort to those in Israel who are crushed and broken for their own sins and those of the nation (compare **61:2-3**; **66:10**). Any other need expect nothing but trouble.” (P. 490)

Again, Oswalt is reading Christian theological ideas into the text instead of saying what the text itself says. The text promises God’s action on behalf of the terribly

(continued...)

⁷⁶(...continued)

sinful returned exiles—He promises healing, leading, and compassions to them—not some six centuries later as a result of the coming of Jesus Christ. In fact, the text says nothing about the suffering servant, or about “in the distant future.” Just as YHWH had forgiven Isaiah’s iniquity, He had already declared Israel’s iniquity pardoned (**Isaiah 6:7; 40:2**). Such forgiveness and healing had been experienced again and again by Israel, just as King David had found (**Psalms 51**, apart from any animal sacrifices [**verses 16-17**], and just as **Psalms 103** so powerfully proclaims concerning what God constantly does (active participles) for His people. To make all of this something that will only happen centuries later is to do an injustice to the **Hebrew Bible!**

Of course, as Paul affirms in **2 Corinthians 5:18**, this reconciling love was active in Jesus Christ—but it didn’t begin with Him. Such healing, leading, compassionate love for sinners has always been YHWH’s character! What do you think?

⁷⁷Oswalt comments on **verse 19** that “The grammar of this verse is difficult...[with its] subjectless participle in the first phrase...and the verb that hangs at the end of the verse...The sense of the first phrase is very obscure. What is *the fruit of the lips...?*” (P. 491)

His solution to these difficulties is to read the first clause as “a continuation of the thought of **verse 18**,” and to take *the fruit of the lips* to mean “the praise and rejoicing that springs from the lips of the redeemed people...God creates the fruit, and the worshipers gladly offer it to the Lord...”

“Peace, peace comes as a ringing proclamation of God’s reconciliation to a sinful world. He is no longer divided from His children whether they are near at hand or far away...That being so, He promises to heal all who will come to Him for that benefit...As Paul understood, that promise is realized through the work of Christ, the servant (**Ephesians 2:17**). Through Christ’s sacrifice God is at peace with the world, and through the proclamation of the message of Christ, God declares that peace to everyone.” (*ibid.*)

According to this interpretation, prior to the coming and sacrifice of Christ, God was at war with the world, and there was no peace, no Divine leading, no Divine healing, no Divine compassion—a denial of so much of the teaching of the **Hebrew Bible!** Read **Psalms 23**, and see if this was truly the case in Israel before the coming of Christ.

We are well aware of Paul’s teaching that Jesus came and proclaimed peace—as well as brought wonderful guidance, healing, and compassion to the world. But His entire ministry was an embodiment of what the **Hebrew Bible** proclaims as God’s work on behalf of humanity throughout the ages.

(continued...)

שְׁלוֹם וְשָׁלוֹם לְרַחוּק וְלִקְרוֹב אָמַר יְהוָה

וְרִפְּאֵתֵיּוֹ:

creating fruit of lips—

Peace, peace for the (ones) far away and for the (ones) near,⁷⁸ said YHWH,

⁷⁷(...continued)

The knowledge of God and Christ has brought deep spiritual peace to sinners with contrite hearts throughout the ages; God has given guidance and healing and compassionate love to those who don't deserve it, but who turn to Him throughout the ages.

But those who point to the wars and divisions etc. that plagued Israel throughout its history, claiming that peace came with Christ, need to examine the history of Christianity, with its constant religious wars and endless divisions. Eternal, unbroken, worldwide peace has eluded God's people both before and after the coming of Christ. It has always been the dream and the hope of believers, but one that has failed to be achieved. Out of that failure has come eschatology, with its apocalyptic visions of a world at peace, which acknowledges both Israel's and Christianity's failure to achieve such peace.

But such failure has not stopped the fact that those who genuinely and deeply relate their lives to God and to Christ find a "peace that passes understanding," as both the **Hebrew Bible** (**Psalm 23**, etc.) and the **New Testament** affirm. What do you think?

⁷⁸Who do you think is meant by "the (ones) far away and the (ones) near"? Slotki says this means the exiles who have already arrived in Israel, and those exiles who are "still on the way." (P. 282) Compare:

Isaiah 43:5-7,

- 5 You shall not be afraid, because I (am) with you!
From (the) east I will bring your descendant(s); and from (the) west I will
gather you!
- 6 I will say to the north, Give!
And to (the) south, You shall not withhold!
Bring My sons from afar,
and My daughters from the earth's extremity!
- 7 Every one, the one called by My name, and for / by My glory--
I created him, I formed him, also I made him!

Isaiah 49:12,

(continued...)

And I will heal him!⁷⁹

⁷⁸(...continued)

Look—these will come from afar;
and look—these from north and from west;
and these from (the) land of (the) Chinese (!)?

Occurring as it does in **Third-Isaiah**, can it instead mean the Israelites and the far away nations of the earth? Ortlund claims that the phrase “includes both Jews and Gentiles,” referring to the **New Testament** passage **Ephesians 2:11-22**, which we think is dependent on **Isaiah 57:19** in **verse 17**.

Knight comments that “In Paul’s day Jews could enter the inner court of the temple, but all others had to stay outside. Thus at **Ephesians 2:13** Paul employs these words of Trito-Isaiah to speak to his own generation, when he sees the ‘near,’ the Jewish people, and the ‘far,’ the Gentiles, all assembling together in the inner court.” (Pp. 20-21)

⁷⁹Achtemeier comments on **verses 17-19** that Yahweh’s anger “was but for a moment (compare **54:7-8**) against the Judeans, because of their oppression of their fellows (‘unjust gain,’ compare **56:11; Jeremiah 6:13**) and their continual disobedience, born of their faithless hearts (compare **verse 11; Jeremiah 3:14, 22; 31:22; 49:4**—all of which use the same terminology in the Hebrew). None of their faithlessness has been hidden from Yahweh; He has seen their ways (**verse 17d**; compare **56:11; 57:10, 12**)...

“Nevertheless—always the **Bible** has that stunning reversal of what we deserve—Yahweh will heal Judah (compare **57:8c; 19:22; 30:26; 53:5; Jeremiah 3:22**) and guide him and repay his faithlessness with the comfort originally announced by **Second Isaiah (40:1; compare 57:5, 6)**. Those who now mourn shall be comforted (**verse 19**); once again we find a passage from which Jesus drew in His beatitudes (**Matthew 5:4**). Despite all past sin, Yahweh will come to the humble in heart in forgiveness, pronouncing His peace and fullness of life upon them (**verse 19cd**; compare **Isaiah 26:12; 32:17**.” (Pp. 49-50)

Knight likewise comments that “Deutero-Isaiah had repeatedly called God the Creator, employing the active participle of the verb to do so, thus meaning ‘the Creating One.’ But here God’s act is one specifically of *re*-creating: ‘For those who are at present filled, not with comfort, but with self-loathing I will create ‘fruit for their lips’—that is, ‘I will give them words to speak constructively to their neighbors, words that will produce in others integrity of mind and heart’...

“Their theme will be *shalom, shalom* [*peace, peace*], both to those now in Jerusalem (‘the near’) and to those not yet returned from Babylon (‘the far’), and in this way ‘I will heal them.’ Heal whom? The answer must be those who speak [righteousness], words of creative love. In fact, Trito-Isaiah is saying virtually ‘Blessed are those who

(continued...)

⁷⁹(...continued)

mourn, for they shall be comforted, even as I give them the words with which they may comfort others, and so, in this way, heal them in their turn.'

בְּרָא ('create') and *shalom* ('peace') are both terms that accompany God's purpose of redemption in and through His covenant people. We have asked the question, with Trito-Isaiah, 'Can this be the New Israel?' Now we see that the answer can only be 'yes.' It was, in fact, this generation that was now back in Jerusalem simply because it was forgiven and renewed Israel; 'Because of his iniquity...I will heal him.' What a great expression of the good news of God this is, one that must be true forever, simply because God is the same forever...Redemption is in fact another term for re-creation...

"Shalom is the end-product of God's creative activity. The root of the noun implies fulness (compare **verse 18**), wholeness, completion, in a general sense. But insofar as human beings can understand the word, it speaks of deep satisfaction, of warm and loving cooperation between family and family, nation and nation, and the harmonious functioning of all aspects of the natural world...

"The 'fruit of the lips' therefore is the expression in words, from the mouth of a renewed personality [see the story of King Hezekiah's healing and his song in **Isaiah 36-39**, especially **38:1-8**], of the shalom which the latter has received and is now seeking to extend to his neighbor." (Pp. 19-20)

⁸⁰Oswalt comments on **verses 20-21**: "But that peace is not a matter of birthright or election. God is at peace with His people [we ask, How so, if the peace is only to come through the Messiah, centuries later?], but are His people at peace with Him? God has declared that He will heal His people, but do His people wish to be healed?..."

"But unless we exercise the right to choice and choose to be reconciled and made righteous, God can do nothing more. Thus there is no peace for the wicked [compare **Isaiah 48:22**]...If persons have experienced the unmerited grace of God as mediated through the Savior, and then expect to live lives dominated by greed (**verse 17**) and self-will, propitiating God from time to time with religious behavior, they will not find peace, but constant upheaval. Their lives will be like the driven sea...The sea is unable to be still. So it is with us humans who choose our ways over God's. Stillness is not in us, and we cannot produce it no matter how hard we try. Peace is only to be found when we give ourselves away to the will and ways of the One Who is beyond change." (Pp. 491-92)

This is a pious comment by a scholar who believes in the Divine inspiration of every word in the **Bible**, a comment that evidently applies this 6th century B.C.E. passage to people centuries away, when the Savior, Jesus Christ has come, and which has no present meaning for those to whom it was originally spoken / written. The comment also begs the question, when speaking of "the One Who is beyond change," Does not

(continued...)

כִּי הַשְׁקֵט לֹא יוֹכֵל

וַיִּגְרְשׁוּ מִיָּמִיו רֶפֶשׁ וְטִיט:

And the wicked people (are) like the driven sea,
because it is not able to be quiet.⁸¹

And its waters cast out mire and mud!

57:21 אֵין שְׁלוֹם אָמַר אֱלֹהֵי לְרָשָׁעִים:

There is no peace, said My God, for wicked people!⁸²

⁸⁰(...continued)

the **Bible** depict God as changing—at one time a Divine Warrior, committing genocide against the world of Noah’s day, and against the Canaanites in Palestine, and then at another time as the Bringer of Peace? Does it not on occasion depict God as “repenting,” for example in **Genesis 6:6**?

We say, the passage proclaims peace to returned exiles from Babylon, if they will only commit themselves into the care of YHWH God, Who will give them spiritual peace in the midst of their confusing, hectic world, long before the coming of the Messiah. It also affirms that there will be no peace for people who choose wickedness, instead of trust in God. What do you think the passage means?

⁸¹The assumption of Third Isaiah, just as it was the assumption of Second Isaiah, is that those promised forgiveness and renewal are those who respond positively to the good news—who repent—turning away from wickedness, to seek YHWH with humble hearts. As Third Isaiah says, “The wicked people are like the driven sea—not able to be quiet!” And then, repeating the words of Second Isaiah (**48:22**), in **verse 21** says “There is no peace for wicked people.”

⁸²Achtemeier comments on **verses 20-21** that “Yahweh’s offer of mercy to the sinful is not an offer of cheap or automatic grace, however...Yahweh will not come to the proud. He will not dwell with those who will not open their hearts to His saving presence. He will be Lord over us, or He will not be with us and for us at all. And apart from Him, there can be no ‘peace’...Apart from God, there is only restlessness, and the mire and mud of daily existence.” (P. 50)

Third-Isaiah wants the hearer / reader to know that the message of peace—of hope and forgiveness--applies only to those who humble themselves before God. Don’t ever kid yourself that because God is a God of love, you are exempt from obedience to His command for genuine righteousness of life, the kind of life that will be depicted in **chapter 58!**