

Isaiah 58, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

58:1¹ קָרָא בְּגֵרוֹן

¹Slotki summarizes **chapter 58** as: “The futility of prayer and fasting without amendment [of life], and the supreme importance of moral and religious conduct.” (P. 282)

Achtemeier states that “The occasion for this oracle [**58:1-14**, the entire chapter] is a day of fasting and lamentation, when the entire community is engaged in prayers of repentance and pleading, and in the ritual exercises of wearing sackcloth, bowing down in the dust, marking their foreheads with ashes, crying out for Yahweh’s mercy, and beating their breasts in gestures of mourning...

“These were standard practices, carried out whenever the community or an individual faced some crisis (compare **Joshua 7:6**; **Judges 20:26**; **1 Samuel 7:6**; **1 Kings 21:27**; **Psalms 35:13-14**; for the laws of fasts, see **Leviticus 16:29-34**; **23:27-32**; **Numbers 29:7-11**)...probably one of the four fast days mentioned in **Zechariah 7:3** and **8:19** that commemorated the siege, capture, and fall of Jerusalem, and the murder of the governor, Gedaliah. At any rate, Yahweh seizes the opportunity to send His prophets with their message of both judgment and salvation to the community as a whole, in order to apply **Third-Isaiah’s** message also to the ritual practices of lamentation.” (P. 53)

Motyer comments on the overall nature of **Isaiah 58** that “Theologically and practically, **chapter 58** belongs with **1:10-20**. The two passages are the same in content, emphasis and movement. In both, it is the unholy alliance between religious punctiliousness and personal shortcoming that is condemned and, in particular, the assumption that it is possible to be truly religious and socially indifferent. [The scholar] Smart puts it exactly: ‘One of the unique features of the biblical faith is that there is no genuine relation with God that is not at the same time a relation with the brother.’ (J. D. Smart, **History and Theology in Second Isaiah**, p. 247)” (P. 478)

We say there is a relationship between **chapters 1** and **58** of **Isaiah**, but do not agree at all that they are “the same in content, emphasis and movement.” What do you think?

Oswalt entitles **verses 1-14** of **chapter 58** “God’s Pleasure Instead of Yours,” and comments that the section “is reminiscent of **1:10-20** as it speaks of the folly of formal religion that does not make a difference in human relationships, especially as it relates to the matters of acquisition and pride (compare **57:15, 17**). In **chapter 1**, however, the note is one of threat (if you do not obey, destruction will come), while here the note is one of promise (if you do obey, blessing will come.” (Pp. 493-94)

However, we must not overlook the positive nature of **chapter 1**—as it offers full forgiveness to Israel if the people are obedient—it is not simply one of threat.

Oswalt comments on **verses 1-5** that “Like **56:1-8** [these verses] speak of a religion that is superficial and not of the heart. Persons who practice it assume that they are the people of God because of their position and heritage. But the implications of the religion have not been allowed
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to extend to the way they treat other people, especially people who do not have the same power they have. The issue for those who have received the grace of God, says the prophet, is to allow that grace to flow out of the worshipers onto everyone around. This is the meaning of being in covenant with God (**56:4, 6**), not whether one performs certain rituals correctly...

“Although the people think their behavior should win them special favor with God, its real purpose is to gain ground in the dog-eat-dog struggle for power, position, and possessions. Why did God institute the forms of religion? As ends in themselves? No, but as symbols of an attitude of submission, surrender, and trust that will manifest itself in changed behavior. Without that attitude as evidenced by the behavior, the forms are sources not of Divine pleasure but of Divine disgust (**verse 5**; compare **1:14-15**).” (Pp. 494-95)

Knight entitles **chapter 58** “True Religion,” reminding us of the statement in **Jacob (“James”) 1:27**,

Pure / clean and undefiled religion / worship with the God and Father is this:
to visit (with help) orphans and widows in their affliction / tribulation,
to keep oneself spotless from the world.
(The last line could be considered a statement of a devout Pharisee;
the second line could be attributed to Third Isaiah!)

Knight comments that “**Chapter 58** contains a timeless sermon. It is such because it is the word of God to our author, as it were, and God’s word does not change. Yet it was spoken to a particular situation, and to a particular group of self-righteous people amongst the returned exiles who must have been a thorn in Trito-Isaiah’s flesh. This was because they believed themselves to be ‘holier’ than the ordinary folk and so would take it for granted that they were the leaders of this, a ‘religious’ community within the People of God...

“Although this ‘word of the Lord’ here has been available in written form to all later generations, many ‘righteous’ leaders of the People of God seem to have been unimpressed by it. For example there was the high priest Jason (**2 Maccabees 4:25**) who possessed ‘no qualification for the priesthood, but having the hot temper of a cruel tyrant and the rage of a savage wild beast’—not to speak of various popes and inquisitors in later medieval Europe [see **Isaiah 56:9-12**].” (P. 22)

Slotki comments on **verses 1-2** that they contain “God’s call to the prophet.” (P. 282)

But the prophet is not named; and while we are inclined to think of one particular prophet who received this command, it may just as well be intended for anyone who was listening for God’s voice.

What do you think? If you take this commandment seriously, and you want to speak for God, should you make this your message?

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אֶל-תְּחַשֵּׁךְ

כְּשׁוֹפֵר תְּרַם קוֹלְךָ

וְהִגַּד לְעַמִּי פִשְׁעֵם

וּלְבַיִת יַעֲקֹב חַטָּאתָם:

Cry out with loud voice--²

¹(...continued)

For my part, I think the message of **Isaiah 58** is a valid, compelling message for every humble, contrite believer in God to take up, and make their own, announcing it to everyone they possibly can. What a difference it would have made if Israel had made this message its own, living by it, and proclaiming it to all the world! What a difference it would have made if Christianity had done the same. But Judaism, under the influence of **Ezekiel / Ezra / Nehemiah** and company, turned to building walls separating themselves from their “unclean” neighbors; and Christianity, after selling its soul to Rome, to a large extent followed suit, building massive cathedrals and centers of hierarchical power, taking up the sword against dissidents, rather than practicing this kind of righteousness (although having said this, we recognize with great thankfulness the deep social concern and services which have characterized the Roman Catholic Church, even though it has led in the Spanish Inquisition and Crusades).

Reading through Alexander’s commentary on **chapter 58**, we conclude that his interpretation reveals his “ivory-tower’ background and inability to feel deeply the dynamic social message it contains. However, he wrote at a time when the social message of the **Bible** was rarely emphasized.

²Literally, “with throat.” The parallel phrase that follows is “lift up your voice like a ram’s horn trumpet!” The Greek translation is “cry aloud with strength!” The Divine message is not to be whispered, or only barely uttered—it is to be proclaimed loudly, with all the power the spokesperson

can muster! There is nothing to be ashamed of in the Divine Word! It is a word that can save and transform those who hear and obey it!

Alexander comments that “the Prophet, after a brief pause, recommences his discourse precisely at the point where he suspended it. The object of address is the Prophet himself, as expressed in the (Aramaic) Targum [which begins with the word **נְבִיא**, ‘the prophet.’” (P. 354) That is, the prophet is speaking directly to himself. We think it more probable that the Speaker intended is YHWH.

Alexander adds that “The loudness of the call is intended to suggest the importance of the subject, and perhaps the insensibility of those to be convinced. The Prophet here seems to turn
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you shall not be silent!³

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away from avowed apostates to hypocritical professors of the truth.” (P. 354) Instead of the Hebrew text’s בְּגֵרוֹן, literally “with throat,” **Rahlfs** translates by ἐν ἰσχύι, “with strength.”

³The Greek translation is καὶ μὴ φείσῃ “and do not spare / and do not refrain!” Slotki thinks this means “Do not spare the throat or the voice.” Perhaps—but we take it to mean proclaim the message to everyone—don’t make exceptions, don’t be silent when it may seem expedient to say nothing in the midst of those whom the message will offend. This is God’s message, and it must be spoken boldly and clearly, to all the people!

The role of God’s spokesperson is to deliver the Divine Word to the people. The spokesperson is not responsible for what the people do in response to the message—but he is responsible for seeing to it that the people hear the message. To be silent when YHWH God is speaking to His people is a terrible betrayal of responsibility. Compare **Ezekiel 33**, where Ezekiel is compared to a watchman standing on the walls of Israel, who sees the sword coming against Israel. It is his responsibility to sound the ram’s horn warning—if he fails to deliver the message of danger, he will be held responsible for the blood of his people who die. But if he sounds the warning, he will not be held responsible—even if the people refuse to take his warning.

As Achtemeier observes, here “a prophet is given Yahweh’s commission to be a watchman for the community, a function indicated by the combination of the words, ‘cry out’ and ‘ram’s horn,’ i.e., ‘trumpet’ (compare **Isaiah 18:3**; **Jeremiah 4:5**; **Ezekiel 33:1-9**; **Hosea 8:1**)...This is a deliberate contrast with the failure of the watchmen in **56:10**.” (Pp. 53-54)

Oswalt states that “The extreme seriousness of the situation is borne out by the nature of the commands of God to the prophet. He is not to speak calmly and quietly about the situation, nor is he to speak to people privately. Rather, he is to shout at the top of his voice (literally ‘with the throat’).” (P. 495)

This has always been the role of those who are called to speak for God to their world. They are not held responsible for how people react to their message—but they are held responsible for making that message known, for enabling the people of God to hear the Divine warning. “Son of a human, I have made you a watchman for the House of Israel; so hear the word I speak and give them warning from Me. When I say to the wicked, ‘O wicked man, you will surely die,’ and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself.” (**Ezekiel 33:7-10**)

The same principle holds true in the Church of the twenty-first century. The spokespersons for God—the ones called by God to proclaim the Divine Word—are responsible for speaking the Divine message as effectively as possible. It is all-important for their calling that the message be gotten out to the people. But what the people do with that message is not their responsibility. If they fail to speak the Divine warning, loudly and clearly, the spokespersons will

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Like the ram's horn trumpet, raise your voice high!⁴

And declare to My people their rebellion,⁵

³(...continued)

be held responsible. But if they speak that message honestly and understandably—then what the people do with it is their concern and responsibility—not the spokespersons'!

⁴In time of war, the leaders of Israel's armies called their people into battle with the blast from a ram's horn trumpet, which was sometimes two feet in length, and which, when properly blown, could give a loud blast much like a modern fire-alarm. The spokesperson is not to be timid, or tentative in his announcement—since life and death issues are at stake, and the spokesperson must cry out like a sentry who sees danger coming, or who has been given orders by the Commander to sound the alarm!

Contrast with this demand the statement of **Isaiah 56:10** that “Israel's sentinels are...all silent dogs that cannot bark...”

We are reminded of the sounding of the ram's horn at Mount Sinai when Israel was called together to hear the commandments of their Savior YHWH (**Exodus 19:16, 19; 20:18**). Compare the similar call to speak for YHWH found at **Hosea 8:1**, “Put the trumpet to your lips!”

It is easy to be cynical about this whole matter, responding to the modern proclaimer of the Divine warning, “Who made *you* a spokesperson? What makes you think you have a Divine Word to speak to *us*? You're just trying to put us on a guilt-trip—we don't have to listen to you!” But this has always been true.

Is there no Divine Word for the church in our time? Does God no longer call people to speak His message? And if we confess that God still speaks to us through those He has called, then do we dare to reject that message with cynical responses, rather than with humility and repentance?

⁵The word is פִּשְׁעָם, **pish(am)**, “their transgression” or “their rebellion.” It implies that the Divine prohibition or guide-line has been “crossed-over.” Compare the very similar statement in **Micah 3:8**, “I am filled with power—with the Spirit of the LORD—and with justice and courage to make known to Jacob his rebellious act, even to Israel his sin.” (**New American Standard**)

Where our Hebrew text has this singular noun, our Greek translation has the plural noun in the phrase τὰ ἁμαρτήματα αὐτῶν, “the sins of theirs.” The other ancient translations also have plural nouns rather than the singular.

As you study this passage, ask yourself concerning your religious community—is it guilty of rebellion against this message?

In the context of the returning exiles from Babylon, when they began to build walls between themselves and their neighbors, declaring themselves clean and their neighbors “unclean”; and

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and to Jacob's house,⁶ their missing-of-the-mark!⁷

58:2⁸ וְאוֹתֵי יוֹם יוֹם יִדְרָשׁוּן

וְדַעַת דְּרָכֵי יַחֲפָצוּן

כְּגוֹי אֲשֶׁר-צָדְקָה עָשָׂה

⁵(...continued)

when they began splitting up families, insisting that half-breed or foreign wives should be divorced—sent away, was that not rebellion against the message of this chapter?

And today, when our religious community refuses to reach out in loving service to its neighbors, especially to those of a different race, or language, or national background, is it not in rebellion against this word of God? During the twentieth century, we have witnessed many religious communities in the inner cities of America closing their doors and moving out into the suburbs—is that not rebellion against this word of God?

⁶Who does the spokesperson mean by “Jacob’s House”? Think back to Israel’s first founders—to Abraham, and his son Isaac, and then to Isaac’s second son, Jacob (whose name was later changed to “Israel”). Jacob’s twelve sons became the “twelve tribes of Israel.” The “House of Jacob,” then, means the nation of Israel, the Jewish people, all the descendants of Jacob.

⁷The noun used here, **חַטָּאתָם**, **chatto)tham**, means literally “their missings-of-the-mark,” just as when an archer misses the target at which he has aimed his arrow, or the sling-thrower misses the object at which he is throwing his stone. God gives His people their “goal,” their “target” in life—the main goal is that of loving God and loving one another. But His people go off in all other directions—not loving God, and not loving each other. That is why they are said to have “missed-the-mark”!

When God speaks to us through His spokespersons, telling us that we have “rebelled” or “transgressed” or “missed-the-mark,” it is not because God hates us, or because His spokespersons want to “put us on a guilt-trip.” It is because God loves us, and doesn’t want us to destroy our opportunity to do His will and fulfill His purpose for our lives!

⁸Achtemeier comments on **verses 2-3b** that here “Yahweh...describes the situation of the people: they are an exceedingly religious people...(But...) they imagine that if they simply go through the ritual practices of fasting, Yahweh will take notice of them and come to be with them; and they cannot understand why this has not been so (compare **Malachi 3:14**).” (P. 54)

Slotki sums up **verse 2** by stating “The people’s worship is formal and insincere.” (P. 283) Yes, but rather than saying so bluntly, **verse 2** is spoken, we think, cynically. It describes how the people think of themselves—a people who are truly righteous, who want to be obedient to God, even though, as the chapter will go on to point out, this is not the case at all! Instead, they are in rebellion against the Divine will!

וּמִשְׁפֵּט אֱלֹהֵי לֹא עֹזֵב
יִשְׁאַלֵנִי מִשְׁפָּטֵי-צְדָקָה
קִרְבַּת אֱלֹהִים יִחְפְּצוּן:

And⁹ it is Me day by day Whom they are seeking,¹⁰

⁹Oswalt translates the conjunction וְ, “and,” as a “disjunctive conjunction,” “Yet.” We think this is entirely possible, but note that it is a quite subjective matter to decide whether the ordinarily coordinating conjunction should be understood as “disjunctive.”

¹⁰The verb דָּרַשׁ, **dharash** means “resort to,” or “seek.” Here the imperfect form of the verb is used, יִדְרֹשׁוּן, **yidhroshun**, literally “they will seek,” but we think that the imperfect is meant in a “frequentative” sense, referring to something they do, over and over. That this is the correct understanding is confirmed by the Greek translation which uses the present tense, ζητοῦσιν, **zetousin**, “they are seeking.” The statement means that the House of Jacob acts like it is daily seeking YHWH God in prayer and worship, eager to know His will. At least, this is what it would seem, from outward appearances. As the chapter develops, however, it becomes clear that this statement is meant ironically, or cynically. The House of Jacob is not really seeking YHWH God, or His will—it is their own will and ways that they want to rationalize and justify—not YHWH God’s!

Motyer comments that though the people’s “...religious practice appears sound...there is that about it which, properly evaluated, is really the rebellion and sin with which **verse 1** charges them.” (P. 479)

Oswalt asks, “Who are these ‘rebels’ and ‘sinners’? They are people who seek God every day! ...These are persons who are very serious about their religion. They have heard the admonitions of **55:5-9** to seek the Lord and His ways...”

“They look much like a nation that did righteousness and did not forsake the justice of its God. But *like* is the key word. To be like such a nation and to be such a nation are not the same thing...”

“But how is it possible to desire, or delight in, God’s ways and yet forsake God’s justice? The clearest illustration of this contradiction is to be found in the Pharisees, who tithed even the spices in their cupboards and yet had no qualms about putting a widow who could not pay her debts on the street (**Matthew 23:23; Luke 20:47**). The law says something about tithing, but it does not say anything about mercy toward a debtor.” (P. 496)

Yes, but more in the context of the returnees from Babylon, is the contradiction to be found in the followers of Ezekiel / Ezra / Nehemiah who are building walls of segregation and divorcing
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and in knowledge of My ways¹¹ they take delight—¹²

¹⁰(...continued)

their wives, refusing to acknowledge them and their children as their own flesh and blood, claiming that only the descendants of Tsadoq have a right to lead in Israel's worship, not the lesser Levites, certainly not people with physical deformities, or foreigners and their children!

And in a later context, what about the modern religious communities that appeal to upwardly mobil classes of people, and have little to do with the poorer classes?

¹¹Here again it quickly becomes obvious in this passage that these words are meant ironically, or cynically. The House of Jacob gives all kinds of external indications that it takes great pleasure and finds its delight in the knowledge of YHWH God's "ways." That is, the people act as if they want to know YHWH God and His ways. They come to the temple, they read the sacred writings, they give lip-service to God's laws. But deep in their hearts it is their own ways that they truly take pleasure in, and find delight in. They do not come to worship in order to change their own desires and ways, but only in order to justify and sanctify what they like, and what they want to do!

What do you think? Do you think this same charge can be made for many worshipers today?

I grew up with a Jewish neighbor, and he and his family were regular worshipers in the synagogue every Friday night, and then strictly observed the 7th day Sabbath. When I decided to go into the ministry, my Jewish neighbor gave a banquet in my honor—and much to my chagrin at the banquet, he stood up to give me a speech, telling me that I was a fool to give up my father's business and go to Christian College to become a minister—since there is no heaven or hell.

I told him how surprised I was at that, and asked him why he always attended synagogue. His response was, "There's more than one reason to go to synagogue!" What he meant was that he attended synagogue for business purposes, not for any real belief in God.

How many of us Christians are just like that neighbor of mine, whose son eventually took over my father's business? Why do we come to worship? To change our desires, to try and get our lives in line with Divine purposes? Or is our religious talk simply that—talk, with no repentance, with no desire to change our goals and attitudes?

¹²The verb יִפְצְצוּן, **yechpatsun** means literally "they will take delight in," or "they will have pleasure in." Here again, we are taking this imperfect verb in a "frequentative" sense, as that which they continually do.

Those who engage in graduate religious education quickly learn that there are many people who love to study the **Bible**, and religious literature, and get advanced degrees in religion, but who at the same time rarely or never pray, not attempting to attend or help build a local church—who, while being intellectually curious about religion, want to pursue a career of teaching religion in some seminary, but who are in fact irreligious.

(continued...)

like a nation¹³ that practiced righteousness,¹⁴
and the justice¹⁵ of its God did not forsake!
They call upon Me (for) judgments of righteousness—¹⁶

¹²(...continued)

One of my classmates at Duke University, upon graduation with the PhD in religion, sold his collection of religious books. I went to him, asking him what he was doing. He said he never wanted to see those books again—and I obliged him by purchasing a number of the excellent biblical commentaries he was getting rid of. Another of those classmates, a member of my denomination, never attended church while in the graduate program, while I myself was serving full-time at First Christian Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina, a congregation deeply involved in racial integration and programs for social justice.. I asked him why this was, and he replied that he simply didn't have time for church. Then upon graduation, he wrote and published a text-book on teaching the **Bible** in the local church!

¹³Alexander comments that “the words like a nation, etc., are descriptive not of a simulated piety, but of a self-righteous belief that by their outward services they had acquired a meritorious claim to the Divine interposition in their favor.” (P. 355)

¹⁴This key-word for biblical ethics, צְדָקָה, **tsedhaqah**, “righteousness,” always involves relationships—it means the fulfillment of what is required in relationships—whether with God, or with other human beings. There simply can be no society that is pleasing to God without righteousness! We believe **chapter 58** should be the basic biblical text for this matter of “righteousness.”

¹⁵This is another key-word for biblical ethics, מִשְׁפָּט, **mishpat**, which is in fact somewhat ambiguous, and can mean either “judgment” or, “justice,” or “right.” For the **Bible**, no society can be pleasing in God's sight unless it is characterized by genuine *justice*, by what is right and true, not simply according to its own think-so's, but according to the will, the judgment of God!

This statement has been taken to mean “the just commandment or requirement of its God.” It is true that the commandments of YHWH to Israel are called מִשְׁפָּטִים, “judgments,” or “judicial decisions.” But this is not the most probable meaning of the phrase.

It is better to take it to mean “YHWH's justice,” the kind of saving, delivering justice that YHWH gives to widows and orphans, and to the poor of the earth. YHWH's actions and attitudes are to be *the* standard for his people's attitudes and actions. If YHWH loves, and practices מִשְׁפָּט, then those who love and serve him must be likewise dedicated to מִשְׁפָּט, **mishpat!**

¹⁶Here the two words just referred to are used together in combination: מִשְׁפָּטֵי-צְדָקָה, “judgments of right relationship,” or “justice of righteousness.” We are to think of Israel's worship services in the temple in Jerusalem—wherein YHWH God is called upon in prayer and praise, with the request to impart to Israel “judgment / judicial decisions / justice of righteousness.” See:

(continued...)

in drawing near to God¹⁷ they take delight!¹⁸

¹⁶(...continued)

Deuteronomy 4:8, what other nation is so great as to have such **מִשְׁפָּטִים צְדִיקִים**, “judgments / judicial decisions of righteousness as Moses is setting forth for Israel?”;

Deuteronomy 16:18, Israel is to appoint judges and officials in every town who will judge the people with **מִשְׁפָּט־צֶדֶק**, judgment / judicial-decision(s) of righteousness;

Isaiah 1:21, once Jerusalem was full of **מִשְׁפָּט־צֶדֶק**, judgment / judicial decision(s) of right relationship, but now is full of murderers!;

Psalms 119:7, I will praise You with uprightness of heart, as I learn **מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדִיקֶךָ**, judgments / judicial-decisions of Your righteousness;

Psalms 119:62, at mid-night I will arise to confess to You concerning **מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדִיקֶךָ**, judgments / judicial-decisions of Your righteousness;

Psalms 119:106, I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to keep **מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדִיקֶךָ**, judgments / judicial-decisions of Your righteousness;

Psalms 119:121, **עָשִׂיתִי מִשְׁפָּט וצֶדֶק**, I did / worked justice and righteousness;

Psalms 119:160, the head / sum of Your Word is truth, and to long-lasting time every judgment / judicial decision of Your righteousness;

Psalms 119:164, seven times a day I praised You concerning **מִשְׁפָּטֵי צְדִיקֶךָ**, judgments / judicial-decisions of Your righteousness;

Ecclesiastes 5:7, if you see oppression of the poor, and the violation of **מִשְׁפָּט וצֶדֶק** justice / judicial decision(s) and righteousness.

Here the noun **מִשְׁפָּט**, **mishpat** is used in the plural, and most probably refers to commandments / judicial decisions that embody both justice and righteousness.

Here the people claim that they have been asking for judicial decisions concerning righteousness. In **verses 6-14** YHWH is depicted as answering those requests—showing them in a powerful way what true “righteousness / righteousness” is. It isn’t in separating themselves from their neighbors, especially those most in need, for example, divorced women with their children, and instead of taking care of them, observing rigid legalistic rites—it is only to be found by reaching out to their neighbors, caring for their needs! It is just the opposite of the program being set forth and defended by leaders like **Ezra / Nehemiah** with their demand for divorce from foreign wives and children!

¹⁷Compare **Psalms 73:28**, the only other place in the **Hebrew Bible** where this phrase

קָרַבְתִּי

אֱלֹהִים, “drawing near (to) God,” or “approach (to) God,” occurs: “And I, drawing near (to) God is good; I have made my Lord YHWH my refuge...”

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We are taking the entirety of **verse 2** as being “ironical” or “cynical” in tone. The House of Jacob gives all sorts of external indications that they are seeking YHWH, day in and day out—they say all the right words of worship and praise; they express great delight in learning and knowing YHWH’s “ways.” They claim that they are practicing YHWH’s righteousness, and they lay strong claim to never having forsaken His מִשְׁפָּט, **mishpat**, justice. Loudly, and unashamedly, the House of Jacob calls out to YHWH for “judgments / judicial decisions of righteousness,” and they seemingly take great delight in “drawing near to God”—i.e., in holding worship services in which YHWH God is praised and adored.

But, as we will quickly sense from later statements, the reality is quite the opposite--instead of being YHWH’s loving people, they are a people in rebellion against their God—they have tragically “missed the mark”! That is why the third line of **verse 2** says they are “like a nation” that does these things—like one, but not actually!

¹⁸Compare footnote 151. The same verb occurs here: יִחַפְּצוּן, “they delight in,” “they are pleased with.” See also **verses 3** and **13** (with the noun חֶפֶץ, **chephets**, “delight,” “pleasure”), where the worship of the House of Jacob is criticized on the basis of the “direction” of its desire—it is aimed at and controlled by their own selfish desire, not by YHWH’s desire!

The real question in worship is, “Who is our ‘audience’?” “Who are we seeking to please?” “Whose pleasure is the controlling factor in our worship?” If we are wanting God to hear, and to be pleased with our worship, it will greatly change what we say and do, and the attitude that we have in our worship!

¹⁹Oswalt comments on **verses 3-4** that “Now these religious people present their complaint against God...Their questions give us a sense of how they view their religion and of why it is not bringing either them or God any satisfaction. They are depriving themselves of food in order to get some gain from God, but God is not responding. He has not paid any attention to (seen) or even acknowledged (known) their feats of self-denial. Surely this is not fair!...

“In other words, religious behavior is for the purpose of getting something from God. It is for the purpose of manipulating Him and securing blessings that He would not otherwise give...This diagnosis of the self-serving motives in the people’s religious behavior is confirmed by the Lord’s response, which begins in the second part of **verse 3** and continues in **verse 4**.” (P. 497)

Compare **Malachi 3:14**, which may well be referring to this statement in **Third-Isaiah**:

You said, (It is) emptiness / vanity to serve God!

And, What profit (is it) that we kept / observed His charge?

And that we walked as mourners before YHWH of Armies?

עֲנִינוּ נִפְשָׁנוּ וְלֹא תִרְעַע
 הֵן בַּיּוֹם צִמְּמֶכֶם תִּמְצְאוּ-חֶפְצִיךְ
 וְכֹל-עֲצָבֵיכֶם תִּנְגָּשׁוּ:

Why²⁰ have we abstained from eating,²¹ ¹ and You have not seen?²²

²⁰The line begins with the interrogative לָמָּה, **lammah**, “For what reason?” / “Why?”

Our Greek translation begins the line by interpolating the participle λέγοντες, “saying (Why...?), as also does the Aramaic Targum, אֲמַרִין לָמָּה, “Saying, Why...”

²¹The root of the verb צִמְּמוּ, צוּם, means “abstain from eating” all or certain foods, especially as a religious discipline, “to fast.” In modern times, such abstinence from eating and drinking is sometimes a means of political protest, but more often, it is simply a medical procedure, as we prepare for surgery—but never even think of it as something to be done religiously.

In Israel, going without food became an increasingly important religious duty, beginning before the time of King Saul, and continuing throughout Israel’s history, becoming even more important in post-exilic times, and in Separatist (“Pharisaic”) Judaism, as a religious practice accompanying penitence and prayer. The verb occurs some 21 times in the **Hebrew Bible**. See our end-note 1.

Knight comments that “The concrete situation addressed [by Trito-Isaiah’s sermon] was the calling of a day of fasting and lamentation...Trito-Isaiah is not preaching now to the flagrantly wicked nor to the idolaters amongst the new settlers; rather, he is addressing certain individuals amongst the returned exiles themselves...These people, to use today’s language, rejoiced to declare that they had been ‘saved’; whereas, Trito-Isaiah declares, no person is saved till he loves his neighbor even as God has loved him. The group sought to show their joy in the Lord by meticulous observance of public worship—‘they delight to know My ways’...

“What had gone wrong between God and these pious believers? It was that they had broken...their side of the covenant that God had given them as a gracious gift. By their introspective religiosity they had failed to allow God to use them for His plan of world redemption...

“In the mind of this pious group God’s saving plan had stopped with them. That was why, therefore, they could not understand why God was paying no attention to their fasts and to their other meticulously ordered practices. This group actually answered God back to His face [see **verses 3b-5**].” (Pp. 22-23)

Oswalt comments that “Only one fast day is decreed in the **Torah**: the Day of Atonement (**Leviticus 16:29**). One is to ‘afflict the soul’...for the purpose of meditation on the seriousness of one’s sins and the greatness of God in making a way of atonement for them. That expressive

(continued...)

(Why) have we afflicted ourselves²³—and You will not take knowledge [of it]?²⁴

²¹(...continued)

phrase then becomes a synonym for fasting (**Leviticus 16:31; 23:27, 32; Numbers 29:7; 20:13; Psalm 35:13**), as here. But many other special fasts were decreed and held over the years (see **Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 31:13; 2 Samuel 12:21-23; 1 Kings 21:27; Ezra 8:23; Nehemiah 1:4; Esther 4:17**).” (P. 497)

²²The implication is, “We have abstained from eating, in accordance with our traditional religious customs—but You, YHWH, have taken no notice—You haven’t even seen what we have done in Your honor! What good is it to worship you?”

As Elizabeth Achtemeier says, “They imagine that if they simply go through the ritual practices of fasting, Yahweh will take notice of them and come to be with them; and they cannot understand why this has not been so.” (P. 54)

²³Where our Hebrew text has the singular noun with a plural suffix, נַפְשָׁנוּ, “our innermost-being,” 1QIs^a has the plural noun with the plural suffix, נַפְשׁוֹתֵינוּ, “our innermost-beings.”

The phrase, עָנִינוּ נַפְשָׁנוּ, “we afflicted (or ‘humbled’) our innermost being,” is closely related to the language of **Leviticus 23:27**, וְעָנִיתֶם אֶת־נַפְשׁוֹתֵיכֶם, “and you people shall afflict (or ‘humble’) your innermost beings” (compare **verse 29**), in the instructions given there for the Day of Coverings / Atonement.

It is obvious that the people are doing what was commanded for the great day of going without eating par excellence—at least in its outward aspects!

Motyer comments that “The people of **Isaiah 58** had ritualized the whole exercise into the bowed head, sackcloth and ashes. The phrase *like a reed* [our, ‘like a weeping willow’] exposes the formalism of the whole exercise; it was as automatic and uncomprehending as a reed before a wind.” (P. 481)

²⁴Again the implication is, “We have gone through all sorts of self-abasement, refusing to satisfy our appetites and longings, making ourselves miserable in order to honor and please You, YHWH, but You take no knowledge of our actions!” “What use is our worship of You?”

YHWH’s answer, which begins in the second half of **verse 3** is that their worship, which gives appearance of being sincere and heart-felt, is in fact superficial and irreverent; they are serving their own pleasures / purposes / desires, rather than joyfully entering into the transformation of their world that YHWH desires for His people and for the world.

Achtemeier comments that “**Third-Isaiah** spells out the nature of their rebellions in the rest of **verse 3** through **verse 5**. The people have been using the fast days to pursue their business (continued...)”

Look!²⁵ On a day of your abstaining from eating,²⁶ you people are finding delight—²⁷

²⁴(...continued)

as usual...The people do not use the fast day for repentance, but for continued oppression of others (**verse 4**)...The injustices mentioned in **57:1-2, 4**, are in the prophet's mind here (compare **Amos 8:4-6**).

“The outcome, therefore, is that Yahweh takes no notice of their false fasting and repentance...Ritual practices such as those mentioned in **verse 5** do not work in and of themselves, and prayers are not automatically answered, and worship does not guarantee the access to God. The persons offering them must first be pleasing and acceptable to the Lord, **verse 5-6** (compare **56:4; 1:10-17; Jeremiah 7:1-15; Ezekiel 8; Hosea 8:11-14; Amos 4:4-5; 5:21-24; Micah 6:1-8**. Such teaching is found throughout the **Bible**, but seldom heeded by worshipers...

“We shall be admitted into God's presence only if we are pleasing to Him, **verses 5-6**; and that raises the fundamental question, How can we be pleasing to Him? It is that question over **which Third-Isaiah** argues with its Zadokite opponents. It is that question with which much of the **New Testament** is concerned.” (Pp. 54-55)

²⁵Knight comments that “‘Behold’ is the first word God uses to reply to them, meaning ‘Open your eyes, think, see!’ Your religious practices are expressions of your basic egotism [an undue sense of self-importance]; you are enjoying yourself in affirming your own self-righteousness, but you are not giving Me joy.” (P. 23)

²⁶Here the noun occurs, **צִמְצֻמְכֶם**, literally “your (plural) abstaining from food.”

²⁷The phrase **תִּמְצְאוּ אֶת-חֲפֵי**, is “You ‘find,’ or ‘attain to,’ or ‘pursue’) your own desire, or pleasure, or even business.”

G. J. Botterweck in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament V**, p. 99, suggests the translation “pursue business.”

This is the common translation of **חֲפֵי**, in **Ecclesiastes**--“matter,” or “business,” and may be meant here in **Isaiah 58**; but still, it is rooted in the basic meaning of the word, “desire,” “pleasure,” and “purpose.” The criticism of Israel's worship is that their own personal desire / pleasure / purpose / business still controls their actions, even in the midst of their worship.

They have found ways to engage in the externals of religious rituals, without changing or effecting their real goals or desires in life! They act as if their religious abstinence from food is “afflicting themselves”--a rigid form of self-discipline and self-denial; but the fact is, says YHWH, even in the midst of these rituals, they are finding ways to gain their own personal delight / purpose / desire / business through those observances. They bend them, and twist them, turning them into something that accomplishes their own will—but not YHWH's!

(continued...)

and you are oppressing all²⁸ your workers!²⁹

²⁷(...continued)

Oswalt states that “Again, the prophet is engaging in heavy irony...The people believe that they are fasting for one purpose, but in fact, whether they know it or not, they are fasting for an opposing reason. They are not actually fasting so as to practice oppression, but the prophet says that this is what the outcome is...

“The hearers were probably shocked and offended at so ridiculous a charge. Of course they did not fast to promote *strife*! What could [the prophet] have meant?...One possibility is that while the master was fasting, he was especially careful to see that just because he was taking a day off from work, his workers did not think this was their chance to loaf...

“The point may be that since these people saw no connection between their mistreatment of the poor and the lowly and their religion (**verses 6-7, 9-10**), that mistreatment cancelled out all their religious acts. The mistreatment loomed so large that it was all God could see. Thus the only purpose their religion was actually serving was to further their acquisitiveness. It certainly did nothing for their relationship with God.” (P. 498)

²⁸There was an obvious mistake in the original copy of 1QIs^a, where the text read וְכֹל. A later hand has written the letter ל above the line, resulting in the correction וְכֹלֵל, “and all.”

²⁹Where our Hebrew text reads עֲצֵבֵיכֶם, “your workers,” **Rahlfs** has “the ones under your (plural) hand / command,” while the Latin Vulgate has “your debtors.”

The phrase וְכֹלֵל-עֲצֵבֵיכֶם תִּנְגְּשׁוּ, “and all your toilers [the word implies painful toil] you pressure, or drive.” These are the “little people,” the household slaves, the hired day-laborers, the ones who depend for their living on these wealthy worshipers, engaged in their religious rituals. Those rituals don’t change the way they treat their workers at all—in fact, at the very time that they are going without food, and supposedly “afflicting themselves,” they are making even heavier demands on their workers, continually pressuring them to produce more and more in order to achieve more financial gains for the worshipers!

The charge reminds us of **Amos 2:6-8**, where the pious northern Israelites are accused of “selling the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals; of trampling on the heads of the poor, and denying justice to the oppressed—and then going to the sanctuary to worship YHWH! What kind of worship is that?

We think that the passage is dealing with the kind of religion that is open to the criticism of Karl Marx--that religion is in reality nothing more than an “opiate of the people,” putting them to sleep with regards to their oppression of others, and failing to make its participants concerned for social justice!

(continued...)

58:4 הֵן לְרִיב וּמִצָּה תְצוּמוּ

וּלְהִכּוֹת בְּאַגְרֵף רָשָׁע
לֹא-תְצוּמוּ כִּיּוֹם
לְהִשְׁמִיעַ בְּמָרוֹם קוֹלְכֶם:

Look! In preparation to go to court and fight,³⁰ you are abstaining from eating,³¹
and to hit with wicked fist!³²

²⁹(...continued)

Knight comments that “Instead of approaching their workers in a spirit of [righteousness], some amongst the returned exiles treated them abominable, actually even oppressing them with physical violence. These workers would be the simple, uneducated ‘People of the Land,’ quite unlike some of the well-to-do returnees...Those unskilled workers were probably being employed now to build homes for the prosperous priests and leaders [see **Ezra 1:4-6**]...In a word, then, the fasting of hypocrites is an abomination to the Lord. True fasting must be motivated by repentance and love.” (P. 25)

³⁰The phrase הֵן לְרִיב וּמִצָּה תְצוּמוּ, literally, “Look–for contention (or ‘strife,’ or ‘dispute,’ or ‘case at law’) and strife you are abstaining from eating food,” implying that while they are supposedly “afflicting themselves,” they are meditating upon and planning their next action in court as they continue their strife with others, in order to make additional profit for themselves. It is obvious that their practice of “abstaining from food” as a religious ritual is doing nothing to change their life-style, or their cruel, grasping for gain by whatever means!

Be careful, businessmen, as you worship! YHWH knows your thoughts and intentions! Don’t be planning business strategies as you are listening to the reading of scripture, or repeating your prayers! Instead, open your heart to God and His word, centering your attention on how you can change and improve your life to be pleasing to God Who is truly your C.E.O.!

³¹Compare the very similar words found in lines 3 and 4 of the preceding **verse 3**.

³²The noun בְּאַגְרֵף, **be)eghroph**, probably means “with fist,” or perhaps “with a club.” Compare **Exodus 21:18**, where the noun אֶגְרֵף, **)eghroph** is translated into Greek by πυγμαῖ, **pugme**, “fist.”

Instead of our Hebrew Text’s בְּאַגְרֵף, 1QIs^a reads בְּגֵרֵף which may be a mis-spelling, or a different spelling of the same word. Our Greek text has καὶ τύπτετε πυγμαῖς, “and you strike with fists.”

(continued...)

You will not abstain from eating like this today,
to (successfully) cause your voice(s) to be heard on high!³³

³²(...continued)

The charge against the House of Jacob is that during the very time of their abstaining from food religiously, while they are enjoying what they are doing, at the same time they are making oppressive demands on their workers. Not only that, they use this so-called “religious time” in order to plan for their up-coming fights in court, in order to strike out at their neighbors, grabbing their inherited property, abusing their rights. Instead of their religious rituals leading them into a closer relationship with God, and His demanding will for justice and right relationships, those rituals are little more than a time of preparation for furthering their wicked, illegal plans! You can accomplish more things at a religious celebration than just worshiping God!

Have you ever been guilty of this? You women who insist that your husbands and family accompany you to worship services—are you guilty of planning your dinner menu or a holiday celebration while supposedly listening to the preaching? If you want your family to hear the Word of God, are you listening for that Word? And is that Word changing you? And you men, who faithfully attend worship, are you concentrating on hearing the Word of God, letting it sink down into your heart, to change your attitudes? Or are you thinking about the upcoming football game, or ways to improve your bottom line in business?

³³That is, such religious abstinence from food will never be accepted by YHWH, and it will never cause the House of Jacob’s voice to be heard on high, by YHWH! The fact is, such worship is nauseating to YHWH, not something He will ever take interest in, or respond to, other than by rejection and condemnation! Better not to worship at all, than to worship while continuing your plans for injustice!

As Achtemeier comments, “Yahweh has not listened to their prayers and taken heed of their plight and come to dwell with them, because they really have not been praying to Him and offering true repentance and seeking to walk in His commandments:

Isaiah 29:13, people come near with mouth and lips, but their heart is far away—it is a religion made up of keeping rules, without transformation of the heart!;

Isaiah 48:1, they take oaths in YHWH’s name, but not in truth or righteousness!;

Jeremiah 7:9-10, those who claim to be safe in YHWH’s house / temple are the very ones who steal, murder, are sexually immoral, and commit perjury!;

Hosea 6:4-6, Israel’s love quickly disappears; YHWH desires mercy, not sacrifice, genuine acknowledgment of God rather than animal sacrifices!;

Jacob (“James”) 4:8, sinners must wash their hand; the double-minded must purify their hearts!

Compare also Jesus’ instructions on true fasting:

Matthew 6:6-18, prayer must be in private, with few words and with forgiveness of others; fasting must not be made obvious to others, but only to the Father!

Achtemeier concludes that “In reality, they have forsaken God...” (P. 54)

(continued...)

58:5 הַכֹּזֶה יִהְיֶה צוֹם אֲבַחְרֶהוּ

יּוֹם עֲנוֹת אָדָם נִפְשׁוֹ
הֶלְכֵךָ כְּאֲנִי רֵאשׁוֹ
וְשָׂק וְאִפְרֹ יִצִּיעַ
הֶלְזָה תִקְרָא-צוֹם
וַיּוֹם רָצוֹן לִיהוָה:

Will the abstaining from eating³⁴ that I will choose be like this—³⁵
a day when a human being afflicts himself?³⁶

³³(...continued)

No, not all worship is equal in the eyes of God. There is much that passes as “Divine worship” in human estimation, that is totally unacceptable and completely rejected by the true and living God. Religion that is unconnected with justice and loving concern for those who work for us, is nauseating to our God.

As Watts observes, “Having set the scene, the rest of the chapter is a *torah* or lesson on proper worship. The criteria for such turns on what God chooses, not what the people like to do.” (P. 274)

³⁴Here again the noun צוֹם, *tsom*, “fast” occurs.

³⁵Oswalt comments that “A literal translation of the Hebrew sounds awkward in English: ‘Like this will be a fast I will choose it?’ The closest approximation would be: ‘Shall a fast that I choose be like this?’” (P. 493)

³⁶Do you think that YHWH, the Creator God who has given the entire earth to His creatures, for their enjoyment and comfort, takes pleasure in seeing His people afflicting themselves, refusing to eat, as if He were some kind of “heavenly Sadist”? We may ask the question of some Christian sects that instruct their adherents to practice self-flagellation and harsh disciplines, as if our God takes pleasure in such things! This text places all such practices in question.

In sharp contrast with such ideas is the Deuteronomic legislation concerning the tithe, in which the tithers were to come to Jerusalem with their tithes, and there use those tithes to buy for themselves and their families, including their slaves / servants, the poor and the Levites, and to have a great feast with the richest of foods, including any strong drinks they desired. See **Deuteronomy 12:4-14; 14:22-27; also 26:12-15.**

Is it to bend down his head like a “weeping willow,”³⁷
and spread out³⁸ mourning-clothes³⁹ and ashes?⁴⁰
Will you⁴¹ call this a day of abstaining from eating,⁴²
and a day pleasing⁴³ to YHWH?⁴⁴

³⁷The phrase כְּאַנְגִּיף, means “like a rush,” or “like a bulrush.” Our translation is paraphrase. Such plants, when they have grown tall and developed their seed-laden “heads,” commonly bend over because of their weight. Watts translates, “like a wilting plant.” (P. 268)

For other occurrences of this noun in the **Hebrew Bible**, see **Isaiah 9:13^{Heb} / 14^{Eng}**; **19:15**; **Job 41:12^{Heb} / 20^{Eng}**.

³⁸The 3rd person singular hiphil imperfect verb יִצְיַע, from the root verb יָצַע, means “he lays out,” or “he spreads” (i.e., as a couch to sit or lie upon).

³⁹The masculine singular noun שַׂק, **saq**, was taken over into Greek as σάκκον, **sakkon** (accusative singular); and these words have influenced the English as “sack-cloth.” It means a garment made from coarse, rough, cheap material—such as black goats’ hair.

⁴⁰It was the Hebrew custom in time of mourning, or death, to wear just this kind of “sack-cloth,” and then to throw ashes or dust in the air, allowing them to settle on one’s head, and then to sit in the ashes / dust—all of which symbolized one’s grief, and the transiency of life.

⁴¹Where our Hebrew text has a singular verb, 1QIs^a has a plural verb.

⁴²Compare the first line of **verse 5**. Here again, the noun צוֹם occurs.

⁴³The masculine singular noun רְצוֹן, (a synonym of חֶפְצִי), means “good-will,” “favor,” “acceptance” (especially in terms of acceptable sacrifices), or “will.”

These words show that the question of the text is centered in what kind of worship YHWH will consider “acceptable.” As Botterweck has noted, both of these synonyms “play a role in the (priestly) theology of the cult [worship in the temple], and especially in the anti-cultic polemic of the prophets.” (**Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament**, V, p. 101)

⁴⁴The answer that is implied to all of these questions is an emphatic “No!” No, this is not the kind of abstaining from eating that can cause YHWH God to notice and respond! What kind of worship will cause God to take interest? The answer begins with the very next words.

Achtemeier comments that “Ritual practices such as those mentioned in **verse 5** do not work in and of themselves, and prayers are not automatically received and answered, and worship does not guarantee access to God...Such teaching is found throughout the **Bible**, but seldom heeded by worshipers. If and when we pray, we are certain that God looks kindly on us.”
(continued...)

⁴⁴(...continued)

Indeed, we sometimes imagine that we are doing Him a favor when we worship. We rush carelessly into His house, as if we had a right to be there, and we expect that God will receive us, no matter what the condition of our hearts and lives...

“The **Bible** has a different view: we shall be admitted into God’s presence only if we are pleasing to Him...” (P. 55)

What do you think? Does this text reveal how we can be pleasing to God?

Achtemeier states that the strophes that follow (**verses 9-12**)...”spell out part of the answer to the question. The fast that Yahweh chooses and the worship that is pleasing to Him is the work (the meaning of ‘worship’ is ‘service’ or ‘work’) of liberation, to remove every yoke that binds human beings to any form of servitude, **verses 6, 9c**...(compare **Amos 2:6-8; Jeremiah 34:8-9; Nehemiah 5:10-12**). [The prophet] also speaks of slavery to the gnawing pain of an empty stomach (**verses 7a, 10a**) and to the misery of homelessness and exclusion from the community (**verse 7b**) and to the shivering shame of being dressed in rags (**verse 7cd**)...Mercy consists of removing their yoke and setting them free (compare **Ezekiel 18:7, 16; Job 31:16-20**).

“The particular acts of kindness mentioned everywhere throughout the **Bible** are acts which are pleasing to God; the **New Testament** includes them frequently in its teaching (compare **Matthew 25:34-36; Luke 3:10-11**). But the reason given for the acts in **verse 7d** is that we all share a common humanity (so too in **Job, 31:15**). We all are flesh from the hand of God, our one Father. Should we then hide ourselves (i.e., withhold our help; compare **Deuteronomy 22:1, 3, 4**) from our own flesh, from our brothers and sisters under God? Once again, the viewpoint is universal...

“But when our Lord gives His reason for such acts of mercy, He goes beyond any merely humanistic views: acts of kindness done to the needy are acts done to Him (**Matthew 25:45**).” (Pp. 55-56)

Yes—but also notice that in **Matthew 25**, it is said that people who do acts of mercy to those most in need are said to be serving the Lord even though they do not know it.

⁴⁵Slotki comments on **verses 6-7** that “The right ways of observing a fast are indicated. One of these is the abolition of slavery and oppression; the other is the practice of benevolent deeds.” (P. 284)

Knight entitles these verses “God’s Thunderous Reply.”

He comments that “In a word, God’s answer to the self-righteous, religious element is—‘Love!’ God’s chosen fast is:

(continued...)

⁴⁵(...continued)

- (1) 'To lose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke'...This was God's act of [righteousness]—when He freed the exiles from the evil yoke of Babylon. Israel was then meant to respond in the same spirit, by acts of [righteousness]—by putting an end to man's inhumanity to man, the exploitation of the poor by the rich, of poor nations by sophisticated economies.
- (2) The Divine demand for social justice is repeated: 'to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke'...God created mankind to be free, and here He demands that all people receive this, their Divinely ordained heritage.
- (3) 'To share your bread with the hungry.' The standard of living of the peasants squatting in and around Jerusalem must have been abysmally low. The richer, educated, and more cultured element in the community (the 'upper classes') were to...literally 'break in two,' to give the poor half of what one has...
- (4) What then does this word 'share / break' mean by going half and half? One is to 'bring the homeless poor,' the refugee, the displaced person, 'into your house'...He will then occupy one half of it!...Israel in exile had experienced such deprivation: God had now restored them to their homeland, where they could put down roots again. Israel was therefore to share this compassionate gift of God with others.
- (5) To clothe 'the naked' by reducing one's own wardrobe. This command of God has no negatives in it...God's words are all positive commands to perform acts of love, compassion, and care for all His 'poor,' whoever they are, and wherever they may be (compare **Matthew 25:31-46**)...Self-denial, as in fasting, without love does nothing to advance God's [business / purpose] for His world. **Old Testament** scholars for a century now have sought to show the Church—which in many areas has consistently refused to accept their findings—that the **Old Testament** 'secularized religion.' It may be that God has had to use the figure of Karl Marx in his century to open the eyes of believers, just as He used the figure of the pagan King Cyrus to effect the release of Trito-Isaiah's generation from the bondage of a selfish cult...
- (6) One is 'not to hide yourself from your own flesh [i.e., one's own family]'...There is the philanthropist who donates large sums to charity but at home can be mean and even cruel to his wife and children. The modern science of psychology has made it clear that children become antisocial and turn to violent ways when their parents 'hide themselves,' that is, do not shower love and affection upon them. Not only do these children then find themselves unloved, they come to believe that they are unlovable." (Pp. 25-27)

Oswalt entitles **verses 6-14** "God's Pleasure."

He comments that "After the biting description of the people's conception of fasting in **verses 1-5**, the prophet turns to a description of God's conception of it in **verses 6-12**..."

(continued...)

פִּתְיַח חֲרָצְבוֹת רָשָׁע
 תִּתֵּר אֲגָדוֹת מוֹטָה
 וְשַׁלַּח רְצוּצִים חֲפָשִׁים
 וְכָל-מוֹטָה תִּנְתְּקוּ:

Is not this (the kind of) abstaining from eating⁴⁶ I will choose.⁴⁷

⁴⁵(...continued)

“That **verses 13-14** address Sabbath keeping, not fasting, shows that fasting is not the real issue of the chapter, but rather what pleases God (compare **verses 1-2**). These verses show that no facile dichotomy between external and internal religion is intended, but that what pleases God is the true combination of both, when His nature has become so much a part of a person’s being that worship expresses a love for God which is so deep that it must overflow in our treatment of others, especially those weaker than we [are].” (P. 502)

Yes! And we must remember how important sabbath observance is for the slaves and servants and lower classes of laborers, as it grants them (animals as well) complete rest one day in seven!

Alexander comments on **verse 6** that “the terms were so selected as to be descriptive of oppression universally; to make which still more evident, the Prophet adds a general command or exhortation, You shall break every yoke. The Targum explains מוֹטָה (‘yoke’) to mean unjust decrees...and [Rahlf’s] applies it to fraudulent contracts...”

“In reply to the question, how the acts here mentioned could be described as fasting, J. D. Michaelis says that they are all to be considered as involving acts of conscientious self-denial, which he illustrates by the case of an American slaveholder brought by stress of conscience to emancipate his slaves.” (P. 358)

⁴⁶Again the noun צוֹם, “a time of abstaining from food.”

⁴⁷The 1st person singular imperfect verb with 3rd person masculine singular suffix, אֶבְחַרְהוּ, “I will choose it,” emphasizes that the important thing in religion is not what the worshipers like, or what they choose to be their “style of worship,” but rather, it is a matter of the Divine choice—what it is that YHWH likes or chooses.

See the article by Seebass in **Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament II**, pp. 73-87.

(continued...)

to get rid of⁴⁸ unfair advantages;⁴⁹

to loosen⁵⁰ everything that binds others down;⁵¹

⁴⁷(...continued)

If YHWH has chosen a certain style of worship, how can His people dare to worship in some other way? It is absurd: such “worship” is not genuine worship at all, but is in fact self-Deification! The most important thing in religion is what “pleases” YHWH (see the roots חָפֵץ and רָצוֹן); what YHWH chooses—not what pleases the human worshipers, and not what they choose to be the proper style of worship.

In American churches of the 21st century the question is constantly being asked, What kind of worship do you prefer? Do you like “contemporary” or “traditional”? A much better question is, What kind of worship does YHWH prefer? This text give us the answer. Our God wants worship that reaches out in loving compassion to the hungry, the oppressed, the outcast!

⁴⁸The piel infinitive absolute verb פָּתַח means “to open,” or “to loose,” and is used of “freeing,” or “ungirding” camels, “setting them free (from their heavy loads).” It is used of loosening and removing sack-cloth from one’s body, or loosening bonds with which one is held. It is also used of “opening” gates, or even a person’s ears. Here it obviously means “loosen and remove bonds” that are unjustly inhibiting the freedom of others. We are paraphrasing here, by our “to get rid of.”

⁴⁹What does the phrase חֲרָצְבוֹת רָשָׁע, “bonds (or perhaps ‘pangs’) of wickedness” mean? It certainly includes taking unfair advantage of others, especially of the weak and underprivileged such as widows, orphans, the poor, refugees and any others who are lacking in power. It means to forgive debts too heavy to be paid; to release prisoners from unjust sentences; to take away the bonds that hold slaves in captivity.

Motyer holds that the phrase “...Points to the need to labor for the abolition of every way in which wrong social structures, or wrong-doers in society, destroy or diminish the due liberty of others.” (P. 481)

What would some of the modern “bonds of wickedness” be? Would they include such things as racial exclusiveness, that holds minorities in poor, segregated neighborhoods, with limited access to healthy groceries and good health care? Would they include the high interest rates charged to the poor, while wealthy people enjoy much easier rates? How would you add to, or change this list?

⁵⁰The hiphil infinitive absolute verb הִתַּר, from the root נָתַר, means “to cause to be free,” or “to loose.” Used as a causative verb, as it is here, it means “to unfasten,” or “to set free,” “to

and to send forth those who are oppressed⁵² (as) free people;⁵³

⁵⁰(...continued)

unbind.” It is a synonym of the piel infinitive verb פָּתַח.

⁵¹The phrase הִתַּר אֲנָחוֹת מוֹטָהּ, means to loosen the leather thongs, or sometimes chains, that were used to bind the heavy wooden yoke to the neck of oxen, forcing them to stay in place and pull their heavy burden. Society, in every age, has invented various types of “yoke-chains” with which they tie people down, forcing them to perform tasks which are against their will, treating them like “beasts of burden.” We paraphrase by “to loosen everything that binds others down.”

According to this text, if you want to truly worship YHWH God, “loosen the yoke-chains” get rid of everything that binds your fellow human beings—set them free! Quit treating them like pack-animals, or “beasts of burden”!

⁵²The verb רָצַץ means “to crush,” and the masculine plural qal passive participle רָצוּצִים means “crushed people,” or “oppressed people.” The heavy burdens which they have been forced to shoulder by oppressive, powerful people, have resulted in “crushing” them. The word is used to describe poor people, who are crushed by their burden of debt.

Slotki comments that the verb is “literally, ‘crushed,’ referring to debtors who were enslaved because of their inability to pay their creditors.” (P. 284) Compare **Nehemiah 5:5**,

And now our flesh is like our brother's flesh, our sons are like their sons--
and look! We are bringing our sons and our daughters into bondage as slaves!
And there are some of our daughters who have been brought into bondage!
And we are powerless!
And our fields and our vineyards belong to others!

What do you think? Is it not true that still today, the poorest people in society are forced to pay the highest interest rates? Do we not still have oppressive policies and practices that favor the wealthy and those in power, while putting the poorest people at a disadvantage? What interest rate does your bank charge you? What does it charge poor people, or will it even lend them money?

For occurrences of this verb in the **Hebrew Bible**, see:

Deuteronomy 28:33, disobedient Israel is told it will have nothing but cruel oppression all its days;

Judges 10:8, the Philistines and the Ammonites shattered and crushed the Israelites;

1 Samuel 12:3, 4, Samuel denies that he has ever oppressed anyone;

Isaiah 42:4, YHWH's servant will not be crushed / oppressed;

(continued...)

⁵²(...continued)

Hosea 5:11, Ephraim is oppressed;

Amos 4:1, the women of northern Israel oppress the poor people;

Job 20:19, Zophar says that the wicked person will not enjoy the profit from his trading, because he has oppressed the poor and left them destitute;

Jeremiah 22:17, Shallum, son of Josiah, is charged with being intent on dishonest gain, on shedding innocent blood, and on oppression and extortion;

2 Chronicles 16:10, King Asa brutally oppressed the people of Judah.

⁵³The adjective חֲפְּשִׁים, here used in the plural, means “free people,” those slaves who have been released by their owners, or those who are “free from paying taxes,” or other obligations.

1QIs^a has a mistaken spelling of this word: ח.שִׁים, with the dot indicating a missing letter. A later hand has written the letter ך above the line, but this does not resolve the misspelling. The missing letter should be פ, not ך.

See elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible**:

Jeremiah 34:9, 10, 11, 16, it is the story of Jeremiah’s going to King Zedekiah of Judah, telling him that YHWH wanted him לְקַרְא לְהֵם דְּרוֹר, “to proclaim liberty” to all their fellow Jews who were enslaved (probably, indentured servants) in Jerusalem. Zedekiah did so, and the enslaved חֲפְּשִׁים שְׁלַחוּ, they sent forth as free people. But later the people changed their minds, and brought those who had been freed back into bondage. Because of this, YHWH proclaims that Zedekiah and Judah will go into bondage to the Babylonians.

Job 3:19, in death, the slave is freed from his master;

Job 39:5, the question, Who let the wild donkey go free?

For the noun דְּרוֹר, **dheror**, which means “flowing,” “free run,” “liberty,” see:

Leviticus 25:10, in the fiftieth year, Israel is to proclaim liberty throughout the land, to all its inhabitants;

Isaiah 61:1, My Lord YHWH’s Spirit (is) upon me, because YHWH anointed me to tell good news (to) poor people; He sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives,
(continued...)

and to tear apart⁵⁴ everything that binds other down?⁵⁵

⁵³(...continued)

and to prisoners complete opening.” (Quoted by Jesus in his initial preaching / teaching in Nazareth—see **Luke 4:18-19**, with an additional reference to **Leviticus 25:10**);

Jeremiah 34:8, 15, 17, 17, see above; this noun is mentioned along with “free people”;

Do you want to worship YHWH, the God of Israel? Then set all slaves free! Help all who are oppressed or crushed get out from under their crushing burdens and loads—loosen them, free them, let them go forth into *freedom*! That’s the kind of worship our God delights in, and chooses!

Here indeed, is the biblical “Emancipation Proclamation”! YHWH God, the Creator and Lord of History, loves to see His creatures living in freedom!

Westermann comments that “What God promised to Israel, and she had experienced, resulted in a new value being attached to what we call freedom. Now, helping to restore a person’s freedom is more pleasing to God than the practice of mortifying one’s flesh. This is the beginning of that great change which declared, in God’s name, that men and women are of greater importance than cultic rites...” (P. 337)

And we are reminded of Jesus’s words, “The sabbath was made for humanity, not humanity for the sabbath!”

⁵⁴The piel imperfect verb **תִּנְתֵּקוּ**, means “you shall tear apart,” “you shall snap.” For this usage elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** see:

Jeremiah 30:8, YHWH declares that in that day, He will break (**אֶשְׁבֵּר**, “I will break”) the yoke off their (Israel and Judah’s) necks and tear off (**אֶנְתֵּק**, “I will tear off”) their bonds;

Ezekiel 17:9, YHWH asks concerning the vine in Ezekiel’s allegory (Pharaoh of Egypt), **הֲלוֹא יִנְתֵּק** **אֶת־שְׂרָשֵׁיהָ**, “will he not snap / pull up its roots?”;

Ezekiel 23:34, Oholibah the prostitute will drink the cup of horror and desolation of her sister Samaria, **וְשָׂרְיָדְךָ תִּנְתֵּק**, and your breasts you will tear apart”;

Nahum 1:13, YHWH promises Judah that **אֶשְׁבֵּר מִמֶּהוּ מֵעַלְיָדְךָ וּמוֹסְרֵיךָ אֶנְתֵּק**, “I will break his yoke from upon you, and your bonds I will tear off”;

(continued...)

⁵⁴(...continued)

Psalm 2:3, earth's rulers decide to tear apart their bonds and cast away their cords—that bind them to YHWH and His anointed king;

Psalm 107:14, YHWH will bring out the people in darkness and the shadow of death, and will tear apart their bonds.

This is a violent word, and expresses the Divine hatred of such yokes or burdens placed on people! Get rid of them! How do you think we can do this in our modern 21st century world?

But the fact surrounding this text was that the program of Ezra / Nehemiah would in later generations place a heavy yoke on the shoulders of the returnees from Babylon—demanding the people learn and observe the 613 commandments of the Mosaic **Torah**, pledging themselves to live by those legalistic laws, just as their descendants, the Pharisees of the time of Jesus were doing, all of which resulted in the **Mishnah** with its fence built around each of the commandments, and then later resulting in the **Jerusalem Talmud** and its much larger cousin, the **Babylonian Talmud**, with their “fences around the fences of the 613 commandments. Such concentration on fulfilling the long list of commandments turned Israel’s attention away from the desire of YHWH that the people learn to live by sacrificial neighborly love—the much more important commandment, that receives little attention if any in the **Mishnah** or the **Talmud**!

Oswalt observes that “The four verbs in this verse all have to do with liberation...The ministry of the servant will be to set people free from all their bondage, and the Babylonian captivity provided a great image of that bondage (compare **Isaiah 42:7; 43:3-7; 45:13; 49:9; 61:1**). Now Isaiah addresses people who have theoretically received the servant’s freedom.” (P. 503)

But this passage is not talking about “the ministry of the future centuries later of the suffering servant,” and that is now only “theoretically” being experienced by the returned exiles. It is talking about the kind of worship God wants from His people, the returned exiles from Babylon, here and now, at the time **Third Isaiah** is being written. They have experienced genuine, real liberation. He wants His people to see that the liberation they have experienced becomes a reality in their community. It is quite true that this is the kind of ministry that is predicted for the servant—but YHWH wants the post-exilic community to fulfill that ministry, thus becoming YHWH’s servant itself! If they will do that, their world will be transformed; the heavenly Zion will begin to be realized on earth; hope will take the place of despair; and those who trust in God and worship in the way He desires, will truly become His “servant people.” What do you think?

⁵⁵The question that YHWH asks implies His worshipers should “break,” or “tear apart” every yoke which binds human beings like animals! We may ask, is that really “worship”? Yes indeed, says YHWH—that’s precisely the kind of worship that I want from My people!

Where is such worship performed? In the halls of sacred buildings / temples? Yes, there, on occasion—but much more, in human society, in the midst of families, and cities, and states, and nations—with their oppressive, unjust structures! That’s where our God wants to be truly worshiped, as we tear down those structures of injustice, ripping apart every unjust “yoke” or

(continued...)

⁵⁵(...continued)

burden that crushes our fellow human beings and restrains them from enjoying the kind of full freedom that our God not only envisions but also demands for all His people!

We have oftentimes wondered why God has so blessed the United States of America. Does the Divine blessing rest upon America because of Abraham Lincoln's "Emancipation Proclamation," or Martin Luther King Jr.'s work in civil rights? Has God blessed us so richly because our nation has allowed the former slaves to go forth as free people? Is it because America has graciously opened her doors to immigrants from all over the world—people who have been heavily burdened with debt in their home-countries, and who have fled to escape those debts? Is it because America has given such people freedom from religious prejudice, and harsh dictatorial rule—allowing them to come into our borders, and find a new home and a future, worshiping as they see fit? What do you think? God bless America! God, keep us from following the advice of politicians such as Donald Trump!

But what if America slams its doors shut to the immigrants, and treats "undocumented aliens" as less than human beings, tearing families in two, sending parents back to their former

countries, leaving their children to fend for themselves here in America? What do you think? Will God bless such an America?

Oswalt comments that **verse 6** raises another rhetorical question. "But what is says seems to have nothing to do with fasting—abstinence from food—at all. How are we to understand this? Is this a denial of the commandment of **Leviticus 16:31**? Is the prophet contradicting the Mosaic legislation?...

"That does not seem at all likely. It is much more likely that this is another example of the Semitic love of hyperbole. In order to break the false dependence on cultic behavior and the sense that when the letter of the ceremonial legislation had been fulfilled all covenant obligations had been met, the prophet goes to the opposite extreme, declaring that cultic observance is of no interest to God whatsoever (see **Isaiah 1:10-20** for the same approach; compare also **Amos 5:25-27; Micah 6:6-8**). By closing the chapter with the call to Sabbath keeping, the writer redress the balance once again (compare **Psalms 51:18-21^{Heb} / 16-19^{Eng}** for the same approach)...

"[The prophet] calls on his hearers to express their relationship to God in a way that is much less open to self-delusion. If they want to deprive themselves, let them do it for the sake of the oppressed, the needy, and the helpless, not for the sake of their own religiosity. God's nature is to give Himself away to those who can never repay Him. There is no clearer evidence of the presence of God in a person's life than a replication of that same behavior." (Pp. 502-03)

We agree with Oswalt—as **Third Isaiah** continues, it does not depict a non-worshipping community, but rather a community that gladly worships with many of the forms of typical Jewish religion. It is not the elimination of religions that the message calls for, but the elimination of the idea that religion without deep and genuine social concern is valid religion.

(continued...)

הֲלוֹא פָרֶס לַרְעֵב לַחֲמֶךָ 58:7⁵⁶

וְעֵינַיִם מְרוּדִים תְּבִיא בַיִת
כִּי־תִרְאֶה עָרֶם וְכִסִּיתוּ
וּמִבְשָׂרְךָ לֹא תִתְעַלֵּם:

Is it not to share⁵⁷ your bread / groceries with the hungry?⁵⁸

⁵⁵(...continued)

What do you think?

⁵⁶Oswalt comments on **verse 7** that “The thought of self-denial for the sake of others (rather than for oneself) is continued and made more explicit here. What good is it to deny oneself food when those around one are going hungry (compare **verse 10**)?...Those who know the compassion of God in their lives will be unable to shut it out from others. This is the mark of true religion throughout the **Bible**.” (P. 504) Yes!

⁵⁷The qal infinitive absolute פָּרַס means “to break in two,” or “to divide.” If your hungry neighbor has no bread, and you have a loaf—break it in two, and share it! The only other passage in the **Hebrew Bible** that uses this verb in this way is **Jeremiah 16:7**—only there, such breaking of bread for those in mourning (and who are fasting) is forbidden. We paraphrase by “share your groceries.”

Slotki’s translation is “to deal thy bread,” and he comments that “The force of the Hebrew is ‘share thy food.’” (P. 284)

⁵⁸Compare the teaching of **Deuteronomy 14:28-29**, where, even though this adjective רָעֵב, “hungry,” does not occur, its teaching is fundamental for the ethical responsibility of the people of YHWH to feed those who are hungry.

Every third year you shall bring out the full tithe (ten percent) of your produce for that year, and store it within your towns; the Levites, because they have no allotment or inheritance with you, as well as the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows in your towns, may come and eat their full so that YHWH your God may bless you in all the work that you undertake.”

See also:

1 Samuel 2:5, Hannah’s prayer praises YHWH in that those who were full now hire them-selves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more;

2 Samuel 17:29, David’s people, fleeing from Absalom’s army, are hungry, tired and thirsty;

(continued...)

And to bring homeless⁵⁹ poor people⁶⁰ into (your) home?⁶¹

⁵⁸(...continued)

2 Kings 7:12, Israel's king tells his officers that the Arameans know how hungry the Israelites are, and have laid a trap for them;

Isaiah 8:21, those who follow mediums and spiritists will roam through the land, distressed and hungry;

Isaiah 29:8, the nations that fight against David's Ariel / Jerusalem will suddenly disappear, like a hungry man who dreams he is eating, and then awakens hungry;

Isaiah 32:6-7, the fool speaks folly...practices ungodliness, spreads error concerning YHWH—the hungry he leaves empty, and from the thirsty he withholds water...He destroys the poor with lies, even when the plea of the needy is just;

Isaiah 58:7 (here), 10, true worship shares bread with the hungry, spends itself on behalf of the hungry;

Ezekiel 18:7, 16, (also important for ethics of feeding the hungry);

Psalms 107:5, 9, 36, people are hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebb away; YHWH satisfied them, filling the hungry with good things, enabling them to build a city;

Psalms 146:7-9, YHWH upholds the cause of the oppressed, gives food to the hungry, sets prisoners free, gives sight to the blind, lifts up those who are bowed down...watches over the alien, sustains the fatherless and the widow;

Job 5:5, Bildad holds that the fool's harvest is consumed by the hungry;

Job 18:12, Bildad holds that calamity is hungry for the wicked;

Job 22:7, Eliphaz accuses Job of sin—you gave no water to the weary, and you withheld food from the hungry;

Job 24:10, Job bemoans the fact that the fatherless, lacking clothes, go about naked; they carry the sheaves in harvest-time, but still go hungry;

Proverbs 25:21, if your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat!;

Proverbs 27:7, to the hungry, even what is bitter tastes sweet.

⁵⁹The plural noun **מְרִידִים**, occurs only three times in the **Hebrew Bible**, at **Lamentations 1:7** (the days of Jerusalem's wandering), **3:19** (I remember my wandering) and here, **Isaiah**

(continued...)

When⁶² you see a person without clothes,⁶³ to clothe⁶⁴ him—⁶⁵

⁵⁹(...continued)

58:7, (wanderers who have no shelter). All three occurrences have a similar context, and the “wandering” or “homelessness” is connected with being “poor people.”

The root verb רוּד, **rudh** means “wander restlessly,” “roam.” In modern terms, we might describe them as “street people,” those who have no home to live in.

⁶⁰The noun עֲנִיִּים, “poor people,” is mis-spelled in the original 1QIs^a scroll, which has עֲנִיִּים; a later hand has written in the letter ם above the misspelled word, indicating the ם should be read as ם.

The noun occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** some eighty times, and there can be no doubt as to the great importance “the poor” play in biblical teaching, in which YHWH identifies with the poor as His people, and demands that they be treated in a very special, caring manner by those possessing wealth.

In these passages we see the combining of “the poor people” עֲנִיִּים, with the “needy,” the “orphan,” the “widow,” the “alien,” and especially with the אֲבִיּוֹן, a synonym also meaning “the poor.” A massive biblical theological ethical teaching can be based upon a combination of all these nouns, and the various teachings of the **Hebrew Bible** concerning them. There can be no doubt that “the poor” become the “touchstone” for biblical ethics: the way the poor are treated (meaning the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant), and their rights are defended, becomes the test for the justice of both individuals and countries!

What about you? Have you let this biblical teaching influence the way you vote? Have you let it influence the way you deal with others in your community?

⁶¹There can be no doubt about it: providing homes for the homeless is truly acceptable worship in the eyes of YHWH God! Joining in such movements as Habitat for Humanity is considered by God as a most acceptable act of worship!

What about us? Are we willing to open our homes (and our hearts) to the homeless poor? Do we even consider the building of a home for the homeless, or an orphanage, an act of worship?

How many orphans, how many refugees, how many homeless strangers have we welcomed into our homes, to give them shelter, good food, and warm clothing? Are we truly worshipers of the God of the **Bible**? Or is our God a Deity Who is pleased with worship limited to songs and prayers and pious words of prayer in sanctuaries, but Who doesn't care whether or not our homes become places of refuge for the needy? What kind of worship does the One we worship demand? It's a mighty important question! Compare **Matthew 25:31-46**!

⁶²Or, “If (you see)...” See **Brown-Driver-Briggs**, p. 473.

⁶³For occurrences elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** of the adjective עָרָם, “naked,” from the root עָרַר, see:

Genesis 2:25, the first man and woman were naked and unashamed;

1 Samuel 19:24, Saul stripped off his clothes and lay naked before Samuel all that day and night, speaking ecstatically, “prophesying”;

Isaiah 20:2, 3, 4, Isaiah is told by YHWH to go about naked and barefoot for three years, as a sign of what is going to happen to Egypt and Cush as they are led away naked by the Assyrians;

Hosea 2:5, 2:3 in English—mother Israel is going to be stripped naked if she doesn’t repent;

Amos 2:16, when YHWH’s judgment comes on northern Israel, even her brave warriors will flee naked;

Micah 1:8, because of Israel’s transgressions, Micah vows to go about barefoot and naked, bemoaning her fate;

Job 1:21, 21, Job states that he was born naked, and he will depart this world naked;
Ecclesiastes 5:14, similar, but universal;

Job 22:6, Bildad charges Job with having stripped men of their clothing and leaving them naked;

Job 24:7, 10, Job complains the fact that the poor and the fatherless, lacking clothes, spend the night naked;

Job 26:6, Job states that death is naked before God.

⁶⁴Or, “cover (him)...” The piel infinitive construct verb כִּסֹּת, “to cover,” is found (in various forms) with reference to “covering nakedness” at:

Genesis 9:23, Shem and Japheth take a garment and cover drunken Noah’s nakedness;

Genesis 38:14, 15, Tamar covers her face with a veil, to identify herself as a prostitute;

Exodus 28:42, linen underwear covers the nakedness of Israelite priests;

Ezekiel 16:8, YHWH covers His adopted daughter’s nakedness with the corner of His garment;

(continued...)

and from your own flesh⁶⁶ to not hide yourself?⁶⁷

⁶⁴(...continued)

Ezekiel 18:7, 16, the righteous person covers the nakedness of others with clothing;

Hosea 2:11, English, **2:9**), YHWH's gifts of wool and linen are intended to cover His wife's nakedness.

But the preeminent usage of this verb is for other forms of "covering."

⁶⁵Isaiah holds that you cannot worship YHWH in a pleasing way if you close your eyes to the naked poor people. Indeed, the kind of worship which YHWH chooses, consists of seeing the naked, and giving them clothing! What about you? Are you really a worshiper of God?

It is considered a very good thing in our modern religious communities that thriving congregations can build beautiful new sanctuaries, with multi-ranked organs, the latest high-tech devices for sight and sound, filling the ears and eyes of the worshipers with beautiful sights and sounds of worship, while sitting in air-conditioned comfort on cushioned pews.

But is it not a much better thing to purchase shopping-centers, and transform them into bee-hives of Christian ministry, where those without adequate clothing can be given good, warm clothing? If a congregation had to choose one of the two, which one do you think YHWH would choose to eliminate?

We easily say we love the **Bible** and its teaching. Do we love this teaching in **Isaiah 58**? Or is it in truth an affront to our religious sensibilities and our political convictions)? If it is, then our priorities and politics need a radical alteration!

⁶⁶For this phrase "your flesh," meaning "relatives," or "kindred" in the **Hebrew Bible**, see:

Genesis 2:23, 24, the first man calls the first woman "his flesh," and they become "one flesh";

Genesis 29:14, Laban tells Jacob that he is his own flesh and blood;

Genesis 37:27, Judah warns his brothers against killing Joseph, for he is their brother, their flesh and blood;

Leviticus 18:6, literally, "No man shall draw near to any physical body of his flesh, to uncover nakedness (sexually)—meaning close relatives, but certainly not meaning his wife;

Leviticus 25:49, near kin / flesh of his flesh, from his clan;

Judges 9:2, Abimelech tells the people of Shechem that he is their "flesh and blood";

2 Samuel 5:1, the tribes of Israel come to David at Hebron, and tell him he is their own flesh and blood, that is, they are family, they are relatives; **1 Chronicles 11:1**, same;

(continued...)

⁶⁶(...continued)

Nehemiah 5:5, sons and daughters of the returning exiles are being forced into debt-bondage by their own flesh and blood, i.e., their fellow returning exiles;

Isaiah 58:7, who does Isaiah mean? Does he mean close family members, like a wife or child? Or does he mean it in a broader sense, “fellow Israelite”? Or does he even mean it in the sense “fellow human being”? The fact is that the wording is ambiguous.

Knight understands the phrase to mean “one’s own family members,” and comments that “There is the philanthropist who donates large sums to charity but at home can be mean and even cruel to his wife and children. The modern science of psychology has made it clear that children become anti-social and turn to violent ways when their parents ‘hide themselves,’ that is, fail to be close to their family members, not showering love and affection on them. Not only do these children then find themselves unloved, they come to believe that they are unlovable.” (P. 27)

But the phrase can also be taken in this context to mean that the suffering refugees, the naked poor, the wandering homeless all across the world are considered by YHWH as being “one flesh” with those who have homes and food and clothing—but who divert their eyes, refusing to notice suffering people, refusing to acknowledge them as their “own flesh,” much less opening their hearts and their pocket-books, as well as their pantries and closets and homes, to genuinely help them!

What do we do when the news channels carry reports on the Haitians following their devastating earthquake, or depict conditions in the refugee camps in Darfur, Sudan, or when we see picture of the hordes of people fleeing from war-torn Syria? Do we change channels, rather than watch? Do we do what the Germans did during Hitler’s Third Reich, refusing to investigate or look at what was happening in the concentration camps?

We agree with Westermann in his comment that “**Verse 7** goes on to list the traditional acts of help to those in trouble. ‘A pageant of people whose social standing is poor passes before the spectators’ eyes—disfranchised, down and outs, slaves, prisoners, the hungry, the homeless, the cold’ (quoting Volz).” (P. 337) Compare **Job 31:13-22**:

13 If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant,
when they brought a complaint against me,
14 what then shall I do when God rises up?
When He makes inquiry, what shall I answer Him?
15 Did not He Who made me in the womb make him?
And did not One fashion us in the womb?
16 If I have withheld anything that the poor desired,
or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,
17 or have eaten my morsel alone,
and the fatherless has not eaten of it--
18 for from my youth the fatherless grew up with me as with a father,
and from my mother's womb I guided the widow--

(continued...)

⁶⁶(...continued)

- 19 if I have seen anyone perish for lack of clothing,
or the needy without covering,
20 if his body has not blessed me,
and if he was not warmed with the fleece of my sheep,
21 if I have raised my hand against the fatherless,
because I saw my confederates in the gate,
22 then let my shoulder blade fall from my shoulder,
and let my arm be broken from its socket.

We must always keep in mind as Christians that our Lord has identified Himself with just such people—yes, with our own family members; but also with the hungry, the naked, the prisoners, the homeless strangers of this earth. For Jesus, “their flesh” is “His flesh.” When we serve such people, we are serving Jesus, even if “incognito,” if unknown to us. See **Matthew 25:31-46!**

In spite of all our rationalizations and attempts to soften down this teaching (“Jesus is only talking about his missionary representatives who are suffering”), we will never be able to truly avoid its piercing demand upon our faith and obedience! And this passage teaches that those who care for others who are suffering, are serving the Lord—even if they don’t know it!

Knight comments that “In his masterly survey of European thought and culture, **Civilization**, Lord Kenneth Clark points to the fact that it was only towards the end of the Victorian era, after writers such as Charles Dickens and artists like William Hogarth had shown up the horrible conditions of the poor in, for example, London’s east end, that we could call that period ‘the dawn of the age of kindness.’ Self-denial, as in fasting, without love does nothing to advance God’s **תְּנוּגָה**, [‘delight,’ ‘pleasure’] for His world...

“**Old Testament** scholars for a century now have sought to show the church—which in many areas, has consistently refused to accept their findings—that the **Old Testament** ‘secularized religion.’ It may be that God has had to use the figure of Karl Marx [in the twentieth century] to open the eyes of believers, just as he used the figure of the pagan King Cyrus to effect the release of [the Jewish exile] generation.” (Pp. 26-27)

⁶⁷To “hide oneself from” means to utterly neglect to aid—to turn away your eyes, to refuse to take notice, and to do nothing to help. Compare **Deuteronomy 22:1-4**, where this same hithpael verb **תַּתְּעַלֵּם** occurs.

Is this not too often our response to the poor, to the naked, to the hungry? Have you ever “hidden yourself” from the poor and the suffering? Have you deceived yourself into thinking that their suffering and hunger would go away if you didn’t see it?

What happens in your church when a needy person comes, asking for assistance? Do you honestly welcome that person, offering help? Or do you say We have no fund for such matters, and send them away empty-handed? Shouldn’t churches be known for their generosity to the

(continued...)

⁶⁷(...continued)

poor? And if you turn the poor person away empty-handed, are you not turning Jesus Christ away, according to **Matthew 25:45**?

⁶⁸Oswalt comments on **verses 8-9a** that “If persons will live out God’s freedom in their relations with one another, then the satisfaction that they have been seeking in their religion (**verses 1-3a**) will be theirs...

“Four elements are mentioned here: light, healing, guidance / protection, and God’s presence ...Light will split our darkness like the dawn. New skin (אֹרֶךְ) will stretch itself rapidly over the wounds that had been suppurating (festering, discharging pus) and infected. Before us will go our righteousness, and behind, gathering up the stragglers, will come the glory of the Lord (**verse 8**). Above all, God Himself will be present in response to the people’s prayers (**verse 9a**)...

“This is ultimately what biblical religion is all about: the presence of God. It is not first of all a system of ideas or a system of ethics. It is first of all the in-breaking of God into our lives, and that in-breaking will change all our ideas and all our behavior...

“The imagery of the colon [line] is taken from the military realm and from the exodus. As the vanguard and the rearguard offer protection (like the pillar of fire and cloud, **Exodus 13:21-22: 14:19-20**), so the righteousness and the glory that the Lord gives to His people will be proof against anything the world can hurl at them. Charges of every sort may be made against them, but nothing will stick if their lives are marked by the glory and righteousness of God.” (Pp. 504-05)

Knight entitles **verses 8-9a** “True Spirituality.”

He comments that “There are always those who work hard to become spiritually minded. They suppose that God expects us to search for holiness, as is the case in Hinduism. But this is not true of the **Old Testament**...Trito-Isaiah understands that true spirituality shines forth from the face of him who does what God does...and who therefore talks with God even as he pours himself out for others...

“So Trito-Isaiah continues by declaring that only when one does what God does ‘shall your light break forth like the dawn,’ as when the rising sun splits the night sky to bring hope and joy to a world that is sitting in darkness. Then too ‘your healing (of others, not of your own soul [we say, of others, and of your own soul as well]) shall spring up speedily,’ as a medicinal plant that can be used immediately to heal a dangerous wound. This is, of course, the kind of acted prayer that ‘the Lord will answer,’ because it reveals not a selfish desire for one’s own good but an unselfish desire to love the needy even as God has loved us. In the very act of sharing bread with the hungry, therefore, God ‘will say, Here I am’; for He Himself has become the Real Presence in the act of breaking bread.” (Pp. 27-28)

וְאַרְכַּתֶּךָ מִהֵרָה תִצְמַח
וְהִלְךְ לְפָנֶיךָ צְדָקָה
כְּבוֹד יְהוָה יֵאֲסֹפֶךָ:

Then your light will break forth like the dawn,⁶⁹
and your healing⁷⁰ will spring up speedily;
and your righteousness will walk before you.⁷¹

⁶⁹Compare the language of **Isaiah 60:1-2**:

- 1 Arise! Become light!
Because your light came,
And YHWH's glory arose over you (feminine singular)!
- 2 Because look—
the darkness covers earth,
and a heavy cloud (covers) peoples.
And upon you YHWH arises,
and His glory will be seen over you!

Do you think that this means whenever YHWH's people reach out in loving generosity to the poor, YHWH's glory will be seen? Is this what the prophet means?

⁷⁰Or "restoration." The phrase אַרְכַּתֶּךָ, "your healing," means "healing of a wound," or "restoration," of the new flesh that grows at the wounded spot. Elsewhere it is used for:

Nehemiah 4:1; 2 Chronicles 24:13, the "restoration" of the walls of Jerusalem;

Jeremiah 8:22, the healing of wounds in the physical body;

Jeremiah 30:17; 33:6 the healing of the nation and city of Jerusalem. We take this to be the meaning the prophet intends here in **Isaiah 58:8**.

⁷¹It is not pious claims, or religious rituals, or noisy proclamations that will go before the true worshipers—it is their righteousness with one another and with others, especially those who are suffering. All the world can see and know genuine love, and goodness; it is the most convincing argument that the people of God can ever make!

Oftentimes we hear arguments about "Which church is the true church?" The answer of **Isaiah 58** is that the true church is the church in which genuine love and compassion and goodness for those who need it most is found.

(continued...)

YHWH's glorious radiance will come behind you!⁷²

58:9 אִזְ תִּקְרָא וַיְהוֶה יַעֲנֶה
תִּשְׁמַע וַיֹּאמֶר תִּנְנִי
אִם־תִּסְיֹר מִתּוֹכָךְ מוֹטֵה
שִׁלַּח אֶצְבֶּע וְדַבֵּר־אֲוִן:

Then you will call out, and YHWH will answer;

⁷¹(...continued)

What about your church? Does a noisy, dogmatic claim go before it, claiming that it fulfills the rules, where others do not? Or is it a stream of people who have been truly cared for and helped that goes before it?

⁷²The verb אָסַף means “gather,” or “remove.” It is used of gathering, collecting armies together for battle. It is also use of “taking up,” “caring for.”

Brown-Driver-Briggs suggests the translation here and at **Isaiah 52:12**, “bring up your rear-guard.”

Achtemeier thinks that the author of this text is quoting **Isaiah 52:12**,

Because not in haste will you (plural) go forth,
and in flight you will not go.
Because going before you is YHWH,
and gathering up (behind) you (is) Israel's God!

The idea is evidently that of YHWH walking behind the people of Israel, gathering together those who have gone astray, keeping the people together in unity, and caring for any of their needs (as in **Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19; 16:10**).

Even though we may not understand the exact connotations of this “gathering,” it is a wonderful promise of Divine protection and companionship throughout our earthly pilgrimage! The promise certainly means that YHWH God will be with the people who worship Him in this His chosen way, helping them, and providing for them all along their pathway!

you will cry for help,⁷³ and He will say, “Here am I!”⁷⁴

If⁷⁵ you will remove from your midst everything that binds others down—⁷⁶

⁷³The 2nd person masculine singular piel imperfect verb **תִּשְׁרַע**, means “you will cry out for help.”

⁷⁴The Divine response, **הִנְנִי**, literally “look–I,” with nothing following, is rather unique for the **Hebrew Bible**, where the phrase occurs oftentimes, but almost always with the content of a Divine action following—“Look, I am doing so and so...” Compare **Isaiah 65:1**; and in a similar way, only with human subjects, Abraham and Jacob at **Genesis 22:7** and **27:18**.

Here, it is the Divine Promise of answered prayer—the promise that our worship will be effective, resulting in Divine answer to our cries for help—what a promise! As if to say YHWH will be our servant, answering our call!

What a promise that is! What do you want out of going to church / synagogue / mosque? Don't you want your voice to be heard on high? How can you be sure that this will happen. The answer is, love your neighbor as yourself. Care for the needy. Open your heart and your home to the poor and the needy. The living God will see and acknowledge and come to your side to bless you. Do you agree?

⁷⁵Knight comments on **verses 9b-12** that “‘To take away the yoke’ means to break forcefully the weighty cross-bar that greedy, vicious, and powerful people have continually laid upon the backs of simple folk, including in their number even little children. As Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote in **The Brothers Karamazov**: ‘It is the defencelessness of children that tempts the tormentor, that sets his vile blood on fire.’ So it was with the ‘warders’ of Auschwitz, both male and female, as they relentlessly prodded their naked captives into the gas ovens.

“‘The pointing of the finger’ was an act of contempt...But, Trito-Isaiah continues, ‘if you pour yourself out for the hungry’ (the verb used of the suffering servant at **53:12** [הִעָרַתָּ] and of the eternal Christ at **Philippians 2:7**), then your election within the covenant to be God’s instrument will be justified. But there is more to it than that one should be obedient. One’s concern for the afflicted must be to satisfy that other person’s desire, or fulfil his personality, before considering oneself... Trito-Isaiah says...that God’s kind of servant, who knows what it means to pour himself out for others, cannot let his client go until he leads him to peace. Then he goes home on a ‘high’ of joy, that deep satisfaction [יִשְׂבַּע] known to the suffering servant (**53:11**), whose creative nature is described again at **61:4**.” (P. 28)

And they will build long-time ruins;
former desolations they will raise up;

(continued...)

⁷⁵(...continued)

and they will renew cities of desolation (synonym),
ruins of generation and generation.

⁷⁶For this noun גִּוְלָה, “pole” or “yoke,” which is used symbolically of oppression, see in the **Hebrew Bible**:

Leviticus 26:13, YHWH reminds Israel that He broke the bars of their yoke in Egypt;

Isaiah 58:6, 6, 9, getting rid of yokes of oppression--the kind of worship YHWH delights in;

Jeremiah 27:2, Jeremiah told to make a yoke to wear on his neck as a symbol of the Baby-lonian captivity that is coming;

Jeremiah 28:10, 12, 13, 13, Hananiah breaks the wooden yoke on Jeremiah’s neck; Jeremiah replaces it with a yoke of iron;

Ezekiel 30:18, YHWH is going to break the yoke of Egypt, bringing her proud strength to an end;

Ezekiel 34:27, YHWH will break the yoke of those who enslaved Israel in Babylonia;

1 Chronicles 15:15, the Levites carried the ark / chest of the covenant with the aid of yokes upon their shoulders..

Watts notes that “God’s promise to meet and respond to prayer is further conditioned on removing from their midst things that are displeasing to Him...All forms of bondage are distasteful to God, whether economic, political, or social. God’s people...are intended to promote freedom for all their fellow human beings.” (P. 275)

Oswalt comments on **verses 9b-10** that “God’s concern is that the worship be delivered from a focus upon [itself] and that the worship will grow out of, and issue in, a genuine caring for others...Negatively, the lovers of God should work at removing *the yoke*: oppression of all sorts... The second removal adds something new: slander and defamation. While the precise connotation of *pointing the finger* is uncertain, it likely conveys mockery and contempt (compare **57:4; 66:5**). The impression is strengthened by the addition of *speaking iniquity*. Oppression of the poor and the weak will not stop ultimately until they are no longer seen as objects of scorn and contempt, or as pitiable victims. They must be seen as persons of worth and dignity, brothers and sisters under God.

“This important note is carried one step farther in **verse 10a**, where the positive element is brought into play...The people whom [the prophet] addresses think that an important way of showing devotion to God is to deprive oneself of food for His sake—to make oneself hungry. The prophet says God would much rather we show our devotion to Him by alleviating hunger in others...

(continued...)

throwing a finger (in condemnation),⁷⁷ and speaking harshly;⁷⁸

⁷⁶(...continued)

“We should pour out our souls for the hungry...Fasting was called ‘affliction of soul’ (e.g., **Leviticus 16:31**). Thus the worshiper was pouring [its] soul to God in an act of self-denial. God says that if it comes to a choice, He would much rather that we ‘pour out our souls’ in ministry to those whose ‘souls’ really are ‘afflicted’ by the crushing forces of life, than that we engage in an ecstasy of self-congratulation over how severe we are on ourselves for the (supposed) love of God. Thus the movement of thought here is profound: from the removal of the acts of oppression to removal of the attitudes on which oppression depends, to a sacrifice of oneself for the sake of those who have been oppressed.” (Pp. 505-06)

⁷⁷The phrase **שְׁלַח אֶצְבָּע**, literally, “to send forth a finger”—perhaps means what we call today “giving the high sign.” The phrase is unique in the **Hebrew Bible**; it probably indicates a form of body language which belittles others, expressing contempt for them.

Watts holds that the phrase may refer to “spying, or accusing in an atmosphere of pressure to induce fear.” (P. 275) Achtemeier holds that “Probably in these verses the prophet has the oppression of the Levitical-prophetic party in mind. ‘Pointing of the finger’...and ‘speaking wickedness’...refer to the mockery, mentioned earlier in **57:4**, directed against them.” (P. 57)

See **Proverbs 6:13** for other examples of “bodily language,” such as winking with the eye, signaling with the feet, motions with the fingers. The world hasn’t changed much, has it?

Achtemeier notes that “Up to this point, the teachings of **Third-Isaiah** have been very similar to the five opening verses of the Sermon on the Mount, a fact that says much about Jesus’ identification with the spirit of the Levitical-prophetic reformers and their role as God’s suffering servant.” (P. 57)

⁷⁸What does the phrase **דַּבַּר-אֵוֶן**, mean? It means literally “to speak trouble, sorrow, or wickedness.”

We all know how easy it is to “stereotype” other people, to point accusing fingers at them, to tell racist jokes that belittle and hurt other people. YHWH God hates that kind of talk, and wants His people to turn it aside from their midst!

Is this just some ancient matter, peculiar to ancient Israel, with which we are no longer acquainted? Or is it not an exact description of so much of our modern conversation—by which we hurt and belittle our fellow human beings, seeking to put them down in order thereby to exalt our own pride and position of privilege? Just think of the language that has become common in our modern political discourse in America, especially now in reference to Muslims! I remember how in the past the objects of put down were the Jews, the Catholics, the Blacks, the Japs, the Germans, the Communists, the Liberals—who is next? The opposite of such put-downs is to acknowledge every human being as our brother or sister, and reach out to them in self-giving, caring love. That’s what God wants from His servant—and we add, from us!

58:10 וְתַפֵּק לְרַעֲבִים נַפְשֶׁךָ

וְנַפְשׁ נַעֲנָה תִּשְׁבִּיעַ

וּזְרַח בְּחֶשֶׁךְ אֹרֶךְ

וְאַפְלַתְךָ כְּצַהֲרִים:

and (if) you offer⁷⁹ your heart-felt concern⁸⁰ for the hungry,⁸¹
and satisfy the deep longings of the oppressed—⁸²

⁷⁹The 2nd person singular hiphil verb תַּפֵּק, from the root פִּיק, means “you will bring out,” “you will furnish,” “you will promote.”

⁸⁰What does this phrase mean, וְתַפֵּק לְרַעֲבִים נַפְשֶׁךָ, literally, “you shall furnish for the hungry your innermost being”? The Greek translation is καὶ ὀψὲς πεινῶντι τὸν ἄρτον ἐκ ψυχῆς σου, “and you should give to one hungering the bread out of your innermost being.” Slotki’s translation is “And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry,” which he says means “display sympathy with.” (P. 285)

The phrase is difficult, and no certainty seems possible. See the next footnote for our conclusion.

⁸¹It is probably best to understand the entire line to mean that YHWH wants His people to get genuinely involved in the plight of the hungry poor, giving them far more than just a loaf of bread, or a basket of groceries. They must truly care, and do all that is possible for them, from the depths of their being! They must “furnish their innermost being” for those who are hungry, i.e., genuinely welcome them, and seek to help them in their hungry condition. We paraphrase by “offer your heartfelt concern.”

⁸²This line is also difficult to translate. It says literally, “and an oppressed innermost-being, you will satisfy.” The noun נַפְשׁ, occurs in both the first and second lines; it may well be that the two lines mean that the worshiper of YHWH is to identify with the longings and desires of the oppressed, and by so doing, to be able to understand and help provide for their needs. Regardless of the difficulty in translation, there is certainly a very important matter at issue here. Instead of rejecting, or refusing to seek to understand the longings of the poor oppressed peoples of the earth, YHWH God wants His people to feel what their fellow human beings are feeling, to identify with them—and so feeling and identifying, to become the kind of people who can understand them, and help provide for their felt needs! This is the nature of *real worship*!

Achtemeier states that “These are the acts...that constitute true fasting in God’s eyes, and they are all acts that deny and give up one’s self for the sake of others. Without such love for others in need, which at the same time is love for God, self-denial can be nothing more than self-

(continued...)

then⁸³ your light will arise in the darkness,⁸⁴

and your gloominess⁸⁵ (will be like) the noon-day (sun)!⁸⁶

58:11 וְנִחַךְ יְהוָה תִּמְיֹד

וְהַשְׁבִּיעַ בְּצַחְצְחוֹת נַפְשֶׁךָ

וְעִצְמֹתֶיךָ יִחְלִיץ

וְהָיִיתָ כְּגֵן רוּחַ

וְכִמוֹצָא מֵיָם

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִכָּזְבוּ מִיָּמָיו:

⁸²(...continued)

indulgence (compare **1 Corinthians 13:3** [If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I am nothing], a luxuriating in one's own feelings of self-righteousness (compare **Luke 18:12** [the Pharisee informs God that he goes without eating twice a week and give ten percent of all his income])." (P. 57)

Watts comments that "The political leader is rare who recognizes that the ultimate measure of a leader's greatness lies in the extent to which he gives himself to and for the very needy of his people. In the end, *satisfying the afflicted* is more important than pleasing the powerful and the rich." (P. 275)

⁸³Literally, "and..."

⁸⁴Compare the first line of **verse 8**. The promise is that regardless of the surrounding darkness, those who act in this way will receive clear guidance on their path through life.

⁸⁵Or, "darkness," or "calamity."

⁸⁶The phrase כְּצַהֲרִים, means literally "like the mid-day," or "like the noon." This is the brightest time of the day, and the phrase is probably meant to be simile ("like") for a time of brightness, happiness. There can be little to cheer about when oppression is heavy in the land, and when the weight of injustice is felt throughout society. But when YHWH's people truly care for the poor and the needy, meeting their deepest needs and desires, then a spirit of gladness and happiness will fill the land—so YHWH promises His people! Light will replace the darkness!

And YHWH will guide you⁸⁷ continually;⁸⁸

⁸⁷The phrase וַיְנַחֵם, “and He will guide you,” uses a common verb for Divine guidance. See elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible**:

Genesis 24:48, Abraham’s servant thanks YHWH for leading him to Rebekah;
Exodus 13:17, God did not lead Israel through the Philistine territory;
Exodus 13:21, God led the Israelites in a pillar of cloud and pillar of fire; **Psalm 78:14, 53**;
Nehemiah 9:12, 19, similar;
Exodus 15:13, In Your steadfast-love You will lead the people You have redeemed;
Deuteronomy 32:12, YHWH alone led Israel through the desert;
Psalm 5:9 (8 in English), Lead me O YHWH, in Your righteousness!;
Psalm 23:3, YHWH leads me in paths of righteousness;
Psalm 27:11, Teach me Your way, O YHWH; lead me in a straight path!;
Psalm 31:4^{Heb} / **3**^{Eng}, For the sake of Your name, lead me and guide me!;
Psalm 43:3, Send forth Your light and Your truth; let them guide me!;
Psalm 61:3^{Heb} / **2**^{Eng}, Lead me to the Rock that is higher than I!;
Psalm 73:24, You guide me with Your counsel;
Psalm 77:21^{Heb} / **20**^{Eng}, You led Your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron;
Psalm 78:72, with skillful hands David led Jacob / Israel;
Psalm 107:30, sailors in a storm were guided by YHWH to their safe haven;
Psalm 139:10, 24, even on the far side of the sea, Your hand will guide me; Lead me in the long-lasting way!;
Psalm 143:10, May Your good Spirit lead me on level ground!;
Proverbs 6:22, your father and mother’s teaching will guide you when you walk;
Proverbs 11:3, the integrity of the upright guides them;
Isaiah 57:18, YHWH will guide the contrite of heart;
Isaiah 58:11 (here), YHWH will always guide you, regardless of the circumstances;
Job 12:23, God שֵׁטַח לְגוֹיִם וַיְנַחֵם, spreads abroad for the nations, and leads them (English translations sometimes have “leads them away”; but we take this to be a very positive, universal affirmation concerning God’s guidance of all nations. What do you think?)

What a powerful promise for those who know their need of guidance and direction in life! As I write this commentary, I am reading Katie Davis’ book **Kisses from Katie** (Gale Cengage Learning, Detroit, 2011) in which this young Tennessee girl who moved to Uganda to care for orphans tells of her experience of constant Divine presence and guidance as she risked her life in selfless service to the unwanted, unclean orphans of Uganda in desert conditions.

⁸⁸What a promise! If YHWH God is continually (תְּמִידָה, **tamidh** implies uninterrupted continuity) guiding us, we need have no fear of anything the present or the future holds!

We agree with Westermann in his comment that these words “...Are reminiscent of **Psalm 23**. Their metaphors of making the bones young again, of the watered garden, the spring of water, and waters that fail not, employ the language used in the blessing.” (P. 339)

(continued...)

and He will satisfy your deep longings in scorched deserts!⁸⁹

And He will invigorate⁹⁰ your bones,⁹¹

⁸⁸(...continued)

Slotki says that this verse is “a metaphor for prosperity and well-being.” (P. 285) And that prosperity and well-being are promised to those who practice the kind of righteousness being described in this chapter.

⁸⁹The phrase **בְּצִחָהּ**, which occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**, evidently means “in scorched regions.”

During years with plentiful rainfall in North and East Texas it is sometimes hard to imagine what would have been in the mind of the biblical writer. But the pilgrim to the wilderness peninsula where Israel wandered for forty years quickly understands this language—just as do people who have spent time in Death Valley, or in the barren deserts of the southwestern United States. The promise should not be limited to literal deserts, however—and may be taken to refer to other times and conditions in life, when the innermost being is “scorched” with loneliness, or oppression, or various sorts of wants. In their very midst, says this Divine promise, YHWH will be with us, meeting our innermost needs and deepest longings!

As Motyer states, “The thought is not what satisfaction the Lord will give but *where* He will give it—when everything is at its bleakest and least promising.” (P. 482)

Perhaps the most “scorched region” through which any of us must go is the dark “valley of the shadow of death.” We can take this promise to mean that even there, YHWH will be with us, guiding us, providing for our deepest need, just as is said of the suffering servant of **chapter 53, verses 10b-12!**

What do you think? Are you prepared to walk through that valley?

⁹⁰The 3rd person masculine singular hiphil imperfect verb **יִחַלֵּי**, means literally “He will brace up, invigorate,” “He will equip for war,” i.e., by imparting strength and vigor. The knowledge of YHWH God does just that—it imparts strength to the weak and the weary.

Compare **Isaiah 40:30-31**, where although this verb is not used, the same assurance is present:

30 Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted;
31 but they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles;

(continued...)

and you will be like a well-watered garden,⁹²
and like a spring of water,
whose waters never fail!⁹³

⁹⁰(...continued)
they shall run and not be weary;
they shall walk and not faint.

⁹¹1QIs^a originally misspelled the phrase for “and your bones” **וּעֲצָמוֹתֶיךָ**, but a later hand has written in the letter **ת** above the line to correct the spelling.

Motyer comments that “...The Divine supply is not only external, it is also an inward strengthening of the *frame*, the gift of durability.” (P. 482)

Oswalt says that “The idea of making the *bones* strong is in contrast to all those references where terror makes the bones tremble and shake (**Job 4:14; Psalm 6:3^{Heb} / 2^{Eng}; Jeremiah 23:9; Habakkuk 3:16**), or sorrow or guilt makes them waste away (**Psalm 31:11^{Heb} / 10^{Eng}; 32:3; 38:3; 102:4, 6^{Heb} / 3, 5^{Eng}**). In contrast, see **Isaiah 66:4; Job 21:24; Proverbs 15:30; 16:24.**” (P. 507)

⁹²We are reminded of the beautiful pictures at the beginning and the end of the **Bible**—in **Genesis 2** and in **Revelation 21-22**, where humanity lives in a Garden of Delights, with the tree of life growing on the banks of the life-imparting river. Such a reality can become a present reality when YHWH’s people truly worship Him in His chosen way of righteousness—loving care for those who suffer!

Achtemeier comments that “Yahweh, the Spring of living waters (compare **Jeremiah 2:13; John 4:14**), will pour out such abundant life on His people (compare **Isaiah 44:3**) that their vitality will become like a fountain of waters that never fails (compare **John 7:38**).

“With such renewed strength given them, the people will be able to rebuild their ancient city (compare **Isaiah 44:26, 28; 45:13; Ezekiel 36:10; Amos 9:11**), to repair the breaches in its fallen wall (compare **Ezekiel 13:5**), and to restore that ‘rest’ (compare **Deuteronomy 3:20; 12:9; Exodus 33:14**) from all their ‘enemies round about’ (**Deuteronomy 12:10; 25:19**; compare **Joshua 11:23**) promised to them in the Deuteronomic teaching.” (P. 59)

Oswalt states that “The person who has the light of God in his or her life, who is led by God, whose soul is refreshed in the deserts of life and whose body is strengthened by Him will be a watered garden (see also **Jeremiah 31:12**). That is, such a person will have a rich supply of gifts to share with others; they will be a source of delight and encouragement. They will not be like the thornbush in the desert, all of whose energy is consumed in the grim business of survival, but will have fruits and flowers to give from the overflow of their abundance.” (P. 507)

⁹³Even in the midst of the most scorched regions of the earth, with YHWH’s presence and guidance, His people will be refreshed and invigorated with renewed strength, becoming like a well-watered garden, whose supply of life-giving water never fails.

(continued...)

וּבְנֵי מִמְּדָה חֲרִבּוֹת עוֹלָם 58:12

מוֹסְדֵי דוֹר־דוֹר תִּקְוִימָם
וְקִרְאָ לָהֶם גִּדְרֵי פְרִיץ
מִשְׁבַּב נְתִיבוֹת לְשִׁבְתָּ:

And they will build up the long-time wasted places because of you,⁹⁴

⁹³(...continued)

There can be little doubt that Jesus' language was influenced by this passage in:

John 4:14,

Those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.
The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water,
gushing up to long-lasting life.”

John 7:37-38,

...Let anyone who is thirsty come to Me,
and let the one who believes in Me drink.
As the scripture has said,
Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.

See also **Jeremiah 2:13**, where YHWH calls Himself the “Spring of living water,” and **Isaiah 44:3**, where YHWH promises to pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground.

Such is the promise that accompanies the genuine worship of loving care for others that YHWH our God chooses. If we will truly worship Him, with a worship that transforms society with genuine compassion, justice and freedom, He promises to make us, and our nation, a garden-land, filled with life-giving water! What a promise for us, and for our beloved United States of America!

⁹⁴Literally, “And they will build...from you...” Following as a consequence of genuine worship, that imparts freedom to all peoples, and builds a society based on justice and righteousness, is the transformation of the formerly “wasted-places” into places where God's people can live securely in plenty and joy. That's the power of genuine worship! Compare:

Isaiah 44:26, 28; 45:13, YHWH predicts the re-building of Jerusalem by Cyrus;

Isaiah 61:4, the Lord YHWH's forgiven people will rebuild the ancient ruins, and restore the places long devastated;

(continued...)

foundations for generation after generation you will cause to stand!⁹⁵
And he will be called / it will be called to you,⁹⁶ “Repairer⁹⁷ (of) Broken Walls,”⁹⁸

⁹⁴(...continued)

Ezekiel 36:10, the destroyed towns will be once again inhabited, and the ruins rebuilt;

Amos 9:11, YHWH promises to restore David’s fallen tent, repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be.

Alexander comments that “as מִמֶּנִּי, **mimmeka**, properly means ‘from you (singular),’ it denotes something more than mere connection, and...must be taken to signify a going forth from Israel into other lands.” (P. 361)

⁹⁵**Exodus 34:6-7** emphasizes the impact that unfailing love can have on subsequent generations. While wickedness can foul the springs of life, even to the third and the fourth generation, unfailing love can reach out to “thousands of generations” with blessings!

As Motyer comments, “This is a promise of continuance and blessing reaching into coming generations (**Exodus 20:6; Proverbs 20:7**) and extending from recovery of past disaster (*ancient ruins*) to provision for future well-being (*streets with dwellings*).” (P. 482)

Those who truly worship YHWH become the “builders of foundations” for generations to come. Younger people, seeing the outcome of faithful worshipers’ lives, will know the kind of life to live, and the kind of worship to give to God! Without such an experience, coming generations are left without proper guidance!

Here the promise is given to those who genuinely worship YHWH God that they will lay the foundation for subsequent generations to build upon. This can be true of our lives, and of our churches. If we will learn how to worship God in the manner described in this text, we will be laying the foundation for restoring the church to its true grandeur and greatness, and generations to come can receive blessing because of what we have dared to do.

⁹⁶The verb מִיִּקְרָא is the pual perfect, 3rd person masculine singular, with waw-conversive, meaning “he will be called.” See the usage of this verb elsewhere at:

Isaiah 48:8, the House of Jacob was called a rebel from birth;

Isaiah 48:12, YHWH is the One Who has called Israel;

Isaiah 61:3, those who are given freedom by YHWH’s servant will be called “oaks of righteousness”;

Isaiah 62:2, when Zion / Jerusalem’s salvation comes, she will be called by a new name;

Isaiah 65:1, YHWH will reveal Himself to a nation that did not call on His name;

(continued...)

⁹⁶(...continued)

Ezekiel 10:13, the wheels of Ezekiel’s vision-chariot were being called “the whirling wheels.”

The verb is the equivalent of saying “it will be called to you,” or “you will be called (named).”

⁹⁷The qal present participle גִּבֹרֵי, means “wall-builder,” or “mason.” See the use of this participle in the following passages:

2 Kings 12:13^{Heb} / **12**^{Eng}, wall-builders / masons were used in repairing the temple of Solomon; **2 Kings 22:6**, same;

Isaiah 58:12, here—you will be wall-builders / masons in rebuilding the ancient ruins;

Ezekiel 13:5, the false prophets have not gone up to the wall to build / repair it;

Ezekiel 22:30, YHWH sought for a man who would stand in the breached wall, and rebuild it;

Hosea 2:8^{Heb} / **6**^{Eng}, YHWH will build a wall to block the movement of His wayward wife;

Amos 9:11, YHWH will restore David’s fallen tent, repairing / rebuilding its broken places;

Job 19:8, Job complains that God has built a wall on his path, and he cannot pass over it;

Lamentations 3:7-9, similar.

⁹⁸The noun פְּרִיץ, means literally “breach (or ‘bursting forth’)” The phrase גִּבֹרֵי פְּרִיץ, means “a mason, repairing a breach” (in a wall).”

The student of the **Jewish Bible** easily relates this promise to the biblical story of Nehemiah, and his sacrificial work of rebuilding the breached walls of Jerusalem, in the fifth century B.C.E. Restoration of genuine worship to the heart of God’s people accomplishes just the same task—it rebuilds the broken-down walls of the City of God, enabling the people of God to fulfill their destiny and achieve their greatness! That’s the promise of this chapter.

But whereas Nehemiah’s wall was built as part of a program of segregation from the people of the land, these walls of Zion will make the people of God strong to reach out to just those people, including the physically deformed and the foreigners, to love and care for them as fellow members of the heavenly Zion—not segregating from them, not refusing to touch them as unclean!

⁹⁹The feminine plural noun נְתִיבוֹת, “pathways,” is mostly used for “pathways of life,” see:

- Judges 5:6,** הַלְכֵי נְתִיבוֹת יִלְכוּ אַרְחוֹת עֲקָלְקָלוֹת, those walking (on) paths will walk (on) crooked paths’
- Isaiah 42:16,** YHWH says, I will cause blind people to walk on a way they did not know, in paths they did not know I will cause them to tread;
- Isaiah 58:12,** here; literally, one bringing back paths for dwelling;
- Isaiah 59:8,** they twisted their paths;
- Jeremiah 6:16,** ask for paths of long-lasting time;
- Jeremiah 18:15,** שְׁבִילֵי עוֹלָם לִלְכֹת נְתִיבוֹת דֶּרֶךְ לֹא סֻלְּוָה, literally, ways of long-lasting time for walking, paths, a road not built up;
- Hosea 2:8^{Heb} / 6^{Eng},** YHWH’s unfaithful wife will not find her ways;
- Psalms 142:4^{Heb} / 3^{Eng},** when my spirit faints within me, YHWH knows my path;
- Job 19:8,** Job complains that God has blocked his path so that he cannot go on;
- Job 30:13,** Job complains that his enemies have broken up his path;
- Job 38:20,** YHWH asks Job if he knows the paths to the dwelling-places of light and darkness;
- Proverbs 3:17,** all wisdom’s paths are **shalom**, peace / prosperity;
- Proverbs 8:2,** wisdom call to humanity takes place at the “house of paths” (literally);
- Proverbs 8:20,** wisdom walks in the midst of the paths of justice;
- Proverbs 12:28,** בְּאַרְחֵ-צַדִּיקָה חַיִּים וְדֶרֶךְ נְתִיבָה אֵל-מוֹת, literally, in righteousness’s way, life; and way of her path–no death!;
- Lamentations 3:9,** “He has walled in my ways with hewn blocks, He has made my paths a maze” (**Tanakh**).

¹⁰⁰The phrase מְשַׁבֵּב נְתִיבוֹת לְשֹׁבֵת, means “one restoring (the hiphil participle of שׁוּב, **shubh**) paths (or ‘pathways,’ ‘courses’) for (literally) sitting down,” but which obviously means “restoring (or ‘repairing’) pathways for dwelling (or ‘living’).”

Achtemeier holds that the word means “rest” (it can be read this way in an unpointed text), but as the Masoretes have pointed it, it is the feminine singular noun which means “seat,” “dwelling,” or “place.”

We have stated that the student of the **Jewish Bible** easily relates this promise to the work of Nehemiah; so also with this name we are reminded of the work of Nehemiah’s contemporary, Ezra—who gave his life to restoring the teaching of the Mosaic **Torah** among the returnees from Babylonian captivity—demanding the returnees to live according to a strict interpretation of the laws of Moses, which had been almost totally forgotten before Nehemiah’s and Ezra’s return and work. Both Ezra and Nehemiah were intent on building walls around the people of God, and leading them to separate themselves from those of differing nationalities and religions—instead of lovingly serving and welcoming them into their midst, as **Third Isaiah** insists the returnees must do. It is this difference in understanding of the will of YHWH for His people that caused the conflict so often referred to by Achtemeier in her interpretation of **Third Isaiah**.

It is obvious that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is in a very similar condition today in the twenty-first century. We ask, How can the Christian Church (and her sister churches) be restored to its Divinely destined position, regaining its message and power in American society, and throughout the world? How can America itself be restored and renewed to fulfill its Divinely-given destiny? Will it be through a return to a rigid interpretation of biblical laws such as Ezra insisted on (and which the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, and some legalistic-minded churches of our present day insist on)? Or will it be through the breaking down of walls, and commitment to loving service of others that renewal can come?

Isaiah 58 gives a powerful answer, and rebuttal to the program of **Ezra-Nehemiah** (and the Pharisees), a program of building walls of separation and demanding divorce from foreign wives and children, while following a rigid interpretation of 613 laws found in the Mosaic **Torah**.

Such a program will not be pleasing to YHWH, and will not bring the world to the knowledge of YHWH! It is only through learning anew to worship God in the way He desires to be worshiped—with a worship that is not just a personal devotion or fulfillment of a legalistic ritual—but rather, a worship that transforms society, not separating itself from foreigners, or those who differ, but through giving freedom to all the oppressed, reaching out to genuinely care for and meet the needs of the suffering peoples of this earth.

When the former exiles practice such a religion, YHWH God will come and be with them, guiding them, providing for their needs, enabling them to become a people who can restore the foundations of life, upon which coming generations can build and be blessed! And it is to just such a “Zion” that the nations of the earth will come streaming! So **Third Isaiah** insists.

(continued...)

אִם־תָּשִׁיב רַגְלֶךָ מִשַּׁבַּת רְגֹלְךָ 58:13¹⁰¹

עֲשׂוֹת חֲפְצֶיךָ בְּיוֹם קִדְשִׁי

וְקִרְאתָ לַשַּׁבָּת עֲנָג

לְקָדוֹשׁ יְהוָה מִכְבֹּד

וְכִבְדֹתוֹ מֵעֲשׂוֹת דְרָכֶיךָ

מִמְצוֹא חֲפְצֶךָ וְדַבַּר דְּבַר:

If you will turn back your foot from (busy activities on the) day of rest,¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰(...continued)

Is not the same thing true for later generations? Is not the teaching of Jesus, both by His life and by His words (see **Matthew 25:31-46**) this same teaching? If we today in America dare to worship God in the manner described in **chapter 58**, will not our God take us, and use us to rebuild our churches and our nation—filling us with His life-giving presence and guidance, resulting in long-time blessing for us, our children, and our world? What a glorious promise that is! Do we dare to take advantage of it?

¹⁰¹Slotki comments on **verses 13-14** that they depict “the pleasures and delights to be derived from the proper observance of the Sabbath.” (P. 286)

¹⁰²What does “turning your foot back from (the) day of rest” mean? Both the Hebrew and the Greek have this same literal phrase. We think it most probably means to quit going out from the home on business trips and journeys—and instead, to stay at home with one’s family, refusing to spoil or disturb the quiet and rest of being at home in undisturbed peace—such as the day of rest legislation envisions.

It is very important for **chapter 58** to see how the joyful, relaxed observance of the day of rest and plenty is being contrasted with the busy, anxious rituals of self-abstinence that seek to put YHWH in the worshiper’s debt.

Alex Motyer observes that “The essence of Canaanite religion was to put the Gods under pressure to perform their functions (hence, for example, what we would call orgiastic rites designed to stimulate Baal to acts of fertility). This is the spirit which **verse 3** reveals...

“The essence of Israelite religion, however, is response. Not doing things to influence the Lord but doing them to obey Him; not works looking for reward, but faith acting in obedience. For this reason, **Isaiah** counterpoises the desperate fasting of **verses 2-3** with the joyful keeping of the Sabbath in **verses 13-14** [‘setting the feast over against the fast,’ p. 483]. For in every sense the Sabbath brings us to the heart of the matter. It is a real test of ‘heart’-religion to give a whole

(continued...)

(from) doing your pleasures¹⁰³ on My set-apart day;¹⁰⁴
and (if) you will call the set-apart day an exquisite delight,¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²(...continued)

day to God and to do it with delight. The Sabbath is, first, a call to consecrate life's timetable to God, to adopt a style for six days which allows the seventh day to be a day apart (**Exodus 16:22-30; Numbers 15:32-36**)...

“But **verses 13-14** go beyond getting the timetable right; they are dominated by the word *delight* (**13c, 14a**). The heart is so captivated by God [and we would add, by what He has already done for His people in creation and redemption] that the day is set apart to joy. This is the reason for the Sabbath emphasis in **chapters 56-66**; it is the symbol of a whole life and heart devoted to the Lord.” (P. 478)

When we quit our busyness, and take one full 24-hour day off to be with our family, to enjoy the quiet of family unity, and when we bring our poor neighbors to share in the bounty of our table, and when we take time to rest, one day in seven, both ourselves and those who work for us, we will be doubly fortunate and blessed. What do you think? Do you agree with Motyer?

¹⁰³The plural noun used here, **תְּפִלֵּיךָ**, literally “your delights,” or “your pleasures,” may well be taken in its late sense in Hebrew as meaning “your business(es)” (so, Westermann, p. 340). The Greek translation is τὰ θελήματά σου, “the wills of yours,” “the desires of yours,” “the purposes of yours.” This is a key-word for the understanding of the entire passage. Whose desires are you seeking to fulfill—yours, or God’s?

¹⁰⁴Westermann comments that “The verse affords us a vivid picture of the importance of the Sabbath in the post-exilic period...The conditions presupposed are those of the city. After the return, when the economy was tight and things were hard, business apparently went on on the Sabbath without regard to the commandment forbidding work on it.” (P. 341)

¹⁰⁵The masculine singular noun **עֲנֻגָּה**, means “daintiness,” or “exquisite delight.” The noun seemingly has connotations of feminine beauty and joy—and may well imply treating the day of rest like a beautiful, well-adorned, beloved “lady,” “Queen Sabbath.” It certainly implies treating the day of rest as a very special day, one to be filled with charm and happiness and intimacy—the very opposite of self-affliction and self-denial! It is a day for spreading the weekly feast, to which slaves and the poorest in society were to be invited—the very opposite of abstaining from food, and mortifying, afflicting oneself.

This noun is found elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** only at **Isaiah 13:22** (“palaces of exquisite delight”).

The definite adjective **הָעֲנֻגָּה**, **ha(anuggah**, “the dainty one,” is found at **Deuteronomy 28:56** used in description of a “dainty woman.” The verb from this same root is found at:

(continued...)

to set apart¹⁰⁶ YHWH (as) an Honored One;¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵(...continued)

Deuteronomy 28:56, a woman who “is so delicate” will do desperate, unthinkable things;

Isaiah 55:2, if you truly listen to YHWH, you will eat what is good and enjoy yourself (delicately) with rich food;

Isaiah 57:4, YHWH asks, Against Whom are you taking delicate delight?

Isaiah 58:14, here, if you truly worship as YHWH desires, you will take delicate delight in Him!;

Isaiah 66:11, YHWH promises His people that they will be like babies at the breast of Jerusalem, drinking deeply with delight;

Jeremiah 6:2, YHWH will destroy the lovely and delicately birthed Jerusalem!;

Psalms 37:4, 11, delight yourselves in YHWH, and He will give you the desires of your heart; the poor people shall inherit the land, and delight themselves delicately in greatness of peace; the usage here in **Psalms 37** is closely parallel to **Isaiah 58:14**;

Job 22:26, Eliphaz holds that if Job will only repent and return to Shadday (the ancient Semitic name for God), then he will delight himself delicately in God;

Job 27:10, Job asks, does the Godless person find delicate delight in Shadday (an ancient Semitic name for God)?

¹⁰⁶The original writing of 1QIs^a had לקדש, but a later hand has written in the letter ך above the line, correcting the spelling to לקדוּשׁ.

¹⁰⁷The purpose of the day of rest is much more than simply a time of rest from work, and family unity and enjoyment. All of this is intended, but even more important than this is spending this set-apart time in honoring YHWH God (the Creator, the Deliverer). The end-result of proper observance of the day of rest is that YHWH will be set apart as special in the lives of those observing the day—becoming truly an “Honored One” in their hearts and lives. All other days will be transformed when the day of rest is properly observed! Such weekly observance of time off from work will not only be a blessing to society in general, it will give us the opportunity to renew our relationship with and acknowledgment of God in our lives!

and (if) you will honor Him / it,¹⁰⁸ by not¹⁰⁹ making your journeys,¹¹⁰
by not finding your (own) pleasure,¹¹¹ and speaking (empty) words—

58:14 אַז תִּתְעַנֵּג עַל־יְהוָה

וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ עַל־ (בְּמוֹתַי) [בְּמַתֵּי] אֲרָץ

וְהֵאֲכַלְתִּיךָ נַחֲלַת יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיךָ

כִּי פִי יְהוָה דִּבֶּר:

then you will take exquisite delight¹¹² over YHWH,¹¹³

and I will cause you to ride¹¹⁴ upon earth's high places,¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁸Or, “Him.” The Hebrew is ambiguous, and can be understood as referring to the day of rest, or to YHWH.

¹⁰⁹Literally “from”—but which we have translated “by not...”

¹¹⁰The phrase could also be translated “not doing your ways,” but it seems obvious that the intended meaning is as we have translated, “not making your journeys.” The Greek translates by literally, “you will not take up (or ‘lift’) the foot of yours upon a work.”

Our translation is of the nature of a commentary, holding that the phrase means something like not going out of your house to set your foot upon a work that you have been engaged in.

¹¹¹Here the phrase is חֲפִצֵּךָ, “your pleasure,” in the singular rather than in the plural as in line two. The most important question in religion is just this: whose pleasure is being fulfilled? Is our religion a matter of catering to our own desires and pleasures, or a sincere, honest attempt to fulfill God's desires and pleasures? It is the most important question we can ask concerning our worship!

¹¹²The 2nd person singular imperfect hithpael verb תִּתְעַנֵּג, “you will take exquisite delight” means that genuine joy and happiness will be found in taking the time to insure that YHWH is set apart in one's life and heart—such a relationship with YHWH will transform all of life, with its manifold problems—turning the darkest, deepest valley into a radiant “high-place” of joyous hope!

¹¹³Motyer comments that “The Lord's ordinances, truly used, are means of grace, avenues to the Lord himself.” (P. 483) Do you agree with Motyer? We do.

¹¹⁴The phrase with the 1st person singular hiphil (causative) verb וְהִרְכַּבְתִּיךָ, means “and I will cause you to ride.” For the occurrences of this hiphil verb in the **Hebrew Bible**, see:

(continued...)

¹¹⁴(...continued)

Genesis 41:43, Pharaoh made Joseph ride in the chariot second only to his own;

Exodus 4:20, Moses caused his wife and sons to ride on the donkey;

Deuteronomy 32:13, YHWH made Israel ride on the high places of the land, and he ate the produce of the field, and He suckled him with honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock (this passage is very similar to **Isaiah 58:14**);

2 Samuel 6:3; 1 Chronicles 13:7, they caused the ark / chest (of the covenant) to ride on a new cart;

1 Kings 1:33, 38, 44, Solomon is caused to ride on his mule for his coronation;

2 Kings 9:28, Ahaziah's body is caused to ride in a chariot to Jerusalem for burial;

2 Kings 10:16, Jehu causes Jehonadab to ride with him in his chariot;

2 Kings 13:16, 16, Elisha tells the king of Israel to "cause his hand to ride upon the bow," i.e., to shoot it;

2 Kings 23:30; 2 Chronicles 35:24, the dead Josiah is caused to ride in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem for burial;

Isaiah 58:14, here; YHWH promises those who truly worship Him that He will cause them to ride upon high places of the land;

Hosea 10:11, אֶרְכִּיב אֶפְרַיִם, I will cause Ephraim to ride...;

Psalms 66:12, literally, You have caused a man to ride to our head;

Job 30:22, Job complains that God causes him to ride the wind;

Esther 6:9, 11, let the Persian king cause the chosen man to ride a horse; not Haman but Mordecai is chosen to do so.

The noun רֶכֶב, means "chariot." No longer will the worshipers of YHWH, who have kept the rest-day as YHWH wants it done, be "plodding" through life. Quite the opposite—they will find themselves lifted up, carried along, "riding" in a Divinely provided chariot!

Compare the great promise of **Isaiah 40:31**, "...Those who wait for YHWH will renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like vultures / eagles, they shall run and not be weary,
(continued...)

and I will cause you to eat¹¹⁶ (from) Jacob your father's inheritance—¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴(...continued)
they shall walk and not faint.”

¹¹⁵See the article on **בְּמוֹת**, “high places,” found in **Brown-Driver-Briggs**, p. 119.

The meaning here in **Isaiah 58:14** probably has nothing to do with the “high places” used for worship in Israel, sometimes in genuine worship, but far too often in the worship of Baal and Anath, with their “high places” dedicated to sacred prostitution. Here the meaning is that the genuine worshipers of YHWH will experience possession, dominion, and victorious life.

Compare:

Deuteronomy 32:13, (YHWH) set (Israel) atop the heights of the land; and fed him with produce of the field; He nursed him with honey from the crags, with oil from flinty rock;

Isaiah 33:16, the man who can live with continual burnings is the righteous man, who oppresses no one—he will dwell on the heights, with Divine provision;

Psalms 18:34, “He (YHWH) made my feet like the feet of a deer, and set me secure on the heights”;

Habakkuk 3:19, “God, YHWH, is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, **יַעַל** **בְּמוֹתַי יִדְרֹכֵנִי**, and makes me tread upon my high places.”

We agree with Westermann in his comment that “Both here and in **Deuteronomy** ‘riding upon the heights of the earth’ is purely metaphorical: high over all depressions and obstacles.” (P. 342)

¹¹⁶The 1st person singular hiphil verb with waw-conversive used here, **וְהֵאכַלְתִּיךָ**, “and I will feed you,” is found in the following places in the **Hebrew Bible**:

Exodus 16:32, Moses reminds Israel of the manna with which YHWH fed them in the wilderness;

Deuteronomy 8:3, 16, Israel has forgotten that Divine feeding;

Numbers 11:4, 18, the “rabble” or “mixed multitude” along with the Israelites in the wilderness long for meat to eat; YHWH answers that He will provide them with meat to eat;

1 Kings 22:27; 2 Chronicles 18:26, the king orders Micaiah put in prison with “bread of oppressions” to eat;

Isaiah 49:26, YHWH will cause Israel's oppressors to eat their own flesh;

(continued...)

for YHWH's mouth has spoken!¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶(...continued)

Isaiah 58:14, here—YHWH will feed those who truly worship Him with the heritage of Jacob;

Jeremiah 9:14, YHWH of Armies will feed rebellious Israel with bitter food and give them poisonous water to drink;

Jeremiah 19:9, YHWH will make the people of Jerusalem eat the flesh of their own children and neighbors; **Jeremiah 23:15**, similar, but it is the false prophets who will have to do so;

Ezekiel 3:2, 3, Ezekiel is caused to eat a scroll;

Ezekiel 16:19, YHWH gave His prostitute bride, Jerusalem, fine food to eat;

Psalms 80:6 (verse 5 in English), YHWH caused His people to eat the “bread of tears”;

Psalms 81:17 (verse 16 in English), YHWH wants to feed His people with the finest wheat and honey from the rock;

Proverbs 25:21, if your enemy is hungry, cause him to eat bread;

2 Chronicles 28:15, the northern Israelite victors caused their defeated Judean captives to eat.

This matter of “feeding with an inheritance” is unique to this passage. When YHWH's people give themselves in great generosity to feed the poor, they themselves will not be left hungry—but rather, will be recipients of the Divine promise of bountiful provision!

¹¹⁷We are reminded of the promises made by Jacob to his children as described in **Genesis 49**, especially those promised to Joseph in **verses 22-26**, which include such statements as “...The God of your father...will help you...with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the long-lasting mountains, the bounties of the long-lasting hills...”

For the use of the construct noun נַחֲלָתָא, “inheritance of...” see:

Numbers 36:3, 8, their inheritance will be taken from the inheritance of our fathers;

1 Kings 21:3, 4, Naboth refuses to give the “inheritance of my fathers” to Ahab the king;

Proverbs 19:14, house and wealth are the “inheritance of fathers.”

¹¹⁸In this **58th chapter of Isaiah**, YHWH is spoken of in the 3rd person, and at the same time is depicted as speaking in the 1st person. It is YHWH's Word, spoken through His servant the prophet(s)—and the message is so intertwined with, and expressed in the words of the human messenger(s), that they cannot be sharply distinguished.

(continued...)

¹¹⁸(...continued)

Achtemeier observes, “An oracle that began with the declaration of Israel’s sins, ends with the sure promise of salvation from God.

“The theological question raised by this oracle, however, is whether or not it involves works-righteousness. The conditional phrasing of the promise of salvation (‘if - then,’ **verses 9c-14**) seems to indicate that the Judeans will earn the right, by mercy toward others and sabbath-rest and true fasting, to have Yahweh draw near to them and dwell with them. Is God’s Presence with us dependent on what we do?...

“The prophet here would seem to be no less misguided than the Zadokites [the followers of **Ezra-Nehemiah**], who think to coerce Yahweh’s favor by restoration of a pure cult. Do our deeds of mercy compel Yahweh’s favor, and the lack of them incur His judgment upon us? We cannot yet answer this question fully on the basis of what we have read in the **Third Isaiah**. Certainly in **57:14-21**, unearned grace was offered to Judah. But in this oracle [**58:1-14**], grace seems to be earned.” (Pp. 60-1)

We deeply appreciate Achtemeier’s honesty in this comment. See her statement at the end of **Isaiah 66**. But here, it seems to us that Achtemeier is introducing a centuries-later concern, for the relationship of faith and works—that is not really an issue in the **Hebrew Bible**, where we do not think such a theological question is raised. Rather, the two—faith and works—exist side by side, without any theological questioning. What do you think?

1. “Fasting” in the Hebrew Bible

Judges 20:26, in the time before the birth of Samuel, the Israelites gathered in Bethel where they offered sacrifices and fasted, seeking YHWH’s direction in their civil war with the people of Benjamin;

1 Samuel 7:6, Samuel leads Israel at Mizpah as they fasted and confessed, calling upon YHWH for aid in their war with the Philistines;

1 Samuel 31:13; 1 Chronicles 10:12, upon the death of Saul and his sons, the men of Jabesh-Gilead burned / cremated their bodies, then buried their bones, fasting for seven days;

2 Samuel 1:12, David and his men mourned and fasted and wept over the death of Saul and Jonathan and their armies;

2 Samuel 12:16, 21, 22, 23, David went without food, and slept on the ground, while pleading with YHWH for the life of his and Bathsheba’s child; but when the child died, he stop-ped his fasting and ate, causing his servants to question his actions;

1 Kings 21:27, when king Ahab hears Elijah’s words of condemnation for what he and Jezebel had done to Naboth, he tore his clothes, put on sack-cloth, and fasted;

Isaiah 58:3, 4, 4, here—indicating that fasting was a common religious practice among the Jews of Isaiah’s time;

Jeremiah 14:12, although the people of Judah fast YHWH will not listen to their cry—again showing that this was a common religious practice of the Jews;

Zechariah 7:5, 5, 5, in a passage closely related to **Isaiah 58**, YHWH tells the Jews that their fasting was not effective. What He wanted was true justice, mercy, and compassion; to not oppress widows, orphans, aliens and the poor;

Esther 4:16, 16, Esther directs Mordecai to gather all the Jews together to fast for her—to not eat or drink for three days, night or day;

Ezra 8:23, the Jews who have been held captive in Babylon fast and pray for YHWH’s help;

Nehemiah 1:4, when Nehemiah hears of the devastated condition of Jerusalem, for some days he mourns and fasts and prays to God.

The noun צֹם, **tsom** occurs some 26 times, at

2 Samuel 12:16, see above;

1 Kings 21:9, 12, the Israelites, at Jezebel’s command, proclaim a day of fasting, before pronouncing the death sentence upon Naboth;

Isaiah 58:3, 5, 5, 6, see above;

Jeremiah 36:6, 9, Jeremiah tells Baruch to go into the temple on a day of fasting to read the words of YHWH which Jeremiah has spoken;

Joel 1:14, during a locust-invasion, Joel declares a set-apart fast during which the nation's leaders will call out to YHWH in prayer;

Joel 2:12, 15, YHWH commands Israel to return to Him with all its heart, with fasting and weeping, telling the people to tear their hearts rather than their clothes—He tells them to blow the trumpet, declare a set-apart fast;

Jonah 3:5, the people of Nineveh believe Jonah's message, declare a fast, and put on sack-cloth;

Zechariah 8:19, 19, 19, 19, Judah observes fast in the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months; they are to become joyful and glad occasions, happy festivals with love, truth and peace;

Psalms 35:13, when the psalmist's opponents were sick, he put on sackcloth and humbled / afflicted himself with fasting, weeping on their behalf;

Psalms 69:11, the psalmist tells how when he weeps and fasts, putting on sackcloth, he endures scorn;

Psalms 109:24, the psalmist complains that his knees are weak from fasting, his body is thin and gaunt, and people scorn him;

Esther 4:3, the Jews throughout Persia mourn with fasting, weeping and wailing, with many lying down in sackcloth and ashes;

Esther 9:31, letters are written to the Jews in Persia's 127 provinces to observe the festival of Purim, accompanied by times of fasting and lamentation;

Daniel 9:3, upon learning from Jeremiah that Jerusalem's desolation would last for seventy years, Daniel pleaded with YHWH, fasting, and wearing sack-cloth and ashes;

Ezra 8:21, Ezra proclaims a fast for the Israelites who are about to be returned to Israel;

Nehemiah 9:1, the Israelites gather in fasting, wearing sack-cloth, with dust on their heads, confessing their sin of inter-marriage with non-Jews;

2 Chronicles 20:3, Jehoshaphat, learning that a large army is coming against Jerusalem from Edom / Moab / Ammon, proclaims a fast for all Judah, during which he prays to YHWH for deliverance.

