

Isaiah 59, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

59:1¹ הֵן לֹא־קִצְרָה יַד־יְהוָה מִהוֹשִׁיעַ

¹Slotki comments on **chapter 59** that “The flagrant sins of the nation have formed a barrier between God and them, and in consequence they were plunged into the direst misery. When, however, their plight was at its worst and their position seemed hopeless, God intervened and delivered them. (P. 287)

Alexander summarizes the chapter by “The fault of Israel’s rejection is not in the Lord, but in themselves (**verses 1-2**). They are charged with sins of violence and injustice (**verses 3-4**). The ruinous effects of these corruptions are described (**verses 5-6**). Their violence and injustice are as fatal to themselves as to others (**verses 7-8**). The moral condition of the people is described as one of darkness and hopeless degradation (**verses 9-15**). In this extremity [YHWH] interposes to deliver the true Israel (**verses 16-17**) [where is there any mention of ‘the true Israel’?]. This can only be effected by the destruction of the carnal Israel (**verse 18**) [but where is the phrase ‘the carnal Israel’ found?]. The Divine presence shall no longer be subjected to local restrictions (**verse 19**). A redeemer shall appear in Zion to save the true Israel (**verse 20**). The old temporary dispensation shall give place to the dispensation of the Word and Spirit, which shall last forever (**verse 21**).” (P. 363)

We deeply appreciate Alexander’s massive work on the **Book of Isaiah**, and his linguistic expertise, including his constant survey of German scholarship in the 19th century. But here, instead of his normal, accurate summarization of the contents of chapters as they are in the **Hebrew Bible**, he summarizes **chapter 59** from a Christian standpoint, reading into the chapter his early “dispensationalist theology, with its distinction between a “true Israel” and a “carnal Israel,” and with its belief that Christianity is a “new dispensation of the Word and Spirit.” As we read the **Hebrew Bible**, all of human history, and specifically the history of Israel, has been a history filled with the Word and Spirit of God. And the meaning of **chapter 59**, as we read it, is that YHWH will redeem His faithful people in Israel, not that He will destroy the nation of Israel and replace it with a “true Israel.” Rather, it is that He will come in judgment on the unfaithful, but bring salvation to the faithful in Israel.

We are much more in agreement with Achtemeier, who describes **chapter 59** as a “judgment-salvation oracle,” that is “intimately connected with **chapter 58**. In her understanding, the chapter is built around a communal prayer of lament, which was uttered during rites of penance and fasting. “**Verse 1** directly answers questions voiced often in such laments about Yahweh’s power to save. **Verses 9-12** are words taken from, or at least modeled after, such actual lamenting prayers. And **verses 15c-19** represent the salvation oracle offered by the priest in answer to the community’s lament and petition...

“However, at every point **Third-Isaiah** goes beyond the standard liturgical form [expanding greatly upon it]...A new situation demands a new interpretation of the Word of God, and we see in **Third Isaiah** how traditional forms and expressions were carried forward, but reinterpreted and altered to match the moment...The Word of God is never

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a dead letter from the past, but always a living, restless, demanding force affecting the present.” (Pp. 63-4)

We are reminded of the **Book of Hebrews**’ statement in **4:12**, “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (**English Standard Version**) No, the word of God is anything but a “dead letter.” It is alive, judging and correcting human hearts in ever new, changing situations! And so it is depicted throughout the **Hebrew Bible**.

Achtemeier adds that “The oracle is directed to the Judean community as a whole, which has followed the lead of the Zadokite priestly party [we say, the program enunciated by **Ezekiel-Ezra-Nehemiah**], but which finds that its cries to Yahweh go unheard, that its worship is received by no one, and that Yahweh does not come to be with it or give it His abundance.” (P. 64)

We think there can be no doubt that **Third Isaiah** reflects a vivid clash of theological ideas among the returned and returning exiles, and we think that clash is rooted in the conviction expressed so powerfully in **Jeremiah 7** that the Jerusalem temple and its Levitical sacrifices are contrary to the will of YHWH, over against the view of **Ezekiel-Ezra-Nehemiah** that the returning exiles are under obligation to rebuild both Jerusalem’s walls and the temple, restoring its Levitical sacrifices, but with a sharp division between the Tsadoqite and the Levite priests; and in addition segregating the people of Israel from the people of the land—over against **Third Isaiah**’s conviction that the returnees should reach out to all their neighbors in loving service and proclamation of YHWH’s love for them—two opposing views of the will of YHWH, both attributed to YHWH.

If this is correct—we believe it is—it reflects the same clash of ideas which we find mirrored in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, as He devoted Himself to a ministry of reaching out to all people, regardless of their background religiously or nationally, including Roman military officers and Sidonian widows, with a forgiveness not dependent on the Jewish temple or its sacrifices, over against the Pharisees and the High Priests of Judaism, whom we consider to be the descendants of **Ezra-Nehemiah** (those identified by Achtemeier as “the Zadokite priestly party”), with their policies of segregation from and rejection of the “unclean peoples of the land.”

Slotki comments on **verses 1-4** that “Not God’s inability or indifference, but the sin of the people, is the cause of Israel’s sorrow and suffering.” (P. 287)

Oswalt says that “The concerns addressed in [**verses 1-2**] are fundamentally the same as those addressed in **58:1-3a**. The people are asking why God does not seem to answer their prayers. Why do they have no sense of His presence and power in their personal lives and in their society? Why is God not keeping all the wonderful messianic

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promises (such as **58:8-9, 10b-12, 14** [are these ‘messianic promises’?])? The answers that they have been accepting—that God is not strong enough (His *hand is too short*), or that He is not really paying attention (His *ear is too heavy*)—are incorrect. God’s promises are prevented from being kept by one thing only: flagrant sin.” (P. 513)

We say that God’s promises are prevented from being kept by Israel’s failure to be YHWH’s servant-nation, living by the loving care and concern for others that **chapter 58** has just depicted, a failure of Israel to produce “righteousness”—which is, we believe, **Third Isaiah’s** definition of “flagrant sin.”

Oswalt insists again and again that it is humanly impossible to live by such “righteousness,” but we disagree. YHWH doesn’t mandate an impossible program of “loving your neighbor as yourself”! It is fully possible, if Israel will only turn to YHWH, asking for His presence and help, and be willing to step out in faith to obey the Divine mandate! It will be costly, perhaps even costing the loss of life in its fulfillment (that is, becoming “suffering servant-Israel / Jacob,” such as **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** depicts). But it is the way to life and peace, and world-wide mission!

Knight suggests a possible scenario for this chapter, stating that “this preacher is confronting his contemporaries with their actual behavior at the moment...In reaction to the enormous problem of recreating in Jerusalem a civilized community—from scratch, so to speak, almost even from the level of primitive society without any tools—men and women had been reverting to dishonest ways, brutality, and injustice. Actually, to crown their vexation and exasperation they had been afflicted with a series of poor harvests (**Haggai 1:6**). Thus they did not have enough to eat nor sufficient wool to clothe their backs, and inflation had made holes in the value of money.” (P. 31) And in such a scenario, it was even more difficult to practice the kind of righteousness that YHWH was calling for through the preaching of Third Isaiah!

Knight states concerning **verses 1-8** that “The first half of the sermon is a reproof,” accusing the people of allowing their iniquities to separate between them and God. And, “since sin is repugnant to God’s holiness, God must necessarily turn His face from the source of sin, the sinner. The only way, then, through the impasse, the separation, that has transpired is for God to take the initiative once again and to reach out to the sinner across the divide in forgiving love. This He has always obviously been able to do, for ‘the Lord’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save...No matter how far Israel had fallen from grace, God was still with that people as their loving ‘Spouse.’

“We cannot blame Israel for disloyalty to their Savior God. The Israel of that day had very naturally supposed that when God fulfilled His promise to bring Israel ‘home’ the kingdom of God would then arrive, ‘paradise’ would follow the exile, real *shalom* [peace] would finally eventuate. We cannot blame them, for the early Church did just the same, and various adventist groups have persisted to this day in the same hope. It

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וְלֹא-כִבְדָּה אָזְנוֹ מִשְׁמוֹעַ:

Look—YHWH's hand was not short, so as not to save / deliver;²
and His ear was not heavy,³ so as not to listen / hear!⁴

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was the hope that with the resurrection of Jesus the second coming was bound to follow, even 'the end of the world'...

“The revelation which the **Old Testament** gives us is that grace and love are not optional extras in the life of the world, but are absolutely indispensable to human existence.” (Pp. 33-4) That is, it is up to humanity to create *shalom*, not to wait for God to come and create it for them.

“And so, Third Isaiah shows how the returned exiles, instead of practicing that grace and love in their community now filled with strangers—half-breed foreigners--were failing to conquer evil through their knowledge of God's action on their own behalf. They were putting their trust instead in *tohu*, “chaos,” and *shaw*, “lies,” and “instead of being able to create life in the womb they can only create death...Everything they are doing is negative, *shaw*, *tohu*, the opposite of all the activities listed in **chapter 58** that lead to the *shalom* of God. “He who eats their eggs dies”; that is, he who joins up with their sect goes down to ‘hell.’” (Pp. 34-5).

We say, God was fully willing to save / deliver; His ear was ready to listen, to hear their calls. But instead of seeking God through obedience and faith, they were putting their trust in the very opposite—chaos and lies—and suffering the consequences.

²Oswalt notes (p. 510) that in the phrase מְדַוֵּשֵׁי, the *min* preceding the hiphil infinitive construct “to save,” is the “privative min,” as it is in the following phrase מִשְׁמוֹעַ, so that both phrases should be translated by “from saving,” and “from hearing,” or “so as not to save,” “so as not to hear.”

³1QIs^a has plural words for both “ear” and “heavy.”

⁴**Rahlfs** translates **verse 1** as a question instead of an affirmation:

Is the hand of (the) Lord not strong to save?
Or the ear of His burdened / weighed down so as not to hear?

Alexander comments on **verse 1** that “The Prophet merely pauses, as it were, for a moment, to exonerate his Master from all blame, before continuing his accusation of the people...The only explanation of the passage which allows it to speak for itself, without gratuitous additions or embellishments is that which likens it to **42:18-25, 43:22-28** and **1:1-2**, as a solemn exhibition of the truth that the rejection of God's ancient people was the fruit of their own sin, and not to be imputed either to unfaithfulness on

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59:2 כִּי אִם־עֲוֹנוֹתֵיכֶם הָיוּ מִבְּדָלִים בֵּינְכֶם לְבֵין אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

וְחַטָּאוֹתֵיכֶם הִסְתִּירוּ פָנִים מִכֶּם מִשְׁמוֹעַ:

But rather, your (plural) iniquities were dividing between you and your God!

And your sins hid faces⁵ from you, keeping (Him) from hearing!⁶

⁴(...continued)

His part, or to want of strength or wisdom to protect them.” (Pp. 363-64)

But does this passage speak of God’s “rejection” of Israel, or rather of God’s “accusation” of Israel’s sinfulness, and refusing to hear her prayers because of that sinfulness? We think the latter. Alexander is intent on interpreting **Isaiah** to mean that “God’s ancient people” has been rejected, to be replaced by the “New Israel,” the Christian movement. This is a denial of Paul’s language in **Romans 11:1**, that God has not rejected His people Israel.

We think **Third Isaiah** depicts a wondrous future for God’s ancient people, as YHWH calls them to repentance and faithfulness, and to a worldwide mission of righteousness, beginning with their practice of the kind of “righteousness” that is depicted in **chapter 58**, which depicts exactly the kind of “sin” Israel is guilty of.

We see that kind of righteousness as the mission of Jesus Christ, transforming a hardened, exclusive Israel into an open world missionary movement, reaching out to any and all with the love and forgiveness of God, directly in line with the teaching of **Third Isaiah** and **Second Isaiah** as well.

What do you think?

⁵The Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations, along with the Aramaic Targum all have “He has hidden His face. **Rahlfs** has καὶ διὰ τὰς ἀμαρτίας ὑμῶν ἀπέστρεψεν τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ἀφ’ ὑμῶν, “and because of your missings-of-the-mark He turned away His face from you.” 1QIs^a and 1QIs^b both have the same reading as the Masoretic Hebrew Text, “your sins hid faces from you.”

⁶The phrase at the end of **verse 2**, מִשְׁמוֹעַ, “from hearing,” is repeated from the end of **verse 1**, and obviously means YHWH’s not hearing.

Alexander comments that “The general idea of this **verse [2]** is otherwise expressed in **Jeremiah 5:25**, while in **Lamentations 3:44**, the same Prophet reproduces both the thought and the expression, with a distinct mention of the intervening object as a cloud.” (P. 364)

Jeremiah 5:25,

(continued...)

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Your (plural) iniquities / guilts turned these aside,
and your sins withheld the good from you!

Lamentations 3:44,

You covered (Yourself / us) with Your cloud,
(preventing) a prayer from crossing over.

In **58:9** the Divine promise has been given that if the returned exiles will practice the kind of righteousness being depicted and demanded in **chapter 58**, they shall cry and YHWH will answer, saying “Here am I.” Israel’s sins that have turned YHWH’s face away from them is just that failure to execute true righteousness, i.e., loving their neighbors as themselves! Unless Israel practices loving-kindness, she need not expect YHWH to hear her prayers! We say, that’s the truth for all who seek to worship God! What do you think?

⁷Oswalt comments on **verse 3** that “Now the prophet launches into a vivid and biting description of what kinds of behavior and attitudes are separating the people from God...The first moves from *hands* (literally ‘palms’) to fingers, and the second moves from *lips* to *tongue*...The whole person of the body politic is involved in the crimes that are taking place. The hands that the people lift in prayer are bloody (compare **Isaiah 1:15**) because their very thoughts (the things they mumble about to themselves) are wrong.” (P. 514)

We say that Israel’s hands and tongue are failing to practice and speak the kind of righteousness depicted in **chapter 58**—this is Israel’s missing-of-the-mark, and it can be corrected by returning to faith in YHWH and obedience to His desire as expressed there!

Achtemeier states that in **verses 3-8** “The prophet...details...the specifics of the Judeans’ sin. Their hands are stained with blood, **verse 3a** [instead of being filled with good deeds to their neighbors as YHWH requires in **chapter 58**], and the whole of **verses 3-4** probably refer to corrupt practices in the court of law. ‘You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor’ was the stipulation in the **Decalogue**...but they have lied about their neighbors...accusing them falsely...and bringing unjust sentences and sometimes even death upon them [instead of treating them as their own flesh, and caring deeply for them; instead of condemning them and separating from them as “unclean,” unworthy of their fellowship, as the **Ezra-Nehemiah** program / party demanded]...

“**Verses 5-8** specifically describe the deeds of that party...It is clear that **Third-**

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שִׁפְתֹתֵיכֶם דְּבַרוּ-שֶׁקֶר לְשׁוֹנֵיכֶם עִוְלָה תִּהְיֶה:

Because your hands were defiled with the blood, and your fingers with the iniquity;
Your lips spoke falsehood,⁸ your tongue mutters⁹ injustice!¹⁰

⁷(...continued)

Isaiah sees the Zadokite party [our **Ezra-Nehemiah** program / party] as the source of the evil in the community, and the description given of the Zadokite leaders is devastating. Their plans hatch evil ('a viper's eggs, compare **14:29**), and their projects to restore the community [rebuilding the walls and the temple, restoring the Levitical sacrifices] are as fragile and impermanent as a spider's web (compare **Job 8:14**). Those who follow their plans ('whoever eats their eggs') will inherit not life but death (in contrast to Yahweh's promise in **58:14**)." (P. 67)

Such a program of wall-building, and rejection of others with a legalistic life-style that stifles the ability to love the neighbor, even one's own wife and children, is not the way to life and peace, but rather the way to divisiveness and death!

Achtemeier adds that "We see here the interior nature of biblical faith. As in Jesus' teaching in **Mark 7:14-23**, it is not outward deeds of piety that determine the character of a person's life (compare also **1 Corinthians 13:13**), but the inner focus of the heart and mind...If the heart and mind are not centered on God in the first place, and do not hunger and thirst after His guidance and Lordship over life, then true goodness is impossible and obedience to God's commands becomes a burdensome legalism (compare **Galatians 5:16-24**). Everything in the devout life hangs on that love of the heart, and it is in their inner selves, **Third-Isaiah** maintains, that the Zadokite party has rejected fellowship with God." (Pp. 68-9)

⁸1QIs^a omits the phrase "your lips spoke falsehood."

⁹The verb qal imperfect verb תִּהְיֶה can mean "groans," or "utters." Oswalt notes that it is often translated "meditates," and that it can mean "to recite to oneself." (P. 510) He himself translates by "mumbles."

¹⁰Slotki notes that "The general accusation in this verse is specified in detail in what follows." (P. 287)

Alexander comments on **verse 3** that 'The wider meaning of the whole description is evident from Paul's combining parts of it with phrases drawn from several **Psalms** remarkably resembling it, in proof of the depravity of human nature." (P. 365)

See **Romans 3:15-17**,

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59:4 אֵין-קָרָא בְצֶדֶק

וְאֵין נִשְׁפָּט בְּאֱמוּנָה

בְּטוֹחַ עַל-תְּהוֹ וְדַבַּר-שָׁוְא

הָרָו עֵמֶל וְהוֹלִיד אֹן:

There is no one entering law-suit / calling (to court) in righteousness;
and there is no one going to law in true-faithfulness--¹¹

¹⁰(...continued)

- 15 Their feet (are) swift to pour out blood,
16 destruction and misery (are) in their ways,
17 and a way of peace they did not know.

Douglas Moo comments on these verses that “their three lines...are all taken from **Isaiah 59:7-8a**, with the **Septuagint** [Greek translation]...being the source for the quotations. **Verse 15** is an abridgment [shortened version] of **Isaiah 59:7a** (why Paul uses ὄξεις, ‘swift’ rather than the ταχινοί, ‘quick’ of the **Septuagint** is impossible to determine). That this, rather than **Proverbs 1:16** (which has in common with **Isaiah 59:7** the words that Paul quotes), is Paul’s source, is probable because **verses 16-17** continue to use **Isaiah 59:7b-8a** (the only difference is that Paul uses ἐγνωσαν in place of οἶδασιν (both mean ‘they know’)...**Isaiah 59:7-8a** is directed against the unrighteous in Israel. Again, then, Paul implies that Israel as a whole must now be considered in this category of the ‘wicked.’” (P. 204)

And we say, it is clear that the “unrighteous” are those who follow in the way of segregation and exclusiveness, rejecting their fellow human beings (their own “flesh,” including wives and children) as unclean, and building a wall (both physical and spiritual), refusing to care for them as YHWH desires. Such a practice is “wickedness”! It is “wrong-relationship” instead of “righteousness / right-relationship”!

¹¹We think the returned exiles were going to law to demand ouster of the present inhabitants of Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, as well as calling for the divorce of wives of mixed race, and getting rid of the children of those marriages—instead of the caring, loving, self-sacrificing conduct which YHWH desires—as detailed in **chapter 58**. How could those wives and children defend themselves in courts of law dominated by advocates of the **Ezra-Nehemiah** program, with their extreme hostility towards the people of the land?

trusting¹² in chaos / confusion, and speaking emptiness--

(they are) conceiving trouble, and giving birth to wickedness!¹³

¹²Slotki comments that “The Hebrew form of this verb [בְּטוֹרָה, ‘to trust’ or ‘trusting’], as of the following verbs in the verse, is in the infinitive and might be rendered: ‘trusting in vanity and speaking lies, conceiving mischief and bringing forth iniquity.’” (P. 287)

Instead of placing trust in YHWH, and loving their neighbors as themselves, they are trusting in the deceptive hope that a segregated remnant of legalistic Judeans, surrounded by a wall, and constantly offering up animals on the altar of a rebuilt temple, will bring forth the New Jerusalem and lead the nations to come and worship in Jerusalem. But **Third Isaiah** says such a hope is in vain; such a program will only give birth to mischief and iniquity, certainly not to the salvation of Israel and the nations! The prophet is not opposed to temple-worship, nor to animal sacrifice—what he is opposed to is the failure to practice true righteousness and love for the neighbor; he believes that if the returned exiles will practice such self-giving love for all others, the nations will be impressed by their witness to their God, and will come streaming to a Jerusalem whose gates are open to all who desire to come.

¹³Oswalt asks concerning the metaphor of conception and birth, “What is the normal result of conception? Life. But here the result is *trouble*...What is that is normally born? An innocent child. But here what is born is twistedness and guilt. Instead of the normal processes of life and regeneration, a society such as this gives its energies to the production of shame and sorrow.” (P. 515)

We say that given the context of the returned exiles under the demands of the legalistic / segregationist policies that would come to a head in **Ezra-Nehemiah**, this is far more than just a metaphor. Many of the returned exiles have married outside the orthodox Jewish religion. Children have been borne to those unions. But now Ezra and Nehemiah are demanding that those who have married “foreign” wives break those marriages, separating themselves from their wives and their children—resulting in trouble, shame, and sorrow—with large numbers of single mothers and children without fathers—just the opposite of the life-style demanded by **Third Isaiah** in **chapter 58!**

Translations of **verse 4** vary:

King James, “None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.”

Tanakh, “No one sues justly Or pleads honestly; They rely on emptiness and speak falsehood, Conceiving wrong and begetting evil.”

New Revised Standard, “No one brings suit justly, no one goes to law honestly; they rely on empty pleas, they speak lies, conceiving mischief and begetting iniquity.”

New International, “No one calls for justice; no one pleads a case with integrity. They rely on empty arguments, they utter lies; they conceive trouble and give birth to evil.”

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New Jerusalem, “No one makes upright accusations or pleads sincerely. All rely on empty words, utter falsehood, conceive trouble and give birth to evil.”

Rahfs, “No one speaks right things, neither is there true justice. They have been persuaded by worthless things, and they speak empty things. Because they conceive pain and they give birth (to) lawlessness.

¹⁴Slotki comments on **verses 5-6** that they contain “a series of striking similes on the people’s machinations, deep-laid plots and deadly designs.” (P. 288)

Oswalt likewise states that “These two verses can hardly be surpassed for their picture of the menace and the futility of the society that is ruled by sin [we say, ‘a society that is ruled by the demand for building walls of exclusiveness from one’s neighbors]...What such a society produces is serpent eggs and spiderwebs. Whether you try to eat the eggs or crush them, the results are equally deadly. The baby snakes, whose poison is already as virulent as an adult’s, will kill a person. If you try to clothe yourself in such a society’s schemes, you will find them as ephemeral and yet as difficult to get free of as a spiderweb...

“Eggs are a source of life, both good to eat and productive of yet more life through the animal inside. But not these eggs! They are the very opposite. Thus also a spiderweb seen on a summer morning when all its symmetry is outlined with glittering dew promises something substantial and significant. Sadly, it is not the case. If one touches a master strand the whole thing collapses before one’s eyes.” (P. 515)

That is, from the standpoint of the human being the spiderweb is insubstantial and insignificant; but not for the spider, or for the insect that is caught in its web. It is very substantial and significant from the standpoint of the insects involved!

But the spiderweb as a metaphor for society is very appropriate, and we think it can be applied to the program set forth by **Ezra-Nehemiah**, with its spider-like web of legalistic demands and exclusiveness, trapping those caught in it, causing them to build a wall between themselves and their fellow human beings, the very people whom God wants them to reach out to with His mercy and salvation. Such a program looks good, and promises much for the future of Israel. But in fact, it cripples the people of God, making them unable to fulfill the Law of God which is centered in humbly walking with God and serving the neediest in society, as detailed in **Isaiah 58**. What Oswalt entitles “sin,” we entitle the “Pharisaic Program of Building Walls of Exclusiveness.”

This was, we believe, the spider-web of legalism and exclusiveness against which Jesus struggled throughout His non-legalistic, inclusive ministry. That ministry of Jesus to the untouchables eventually resulted in His death at the demand of Israel’s Zadokite High Priest. His death was a fulfillment of **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**, the death of YHWH’s “suffering servant” on behalf of Israel and of others—that’s what true “righteousness” looks like—and so is the description of true fasting as given in **Isaiah 58**—

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וְקוֹרֵי עֲפָרִישׁ יֶאֱרָגוּ
הָאֵכֵל מִבִּיציָהֶם יָמוּת
וְהַזֵּוּרָה תִּבְקַע אֶפְעָה:

Eggs of a snake¹⁵ they broke open,¹⁶

¹⁴(...continued)

giving one's self and possessions in loving care for others, rather than pulling away from them, building walls to keep them out, and refusing to share the grace of God with the unwanted outcasts of other races and religions!

We also believe that this is the same struggle that confronts churches throughout the modern world. Are they going to build magnificent temples, with locked doors, keeping out the modern “untouchables,” fleeing to the suburbs rather than serve the “people of the land” in the inner-city, believing that their religious rituals and music will please God, as they refuse to honestly witness to addicts and former prisoners, and illegal immigrants, etc. etc.? Do they dare believe that because they follow a correct ritual of worship, and subscribe to an orthodox creed or hold to a fundamental belief in the inspiration of the **Bible**, they will be saved?

How we need to hear the message of **Jeremiah 7** and **Third Isaiah** still in this 21st century!

¹⁵The question is raised, Do snakes lay eggs? And the answer is that “Only 70 percent of the world's snakes lay eggs. The rest give birth to live young. Oviparous—egg-laying—snakes tend to live in warmer climates, which helps incubate their eggs. Viviparous—or live-birthing—snakes tend to live in cooler regions, where the ground is too cold for the eggs to develop on their own.” (**National Geographic**, on the Internet 7/29/2015)

For occurrences elsewhere in the **Hebrew Bible** of this noun see **Isaiah 11:8**; **Jeremiah 8:17** and **Proverbs 23:32**. Oswalt notes that “As a result of this rarity, it is not clear what kind of snake is being referred to: only that it is one that does not give birth to live young.” (P. 511)

¹⁶Slotki's translation of this first line of **verse 5** is “They hatch basilisks' eggs.” He comments that “As the eggs produce basilisks [‘In European bestiaries and legends, a **basilisk** (from the Greek *basiliskos*, “little king;” Latin *regulus*) is a legendary reptile reputed to be king of serpents and said to have the power to cause death with a single glance.’ **Wikipedia**, 7/28/2015] so do their projects mature into fatal acts.” (P. 288) English translations vary between “adders” and “vipers.” The Hebrew noun is **צַפְעוֹנִי**, “a poisonous snake.”

and webs of a spider they weave;¹⁷
the one eating some of their eggs will die,¹⁸
and the one pressed down will break open (with) a viper!¹⁹

59:6²⁰ קוֹרֵיָהֶם לֹא־יְהִי לְבָגֵד
וְלֹא יִתְכַסּוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂיהֶם
מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם מַעֲשֵׂי־אֶזְרָא

¹⁷Slotki comments on this line that it means “They ensnare the innocent.” (P. 288) And we ask, who could be more innocent than the children of mixed marriages, who were the victims of the **Ezra-Nehemiah** program’s demand for divorce of their parents and their exclusion from Israel’s temple worship?

¹⁸Where our Hebrew text predicts death as a result of eating a serpent’s eggs, **Rahlf**s omits any mention of death: “and the one about to eat some of their eggs, having broken / crushed found wind, and in it a basilisk.”

¹⁹Oswalt translates by “and the one who crushes will hatch an adder.”

Slotki comments on the last two lines of **verse 5** that “Their plots are so deadly that whether one falls victim to them, or one attempts to counteract them, the effects are equally fatal.” (P. 288)

The last line of **verse 5** is given varying translations, from “and that which is crushed breaketh out into a viper,” to “And if one is crushed, it hatches out a viper,” to “and when one is broken, an adder is hatched.” See the preceding footnote for the Greek translation.

²⁰Slotki comments on **verse 6** that “Even when their acts appear to be beneficent, they are in reality useless if not dangerous.” (P. 288)

Verse 6 can easily be applied to the program of Ezra-Nehemiah, and the Zadokite-led sacrificial system of the rebuilt altar and temple. The claim of that program is that those participating in its rigid biblical legalism, and sharing in its sacrifices, and segregating themselves from their fellow-human beings whom they consider “pagan” and “unclean,” will be clothed in righteousness and cleanliness.

But the fact is, they will be far from being dressed in the righteousness / God-desired way of life described in **Isaiah 58**—and as a result be naked before God! Following the directions of their leaders concerning divorce and putting away of their families, they will be doing terribly evil things, rather than pleasing their Creator God, Whose will is that they should love their neighbors as themselves, not cast them off! The Ezra / Nehemiah program for bringing righteousness to Israel is no better than trying to make clothes out of spider-webs!

וּפְעַל חֲמָס בְּכַפֵּיהֶם:

Their webs will not be for a garment,²¹

and they²² will not cover themselves²³ with their works.²⁴

Their works are works of wickedness;

and doing of violence (is) in their hands!²⁵

²¹Slotki comments on this line that their webs “can never be made into garments. They are too frail and flimsy for the purpose.” (P. 288) Yes—see the preceding footnote.

Alexander comments that “Having introduced the spider’s web, in connection with the serpent’s egg, as an emblem of malignant and treacherous designs, [the prophet] here repeats the first but for another purpose, namely, to suggest the idea of futility and worthlessness...The sentence is more pointed if we understand it as including a specific menace that the authors of these devices shall derive no advantage from them.” (P. 367)

²²Oswalt notes that “The subject is presumably not those who spin the webs, but someone else who, seeing the web, would try to put it on.” (P. 511)

Converts to the legalistic religion advocated by **Ezra-Nehemiah** will quickly become participants in exclusiveness and in the belief that YHWH is pleased with animal sacrifices— segregating themselves from their neighbors, failing to live by YHWH’s desire and demand for neighbor-love and self-sacrificing service to the neediest people of the land as depicted in **Isaiah 58**.

²³The hithpael verb יִתְכַסּוּ, “will (not) cover themselves,” is changed by 1QIs^a to יִכְסוּ, probably the piel verb, “will (not) cover (i.e., anything).”

²⁴Slotki translates this line by “Neither shall men cover themselves with their works.” He comments that this is “because they are unsuitable as coverings. Wicked deeds ultimately benefit no one.” (P. 288)

We say the same thing concerning the works of the legalistic / segregationist program of Jewish orthodoxy: building walls of exclusivism will not help their neighbors; and the animal sacrifices which YHWH has so powerfully denounced in **Jeremiah 7** (compare **Isaiah 66:3**) will not feed the hungry or cloth the naked; neither will these things make adequate coverings for the spiritual nakedness of their adherents!

²⁵The last line of our Hebrew text וּפְעַל חֲמָס בְּכַפֵּיהֶם, “and doing violence (is) in their hands,” is omitted by **Rahlf**s.

59:7²⁶ רַגְלֵיהֶם לָרַע יִרְצוּ

וַיִּמְהָרוּ לְשִׁפּוֹךְ דָּם נָקִי

מִחֲשָׁבוֹתֵיהֶם מִחֲשָׁבוֹת אֵין

שֶׁד וְשָׁבַר בְּמִסְלוֹתָם:

Their feet run to the evil,²⁷

and they hurry to pour out innocent blood.²⁸

²⁶Slotki comments on **verses 7-8** that “They not only devise mischievous plans, but hasten to put them into operation.” (P. 288)

And we ask, What could be more mischievous than the demand that all those with mixed-marriages should divorce, getting rid of their wives and children? What an entangled spider-web of social evil that would be for all of those involved!

²⁷Alexander comments that this is “not a mere disposition, but an eager proclivity to wrong.” (P. 367) But interpreters far too commonly, take “wrong / evil” in a general way, without understanding it in its context.

The fact is—the **Ezra-Nehemiah** program would insistently lead Jewish men to divorce and to the creation of multitudes of single mothers with fatherless children; it would eagerly and purposely divide Judean society into the “clean and the unclean,” leaving those considered unclean outside the establishment, on their own—just the opposite of the kind of righteousness envisioned by **Isaiah 58**, in which the people of God are called to be the caring, love-giving providers for those less fortunate than themselves, welcoming the blemished person (eunuch) and the children of foreigners (**Isaiah 56:3-8**)!

²⁸Slotki comments that “The first half of **verse 7** closely resembles **Proverbs 1:16**.” (P. 288)

Because their feet run to the evil,
and they hurry to pour out blood!

Where our Hebrew text of **Isaiah 59:7** has the adjective נָקִי, “innocent (blood),” **Rahfs** has no adjective, similarly to **Proverbs 1:16**.

We have pointed out the evil consequences of the legalistic / segregationist program among the returned exiles, a program that would be galvanized under Ezra-Nehemiah’s leadership in preceding footnotes.

(continued...)

Their thoughts (are) thoughts of wickedness;²⁹
ruin and brokenness³⁰ (are) in their highways.³¹

²⁸(...continued)

But this is also what we see in the life of Jesus—how the hyper-religious Pharisees, because of their insistence on a legalistic and exclusivistic interpretation of the **Torah** as advocated by **Ezra-Nehemiah**, were quick to reject Jesus and his self-giving ministry to the neediest people of his day (embodying the teaching of **Isaiah 56** and **58**), and shared in the responsibility for pouring out His innocent blood, making of him the great embodiment of YHWH's suffering servant. And one of their motivating factors was His statement concerning the temple in Jerusalem which was almost a repeat of Jeremiah's temple sermon in **Jeremiah 7**!

²⁹Alexander states that "The word translated thoughts, has here and elsewhere the specific sense of purposes, contrivances, devices." (P. 367) We insist that **Third Isaiah** is talking about theological ideas and programs—specifically those of the legalistic-minded Jews that had powerful influence in the thoughts and purposes of the people of Israel, and that would come to a head under the leadership of Ezra / Nehemiah.

Oswalt conceives of all of this as a generality of "sin"—but overlooks the obvious meaning of the text that the plans and schemes are nothing other than the refusal of Israel to practice the "righteousness" that has been described in **chapter 58**, and their development of legalistic rules and rigid interpretations of the **Torah** designed to keep the blemished and foreigners out, in order to protect their pious exclusivism.

³⁰1QIs^a interpolates an additional noun at this point in the text: **חַמָּס**, **chamas**, "violence."

There can be no question that the legalistic / segregationist group that would later be led by **Ezra-Nehemiah** produced ruin and brokenness in multitudes of Judean families with their demand for separation from of foreign wives and their children, and its insistence on segregation from the people of the land meant ruin and brokenness for many of those who would be excluded from the loving care of God's people.

³¹Alexander mentions the explanation that "ruin *in their paths* [means] that it awaits themselves," but he adds that "most interpreters take both expressions in an active sense, as meaning what they do to others, not what they experience themselves. Their paths are then the paths in which their feet run to evil and make haste to shed innocent blood." (P. 367)

We say, whenever God's people segregate themselves from others, and as a result fail to know and care for the hungry and the naked, they are in fact doing evil and shedding innocent blood. What do you say?

(continued...)

59:8 דֶּרֶךְ שְׁלוֹם לֹא יָדְעוּ
 וְאֵין מִשְׁפָּט בְּמַעַגְלוֹתָם
 נְתִיבוֹתֵיהֶם עֲקָשׁוּ לָהֶם
 כֹּל דֶּרֶךְ בָּהּ לֹא יָדַע שְׁלוֹם:

A way of peace / welfare they did not know,
 and there is no justice in their tracks.

They made their pathways crooked for themselves,
 everyone walking in it did not know peace / welfare.³²

59:9³³ עַל-כֵּן רָחַק מִשְׁפָּט מִמֶּנּוּ

³¹(...continued)

We observe how the sins being condemned in this passage are examples of “social injustice” –violence, planning the taking advantage of others, shedding of innocent blood–the exact opposite of what **Isaiah 58** calls for as the true worship of God.

³²Alexander states that “The obvious and simple meaning is, that their lives are not pacific but contentious.” (P. 368)

And, in fact, this is always the case with religious legalism / Pharisaism, that follows in the path of **Ezra-Nehemiah**, and that can be documented in the history of legalistic sects throughout history, that quickly disintegrate into competing factions. The way of life advocated by **Third Isaiah** is exactly the opposite, leading to loving sacrificial service of others, and peace. What we have seen in the history of the Christian movement is that whenever legalism has reared its ugly head, loving service to others has quickly come to an end, and factious divisiveness has begun. **Isaiah 58** has depicted beautifully the outcome of loving self-giving to others–it results in light breaking forth, healing, and the presence of YHWH. It results in the overcoming of the darkness, the rebuilding of ruins, and “riding on the heights of the earth.” Such is the peace that YHWH longs to give His people! But to fail to practice such “righteousness” is to walk upon a darkened way, stumbling and groping, the way of death!

³³Slotki comments on **verses 9-11** that “The physical and moral darkness that enveloped the people deprived them of the light, justice and salvation for which they longed.” (P. 289)

The program advocated by **chapter 58** is a way that leads to genuine peace–but the program advocated by its legalistic opponents leads not to salvation, but to utter darkness!

(continued...)

³³(...continued)

We must respond to God's grace to us by the transformation of our lives in obedience to the will of God, embodying that grace in our own lives, and in the way we treat others, especially those marginalized by legalistic religion—just as **Third Isaiah** has detailed so powerfully in **chapters 56** and **58**. The failure to care for suffering people destroys true justice and right relationships in any society. Any other program is a “missing-of-the-mark!”

Oswalt comments that “The switch from the 2nd and 3rd person references of the preceding verses to the 1st person references that follow indicates that the prophet is not standing off in lonely isolation hurling bombs of condemnation...Whether he is directly implicated in the sins or not, he is surely a participant in their grievous results. He makes no attempt to shift responsibility, but feels with his people the pain of their condition.” (P. 519)

Oswalt adds that “More clearly than before in the **book**, the prophet links salvation and behavior. If the people are not experiencing the righteousness of God, it is because they are not behaving in a righteous manner. (P. 519) We say, Yes—and that righteous manner of behavior has just been spelled out in **chapter 58!**

We do not understand Oswalt's comments concerning “righteousness,” which apparently have to do with God's righteousness in offering Christ on our behalf—but are disconnected from the depiction of genuine righteousness which has just been given in the preceding chapter.

True “righteousness” is not some heavenly affair, accomplished through God's dealings with the angels, or the devil, or only to be accomplished through the death of Christ. It is a matter of justice and righteousness in society, here and now. God has broken their yoke of bondage in Babylon, allowing them to go free, and now it is their time to break the yokes binding others, learning to treat other human beings as their own flesh—loving, self-sacrificing care, rather than pulling away from them, refusing to associate with them. It's the kind of righteousness that Jesus Christ practiced throughout His ministry, and that He called for as He confronted the leaders of legalistic, separatist Judaism. It is the kind of righteousness that is embodied in the suffering servant of **Isaiah 52:13-53:12**, as the servant of YHWH willingly gives up his rights and dies for others—that is what **Isaiah 58** is calling for the returned exiles to do—the exact opposite of the legalistic program that would later be headed by Ezra / Nehemiah, and the program of the Pharisees in 1st century Judaism!

Knight comments on **verses 9-15a** that “These verses constitute a group confession. To understand the declaration that follows we must first discover the situation to which it is addressed, else it makes little sense. Our imagination must be stirred to grasp the immensity of the logistics required by the huge migration of fifty thousand persons in all who returned from Babylon (**Ezra 2**). They had to be ‘tented,’ fed, watered, doctored, clothed throughout the long, perhaps six-month march...Only

(continued...)

וְלֹא תִשְׁיָגְנוּ צְדָקָה
 נִקְנָה לְאוֹר וְהִנֵּה-חֹשֶׁךְ
 לְנִגְהוֹת בְּאַפְלוֹת נְהַלְךְ:

For this reason³⁴ justice is far away from us,³⁵

³³(...continued)

the first detachments of this huge ‘army of the Lord’...would by now have reached their goal...Had they traveled swiftly, and with light hearts, ‘singing the songs of Zion’ as they went, and quoting to each other snatches of the sermons of Deutero-Isaiah which they had heard him preach in Babylon? But when they arrived, there was no one there to help them recreate their lives in the ruins of the holy city. There was only hostility.

“Some bold spirit, therefore, puts his finger upon the spiritual malaise that has befallen them all. The picture he paints is of a very human situation. But he has the strength of leadership—we might even say the charisma—to induce these early settlers to utter together this profound confession. And so they confessed how they were exhausted, depressed, deflated, and therefore quarrelsome, growling at each other (**verse 11**), and putting all the blame upon God for causing it all (**verse 13**).

“Consequently, they confessed, ‘justice,’ the practice of righteousness, ‘is far from us’ (verse 9). ‘We look for light,’ for the shining of God’s face, ‘and behold, darkness,’ the darkness of evil, of *tohu* [chaos], of death. It is a case of each one for himself; and ‘kindly love’ (‘righteousness’) does not overtake us.’ We hear only ‘We...we...we’: ‘we grope...we stumble...we growl,’ even though we belong to the people whom God has ‘put right’ with Himself. But fancy groping for God when there was no need, for God had already found them...

“In fact, everyone of the verbs used here describes actions, the ongoing actions of living persons, as the active participles employed here make clear. Thus a breakdown in social justice is found to follow upon repudiation of the love of God.

“Those high-minded, excited returnees, by losing faith in God’s *chesedh*, His steadfast-love, had thereby said ‘No’ to the covenant. Consequently, they had opted to call down upon themselves the curse outlined in **Deuteronomy 28**.” (Pp. 35-36)

³⁴Or, “Therefore...” The reason for their terrible condition is not something that YHWH has done to them, or failed to do for them, but is the direct result of their own choices and actions! They have failed to live by the demands of **Isaiah 58**!

³⁵Where our Hebrew text has **רָחַק מִשְׁפָּט מִמֶּנּוּ**, “justice was far from us,” **Rahlf**s has ἀπέστη ἡ κρίσις ἀπ’ αὐτῶν, “the justice departed from them.”

(continued...)

and righteousness will not reach us.

We will wait for the light, and look–darkness;

for brightness–in the darkness we will walk!³⁶

59:10 נְגִשָּׁה כְּעֹרִים קִיר

וּכְאִין עֵינַיִם נְגִשָּׁה

כְּשִׁלְנוּ בְצַהֲרִים כְּנֹשֶׁף

בְּאֲשֻׁמֹנִים כְּמֹתִים:

³⁵(...continued)

And we say, Yes, if they (or we) fail to practice the self-sacrificing love of **Isaiah 52:13-53:12** and the righteousness of **Isaiah 58**, justice will continue to be far from them (and from us)! It is not justice to treat other human beings—our own flesh—as unclean, pushing them away, segregating ourselves from them!

From a biblical standpoint, it is not right to overlook or forget the powerful “temple message” of **Jeremiah 7** (or a host of other passages, such as **Isaiah 1**), in which the Divine Word is given that YHWH does not want the temple or its animal sacrifices, and then proceed to rebuild the altar and temple and begin anew their animal sacrifices, substituting these for the kind of righteousness and self-sacrificing loving-kindness to their fellow human beings that are what YHWH desires.

³⁶Oswalt comments on **verse 9** that “the same words are used here as in **58:10**... but with the opposite effect...Where is this bright noonday light we are supposed to enjoy? It is nowhere!...

“It is easy to believe that this kind of attitude prevailed among the returnees in the 6th century B.C.E. Where were all the wonderful promises that the prophets had given? Judah was neither independent nor powerful. The nations were not flowing to her with their riches, and most painful of all to those with hearts for God, there did not even seem to be a revival of the kind of religion that could change the society.” (P. 520)

And what is the “kind of religion” that can change society, causing the light to shine? Is it a religion that builds walls of separation, and that separates itself from others with pious claims to sanctity and rejection of others as “unclean” and “pagan”? No, it is a religion that sees all other human beings as “our flesh”—and does all in its power to identify with them, and help to meet their needs. But the legalistic kind of religion which would find its classic leaders in **Ezra-Nehemiah** was just the opposite—it was one of building walls and casting off others who were different—and building a religion of exact, legalistic rules of purity and impurity—which meant divorcing foreign wives and getting rid of the children of those marriages! Such a religion will never cause the nations to flow to it, but will only result in hatred and religious wars.

We grope like the blind people, (for) a wall,
and like those without eyes we grope;
we stumbled at the mid-day like (in) the twilight,
among the vigorous people like the dead people.³⁷

³⁷Translations of this last line of **verse 10** vary:

King James, “we are in desolate places as dead men.”
Tanakh, “Among the sturdy, we are like the dead.”
New Revised Standard, “among the vigorous as though we were dead.”
New International, “among the strong, we are like the dead.”
New Jerusalem, “among the robust we are like the dead.”
Rahifs, “like those dying they shall groan.”

The reason for these variances is the Hebrew phrase **בְּאִשְׁמֹנִים**, which occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**. Greek and Syriac translate by “groan,” the Latin Vulgate translates by “the dark,” while the Aramaic targum has “The world is shut in your face like the grave is shut in the face of the dead.”

Alexander says to compare with **verse 10** the following texts:

Deuteronomy 28:29, stating that among the consequences of disobedience will be:

and you will be feeling / groping in the noon-day, just like the blind person feels /
gropes in the gloominess / darkness;
and you will not make your way prosperous;
and you will surely / only be oppressed and robbed all the days;
and there is no one saving / delivering.

Zephaniah 1:17, when YHWH’s judgment comes on humanity, YHWH says,

And I will cause cramping / distress for the humanity;
and they will walk like the blind people,
because against the YHWH they sinned.
And their blood will be poured out like the dust,
and their intestines like the excrement / dung!

The text depicts the returned exiles as “walking blind and dead people,” whereas **chapter 58** has promised that if they will follow YHWH’s way of righteousness, loosing the bonds that bind others, removing the yokes from the shoulders of others, feeding the hungry, providing shelter for the homeless, their light will break forth like the dawn, and the gloom and darkness will be filled with the light of noonday. Why then, are they living in a land of gloom and darkness?

(continued...)

59:11³⁸ נִהְמָה כְּדָבִים כָּלֵנוּ

וְכִיּוֹנִים הָגָה נִהְגָה

נִקְוָה לְמִשְׁפָּט וְאִין

לִישׁוּעָה רַחֲמָה מִמֶּנּוּ:

We growled like the bears, all of us;
and like the doves, we certainly moaned.

³⁷(...continued)

We say, simply because they are not living by the teaching of **chapter 58**, and are unwilling to become the kind of servants YHWH has called them to be! Indeed, under the influence of the legalistic / segregationist movement, they are believing and doing the very opposite of what YHWH wants them to believe and do. They are creating their own world of darkness and death! They are returning to a narrow world of segregating walls, and a religion that imagines what God wants is legalistic rituals and the blood of animals, while the people refuse to associate with their own flesh and blood, imagining that they are too “clean” for such associations! We are reminded of the Pharisees and their condemnation of Jesus for associating / eating with sinners and tax-collectors—see **Matthew 9:10-13** and its many related passages in the **Gospels**.

³⁸Oswalt comments that “This **verse [11]** completes the lament portion of the segment...[It] closes on the same note with which it began: the distance [רַחֲמָה, **rachaq**] compare also **verses 9** and **14**) at which justice and salvation seem to be from the people.” (P. 521)

The lamentation depicts the misguidedness of the people. The prophet has just depicted what genuine justice and salvation / deliverance looks like in **chapter 58**—it is not something to be expected as coming down from heaven, or from afar—it is something that is completely within their power to create on their own, based on YHWH’s gift of forgiveness and deliverance to them. They have experienced YHWH’s justice and salvation, in being freed from bondage in Babylon. Now, YHWH wants them to reach out to the neediest people in their environment with loving care, to free those burdened with yokes, to cloth the naked, establishing a society where justice is practiced for all, where the oppressed go free, the hungry are fed, the homeless poor are given a home, and the worship of God is a delight, not a burden. Such justice and salvation are as near as their decision to make them real—they don’t have to be awaited!

But another program is being enforced in their midst—a program of wall-building, to separate them from their fellow human beings, and a legalistic religion that centers in themselves, and their supposed “cleanness,” causing them to reject all others as “unclean,” and thereby making true justice and salvation far away from them!

We waited for the justice, and it is not;
for salvation / deliverance--it was far away from us!

59:12³⁹ כִּי־רָבּוּ פְּשָׁעֵינוּ נִגְדָּךְ

וְחַטֹּאתֵינוּ עֲנָתָה בְּנוּ

כִּי־פְּשָׁעֵינוּ אִתָּנוּ

וְעֹנֹתֵינוּ יָדְעָנוּם:

Because our transgressions were many before You,
and our missings-of-the-mark answered / testified against us;
because our transgressions (are) with us,
and our iniquities, we knew them--⁴⁰

³⁹Slotki comments on **verses 12-15a** that “The prophet voices a confession to God of the sins of the people.” (P. 289) Compare

Psalm 51:5^{Heb} / **3**^{Eng},

For my transgressions, I, I will know;
and my missing-of-the-mark (is) before me, constantly!]

Since **chapter 58** has depicted “righteousness” as being the kind of worship that takes away the yokes that bind their fellow human beings, and that cares for the needy people of the land, it seems obvious that their transgression / missing-of-the-mark is their failure to practice such a life of justice and righteousness.

And we ask, how can they be so blind? Is it not because of their obedience to another voice, that will become louder and louder with the coming of **Ezra-Nehemiah** to build a wall of separation between themselves and others, and to practice a religion of rigid legalism that condemns all others as unclean, and refuses to touch them?

Such a religion will immediately keep its adherents from living lives of justice and righteousness, and will prevent them from entering into YHWH’s light and peace. That’s what is keeping them back!

Oswalt cannot see this, and insists that it is their sinful nature, their bondage to sin, that holds them back, something that can only be resolved with the coming of the Servant / Messiah Jesus Christ.

⁴⁰Slotki comments that the last two lines mean “We are conscious of them.”

(continued...)

59:13⁴¹ פִּשְׁעַ וְכַחֲשׁ בִּיהוָה

וְנִסּוּג מֵאַחַר אֱלֹהֵינוּ

דְּבַר-עֲשֵׂק וְסָרָה

⁴⁰(...continued)

We say, the confession shows that they are conscious of the consequences of their transgressions and iniquities, but they are blind to the fact that it is their religious guides that are blinding them, and causing them to fail to live by God’s desired righteousness as so powerfully depicted in **Isaiah 58!**

⁴¹Slotki comments that “All the verbs in the **verse [13]** are infinitives. The ‘denial’ consists in rebellion against God’s precepts.” (P. 290)

We say, the “denial” consists in refusing to practice the righteousness just depicted in **chapter 58**. **Third Isaiah** is insisting that they are denying the present voice of YHWH, calling them to genuine righteousness. The movement that would soon be headed up by **Ezra-Nehemiah** insists that the precepts they are denying are those of the **Book of Leviticus**, calling them to a rigid legalism of exclusiveness and rejection of the people of the land as unclean.

It is a theological conflict that the returnees are involved in—with leaders of the **Jeremiah / Second Isaiah / Third Isaiah** movement making their powerful claim that the building of walls and temples and re-institution of animal sacrifices are not the will of God, over against powerful legalistic and segregationist leaders—later, Ezra and Nehemiah--claiming that walls and temples and animal sacrifices are exactly what YHWH desires.

The first group of leaders insist that the will of God is to practice genuine love for neighbor with the people of the land, bringing light and salvation to others; the second group insists that it is the will of God to segregate themselves from the unclean people of the land, separating themselves from mixed marriages, sending away the wives and children of those marriages, and having nothing to do with them. It is the same theological battle in which Jesus was engaged throughout His ministry, and which eventually cost Him His life.

We insist that the six infinitives that follow depict the kind of life that results from refusing to embody the teaching of **chapter 58**. God calls upon His people to “love their neighbors as themselves,” but they are being led into a religion that segregates them from their neighbors with a wall, and that makes them think of themselves as “clean” while all others are “unclean,” and therefore untouchable. God’s mission is to reach all humanity with His Word of grace and acceptance, but they are being led to believe that God only condemns the non-orthodox Jews. Such rejection of God’s desires amount to apostasy, and lead to the Divine wrath rather than to the Divine promises of peace.

הָרָוּ וְהִגְּוּ מִלֵּב דְּבַר־יִשְׁקָר:

transgressing,⁴² and deceiving / lying against YHWH,
and turning away from (following) after our God;
speaking⁴³ oppression and apostasy / turning aside,
conceiving⁴⁴ and uttering⁴⁵ from (the) heart,⁴⁶ words of falsehood.⁴⁷

59:14⁴⁸ וְהִסָּג אַחֲזָר מִשְׁפָּט

⁴²The original text of 1QIs^a had פִּשְׁעוּ, “they transgressed.” But a later hand has written the letter ׀ above the line, probably indicating there is a mistake in spelling, and that instead of the 3rd masculine plural, the infinitive should be read as our Hebrew text has it, פִּשְׁעַ.

⁴³Where our Hebrew text has the infinitive דַּבֵּר, “to speak,” 1QIs^a has וּדְבַרְוּ, “and they speak.”

⁴⁴1QIs^a omits the poel infinitive הִרְוּ, “conceiving.”

⁴⁵Where our Hebrew text has the infinitive in the phrase וְהִגְּוּ, “and uttering,” 1QIs^a reads the finite verb הִגְּוּ, “they uttered.”

⁴⁶Slotki comments that this last phrase, “uttering from the heart” means “meditating [on],” “devising.” (P. 290)

⁴⁷When people turn away from the God of truth, the Creator of every human being on earth, they will soon begin to further their causes by falsehood and outright lies, and will begin to oppress others when it is to their advantage, instead of being the kind of people just described in **chapter 58**, practicing genuine righteousness. But whenever humans turn to God in reverent awe, they will learn to control their tongues, seeking to always speak what is true and right. They will seek to treat every other human being as a fellow-child of the Creator, as their brother or sister, to whom they will give themselves in loving service, caring for their needs, become “suffering servants” on their behalf.

⁴⁸**Verse 14** asserts that in the broad place at the city gate, the place where judgment and lawful transactions should take place, justice, righteousness, truth and uprightness are driven away, and are no longer present.

Oswalt comments that this is “a beautifully constructed verse. The four nouns—*justice, righteousness, truth, and honesty*—are in the center of the verse...*Justice* is at the end of the first colon, and *righteousness* immediately follows it at the beginning of

(continued...)

וַיִּצְדָּקָה מִרְחֹק תִּעֲמֹד
 כִּי־כִשְׁלָה בְּרַחֲוֹב אֲמַת
 וַיִּנְכַּחַהּ לֹא־תִוָּכַל לָבוֹא:

And justice is driven back,⁴⁹
 and righteousness stands from afar.

⁴⁸(...continued)

the second. In the same way *truth* ends the third colon, and *honesty* [our ‘uprightness’] immediately begins the fourth... Tragically, the content of the verse says that the opposite is true of the people. These characteristics are on the periphery and cannot get in. Justice knocks at the gate and is turned away; righteousness is standing far away (compare **verses 9, 11**) and does not even try to enter. In the central *square*, where the city’s business is done, truth has fallen down, and honesty cannot even make an appearance. Again, this is reminiscent of **chapter 1** (especially **verses 21-23**).” (P. 524)

What is being described here is just the opposite of what the prophet has described in **chapter 58**. But beginning in their city gate, the place where justice and righteousness could and should be instituted and defended, these are turned away, and cannot find entrance!

This is what has happened so many times in human history. We think of the Nazi “courts of justice” in which Jews and other unwanted people found themselves condemned to death simply because of their race or religion or “inferior status.” We think of the “courts of justice” in the 1960’s in North Carolina, where I served as a “court-watcher,” and observed persons of color being denied basic human rights and “Christian” judges defended those denials.

And we wonder, what kind of justice could the divorced wives and children of the “clean” Judeans hope to find in the courts of justice dominated by the followers of the powerful legalistic / segregationist movement later to be headed up by **Ezra-Nehemiah** as those leaders were the advocates of segregation and divorce from foreigners? What kind of justice do you think Jesus could expect in a Sanhedrin court dominated by High Priests of that same movement in Israel?

⁴⁹Where our Hebrew text has וַיִּהָסֵג, “and driven back,” 1QIs^a has וַיֵּאָסִיג, “and I will move back.”

Because true-faithfulness fell / stumbled⁵⁰ in the city-square,
and uprightness is not able to enter.⁵¹

59:15 וַתֵּהִי הָאֱמֶת נִעְדָּרְתָּ
וְסֵר מִרַע מִשְׁתּוֹלֵל
וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה וַיִּרַע בְּעֵינָיו
כִּי־אֵין מִשְׁפָּט:

And the true-faithfulness was lacking,⁵²
and to turn aside from evil (is) to be despoiled.⁵³

⁵⁰Where our Hebrew text has כָּשְׁלָה, “stumbled,” **Rahlfs** has καταναλώθη, “was consumed.”

⁵¹Slotki comments that “The רְחוֹב, ‘open space,’ is the market-place close to the city gate where the people assembled, public orations were delivered and judges tried cases. It was also the children’s playground and travelers sometimes spent the night there.” (P. 290)

And, **Third Isaiah**, in the next two lines insists, it is also the place where terrible injustice was practiced, and YHWH’s righteousness and uprightness were denied entry into the city gates—courts of the land! We think it is clear that in the context of **Third Isaiah**, such injustice and lack of righteousness / uprightness are referring to the demands of the legalistic party that foreign wives and their children should be cast away, leaving them without the protection of husbands and fathers, alongside with the segregating of full-blooded Judeans from the people of the land with questionable lineages, treating them as enemies rather than as neighbors to be cared for as YHWH’s righteousness demands, and all of this being justified by the courts.

⁵²Where our Hebrew text has the niphal infinitive נִעְדָּרְתָּ, “to be lacking,” **Rahlfs** has ἠρτάι, “was taken away.”

What could be a better example of “true-faithfulness being lacking,” than the demand that would later be made by the **Ezra / Nehemiah** movement that Judean men who had intermarried with people of the land should divorce their wives—sending them and their children away, to live as single-mothers with fatherless children? Or, building a wall (both physically and religiously) between the orthodox Jewish party and the people of the land which would mean not caring for them as neighbors?

⁵³Translations of this line vary:

(continued...)

And⁵⁴ YHWH saw, and it was evil in His eyes,⁵⁵

⁵³(...continued)

King James, “and he *that* departeth from evil maketh himself a prey”;

Tanakh, “He who turns away from evil is despoiled”; **New Revised Standard**, similar;

New International, “and whoever shuns evil becomes a prey”;

New Jerusalem, “anyone abstaining from evil is victimised”;

Rahifs, καὶ μετέστησαν τὴν διάνοιαν τοῦ συνιέναι, “and they turned aside the mind from understanding.”

We understand this line to mean that any of the returned exiles who refused to follow the **Ezra-Nehemiah** program became the target of those leaders, being accused of unclean evil-doing; and we wonder if **Third Isaiah** is speaking of its speakers / writers.

1QIs^a has a blank line following the qal passive participle מִשְׁתוֹלֵל, beginning **verse 15b** on the next line, perhaps indicating that the copyist thought a new thought began with the phrase “And YHWH saw...”

⁵⁴Knight comments on verses **15b-19** that “Some individual person present at the delivery of this sermon now crowns the group confession by exclaiming that since the *chasideim*, the loyalists, also were sinners, therefore ‘there was no one to intervene’ in the situation. Thus he was pointing to the logical reality that only God was left to do so...”

“There now follows a surprise. One expects a voice of judgment; but no. ‘His Own arm’ alone ‘brought Him victory,’ and His Own love alone is what God has relied on, what has ‘upheld him.’ There follows a description of the uniform of the Divine Warrior (**verse 17**)...We must look carefully to discover what exactly the ‘righteousness’ that God ‘put on’ means here...The reference is to God’s saving love exhibited in the actions of a human being...[Knight is thinking of the promised messiah of Isaiah 9.]...”

“Here is Isaiah’s awareness that God will use as the mediator of His plan a man, a human being (at present there was ‘no man’ available, verse 16), who would be at the same time Mighty God Himself (compare Everlasting Father and Prince of shalom, 9:6) ...When His plan is finally enacted then, ‘the coastlands,’ the gentile trading peoples around the Mediterranean, in fact all people everywhere, ‘from the rising of the sun’ in the east to the west—and so not just the covenant people—‘shall fear the name of the Lord’ (the revelation of His nature as savior) and shall see ‘His glory.’” (Pp. 37-38)

⁵⁵Oswalt entitles **59:15b-21** “His Own arm brings victory,” and comments that in this segment, “God is depicted as the mighty Warrior Who comes to defeat Israel’s enemies as He first did to Amalek and the Canaanites so many years before...But who are those enemies now? There is no reference to Assyria, Babylon, or Persia, or even the nearer neighbors, the Philistines, Moabites, or Ammonites. What is it that is defeat-

(continued...)

because there is no justice.⁵⁶

⁵⁵(...continued)

ing Israel, that is preventing its light from dawning on the world? It is no longer Babylon ...Yet Israel is still in need of deliverance; it is still defeated. By what?" (P. 527)

Oswalt claims that it is Israel's "inability to live the life of God, to do justice and righteousness (**56:1**) in the world. Here is the true enemy against which God has come to make war...This is the ultimate development of the Divine Warrior motif in the **Bible**: God comes to destroy the final enemy of what He has created: not the monster Chaos, but the monster Sin...

"Just as in the conquest of the land of Canaan, so it will be in the conquest of sin: the power of God alone makes such a conquest possible. When it does so, the mouth of God's people will be a clean vehicle for the Spirit of God to speak through to reveal Himself to the watching world (verse 21). In short, the vocation that came to the man of unclean lips for his nation in **chapter 6** will now have come to the nation of unclean lips (**6:5**) for the world." (P. 527)

Oswalt is reading his overall biblical theology into this passage, which says nothing at all about "the monster Chaos" (note the capital letter), or "the monster Sin" (again with the capital letter). And this chapter reveals no Divine extermination of other nations as in the conquest of the land of Canaan.

We say, No--the Divine Warrior is depicted as coming to fight against the injustice that characterizes His people, the exiles who have now returned from captivity by Divine grace, but who now are being led to refuse to extend that grace to others, practicing YHWH's demand for justice and righteousness as depicted in **chapter 58**. The returnees are not unable to live by the justice and righteousness which YHWH commands--they are being led by those who hold to the position that will later be led by **Ezra/Nehemiah** to believe that YHWH wants them to do something else, something contrary to YHWH's desires--to build a wall separating them from their fellow human beings, to rebuild the temple He has rejected, and to live by a legalistic code of laws that keep them apart from those who so desperately need their justice and righteousness. They are wholly able to follow the Divine command--YHWH doesn't command the impossible--but they are being led astray from that command by a narrow-minded legalism that will keep them from bringing God's Word of grace and mercy to their hurting world, to their brothers and sisters, the people of the land, and to their own foreign wives and their children by those wives. What do you think?

⁵⁶Slotki comments that "The absence of justice is specially emphasized as outweighing all the other transgressions because it is fundamental." (P. 290)

Oswalt comments that "Unless people are committed to be faithful to each other and also to adhere to a standard of integrity that is exterior to themselves, justice will always fall prey to devouring self-interest. This seems to be the point of the rather strange **verse 15a**. Because there is neither faithfulness nor integrity in society, life

(continued...)

59:16 וַיִּרְא כִּי־אֵין אִישׁ

וַיִּשְׁתּוֹמֵם כִּי אֵין מִפְּנֵיעַ

וַתּוֹשַׁע לוֹ זַרְעוֹ

וַצַּדִּיקְתּוֹ הִיא סִמְכַתְּהוּ:

And He saw that there is no man;⁵⁷

⁵⁶(...continued)

quickly falls to the lowest common denominator of self-seeking ...For social harmony to exist, all persons must be committed to the bare standard of truth in all relationships.” (P. 524)

We say, Unless the returned exiles are committed to practicing true justice and righteousness with their neighbors, the people of the land, the kind of justice and righteousness depicted in **chapter 58**, there will never be justice in Israel—but only alienation and hatred and bloodshed. It is not “the bare standard of truth in all relationships [which can be taken to mean the truth that ‘we are the chosen people of God,’ and all others are not],” but YHWH’s desire for His servant(s) to become suffering servants, practicing loving-kindness and mercy in all relationships! It is not justice to cast away wives and children, leaving them husbandless and fatherless! It is not justice to enter into a program of self-righteous segregation, claiming yourself to be “clean,” and denouncing all others as “unclean,” and therefore to be pushed away rather than to be cared for, even died for!

Look at the life and death of Jesus for a powerful demonstration of this truth, as He lovingly ministered to and cared for, and eventually died for the outcasts of Israel in the first century, and as He taught a way of life not dependent on the Jewish temple and its sacrifices, but rather dependent on God and His goodness!

⁵⁷Slotki holds that “no man” means no one “worthy of the name to protest against the prevalent evil.” (P. 290) Compare **Isaiah 63:5**,

And I looked, and there was no one helping;
and I was appalled, and there was no one supporting.
And My arm saved / delivered for Me,
and My rage, it supported Me.

And we wonder, does this mean there was absolutely no one, not even the authors of **Third Isaiah**, or any of their followers? We take the statement to be a generalization, referring to the priestly authorities and the party which would later be headed up by Ezra / Nehemiah, among whom there was no one willing to speak out against their program, or lead the returned exiles in a different direction.

and He was appalled,⁵⁸ because there is no one entreating.⁵⁹

⁵⁸Where our Hebrew text has the hithpoel verb וַיִּשְׁתּוֹמֵם, “and He was appalled,” **Rahlfs** has καὶ κατενόησεν, “and He took notice, observed.” The Aramaic Targum has “it was known before Him.”

⁵⁹Slotki translates the hiphil participle מִפְגִּיעַ, **maphgiya**(by “intercessor,” and comments that it means one who intercedes “on behalf of the people to God, or on behalf of the poor and oppressed to the oppressors. The verbs in the verse may be regarded as prophetic perfects [that is, describing something in the future as having already occurred].” (P. 290)

But why should they be regarded as prophetic perfects? We think **Third Isaiah** is describing the actual situation in which the returned exiles were involved, with the two parties in conflict, and with the Ezra / Nehemiah party in control. In such a situation, YHWH is depicted as stating that He Himself will take control, and change things.

Oswalt comments that “No national leader would or could do what was necessary to be done for Israel.” (P. 528)

But if it was impossible, why would YHWH be looking for someone to do it, and why would He wonder that there was no one to do it? In fact, national leaders like Moses and Aaron and Phineas had successfully intervened for Israel (see **Numbers 17:11**^{Heb} / **16:46**^{Eng}, depicting Aaron’s stopping a Divine plague; and Kings like Josiah and Hezekiah had done what was necessary to be done for Israel! We think Oswalt goes far afield from the text by his comment.

Compare **2 Kings 14:26-27**,

- 26 And YHWH saw Israel’s affliction, being exceedingly bitter / disobedient,
and a ceasing of (anyone) restrained, and a ceasing of (anyone) restored;
and there was no one helping for Israel.
- 27 And YHWH did not say to wipe out Israel’s name from beneath the heavens;
and He saved / delivered them by (the) hand of Jeroboam, son of Joash.

Ezekiel 22:30-31, which tells of YHWH’s seeing the land’s oppression, extortion, and lack of justice for the poor people and the temporary residents, and YHWH’s saying:

- 30 And I sought from them a man, one building a wall, and standing in the breach /
broken place before Me,
on behalf of the land, so as to not destroy it;
and I did not find (one).

(continued...)

⁵⁹(...continued)

31 And I poured out upon them My indignation;
with My fury's fire I finished them off;
their way I placed on their head—(it is) a saying of my Lord YHWH!
(This last text is the most closely related to **Isaiah 59**, since while in the other passages a human was found to do the work, no one is found here in **Ezekiel 22.**)

The text states that if YHWH can't find a person to do the work, He Himself will do it! It is not a text about total hereditary depravity as Oswalt takes it, but it is a text about the failure of leadership among the returnees from Babylon. YHWH has looked for a man to take leadership, but has not found anyone willing to do the work—including, we presume, Zerubbabel, and Joshua, and later, Ezra and Nehemiah, as well as Haggai and Zechariah. And, not finding the right person, YHWH is depicted as saying that He Himself will have to act, coming in salvation and in judgment, to do the work that the people have failed to do.

Achtemeier states that “**Third-Isaiah** makes it very clear that what Yahweh does toward us is fundamentally affected by what we do toward Him (compare **Matthew 10:32-33**). God takes sin seriously. It cannot be hid behind an outward show of piety and worship [that withholds loving-kindness from suffering fellow human beings].” (P. 69)

She states that in the final section of this oracle (**verses 15b-20**) **Third-Isaiah** reveals “that God does not passively accept such rejection of Him. His Lordship over His creation is never dispelled or defeated by our denial of that Lordship. Yahweh comes. Whether we want Him to or not, He comes to set up His kingdom and to establish His rule over the earth...”

“**Third-Isaiah** announces this coming of Yahweh, **verses 15c-20**, by employing the ancient motif of Yahweh the Divine Warrior...”

“In the prophecies of **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel**, however, it was announced that Yahweh had turned to fight against His Own people because of their sin (**Jeremiah 4:19-22, 25-28; 5:15-17; 6:1-5, 6-8**, etc.; **Ezekiel 7; 13:5**; see also **Lamentations 2:5; 3:2, 43**). The opening good news of forgiveness in the prophecies of **Second Isaiah** there-fore announced that this warfare of Yahweh against His people was finally ended (**40:2**), and that prophet pictured Yahweh as a mighty Warrior once again, rescuing His people from their enemies and from exile (**42:13; 52:10**)...”

“So here too in **Third-Isaiah**, Yahweh arms Himself to bring salvation to His people and judgment on His enemies. But there is a new twist: now the enemies are within not without the community of Israel...Both Yahweh's judgment and His salvation are to be exercised first of all within the borders of Israel itself. The oracle is intended therefore as a warning to the unfaithful to turn from their rebellion against God before it

(continued...)

And His arm saved / delivered for Him,⁶⁰
and His righteousness, it supported Him.⁶¹

59:17⁶² וַיִּלְבַּשׁ צְדָקָה כְּשָׂרִיין

⁵⁹(...continued)

is too late, and to participate in the redemption that Yahweh will bring to the faithful, **verse 20** (compare **Ezekiel 18:30-32**; **Romans 11:26-27**).

“The beginning lines of the Divine Warrior section, **verses 15c-16**, emphasize that the establishment of Yahweh’s order and abundant life in the community will be solely His act (compare **Exodus 14:13-14**). There is no one else (compare **41:28**; **50:2**; **57:1**) who can bring salvation— especially not the Zadokites [the High-Priestly party] who think to coerce Yahweh by their ritual. But Yahweh is astonished that no prophetic intercessors have been pleading with Him for the life of the community, **verse 16b** (compare **Ezekiel 22:30**). However, His Own arm has all power to save...and His faithfulness to His covenant with His people motivates Him to act on their behalf.” (Pp. 69-71)

And this makes us wonder, Were not the authors of **Third-Isaiah** interceding, pleading for the life of the community? Does this language only apply to the Zadokites, who are guiding the returnees into the wrong program?

⁶⁰This line is translated by **Rahlf**s as καὶ ἠμύνατο αὐτοὺς τῷ βραχίονι αὐτοῦ, “and He defended them by the arm of His.” The Aramaic Targum is similar.

⁶¹If YHWH’s righteousness has been explicitly depicted in **chapter 58**, does this not mean that YHWH’s practice of lovingkindness to human beings, regardless of lineage or religious party, is what supports Him as He saves / delivers those most in need?

⁶²Slotki comments on **verse 17** that “God is represented as a Warrior Whose coat of mail, helmet and other equipment consist of righteousness, salvation, vengeance and zeal, attributes for the chastisement of the wicked and the deliverance of the Godly.” (P. 291)

But strikingly, the equipment which YHWH is depicted as putting on is all defensive in nature, not offensive, to “chastise the wicked,” unless it is the בְּגָדֵי נִקְמָה, “garments of vengeance / revenge,” or the wrapping of Himself with קִנְיָה, **quinjah**, “ardor,” “zeal.”

And we ask, What kind of garment worn by a warrior would be used for vengeance / revenge? Could this mean “covering over” the crimes of His enemies with vengeance? And what kind of a wrapping would “ardor / zeal” be? Perhaps this would

(continued...)

וְכֹבֵעַ יְשׁוּעָה בְּרֵאשׁוֹ

⁶²(...continued)

mean clothing Himself with the desire for revenge, and a determination to fight against His enemies—but still, where are the offensive weapons?

Oswalt states that “In this verse the idea of God’s coming to the defense of His people is fully engaged through the imagery of a warrior preparing for battle. This imagery is no doubt the prototype of that in **Ephesians 6:13-17**...

“It is not apparent that there is special significance in righteousness being imaged as a coat of mail / body armor, but the...coat of mail’ (P. 371)] or of vengeance being imaged as a tunic worn over the coat of mail. It is more probably the overall image that is important. God is fully clothed as a warrior, with helmet, coat of mail, tunic, and cloak...

“It is interesting that no offensive weapons are mentioned, not bow, spear, or sword. Why these should be omitted is not apparent. Perhaps Delitzsch is correct when he says that all that was needed to wreak God’s vengeance on His enemies and work salvation for His people was His mighty arm.” (Pp. 528-29) Do you agree? Why not say instead, “His mighty love and compassion for His people, and His anger at their going astray?”

Alexander states that “The writer simply carries out in detail his general declaration that [YHWH] undertook the cause of Israel Himself, under figures borrowed from the usages of war. The older writers have in vain perplexed themselves with efforts to determine why righteousness is called a breastplate, or salvation a helmet, and to reconcile the variations in Paul’s copies of this picture (**Ephesians 6:14-17** [breastplate of righteousness] **1 Thessalonians 5:8** [breastplate of faith and love]) with the original ...[The distinguished commentator] Clericus states that ‘Justice...might just as well have been a sword, salvation a shield, vengeance a javelin or spear, and zeal or jealousy a torch with which to fire the hostile camp’...

“That the figures in this case were intended to convey the general idea of martial equipment, may be gathered from [the] fact...that there is no reference whatever to offensive weapons...There is...plausibility in Knobel’s suggestion, that the first two nouns [righteousness and salvation] have reference to Israel, and the last two [vengeance and jealousy] to [Israel’s] enemies; the same catastrophe which was to secure justice and salvation to [Israel], would bring the zeal and vengeance of [YHWH] on the [enemies of Israel].” (P. 372)

What do you think? If these are “figures borrowed from the usages of war,” where are the offensive weapons? Can it be that the breastplate of righteousness means that YHWH’s warfare is conducted through the kind of righteousness depicted in **Isaiah 58**—lovingkindness for the weak and the suffering, that is His way of taking vengeance on His enemies? Is that why no offensive weapons typical of ancient warfare are mentioned? Perhaps...but the text does not make it clear.

וַיִּלְבַּשׁ בְּגָדֵי נִקְמָה תְּלַבְּשֵׁת
וַיַּעַט כְּמַעִיל קְנָאָה:

And He dressed (with) righteousness like the body-armor,
and a helmet of salvation / deliverance on His head;⁶³
and He dressed (with) garments of vengeance—(for) raiment;⁶⁴
and He wrapped Himself (with) zeal / jealousy like the robe.⁶⁵

⁶³In **1 Thessalonians 5:8**, Paul states that the helmet is the ἐλπίδα σωτηρίας, “hope of salvation / deliverance.” We think that would be appropriate for Christian disciples; but here, as a part of the Divine body-armor, it is not “hope of salvation,” but rather, salvation / deliverance—something which YHWH embodies and makes real for those He comes to in His wrath, as He overcomes their opposition to His way, and leads them into true righteousness. The Divine Warrior comes, not with destruction, but with transformation / salvation / deliverance! How do you explain this?

⁶⁴The Syriac translation omits this line. **Rahifs** has καὶ περιεβάλετο ἱμάτιον ἐκδικήσεως, and He put around (Himself) a garment of vengeance.”

⁶⁵Alexander states that “the meaning of the whole verse is, that God equipped Himself for battle, and arrayed His power, justice, and distinguishing attachment to His people against their persecutors and oppressors.” (P. 372)

But, we ask, how is God equipped for battle if He has no battle weapons? We say, He is equipped to transform and save His people through righteousness, bringing to them salvation / deliverance through His determination.

Achtemeier states, “Yahweh comes as Redeemer (compare **41:14; 43:1, 14; 44:6, 22, 23, 24**, etc.) to those who turn from rebellion—but only to those who turn. To the unrepentant He comes as a jealous and avenging Warrior” (p. 72)—but we note, without any weapons to destroy them, only with His righteousness and salvation / deliverance which, if received, will transform them from rebels into the kind of people He wants them to be.

As closely as **Third Isaiah** comes to proclaiming universal salvation, the fact is that its text never proclaims a salvation without humble penitence. The eunuch and the foreigner’s child who are accepted, and who become ministers to YHWH, are those who have entered into covenant relationship with Him! All can be saved; but all must repent! And YHWH’s coming to the people as the Divine Warrior is intended to bring about that repentance, not their destruction in battle.

What do you think? How do you explain this puzzling / enigmatic material? Did you expect it to be clear, leaving no questions?

כְּעַל גְּמֵלוֹת כְּעַל יִשְׁלָם 59:18⁶⁶

חַמָּה לְצָרָיו גְּמוּל לְאֵיבָיו

לְאֵיִם גְּמוּל יִשְׁלָם:

According to dealings, accordingly He will repay:⁶⁷

rage to His adversaries, recompense⁶⁸ to His enemies.

To the coast-lands, He will repay recompense.⁶⁹

⁶⁶**Verse 18** depicts YHWH's future repayment of those who have become His adversaries / enemies.

Rahfs significantly shortens **verse 18**: ὡς ἀνταποδώσω ἀνταπόδοσιν ὀνειδος τοῖς ὑπεναντίοις, "As One repaying retribution, reproach to the opponents."

There is no mention in the Greek translation of annihilation, or of overwhelming destruction--only retribution, reproach. Does the Hebrew text demand more than this, with the noun חַמָּה, "heat," "rage," "wrath"? We think it well may. Still there are no destructive weapons attributed to YHWH, and for **Third Isaiah**, the end result of YHWH's wrath and vengeance is that the nations come flowing to Jerusalem, bringing with them the scattered peoples of Israel. The end result of the Divine rage / vengeance is the transformation / salvation of the nations! Do you agree?

⁶⁷This line is difficult to translate: כְּעַל גְּמֵלוֹת כְּעַל יִשְׁלָם חַמָּה, literally, "as upon dealings / deeds, as upon He will repay wrath." It seems apparent that the object is missing from the second כְּעַל, "as upon." **Rahfs** omits the word. Alexander interpolates "them." Like some others, I have given a second meaning to the second כְּעַל, "accordingly." Oswalt has "so." We take this to be an unresolved difficulty in the text.

⁶⁸Where our Hebrew text has the word גְּמוּל, 1QIs^a has the first and last letters ל.ג. with two dots separating them, indicating the scroll was illegible.

⁶⁹Oswalt sums up the meaning of **verse 18** by stating "God will repay His foes; He will take vengeance on those who have opposed Him." (P. 529)

What do you make of this depiction of YHWH as "taking vengeance"? Do you understand this to mean "destroying them"?

(continued...)

59:19⁷⁰ וַיִּירָאוּ מִמַּעַרְבֹתֶיךָ אֶת־שֵׁם יְהוָה

וּמִמְזַרְח־שָׁמֶשׁ אֶת־כְּבוֹדוֹ

כִּי־יָבוֹא כְנַהר צָר

רוּחַ יְהוָה נֹסֶסָה בּוֹ:

And they will fear / tremble in awe⁷¹ from (the) west, YHWH's name;

⁶⁹(...continued)

And if Jesus teaches us to be like God (**Matthew 5:48**), what does He mean when He forbids His followers from taking vengeance / retaliation (**Matthew 5:38-47**)? Are we to think of YHWH as taking vengeance through bringing lovingkindness among the nations, a way of acting that overcomes evil, thereby avenging the lack of genuine concern and peace among His human creatures?

Is this what Paul means in **Romans 12:19-21** by “overcoming evil with good” (a passage that we think may well have been inspired by Paul’s understanding of **Isaiah 59**?

- 19 Not avenging yourselves, beloved,
but rather, Give place to the wrath.
For it has been written:
vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says (the) Lord. (**Deuteronomy 32:35** +?)
- 20 But rather is the enemy of yours hungers, feed him;
if he thirsts, give him drink.
For doing this, coals of fire you will heap up upon his head! (**Proverbs 20:22**)
- 21 Do not be overcome by the evil;
but rather, overcome the evil by the good!

Would Paul say that God had been overcome by evil in His taking vengeance? Or does he mean that God’s vengeance is likewise that of doing good to those who are evil, overcoming the evil by the good? And is this the reason that YHWH is depicted as bearing no offensive weapons?

⁷⁰Slotki comments on **verse 19** that “The consequence of God’s intervention will be a world-wide recognition of His Sovereignty.” (P. 291) We agree. The consequence is not world-wide destruction and hatred of God for His violent overwhelming of these former enemies, but rather their trembling awe, and their coming to Jerusalem with the Jewish people scattered across the world.

⁷¹The verb וַיִּירָאוּ, “and they shall fear,” is the common verb used for “fear of YHWH,” which doesn’t mean slavish fear, but rather, trembling awe, recognition of His

(continued...)

and from the sun's rising / east, His glory.⁷²

⁷¹(...continued)

grandeur and power, turning to Him in penitence and obedience. The result of YHWH's vengeance is not that the nations will hate YHWH, resenting His overwhelming destruction, but rather, their recognizing His "name" and His "glory." It is the lovingkindness / righteousness of God that will conquer the nations, not militant acts of destruction!

⁷²It is a prediction of universal fear of, or reverent awe for, YHWH's name and glory, as YHWH acts powerfully (like a wind-driven wadi with its rushing water) to reveal Himself to the nations.

A statement closely similar to this is found in **Malachi 1:11**, (only in the present tense, not the future tense of this passage in **Isaiah 59**):

1:11 Because from sun's rising and as far as its setting
My name (is) great among the nations!
And in every place incense is brought near to / for My name, and a pure
offering--
because My name (is) great among the nations!--said YHWH of Armies.

The Greek translation makes this affirmation even stronger:

Because from risings of (the) sun as far as (its) settings,
the name of Mine has been glorified among the nations / gentiles;
and in every place incense is being brought to My name, and pure / clean
sacrifices;
because great (is) the name of Mine among the nations / gentiles--says
Lord Almighty!

Many nervous Christian translators, instead of accepting this powerful claim concerning YHWH of Israel's universal greatness, take the liberty of making the statement future--"My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord Almighty." (**New International**; so also **King James** and **English Standard Version**).

However, the **New Jerusalem Bible** and the **New Revised Standard** leave the language as it is in Hebrew and Greek, in the present tense.

The 19th century German / Lutheran commentator C. F. Keil frankly stated that, "The idea, therefore, that the statement, that incense is burned and sacrifice offered to the name of [YHWH] in every place, refers to the sacrifices which the heathen offered to their Gods, is quite inadmissible [and we ask, is it Keil's job to say what is admissible and inadmissible in this ancient writing? Simply because it does not agree with Keil's views, does that mean he has the right to change the statement? Keil goes on:] At the time of Malachi the name of [YHWH] was not great

(continued...)

Because it will come like the narrow river / wadi,
YHWH's Spirit,⁷³ driving (them on)⁷⁴ for Him!

⁷²(...continued)

from the rising to the setting of the sun, nor were incense and sacrifice offered to Him in every place, and therefore...The expression ['in every place' says too much]. Consequently we must understand the words prophetically as relating to that spread of the kingdom of God among all nations, with which the worship of the true God would commence 'in every place.' ['In every place'] forms an antithesis to the **one** place, in the temple at Jerusalem, to which the worship of God was limited during the time of the old covenant..." (P. 438)

All of which means, according to Keil, **Malachi's** statement cannot be taken at face value, and the modern commentator has the right to change his perfect and present tenses into futures! But this is to reject a recurring biblical theme that can give the student of **Malachi** a much broader and fuller understanding of the nature of YHWH, the God of Israel.

It is an interesting and helpful question--"Why do some Christian translators feel compelled to change from the present to the future tense?" A closely related question is, "Why are Christian readers of the **Hebrew Bible** so reticent to affirm its statements concerning YHWH's loving forgiveness and granting of salvation to humanity, or YHWH's statements such as **Amos 9:7** that YHWH has acted for other nations, even the most hated of Israel's enemies, just as He has acted in Israel's history? We wonder, do some Christians feel that they are detracting from the honor of Jesus Christ by admitting what the **Hebrew Bible** claims about YHWH? How do you personally respond to such matters? Are we the heirs of an exclusiveness that is reflected in such views, refusing to accept biblical statements affirming YHWH's universal activity and impact centuries before the coming of Jesus?

⁷³The Hebrew noun רוּחַ, **ruach**, is notoriously ambiguous, as it can be translated "breath," or "wind," or "spirit," or, "Spirit." It seems apparent here that the combined meanings of Spirit and wind are intended, with YHWH's mighty Spirit-wind driving the water along the narrow wadi.

Oswalt holds that "apart from a possible double meaning (God's Spirit will drive God's wrath [and therefore it will not be mindless wrath]), the more straightforward reading of "wind" seems best here." (P. 526) Still, it is YHWH's wind, and will only accomplish Divine purposes.

Oswalt explains these last two lines of **verse 19**, stating that "The wrath of God... will be like a stream thundering through a narrow canyon, pushed on by a roaring wind; and those who choose to ally themselves [against Him], no matter where they are in the world, will have good cause to be terrified." (P. 530) He states that the Divine battle is against "sin"—but the text does not say this.

(continued...)

⁷³(...continued)

Alexander states that “The meaning of the verse appears to be, that the ends of the earth shall see and fear the name and glory of [YHWH]; because when He approaches as their enemy, it will be like an overflowing stream...in which His Spirit bears aloft the banner or the signal of victory.” (P. 377)

As Alexander observes, the end result of the coming of YHWH, the Divine Warrior, with overwhelming power, is not the destruction of the ends of the earth, but fear / reverence for the name and glory of God! Oswalt calls this “being terrified”—but we insist that this is not terror, but the fear of God that is the beginning of wisdom. What do you think?

⁷⁴Where our Hebrew text has וְנִסְסָהּ, “was driving (it on),” 1QIs^a has the same reading, but a later hand has written a ו, above the line, interpolating the conjunction “and.”

⁷⁵Slotki comments on **verses 20-21** that they contain “A promise of the final redemption of Zion and of those who turn away from transgression, and God’s eternal covenant with them.” (P. 291) But where in the text do the words “final redemption” and “eternal covenant” appear? The text certainly speaks of the future coming of a redeemer / next-of-kin to Zion and to those turn from rebellion in Jacob, and depicts a covenant of God with them, but Slotki is reading the rest of his comments into the text.

Oswalt states that “However we understand **verse 19**, **verse 20** is clear. God assumes the warrior stance so that He may fill the role of *Redeemer*. His ultimate purpose in attacking the sin of the world is to redeem the world as typified in Zion. No matter how fearsome His wrath against sin, no matter how terrified those who choose to remain in sin should be, still it is the patient compassion of a God Who longs to forgive that should capture our attention as it did that of the ancient Israelites (**Exodus 34:6-7; Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17; Psalm 86:15; 103:8-10; 145:8-9**)...

“As this verse shows, however, there is a fundamental condition for experiencing that compassion: turning away from continued rebellion. God’s grace is inherent in His character; nothing human can prompt it or create it. But one thing can block its flow—an unrepentant spirit...Thus the section (**58:1-59:21**) has moved from declaration of sin to turning from sin, and from judgment to redemption.” (P. 530)

Oswalt assumes that **verse 19** is not clear. It seems very clear to us. And **verse 20** does not make it clear that YHWH “assumes the warrior stance so that He may assume the role of Redeemer,” nor does it state that “His ultimate purpose in attacking the sin of the world is to redeem the world as typified in Zion.” All that **verse 20** predicts is the coming of a redeemer / next-of-kin to Zion, specifically to those turning away from transgression.

(continued...)

וְלִשְׁבֵי פְשַׁע בִּיעֲקֹב

נֵאֻם יְהוָה:

And a redeemer / next-of-kin will come to Zion,⁷⁶

and to those turning away from transgression in Jacob!

–(It is) a saying of YHWH.⁷⁷

⁷⁵(...continued)

We deeply admire Oswalt’s long-time work on the **Book of Isaiah**, but are again and again put off by his reading theological presuppositions into the text that are simply not found there! The text states that YHWH is revealing His name and His glory to the whole world—and then adds that a redeemer / next-of-kin will come to those in Zion / Jacob who turn away from transgression.

⁷⁶It is a simple, straightforward prediction, easily understood. A redeemer, meaning one who is “next-of-kin” will come to Jacob, meaning those who are descended from the patriarch Jacob whose name was later changed to “Israel.” The Israelite returnees are in mind-boggling trouble, as has been stated in the first part of this chapter. YHWH can’t find a man to do the work that needs to be done. But still there is hope—a redeem-er will come to Zion, specifically to those Israelites who turn away from transgression. The redeemer’s work will not be indiscriminate, for just any and all. Rather, it will only be for those who repent! But there the prediction ends. It does not identify the redeemer.

⁷⁷What do you think this prediction of the coming of a “redeemer” / “next-of-kin” to Zion means?

Throughout **Isaiah 40-66**, we read again and again that YHWH is Israel’s Redeemer / Next-of-kin. See **41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 60:16; 63:16**. Should we suppose that here, **59:20**, even though it is in a saying of YHWH, the redeemer / next-of-kin is not YHWH, but some other redeemer / next-of-kin, some great human leader who will insure Israel’s future welfare? Can this be a way of speaking of the predicted messiah of **Isaiah 9**?

Christian interpreters have insisted that Jesus the messiah is the one intended, but the prediction does not use the word “messiah.” And cannot YHWH refer to Himself in third person language? But again, cannot the great Divine Redeemer send someone else to be a redeemer for Israel in its time of need?

In **Romans 11:26**, Paul quotes this passage with significantly different meanings. In order to see the matter clearly, we begin with the Hebrew text, then the Greek translation, then Paul’ translation:

(continued...)

⁷⁷(...continued)

Hebrew:

And a redeemer / next-of-kin will come to Zion,
and to those turning (away from) transgression in Jacob—
(it is) a saying of YHWH.

Rahfs:

And he will come on behalf of Zion, the one delivering;
and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
(That is quite different from the Hebrew text! Instead of coming to those who
turn away from transgression in Jacob, the redeemer will turn away ungodliness
from Jacob, that is, from the entire nation of Israel!)

Paul:

And in this way all Israel will be saved,
even as it has been written:
He will come out of Zion, the one rescuing;
he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
(Paul predicts the salvation of all Israel, as a fulfillment of this passage in **Isaiah 59:20**; but instead of quoting the Hebrew text, he quotes the Greek translation with its significant differences from the Hebrew. Instead of a redeemer / next of kin coming to Zion, the Greek text, has the one delivering coming on behalf of Zion. Paul changes to the one delivering coming out of Zion. Paul does not identify who the one delivering is, but it is obvious that it does not refer to the original coming of Christ, since it is one delivering all Israel after the “fulness of the Gentiles / non-Jews” have been gathered in, i.e. at the close of the Christian mission to the non-Jews.)

Again we say, when studying Paul’s predictions of the future, we must keep in mind his statements in **1 Corinthians 13** concerning his “seeing through a mirror darkly / or enigmatically, and his having a limited, partial knowledge—rather than assuming he sees the future clearly and fully! Too many interpreters of Paul assume he has a full and accurate “road-map of Israel’s future” which God is under obligation to fulfill!

And if you notice, Paul’s language is rooted in **Numbers 12:6-8**, where it is said that the messages received by prophets were given to them in visions, enigmatically. Do you think that only applies to Aaron and Miriam, but not to later prophets like Hosea, Amos, First Isaiah, Second Isaiah, Third Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, or Zechariah?

The cynic may say, Well if Paul and the other prophets were not able to predict the future perfectly, what’s the need of paying attention to them? Our answer is, Just because Israel’s prophets along with Paul don’t know everything perfectly, they still

(continued...)

59:21 וְאֲנִי זֹאת בְּרִיתִי אִתְּם אָמַר יְהוָה

רוּחִי אֲשֶׁר עָלַיָּךְ וּדְבָרֵי אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַתִּי בְּפִיךָ
לֹא-יִמּוּשׁוּ מִפִּיךָ וּמִפִּי זֶרַעַךְ וּמִפִּי זֶרַעַךְ אָמַר יְהוָה
מֵעַתָּה וְעַד-עוֹלָם:

And I—this is My covenant with them, said YHWH;

My Spirit which is upon you (singular), and My words⁷⁸ which I placed in your mouth,

⁷⁷(...continued)

know a lot. And their constant dialogue with God has yielded some of the most powerful teaching ever known in history, setting forth a powerful ethical standard that was embodied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ—a standard that challenges us for fulfillment in our present twenty-first century, as the only way to peace!

Would you say that because Socrates, or Plato, or Aristotle, or Einstein—or Christ, or Buddha, or Confucius, or Gandhi, or King, or any other great teacher or leader didn't know everything (Jesus is quoted as saying he didn't know the time of the end, only God knew that, **Mark 13:32; Matthew 24:36**), that therefore they are not worthy of our study, that we cannot learn from them?

Such a view contributes nothing to the search for God and truth and the way to peace! We say, We can learn from all the worlds great leaders and teachers, and that we will find in them much that can help us in our search. But we have found no teaching or guidance more powerful and applicable to our war-torn world than that of Israel's prophets that has been embodied and fulfilled in Jesus Christ. What do you suggest is the alternative?

⁷⁸Slotki holds that the phrase “My words” means “The **Torah**, the revelation at Sinai.” (P. 291) This implies that it is not “a new covenant,” but the same “old covenant” given to Israel at Sinai.

Achtemeier very differently, states: “Yahweh here makes a new covenant with His people (compare **Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-28**), that is, He enters into a new relationship with them. But that relationship is vastly different [from] that promised in **Jeremiah** or **Ezekiel**. The new covenant here is that two-pronged relationship set forth in the prophets' words (compare **Jeremiah 1:9; Isaiah 49:2; 51:16**) as they have been inspired by the Spirit: judgment to the enemies of Yahweh, salvation to those who love Him. This verse is the promise that the oracles of **chapters 56-59** will come to pass. The Word of God will not return to Him void (compare **40:8; 55:10-11**). The section ends on the same note with which it began (...**56:1**).

(continued...)

⁷⁸(...continued)

“Further, that two-pronged message will endure forever in Israel. It will be handed down from one generation to the next...[that is, there will be] the perpetual remembrance of the prophets’ words. And indeed, their words have been handed down and reread and pondered from the time when they were first uttered in the sixth century B.C.E. until this very day. We have to ask ourselves, therefore, if this relation of both judgment and salvation is the one which God still has with us in Jesus Christ.” (Pp. 72-73)

Achtemeier is reading the word “new” into this text (on the basis of its use in **Jeremiah** and **Ezekiel**), and she is also reading into the text her view that the covenant is the “two-pronged relationship set forth in the prophets’ words as they have been inspired by the Spirit: judgment to the enemies of Yahweh, salvation to those who love Him.”

When reading a text like this we need to recall that YHWH is a “covenant-making” God, Who continually enters into covenants with His people, who also enter into numerous covenants:

Think of YHWH’s covenant with Noah, and Abram, later His circumcision covenant with Abraham, a covenant renewed with Isaac and Jacob, and then the covenant with Israel at Sinai, enshrined in the “ark of the covenant.”

Think of the covenant of Joshua in **Joshua 24:25**; the covenants of Jonathan and David with YHWH; David’s covenant with Abner, and with all the elders of Israel;

Think of YHWH’s long-lasting covenant with David and his household; Jehoiada’s covenant between YHWH and Joash; Josiah’s covenant with YHWH to keep the book of the **Torah** that had been found;

Think of Asa’s covenant with the people to seek YHWH; Jehoida’s covenant with the people to be YHWH’s people; Hezekiah’s covenant with YHWH to turn away wrath from Israel; the returnees from Babylon’s covenant to put away their foreign wives; the covenant of the priesthood and the Levites;

Think of Job’s covenant with his eyes; the covenant made between wives and God; the people of Judah’s covenant with death;

Think of YHWH’s servant given as a covenant to the people; the promise to Israel of a long-lasting covenant; Jeremiah’s promise of a new covenant, not like the one at Sinai;

Think of YHWH’s covenant with the day and with the night; YHWH’s covenant with the Levites; Zedekiah’s covenant with the people of Jerusalem to set free all slaves;

(continued...)

shall not depart from your mouth, and from (the) mouth of your descendant(s), and from
(the) mouth of your descendant(s),⁷⁹ said YHWH,
from now and until long-lasting-time!⁸⁰

⁷⁸(...continued)

Think of Jeremiah's prediction that the people of Israel and the people of Judah following Babylon's fall will join in a covenant with YHWH; the covenant between a royal descendant in Babylon with the Babylonians not to rebel (considered valid by YHWH); Ezekiel's prediction of a covenant of peace;

Think of YHWH's covenant with the wild animals; empty oaths / covenants made by the northern Israelites.

Others could be mentioned. But what is obvious is that YHWH is a God Who makes many covenants, again and again; and people also make many covenants, both true and false.

All that our text says concerning this covenant is that it is YHWH's covenant with "them"—that is, the people in Jacob who turn from rebellion--and that it has to do with His Spirit and His words which He has placed in "your mouth" (meaning the prophet's mouth or the penitent people's mouth?). That word (we assume, the message of **Third-Isaiah**) is to continue to be in their and their descendants' mouth into the indeterminate future.

The text does not make the covenant nearly as specific as Achtemeier does. But it does emphasize the critical importance of **Third Isaiah's** message for future generations. And for Christians, it is so important to remember how Jesus identified his ministry and mission in the words of Third Isaiah!

⁷⁹Slotki holds that here, "All faithful Israelites are personified in the prophet." (P. 291)

⁸⁰Alexander comments on **verse 21** that "Israel...was to be the light of the Gentiles, the reclamer of apostate nations [but **verse 20** does not mention 'apostate nations'—it mentions 'those in Jacob / Israel who turn from transgression,' i.e., the Israelite apostates]; and in this high mission and vocation was to be sustained and prospered by the never-failing presence of the Holy Spirit." (P. 378)

The promise is that even though Israel has had to suffer much in punishment from YHWH, YHWH has a wonderful future in store for Israel—He will fill Israel with His word and with His Spirit for all time to come. He has not rejected Israel, but promises to use Israel powerfully throughout the ages of human history!

(continued...)

⁸⁰(...continued)

Paul quotes or paraphrases portions of the Greek translation of **Isaiah 59:20-21** in **Romans 11:26-27**:

Isaiah 59:20-21,

- 20 And he will come on behalf of Zion, the one rescuing / delivering;
and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
- 21 And this (is) for them the covenant from Me, said (the) Lord:
the Spirit of Mine which is upon you,
and the words which I gave / placed in your mouth,
will not fail / cease out of your mouth,
and out of the mouth of your descendant(s),
for (the) Lord spoke, from the now and into the ages!

Romans 11:26-27

- 26 And in this way all Israel will be saved / delivered, even as it has been written;
The one delivering will come out of Zion;
he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
- 27 And this (is) for them the covenant from Me,
when I shall forgive their missings-of-the-mark / sins!

Where **Isaiah 59** says the one delivering will come on behalf of Zion, Paul says he will come out of Zion. Paul's quotation regarding the covenant is identical to the first line of **Isaiah 59**, but then goes in a completely different direction in the remainder of his statement, quoting the third line of **Isaiah 27:9**, from its Greek translation with a slight change, and which is significantly different from the Hebrew text (see below).

Paul refers to **Isaiah 59** to support his hope that "all Israel will be saved," and it seems that this is indeed what **Isaiah 59**, indicates, if we understand the verse to mean "all of the faithful in Israel," although these actual words are not found there. It is in fact speaking of those in Israel who turn from rebellion.

It seems apparent to us that Paul, in **Romans 11**, is attempting to cobble together a "time line" for Israel's future on the basis of **Third Isaiah**, and in so doing has led interpreters on an endless goose-chase, assuming that Paul was reading the future by Divine inspiration.

Interpreters of Paul need to pay close attention to his statements in **1 Corinthians 13:12**, where he confesses that he sees "through a mirror dimly," or enigmatically," and that he knows only partially. The programs drawn up by those who think they can read a Divine time-line through Isaiah;s and Paul's statements, have constantly been in disarray and disagreement!

(continued...)

⁸⁰(...continued)

Isaiah 27:9, which is part of a vision of the future, when Jacob / Israel will fill all the world with its fruit, but only after it has suffered exile as punishment from YHWH and has gotten rid of its idolatry:

Therefore by this Jacob's iniquity will be covered / atoned (for);
and this—all fruit (of) removing his missing-of-the-mark / sin:
by his placing all stones of an altar like stones of chalk, having been pulverized--
Asherahs will not arise, and (neither will) the sun-pillars.

The Greek translation of this Hebrew text is:

Through this the lawlessness of Jacob will be taken away.
And this is the blessing of his when I shall take away the sin of his,
when they shall place all the stones of the high places / altars having been
broken in pieces like fine dust,
and their trees shall not remain,
and their idols having been cut down like a thicket far away.

Paul has taken the last part of the second line of the Greek translation, "when I shall take away his sin," and changed it to the plural, "when I shall take away their sins."

We understand **Isaiah 27** as predicting Israel's punishment, exile, and forgiveness, resulting in Israel's bringing forth fruit for all the nations. Paul's use of both of these texts, even with the slight variants, is legitimate, as giving the true sense of the **Book of Isaiah**. But the further conclusions which Paul draws are highly speculative. That YHWH loves Israel / Jacob and has a blessed future in store for the faithful in Israel, is a given according to the **Book of Isaiah**. But to put all of this into an exact time-line of the future is beyond Isaiah's expertise, and Paul's, and especially ours! What do you think?

Knight comments on this closing statement of **chapter 59**, that "Israel, of course, already possesses two gifts from God, 'My Spirit which is upon you' and 'My words which I have put in your mouth,' and these shall belong to you and to your children's children 'from this time forth and forevermore'..."

"The 'movement' of the covenant, from now on therefore, took a new direction within the new Israel. What had now happened was the fulfilment of Moses' longing cry (**Numbers 11:29**): 'Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put His Spirit upon them.' Trito-Isaiah comments in consequence: 'My Spirit...shall not depart out of your mouth, or...of your children.' Thus we have come to the end of the line, historically speaking, of the great individual prophets. From now on the office of the interpreter of the word was to be shared by the ordinary family both as part of their life on earth as well as in the life to come.

(continued...)

⁸⁰(...continued)

“The return and the reestablishment of Jerusalem ought to have been a cosmic event. As it turned out, it was only a shabby affair, to use Yehezkel Kaufmann’s [Jewish philosopher, born in the Ukraine in 1889, professor of Bible in Hebrew University, Jerusalem, in 1949; died in 1963. His book, **Exile and Estrangement**, held that ‘what preserved Israel’s uniqueness through the ages was solely its religion] choice of words. Yet it was Trito-Isaiah’s faith, as Kaufmann goes on to declare, that it was also a ‘crypto-cosmic’ event. For the ultimate significance of the event God, in His good time, would reveal through His unshakable loyalty to His covenant, and it would be interpreted down the ages through the lips of little children within the ‘covenantal’ fellowship of the happy home.” (Pp. 40-41)

But is this what Third Isaiah means by this promise—no more prophets, only the nation of Israel with the Spirit and the word of God in its families? Surely that is a wonderful promise—but what of Israel’s relation to the nations of the earth? Israel has been given the Spirit and the word—we think of Second Isaiah’s depiction of Jacob / Israel as YHWH’s “servant,” and YHWH’s word to the returnees concerning the kind of righteousness YHWH desires, and His servant’s willingly, self-sacrificially giving its life for the sake of others.

The question is, will Israel follow the Spirit’s guidance, and fulfill this word, truly becoming YHWH’s “servant,” reaching out to and serving sacrificially the foreigners and unclean sinners in her midst?

Or will Israel listen to the voice of the legalists and segregationists, who insist on Israel’s building a wall and refusing to have anything or as little as possible to do with foreigners and “half-breed Jews”? The question is not one of ability. Israel is fully endowed with the ability to fulfil the Divine desire and command. The decision is Israel’s to make.