

Isaiah 66, Hebrew Text with Translation and Footnotes

66:1¹ כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה

¹Slotki states that **chapter 66** depicts “God’s overwhelming greatness and profound condescension. Dire retribution will be the lot of the apostates, while eternal peace and happiness will be the reward of the faithful.” (P. 319)

While this chapter does not mention “eternal peace and happiness,” **verse 22** states that as the new heavens and earth remain before YHWH, so shall Israel’s seed and name remain.

Alexander, in his usual dispensationalist manner, sums up **chapter 66** by stating, “This chapter winds up the prophetic discourse with an express prediction of the change of dispensation, and a description of the difference between them. [YHWH] will no longer dwell in temples made with hands (**verse 1** [does Alexander mean that whereas YHWH formerly dwelt in hand-made temples, He will no longer do so?]) Every sincere and humble heart shall be His residence (**verse 2**). The ancient sacrifices, though Divinely instituted, will henceforth be as hateful as the rites of idolatry (**verse 3** [does Alexander mean that what YHWH once loved, He will later hate?]) They who still cling to the abrogated ritual will be fearfully but righteously requited (**verse 4**). The true Israel cast out by these deluded sinners shall ere long be glorified, and the carnal Israel fearfully rewarded (**verses 5-6**). The ancient Zion may already be seen travailing with a new and glorious dispensation (**verses 7-9**). They who mourned for her seeming desolation, now rejoice in her abundance and her honor (**verses 10-14**). At the same time the carnal Israel shall be destroyed, as apostates and idolaters (**verses 14-17**). The place which they once occupied shall now be filled by the elect from all nations (**verse 18**). To gather these, a remnant of the ancient Israel shall go forth among the Gentiles (**verse 19**). They shall come from every quarter, and by every method of conveyance (**verse 20**). They shall be admitted to the sacerdotal [priestly] honors of the chosen people (**verse 21**). This new dispensation is not to be temporary, like the one before it, but shall last for ever (**verse 22**). While the spiritual Israel is thus replenished from all nations, the apostate Israel shall perish by a lingering decay in the sight of an astonished world (**verses 23-24**).” (P. 456)

But we ask, where in this chapter does the phrase “change of dispensation” occur? Where does it say the ancient sacrifices were “Divinely instituted”? Where does it use the language “true Israel” or “carnal Israel” or “spiritual Israel”? And where does it identify those who have rebelled against YHWH as “the apostate Israel”? None of this language appears in this chapter, and it is apparent that Alexander is reading his Christian theology into the text—again, an example of “eisegesis,” interpreting and reading information into the text that is not there.

Ortlund entitles **66:1-24** “True Worship Now and Forever,” and states that “Though the worship of God is violated now, in the future falsehood will be judged, true worship will spread, and God will be honored forever.” (P.1360)

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Achtemeier comments that “**Isaiah 66:1-18a** is made up of a number of rather brief oracles, which probably were originally independent proclamations, delivered by various prophetic members of the Levitical-prophetic party, but which now have been joined together to form a summary of the message of **Third-Isaiah**. As in **chapter 65**, the proclamations alternate between judgment and salvation, and they should be read in intimate connection with one another, in the order in which they now stand. They add little new to the theology of **Third-Isaiah**, but they utilize new and powerful figures of speech which are evidence of the continuing vitality of the Levitical-prophetic community.” (Pp. 134-35)

Oswalt entitles **verses 1-6** “Humility, not sacrifice.”

He comments that these verses are “a judgment passage coming abruptly after the preceding hope passage...This interchange between judgment and hope is a feature of this final section of the **book [of Isaiah] (65:17-66:24)**. But even the judgment passages, like this one, are cast in the setting of hope...The judgment pronounced here is on those who are depending on externals for their relation to God...The concern here is identical with the one expressed in **Isaiah 1:10-15**. The hope for Israel’s future is not in cultic manipulation, but in repentance and faith in the power of God to enable us to live truly righteous lives.” (P. 666)

Knight entitles **chapter 66** “Heaven and Hell,” and begins his comments with the question “Where Is God To Be Found?”

He states that “More than one person seems to be responsible for this chapter. It appears to be a collection of snippets [small pieces or brief extracts] from sermons, **verses 1-6** being the longest amongst them...”

“To what date should we ascribe this collection? Nowhere...is there any mention made of Sheshbazzar, the political head of state appointed by King Cyrus...or of Haggai or Zechariah (both of whom come to the fore about 520 B.C.E. Nor has any mention been made till now of the temple apart from references to what must have been open-air worship round a partly-built altar. At **Haggai 1:9** we learn that God’s ‘house’ was still in ruins...”

“So we see a party arising, calling themselves ‘the remnant of the people’ (see **Isaiah 10:20**, where this title is given to the ‘survivors’). The moving spirits of this new party seem to have been the prophet Haggai and Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jehoiachin (**2 Kings 24:8-17**) and thus of the Davidic line, who was the appointee of the Persian government as governor of Judah. And with Zerubbabel we associate the name of Joshua, the high priest, whom we have not met before either. These all had returned from Babylon at an unknown date or dates. We should note then that it was not ‘the people of the land’ who urged the rebuilding of the temple, but returnees from the exile (**Ezra 6:16, 19**).

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“Over against this group, again, the ‘evangelic’ [‘rooted in the good news’] group represented by Trito-Isaiah seemed to feel no more need for a temple than did the Qumran community in the century before Christ. They seemed to accept the idea that God’s need of a holy ‘place’ had ended with the fall of Jerusalem, so that instead of such a building the concept of a holy ‘time’ had grown up. This was aided, it would seem, by Trito-Isaiah’s emphasis upon the sabbath; and this in turn was leading to the concept of continual re-creation (**Isaiah 66:2**)...

“Haggai is called ‘the messenger of the Lord’ (**Haggai 1:13**)...Zechariah, in his turn, referred to God’s express word as addressing the high priest in the form of ‘the angel [/ messenger] of the Lord’...thereby giving him authority to ‘rule My house and have charge of My courts’ (**Zechariah 3:7**) once the temple should be rebuilt. But at the same time Zechariah seems to have regarded Zerubbabel as the contemporary messianic figure, son of David, and so as the ‘Branch’ of which Isaiah and Jeremiah had spoken (**Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15**)...

“**Isaiah 66**, coming as it does at the end of our collection of interpretative prophecy, or theological thought, seems thus to contain the theology of at least three different parties amongst the inhabitants of Jerusalem. A unifying factor, however, is that the two prophetic hopes of Ezekiel, that of the ‘resurrection’ of Israel and that of rebuilding of the temple, are prefaced equally by the phrase ‘the hand of the Lord was upon me’ (**Ezekiel 37:1; 40:1**).

“We are to remember that Ezekiel had seen the glory depart from the ruins of the temple (**10:18-19**) yet believed that it had removed only to Babylon, where it rested over the dejected exiles. But he had also believed that the glory would return to Jerusalem once God had brought His people home and once the temple was rebuilt and dedicated (**Ezekiel 48:35**). At this point in history, however, the temple had not yet been begun...

“It would seem that the prophet whose words we have in **Isaiah 66:1-2** does not believe it is God’s will that the temple should be rebuilt. For him the locus of the sacred is no longer such a building but is rather human possibility, humanity’s future, mankind’s destiny, broken indeed by sin yet restorable and transformable by God. That must include the humanization of mankind and the transformation of society. This will eventuate only if people humble themselves before God, let God destroy their ego, and permit God Almighty (‘all these things are Mine’) to perfect His will with humankind.

“The uninitiated can be perplexed if they are told that the **New Testament** contains no one specific doctrine of atonement. In the same way, this long **Book of Isaiah** likewise finished up with at least three views of what God had planned for Israel’s future, now that His *tsedeq* [Knight’s ‘love,’ our ‘righteousness’] had become a fact of history.” (Pp. 101-03)

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Slotki comments on **verses 1-2** that “No man-made Temple can contain God in His infinity and majesty. The Heavens are but His throne and the earth only His footstool. Yet He is near to man and ready to listen to the voice of the humble, contrite and truly pious.” (P. 320)

Achtemeier states that **verses 1-2** consist of “a prophetic **torah** or teaching concerning the efforts of the Zadokite party to rebuild the temple. Such efforts are vividly pictured in the prophecies of **Haggai** (520 B.C.E.) and **First Zechariah** [she means **Zechariah 1-8**] (520-518 B.C.E.; compare **Ezra 4:24-6:18**), and this oracle may date from about their time. It sets forth the northern prophetic protest against imprisoning the Ruler of the universe in a house made by human hands, a protest that was present in Israel from very early times (compare **2 Samuel 7:4-7**). Yahweh is a God Who is on the move, according to the **Old Testament**. He is a God Who goes with His people during the wilderness wanderings, enthroned above His portable shrine, the ark (compare **Exodus 33:16; Numbers 10:33-36**). He can be in Babylonia as easily as in Palestine (compare **Jeremiah 29:7; Ezekiel 1**). He does not confine Himself to a temple, but only places His name there (compare **Deuteronomy 12:11 et passim** [here and there]) that He may be worshiped by His people. And, as here, He destroys all efforts to domesticate Him within a house or cult (compare **Jeremiah 7:1-15**).

“As in **Second Isaiah** (compare **40:12-31**), God is enthroned above the universe in the picture of this oracle (compare **Psalms 11:4**), the earth a mere footstool for His feet (compare **Matthew 5:34-35; Acts 7:49-50**). So He waves His hand out across His universe and says, ‘All of this is Mine, because I fashioned it (compare **Psalms 24:1-2**). Are you going to confine Me, then, within a tiny temple?’...a [question] which we, with our modern understandings of the vastness of space, may appreciate all the more...

“[However,] it is questionable if this oracle is intended to reject the temple as such. Rather, it is a protest against the Zadokites’ misunderstanding of the function of the temple as a *guarantee* of Yahweh’s presence in the midst of His people. Nothing can guarantee God. No one can manipulate Him or command His will and Presence (compare **40:13-14**). If He dwells with His people, He does so out of His Own free choice and gracious condescendence, and the final lines of His oracle tell with whom Yahweh will dwell. As earlier in **Third-Isaiah** (compare **57:15**), He promises that He will ‘look to,’ that is, hear the prayers, accept the worship, and draw near to those who humbly approach Him in repentance and trust (compare **Psalms 34:18; Matthew 5:3; Luke 18:13-14**). Then a new description is given of the faithful: they are those who ‘tremble at’ or ‘revere’ Yahweh’s Word (compare **Ezra 9:4; 10:3** [note that both parties use this phrase])...No temple worship is acceptable, the oracle is saying, which is not carried out in pure and sincere trust in Yahweh alone (compare **John 4:20-24**, where a Samaritan woman questions Jesus, and Jesus responds:

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- 20 The fathers of ours worshiped in this mountain [in Samaria]; and you (plural) say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship.
- 21 The Jesus says to her, Believe me, woman, that an hour is coming when neither in this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you (plural) worship the Father.
- 22 You (plural) worship that which you do not know. We worship that which we know; because the salvation / deliverance is out of the Jews.
- 23 But rather, an hour is coming and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for also the Father is seeking such people (as) the ones worshiping Him!
- 24 Spirit (is) the God—and the ones worshiping Him, in spirit and in truth it is necessary to worship!].” (Pp. 139-40)

Knight comments on **verses 1-2** that “This is evidently not the same voice that gave us **chapter 65**...He speaks as if Heaven and earth were one. This concept may be based on Trito-Isaiah’s good Hebraic monistic view, as against the dualistic thought of Greece and the Orient where heaven and earth are opposites. In God’s sight they are one. This means that God can be worshiped equally as Transcendent Being and as Immanent Friend. Because of this there is no need for a special ‘house’ where God is to be found, such as a temple; for ‘the place of My rest’ cannot be confined to a building made by human hands...

“What this voice is saying is that, since the *eschaton* [‘end’ ‘goal’] has begun, Zion itself is sufficient as the firstfruits of the heavenly temple...That God had chosen Jerusalem was a belief basic to the particularism of the biblical faith. That God had called for one particular ‘house’ for His worship goes back to His particularistic choice of David and of David’s son, so that Solomon’s temple could be known even as God’s ‘footstool’ (**Psalm 99:5; Lamentations 2:1**; see **2 Samuel 7:1-6; 1 Kings 5:5; 8:12-13; Psalms 11:4; 132:7-8**). Yet in the **New Testament** we hear Stephen, before his martyrdom, quoting our present passage (**Acts 7:47-50**) to suggest that Solomon had been mistaken to tie God down in this way.

“Yet the question arises: as the large, excited group of priests, Levites, and temple servants now present in Jerusalem (**Ezra 2:36-54**)—having been aroused from their lethargy and lack of faith by Haggai—were arguing and discussing and planning to rebuild the temple, was what they were doing in contradiction to the thought of the first voice? In the light of **Isaiah 65:17**,

[Because look at Me— creating, new, heavens and a new earth;
and the former things, will not be remembered,,
and they will not come up on heart(s).]

was a temple of any kind not one of those valuable elements in the past of Israel’s faith out of which God was now creating something new? Would it then be ‘new’ in the sense that the temple of old ‘shall not be remembered of come into mind’ (**Isaiah 65:**

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הַשָּׁמַיִם כְּסֵאֵי וְהָאָרֶץ הַדָּם רַגְלֵי

אֵי־זֶה בַּיִת אֲשֶׁר תִּבְנֶה לִּי

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17; compare **Revelation 21:22**)? In other words, was this first voice in fact inviting his priestly brethren to think eschatologically, rather than in terms of space and time, bricks and mortar? There have always been groups from amongst both Jews and Christian who have tended to disregard the present as being unimportant in comparison with the heavenly vision.

“But then the heavenly vision is not just something laid up for the future. It is also to be found in ‘the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit’ (literally, ‘broken and needing repairing’)...By the word ‘contrite’ (*ani*, אֲנִי) we understand a wounded heart, humbling the individual to the earth so that he is not able to rise (see **49:13**; compare **Luke 6:20-22**, along with the Magnificat, **Luke 1:46-55**)...

“If we are not in such a condition, then we must be prepared to be humbled by the mighty hand of God to our shame and disgrace, as John Calvin comments here. What God looks for is obedience, not ritual, not ecstatic worship, but a personal acceptance of God’s call to be His suffering servant [we add, practicing genuine righteousness]. This experience can be heard and known directly by an individual man or woman without the aid of a temple of of any human activity.

“The first voice is handling an important issue. It is that God addresses us by His word. The Chinese word for love means something different from the Swahili word that we so translate, because in each case the concept behind the word is rooted in two different cultures. Human beings with their very different cultures discover that none of them can interpret the content of the word of God (**Isaiah 55:8-9**). All that man can do, say this voice, is to ‘tremble at His word.’” (Pp. 103-04)

Motyer states that in **verses 1-4**, “Those who have chosen their own way and worshiped improperly are under judgment.” There is, of course, nothing new in this; it is found oftentimes throughout the **Hebrew Bible** and the **Greek New Testament**.

But dogmatic interpreters of the **Bible** such as Motyer should not forget the statement in **Ezekiel 16:53-55** concerning YHWH’s promise of the restoration of the fortunes of the sinful cities of Jerusalem, Samaria, and Sodom, or the statements in **1 Peter 3:18** and **4:6** which apparently teach the possibility of hearing and responding to the good news of Jesus Christ after death.

No one can deny the presence of fearsome threats to the ungodly and sinners throughout the **Bible**—but we should not conveniently overlook such hope-filled statements as these, which when dealt with, are most often in my experience forced to say something other than what they say.

וַאֲיִזָּה מִקּוֹם מְנוּחָתִי:

In this way YHWH spoke:²

The heavens—My throne!³ And the earth⁴—footstool for My feet!⁵

²This is again the constantly recurring “prophetic” formula, כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה, “in this way He spoke, YHWH.” We think that here, the phrase indicates the beginning of a new vision, and that therefore the division of chapters at this point is appropriate.

³Wolf / Stek note that “The *house* referred to in **verse 1** is the Jerusalem temple, which was in the process of being rebuilt at the time of this oracle.” (P. 1048)

For occurrences of this phrase כִּסֵּאִי, “My throne,” on the lips of YHWH, see:

Jeremiah 49:38, “I will set My throne in Elam, and destroy her king and officials, a saying of YHWH”;

Ezekiel 43:6-7, “I heard someone speaking to me from inside the house (temple; where YHWH’s glorious radiance has just been described as having returned). He said, Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place for the soles of My feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites for long-lasting time.”

In the light of these two passages, we ask, “Where is YHWH’s throne?” The answer they give is, “both in Elam and in a future Jerusalem.” But here, in **Isaiah 66:1**, the answer is “heaven” is YHWH’s throne, and the whole earth (or ‘land’) is His footstool. Under this imagery, the whole earth is part of heaven, serving as a footstool for YHWH Whose throne is above the earth, and fills creation. Do you conceive planet earth as being included as part of heaven? And how big do you conceive “heaven” to be, in the light of the Hubble telescope with its astounding pictures of the star-worlds / universes?

Oswalt comments on **verses 1-2** that “The Creator God who can make a new heaven and earth whenever it suits Him is certainly not a sky father or an earth mother who could be housed in some structure made with human hands. This understanding is hardly new to Isaiah [66].” (P. 666)

See our study of **1 Kings 8:22-53**.

What do you make of this contrast between **Jeremiah 48:38** and **Isaiah 66:1**? Are the two passages contradictory? Or is YHWH’s “throne” anywhere His Kingdom is manifested in human history, including countries foreign to Israel (“Elam” in southern Iran) and yet far greater than any of those places, including Jerusalem with its house / temple?

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In a number of biblical passages, YHWH's "throne" is said to be "above the cherubim"—that is, just above the ark / chest of the covenant in the "holy of holies" in the moveable sanctuary in the wilderness, and later in the temple in Jerusalem. But then also, there are a number of biblical passages, like this in **Isaiah 66:1**, where it is said that YHWH's "throne" is in heaven—and Solomon makes this clear in his prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem (**1 Kings 8**)—just as it is depicted in the great "throne-room scenes" in **Revelation 4-5**.

How do you understand this? Is it a contradiction? Or is it the profound truth that YHWH is present in all the earth, all creation, at all times—and yet manifests His presence in particular places and at particular times?

Slotki states that the answer to the question, Where is the house you will build for Me? is, "Nowhere, since God is infinite. The function of the temple was not to provide a dwelling-place for God, but to serve as a religious center for the people and as a symbol of the covenant between them and Him." (P. 320) And, Slotki adds, while God is infinite, "Yet He is near to man and ready to listen to the voice of the humble, contrite and truly pious." (**Ibid.**) We agree, and insist that this is mighty good news about our God!

The Christian martyr Stephen quoted this passage, **Isaiah 66:1-2** according to the story in **Acts 7:49-50**, in his rehearsal of the history of Israel, arguing that the physical temple in Jerusalem is not God's dwelling-place, a view which resulted in his being stoned to death. However, Stephen was saying nothing that the **Book of Isaiah** had not said some five or seven centuries earlier!

⁴The original reading of 1QIs^a has the indefinite noun אַרְצָא, "and earth," but a later hand has written in the definite article above the line.

Watts translates by "the land," meaning Palestine. He states that "The place that demonstrates Yahweh's sovereignty to humankind is Palestine: promised to Abraham, given through Moses and Joshua, secured through David and Solomon." (P. 355)

We think it much more likely that the new heavens and the new earth should be understood in the light of **Genesis 1:1**—not in terms of the tiny country of Palestine, but of planet earth. And we believe that not just the land of Israel, but the whole earth, and all of nature, demonstrate the dependence on God, and the reliability of God. What do you think?

⁵For occurrences of this noun, אֲרָצָא, "footstool," see:

Isaiah 66:1 (here; the earth / land is the footstool of YHWH's feet; Motyer comments that "this is the only place where *earth* itself is the Divine *footstool*," p. 533);

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Psalms 99:5 (Israel is called to worship at YHWH the universal God's footstool, in His set-apart mountain, meaning in Jerusalem);

Psalms 110:1 (David is invited to "sit at YHWH's right hand," until YHWH has made David's enemies the footstool for David's feet);

Psalms 132:7 (David invites Israel to go to YHWH's dwelling-place, to worship at His footstool, His "resting-place," where the ark of the covenant is located);

Lamentations 2:1 (in allowing Jerusalem to be destroyed, and her people taken captive, YHWH is accused of having hurled down Israel's splendor from heaven to earth; He has not remembered His footstool);

1 Chronicles 28:2 (when David wanted to build the temple in Jerusalem, it was to be a place of rest for YHWH's ark of the covenant and the footstool of Israel's God).

This present passage is, we think, a sort of "demythologization" of the temple as YHWH's footstool—not one tiny temple in Jerusalem, but the whole earth / land is His footstool! And when you consider the entire **Book of Isaiah**, with its magnificent depictions of YHWH's surpassing greatness (as in **chapter 40**—With His hand's breadth He marked off the heavens, holds earth's dirt in a basket, weighs the mountains of the earth in scales; earth's nations are like a drop in the bucket, like nothing before Him; He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth; its people like grasshoppers, the heavens His tent; He controls the stars of heaven; He is the Creator of the ends of the earth!), you have to ask, How can one tiny land like Israel literally be His "footstool"—much less a building on the top of a tiny hill in Jerusalem? Surely this can only be meant symbolically! What do you think?

We are reminded of Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, in which he asks, "But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built!" (**1 Kings 8:27**)

Ortlund notes that "The Creator cannot be walled in—not even by His Own temple in Jerusalem (compare **1 Kings 8:27**; **Jeremiah 7:8-15** [in Jeremiah's 'temple sermon,' he expresses YHWH's promise to let the Israelites worship in the temple if it is the home of genuine repentance, justice, and compassion for the weakest members of society; if not, and if it becomes a 'den of robbers,' it will be destroyed just like the sanctuary at Shiloh in 1050 B.C.E.]...**Acts 7:44-50** [Stephen quotes **Isaiah 66:1**, insisting that the Most High does not live in man-made houses like the Jewish temple])...

"The **Old Testament** is constantly at pains to remind God's people that He is greater than the institutions He has authorized, and He will not be manipulated by their use." (P. 1360)

Where (is) this⁶, ¹—a house which you people will build for Me?⁷

⁶The phrase here in line 3, **אֵי-יְהוָה**, literally “Where-this?” is repeated in line 4, **וְאֵי-יְהוָה**, literally “and where this?”, and is then related to the phrase **וְאֵל-יְהוָה**, literally “and to this” in line 3 of **verse 2**. Watts translates the phrase here by “What is this?” (P. 350) He notes that the Greek translation is *ποῖον*, “what?” or “what manner of?” Oswalt notes that “The compound adverb **אֵי-יְהוָה** (literally ‘where this’) occurs 12 other times in the **Hebrew Bible** [see our end-note 1]. The **יְהוָה** (‘this’) seems to intensify the question ...The rhetorical sense is that such a house does not exist, and cannot.” (P. 663)

YHWH is questioning His people about where His house can be found, a proper “resting-place” for Him. The questions imply that what they may think is an adequate resting-place for YHWH, is not at all adequate. Instead of the kind of places that they may think are adequate—all of them places which His hands made, and which are finite, temporal--YHWH states that He looks to something completely different--to a poor person, one contrite of spirit, who trembles before His Word. There, and only there, the statements imply, will YHWH find an adequate “place of rest”!

We are reminded of the statements attributed to Jesus in **John 4**, as He tells the Samaritan woman that God’s worship is neither on a mountain in Jerusalem or a mountain in Samaria, both the sites of temples, the one of the Jews, the other of the Samaritans--but God chooses to be worshiped “in spirit and in truth,” even by an out-caste Samaritan, and an “inferior” woman at that! Likewise we think of the attempts of Christians to build cathedrals adequate for housing the risen Lord—but hear His promise to be with two or three people gathered in His name, wherever they may be (**Matthew 18:20**)! What do you think?

Ortlund notes that “Even Levitical worship [that is, the worship commanded in the **Book of Leviticus**]—without a trembling heart—is abhorrent to God (compare **Isaiah 1:10-17** [the Levitical worship is said by YHWH to be nothing to Him; He cannot abide worship that is not filled with justice and concern for the least in society]; **Jeremiah 7:21-23** [YHWH wants His people to ‘walk with Him’ in obedience—His commands were not about animal sacrifices! Note how **New International** adds the word ‘just’ to Jeremiah’s words in order to blunt his statement]). Such animal sacrifices are as bad as outright murder (‘kills a man’) and idolatry (‘breaks a dog’s neck, offers pig’s blood, blesses an idol’)...True faith is essentially an openhearted listening to the Word of God and whole-heartedly believing it.” (P. 1360)

⁷See Solomon’s honest confession in **1 Kings 8** that no earthly temple, not even the universe itself, can contain YHWH! The true and living God is too big for any building we human beings may build to contain! This is the implication of YHWH’s question here. Where on earth is there any place big enough to build a house for Me?

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Compare **Amos 9:6**, “He builds His (temple-)stairs in the heavens and sets its arches on the earth” (a difficult passage to read; but one that envisions a heavenly temple, far greater than any earthly building). Still, as will be shown in the next footnote, there was the belief in Israel that Jerusalem and its tabernacle / temple were in fact YHWH’s “place of rest.”

Motyer comments that “Solomon’s prayer at the dedication of the temple (**1 King 8:12-29**) provides an interpretative background because in it he offers a rationale for the temple. His question in **verse 27** is crucial: ‘But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens...cannot contain You. How much less this temple I have built!’ The question itself seems to be moving towards the answer ‘No,’ but the answer necessitated by the whole prayer is ‘Yes’...

“Solomon began by stating the fact of the house as a Divine dwelling (**verse 12^{Eng} / 13^{Heb}**, בְּנֵה בְּנֵיתִי בַיִת זֶבֶל לְךָ מְכוּן לְשִׁבְתֶּךָ עוֹלָמִים, ‘I indeed built a house of elevation for You, a fixed place for Your dwelling [for] ages’); next, he affirmed publicly the Divine mandate given for the building of such a house (**verses 14-21**); thirdly, he gave thanks that the promise to David had been kept (**verses 22-26**). Against this background, the answer to **verse 27** is never in doubt: in all His greatness the Lord will live in this house because He has promised to do so...

“This provides perspective for **Isaiah 66:1**. The Lord is transcendent but, yes, He does come to live among His people. He does not scorn an earthly house. But where did you say it was? It is hard to resist a certain irony in the question! Human beings build towering, obtrusive edifices for God and God professes them hard to find. This is not because He despises them or rejects the motives that prompted them but because it is not where His eye most easily and readily focuses. Thus the [‘where this’] of **verse 1** takes second place to the [‘But this’] of **verse 2**. The Lord’s priority is the individual who has a trembling reverence for His word.” (P. 532)

We think that Motyer is misunderstanding the narrative in **1 Kings 8**, which teaches emphatically that while YHWH’s “name,” or “glorious radiance” dwells in the Solomonic house / temple, it is in reality no more than a “sounding-board,” a “listening station” for YHWH, Who dwells in heaven. See our Endnote 1 on **1 Kings 8:22-53**. Nowhere in **1 Kings 8** is it said that YHWH “in all His greatness will live in this house / temple”!

Achtemeier describes **66:1-2** as “a prophetic **torah** or teaching...It sets forth the ...prophetic protest against imprisoning the Ruler of the universe in a house made by human hands, a protest that was present in Israel from very early times (compare **2 Samuel 7:4-7** [where Nathan tells David that YHWH has not dwelt in a house since Israel’s leaving Sinai, but has been moving from place to place in a tent, never asking anyone to build Him a house of cedar– YHWH is building a house for David–He does not need David to build a house for him!])...

(continued...)

And where is this—a place for My rest?^{8, 2}

⁷(...continued)

“Yahweh is a God Who is on the move, according to the **Old Testament**. He is a God Who goes with His people during the wilderness wanderings, enthroned above His portable shrine, the ark...He can be in Babylonia as easily as in Palestine (compare... **Ezekiel 1** [Ezekiel sees visions of God and experiences the hand of YHWH upon him in Babylonia]). He does not confine Himself to a temple, but only places His name there (compare **Deuteronomy 12:11** [and elsewhere] so that He may be worshiped by His people. And, as here, He destroys all efforts to domesticate Him within a house or cult (compare **Jeremiah 7:1-15** [where YHWH declares that His presence / name can only be found in the temple, whether at Shiloh or in Jerusalem, if it is a house of justice and ethical purity, not a den of robbers!])).

“As in...**Isaiah...40:12-31**...God is enthroned above the universe in the picture of this oracle (compare **Psalms 11:4** [YHWH is in His set-apart temple, ‘YHWH—in the heavens His throne’]), the earth a mere footstool for His feet...So He waves His hand out across His universe and says, ‘All of this is Mine, because I fashioned it (compare **Psalms 24:1-2**). Are you going to confine Me, then, within a tiny temple?’ (P. 139)

⁸The noun here is מְנוּחָתִי, “My rest,” or “My resting-place.” For occurrences of this noun in the **Hebrew Bible**, see our end-note 2.

People need to find a “place of rest”—and that is exactly what they find when they come to know YHWH as their Shepherd (or, for the **New Testament**, when they come to Jesus—see **Matthew 11:28-30**). But in addition, human beings need a secure home to live in, here in this life, on this earth—a physical “place of rest.”

But when humans attempt to build a secure home for YHWH to occupy, a Divine “place of rest,” it is impossible, says **Isaiah 66:1**. Isaiah knows that in Israel’s tradition, just such a term has been applied to the house / temple in Jerusalem, and the chest / ark of the covenant has been called “YHWH’s footstool” (see **Psalms 132:8**). But **Third-Isaiah** depicts YHWH as questioning whether that can be true—since the heavens are His throne, and the earth is His footstool.

Alexander states that “All interpreters [of **Isaiah** whom he had consulted] agree that this question implies disapprobation [strong disapproval] of the building [of the temple in Jerusalem] as at variance with the great truth propounded in the first clause, namely, that the frame of nature is the only material temple worthy of [YHWH]...”

“This obvious relation of the clauses is sufficient of itself to set aside two of the old interpretations of the passage. The first is that of Kimchi...that this chapter is a counterpart to the **first [chapter]**, and that the Prophet here recurs to his original theme, the corruptions and abuses of his own age...[The second is] the theory of Grotius, that this chapter was intended to console the pious Jews who were debarred from the customary public worship during the profanation of the temple by Antiochus

(continued...)

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Epiphanes. In neither of these cases could there be occasion for objecting to the building or rebuilding of the temple...

“Those who refer this whole series of predictions to the period of the Babylonish exile find it hard to explain this chapter upon that hypothesis, since the building of the temple is urged upon the people as a duty by the acknowledged prophets of the exile.” (P. 457)

But this is to overlook the objections to the temple made by Jeremiah (see **Jeremiah 7**), and the fact that this chapter by **Third Isaiah** is the work of a prophet or prophets of the exile. Alexander will not admit any difference between **Ezekiel / Ezra / Nehemiah** (with their emphasis upon building the temple, and segregating the returnees between “clean and unclean,” and **Jeremiah / Third Isaiah**, both of which insist the physical temple is to be destroyed and no longer necessary, with loving outreach to the very people being cast off as unclean by **Ezra / Nehemiah**. What do you think?

Alexander goes on to state that “The Prophet now addresses the apostate and unbelieving Jews at the close of the old dispensation, who, instead of preparing for the general extension of the church, and the exchange of ceremonial for spiritual worship, were engaged in the rebuilding and costly decoration of the temple at Jerusalem. The pride and interest in this great public work, felt not only by the Herods but by all the Jews, is clear from incidental statements of the Scripture (**John 2:20; Matthew 24:1**), as well as from the ample and direct assertions of Josephus. That the nation should have been thus occupied precisely at the time when the Messiah came, is one of those agreements between prophecy and history which cannot be accounted for except upon the supposition of a providential and designed assimilation...

“It may be asked, then, why this truth did not forbid the erection of the temple at first, as well as its gorgeous reconstruction in the time of Christ. The answer is, that it was necessary for a temporary purpose, but when this temporary purpose was accomplished it became not only useless but unlawful. Henceforth the worship was to be spiritual worship, the church universally diffused, and the material sanctuary...no longer an earthly residence for God but a convenient place of meeting for His people.” (Pp. 458-59)

Achtemeier comments that “It is questionable if this oracle [in **Isaiah 66**] is intended to reject the temple as such. Rather, it is a protest against...misunderstanding of the function of the temple as a *guarantee* of Yahweh’s presence in the midst of His people. Nothing can guarantee God. No one can manipulate Him or command His will and Presence (compare **Isaiah 40:13-14**). If He dwells with His people, He does so out of His Own free choice and gracious condescendence, and the final lines of His oracle tell with whom Yahweh will dwell.” (P. 140)

(continued...)

66.2 וְאֶת־כָּל־אֱלֹהֵי יָדַי עָשָׂתָה

וַיִּהְיוּ כָל־אֱלֹהֵי נְאֻמ־יְהוָה

וְאֶל־זֶה אָבִיט

אֶל־עֵינִי וְנִכְה־רוּחַ

וְחָרַד עַל־דְּבָרַי:

And all of these⁹—My hands made!¹⁰

and all these became¹¹ —(it is) a saying of YHWH!¹²

⁸(...continued)

What do you think? Is **Isaiah 66:1** rejecting the Jewish temple in Jerusalem as such? We think it is—and that the only true place of rest for YHWH is the humble hearts of believers.

Do you believe that? Is it not a marvelous biblical teaching that the Creator of the universe wants to make His dwelling-place, His place of rest, not in houses made by human hands, but in humble human hearts? Is this not what Jesus Christ taught? What about your heart? Is it God's dwelling-place?

⁹Slotki states that the phrase in his translation, “all these things,” points to “all visible creation.” (P. 320)

¹⁰It is an excellent question. If YHWH is the Creator-God of the entire universe, if He made everything that there is—how can little human beings even conceive of building a “place of rest” for Him, located on a hill-top only a few acres in size, in Jerusalem? Is that not the height of irreverence? As a place for His “calling card,” with His “name” written on it, yes—it can be that. But as a place able to contain YHWH, the God of heaven and earth—no way!

This is what we take this Divine question to imply. What do you think?

¹¹Where the Hebrew text reads וַיִּהְיוּ, “and they were,” or, “and they became,” the Greek translation has καὶ ἔστιν ἐμὰ, “and it is Mine.” Compare the Old Latin and the Syriac translations and 1QIs^a, which reads וַדְּהוּ, “and they will be” if waw-conversive / consecutive, or “and they were,” if not waw-conversive / consecutive.

Since YHWH God is the First and the Last (see **Isaiah 41:4; 44:6**) can a place that “became” be an adequate place of rest for Him? Christian readers of **Isaiah** are

(continued...)

And to this (person) I will look—
to a poor person, and one contrite¹³ of spirit,
and trembling before My Word.¹⁴

¹¹(...continued)

reminded of how the **Book of Revelation** affirms that Jesus Christ is the First and the Last—see **Revelation 1:8; 21:6** and **22:13**.

¹²The phrase here, נִאֲמַיְהוָה, “it is a saying of YHWH,” occurs some 275 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, a constant reminder that the biblical teachings are claimed to have come by Divine revelation.

¹³Where our Hebrew Text reads וְנִכְחָה, “and broken,” or “and stricken,” some other Hebrew manuscripts read וְנִכְאָה, “and stricken,” a synonym with identical meaning. 1QIs^a reads וְנִכְאֵי, “and stricken ones,” in the plural rather than the singular. Compare 1QIs^b which reads וְנִכְאָה, a singular form with similar meaning.

¹⁴This is a powerful and deeply meaningful affirmation concerning YHWH’s “place of rest,” or “dwelling-place.” YHWH is not looking for, nor interested in, beautiful, massive buildings. What YHWH is looking for is a “poor” person, one contrite of spirit, who trembles before YHWH’s word. There is the place YHWH can dwell, and find His resting-place! Compare **Isaiah 57:15**:

Because in this way He spoke—One Being High and Being Exalted,
One Dwelling until (the future), and Set-apart (is) His Name:
height (of heaven) and set-apart—(there) I will dwell—
and with a contrite (or ‘crushed’) person, and low(ly) of spirit—
to bring to life lowly people’s spirit,
and to bring to life contrite (or ‘crushed’) peoples’ heart.

These two passages together emphasize **Third-Isaiah’s** vision of YHWH God as being far too big for any earthly building—but at the same time as deliberately choosing to come to, and make His “place of rest” in the hearts of the lowly and needy. Compare:

Psalms 34:19, verse 18 in English: “YHWH is close to the broken-hearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Matthew 5:3, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God”;

Luke 18:9-14, the parable of the proud Pharisee and the humble tax-collector, concluding that “Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

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These passages again join in demonstrating how the teaching of Jesus is a fulfillment of **Isaiah's** teaching.

Motyer comments that "It is certainly legitimate to build a house [that is, 'temple'] and, great though He is, the Lord will condescend to live there [Motyer is adding this last statement to the text, which states that YHWH chooses to live in the hearts of the contrite and lowly of spirit, that tremble at His Word—not in physical buildings!], yet the foremost Divine desire is the individual trembling at His word. Cultic practices can become debased and unacceptable, and the Lord will have no truck [meaning 'dealings with'] with those who refuse His word and way.

He quotes Birks as commenting, "One object in creation, amid suns and stars, secures the gaze of the great Creator.' The *humble* (עֲנִי, τὸν ταπεινόν) are socially those who are at the bottom of the heap, pushed down by stronger, dominant interests. However, religiously they are those who are ready to take the lowest place before and for God." (P. 534)

Achtemeier notes that "As earlier in...**57:15**...He promises that He will 'look to,' that is, hear the prayers, accept the worship, and draw near to those who humbly approach Him in repentance and trust...Then a new description is given of the faithful: they are those who 'tremble at' or 'revere' Yahweh's word (compare **Ezra 9:4; 10:3**)... No temple worship is acceptable, the oracle is saying, which is not carried out in pure and sincere trust in Yahweh alone..." (P. 140)

Knight states "It would seem that the prophet whose words we have in **Isaiah 66:1-2** does not believe that it is God's will that the temple should be rebuilt. For him the locus of the sacred is no longer [but, was it ever?] such a building, but is rather human possibility, humanity's future, mankind's destiny, broken indeed by sin yet restorable and transformable by God...

"This means that God can be worshiped equally as Transcendent Being and as Immanent Friend. Because of this there is no need for a special 'house' where God is to be found, such as a temple [or, we add, 'synagogue,' or 'cathedral' or 'church building' or 'mosque']; for 'the place of My rest' cannot be confined to a building made by human hands...What God looks for is obedience, not ritual, not ecstatic worship, but a personal acceptance of God's call to be His suffering servant. This experience can be heard and known directly by an individual man or woman without the aid of a temple or of any human activity." (Pp. 102-03)

This is a very important matter for consideration by all who are interested in Biblical Theology, and especially for those whose lives are committed to serving the synagogue or church or mosque—the religious community--through buildings built for such a purpose.

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And we ask, Is Knight correct in drawing the conclusion that because YHWH is looking toward those with a contrite heart, who tremble at His word, that therefore temple-buildings, synagogues, church buildings and mosques are unnecessary, and useless?

We think that is not at all a necessary conclusion. Such religious buildings (and their rituals) can serve very important and helpful purposes, in drawing people together for worship, teaching, and the powerful role that organized lovers of God (“word-tremblers”) can play in so many important ways, but especially as examples to and influences on others. What **Isaiah’s** words warn against is thinking YHWH can be confined to religious edifices—a magical, superstitious view of religion and sacrifice, that always needs to be guarded against! What do you think?

Watts holds that this statement in **66:2b-5** confirms YHWH’s “rejection of the old priestly ways and His installation of a more direct spirituality for the meek who tremble at His word.” (P. 351)

We think that YHWH is not “installing a new spirituality” at all. Rather, this is what has always been the truth, as old as Enoch in **Genesis 5:21-24**, who walked with God without benefit of priest or temple as far as his story goes. Compare the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc., which also make no mention of temples / cathedrals / synagogues / church buildings / mosques). But this does not mean that Enoch’s or Abraham’s descendants would not have the necessity for religious buildings and rituals. We think **Isaiah 66:2-5** is rejecting the old magical ways of conceiving the nature of the temple and its rituals—not rejecting organized religion or buildings of worship as such.

And we insist that we should not make **66:2-5** fly in the face of **Isaiah 56:1-8**, where those formerly rejected from the temple and its worship because of physical deformities, and because of being foreigners, are invited into YHWH’s temple and its rituals of burnt offerings and sacrifices upon YHWH’s altar, and the temple is depicted as being what YHWH desires—a “house of prayer for all nations.” Are we to conceive of **Isaiah 66:2-5** as rejecting that view? We think not.

Does this sharp criticism of the temple and of the priestly worship there mean the end of temples and priests? Or, does it not make clear the limit of temples and priestly rituals, and the true goal of all external religious practices?

When Jesus teaches the woman of Samaria that God is worshiped in spirit and in truth over against being worshiped exclusively on this mountain in Samaria or that mountain in Jerusalem (**John 4:21-24**), does He mean that there is no more need for temples (as houses of prayer for all peoples; compare the statement attributed to Him in **Mark 11:17 / Matthew 21:13 / Luke 19:46**, quoting **Isaiah 56:7b**), synagogues, cathedrals, churches? Why, then, have His followers built religious buildings—schools,

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churches, hospitals, universities, wherever they have gone? When you understand that you can worship God in the privacy of your own home or heart, does that mean the elimination of religious edifices and all public religious services? Is there no more need for public prayer and worship? Is there no more need for organized world-missions?

We think the passage means we should recognize the limits of what such religious buildings and religious rituals can accomplish—but not eliminate them altogether! Do you agree?

Watts again states that “The issue of the nature of worship in the new temple helps to place the passage historically. The nature of worship and the status of the priests were major concerns in the restoration of Jerusalem from 520 B.C.E. through the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah in the latter 5th century B.C.E. They were still burning issues at the end of that period. The vision [of **Isaiah**] does not support the rising power of the priesthood that Ezra is installing with the intention of continuing the sacrifices of the Levites. [Are we then to understand **Third Isaiah’s** message as written in opposition to the work of Ezra and Nehemiah? We think so—do you?]

“The reference in **66:1** to ‘a house built for’ Yahweh brings the passage back to an historical issue. The episode challenges plans for building the temple. It does not reject the practice of worship, as **verse 2b** makes plain. **Verse 3** shows that the issue turns on the kind of house and the nature of that worship...This position is consonant with that of the vision [of **Isaiah**] throughout, opposing sacrifice (**1:11-14**), urging commitment to justice (**1:16-17**) and supporting a view of religion as pilgrimage to experience God’s presence and hear His teaching that leads to peace (**2:1-4**).

“This view is apparently set against a doctrine of temple worship that is exclusive in the claim that God is only present there (not in the rest of the city [or world!]) and that only certain priests may practice because they are the only ones authorized to sacrifice. These issues are emphasized in **Leviticus** and portions of **Numbers** dealing with priestly privileges.” (P. 352)

What do you think? While we are taking issue with Watts, we think his view is very important, and certainly worthy of deep consideration. We think this pointed criticism of temple worship in **Isaiah 66:1-3** should be kept in mind throughout our study of **Exodus** and **Leviticus**, and in our consideration of the meaning of the Levitical worship in the temple in Jerusalem. The question is: Are **Jeremiah 7** and **Third Isaiah** rejecting the teachings concerning the temple and the Levitical priesthood in **Exodus / Leviticus** as invalid, as no longer useful or applicable? Or are these spokespersons pointing out the absurdity of making too much of the temple and its priestly rituals, turning them into centers of magic rather than humble worship of the people of God? Has Israel misconstrued the teaching of the **Torah**?

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This is not just a question with relevance in the time of **Ezra-Nehemiah / Jeremiah-Third Isaiah** and Jesus—it is a question with biting relevance in all times and places for organized religion!

¹⁵Watts holds that in **verse 3** “a series of legitimate sacrifices, as far as the **Torah** is concerned, is then identified with some that are prohibited.” He outlines them as follows: (p. 355)

Acceptable	Unacceptable
slaughtering an ox (Leviticus 17:3-4)	striking a person (Leviticus 24:17-21; Deuteronomy 19:6; 27:24-25)
sacrificing a lamb (Leviticus 14:10-24)	breaking a dog’s neck (Exodus 34:20 , of a donkey)
presenting a cereal offering (Leviticus 14:8; Isaiah 65:4; 66:17)	swine’s blood (Leviticus 11:7; Deuteronomy 2:1, 13)
a memorial with frankincense (Leviticus 2:2, 16; 6:8 [verse 15])	blessing a vain thing

But what is the purpose of placing these “acceptable items in worship” in such a parallel list with “unacceptable items in worship”? Is it to identify them as being identical? Is this passage saying that there is no difference between them, and that the worship of the Jewish temple is no different from the worship of the surrounding Canaanite religious practices? We think this is quite possible.

Ackerman comments that “A list of four sacrifices (*ox, lamb, grain, frankincense*) considered religiously acceptable is paralleled by a list of sacrifices condemned as illegitimate...Some suggest that the entire sacrificial system is being rejected here, but because the word ‘like’ is not in the Hebrew [the ancient versions all have comparatives, as does **Rahlf**s, with ὡς, ‘as,’ ‘like’] the point seems, rather, that any worshiper who participated in inappropriate rituals, even alongside appropriate rituals, should be castigated.” (P. 1048)

Slotki holds that “The mechanical, unspiritual offering of sacrifices by men steeped in idolatry and addicted to its abominable rites is as contemptible in the eyes of God as the actual performance of these horrible practices and will receive retribution, measure for measure.” (P. 320) What do you think?

Motyer, like Ackerman, notes that the phrases “is like” and “is like one who presents” which are oftentimes interpolated into English translations [so, **JPS 1917** and **New American Standard**; but not **Tanakh**, which has ‘As for those who slaughter oxen and slay humans, Who sacrifice sheep and immolate [‘kill as a sacrifice’] dogs, Who present as oblation [‘offering’] the blood of swine, Who offer incense and worship false

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Gods--Just as they have chosen their ways And take pleasure in their abominations'] amount to "an outright condemnation of the sacrificial side of religion."

But Motyer states, "This is not [Isaiah's] position. What he does here is simply to set items side by side. He contrasts the lawful with the sinful (one slaughters a bull: one kills a man); the lawful with the meaningless (one sacrifices a lamb: one strangles a dog); the lawful with the unacceptable (one brings a gift: pig's blood); and the lawful with the apostate (one makes an incense memorial: one blesses an idol)..."

"According to **Ezekiel 8**, pre-exilic worship of the Lord went hand in hand with the secret practice of just such deviations [the spokesperson Ezekiel is shown worship going on in the Jerusalem temple alongside which he sees 'the idol that provokes to jealousy,' probably a statue of Asherah, and all sorts of crawling, creeping animals along with idols, painted on the walls of the temple; incense arising, but at the shrines of idols; women mourning for Tammuz, a Babylonian fertility God; a group of men worshipping the Sun in the east! It is an amalgamation of the Near-Eastern religions with the worship of YHWH in His temple! But Third Isaiah is written to post-exilic Israel. Are we to assume that the same kind of worship that was going on in Ezekiel's day was still continuing among the returnees from Babylon? In the light of this passage, we think so!]..."

"The purpose of **Isaiah's** catalogue is to present a call to be clear-cut. The distinction between the two lists is that one expresses a consent to the Word of God and the other is deviationist. The building of a house [temple] means nothing of itself; the sacrificial cult divorced from 'trembling at the Lord's word' is sinful, meaningless, unacceptable and apostate. When **Amos** said 'Go to Bethel and sin' (**4:4**) his meaning was the same—ritual conformity without moral obligations only extends sin into another area of life. It is possible to be religiously meticulous and at worst incur guilt, at best achieve nothing. The Word of God is the key to everything." (P. 534)

What do you think? Is the parallel list of acceptable worship and unacceptable worship meant to identify the two—saying that Israel's sacrificial worship in the temple is worthless? Or is it, as Motyer holds, saying that Israel is combining both acceptable and unacceptable worship? In fact, the list is ambiguous, and the text both has been and can be interpreted in these different ways.

Watts states that "Either the pairs express identification (the one doing this also does that) making these an accusation of syncretism ['the attempt to combine or reconcile differing beliefs'] (which is not really credible here [we ask, Why not? That is exactly what was happening in **Ezekiel**]) or the one doing legal sacrifices is portrayed as no more acceptable to God than one who is doing the illegal and abhorrent things. The latter seems most fitting: a heavy insult heaped on the practicing priests. And it is also a claim that the ancient sacrifices are no longer valid in the new age." (P. 356)

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Do you agree with Watts? Is there to be no more sacrifice in the new age **Isaiah** envisions? Compare:

Isaiah 56:6-7, foreigners and those formerly excluded from the temple because of physical deformities are welcomed into the temple worship, with their burnt offerings and sacrifices being acceptable upon YHWH's altar;

Isaiah 66:20-22, the "brothers" gathered in from the nations are depicted in that new age as being brought as "gifts" in clean vessels to the house of YHWH, with some of them serving as "priests," and all humanity observing weekly (sabbaths) and monthly (new moons), worshiping in Jerusalem. Does that not indicate a continuation of the temple worship and priestly service, although in a renewed, modified way, with the exclusiveness broken in favor of openness to all?

What do you think? What kind of conclusion should we draw concerning public worship in the temple of the new Jerusalem? Is there a temple there? And how do you relate this to John's vision in **Revelation 21-22** in which there is no temple building (**21:22**), but the entirety of the new Jerusalem is one giant "holy of holies"?

Achtemeier thinks that **verses 3-4** contrast the true worship mentioned at the end of **verse 2** [YHWH looks to the one who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at His word] with that of the Zadokites and their followers—"verse 3 is simply a listing of the worship practices of the Zadokite party. They offer the legitimate burnt and cereal offerings...but...the Zadokite party also offers heathen sacrifices to heathen Gods. They engage in child sacrifice...They eat the flesh of dogs... They bring the blood of unclean swine to Yahweh's altar (compare **65:4**)...They 'choose' to walk in their own ways rather than in Yahweh's way...

"Therefore, over-against that choice which the Zadokite party makes, Yahweh will also make a choice, **verse 4**. They choose the Gods of Fate and Fortune (compare **65:11**), but the future is in Yahweh's hands, and by His choice the outcome of such idolatry will be misfortunes (compare **65:11**) ...

"As Yahweh is never bound to the temple, **verses 1-2**, so here He is never coerced by ritual, and sacrifices are never automatically efficacious. They must be offered in trust and not fear, in obedience and not rebellion, in love for Yahweh alone, Who holds the future in His hands...Such offering alone, **Third-Isaiah** says, is pleasing to God. He delights in human beings who freely come in love to worship Him." (Pp. 140-41)

Oswalt comments on **verses 3-4** that "**Verse 3** contains one of the strongest denunciations of cult [not meant in a bad sense, but simply meaning 'religion' or 'worship'] in the **Bible**...Is a Hebrew prophet really saying that the sacrifices commanded in the **Torah** are no different from the unclean offerings that the **Torah** abominates and con-

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demns?...The prophet does attack apparent fulfillment of the *Torah*, using the strongest language he can muster.

“But such attacks are hardly unique to [the **Book of**] **Isaiah**. **Amos 5:21-25... Isaiah 43:23-24...Jeremiah 7:21-22...Micah 6:6-8...Malachi 1:10...Matthew 23:27...** This is Semitic hyperbole, which knows nothing of finely nuanced distinctions. People with unclean hearts will offer unclean offerings, no matter how rigorously they obey the *Torah*, and such offerings are an offense to God.

“Offered out of an unclean heart, an ox is no different from a man, a lamb is no more clean than a dog whose neck has been wrung...the firstfruits of the grain are no more pleasing than the blood of a swine, and a memorial offering of incense might as well be given to an idol...

“But how do we know the offerers’ hearts are unclean? Because what they are doing reflects not what God has chosen, but what they have chosen...Instead of following the admonitions of **55:7** [forsake wicked ways] and seeking the ways of God, these people have chosen their own ways, and instead of seeking out what God desires, like the son of the foreigner (**56:4**), they have acted as though they desired God (**58:2**) while all the time desiring abominations...

“From such persons God desires nothing but repentance [no—God wants righteousness, the kind of righteousness depicted in **Isaiah 58**—self-giving love to the neediest of their neighbors!] They are not His servants because they do not listen to Him.” (Pp. 668-69)

Knight comments on **verses 3-4** that “Perhaps then we are to take the middle way between what the first voice seems to be saying and what a second voice maintains in [these two verses]. Here the author goes on to extraordinarily literalistic extremes to denounce the whole sacrificial cult that may be associated with any temple. But Isaiah of Jerusalem seems to have done so already (**Isaiah 1:10-17**)...

“‘He who (ritualistically) slaughters an ox (for sacrifice)’ is only one half of a sentence. The other half runs: ‘him who “smites” (‘kills,’ as **RSV**?) a man.’ Is the **RSV** in order when it places the word ‘like’ between the two statements, though it is not there in the original? Does this voice mean to say ‘He who sacrifices an ox in the worship of Yahweh is as bad as a murderer’? Or again, is the innocent act of handling a ‘cereal offering’ as wrong as offering ‘swine’s blood,’ for of course handling pigs is taboo? In the light of **1:12-17**, however, is not what he is wanting to say just this, that such practices must not be continued by the self-righteous, whose heart is far from God?...

“If so, then is he not merely repeating the words of **65:12**,

(continued...)

זֹבַח הַשֶּׁה עֶרְף כָּלֵב
 מַעֲלָה מִנְחָה דַם־חַיִּיר
 מִזְכִּיר לְבָנָה מְבָרֵךְ אֵוֹן
 גַּם־הֵמָּה בְּחָרוּ בְּדַרְכֵיהֶם
 וּבְשִׁקּוּצֵיהֶם נִפְשָׁם חִפְצָה:

One slaughtering the bull¹⁶--someone killing a man;¹⁷

¹⁵(...continued)

[and I will fate you people for the sword;
 and all of you for will kneel down for the slaughter.
 Because I called, and you people did not answer;;
 I spoke and you did not listen.
 And you did the evil in My eyes,
 and you chose that with which I was not pleased.]?

For there they 'chose their own way in which I did not delight'...So God will in return 'choose affliction for them,' He says (66:4)...

“Again, sacrificing a lamb was an ancient institution and clearly goes back to the command of God (**Exodus 12:21**); yet the voice says it is really no different from breaking ‘a dog’s neck.’ Perhaps this is the exaggerated Semitic way of likening the Zadokite priests once again to those who commit ‘abominations.’ We may suppose so, since the ‘also’ with which **Isaiah 66:4** begins (גַּם, *gam*) is a particle used before a solemn statement. Here then it opens an expression of the Divine wrath.” (P. 105)

¹⁶1QIs^a originally has the noun שׂוֹר, “bull” without the definite article. But a later hand has written the letter ה (the definite article) above the word.

We are tempted to interpolate the phrase “(is like)” into each of the four lines, although there is no verb in the original text, and no comparative word such as “like.”

Translations vary:

King James, “He that killeth an ox *is as if* he slew a man; he that sacrificeth a lamb, *as if* he cut off a dog's neck; he that offereth an oblation, *as if he offered* swine's blood; he that burneth incense, *as if* he blessed an idol...”

(continued...)

and one sacrificing the sheep—someone breaking a dog’s neck;
one offering up a grain offering—(one offering) a pig’s blood;¹⁸
one making a memorial sacrifice of frankincense—one blessing an idol-nothing!
Also they chose their ways—¹⁹

¹⁶(...continued)

Tanakh, “As for those who slaughter oxen and slay humans, Who sacrifice sheep and immolate dogs, Who present as oblation the blood of swine, Who offer incense and worship false gods...”

New Revised Standard, “Whoever slaughters an ox is like one who kills a human being; whoever sacrifices a lamb, like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever presents a grain offering, like one who offers swine’s blood; whoever makes a memorial offering of frankincense, like one who blesses an idol...”

New International, “But whoever sacrifices a bull is like one who kills a person, and whoever offers a lamb is like one who breaks a dog’s neck; whoever makes a grain offering is like one who presents pig’s blood, and whoever burns memorial incense is like one who worships an idol...”

New Jerusalem, “Some slaughter a bull, some kill a human being, some sacrifice a lamb, some strangle a dog, some present an offering of pig’s blood, some burn memorial incense, a revolting blessing...”

Rahfs, “But then the lawless person, the one who sacrifices for Me a calf, like the one killing a dog; and then the one offering up fine wheat flour, like blood of a pig; the one giving incense for a memorial, like a blasphemer...”
(We have to remind ourselves that in the original Hebrew text, there is no “like” or “is like.”)

¹⁷Slotki comments that “The former [killing an ox] is as hateful as the latter [killing a man]. But it is to be noted that there is nothing in the Hebrew corresponding to *as if*, and a more literal rendering is: ‘he that kills an ox slays a man,’ and similarly throughout the verse. The meaning may be that simultaneous with the lawful acts of worship are practices which God loathes.” (P. 320)

¹⁸See our end-note 5 on **chapter 65** for references in these two chapters to pigs. Here, instead of eating pork, it is a matter of pouring out pig’s blood as a religious ritual, adapted from the Canaanites.

¹⁹This is the heart of the criticism of the worship that is going on in Israel: it is not a matter of seeking YHWH’s choice, and following it, but rather, the people are making their own choices, on the basis of their likes and dislikes, refusing to seek YHWH’s guidance, “trembling at His Word.” For the phrase “choosing a way,” see besides here:

Job 29:25, Job claims that in earlier times he chose the way for others;

Proverbs 3:31, “Do not envy a violent man, or choose any of his ways.”

(continued...)

and their innermost being(s) took pleasure²⁰ in their detested idols.^{21, 3}

66.4 גַּם־אֲנִי אֶבְחַר בְּתַעֲלָלֵיהֶם
וּמִגִּוְרָתָם אֲבִיא לָהֶם

¹⁹(...continued)

Watts comments that “They *delight in their abominations*, that is their unacceptable pagan practices...They continue practices from older times, pagan and legal, without regard to Yahweh’s will for His new age. The charge may well apply to remnants of the old Zadokite priesthood who were fighting to maintain their grip on Zion’s ritual.” (P. 356)

What would you say YHWH’s choice is for Israel’s worship? We say the answer is given in **Isaiah 53** and **58**, where YHWH depicts His servant as one who willingly suffers, bearing the sins of others, and in contrast to the ritual of fasting calls for righteousness—the practice of self-giving love and care for all who suffer. All else, whether rituals from the Mosaic legislation, or from the fertility religions, cannot substitute for righteousness!

²⁰It was something that deeply satisfied the worshipers—it was from their innermost beings—an expression of their own heart’s desire but done without thought for YHWH’s will or desire.

It is quite true that human beings have likes and dislikes in worship styles, some choosing this style, others choosing a very different style. But the question in worship, according to **Third Isaiah**, is not what we worshipers like, but what YHWH likes, what YHWH chooses—and he makes it very clear that what YHWH likes and chooses is humble, contrite hearts. That’s what counts in worship!

²¹The masculine plural noun שְׂקִינֵיהֶם, means “their detested things.” The noun occurs in some 28 places in the **Hebrew Bible**. For these occurrences, see our end-note 3.

It is difficult for us in modern times to understand or explain how appealing the obviously lifeless idols were to the ancient Israelites. But the fact is, this was Israel’s surrounding culture—that proclaimed loudly and insistently in Israel’s ears the belief that worship of idols was the sure way to better crops and animal production, the way to a much higher gross national product—a claim that was very difficult for Israelites to ignore—just as is the modern claim that the only way to true happiness is through acquisition of money and property, and devotion to those things that give pleasure, such as extra-marital sexual pursuits, and consumption of alcohol.

Keep in mind that in the **New Testament, Ephesians 5:5**, the constant desire for more and more is identified as “idolatry”! And we who live in the 21st century know well how appealing this modern form of idol-worship is!

יֵעַן קָרָאתִי וְאֵין עֹנָה

דְּבַרְתִּי וְלֹא שָׁמְעוּ

וַיַּעֲשׂוּ הָרַע בְּעֵינַי

וּבִאֲשֶׁר לֹא-חִפְצָתִי בַחֲרוּ:

Also, I, I will choose among their immoral cruelties;²²
and their terrors,²³ I will bring to them.²⁴

²²The masculine plural noun תַּעֲלֵלִיהֶם, means “their wantonness (that is, ‘their immoral cruelties’),” or “their caprice (that means ‘their impulsive changes of mind’).” This noun only occurs twice in the **Hebrew Bible**, here and at **Isaiah 3:4**, where in the following **verses 5-6**, it is described as a condition when “People oppress each other—man against man, a man against his neighbor. The young rise up against the elderly, the base against the honorable.” We say this is a description of those who fail to live by the self-giving love for the needy as depicted in **Isaiah 58**—which may well mean their becoming the “suffering servants” that YHWH wants His servant to be (**Isaiah 53**).

²³The feminine plural noun מִגֹּרְתָם, means “their fears,” “their terrors.” The noun occurs only three times in the **Hebrew Bible**—here, and:

Psalms 34:5, translated into Greek by παρακλιῶν, “those staying in a foreign land without citizenship”;

Proverbs 10:24, מִגֹּרַת רָשָׁע הִיא תְּבוֹאֲנוֹ וְתַאֲוַת צְדִיקִים יִתֵּן, “A wicked person’s terror—it will come to him; and righteous peoples’ desire will be given.”

This proverb is helpful for understanding **Isaiah 66:4**. These supposedly religious people are in fact wicked people—and that which they fear the most, YHWH will bring upon them as a punishment.

²⁴“The punishment fits the crime.” The things they have trembled before will become their destiny.

Motyer comments that this language suggests that “they flew to their questionable practices as a protective technique. This matches the earlier reference to cultivating the Gods Fortune and Destiny (**65:11**). But far from escaping, Divine justice will bring on them what they sought to avoid—as it always does when security is sought some place other than in the Lord (**Genesis 11: 4, 8** [the tower of Babel]).” (Pp. 534-35)

Because I called, and there was no one answering,²⁵

I spoke, and they did not listen.²⁶

And they did the evil in My eyes

²⁵See **Isaiah 50:2** for this same phrase, **וְאֵין עֹנֶה**, “no one answering”:
“When I came, why was there no one? When I called, why was there no one
answering?” YHWH is depicted as wanting and expecting intimate interpersonal
relationship—and finds none.

Slotki comments that the reader should compare **Isaiah 65:12**, “Because I
called, and you people did not answer,” in which “the same phrase occurs with the
change of the third person to the second.” (P. 321)

²⁶YHWH has been constantly calling, speaking, inviting, praying—but there has
been no response. For this motif of Divine speech (that sometimes goes unheeded) in
Isaiah, see:

13:3, YHWH has called His mighty men to be instruments of His anger against
Babylon;

22:20, YHWH will call to His servant Eliakim to be His steward, replacing Shebna;

30:7, YHWH calls (that is, calls out a name for) Egypt: “Rahab, Cessation”;

41:9, from the farthest corners of the earth YHWH has called His servant Israel;

42:6, YHWH has called His servant in righteousness;

43:1, YHWH has called Israel / Jacob by name;

48:15, YHWH has called Cyrus, the Persian emperor, His “messiah,” to be His chosen
ally;

50:2, when YHWH called to the Jews in Babylonian captivity, why was there no one to
answer?;

51:2, YHWH called Abraham, just one man;

65:12, YHWH called those who forsake Him, but they did not answer;

66:4, here; YHWH called those who have forsaken Him, but they did not answer.

and among whatever²⁷ I did not like, they chose!²⁸

66:5²⁹ שְׁמַעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה הַחֲרָדִים אֶל־דְּבָרוֹ

²⁷1QIs^a is slightly illegible for this word, which in our Hebrew text is וּבְאִשֶׁר. It has the letters וּבְאִשׁ, but the letter ר cannot be read.

²⁸For Biblical Theology, YHWH God is the standard for human ethics and behavior. What God does, is what humanity should do. What God chooses is what human beings should choose. And in **Second** and **Third Isaiah**, there can be no question that what YHWH chooses is the fulfillment of **Isaiah 53** and **58**—willingness to suffer for others, and the kind of righteousness that gives itself in loving service to its neighbors. But Israel, supposedly YHWH’s people, has done what is evil in YHWH’s eyes, and has chosen what displeases YHWH. That is the essence of rebellion against YHWH!

Motyer asks, “Did they say, ‘It is so helpful, it must be right’ or ‘It is so uplifting, it can’t be wrong’?” But then he responds that “actually what they chose was abominations, a very strong word covering all that the Lord detests.” (P. 534)

Achtemeier comments that “As Yahweh is never bound to the temple, **verses 1-2**, so here He is never coerced by ritual, and sacrifices are never automatically efficacious. They must be offered in trust and not fear, in obedience and not rebellion, in love for Yahweh alone, Who holds the future in His hands...**Isaiah** is concerned with freedom here—the freedom of a sovereign God—and the freedom of worshipers from fear and anxious ritualism...” (P. 141)

²⁹Motyer comments that in **verses 5-14** “Two groups are described. On the one hand, those who tremble at His Word (**5b...**) and on the other, those who set themselves against an expectant spirituality and its adherents (**5c-f**)...The one group hates the other, opposes its membership of the community and scorns its spiritual expectations (**5c-e**). The heart of the present section (**10-11**) instructs the ‘Word-tremblers’ how to behave in this situation...For the one group, ‘bringing upon them what they dread’ becomes the wholesale destruction of city and temple (**6ab**). They are themselves the Lord’s enemies, receiving full, wrathful requital (**6cd, 14d**). For the other group, metaphors of birth and infancy (**7-9, 12-13**) are used to indicate the supernatural action which will initiate them into the new Zion and the comforts they will enjoy there. They are dignified by the grand title of the Lord’s *servants* (**14c**).” (P. 535)

Ortlund notes that those who hate “are people who profess biblical faith but lack a trembling heart, who scorn the humble and contrite.” (Pp. 1160-61)

Who do you think these two opposing groups are? Can they be the followers of the Zadokite priests with their temple sacrifices mixed with Canaanite rituals, and holding to a program such as would later be spelled out in **Ezra-Nehemiah**, demanding segregation from foreigners, including divorce from their foreign wives and half-breed children, over against those who are followers of **Jeremiah / Second and Third Isaiah**,

(continued...)

²⁹(...continued)

who are reaching out to those excluded, calling for neighbor-love and inclusiveness? We think this may well be the identity of these opponents. What do you think?

Achtemeier comments on **verses 5-6** that they are “a combination of judgment and salvation, but it is spoken to the faithful Levitical-prophetic party, who ‘tremble at’ or obey Yahweh’s word in the Deuteronomic law (compare **verses 2-3**), and it therefore offers comfort to them in the form of judgment on their enemies...

“The enemies are specifically described as ‘your brothers who hate you and who cast you out for the sake of My name’ (compare **Psalm 38:20; Matthew 5:10-12; 10:22; John 15:18-20**). The reference can be no other than the Zadokite priests who had excluded the Levites from service at Yahweh’s altar, because of the Levites’ supposed idolatry (compare the polemic in **Ezekiel 44:10**), and who have subjected the Levites to scorn (compare **57:4; 58:9**), to segregation (compare **63:16; 65:5**), and even to death (compare **57:1-2**). This is the only time **Third-Isaiah** calls the Zadokites ‘brothers’ of the Levites, and the term refers to membership in Israel...This is also the only time **Third-Isaiah** describes the Zadokites’ attitude toward the Levites as hatred.” (P. 142)

Oswalt comments on **verses 5-6** that “Now God announce to His Own, those who tremble at His word...[and here Oswalt gives his description of the opposing groups:]

“The biblical-historical accounts about the postexilic period found in **Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, Ezra** and **Nehemiah** help us to identify the two groups described here. The outcasts are those who wish to keep God’s covenant carefully from the heart, treating the poor equitably, avoiding inter-marriage with pagans, carefully observing the Sabbath, and performing rituals exactly as God prescribed. By and large, they are not the persons in power. Those who are doing the casting out are the wealthy, the priests, and the nobles.” (Pp. 669-70)

We disagree. Reading these books convinces us that the ones doing the “casting out” are those following the teaching of **Ezra / Nehemiah** and their followers, including **Haggai** and **Zechariah**, certainly the “ones in power” among the returnees, and who were demanding the casting out of foreign wives and half-breed children, creating a huge group of single mothers with their children without the support of their fathers, as well as calling for exact performance of 613 commandments of the Mosaic legislation, including the temple rituals of the **Book of Leviticus**. **Third Isaiah** pleads for the acceptance of foreigners who tremble at YHWH’s word, and calls for the returnees to treat all people with brotherly love, providing sacrificially for their needs, even becoming suffering servants on their behalf, rather than casting them out from their fellowship.

And we ask, which one of these two groups do you think Jesus Christ would have belonged to—the group depicted by Oswalt, or the group we have depicted? And could there not have been other groups among the returnees, not so easily identified?

(continued...)

²⁹(...continued)

Knight comments on **verse 5** that “A third voice, though only a short interjection, makes a very weighty statement. The speaker declares that it is not his words, but ‘the word of the Lord’ that he is uttering. Perhaps this individual is seeking to mediate between the various parties. He turns to those for whom the first voice speaks and declares: ‘Please be reasonable. God says, ‘There are those who actually hate you and cast you out for My name’s sake’ (author’s translation)...

“The words ‘cast out’ are very emphatic. They form a pun upon the word ‘menstruation,’ a natural process which was considered to render a woman unclean (**Leviticus 12:5**). The verb is found again with this double meaning in **Amos 6:3**. We can see how, therefore, in later Hebrew it came to mean ‘excommunicate.’

But, the voice goes on, there are also those who believe we should build the temple to the glory of God, and who thus desire to ‘let the Lord be glorified.’ The tables will then be turned. ‘We’ shall ‘see your joy,’ but ‘they’ in turn ‘shall be [put to shame]’...

“So perhaps the speaker was one of the disenfranchised Levites [who were demoted from offering priestly sacrifices]. He would know his **Torah** well, and so would declare on its basis, ‘Hear the word of the Lord.’ They were opposed by the pragmatic, realistic Zadokites [the descendants of Tsadoq, who now claimed exclusive right to offer priestly sacrifices], who were also pressing for a rebuilt temple, but on their terms [with the Levites serving in lowly positions, as their servants]. How broad-minded then Triton-Isaiah was to include these opposing views in his ‘book’...

“However, this verse may be—and in fact is—construed differently by other editors. ‘Your brethren who hate you’ may refer to the descendants of those Israelites who had never been in Babylon, and who were now known as the ‘*am ha-arets*’, the ‘people of the land.’ They had long ago taken possession of the properties that had belonged to the exiles of old. Now the rightful owners had returned and were very naturally claiming these properties as their own. In consequence, antagonism and jealousy had developed between the two parties.” (Pp. 105-06)

As I write these notes, it is presidential election time in the United States, and the air-waves are ringing with differing voices—with Republicans divided into “Tea Party” versus “Establishment,” plus other views being expressed vigorously by the numerous candidate running for president. The Democrats have two rival candidates, each accusing the other of holding wrong positions.

And I ask, are we to think the Jewish returnees to Jerusalem, who now lived alongside the “people of the land,” and numerous foreigners, only had two “parties”? I suspect that there were many diverse and conflicting views, including the party that followed the teaching of Second and Third Isaiah, the party made up of followers and supporters of the Zadokite priestly party, along with the more legalistic and exclusivist followers of the program announced by Ezra / Nehemiah, as well as others whom we

(continued...)

אָמְרוּ אַחֲיֵיכֶם שְׁנֵאֵיכֶם מִנְדִּיכֶם לְמַעַן שְׁמִי

יִכְבַּד יְהוָה וְנִרְאָה בְּשִׁמְחַתְכֶם

וְהֵם יִבְשׁוּ:

Listen to YHWH's word,³⁰ those who tremble at His word.³¹

²⁹(...continued)

cannot exactly identify. What do you think? Should this divided condition be surprising in the light of America's experience of religious denominationalism?

³⁰This phrase, שְׁמַעוּ דְבַר יְהוָה, "Listen to YHWH's word!", is a phrase occurring at least 20 times in the **Hebrew Bible**. There is no more important commandment in the religion of YHWH!

We remember **Mark 12:28-34**, where Jesus is depicted as responding to the question concerning the most important commandment by quoting **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, "Hear, O Israel...!", the "Shema" ["Listen"]. Of course, Jesus summed up the **Torah** by the two laws of love for God and love for neighbor—but He held, according to this passage, that the most important command is to hear!

What do you think? How important is it for us to listen for and seek to discern God's word? And is it simply a matter of quoting a favorite passage? Would not the one group quote **Ezra** and **Nehemiah** for their insistence on segregation, and the other group quote **Jeremiah** and **Second** and **Third Isaiah** for their insistence on openness to and acceptance of "foreigners"? Would not other groups quote their favorite scriptural texts for justification of their views?

What we have found is that differing, opposing groups all have their "proof-texts."

We hold that all of the texts should be studied and kept in mind, and that humbly and honestly we should seek for God's word, asking in prayer for Divine guidance in our pilgrimage-quest, acknowledging that our convictions are ours, and allowing others the same right. Of course, this is not easy, when we are worshiping in the same place of worship (the Jerusalem temple), and the one group says Keep those people out!, while the other group says We are bringing them in!

³¹Where our Hebrew text has דְּבַר, "His word," 1QIs^a has דְּבָרָיו, "His words."

For this phrase, "tremble at" the word of YHWH, see:

Isaiah 66:2, "to this (person) I will look—to a poor person, and one contrite of spirit, and trembling before My word";

(continued...)

Your brothers, those hating you,³² said--thrusting you away / excluding you³³

³¹(...continued)

Isaiah 66:5, here; “those who tremble at (YHWH’s) word”;

Ezra 9:4, “Then everyone who trembled at the word of the God of Israel gathered around me.”;

Ezra 10:3, וְהַחֲרָדִים בְּמִצְוַת אֱלֹהֵינוּ, “and those trembling at our God’s commandment.”;

This similarity between the language of **Isaiah 66** and that of **Ezra 9, 10**, can be used in an argument for dating the Isaianic material in the post-exilic period, as is done by many scholars.

Watts comments that **verse 5** is “A speech directed to the faithful that says they *hear the Word* and *tremble at the Word*. The measure of piety, instead of being related to temple and sacrifice, is said to relate to God’s Word and the response to that word... Yahweh seems to say: the city will be built, but no temple and no sacrifice. They are not essential... Those things that are essential in the new city are clearly shown: Yahweh’s creative power, direction, and presence with humble worshipers who are hungry for Yahweh’s word in the city open to all who want to come. In Yahweh’s new creation that is enough.” (Pp. 356, 358)

But we think this is obviously overstatement in the light of **Isaiah 56:6-7**, which states that the foreigners who join themselves to YHWH will minister (the verb used for Levitical priests) to Him. What do you think?

³²Here, Achtemeier identifies those called “brothers” as “the Zadokite priests who have excluded the Levites from service at Yahweh’s altar” (p. 142), a view which she mentions time and again throughout her commentary.

We agree with Achtemeier, thinking the conflict is between the Zadokite priests along with the followers of **Ezra-Nehemiah**, who claim that they are “word-tremblers,” and who refuse to allow half-breed Jews and foreigners into their temple worship, over against the other group of Jews who likewise claim to be “Word-tremblers,” but who reject the view of Ezra and Nehemiah that inter-marriages with half-breed and foreign women should be broken, and the wives and children of those marriages be refused acceptance into Israel and its worship--Jews whom we classify as followers of **Jeremiah 7** and **Second and Third Isaiah**. And we see in this conflict the same conflict that Jesus was involved in against the Pharisees--as well as a conflict that still continues between “conservatives” and “liberals” in 21st-century religion.

Whether this is correct or not, there can be no question that this verse points to division and conflict among the returnees from Babylon, with one group casting the other group out from their fellowship.

(continued...)

³²(...continued)

Knight holds that “‘Your brothers who hate you’ may refer to the descendants of those Israelites who had never been in Babylon, and who were now known as...the ‘people of the land.’ They had long ago taken possession of the properties that had belonged to the exiles of old. Now the rightful owners had returned and were very naturally claiming these properties as their own. In consequence, antagonism and jealousy had developed between the two parties.” (P. 106)

Perhaps, but we see no real indication of this in Isaiah’s text. Do you?

Watts comments that “*Your brothers* is a remarkably generous designation for those else-where called rebels. *Brothers* is used for fellow members of covenant in **Deuteronomy 1:16; 2:4; 3:18; Jeremiah 7:15; 29:16**. This shows how the division between servants and enemies cuts through the heart of the community, perhaps even through families. *Who hate you* accents the bitterness of the fraternal struggle which had occasioned their previous expulsion.” (Pp. 356-57)

In the light of this passage, we are reminded of the teaching attributed to Jesus in **Matthew 10:34-36** (using the language of **Micah 7:6**): “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law, and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.” Again we remark how the ministry and teaching of Jesus is so closely related to the teaching of **Third Isaiah!**

³³Slotki comments that “The Hebrew verb for *cast out* [מְנַדֵּיכֶם] means in late Hebrew ‘to excommunicate.’” (P. 321) **Brown-Driver-Briggs** defines this piel participle as meaning “thrust away,” “exclude from association in worship.” The verb only occurs here and in **Amos 6:3**, where it means “thrusting away the evil day” that Amos predicts is coming.

In the context, we think this verb could very accurately be applied to what the followers of **Ezra-Nehemiah** were demanding be done to the foreign wives and half-breed children of the Judean men who had intermarried with “people of the land” / foreigners. In the name of YHWH, they were casting them out from their orthodox Jewish fellowship, just as Orthodox Jews have continued to do throughout their history for such things as uttering the name of God in vain, luring another person to sin, refusing to testify before a court at the allotted time, selling non-kosher meat as kosher meat, and marrying a non-Jewish individual.

Those acquainted with modern orthodox Jewish synagogues, will recognize this kind of thinking when an orthodox rabbi refuses to let parishioners be buried in the Jewish cemetery, if they cannot prove the lineage of both the one who has died and his / her mate. Such was my experience in Fayetteville, North Carolina, when the wife of

(continued...)

because of My name—³⁴

YHWH will honor,³⁵ and we will look³⁶ on your joy!³⁷

And they will be put to shame.³⁸

³³(...continued)

an orthodox Jewish man was refused burial because of his wife's having been adopted as a child, and unable to prove her Jewish lineage.

³⁴The ironic fact is that terrible crimes against humanity have been committed in the name of YHWH. Reading **Ezra / Nehemiah** leaves no doubt that the program of legalistic observance of the Mosaic legislation, including the casting out of foreigners, was all being done in the name of YHWH. When the High Priest Caiaphas tore his robe and led the Jewish Sanhedrin in pronouncing the death sentence against Jesus, he did so in the name of YHWH. When Pope Urban II ordered the crusades against the Muslims to begin in 1095 C.E., there can be no doubt that he did so in the name of God.

We say, Watch out for those who call upon the name of God to justify their crimes!

³⁵Where the Hebrew text reads the qal active imperfect **יִכְבֵּד**, “He will honor,” the Greek, Syriac and Latin Vulgate translations all read the passive imperfect, **יִכְבֹּד**, “He will be honored.”

³⁶Where the Masoretic Text reads **וְנִרְאָה**, “and we will see,” or “and we will look,” 1QIs^a reads **וְיִרְאָה**, “and He will see,” or “and He will look.”

³⁷Where our Hebrew text has **וְנִרְאָה בְּשִׂמְחַתְכֶם**, “and we will look on your joy,” **Rahlf's** has “and He will be seen in their gladness.”

Motyer thinks that the statement in these last two lines constitute “cynical mockery of spiritual expectation.” (P. 535) Ortlund likewise notes that “This is the cynical contempt of the self-righteous, excluding the humble.” (P. 1361)

³⁸If Motyer and Ortlund are right, and the preceding two lines are cynical mockery, this line is the response of the “Word-tremblers,” answering the cynical statement of their opponents with the affirmation that the mockers are the ones who will be put to shame

Motyer comments that “The Lord holds out to His beleaguered ‘Word-tremblers’ the hope of the [soon-coming] reversal...The shame they will reap is dramatically presented: city and temple gone and themselves exposed as objects of Divine enmity.” (P. 536)

(continued...)

66.6³⁹ קוֹל שְׁאוֹן מְעִיר קוֹל מְהִיכַל

קוֹל יְהוָה מְשַׁלֵּם גְּמוּלָה לְאִיְבָיו:

³⁸(...continued)

But does **Third Isaiah** say that the city and temple will be gone? What do you think?

³⁹Watts comments that “The limits of this section [66:6-24] are set at the beginning by the uproarious recognition that the decisive moment in Jerusalem’s renaissance is occurring (**verses 6-8**) and at the end by the sad recognition of the fate of the rebels (**verse 24**)...People from the nations will facilitate the return of Jews (**verse 20**). Some of these will become priests and Levites (**verse 21**). Jewish successors in blood and name are assured for the period of the new creation (**verse 22**). And all humanity may come to worship in the new city (**verse 23**). Thus the episode ties up the loose ends from the Vision [of **Isaiah**] and establishes the ground rules for the new era...Not all Israel or Judah or Jerusalem are participants in the celebration. God’s victorious joy cannot be complete without a mixture of pain...

“The Vision [of **Isaiah**] closes as it began with a scene in the heavenly court of God. It is vitally related to the happenings in Jerusalem’s temple and the people who worship there. But, in these scenes at least, the point relates more to that worship and the attitudes of the worshipers than to any historical issues...The city on a hill to which all people would flow (**2:1-4**) finds its fulfillment here in **verses 18-20**. The great announce-ment of good news for Jerusalem (**40:1-9**) is fulfilled in this scene. The promises of the restoration of Jerusalem in **chapters 45, 49, and 54** and especially **chapters 60-62** are picked up and closed here. It is a grand finale indeed.” (P. 362)

Oswalt comments on **verse 6** that “The means of the disgrace of the proud is now declared...(as) the prophet announces the intervention of God...It is not merely the sound of the Lord but the voice of the Lord that the prophet hears both pronouncing the doom of His enemies and effecting that doom...The prophet hears an *uproar*, undefined noise, from the city, then he determines that it is emanating from the temple, and finally he recognizes the sound as the voice of God speaking in judgment...They have been calling on God to give them what they deserve, to ‘repay’ them with the comfort He had promised (compare **57:18**). Isaiah says that God will repay them...But God will choose for them in accord with what they have chosen (**verse 4**), and the result will not be comfort, but all that they had feared.” (P. 671)

Knight comments on **verse 6**, that here “A fourth voice requires only one verse to make his point. He upholds the party that plans to rebuild the temple. From his viewpoint, therefore, he declares that God will roar from the temple His righteous judgment upon ‘His enemies.’ Who these enemies are we are not told.” (P. 107)

A voice⁴⁰ of uproar⁴¹ from a city; a voice from a temple;
a voice of YHWH, repaying to His enemies recompense!⁴²

⁴⁰Watts translates by “A sound.” (P. 358).

⁴¹Alexander comments that ‘The Hebrew word שׁוֹןִי is never applied elsewhere to a joyful day or a cry of lamentation, but to the tumult of war, the rushing sound of armies and the shock of battle, in which sense it is repeatedly employed by Isaiah.’ (Pp. 463-64) The noun occurs in **Isaiah** at:

Isaiah 5:14, the roar of Jerusalem’s wealthy, going down to the grave / death;

Isaiah 13:4, the roar of kingdoms, being gathered together for battle;

Isaiah 17:12 (twice), the roar of nations, like the roar of many waters;

Isaiah 17:13, same as **verse 12**;

Isaiah 24:8, the roar of the jubilant has ceased under Divine judgment;

Isaiah 25:5, YHWH subdues the roar of foreigners;

Isaiah 66:6 (here), where Aben Ezra says these enemies are those who cast the others out.

⁴²This is a prophetic “audition”—that is, there is no description of a vision, but only the report of a double voice that is heard. It is the voice of YHWH in a city (doubtless Jerusalem) and from a temple (of course, the Jerusalem temple)—it is the voice of YHWH repaying His enemies!

Motyer comments that “Because they did not ‘tremble at His Word’ they will certainly tremble before His wrath,” as YHWH makes full settlement with His enemies.” (P. 536)

For other examples of a double “voice” see:

Isaiah 13:4, two voices are heard as YHWH gathers an army for war;

Isaiah 40:3, 6, two voices proclaiming comfort for the Babylonian captives and the unfailing nature of God’s word;

Isaiah 52:8, the voice of watchmen, lifting up their voice in joy at YHWH return to Zion;

Zechariah 11:3, the voice (wail) of shepherds and the voice (growl) of lions, over the destruction of the forests with their trees and the lush thickets of the Jordan.

(continued...)

⁴²(...continued)

Alexander comments on **verse 6** that it “may be applied to the giving up of Zion and the temple to its enemies, as a final demonstration that the old economy was at an end, and that the sins of Israel were now to be visited on that generation....

“A better commentary on this brief but grand prediction cannot be desired than that afforded by Josephus in his narrative [we assume, **The Jewish War**] of what may be regarded as not only the most dreadful siege on record, but in some respects the most sublime and critical conjuncture in all history, because coincident with the transition from the abrogated system of the old economy to the acknowledged introduction of the new, a change of infinitely more extensive influence on human character and destiny than many philosophical historians have been willing to admit, or even able to discover.” (Pp. 464-65)

Again we respond to Alexander’s view, that not a word is said about “the giving up of Zion and the temple to its enemies,” or that “the old economy was at an end,” or that “the sins of Israel were now to be visited on that generation.” All the verse says is that the sound of an uproar is heard from a city and a temple—which is YHWH’s voice, repay-ing His enemies. All the rest of Alexander’s comment is being read into the text—which could apply to many situations in Israel’s history.

⁴³Ortlund comments on **verses 7-14** that “The people of God are set apart by miraculous blessing...Mother Zion gives birth, effortlessly and instantly, to a new nation ...Compare:

Isaiah 49:19-21, the ruined city and land will be too small for its newly born occupants;

Isaiah 54:1-3, more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who had a husband...

The poetic imagery is of a nursing baby who finds comfort, joy, nourishment, and satisfaction in the arms of its mother...The same Hebrew word for comfort found in **40: 1**...is repeated three times here...” (P. 1161).

Watts notes that these “eight verses use birth and child imagery to describe the emergence of the new city. The suddenness of the events is portrayed in this verse... Jerusalem’s destruction in 587 B.C.E. had left marks on the city which were not removed until Nehemiah rebuilt the walls in 437 B.C.E...After that long wait of well over a century, it took only two years for Nehemiah to complete the wall. It was an unbelievable feat. The metaphor picks up imagery from **49:20-21**.” (P. 363)

Nehemiah 6:15 states that the wall was completed in 52 days—not two years. If completion in two years was an “unbelievable feat,” what about in 52 days? But was completion of the wall around Jerusalem the birth of a new nation? We say, hardly.

(continued...)

⁴³(...continued)

Ackerman comments on **verses 7-8** that “Mother Zion (another name for Jerusalem) delivers the renewed nation.” (P. 1048) For Jerusalem as a mother, see also:

Isaiah 49:14-18, Zion’s sons are returning to her;

Isaiah 49:19-23, children born to Zion during her bereavement, carried home by the non-Jews, with kings and queens serving as their foster-parents;

Isaiah 50:1, YHWH has divorced mother Zion;

Isaiah 51:18, Jerusalem has borne sons, but none able to guide her, or take her by the hand;

Isaiah 54:1-3, Zion, now devastated and barren, is urged to burst into song, for the desolate Zion will have even more children than before;

Isaiah 54:13, the afflicted city has a bright future, with all her children taught by YH’WH;

Isaiah 60:4, Zion’s light has come; the nations are coming to her; her sons will come from afar, and her daughters carried to her;

Isaiah 66:10-11, those who mourn over Jerusalem can rejoice with her, nursing and being satisfied from her consoling breast

Knight likewise comments that “The historical fact facing the returnees...was that God’s holy Spirit had in fact come upon their virgin mother, Zion (**61:1**). Thus the pains of the exile which Israel had endured were actually the pains of labor. Now that Mother Israel is back home from Babylon, she will...bring forth a new generation of the people of God, to be known as the new Israel...God has by no means ‘shut the womb’ and so ceased to create (see **66:22**).” (P. 108)

But is this what the text is talking about? Was Zion a “virgin mother”? Was she not instead a divorced woman, with a sordid past which had led her into exile? Or has YHWH forgiven His former wife, remarrying her, making her as pure as a virgin entering into marriage? Was the returned community anything near “a new nation born in one day”? Instead, was it not a tiny community, living in the midst of threats from surrounding enemies, with an inglorious rebuilt temple, nothing to compare with the former temple of Solomon (see **Ezra 3:2**)? Isn’t **Third Isaiah’s** vision pointing forward to something far greater, something much more significant / marvelous than that?

In fact, aren’t Christian interpreters who see the birth of the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus Christ, with thousands added to the church, a “new Israel” and a new spiritual temple, given birth in one day, in what

(continued...)

⁴³(...continued)

within decades would become a world-wide movement of faith, reaching out to the nations, a much greater and better fulfillment of **Third Isaiah's** language?

Alexander interprets the passage in this way. He states "All interpreters agree that the mother here is Zion, that the figure is essentially the same as in **49:[18-]21**,

- 18 Lift up your eyes all around, and see—
All of them gathered, they came to you.
As I live—a saying of YHWH—
that you shall wear all of them like the ornament,
and you shall bind them on like the bride!
- 19 Because your ruins and your desolations
and (the) land of your destruction--
because now it will be too small / cramped for (so many) inhabitant(s).
And those swallowing you will be far away!
- 20 Again they will say in your ears, (the) children of your bereavement,
the place is (too) narrow for me,
draw near to me, and I will dwell (here)!
- 21 And you will say in your heart,
Who gave birth for me to these?
And I—childless and barren, exiled and put away--
and these—who raised (them)?
Look—I was a remnant, by myself--
these—where did they come from?

"And that in both of these cases an increase in numbers is represented as a birth, while in that before us the additional idea of suddenness is expressed by the figure of an unexpected birth...

"Those who see nothing in these chapters but the restoration of the Jews from Babylon explain this verse as meaning simply that the joyful return of the exiles to the long forsaken city would be like an unexpected birth to a childless mother...[But Alexander thinks it best] to understand the parturition [the action of giving birth] as a figure for the whole eventual crisis of the change of dispensations, and the consequent change in the condition of the church. This indestructible ideal person, when she might have seem to be reduced to nothing by the defection of the natural Israel, is vastly and suddenly augmented by the introduction of the Gentiles, a succession of events which is here most appropriately represented as the birth of a male child without the pains of childbirth." (Pp. 465-66)

Of course, there is nothing said in the text about "the change of dispensations," or "the natural Israel," and the introduction of the Gentiles into the church was not a matter of "one day," but rather a matter of long months and years of work headed up by the Apostle Paul in his missionary outreach as described in the **Book of Acts**.

(continued...)

⁴³(...continued)

So what do you think? Is the birth of the Christian movement on the Day of Pentecost as depicted in **Acts 2** what **Third Isaiah** is predicting? Or is this matter of Mother Zion giving birth suddenly meant to describe the return of the Israelites from Babylon, with the expectation of the nations to come flowing into Jerusalem, bringing other Jewish exiles with them what is meant?

One thing is certain—**Third Isaiah** predicts a wondrous future for Jerusalem / Zion.

Achtemeier comments that **verses 7-9** constitute “a salvation oracle to the Levitical-prophetic party and its followers, and it has much the same theme as had **65:8-10, 13-25**: Yahweh will create a new elect people, a new ‘son’ for Himself (compare the former Israel as ‘son of Yahweh’ in **Hosea 11:1; Isaiah 1:2; Exodus 4:22-23; Deuteronomy 8:5; Jeremiah 31:20**) from the faithful in Judah and Jerusalem, specifically from the Isaianic and Jeremianic prophets, from the Levites, and from their followers...

“Jerusalem is pictured as a woman (compare **60:1**) giving birth to a male child (compare **49:20-21; Revelation 12:5**). But the suddenness and imminence of the birth are emphasized. Even before her birth pangs start—which, allegorically, might refer to Jerusalem’s trials after 538 B.C.E.—she brings forth a son. That is, before Jerusalem is in real distress, the new covenant people of Yahweh will be born...It reminds one of the new people of the Christian church, born in a moment on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**).” (Pp. 143-44)

Oswalt entitles **verses 7-14** “Mother Jerusalem,” and comments that “In this segment the focus returns to hope, picking up a theme that has recurred throughout the **book [of Isaiah]**: Jerusalem / Zion as mother...

“Jerusalem is to know abundance and blessing, and is to be the source of these for its inhabitants. Gone will be the days when the city was stripped and barren, when its children were slaughtered, and when it seemed impossible that it could ever give birth again. Now its children will spring to life effortlessly, and a future of fecundity and laughter stretches endlessly ahead. The segment seems to have three parts: **verses 7-9**, an announcement of salvation; **verses 10-11**, a call to rejoice in the new reality; **verses 12-14**, a fuller description of the blessing of Jerusalem’s inhabitants.” (Pp. 673-74)

Knight entitles **verses 7-11** “Extract from a Sermon.”

He states that “The outstanding issue in this sermon is the principle, explained by means of several illustrations, of how God works towards His end of creating a new heaven and a new earth...Central here is that God is Creator. God creates His kingdom by bringing something new out of the old, just as at the beginning He brought light out of chaos...

(continued...)

בְּטֶרֶם יָבוֹא חֶבֶל לָהּ וְהִמְלִיטָה זָכָר:

Before she will writhe (with labor pains), she gave birth!⁴⁴

⁴³(...continued)

“The birth of a baby is an astonishing thing; it is a miracle wrought by the Creator ...The pains of the exile which Israel had endured were actually the pains of labor. Now that mother Israel is back home from Babylon, she will therefore bring forth a new generation of the people of God, to be known as the new Israel...

“The keynote of the new life in the new Jerusalem is to be joy. What happened under Cyrus in the year 538 is to be seen as an eschatological moment, a sacramental sign of something greater still to come. God has by no means ‘shut the womb’ and so ceased to create (see **66:22**)...

“Trito-Isaiah is here speaking from his heart, for he now possesses the immense satisfaction of knowing who he is and what he exists for...Because one has discovered himself to be a child of the covenant, he need not seek farther for a meaning to his life...Israel too has found its life’s purpose. That purpose is to do the will of the Father in love and in mission to all mankind, now that the son knows the joy and peace of forgiveness within his own heart...

“All this is a word from God. It is not a mere recommendation; it is a Divine command. The new land (**verse 8**) is, of course, the old land of Palestine. But it too is ‘recreated’ when the Creator creates (*bara*) it as the firstfruits of the new heaven and the new earth...We are hearing God revealing to us the eternal reality that He is always working, always creating, now and eternally.” (Pp. 107-09)

Oswalt comments on **verse 7** that “Here again is one of Isaiah’s graphic metaphors used to make a point. The point is surely to promise that the day will arrive when joy and blessing will come to those in God’s new Jerusalem without pain or even effort ... Without any more pain or effort than swallowing, a pregnant woman lets a baby (male child) slip into the world. What could speak more graphically of an entirely new world?”...

“But beyond the graphic force of the statement, it is almost certainly an allusion to **Genesis 3:16**. According to the passage, pain in childbirth is a concomitant of the Fall. Isaiah is looking to a world where the effects of the Fall have been done away with.” (P. 674)

But there is nothing said in our text about the “Fall”--all of this is being read into the text by Oswalt.

⁴⁴**Tanakh** translates by “Before she labored, she was delivered; Before her pangs came, she bore a son.”

Before travail will come to her⁴⁵--and she will deliver⁴⁶ a male child.⁴⁷

⁴⁵The phrase in our Hebrew text is לָהּ לִבְלֹלָהּ, “travail to her”; but in 1QIs^a all that can be read clearly is לָהּ לִבְ, with the ל at the end of the first word illegible.

⁴⁶The Hebrew phrase וְהִמְלִיטָה “and she will deliver,” has the hiphil perfect consecutive verb, 3rd person feminine singular of the root מִלַּט, “slip away,” “escape,” meaning in the hiphil “to cause to slip away / escape.” Oswalt notes that “It is the same word used of the owl ‘laying’ its eggs in **Isaiah 34:15**.” (P. 671) **Rahlfs** has “she escaped and gave birth.” The Aramaic Targum has “her king will be delivered.”

⁴⁷The two statements in **verse 7** describe one and the same unusual event that is contrary to normal human experience. Birth comes before labor-pains, delivery of a male child comes before the pains of travail are experienced by the woman giving birth.

Motyer comments that “Painless birth (compare **Genesis 3:16**) is a symbol of Eden restored and the curse removed. The picture is of motherhood without labor, that is, the child is really hers, but at no cost.” (P. 536). Wolf / Stek agree, stating that “Jerusalem’s delivery is accomplished without labor; however, women had been cursed with pain in childbirth since the expulsion from Eden...The promised restoration is thus envisioned as a return to paradise.” (P. 1048)

But is this what is being described—Eden restored? We think not. The new heavens and new earth have not yet appeared in the vision, and instead of babies being born through the natural process of population growth, the depiction is of a land or nation being given birth in one day—we think in terms of a nation such as Judah being restored to statehood suddenly, with little forewarning or painful negotiations—or of the delivery of the Hebrew slaves from Egyptian captivity at the same time as the death of Egypt’s firstborn, or especially the birth of the Christian Church on the day of Pentecost following the resurrection of Jesus.

This is not so much a vision of painless motherhood, as of a land or nation’s being given birth in one moment—and then the statement is made that “Zion was in labor, and gave birth to her children.” What do you think? Is this an example of what we insist is true of the prophetic vision— it is enigmatic, oftentimes seemingly contradictory?

Achtemeier thinks the reference here is to the formation of a new people of YHWH: “Yahweh will create a new elect people, a new ‘son’ for Himself...from the faithful in Judah and Jerusalem, specifically from the Isaianic and Jeremianic prophets, from the Levites, and from their followers...” (P. 143)

We think that this is far more specific than the text itself, which would identify this elect “son” as being those with contrite hearts, who tremble at YHWH’s Word, without

(continued...)

66.8⁴⁸ מִי־שָׁמַע כְּזֹאת

מִי רָאָה כְּאֵלֶּה
הַיּוֹחֵל אֶרֶץ בַּיּוֹם אַחֵר
אִם־יִוָּלַד גּוֹי פְּעַם אַחַת
כִּי־תִלְדָּה גַם־יִלְדָּה
צִיּוֹן אֶת־בְּנֵיהָ:

Who heard (anything) like this?⁴⁹

⁴⁷(...continued)

naming specific parties or “sects.”

Obviously, **Third-Isaiah** sees a great future being brought about by YHWH’s action in history—but the vision is far from clear and exact, and as we are seeing in these notes, many varying interpretations can be and are given as to what Isaiah envisions.

There is a sharp variation in tenses used in this statement. “She gave birth,” and “she will deliver a male child.” Is **Isaiah 66:7-8** describing something that has already happened in the past, or something that is going to happen in the future? Or, instead of saying “either / or,” should we say “both / and”? Has YHWH always brought forth a newly born people from what seems to be a hopeless situation? Is this YHWH’s way of acting in history, which can also be expected in the future?

Our answer is that Yes, this is YHWH God’s “modus operandi.” He always brings forth the “remnant” from the fallen oak. He has judged and rejected, and given new birth to and blessed His people Israel again and again in history. We should learn from history to expect just this sort of novelty to happen, again and again. What do you think?

⁴⁸Oswalt comments on **verse 8** that “Here the prophet underlines the remarkable nature of what he is saying with four rhetorical questions, all of which expect negative answers.” (P.674)

⁴⁹Slotki comments that the phrase “such a thing” means “Such a rapid transformation from desolation to a teeming population.” (P. 322)

Who saw (anything) like these things?⁵⁰
Shall a land⁵¹ be brought to birth in one day?
Or a nation be given birth (in) one moment?⁵²

⁵⁰The first four lines of **verse 8**, with their rhetorical questions, are a response of astonishment to the unusual event of painless birth described in **verse 7**. Such an event is unheard of—it has never before been seen. If the original creation took seven days, how can it be that a land / earth / people is brought to birth in one day?

⁵¹Or, perhaps, “earth.” The noun אֶרֶץ is ambiguous, and can mean either.

⁵²Alexander states that “This verse, in the form of pointed interrogation, represents the event previously mentioned as without example. The terms of the sentence are exceedingly appropriate both to the return from Babylon and the future restoration of the Jews, but admit at the same time a wider application to the change of economy, the birth of the church of the **New Testament**.” (P. 466)

Achtemeier describes these questions in **verse 8** as “the astonished questions of an unidentified speaker.” The implication of the questions is that “Yahweh is going to create a new people for Himself in one day—nay, in one moment...It reminds one of the new people of the Christian church, born in a moment on the day of Pentecost (**Acts 2**).” (Pp. 144-45)

It can also remind the reader of the statement of John the Immerser in **Luke 3:7**, that God is able to raise up children for Abraham out of the stones in the Jordan River valley.

Watts has a very different understanding: “The achievements of Ezra and Nehemiah were memorable. They accomplished more in a short period than anyone else in the century before and the century after them. *The children of Zion* are the new covenant community of faithful servants of Yahweh. This passage develops the theme of **65:8-10, 13-15**.” (P. 363)

What do you think? Do you agree that this passage relates to the re-birth of Israel following the return from Babylonian exile? And is it the re-birth of Israel through one of the competing factions among those returning exiles, specifically as Achtemeier sees it, through the Levitic-prophetic group over against the followers of the High-priestly party, following the teaching of **Ezra-Nehemiah**?

Or do you see it referring to the sudden new birth of the Christian Church on the Day of Pentecost? The passage itself is not nearly as specific as are its interpreters. Can the passage be describing what constantly happens in history as YHWH God continues His new creation, and as the Spirit creates new movements where previously there has been arid, unproductive “soil”?

(continued...)

Because Zion was in labor,

and gave birth to her children.^{53, 4}

66.9⁵⁴ הָאֲנִי אֲשַׁבֵּיר וְלֹא אֹלֵיד יֵאמֶר יְהוָה

⁵²(...continued)

Would anyone have thought that suddenly Cyrus would overthrow Babylon, and send the captive Israelites home with resources to rebuild the temple? Who could have imagined that happening? And would anyone think that out of these competing groups of former exiles a new people of God would emerge? Did such a thing happen?

No one, likewise, would have thought that following the death of Jesus, His followers would be able to regroup and suddenly on Pentecost give birth to a worldwide religious movement. No—that could never happen! But in fact, it happened.

And, we ask, if such things have happened in the past, should we not look to God for similar new developments in our own future, and in the world’s future? It is our conviction that the serious **Bible** student will learn to look to the future with vibrant hope and expectancy, to “stand on tip-toes,” believing that God, Who has acted so unexpectedly and suddenly in the past, is still creating, still bringing out the “new.” Do you agree? If not, why not?

⁵³For this matter of suffering Zion, depicted as a barren woman without children, but because of YHWH’s great compassion and love as still having a future with descendants (the “remnant motif”), see our end-note 4.

⁵⁴Whereas the questions in **verse 8** are those of an unidentified person, here in **verse 9** YHWH is depicted as asking His Own questions.

Achtemeier sums up the Divine questions as: “Should He begin an action and not complete it? His salvation of His people has been started: they have returned from exile, been brought back to their own land, in fulfillment of the prophet’s promises. Yahweh’s Word has stood, and come to pass, as **Second Isaiah** said it would (**40:8; 55:10-11**). Will He not then also give them that future abundant life promised by the prophets? Will He not exalt His servants, as He said He would (compare **52:13**)?...Will Yahweh not create the new covenant people, promised in His past Word?...It is inconceivable that Yahweh should not fulfill His Word, that He should start a saving action and not bring it to completion.” (P. 144)

Watts comments that “Yahweh pictures the stages of birth. He is the Midwife. The process of birth will be carried through. *If I am the One Who brings to birth*. He has claimed from **chapter 10** on that He had initiated all the things that had happened. All of them pointed to this moment when Jerusalem would resume its functions and open its gates to believing pilgrims. *Shall I hinder it?* After having brought this project this far, it is unthinkable that God would turn back now.” (P. 363)

(continued...)

אִם־אֲנִי הַמּוֹלִיד וְעֵצְרָתִי אֶמַר אֱלֹהִים:

Shall⁵⁵ I, I cause (water) to break, and not give birth?⁵⁶ YHWH says asks!⁵⁷

⁵⁴(...continued)

Oswalt states that in **verse 9**, “God addresses possible objections and asserts explicitly that a miracle such as this could only come about through His superintendence...He declares that the fulfillment of this promise, and all those others like it, does not depend on human power or ‘normal’ circumstances...Thus if the Lord says that He will make Zion bring forth, and if God says that He will not shut up her womb, we may know that neither time nor precedent can prevent that promise from being realized.” (Pp. 675-76)

⁵⁵Where our Hebrew text begins with the phrase אִם־אֲנִי, “Shall I?”, the original text of 1QIs^a began without the ה- interrogative, אֲנִי, “I...” A later hand has written the ה- interrogative above the line, making the scroll read the same as ours.

⁵⁶The “water breaking” has reference to the procedure of a mid-wife or doctor who ruptures the amniotic sac surrounding a fetus in order to deliver the baby. Here, YHWH is evidently being depicted as the “Mid-wife,” or “Mid-Husband,” Who is assisting in the birth. YHWH’s question is, “Shall I cause (water) to break, and then quit the procedure, that is, not go forward in giving birth to the child?” Of course, the answer is negative. When YHWH causes water to break, He is going to complete the birth process. And He has begun the process of giving birth to the new heavens and new earth. It will not be aborted; it will be brought to successful completion!

Motyer does not interpolate the word “water” into the phrase, and states that it means “to break out of the womb in birth.” (P. 537) See the related noun in:

2 Kings 19:3, “children came to breaking (of water); and there is no strength to give birth”; **Isaiah 37:3** (exactly the same);

Hosea 13:13, “labor-pains of a woman giving birth will come to him; he (is) an unwise son. Because (it is) time—he will not stand (up to help?) when children are breaking (water).” Wolff translates by “When the pangs of birth come for him, he is an unwise son. At the proper time, he does not present himself at the mouth of the womb,” with a note stating that the last phrase is literally “the place where the sons burst forth.” (P. 221) **New English** has “The labor pains of a woman will overtake him, but the baby will lack wisdom; when the time arrives, he will not come out of the womb!”

Motyer comments that the statement here in **Isaiah 66:9** expresses two truths. “First, the illustration of a process well advanced but not brought to completion...shows that the Lord does not proceed so far with His purposes only to abandon them before they are fulfilled...Secondly, the illustration of something begun and frustrated before it

(continued...)

Or (shall) I, the One impregnating,⁵⁸ prevent⁵⁹ (the birth)? Your God spoke!⁶⁰

66:10⁶¹ שְׂמַחוּ אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם וְגִילוּ בָהּ כֹּל־אֵהָבִיָּהּ

⁵⁶(...continued)

can even move toward fulfilment...shows that the Lord does not begin what He does not propose to finish...In each illustration the personal pronoun I is emphatic ('It is I Who...I am the One Who...'). If the Divine 'I' is in charge what can fail? The illustration of the birth processes links this vision of the future with the earlier Zion passages (**49:21; 54:1.**" (P. 537)

⁵⁷The phrase יְהוָה יֹאמֵר, is literally, "He will say, YHWH (will)." The phrase is found some 12 times in the **Hebrew Bible.**

⁵⁸The hiphil participle with the definite article is הַמְּוֹלֵד, "the One begetting," the One fathering a child." **Tanakh** translates by "Shall I Who cause birth shut the womb?" English translations commonly have "shall I bring to the birth," which evidences a desire to keep YHWH out of the sexual imagery of Fathering children (which we think is meant figuratively, not literally).

⁵⁹Where our Hebrew text has וְעִצְרָתִי, "and (shall) I restrain / shut (the womb)?", 1QIs^a is illegible, having the letters רה אעצ which we cannot read.

⁶⁰Alexander comments on **verse 9** that "The sense now put upon the figure by the general consent of interpreters is, that He who begins the work may be expected to accomplish it, to be both its Author and its Finisher...It extenuates [lessens] the wonder which had been described by representing it as something which was to be expected in the case supposed. That is to say...it would have been indeed surprising if He Who began the change had stopped it short, and interfered for the prevention of His Own designs." (P. 466)

Verse 9 as **Rahlfs** translates it is: "But then I, I gave this expectation, and you (singular, feminine) did not remember Me, said (the) Lord! Was it not—look!—I (Who) made one (feminine) giving birth and one sterile?—said the God?"

Oswalt notes that the Aramaic Targum has creation as a guarantee of the return of the exiles to Judah, while the Latin Vulgate has if God makes others give birth, He Himself will not be barren (P. 672).

⁶¹Achtemeier comments that **verses 10-13** are a "salvation oracle" that "addresses the faithful 'who love Jerusalem' (compare **Psalm 26:8; 122:6; 137:6**)...They are also addressed as those 'who have mourned over' Jerusalem (compare **60:20; 61:2-3**), namely over her desperate and sinful state. Now such faithful lovers of Yahweh and of His holy hill are called to rejoice over the gladness which Yahweh is going to bring to His sacred city...Yahweh is going to keep His Word of comfort promised in **Isaiah 40:1**

(continued...)

שִׂישׂוּ אֶתְּהָ מִשׁוֹשׁ כָּל־הַמְּתַאֲבָלִים עִלֶּיהָ:

Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad in / with her,⁶² all her lovers!

⁶¹(...continued)

and **49:13**. He is going to comfort Jerusalem. And from her comfort, all those who love Jerusalem will be able to draw comfort. As in **chapter 60:4ff.**, Jerusalem is pictured as a mother, and when she is consoled, all her faithful children will be able to nurse fully and deeply at her overflowing breast (compare **60:16**)...Yahweh will cause abundant life (*shalom*) to flow out upon Jerusalem like a river [compare **48:18** which is quoted here]...

“Further, the ‘glory,’ that is, the wealth, of the nations will flow to Zion like an overflowing stream (compare **60:5ff.**, **11**, **13**; **61:6**). And from all this abundance, the faithful will be nourished, allowed to suckle at their Mother Jerusalem’s breast, and to be carried on her hip (compare **60:4**) and dandled [move a baby up and down, in a playful, affectionate way] upon her knees...Yahweh is acting through it all, comforting His faithful followers (compare **12:1**).” (Pp. 144-45)

Alexander comments on **verse 10** that “This is an indirect prediction of the joyful change awaiting Zion, clothed in the form of a command or invitation to her friends to rejoice with her...

“Different interpreters, according to their various exegetical hypotheses, explain this as a prophecy of Israel’s ancient restoration from Babylonish exile, or of their future restoration from the present exile and dispersion, or of the glorious enlargement of the church after the excision of the unbelieving Jews, and the throes of that great crisis in which old things passed away and the new heavens and the new earth came into existence; which...I believe to be the true sense, for reasons which have been fully stated.” (Pp. 466-67)

Oswalt comments on **verse 10** that “Those who love Jerusalem, but who have had reason to mourn her condition, now have reason for great joy...God has one [Oswalt means YHWH’s servant / messiah] who has promised to give joy in place of mourning (**60:20**; **61:2-3**; **65:18-19**). Not only will Jerusalem be restored as a great and glorious city, but even more importantly, God will come in the power of His Spirit and put His words in the mouth of His people (**59:21**) so that they will follow His leadership (**63:11**) and stop grieving Him (**63:10**). The bereft mother, rejected by her husband, has been restored to His love and has given birth painlessly to an entire nation in a single day (**49:19-50:3**). What a cause for taking off the mourning clothes and singing for joy.” (P. 676)

⁶²Where our Hebrew text has **וְגִילָהּ בָּהּ**, “and be glad in / with her,” **Rahlfs** has **καὶ πανηγυρίσατε ἐν αὐτῇ**, “and celebrate a festival in her.”

Be glad with her, (with) gladness, all the ones mourning over her!⁶³

66.11⁶⁴ לְמַעַן תִּינְקוּ וְשָׂבַעְתֶּם מִשָּׂד תְּנַחֲמֶיהָ

לְמַעַן תִּמְצוּ וְהִתְעַנְגַתֶם מִזֵּיו כְּבוֹדָהּ:

So that you people will nurse, and will be satisfied from her breast's comfort;

so that you will drink fully, and delight yourselves from her abundance of honor!⁶⁵

⁶³Watts comments that “Yahweh finds that mourning indicates lack of faith in His plans. It is no longer appropriate.” (P. 363)

⁶⁴Motyer comments on **verses 10-11**, that “These verses are the pivot of the whole section...In the present the call is to identify with Jerusalem: to *rejoice* in her joy, to *love* her for what she is and to *mourn* over her sorrows...

Then Motyer states, as a Christian commentator, “In a word, as members of Zion here and now (**Hebrews 12:22** [‘But you,’ first century Christians, ‘have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God’]), we are to be fully involved in, and committed to, the whole life of the earthly church. Zion is looking forward to blessings, still in store; to *rejoice with Jerusalem* is to share this forward look. To *love* her is to prize what she stands for: the city where the Lord dwells in holiness, mercy and law. We are to live in the benefit of Divine mercy, enjoy the richness of Divine fellowship and fashion our lives in obedience to the Divine Word...

“To *mourn over her* (compare **Ezekiel 9:4** [‘those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things done in Jerusalem]) is to lament the sins of the visible church, its shortcomings, its weakness and ineffectuality in the face of the world and the presence within of compromisers and apostates, but to do so as a fellow-sinner, longing for the blessings and perfection yet to come (compare **59:9-13**). This identification with Jerusalem will issue in participation in the blessings concentrated in her; both present and [future].” (Pp. 537-38)

What do you think about Motyer’s identification of Zion and the new Jerusalem with the Christian Church? Is this valid exegesis of **Isaiah**? If we take the nation being born in one day as as having been fulfilled in the birth of the Christian movement on the Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ, we can apply this to the New Israel / Heavenly Zion.

Alexander comments on **verse 11** that “Those who have sympathized with Zion in her joys and sorrows shall partake of her abundance and her glory. The figure of a mother is continued, but beautifully varied.” (P. 467)

⁶⁵Where our Hebrew text has the difficult phrase מִזֵּיו כְּבוֹדָהּ, “from abundance / fullness / moving things of her glory,” **Rahlfs** has ἀπὸ εἰσόδου δόξης αὐτῆς,

(continued...)

⁶⁵(...continued)

“from entrance of her glory.” See Oswalt’s note 36 on his pp. 672-73.

Jerusalem is depicted as a great mother, from whose flowing breasts all those who have mourned for her in the midst of her labor pains can now nurse and be satisfied. For this imagery of the faithful people of Israel nursing in **Isaiah**, see:

49:23, “See, I will beckon to the nations, I will lift up My banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their shoulders. Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers”;

60:16, “You will drink the milk of nations and be nursed at kings’ breasts”;

66:11, here; “you will nurse and be satisfied at Jerusalem’s comforting breasts; you will drink deeply, and delight yourselves in her abundance of honor”);

66:12, “You people will nurse, you will be carried, and upon knees you will be played with.”

YHWH’s people are His children; and YHWH will see to it that His children are properly nourished!

Ackerman comments on **verse 11** that “Jerusalem’s bosom [the noun שֶׁד means ‘breast’] is described as ‘full-laden’ [but the phrase תִּנְחַמֶּיהָ means ‘her comfort,’ hardly ‘full-laden’] (rather than *glorious*); the point is that the new Eden will be filled with food for its inhabitants, as was the old (**Genesis 2:16**). Implicit is an identification of mother Jerusalem with God (see similarly **49:15, 22** [we do not think these verses identify Jerusalem with God, but rather make a distinction between God and Jerusalem --Jerusalem may forget her children, but YHWH will not!]), as the city takes on the role of provider that God assumed in Eden.” (P. 1049)

As noted earlier, we doubt that the identification of the new Jerusalem with the garden of Eden is correct. But in the creation story, God quickly calls on His creatures to join with Him in the work of bringing forth new life on the earth—it is this role that Third Isaiah is claiming now belongs to the new Jerusalem. What do you think?

Knight comments Trito-Isaiah “now possesses the immense satisfaction of knowing who he is and what he exists for. Clearly he is now utterly aware that God is his Father, that Zion is his Mother, and that he is a child of the union between them.” (P. 108) Do you agree with Knight? Do you think that **Third Isaiah** doubted this spiritual fact before this present statement?

הַנְּנִי נֹמֶה-אֵלֶיהָ כְּנָהָר שְׁלוֹם

וְכַנְחַל שׁוֹטֵף כְּבוֹד גּוֹיִם

וַיִּנְקַתֶּם תְּנַשְׂאוּ וְעַל-בְּרָכִים תִּשְׁעֲשְׁעוּ:

Because in this way YHWH spoke:⁶⁷

Look at Me⁶⁸ –reaching out to her like a river of peace,⁶⁹ 5

⁶⁶Oswalt comments on **verses 12-13** that “Ultimately, only God can provide the kind of complete supply for all the needs of His people that the previous verses have been talking about. If Zion is now able to supply her children’s needs, it is only because God supplies them through Zion...What is it that Zion’s children will derive from her through the provision of God? Rivers of peace, and wadis full of the glory of the nations. They will be favored children, carried on the hip and bounced on the knees of an adoring mother.” (Pp. 677-78)

Alexander comments on **verse 12** that “The objects of address in this verse are the sons of Zion, to be gathered from all nations.” (P. 468)

⁶⁷The phrase **כִּי-כֵן | אָמַר יְהוָה**, is literally “because this way He spoke, YHWH (did).” The phrase occurs some 46 times in the **Hebrew Bible**.

⁶⁸This phrase on the lips of YHWH, “Look at Me,” is found in the following places in **Isaiah: 13:17; 28:16, 16, 29:14; 37:7; 38:5, 8; 43:19; 52:6; 58:9; 65:1, 1, 17, 18** and **66:12** (here).

The source of Jerusalem’s hope is in YHWH alone! We may say, If God is, and if God cares for His people as **Third Isaiah** claims, then there is hope—lasting, vibrant hope for the future! We may not--indeed we cannot--know its exact shape and details; we may be able only to draw up (or, YHWH may only give us) imaginative pictures that can foreshadow its reality. But the hope that gives rise to those pictures remains strong and vibrant!

⁶⁹For this metaphor of a “river of **שְׁלוֹם**, peace / prosperity,” see:

Isaiah 48:18, “If only you people had paid attention to My commands, your **shalom** / peace / prosperity would have been like a river, your right relationship like the waves of the sea”);

Isaiah 66:12, here; “I will extend peace to her like a river, and the wealth of nations like a flooding stream”;

(continued...)

and like an overflowing wadi, honor of nations.⁷⁰

⁶⁹(...continued)

Psalm 78:16, “He brought streams out of a rocky crag and made water flow down like rivers.”

We take it from these passages that YHWH’s “peace” is something that Israel could have had at any time in her historical existence through obedience to YHWH’s commands, but far too often has been rejected by Israel herself.

Should we not see a close relationship between these Divine promises and the promise of Jesus that the water He gives “will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (**John 4:14**)? Is this not closely related to the “river of life” that flows through the streets of the new Jerusalem of **Revelation 22:1-2**? Is this not the river that Ezekiel sees in vision flowing eastward from Jerusalem’s temple, descending into the Dead Sea, filling it with life (**Ezekiel 47:1-12**)?

Achtemeier translates *shalom* by “abundant life.” (P. 138) And Watts comments that שְׁלוֹמִים “means much more than absence of conflict. Its completeness includes health and prosperity.” (P. 363)

The theme of peace / security / welfare runs throughout the **Book of Isaiah**, sometimes as a promise for the future, and sometimes as a present possibility or possession. See end-note 5.

For the entire **Book of Isaiah**, peace / welfare / security is a wonderful goal, promised by YHWH to His faithful people, but withheld from the wicked, who do not know His way. Not only that, it is also something that can be had in this life, a present possession that the people of YHWH enjoy in life, and upon dying, can continue to enjoy. And, we add, such a condition of “peace” is exactly what is promised to the faithful people of YHWH in **Leviticus 26 / Deuteronomy 28**.

What do you think? Do you think that the Divine gift of peace is something that only originated with the coming of Jesus Christ?

⁷⁰Watts comments that כְּבוֹד גּוֹיִם, “glory of nations,” continues “the picture of prosperity as the wealth of nations converges on the city. See:

Isaiah 60:5-7, 11, 13, [the wealth on the seas, the riches of nations; caravans loaded with gold and incense; flocks and herds; the wealth of nations];

Isaiah 61:6, [“You will feed on the wealth of nations,” their riches].” (P. 363)

And you people will nurse,⁷¹ you will be carried⁷² on (the) hip,

⁷¹Where the Hebrew has the 2nd masculine plural וַיִּנְקְתֶם, “and your people nursed,” or “will nurse,” the Greek omits the verb. For **verse 12 Rahlfs** has:

Because these things says (the) Lord:

Look—I, I will turn aside to them like a river of peace,
and like a wadi sweeping away (the) glory of nations.

Their children upon shoulders will be carried,
and upon knees will be comforted.

In **verse 11** the nursing is done at Jerusalem’s comforting breasts; here the nursing is apparently from the breasts of those carrying them, and playing with them upon their knees (i.e., the nations who bring their honor to YHWH’s people). As Slotki notes, these are “the nations that had hitherto oppressed them.” (P. 343)

Compare:

Isaiah 49:22,

In this way spoke my Lord YHWH:

Look—I will lift up My hand to nations and to peoples;
I will raise My signal / standard;
and they will bring your sons in (their) arms / bosom,
and your daughters upon (their) shoulder(s) they shall be lifted up.

Isaiah 60:4,

Lift up (all) around your eyes, and see—
all of them were assembled;
they came to you;
your sons from afar will come,
and your daughters upon hip(s) will be nourished.”

At this point, where our Hebrew text has וַיִּנְקְתֶם, “and you (plural) shall suck,” 1QIs^a has תִּיהֵנָה, which we cannot read.

⁷²Where the Hebrew text has תִּנְשְׂאוּ, “you (plural) will be carried,” 1QIs^a reads תִּנְשְׂאָנָה, the 2nd feminine singular, “you (singular) will be carried. The Greek translation has “they will be carried.”

and upon knees⁷³ you will be played with.⁷⁴

66:13⁷⁵ כְּאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר אָמוּר תִּנְחַמְנוּ

⁷³Watts translates by “and you may play on her knees (like a toddler).” (P. 359)

⁷⁴Where the Hebrew text reads עַל-צֶדֶד תִּנְשְׂאוּ וְעַל-בְּרָכִים תִּשְׂעֶשְׂעוּ, “upon a side (or ‘hip’) you people will be carried, and upon knees you will be played with,” the Greek translation reads “upon shoulders they will be carried, and upon knees they will be comforted.”

The root for the verb תִּשְׂעֶשְׂעוּ, “you will be played with,” (or, perhaps, ‘cuddled,’ ‘made much of’) occurs some 9 times in the **Hebrew Bible** at:

Isaiah 6:10, Isaiah is instructed by YHWH to הִשָּׁע עֵינָיו, “to smear over his eyes,” make the people not able to see;

Isaiah 11:8, וְשִׂעֶשְׂע יוֹנֵק, “and a nursing child will ‘take delight,’ ‘play’;

Isaiah 29:9, 9, הִשְׂתַּעֲשְׂעוּ וְשִׂעוּ, “blind yourselves and be blind,” compare **6:10**;

Isaiah 66:12, here, evidently with the same meaning as **11:8**, “take delight,” “play”;

Psalms 94:19, תִּשְׂעֶשְׂעוּ נַפְשִׁי, “Your consolations will delight my innermost being,” Divine cure for anxiety;

Psalms 119:16, “in Your statutes I will delight myself”;

Psalms 119:47, “and I will delight myself in Your commandments, which I love”;

Psalms 119:70, “I, in Your law, I took delight.”

Watts comments that The figure pictures Jerusalem nurturing the faithful as a mother nurtures a baby or a toddler.” (P. 363)

⁷⁵Knight comments on **verses 12-14** that “What we have here is a picture of idyllic peace, of happy, healthy children no longer in danger of a serpent’s bite, but now being ‘dandled upon their mother’s ‘knees’ (compare **Isaiah 11:8**: ‘and a nursing child will play / take delight upon / over a venomous serpent’s hole, and upon / over a snake’s hole a weaned child will stretch out his hand’]. But this is what Israel actually is in God’s sight, a child (**Hosea 11:1-4**), and what Jesus expects the new Israel to be, children in their faith (**John 13:3**). Again, the trusting parent-child relationship seen here is a picture of complete freedom, freedom from anxiety about oneself...

(continued...)

כֵּן אֲנִי אֲנַחֲמְכֶם

וּבִירוּשָׁלַם תִּנְחַמוּ:

Like a man, whose mother comforts him,⁷⁶
in this way I, I will comfort you;⁷⁷

⁷⁵(...continued)

“The passage also reveals to us the ‘Mother love’ of the living God, for Zion is called to do and to be on earth what God is like in His eternity.” (Pp. 110-11)

Motyer comments that **verses 12-13** “match the metaphor of birth (**verses 7-9**).” (P. 538)

The future for the “word-tremblers,” for those who love and have mourned for Jerusalem is not only one of total nourishment from her breasts, but also a flowing “river of peace / prosperity,” with honor and comfort in addition for all YHWH’s people.

There can be no question that the prophetic vision is filled with symbolism—such as “drinking from Jerusalem’s breasts,” and “a river of *shalom*”—and while there is much that is enigmatic and puzzling with regards to the vision and its symbolism, there can be no mistaking its vibrant hope for the future, rooted in the conviction that YHWH is actively creating a wondrous future of peace and welfare for His faithful people!

What do you think? Do you see this prophecy as being fulfilled in the return of the exiles to the physical city of Jerusalem under the control of the Persians? Yes, but certainly not completely. The prophecy points far beyond that physical return, and can very naturally be applied to the new Jerusalem of Christian faith.

In John’s prophetic vision in **Revelation 21-22**, there is likewise just such a dynamic, throbbing hope for the future. Not a “river of shalom,” but the water of life flowing through the streets of the city, with the tree of life producing its healing fruits; not earth’s kings and queens carrying the people of God in their arms, nursing them from royal breasts, but the earth’s kings bringing tribute into the city, gaining healing for the nations from the leaves of its trees.

⁷⁶Where our Hebrew text has תִּנְחַמְנִי, “will comfort him,” 1QIs^a has only the final letter, ך, apparently indicating an omission in the text.

⁷⁷This is unique, feminine imagery used by YHWH for Himself, comparing Himself to a mother who comforts her grown son. Here, YHWH is the Mother Comforter, and the people of YHWH are like “a man,” that is, an “adult son” being comforted. English translations commonly weaken the imagery, by translating:

(continued...)

and in Jerusalem,⁷⁸ you will be comforted.⁷⁹

⁷⁷(...continued)

Tanakh, “As a mother comforts her son, so I will comfort you”;

New American Standard, “As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you.”

Both of these translations are easily understood of a mother comforting a child. The phrase כְּאִישׁ can be translated by “as one,” but more likely by “like a man.”

Oswalt states that “God is not compared to a nursing mother; Zion is. God is compare to a mother who embraces her grown son (Hebrew, אִישׁ, a man) in an hour when his need is much deeper than the one he had as an infant for her breasts...His need is not physical but spiritual, as he faces grief, failure, and loss.” (P. 678)

Westermann comments on this verse that “This is the first time in the **Old Testament** that the witness borne to Yahweh breaks through the reserve which elsewhere it observes so strictly and associates feminine predication with Him. This lends all the greater conviction to what is here said of the passionateness of God’s love for those who in sorrow and with humility wait for His salvation.” (P. 420; Westermann is quoting Kessler.) Compare:

Isaiah 49:15, “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne?”, where the imagery is of a mother with her baby / child, but this is not the language here.

Isaiah 51:12, אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי הוּא מְנַחֵמְכֶם, “I, I (am) He, your Comforter.”

Watts comments that “Yahweh is the ultimate Source of *comfort*.”

Christian readers of **Isaiah** are reminded of Paul’s language in **2 Corinthians 1:3-7**, where God is described as the “God of all comfort.” There are many earthly comforters—especially mothers—who attempt to comfort in times of suffering, pain and loss. But ultimate comfort comes from God alone!

What do you think? Do you think that people living in the secular city can find lasting comfort in poetry, music, memories, etc., apart from calling on God? What do you think the role of the synagogue / church / mosque / religious organization should be when located in the midst of the secular city? One thing they can do is to open their doors to those who are suffering pain and loss, making their facilities available for bringing comfort to such people. And people who receive such services, become much more favorable towards listening to the message of their comforters.

⁷⁸Where our Hebrew text has וּבִירוּשָׁלַם, “and in Jerusalem,” in 1QIs^a the letters רַ are illegible.

Alexander states that the phrase “in Jerusalem” suggests “the only means by which these blessings are to be secured, that is a union of affection of interest with the Israel of God, to whom alone they are promised.” (P. 468) We think this is reading more into the phrase than it actually contains.

⁷⁹The root verb נחם, occurs three times in 66:13, תִּנְחַמְנִי, 3rd person singular, piel imperfect, “she will comfort him”); אֲנַחֲמֶכֶם, 1st person singular, piel imperfect, “I will comfort you people”), תִּנְחַמְוּ, pual imperfect, 2nd person masculine plural, “you people will be comforted”). Here, 1QIs^a reads תתנחמו, the hithpael form of the verb, “you people will comfort yourselves.”

Elsewhere in **Isaiah** this root verb occurs some 14 times:

Isaiah 1:24, niphal imperfect, “I will be comforted or, ‘get relief’ from My enemies”;

Isaiah 12:1, יִשָּׁב אַפְּךָ וְתִנְחַמְנִי, “Your anger turned, and You comforted me”;

Isaiah 22:4, piel infinitive, “do not hasten to comfort me”;

Isaiah 40:1, repetition of the piel plural imperative, “Comfort! Comfort My people!”;

Isaiah 49:13, piel perfect, YHWH comforted His people; **52:9**, same;

Isaiah 51:3, piel perfect used twice, YHWH comforted Zion, comforted her ruins;

Isaiah 51:12, piel participle, “I, I am He, the One comforting you”;

Isaiah 51:19, in the wake of double calamities, how can I comfort you?, piel imperfect;

Isaiah 54:11, Jerusalem is לֹא נִחַמָהּ, (lo) nuchamah, pual perfect, “not comforted”);

Isaiah 57:6, אֲנַחֵם, 1st person singular, niphal imperfect, “will I be comforted or, ‘relent’”;

Isaiah 61:2, לְנַחֵם כָּל-אֲבֵלִים, piel infinitive, “to comfort all those mourning.”

וְעִצְמוֹתֵיכֶם כַּדָּשָׁא תִפְרָחְנָה

וְנִוְדְעָה יַד־יְהוָה אֶת־עַבְדָּיו

וְזַעַם אֶת־אֵיבָיו:

And you will see,⁸¹ and your hearts will rejoice;⁸²

⁸⁰Achtemeier comments that **verses 14-16** contain “a combination salvation-judgment oracle, much like that in **65:13ff.**, where we have the same contrast between the fate of the faithful and of the unfaithful...

“Not only the faithful will ‘see,’ according to **verse 14**; a universal revelation is implied (compare **60:3, 14; 61:6, 9,11; 62:2**). ‘It shall be known’ by all in the world that Yahweh has saved His ‘servants’...

“The authors of **Third-Isaiah** are concerned not just for their own salvation, but for that of all peoples.

“Yahweh’s destruction of His enemies, previously alluded to in **verse 6**, now is portrayed in more graphic figures, **verse 15**, and as in **59:15c-20** and **63:1-6**, the picture is of Yahweh the Divine Warrior...We are evidently dealing in this final chapter of **Third-Isaiah** once again with Yahweh’s choice of a new people for Himself, at the same time that He destroys His enemies among His former people and among the nations of the world...Yahweh the Divine Warrior comes, as we have seen so often before, with salvation for the faithful and with death for the unfaithful.” (Pp. 145-46)

⁸¹It is more than just a promise that is heard and believed; it is an experience which the people of YHWH will actually see happening for themselves. That is the basis for rejoicing—the conviction in faith that YHWH is bringing His promises to pass. And the fact of faith is that such a conviction imparts comfort even when the fulfillment of the promises are far off.

Motyer comments that “**Verse 14** matches **verses 5-6**. The mockery of those who dismissed the future glory as something they would never see is countered by the affirmative promise, ‘and you will see.’” (P. 538)

Watts holds that “The address to all who love Jerusalem continues [in **verse 14**]. They can see, rejoice, and flourish in the sight of what is happening there.” (P. 364) Compare:

Isaiah 49:18, 22, “Lift up your eyes and look around; all your children gather and come to you”;

(continued...)

⁸¹(...continued)

Isaiah 60:4-5, “Lift up your eyes and look about you: all assemble and come to you.

Your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the arm. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you...”

This is not a description of hope for YHWH’s saving action; it is a matter of observation of YHWH’s salvation actually occurring in history, which is the foundation for joyful worship.

We think that this call to immediate worship because of YHWH’s saving action can hardly be something distant in the future (the coming of the new Jerusalem in Christ), but must be understood in terms of the returning exiles from Babylonian captivity. But if this is so, how much more applicable it will be to that future fulfillment! Do you agree? If so, why? If not, why not?

⁸²Compare a very similar statement by Jesus in **John 16:22**, “I will see you again, and you will rejoice.”

For statements in **Isaiah** concerning the heart, see:

1:5, “every heart is **רֵוֹי**, “faint”; compare **Jeremiah 8:18** and **Lamentations 1:22**;

7:2, the hearts of Ahaz and his people wavered like the trees of a forest in a strong wind;

7:4, Isaiah is to tell Ahaz his heart shall not be afraid;

13:7, because the day of YHWH is coming, every man’s heart will melt; **19:1**, similar;

35:4, say to those hurried of heart (**נִמְהָרֵי-לֵב** , too fast a pulse), Be strong; do not fear!;

Isaiah 57:15, YHWH **תְּחַיֶּה**, revives the heart of the crushed; compare **Psalms 23:3**, **נִפְשִׁי יְשׁוּבָה** “my innermost being He (YHWH) restores”;

Isaiah 60:5, when YHWH rises upon Israel, **פָּתַח וְרָחַב לְבָבְךָ**, “your heart will be filled with awe / reverence, and will grow large, swell with joy;

Isaiah 61:1, YHWH’s servant binds up the broken-hearted;

(continued...)

and your bones like green grass will sprout.⁸³
and YHWH's hand⁸⁴, ⁶ will be known to His slaves,⁸⁵

⁸²(...continued)

Isaiah 63:17, Why, YHWH do you harden our hearts so they will not tremble in awe before You? (compare the powerful theme in **Exodus** of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart);

Isaiah 65:14, YHWH's slaves will shout from goodness of heart;

Isaiah 66:14, here; when you see YHWH's comfort, your heart will rejoice.

Motyer comments that "*Heart and bones* comprise the whole person, the psychic and the physical." (P. 538) Watts likewise notes that *Heart and bones*...point to the very center and structure of their being." (P. 364)

The joy that comes from YHWH's comfort is not a partial, temporary thing; it reaches deep into the entire being of those who experience it, even of those who continue to suffer terribly. The critic can easily claim that such joy is illusory; but one who has experienced that joy knows it is real. What do you think?

⁸³Compare the promise made to those who do away with oppression, practicing genuine "righteousness" in **Isaiah 58:11**, "YHWH will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will invigorate (or 'strengthen') your bones."

Here, **66:14**, the promise is that "your bones like green grass will sprout." That is, your skeletal system—the foundation of your physical being--will take on new growth and strength.

In the two other occurrences of the noun אֲשֵׁר, "grass" in **Isaiah**, it is used to symbolize human transiency—see:

Isaiah 15:6, because herbage was dry, it was finished; there was no green grass;

Isaiah 37:27, evidently, grass on rooftops that is blighted (a difficult text to read).

Here, just the opposite is true, as the comparison is to newly sprouting green grass / herbage in spring. Watts states that "*Like the grass* is a metaphor which reverses the intention of **40:6-8** [רֵעִיר, herbage that withers]. Here it pictures its ubiquitous presence [everywhere]." (P. 364)

⁸⁴Where our Hebrew text has וְנִדְעָהּ יָד, literally "and it will be known, hand...", 1QIs^a has וְנִדְעָהּ יָ, with the missing letters being illegible. From this point on, the last leaf of 1QIs^a contains many words with illegible letters, and portions of

(continued...)

and He will be indignant⁸⁶ to His enemies.⁸⁷

66:15⁸⁸ כִּי־תִהְיֶה יְהוָה בְּאֵשׁ יָבוֹא

⁸⁴(...continued)

verses 19-24 are missing from the scroll, apparently because of the last leaf's having been damaged in handling of the scroll.

⁸⁵For biblical passages that speak of YHWH's / God's hand, see our end-note 6.

⁸⁶The phrase יִזְעַם means "and He will be indignant," or "and He will be furious." For the **Bible**, YHWH God is a God of passion, of feelings, Who cares deeply when people forget His will and carelessly disobey His commandments, fighting against His causes. He is long-suffering and kind, but the time comes when "enough is enough," and YHWH decides to punish the rebellious.

What do you think? Do you believe in such a God as this? Or is your God your "Buddy," all sweetness and light, "the Old Man upstairs," upon Whom you can call whenever you get in trouble, but not at all a God of infinite demand, Who comes in fire to destroy the rebellious? And if so, is your God the God of the **Bible**?

⁸⁷Alexander comments on **verse 14** that "The object of address still continues to be those who had loved Zion, and had mourned for her, and whom God had promised to comfort in Jerusalem." (P. 468)

⁸⁸Oswalt entitles **verses 15-24** "Worship or destruction."

He comments that "This segment forms the conclusion of **65:17-66:24**, of **chapters 56-66**, and of the **book [of Isaiah]** as a whole. As such it manifests a diversity of themes that seems mirrored in a diversity of styles and forms as well...

"The argument in favor of seeing **verses 15-24** as a unit rests on the observation of the nature of the **book [of Isaiah]**. When one observes the **book** as a whole, the interchange between judgment and hope is unmistakable...Here this interchange occurs for the last time, with **verses 15-17** (and **verse 24**) depicting the fate of those both within and beyond the Israelite community who persist in rebellion against God, and **verses 18-23** depicting the salvation of the nations that will occur as a result of the revelation of God's glory in both judgment and redemption. Finally, as far as this **book [of Isaiah]** is concerned, judgment and hope are inseparable. It is out of judgment that hope emerges, but hope never removes the potential and the reality of judgment...

"Finally, **verse 24** is the kind of final reminder that has appeared throughout the **book [of Isaiah]**: the grace of God, in redeeming even those who have initially refused to trust Him but eventually come to do so, never means that those who persist in rebellion can presume on that grace." (Pp. 683-84)

(continued...)

וְכִסּוּפָה מְרִכְבֹּתָיו
 לְהָשִׁיב בַּחֲמָה אֲפֹ
 וְנִעְרַתּוֹ בְּלֵהֲבֵי-אֵשׁ:

Because look—YHWH will come⁸⁹ with the fire,^{90, 7}

⁸⁸(...continued)

Motyer comments on **verses 15-17** that they “arise out of **verse 14d** and focus on coming universal judgment...In **verse 17** *those slain by the Lord (16c)* are defined as the compromising and apostate cultists of **verse 3.**” (P. 539)

Watts notes that in **verses 15-16** “Yahweh appears as the Divine Warrior...The two verses draw on imagery that is very old in Israel. *He comes in a fire, His chariots are like the storm wind* is a quotation from **Jeremiah 4:13** (see also **Psalms 68:17** (‘the chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands’) and **Habakkuk 3:8**.)” (P. 364)

In the **New Testament**, see **Revelation 19:11-16**, where the Rider on the white horse, the Word of God, strikes down the nations—again the “Divine Warrior” motif, taken up and applied to Jesus, Who is the “Lord of History,” Whose will is ultimately victorious over all the powers of evil.

What do you think? Do you believe in such a Jesus as this? Or is the Jesus you believe in “Gentle Jesus, Meek and Mild,” Who wouldn’t harm a flea? Many modern religionists who say they believe in God, and in Jesus Christ, cannot fathom the biblical picture of YHWH and of Jesus Christ. The Jesus Christ they believe in is a concoction of their own think-sos and desires, not the biblical Jesus Christ!

Do you agree? Do you dare to let the **Bible** determine your beliefs? Or, are you so wise that you do not need to read the Prophets?

Oswalt comments on **verse 15** that “God’s hand is with His servants, but He will be indignant with His enemies (thus also **verses 23-24**). Here that indignation is expanded in the classical language of God’s wrath: falling *fire* (three times in these two verses) and the rumbling of war *chariots*.” (P. 684)

⁸⁹Watts changes the imperfect tense of the Hebrew, יָבֹֿא, “He will come,” to the present tense, “Yahweh comes” (p. 359).

Throughout Biblical Theology, YHWH is the “coming God.” Not the God Who came in the past, and one day will come again in the future—but the God Who

(continued...)

⁸⁹(...continued)

constantly comes, to inspect, to forgive, to heal, to guide, to destroy evil with flaming fire—in the past, in the present, and in the future. He is indeed “the Coming God”!

⁹⁰Where our Hebrew text reads **בְּאֵשׁ**, “in the fire,” two Hebrew manuscripts read **כְּאֵשׁ**, “like the fire.” For occurrences of the noun “fire” in **Isaiah**, see our end-note 7.

Just as we have seen with reference to YHWH’s “hand” that it has a two-fold usage, coming in both salvation and judgment, so it is with “fire.” The fire can be a symbol of YHWH’s protective presence with His people, but much more often it is a symbol of His judgment upon His enemies, including those who do not tremble at His Word in Jerusalem. Here, as Watts notes, “Yahweh’s intervention to ‘bring to birth’ also involves settlement of issues relating to His enemies.” (P. 364) This matter of Divine coming in fire is one of the prominent motifs in the **Book of Revelation**.

Achtemeier comments that “Yahweh the Divine Warrior comes, as we have seen so often before, with salvation for the faithful and with death for the unfaithful.” (P. 146)

Knight comments on **verses 15-16** that “Much biblical theology is enshrined in the imagery of fire...’Fire’ can incorporate within itself the paradox of destruction and of the cleansing which **Isaiah** looked for at **1:21-26**...Fire is representative of the nature of God Himself, as **Deuteronomy 4:24** declares: ‘YHWH your God is a devouring fire’... This verse forms part of the ‘quintessence of **Old Testament** faith’ (as some **Old Testament** theologians suggest) that belongs in the core of passages comprising **Deuteronomy 4:32-34; 6:4-9, 20-25; 26:5-19; Joshua 24:1-28**...

“Fire and tempest were...the usual accompaniments of a Divine theophany, when God unveiled His Self:

Isaiah 29:5b-6 ‘Suddenly, in an instant, YHWH of Armies will come with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with windstorm and tempest and flames of a devouring fire’;

Isaiah 30:27 ‘See, the name of YHWH comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; His lips are full of wrath, and His tongue is a consuming fire’;

Psalms 50:3 ‘Our God comes, and will not be silent; a fire devours before Him, and around Him a tempest rages’;

Deuteronomy 5:22 ‘These are the commandments YHWH proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain from out of the fire, the cloud and the deep darkness’;

(continued...)

⁹⁰(...continued)

Ezekiel 38:22 'I will execute judgment upon Gog with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hail-stones and burning sulphur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him';

The fires of God, however, cannot be merely capricious flames, sent against the powers of evil in His anger and wrath (**Psalm 89:46**, 'How long will Your wrath burn like fire?' God is the Holy God, and so the fire of His wrath is His holy fire...

"Since God's fire is the profound and ultimate picture of His loving nature, it burns in order to refine:

Isaiah 48:10 'See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction';

Malachi 3:2 'But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner's fire, or a launderer's soap').

"The fire of God's nature is His passionate, burning love, in that He is determined, at all costs, even at the cost of [burning fires of] hell, as we might say—that the gold should be melted out of the alloy 'in the furnace of affliction,' in the heat of His love!...Then He adds, 'for My Own sake I do it' (**Isaiah 48:11**) which Knight interprets to mean because I am what I am: passionate love itself..." (Pp. 112-13)

Knight adds that, "How very different the Isaian awareness of God as love is from that of many people today whose concept of God as 'love' is weak, insipid, and shallow...God is the loving God; consequently He is the God of action Who extends His 'arm' into human history. Then the casting of fire becomes historical event..."

"This is an issue that puzzles those who examine the **New Testament** before studying the **Old Testament**, which is the original text. They are unable to grasp the historical significance, for example, of the words of John the Baptist about Jesus: 'He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.' (**Matthew 3:11**)..."

"One particular basic 'statement of faith' which Israel used throughout the centuries is the Song of Moses:

Deuteronomy 32:22a:

Because a fire was kindled in My anger;
and it kindled (fire) as far as (the) grave / underworld beneath'

"We can understand in consequence why the early Church without division of mind included in its creeds the phrase 'He descended into hell.' That clause declares for us that the passionate saving love of God envelopes even what our verse here

(continued...)

⁹⁰(...continued)

declares (**Isaiah 66:15**): ‘For behold, the Lord will come in fire...’ Such then is the eschatological picture of God’s furious, recreative love. It is this which the **New Testament** takes over and which it calls ‘hell’ [which sometimes appears as the translation of γέεννα, literally ‘Valley of Hinnom,’ used figuratively for ‘hell’] as it speaks of the love that will not let us go, the love that lays down its life for its friends. But so fierce will be the conflict that there will be many casualties to the heat of the flames. The reality of hell, as a modern writer has put it, is the greatest compliment that the Divine can pay to humanity.” (Pp. 113-14)

What do you think? Do you agree with Knight’s definition of the fire of God, and that the fire of “hell” is the fire of Divine love? And if it is God’s fire, and God is love, can that fire be anything other than the fire of God’s love? And will it not result in the ultimate salvation of those it burns and purges? Is this not what the statement in **Ezekiel 16:53-58**, that YHWH is going to restore the fortunes of the prostitute cities of Samaria, Sodom, and the worst prostitute city of all, Jerusalem, implies?

Alexander comments that the phrase **לְהַשִּׁיב בְּחַמָּה אִפּוֹ**, which he translates by “to appease in fury His anger,” explains “how His anger was to be appeased, that is, in the free indulgence of it [His anger].” (P. 469) But does **לְהַשִּׁיב** mean “to appease”? Translations of the phrase vary:

King James, “to render his anger with fury”

Tanakh, “To vent His anger in fury”

New Revised Standard, “to pay back his anger in fury”

New International, “he will bring down his anger with fury”

New Jerusalem, “to assuage [satisfy, appease] his anger with burning

Rahifs, “to give back / return vengeance in / with wrath”

Alexander concludes that “The whole verse represents [YHWH], considered in relation to His enemies, as a consuming fire.” (P. 470) See:

Deuteronomy 4:24,

Because YHWH your (singular) God, He (is) a consuming fire,
a jealous Supreme God!

Hebrews 12:29,

For also, the God of ours—a consuming fire !

2 Thessalonians 1:8, which speaks of a time when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven,

(continued...)

and like a storm-wind,⁹¹ His chariots,⁹²

⁹⁰(...continued)

in fire of flame,

giving vengeance to those not knowing God,

and to those who will not obey the good news of the Lord of ours, Jesus.

⁹¹For occurrences of the noun סופה, **supah**, “storm-wind” in **Isaiah**, see:

Isaiah 5:28, the chariot-wheels of enemies are like a storm-wind;

Isaiah 17:13, YHWH’s enemies are driven away like chaff before a storm-wind;

Isaiah 21:1, invaders come from the desert like storm-winds;

Isaiah 29:6, YHWH comes like a storm-wind to destroy Zion’s enemies;

Isaiah 66:15 YHWH’s chariots are like a storm-wind; closely similar to **5:28**.

⁹²For this imagery of YHWH’s chariots coming in judgment on His enemies, see:

Jeremiah 4:11-13,

- 11 At that time this people and Jerusalem will be told,
A scorching wind from the barren heights in the desert blows toward (the)
daughter of My people,
but not to winnow or cleanse;
12 a wind too strong for that comes from Me.
Now also I, I pronounce judgments against them.
13 Look! He advances like the clouds,
and His chariots like a whirlwind,
His horses are swifter than vultures / eagles.
Woe to us, because we are ruined!
(We think the chariots of Israel’s enemies are being described as YHWH’s
chariots of judgment!)

Habakkuk 3:8,

Were You angry with the rivers, O YHWH?
Was Your wrath against the streams?
Did You rage against the sea when You rode with Your horses and Your
victorious chariots?...

(This is a depiction of YHWH’s coming in judgment upon His enemies and in
deliverance for His people.)

(continued...)

to return / settle with rage His anger,⁹³ 8
and His rebuke in flames of fire!

66:16 כִּי בְאֵשׁ יְהוָה נִשְׁפָּט
וּבְחַרְבוֹ אֶת-כָּל-בָּשָׂר
וְרַבּוֹ חֲלָלִי יְהוָה:

Because with the fire YHWH (is) judging,⁹⁴

⁹²(...continued)

Motyer comments that “*Chariots*, an earthly manifestation of destructive power, are symbolic of the irresistible power of the holy God acting in judgment.” (P. 539)

⁹³The noun אַף, literally “nose,” but meaning “anger,” is sometimes used as a conjunction meaning “also,” or “yea,” or “surely.” It occurs some 56 times in **Isaiah**. Here, **1QIs^a** reduplicates the noun, reading אַפּוֹ אַפּוֹ, “anger anger.” For occurrences of this noun in **Isaiah**, see our end-note 8.

Oswalt comments that “God is coming to *settle* His *anger*. The verb used is the common one meaning ‘return’ (שׁוּב). The sense here is either to calm His wrath (to return it to rest) by the execution of judgment, or more likely, to return on His enemies the results of their rebellion.” (P. 685)

⁹⁴Where our Hebrew text reads כִּי בְאֵשׁ יְהוָה נִשְׁפָּט, “because in the fire YHWH (is) judging (a niphil present participle),” **1QIs^a** reads יָבוֹא לְשַׁפֵּט, “He will come to judge.” The Greek translation reads “for in the fire of Lord’s it will be judged, all the earth.”

This statement concerning God’s judgment in fire is a theme found many parts of **Revelation**--see **chapters 8-9**, and also see:

Psalm 96:13,

Because (YHWH) is coming (qal present participle), because He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge (the) world by righteousness, and peoples by His true faithfulness; **Psalm 98:9**, almost identical except the last word, which here is “by uprightness / equity”;

1 Chronicles 16:33,

(continued...)

and with His sword⁹⁵, ⁹--all flesh,⁹⁶
and the one(s) slain (by) YHWH⁹⁷ will be multiplied.⁹⁸

⁹⁴(...continued)

Then trees of the forest will give a ringing-cry before YHWH—
because He is coming (qal active participle) to judge the earth.

⁹⁵For the “sword of YHWH,” see end-note 9.

This continued mention of YHWH’s “sword” is but one element in the **Hebrew Bible’s** theme of “YHWH, the Divine Warrior,” Who, as Lord of History, enters into the continuing wars in history, bringing about deliverance of the oppressed, and rendering judgment upon the oppressors.

Pacifist interpreters of the **Bible** find great difficulty in dealing with (or disposing of) this kind of material that is part and parcel of the **Hebrew Bible**—and that continues in the **New Testament**—see for only two examples, **Mark 13** and **Revelation 19:11-21**.

What about yourself? How do you deal with all of this? Biblical documents speak of “peace” as the long-term Divine goal of history; but they also speak again and again of the necessity for “war” until finally that “peace” is won.

⁹⁶The phrase כָּל־בָּשָׂר, “all flesh,” occurs here and two other places in **Isaiah**:

49:26, when Israel’s oppressors are made to eat their own flesh and drink their own blood, then all humanity will know that YHWH is Israel’s Savior;

66:23, 24, in the new Jerusalem, all humanity will come to worship before YHWH; as they leave the city, they will see the corpses of transgressors whose worm will not die and whose fire will not be quenched—and they will be an abhorrence to all humanity.

Oswalt states that “The imagery of **verse 15** continues...The imagery almost certainly provides the basis for Jesus’ description of the destruction of Jerusalem...in **Matthew 24:22**....In the light of **verse 17**, [some commentators] make these words a specific prediction of the events of 70 C.E. [the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple] and the end of the world.” (P. 685)

Those who interpret in this way are Christians commentators, reading **Isaiah** from the standpoint of some 2,500 years later, in the light of the **New Testament**.

⁹⁷1QIs^a omits the name YHWH, reading “His slain.”

⁹⁸For this phrase, חַלְלֵי יְהוָה, “those slain by YHWH,” compare **Jeremiah 25:33**,

(continued...)

⁹⁸(...continued)

At that time, those slain by YHWH will be everywhere—
from one end of the land / earth to the other.

Alexander comments on **verse 16** that “According to Knobel, ‘all flesh’ means all nations, and especially the Babylonians who had not been sufficiently punished by Cyrus. Henderson applies the verses to the battle of Armageddon, described in **Revelation 16:14-21, 19:11-21**...

“A much surer clue to the primary application of [**verse 16**] is afforded by our Savior’s words in **Matthew 24:22**, where in speaking of the speedy destruction of Jerusalem He says, that excepting the elect no flesh should be saved, i.e., no portion of the Jewish race but those who were ordained to everlasting life through faith in Him [this is Alexander’s creedal interpretation, not at all the words of Jesus]. This application of **Isaiah’s** prophecy agrees exactly with the view already taken of the whole preceding context as relating to that great decisive crisis in the history of the church and of the world, the dissolution of the old economy and the inauguration of the new...The terrific carnage which attended the extinction of the Jewish State, and of which, more emphatically than of any other even outwardly resembling it, it might be said that *many were the slain of [YHWH]*.” P. 470)

But Alexander is reading a later Christian viewpoint into the text, which says nothing about “that great decisive crisis in the history of the church and of the world,” or “the dissolution of the old economy,” or “the inauguration of the new [economy].”

⁹⁹Achtemeier comments on **verses 17-18a** that in them “we hear once again of the cultic sins of the Zadokite party—of their claim to be ‘set apart’ as holy to Yahweh (compare **65:5**), and yet of their idolatry in heathen gardens (compare **65:3; 1:29**), their eating of swine (**65:4**; compare **Leviticus 11:7**) and of unclean or defiled animals...and even of mice...Those so defiant of Yahweh’s law can never be acceptable to Him. ‘Together’ (compare **1:28, 31**) they shall all die, is the judgment of God.” (P. 146)

We say, perhaps...But we have a hard time thinking that the program set forth by **Ezra-Nehemiah**, with its insistence on exclusion of foreign elements would ever condone any such worship. What do you think? And if not the Zadokite party, who would you suggest? Were the followers of **Jeremiah / Second and Third Isaiah**, with their emphasis on inclusiveness, willing to participate in such religious actions? We doubt it, especially as this condemnation of such worship comes from **Third Isaiah**. Was there a third party (or perhaps even more) among the returnees— some who had rejected the Jewish religion entirely, and entered into some forms of Near-Eastern religion that participated in these grotesque practices? Were the Zadokites still participating in Canaanite rituals, as they are depicted as doing in **Ezekiel 8**? We think this is entirely possible, and lies at the heart of Third Isaiah’s criticisms here in **chapters 65 and 66**.

(continued...)

אַחַר (אַחַר) [אַחַת] בְּתוֹךְ

⁹⁹(...continued)

Alexander holds that “all [interpreters of **Isaiah** whom Alexander had consulted] admit [such gross idolatry] to have had no existence among the Jews after their return from exile.” (P. 473) However, it seems apparent that **Third Isaiah** knew of such practices among the returnees, as he spends so much space condemning it, both in **chapter 65** and now here again in **chapter 66**.

Motyer states that in **Isaiah 66:17**, “In essence we meet here the people of **65:2-7** [an obstinate / rebellious people, who walk in ways not good; offering sacrifices in gardens, sitting among the graves, eating pork, etc.], **11-12** [those who spread a table for Fortune with mixed bowls of wine for Destiny] and **66:3-4** [those who kill a man, break a dog’s neck, presents pig’s blood, etc.]: the compromisers and apostates among the Lord’s professing people, those who did not tremble at His word. For when people cease to heed the word of revelation, it is not that they then believe nothing but that they will believe anything—gardens, pigs, and rats included.” (P. 540) Do you agree with Motyer?

There are some who claim that they “don’t believe anything!” But when you observe their lives and their actions, you quickly learn that they do actually believe in many things, such as money, abundant sex, the stock market, science, “natural laws,” Godless evolution, their nation, their family, military might, etc. etc.

The fact is, human beings cannot live without faith. The real question is, What will we place our faith in? When the Germans under Hitler renounced their Christian faith, they quickly placed faith in the Third Reich—and history records the destructive consequences that followed. When the Communists in the Soviet Union renounced their Christian faith they quickly placed their faith in the murderous regime of Lenin and Stalin that resulted in the murder of even more people than died under Hitler.

What do you think? Can we live without faith? When you put your faith in the God of the **Bible**, you get the Ten Commandments, and the prophetic call to ethical living—such as the “righteousness” demanded in **Isaiah 58**, a righteousness embodied in Jesus Christ! Where else can you get such powerful ethical teaching?

Or, can it be that **Third Isaiah**, in the light of its statement in **66:3** is saying Israel’s ritual of worship is equivalent to these practices of the fertility religions? Oswalt states that “Just as in **57:3-13**; **58:1-5**; **65:1-7**; and **66:3-4** (as well as **1:11-20**), religion that is nothing other than form and routine and is not demonstrated in heartfelt obedience to the covenant [or to the teaching of **Isaiah 53** and **58**] is as disgusting to God as rank idolatry. It is not pleasing to God, but is as nauseating as the eating of swine and mice...It is not clear whether the prophet is accusing the people of literally doing these things or saying that they might as well be doing these things for all the good their religiousness will do them.” (P. 686)

אֲכִלִּי בֶּשֶׂר תַּחֲזִיר וְהִשְׁקֵץ וְהִעֲכֹבֵר

יַחֲדוּ יִסְפוּ נְאֻמֵּי הוֹהָ:

The ones consecrating themselves and cleansing themselves¹⁰⁰ in the gardens¹⁰¹
following one¹⁰² in the midst,¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰Knight comments that “This [sanctifying and purifying themselves] is what the priest must do before pursuing his holy calling as an intermediary between God and mankind (**Exodus 19:20**) ...But here Israel’s act was a perversion of any preparation to serve the true God.” (P. 114)

We think it is somewhat misleading to call this “Israel’s act.” The act of some in Israel—but not all Israel. What do you think?

¹⁰¹Motyer comments that “*Gardens* (compare **1:29; 65:3**) were the loci of fertility cults purporting to offer the key to fulness of life and prosperity.” (P. 540)

¹⁰²The Masoretes offer two readings: first, the *kethibh*, “what is written,” אָחָד, the masculine form as do many Hebrew manuscripts; second, the *qere*, “to be read,” אַחַת, the feminine form, which is read by both 1QIs^a and 1QIs^b.

Slotki comments that “The [masculine form] may denote the leader of the procession, the [feminine form] a Goddess, possibly the *Asherah*. Maimonides explains as ‘behind one tree in the midst,’ which he understands as indulgence in forbidden lust (**Guide to the Perplexed**, III, p. 33).” (P. 324) We have reversed Slotki’s identifications here.

Oswalt comments that “It is not clear what after one in the midst means. If the *Kethibh*..is correct, it may suggest that the worshipers are following (after) the directions of a leader who stands in the center of a circle (compare **Ezekiel 8:11**)...The *Qere*... may refer to a priestess...or to a statue of a Goddess such as *Asherah*, which stood in the center of the garden used for pagan worship and was an object of such worship.” (P. 686) Compare:

Jeremiah 7:9,

Will you steal, murder and be sexually immoral,
and swear by the vapor / breath,
and burn incense to the Baal,
and walk after other Gods which you did not know?

Hosea 11:10,

(continued...)

¹⁰²(...continued)

Following YHWH they will come;
like a lion He will growl;
for He will growl,
and sons will tremble (and come) from (the) west.

Knight comments that “the phrase ‘following one in the midst’ seems to describe poor, simple, deluded souls blindly but eagerly repeating the actions of a leader, who would be a kind of shaman or dervish or medicine man. How common such cults are today, rising quickly, attracting the disillusioned, and then fading out. But the point is that these simple folk had freely and willingly ‘sold their souls’ to the devilish cult that had attracted them (compare **Isaiah 65:3-4**).” (Pp. 114-15)

But if the leaders in this syncretistic worship were the Zadokite priests of Israel, it was not a matter of some small “cult,” made up of poor, simple, deluded souls, but rather it had to do with the very heart of Israel’s community, with its official priests doing the leading!

¹⁰³It is possible that this indicates a religious leader in the Canaanite worship ritual—perhaps a sacred prostitute, or a homosexual priest (thus the variant reading, changing from feminine to masculine), or some other form of religious leader—perhaps even a Zadokite priest!

Motyer notes that “The nearest **Bible** parallel to *following the one in the midst* is **Ezekiel 8:7-11**, where the prophet saw the pre-exilic cultists at their worship, seventy elders of Israel with ‘Jaazaniah standing in the midst of them.’ The same preposition (בַּתְּוֶכֶחַ, **battawek**, ‘in the midst’) occurs in both passages. We do not know enough about ancient worship forms to take the matter further. It sounds, on the surface, simply like a congregation taking their lead from a central figure, but it may be colloquialism by which members of a secret or semi-secret society identified each other.” (P. 540)

See **Ezekiel 8: 7-11**,

- 7 And He brought me to the court-yard’s door;
and I saw, and look—one hole in the wall!
- 8 And He said to me,
Son of a human, dig now / please in the wall!
And I dug in the wall, and look—one door.
And He said to me, Enter!
And see the evil abominations
which they are doing here!
- 10 And I entered, and I saw, and look—
every figure of creeping thing(s) and cattle / beast(s), and detestable
thing(s),
and every idol of Israel’s household,

(continued...)

eating flesh of the pig,¹⁰⁴ and the detestable thing,¹⁰⁵ and the mice

¹⁰³(...continued)

carved upon the wall—around, around.

- 11 And seventy men from Israel's household officials;
and Yaazneyahu, son of Shaphan standing in their midst, standing in front
of them;
and each one (with) an incense burner in his hand.
And (the) odor of a cloud of sweet-smelling smoke going up.

It is a depiction of Israel's temple that has combined the worship commanded in the **Torah** with the idolatrous worship rituals of the surrounding Near-Eastern religions, with Israelites, even Zadokite priests, taking the role of the Canaanite religious leaders in worship.

For the first half of **verse 17**, **Rahlf**s has "the ones purifying and cleansing themselves in the gardens and in the forecourts..." with nothing said concerning following one in the midst.

¹⁰⁴See end-note 10 for the use of pig's meat and blood in Canaanite religion, and for the various practices of Near-Eastern fertility religions.

¹⁰⁵Where the Hebrew text reads וְהַשְּׂקִיז, "and the detestable thing," the Syriac translation reads וְהַשְּׂרִיז, "and the swarmer(s)." **1QIs^a** spells the noun וְהַשְּׂקִיז, the more normal way of spelling it.

For occurrences of this noun שְׂקִיז, "detestable thing" in the **Hebrew Bible** see:

Leviticus 7:21, something touched by an Israelite, causing him to become unclean;

Leviticus 11:10, 11, 12 fish that do not have fins and scales;

Leviticus 11:13, certain birds and all bats;

Leviticus 11:20, 23, flying insects that walk on all four legs, excluding locusts, katydids, crickets and grasshoppers;

Leviticus 11:41, 42, all creatures that move about / swarm on the ground;

Isaiah 66:17, here; joined together with pig's flesh and rats / mice;

Ezekiel 8:10, Ezekiel goes (in vision) into the pre-exilic temple and sees portrayed all over the walls all kinds of crawling things and detestable animals and idols.

–together they will be brought to an end¹⁰⁶–(it is) a saying of YHWH!¹⁰⁷

66.18¹⁰⁸ וְאֲנֹכִי מַעֲשִׂיהֶם וּמַחֲשַׁבְתֵּיהֶם

¹⁰⁶The verb יִסְפּוּ / ἀναλωθήσονται, “they will be brought to an end,” “they will be destroyed” means termination—not conscious torment. See:

Isaiah 1:28, יִכְלֶוּ, “they will be finished / spent”;

Isaiah 1:31, “they will burn and there will be no one quenching the fire,” that is, no one stops the cremation.

¹⁰⁷Again we see the phrase נְאֻם־יְהוָה, “a saying of YHWH,” which occurs some 275 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, affirming that the message originated with YHWH, not with the individual speaking.

¹⁰⁸The Jewish scholar, Slotki sums up **verses 18-22** by stating that “God’s glory and power will be manifest over all the nations of the world who, as a tribute to His sovereignty, will bring, with many marks of respect and honor, all the Israelites who lived among them in exile.” (P. 321)

The Christian scholar Westermann comments on **verses 18-21** that “The present speaker means that God’s advent to judge the world is far from being the final act. It is followed by something else, a gathering for which there is no precedent. God’s action in gathering, which elsewhere refers exclusively to the dispersed of Israel, is here extended to include all nations and tongues. This utterance makes God’s salvation truly universal.” (P. 214)

What do you think? Do you agree with Slotki, the Jew, or with Westermann, the Christian?

Motyer argues for the Christian view, stating that “The spotlight swings back to the other group, those whom the Lord will gather into the new Jerusalem. In this passage we come full circle, both to **65:1** [where YHWH is calling to a nation not called by His name] and...on the wider screen, to **56:1-8** [where foreigners and eunuchs, once excluded from YHWH’s assembly, are welcomed into YHWH’s ‘House of Prayer for All Nations’]...

“In **New Testament** perspective [that is, looking back at **Isaiah** from the standpoint of the Christian Church], this final section spans the first and second comings of the Lord Jesus Christ: His purpose for the world (**verse 18**), His means of carrying it out (**verses 19-21**), the *sign* set among the nations, the remnant sent to evangelize them (**verse 19**) and the gathering of His people to Jerusalem (**verse 20**) with Gentiles in full membership (**verse 21**). Jerusalem is not the literal city, but the city of **Galatians 4:25-26; Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 21**...

(continued...)

¹⁰⁸(...continued)

”Exactly so; but for Isaiah, not privileged as we with hindsight, it was a vision of staggering proportions. Somehow in relation to the Lord’s new-creation purposes for Zion, it would devolve upon those who were already its citizens to gather in from the whole world those who would be co-equal with themselves in citizenship and privilege in the day when Jerusalem would be the pilgrimage center for all creation and when every opposing factor and person would be a thing of the past...

“In **verses 18-19** the Lord announces that the time has come to set His sign among the nations and to send emissaries to those who have not heard His message or seen His glory...In **verses 20-22** the emissaries bring back to Jerusalem those who are called their ‘brothers,’ and they will be received by the Lord as full members of the cultic community...In **verses 23-24** monthly and annual festivals will see ‘all flesh’ gathering in worship, enjoying the privileges into which they have been brought and aware of the fate from which they have been saved.” (P. 540)

Achtemeier states concerning **verses 18b-21** that “The universal vision with which **Third-Isaiah** began, in **56:1-8**, is recalled and broadened...Now, after the purging fire of [Yahweh’s] judgment, He comes to gather together all remaining nations and tongues (compare **Zechariah 8:23; Daniel 3:4**)...His purpose in gathering together all peoples is to show them His glory (compare **59:19; 60:1**). The Word of **Second Isaiah** will be fulfilled; all flesh will see the glory of Yahweh (**40:5**).” (P. 147)

Concerning **verse 18** itself, Motyer states that “the translation of **verse 18** is an unresolved conundrum [‘riddle,’ ‘problem with no satisfactory solution’]...[It] is so broken that no ingenuity has so far been able to reconstruct it. It consists of three or maybe four words: ‘And I...their deeds and their thoughts...(it) has come [no—‘she is coming’].’ Either linking words have dropped out in transmission, or the whole context has become disorganized leaving these words isolated, or we are dealing with idiomatic Hebrew beyond our ken.” (Pp. 540-41)

Achtemeier states that “**Verse 18** of this prose section is obviously corrupt, but by attaching part of its first phrase to **verse 17**, and by emending the feminine participle, ‘she is coming’ to ‘I am coming,’ good sense can be restored.” (P. 147)

Oswalt states that “This **verse [18]** marks the transition to the final word of hope. Its form is difficult...but if the text is correct, the sense is that the evil works and the twisted plans of rebel humans will serve only as a foil for the greater revelation of the glory of God. He will gather all the peoples of the world, including ethnic (*nations*) and linguistic (*tongues*) groups, to see His power and His righteousness...

“**Verses 18-24** have a close affinity with **Zechariah 12-14**, so much so that one could consider the **Zechariah** passage to be an expansion on these verses in **Isaiah**...

Translations of the first half of **verse 18** vary:

(continued...)

בָּאָה לְקַבֵּץ אֶת־כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם וְהַלְשׁוֹת

וּבְאוּ וְרָאוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי:

And I...their deeds and their thoughts...

¹⁰⁸(...continued)

King James, “For I *know* their works and their thoughts: it shall come...”

Tanakh, “For I *know* their deeds and purposes. *The time* has come...”

New Revised Standard, “For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming...”

New International, “And I, because of what they have planned and done, am about to come...”

New Jerusalem skips words and has only “I am coming...”

Rahfs, literally, “I also, the works of theirs and the reasoning of theirs I know; I am coming...”

Those who say, “The **Bible** says it, I believe it, that settles it” must ask themselves, But what does this verse say? A simple answer simply won’t do! See Oswalt’s note 60 on p. 681.

Knight entitles **verses 18-21** “The Great Commission.”

He comments that “Our editor draws his final chapter to a close by asking us to take a look at ‘the last things.’ ‘As for Me,’ he lets us hear God say (the phrase being very emphatic in Hebrew), ‘their works and their thoughts...’ That is all we have, so that the sentence forms an *aposiopesis*, a sudden breaking off of thought. God’s works and thoughts are totally different from human’s, God Himself is warning us; Deutero-Isaiah has already declared this at **55:8**...

“But what is this ‘it’? Is it the fulfilment of God’s plan, of His actions and of His thoughts. Whatever ‘it’ is, the word must refer to what follows, when God says, ‘I am coming to gather all nations and tongues.’ This then is to be an act of the Lord and not of mankind. It is expressed in a phrase characteristic of the Aramaic sections of the **Book of Daniel**, and which is common in intertestamental apocryphal literature.

“Thus, ‘and they shall come and shall see My glory’ will be the doing of God alone. Isaiah had spoken of ‘all the nations’ flowing to Mt. Zion (**Isaiah 2:2**), the end result of which would be worldwide *shalom* [peace]. But here we see that mankind will ‘flow’ thither only because God is creating the movement. Our passage continues: ‘All mankind ‘shall see My glory,’ meaning all will obtain the heavenly vision. But even then, the attainment to ‘it’ will not yet be the end. The end will be an event that can be paralleled with the manner in which Matthew’s **Gospel** finishes [i.e., Jesus’ ‘Great Commission’].” (Pp. 115-16)

it (feminine) is coming--¹⁰⁹ to gather all the nations and the tongues;¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹The qal active participle here, **בְּאֵהָ**, is feminine singular, and the only subject of the participle must be YHWH. Is this another instance of YHWH being described in feminine terms? Compare footnote 77, where feminine / motherly imagery for YHWH is involved. The only other place in **Isaiah** where this same feminine singular participle occurs is **63:4**, **שָׁנַת גְּאוּלַי בְּאֵהָ**, **ba)ah shenath ge)ulay**, “year of My redemption is coming.” The Greek translation here at **66:18** (see also the Syriac and the Latin Vulgate), instead of using a participle, has the phrase ἐπίσταμαι ἔρχομαι, “to understand I come (or “am coming”).”

Watts comments that “The idea of God’s coming is pervasive in the **Bible**...The purpose of God’s appearance [Watts translates by ‘I...am coming,’ p. 359] is to gather all the nations and the language groups (see:

Isaiah 55:1-8 ‘you will summon nations you know not, and nations that do not know you will hasten to you...’;

Zechariah 8:23 ‘in those days, ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew...and say, Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you’).

“He wants them all to see His glory (see:

Isaiah 40:5, the glorious radiance of YHWH will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it”;

Isaiah 59:19, “from the west, men will tremble in awe before the name of YHWH; and from the rising of the sun, they will revere His glorious radiance”;

Isaiah 60:1-3 “darkness covers the earth...but YHWH rises upon you and His glorious radiance appears over you. Nation will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn.” (P. 364)

What do you think? Does Isaiah’s “gathering of the nations” refer solely to the Jewish diaspora, those living outside the land of Israel? Or does it include the non-Jews? We say it includes the non-Jewish nations, who will come streaming to Jerusalem, bringing with them Jewish exiles.

¹¹⁰Watts translates by “language groups.” (P. 359).

For this matter of gathering all the nations, see:

Isaiah 2:2-4,

(continued...)

¹¹⁰(...continued)

- 2 And it will happen in (the) future / latter part / end of the days,
(the) mountain of YHWH's house / temple (will be) established on top / at
head of the mountains,
and it will be lifted up from (the) hills,
and all the nations will flow to it / Him.
- 3 And many peoples will go,
and they will say, Come / Go! And we will go up to YHWH's mountain,
to (the) God of Jacob's house / temple!
And He will teach us some of / from His ways,
and we will walk in His paths!
Because from Zion **torah** / law / teaching / guidance will go forth,
and YHWH's Word from Jerusalem!
- 4 And He will judge between the nations;
and He will decide / reprove / rebuke for many peoples.
And they will beat their swords into pieces,
and their spears into pruning knives.
Nation will not lift up a sword to a nation,
and they will not again learn war!

Isaiah 45:23,

By Myself I swore;
righteousness went out from My mouth, a Word—and it will not return.
That, To Me shall bend every knee; (to Me) shall swear every tongue!

Revelation 7:9-10,

- 9 After these things I saw, and look--a great crowd, which no one was able to
number,
out of every nation, and tribes, and peoples, and tongues--
having stood before the throne and before the Little Lamb,
having been dressed in white robes, and palm-branches in their hands.
- 10 And they cry out with a great voice, saying,
The salvation / deliverance (belongs) to our God, to the One sitting upon
the throne, and to the Little Lamb!

YHWH's gathering all nations, peoples and tongues to Himself is not some minor
footnote in Biblical Theology—but rather a prominent theme, that is highly important for
both the **Hebrew Bible** and for the **New Testament**.

Oswalt comments that "The emphasis on *nations* is a reprise [repeat] of the
thought of the opening verses of this division (**56:1-8**). The message of God is not for
the descendants of Jacob but for the world, and those of the world who respond to it
are the true children of Jacob." (P. 687)

(continued...)

and they will see My glorious radiance.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰(...continued)

Those involved in the mission of the church in the 21st century need to take this matter into serious consideration. Can our churches be the embodiment of this kind of gathering of peoples from all nations and languages? What methodology and strategy can we develop to effectively implement this biblical mandate? Can we do it by claiming we have the truth and all others are mistaken and wrong? Or, can we lead the world in practicing the kind of righteousness **Third Isaiah** calls for in **chapter 58**—holding fast to our devotion to God, but reaching out in genuine love and self-giving service to everyone in need, regardless of their religion or nationality? This was the way of Jesus—and we believe it is the only way. What do you think?

¹¹¹Achtemeier comments that “The universal vision [begun in **56:1-8**, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’] is recalled and broadened...Now, after the purging fire of His judgment, He comes to gather together all remaining nations and tongues...His purpose in gathering together all peoples is to show them His glory (compare **59:19** [‘From the west, men will fear the name of YHWH, and from the rising of the sun, they will tremble in awe before His glorious radiance’]; **60:1-3** [‘the light has come, the glorious radiance of YHWH rises upon you...YHWH rises upon you, and His glorious radiance appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn’]).” (P. 147)

Knight states that the coming of the nations and the seeing of YHWH’s glorious radiance “will be the doing of God alone. **Isaiah** has spoken of ‘all the nations flowing to Mount Zion (**2:2**), the end result of which would be worldwide *shalom*. But here we see that mankind will ‘flow’ thither only because God is creating the movement...’All mankind shall see My glory,’ meaning all will obtain the heavenly vision. But even then, the attainment to ‘it’ will not yet be the end. The end will be an event that can be paralleled with the manner in which **Matthew’s Gospel** finishes [meaning, the “great commission,” and the promise of Divine presence to the end of the age].” (Pp 115-16)

Westermann says that “This is the first sure and certain mention of mission as we today employ the term—the sending of individuals to distant peoples in order to proclaim God’s glory among them. This completely corresponds to the mission of the apostles when the church first began. One is amazed at it; here, just as the **Old Testament** is coming to its end, God’s way is already seen as leading from the narrow confines of the chosen people out into the wide, whole world...

“This not only agrees with what [is] said in **45:20-25** [God is enthroned above the circle of the earth]. It also agrees with the places in the servant-songs where the servant is appointed to be a light to the Gentiles, and is destined to bring God’s justice to them. There can be no doubt about it: the people who tell the tidings of God’s glory are also characterized as witnesses. As those saved from a catastrophe (the ‘survivors’) and, as saved, having experienced that Yahweh is God, they go to those who have

(continued...)

¹¹¹(...continued)

not seen or heard. As His witnesses they can be made into people who proclaim His glory among the nations.” (P. 425)

What do you think? Are these Christian commentators reading their ideas into this ancient Hebrew document? Or does this vision of Isaiah genuinely point forward to something very similar to Jesus’ “great commission,” and to the world-wide mission depicted so graphically in the **New Testament Book of Acts**?

And what will we Americans say in this 21st century when the nations with their various religions are literally coming to America, living side by side with us in our cities (in Frisco, Texas, we sometimes wonder whether this is Frisco, India)? How can our synagogues and churches deal with this? How multi-national and multi-lingual do we dare to become? How willing are we to welcome those of very different religious backgrounds, seeking to understand them and their religions, learning how to enter into constructive dialogue with them? What will it take? Or will we deny that this is our urgent task, and retreat into the confines of homogeneity / all being of the same color / class / nationality / political conviction?

¹¹²Oswalt comments on **verse 19** that “This verse has two uncertainties. One is the nature of the sign (אֹת) that God will give, and the other is the antecedent of *them*. On the basis of the use of אֹת, ‘sign’ in the **book of Exodus**...most commentators... up to the twentieth century agreed that some kind of miraculous event is intended...But it is not clear whether the author has something specific in mind, and if so, whether it is a single event or a series of them. Commentators have tended to identify it as the series of events surrounding the founding of the church; but as in **verse 17**, this seems to be too narrow a focus in view of the eschatological [concern with the final events of history] cast of this entire segment...It seems best to leave the answer to the question as broad as possible, and to say that Isaiah, with other prophets (compare **Joel 3:3**^{Heb} / **2:30**^{Eng}) understood that at the end of the age God would make His power clear in certain miraculous ways, and in so doing call to Himself all who are willing to hear.” (P. 688)

But Oswalt in reading this matter of “eschatology” into the text, which says nothing about “the end of the age.” The passage from Joel speaks of the “day of YHWH,” but while that day means the destruction of evil powers, it is a far cry from Christian teaching concerning “the end of the world.” The “day of YHWH” is a day that has come many times in the past, that comes in the present, and that will come in the future.

With regard to the uncertainty of the antecedent of “them,” Oswalt considers two possibilities: “either the Jews of the Gentiles. On the one hand, the immediate context seems to favor the Gentiles, as they are the nearest persons identified...On the other

(continued...)

וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי מֵהֵם אֶת־פְּלִיטִים אֶל־הַגּוֹיִם
 תְּרֹשֶׁת פּוֹל וְלֹד מִשְׁכֵי קֶשֶׁת
 תִּבֵּל וַיּוֹן הָאֲיִים הַרְחֻקִים
 אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שָׁמְעוּ אֶת־שִׁמְעִי
 וְלֹא־רָאוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי
 וְהִגִּידוּ אֶת־כְּבוֹדִי בְּגוֹיִם:

And I will place among them a sign;¹¹³

¹¹²(...continued)

hand, the survivors may be Jews who have survived God's judgment on them. This seems to accord better with the larger context of the **book [of Isaiah]**...The Jews seem to be addressed in **verse 20**. This understanding would certainly accord well with the tone of **chapters 60** and **61**, where it is through what God has done in judging and delivering His people that the nations are drawn to God in Jerusalem...

“So God will bring judgment on His people, but through that judgment He will also bring purification and deliverance to some. From them God will send survivors to all the world, telling the wonders of God and what He has done. As Westermann comments, this corresponds exactly with the mission of the apostles. Apparently Isaiah sees this process being carried out on an even grander scale at the end of time.” (Pp. 688-89)

And again we ask, Where does this text say anything about “the end of time”? It obviously is looking out into the future, and sees God at work—but nowhere does it say the world will come to an “end,” or that “time will be no more.”

Oswalt goes on to state that “the prophet is saying that the message of God's glory will reach everywhere, even to places that have never heard of Israel's God.” (P. 689) Yes, the passage certainly says that!

¹¹³The noun **אֹת** / σημεῖα means “a sign.” Watts comments that “In **7:14** the sign was a child yet to be born. In **19:20** it was a monument on Egypt's border. In **55:13** the joyful return and the land's renewal was the sign. Here the sign is not defined. It is *in them*, that is, in the nations, and *established* by Yahweh.” (P. 365)

Motyer asks, “How is this world-wide privilege to come about? *I will set a sign among them* refers not to a banner raised at a distance to attract...but to a sign...among

(continued...)

¹¹³(...continued)

them, round which they rally where they are. Knowing as we do [in Christian interpretation of the **Hebrew Bible**] that this passage refers to the interim between the comings of the Lord Jesus, the 'sign' can only be His cross. **Isaiah**, however, knows and says only that the world finds common cause round a sign the Lord sets among them." (P. 540)

What do you think? Do you agree with Motyer? Could the "sign" set among the nations be a people of God that boldly fulfills the Divine Mandate of **Isaiah 53** and **58**—willingly becoming suffering servants who welcome and do everything in their power to meet the needs of their fellow human beings?

Achtemeier holds that the "sign" is "Yahweh's salvation of His people by His Presence in their midst (compare:

Isaiah 11:10 ['In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him...],

Isaiah 11:12 ['He will raise a banner for the nations, and gather the exiles of Israel...from the four corners of the earth'];

Isaiah 62:10 ['Raise a banner for the nations']).

"By this sign, all peoples will know that Yahweh is true God and Savior. Therefore, from among those in the nations who have survived Yahweh's universal judgment, there will be those willing to become missionaries, those willing to go into all the world to tell of Yahweh's saving acts and to declare His honor to all peoples." (P. 148)

Another passage with the noun אֹת / σημεῖα to be considered is **Isaiah 55:12-13**:

- 12 Because in gladness you people shall go forth;
and in peace you shall be borne along;
the mountains and the hills will break forth before you (with) a ringing-cry;
and all trees of the field will clap (their) hand(s)!"
- 13 Instead of the thorn-bush, a cypress / fir shall grow up;
and instead of the desert-plant, a myrtle (tree);
And it will be for the YHWH for a name,
for a long-lasting sign--it will not be cut off!

Knight states dogmatically that "That 'sign' will be the use God will make of His servant people, the remnant whom He has delivered and saved, and who are now living in full view of the nations of the world. These are the 'survivors,' and it is these whom God will 'send to the nations'...'Those whom God spares will become missionaries to the far world of strange place-names.' There 'the fields are white,' as we might say.

(continued...)

and I will send from them survivors¹¹⁴ to the nations,

¹¹³(...continued)

They are to go to people ‘that have not heard of My fame or seen My glory,’ that is, the story of God’s mighty acts and redeeming love...Only they can pass on God’s *tsedaqah* [Knight’s ‘love’; our ‘righteousness’], because only they have known God’s *tsedeq* in their own experience of ‘resurrection’ and renewal...Only they shall bring ‘all your brethren from amongst all the nations’ (persons such as Mordecai and Queen Esther who dwelt at the court of the Persian monarch?) ‘to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says the Lord.’” (P. 116)

What do you take this prediction of **Isaiah 55** to mean? Does it mean that when the people of YHWH experience His deliverance / salvation, and respond in joy and peace, and the desert around them is filled with trees instead of thorn-bushes, it will proclaim YHWH’s name, and be a long-enduring sign to the world, a sign that will not be cut off? Does it mean that the joy of YHWH / Jesus Christ, seen in the people who have experienced deliverance / salvation—Israel from Babylonian captivity, Christians through Jesus Christ—is the powerful sign that the world cannot overcome? What do you think? Do you agree with Motyer, or Achtemeier? Can you suggest a better interpretation?

It is a very important matter. What can the synagogue or church do in the modern world to “raise a banner” which will enable the many different nationalities and languages who are in our midst to come and learn about YHWH / Jesus Christ? Is it the banner of YHWH’s deliverance of Israel / the banner of Christ’s love? See **John 13:35**: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you love one another.”

If we say that the banner is Jesus Christ Himself, how can we raise Him up in such a way that all nationalities and languages will come to Him? Can we accomplish this without reaching out to those people in loving acceptance and welcome and selfless serving them in their deepest needs? Can we “set a sign” among them by hating them and telling them they are going to hell? Or can we “set a sign” among them by enabling them to get clean drinking water, and good housing, and enabling them to see with the removal of cataracts and good glasses?

¹¹⁴Watts comments that “In context *their survivors* refers to those who survive among the nations, although the antecedent for *their* is not defined. Or does it refer to survivors who are among the group in Jerusalem? Some of these Yahweh *will send to the nations.*” (P. 365)

Motyer comments that the phrase “‘And I will send some...’ is the clearest **Old Testament** statement of the theme of missionary outreach...The missionaries are *those who survive*, the ‘escapees’...In context they are those who have escaped the manifestation of the Lord in fire and sword (**verse 16**...) Some of these are now His emissaries to the world.” (P. 542)

Knight agrees (see footnote 113), and Ortlund likewise holds that the survivors

(continued...)

Tarshish, Pul¹¹⁵ and Lud, drawers¹¹⁶ of (the) bow,¹¹⁷

Tubhal and Greece, the Islands that are far off,¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴(...continued)

are “the remnant of Israelite believers who survive the judgment of God.” (P. 1362)

Who do you think these “survivors” are? Are they the people who out of the midst of a world in conflict, and under Divine judgment, experience the salvation / deliverance of YHWH such as Israel experienced from Babylonian captivity, or the salvation / deliverance experienced by both Jews and non-Jews in Jesus Christ, and who hear the Divine call to tell their story to the world around them?

¹¹⁵Where the Hebrew text reads פּוּל, pul, the Babylonian name of Tiglath-Pileser, the Greek translation reads καὶ Φουδ, “and Phoud,” of unknown meaning (see **Genesis 10:6** and **1 Chronicles 1:8**).

For occurrences of the name פּוּל, pul in the **Hebrew Bible**, see **2 Kings 15:19, 19; Isaiah 66:19** and **1 Chronicles 5:26** (where his other name is given as פִּלְנֶסֶר תִּלְגַּת, “Tilghath Pilneser.” The Latin Vulgate reads **Africam**, “in Africa.”

¹¹⁶Where the Hebrew text reads מוֹשְׁכִי, “drawing out,” the Greek translation has “and Mosoch,” the name of an unknown country which occurs in the following passages in the **Greek Bible**: **Genesis 10:2, 23; 1 Chronicles 1:5; Isaiah 66:19** (here); **Ezekiel 32:26; 38:2-3** and **39:1**. 1QIs^a is illegible at this point.

Some interpreters of biblical prophecy insist that this name means “Moscow,” the capital city of Russia, and thus make Russia the subject of biblical prophecies that include this name. But for the **Greek Bible**, it is the name of a country already in existence by at least the second century B.C.E., and the modern Russian City of Moscow did not come into existence until some time in the twelfth century C.E.

¹¹⁷A few Hebrew manuscripts omit the noun בִּקְשֵׁת, “bow,” as does the Greek translation.

¹¹⁸Watts comments that “These ancient missionaries (‘sent ones’ or ‘apostles’) are sent to distant lands. The Vision [of **Isaiah**] has given most attention so far to the nations in Palestine or immediately adjacent to it. But here the list reaches far afield in distance and in time (see **Genesis 10**)...The list uses ancient names and makes no effort to put them in current forms. It is intended symbolically. *They go out to those who have not heard God’s announcements.*” (P. 365)

(continued...)

who did not hear My report,
and did not see My glorious radiance;¹¹⁹
and they¹²⁰ will declare My glorious radiance among the nations.¹²¹

¹¹⁸(...continued)

Motyer comments that “The place-names are intended to be impressionistic rather than literal, creating a sense of world outreach...and the locations are at the least not certain...The task of the missionaries is to go into real situations, to face organized, independent peoples and actual dangers.” (P. 542)

Ortlund likewise states that these names “exemplify the remote places of earth.” (P. 1362)

¹¹⁹Motyer notes that “They have this in common, that *they have not heard of my fame* / ‘they have not heard a hearing / message / report of Me’ / ‘have heard nothing at all of Me’ or *seen My glory*.”

¹²⁰We understand this “they” to refer to those survivors who have gone to the nations.

Watts, however, evidently understands this differently, as he translates, “and those who have not seen My glory will make known My glory among the nations.” (P. 360) But, we ask, If they have not seen YHWH’s glorious radiance, how can they make it known?

¹²¹This passage is describing a world-wide “mission” of those who have survived the Divine judgment in history, and who have seen YHWH’s glorious radiance, some of whom He will send to the far-flung, non-Jewish nations, who will hear their report concerning YHWH. YHWH wants all the world to know Him!

This is very similar to the constantly repeated statement in **Exodus** that YHWH wants Egypt and Pharaoh to know Him. See **Exodus 7:5, 17; 8:10, 22; 9:14, 16, 29; 11:7; 14:4, 18.**

For this vision of universal mission of **66:19-21** compare:

Isaiah 2:2-3, And it will be / happen in a latter part / close of the days, the mountain of YHWH’s house will be established on top of the mountains; and it will be lifted up from (the) hills. And all the nations will flow / stream to it. And many peoples will go, and they will say, Come, and we will go up to YHWH’s mountain, to (the) house of Jacob’s God; and He will teach us from His ways, and we will walk in His paths;

Isaiah 56:1-8, those formerly rejected from the temple and its worship because of physical deformities, and because of being foreigners, are invited into YHWH’s

(continued...)

¹²¹(...continued)

temple and its rituals of burnt offerings and sacrifices upon YHWH's altar, and the temple is depicted as being what YHWH desires—a "house of prayer for all nations";

Isaiah 59:19, from the west, men will tremble in awe before the name of YHWH; and from the rising of the sun, they will revere His glorious radiance;

Isaiah 60:1-3, darkness covers the earth...but YHWH rises upon you and His glorious radiance appears over you. Nation will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn;

In addition see the description of YHWH's servant as a "light to the nations":

Isaiah 42:6, ...I will keep you, and will make you to be a covenant for the people, and a light for the non-Jews;

Isaiah 49:6, It is too small a thing for you to be My servant to raise up the tribes of Israel...and I will give for a light of nations / non-Jews, so that My salvation may be as far as earth's end.

There can be no doubt that YHWH's intention in saving / delivering reaches far beyond the return of the Israelite captives from Babylonia. They are only the beginning of YHWH's work. YHWH is raising up His servant-people to reach out beyond the boundaries of Israel, to all the nations, to bring them into covenant with Himself, so that they may share in His salvation / deliverance.

¹²²Oswalt comments on **verse 20** that "Although the purpose of the mission to the nations was not to regain the lost members of the house of Israel, that will be one of its results, as stated earlier:

Isaiah 43:6,

I will say to the north, Give!
And to (the) south, You shall not withhold!
Bring My sons from afar,
and My daughters from the earth's extremity!

Isaiah 49:22,

In this way my Lord YHWH spoke:
Look—I will lift up My hand to (the) nations,
and to peoples I will raise My signal;
and they will bring your sons in (their) embrace,
and your daughters they will carry upon their shoulder.

(continued...)

מִנְחָה לַיהוָה
בְּסוֹסִים וּבָרֶכֶב וּבְצַבִּים וּבַפָּרָדִים וּבַפָּרָוֹת
עַל הַר קְדְשֵׁי יְרוּשָׁלַם
אָמַר יְהוָה
כִּיאֲשֶׁר יָבִיאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה
בְּכָל־יְהוָה בֵּית טְהוֹר בֵּית יְהוָה:

And they will bring all your brothers¹²³ from all the nations,¹²⁴

¹²²(...continued)

Isaiah 60:1-22, portions:

- 3 And nations will walk / come to your light,
and kings to (the) brightness of your dawning.
- 4 Lift up your eyes and see all around--
all of them were gathered;
they were coming to you--
your sons from afar will come,
and your daughters upon a hip will be supported.
- 9 Because for Me coast-lands wait,
and the ships of Tarshish at the first,
to bring your children from afar,
their silver and their gold with them,
for YHWH your God's name,
and for Israel's Set-apart One,
because He beautified you!

“The believing Gentiles will come streaming to Jerusalem, bringing *your brothers* with them...These persons will be brought by the Gentiles as a precious *offering* to God.”
(P. 689)

¹²³Slotki comments that “This reference is ambiguous; it may relate to the nations conveying the Israelites, or the Israelites who are so conveyed, or both; most probably it is the second.” That is, no matter who does the conveying, the passage is describing

(continued...)

¹²³(...continued)

the return of the Israelites from their scattering throughout the earth—and they are “brother Israelites.” (P. 325)

Motyer, however, comments that “*Your brothers* are not fellow-Israelites—what an anti-climax that would be! What would be the point of saying that returned Israelites would become priests and Levites (**verse 21**)?...[Former] Gentiles [non-Jews] are gathered as *brothers* (compare **Isaiah 19:24-25** [where Egypt and Assyria are joined together as one with Israel]; **45:14-25** [foreigners out of Egypt and Ethiopia come, worshiping the God of the Jews; all the ends of the earth come, bowing in confession to YHWH]), and thus the promise of **56:8** [foreigners who bind themselves to YHWH, and whose worship is accepted by YHWH] is fulfilled.” (P. 542)

Ortlund likewise states that this mention of priests and Levites “speaks of Gentiles, perhaps as those who will carry out the calling of Israel (see **61:5-7** [in the year of YHWH’s favor, ‘strangers will stand and will shepherd your flocks; and children of foreignness will be your ploughmen and vine-tenders. And you will be called priests of YHWH; you will be named ministers of our God...’]), or else (in view of the mention of Levites) as those who will provide worship leadership within the people of God.” (P. 1362)

Although we are inclined to agree with Motyer at this point, we have to admit that the text is somewhat ambiguous, and both can be and has been interpreted in slightly differing ways. But there can be no doubt as to YHWH’s desire for the universal proclamation of His glorious radiance and the gathering of the nations and tongues to come and see that radiance.

¹²⁴The original text of 1QIs^a read **הַגּוֹיִם**, “the nations,” but a later hand has written **מִכָּל**, “from all” above the line.

¹²⁵The definite noun **הַמִּנְחָה**, “the gift,” or “the offering,” occurs over 200 times in the **Hebrew Bible**, and is, as Motyer notes, “the most widely used word in the offering vocabulary” (p. 542). The gift here is apparently “the brothers” who are brought back by the missionaries from the foreign nations—offered up to God as the fruits of their universal proclamation.

Knight comments that “All these are to come as an ‘offering’ to God, a **מִנְחָה**. This kind of offering was not intended to go up in flames, as was a burnt offering (**עֹלָה**)... It was a ‘substitute’ offering, here evidently for the sins of the Gentiles...”

“The view held by some **Old Testament** prophets was that at the end all the nations would assemble to be destroyed in one great burnt offering, one great sacrifice:

(continued...)

on the horses and in the chariot(s)

and on the litters and on the mules and on the dromedary camels,¹²⁷

¹²⁵(...continued)

Zephaniah 3:8, I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out My wrath on them—all My fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of My jealous anger;

Joel 3:2 I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of YHWH Judged. There I will enter into judgment against them...;

Zechariah 14:1-3 ...I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it...Then YHWH will go out and fight against those nations...

Not so the theology of the Isaian tradition.” (P. 116)

Watts comments that “The believers in the diaspora will bring your brothers in covenant and faith from all the nations [but where does this text mention ‘covenant’ and ‘faith’?]. They do this as *an offering to Yahweh* which is obviously far more acceptable than the ox or lamb in **verse 3**...The vision of **2:2-3** is coming true. See also:

Isaiah 11:9, “the earth will be full of the knowledge of YHWH”;

Isaiah 56:7-8, these foreigners who bind themselves to YHWH, “I will bring to My set-apart mountain and give them joy in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on My altar...” Note that this passage disagrees with the view that there will be no more Levitical sacrifices in the temple in the new Jerusalem.

Isaiah 65:1 YHWH revealed Himself to a nation that was not called by His name. (P. 365)

¹²⁶Alexander states that “The survivors sent forth to the nations are...described as bringing back the converts to the true religion as an offering to [YHWH].” (P. 477)

But where in the text is anything said about “converts to the true religion”?

¹²⁷The plural noun כַּרְכָּרוֹת, “dromedaries / one hump camels,” occurs only here in the **Hebrew Bible**. There is no corresponding word in the Greek translation.

Where the Hebrew has “on the horses, and in the chariot(s), and in litter-wagons, and on mules, and on dromedaries,” **Rahfs** has “with horses and carriages, in covered chariots of mules with sunshades.”

(continued...)

to¹²⁸ My set-apart mountain,¹²⁹ Jerusalem

–said YHWH¹³⁰–

just as Israel’s children will bring the gift(s) in a clean vessel¹³¹

(to the) house of YHWH.¹³²

¹²⁷(...continued)

Oswalt notes that “The ancients [meaning the various translations] had no idea of the meaning of the Masoretic Hebrew text’s כְּכַרְוֹת...1QIs^a has ובכורכובות [an unknown word or combination of words]...the Aramaic Targum has ‘songs of praises’; and the Latin Vulgate has ‘coaches.’ The Syriac translation omits the word...” (P. 682)

Motyer notes that “The list of [means of] transportation is as impressionistic as the list of nations. No distance or difficulty will stand in the way of bringing the brothers home; every [possible means of] transport will be put under contribution. Military transport (*chariots*) will be transformed to works of the gospel of peace; there will be *wagons* where there are roads, *camels* where there are deserts, but, in whatever way, all will come safely to *my holy mountain*.” (P. 542)

Knight comments that ‘It is not only warrior youths who will come to Jerusalem; the rich too will come in their chariots, pregnant women on the litters (or perhaps ‘covered wagons’), the poor upon their mules, the merchants upon dromedaries.’ (Pp. 115-16)

¹²⁸Or, “upon.”

¹²⁹Where our Hebrew text has הַר, “mountain,” **Rahlfs** has πόλις, “city.”

¹³⁰Again the phrase is אָמַר יְהוָה, “said YHWH.”

¹³¹Where our Hebrew text has “the gift in a clean vessel,” **Rahlfs** has “the sacrifices of theirs with psalms.”

¹³²As a result of this world-wide mission of making YHWH known to the nations, Israel’s “brothers” who have been scattered abroad throughout the nations will be brought back to Israel, to Jerusalem, by all sorts of transportation.

Can this mean that the “missionaries” are involved in returning the Jewish diaspora to Palestine, whom they present as an offering to YHWH, in the sixth and fifth centuries B.C.E.? Or are these “brothers” those from the nations, peoples and tongues who have seen the glorious radiance of YHWH, and are being brought to share in Israel’s worship (that is, “converts”)?

(continued...)

66:21¹³³ וְגַם־מֵהֶם אֶקַח לְכֹהֲנִים לְלוֹיִם

אָמַר יְהוָה:

And also from them¹³⁴ I will take (some)¹³⁵ for the priests, for the Levites,¹³⁶

¹³²(...continued)

Motyer, who holds that the reference is to Christ's missionaries reaching out to the non-Jews, states that "Coming to the holy place they will be as acceptable to the Lord as one of the offerings He Himself authorized His Own people to bring and which was brought with full attention to the rules of cleanness." (P. 542)

Alexander states that "The only general exegetical question in relation to this verse is whether *your brothers* means the scattered Jews or the converted Gentiles." (P. 477)

¹³³Oswalt comments on **verse 21** that "Not only will the people of the nations be pure vessels in which to carry the offerings of God, but some of them will be Levitical priests. This thought is so shocking that it can only have been intentional. It is of the same order as saying that a eunuch or a foreigner is a servant of God (**Isaiah 56:5-6**). It flies in the face of the teaching of the [Mosaic] **Torah**. Not even every member of the house of Israel could be a priest, much less any Gentile!...Nothing else could as effectively symbolize the breaking down of the barriers between Jews and Gentiles. If a Gentile can become a Levitical priest, a Gentile cannot be excluded from anything." (P. 690)

Yes, it flies in the face of the Mosaic **Torah**—see especially **Deuteronomy 23:2-4^{Heb} / 23:1-3^{Eng}**. But more than that, it flies in the face of the **Ezra / Nehemiah** movement among the returnees from Babylon, calling for the building of a wall of segregation between the pure people and the impure people of the land; it flies in the face of their demand for the divorce of foreign wives with their half-breed children; it flies in the face of the Zadokite demand that the priesthood should be exclusively the privilege of those descended from Tsadoq. This is **Third Isaiah's** powerful teaching, rejecting those narrow, nationalistic programs—that in later centuries developed into Pharisaism, that Jesus rejected so strongly.

¹³⁴The statement is ambiguous—does YHWH mean from the Jewish people being returned to Jerusalem following their dispersion, or does He mean from among the non-Jewish nations who bring them back? The statement can be, and has been understood in either sense. We wish that **Third Isaiah's** predictions were more specific—but in fact, they are full of ambiguity and somewhat enigmatic statements—as we should have expected.

Watts holds that "*From them also* means from the diaspora and the believers that come from everywhere." (P. 365)

(continued...)

¹³⁴(...continued)

Alexander states that “The only question here is to what the pronoun *them* refers. The Jews of course refuse to understand it of the Gentiles; and even Joseph Kimchi, who admits this application as required by the context, avoids all inconvenient consequences by explaining *for the priests and Levites*, to mean for their service, ‘as hewers of wood and drawers of water!’...

“The most natural interpretation...seems to be as follows: The mass of the Jewish people was to be cast off from all connection with the church; but the elect who should escape were to be sent among the nations and to bring them for an offering to [YHWH], as the priests and Levites offered the oblation at Jerusalem. But this agency was not to be confined to the Jews who were first entrusted with it; not only of them, but also of the Gentiles themselves, priests and Levites should be chosen to offer this oblation, i.e. to complete the vocation of the Gentiles.” (Pp. 478-79)

¹³⁵**Rahlf**s interpolates the phrase ἐμοῦ, “to / for Me,” or “to / for Myself,” as apparently does 1QIs^a which reads לִי, “to / for Me.”

¹³⁶Where our Hebrew text reads לְכֹהֲנִים, literally “for the priests,” a large number of Hebrew manuscripts, the Greek translation and the Harclean Syriac read וְלִכְהֹנָיִם, “and for the priests.”

Slotki notes that “Some commentators hold that converted Gentiles as well as the returning Israelites will, by Divine decree, be appointed as priests and Levites; but this is improbable since it is contrary to the laws of the priesthood.” (P. 325)

Motyer comments that “In Isaiah’s day only some Israelites were priests or Levites, and he works on this analogy, but by doing so demonstrates that the Gentiles come in on equal terms and into equal privileges.” (Pp. 542-43).

Achtemeier calls this “The most daring announcement, paralleling that of **56:3-8**...From among the foreigners streaming to Zion, Yahweh will choose some to become Levitical priests ...Just as in **56:7**, the temple is to be a house of prayer for all nations... But even more is said: foreigners can be priests, offering sacrifices to God and performing the duties of the sacred altar.” (Pp. 148-49)

Compare **1 Peter 2:5, 9**, where Christians are described as a spiritual house and a set-apart priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ, and quoting the **Hebrew Bible’s** description in **Exodus 19:6** of Israel as a “royal priesthood” and applying it to the Christian church.

Knight gives a similar interpretation: “Some of these outlandish foreigners ‘I will take for priests and for Levites...says the Lord.’ This was an honor not attainable even by ordinary Israelites...For it there is no precedent in the **Torah**. As Arthur Summer

(continued...)

said YHWH.¹³⁷

66:22¹³⁸ כִּי כִאֲשֶׁר הַשָּׁמַיִם הַחֲדָשִׁים

¹³⁶(...continued)

Herbert [author of **Isaiah 40-66** in **The Cambridge Bible Commentary** has put it: ‘This is in very truth (a sign of) a new heaven and a new earth!’

Watts states that “Yahweh will take some to be Levites and priests. The new openness will keep nothing reserved for special groups. Leadership in worship may be accorded to the pilgrims (see **56:3-8**...The temple, instead of being a place where privileged priests perform sacrifices, will have truly become ‘a house of prayer for all nations’ (**56:7**).” (P. 365)

Westermann comments that “The witnesses and messengers from the nations are really just as much a part of the chosen people as those whom they won over by their witness. They are therefore qualified for service in the holy place...This is a thing the orthodox [Jews] never dreamed of—the admission to the innermost circles of priesthood, the prerogative of descent, of heathen!” (P. 426)

We agree with these Christian commentators, although the text is not unambiguous. Those who are bringing the “brothers” are from the non-Jewish nations; they are bringing the “brothers” in vessels, some of which could not possibly be considered “unclean” by Levitical standards (see **Deuteronomy 14:7**, which declares camels as “unclean”). But these are among the vessels in which the offering is carried, and offered up to YHWH—they are performing a priestly function, and the unusual vessels in which they bring the offering are considered “clean”!

What do you think? Is the biblical text depicting YHWH doing a “new thing,” something unimaginable to orthodox Judaism? We think it is.

¹³⁷The phrase here in **verse 25** is again אָמַר יְהוָה, “He said, YHWH (did).” Compare **verses 7** and **8**.

¹³⁸Ortlund comments on **verses 22-23** that “The cosmos, which bore witness to Israel’s sins in **1:2-3**, is renewed as the environment for the endless worship of the new people of God, who represent *all flesh*.” (P. 1362)

By contrast, Slotki holds that **verse 22** depicts “Israel’s eternal existence and fame.” (P. 325) What do you think?

Knight comments on **verses 22-23** that “What will ‘remain’ therefore is that for which God, in the beginning began to create (**Genesis 1:1 RSV** margin), namely a new people. Throughout time He brought into being—He created or, as we have now learned to translate the word, He re-created (*bara*)—His people, from a ‘no-people’ to His Own possession (**Isaiah 43:15**,

(continued...)

¹³⁸(...continued)

I (am) YHWH, your (plural) Set-apart One,
Who creates Israel,
your King!)

But now they had gone through a new metamorphosis; they were children, ‘brought forth in one moment’ (**Isaiah 66:8**)...Trito-Isaiah is in the position to tell us that God’s love for His people, and the forgiveness inherent in His nature actually belong to eternity. Because this is so, God’s beloved and forgiven people too will necessarily ‘remain’ to all eternity. For, ‘God’s sustaining creativity’ is evidently what Paul Tillich declared to be another name for grace. The פְּלִיטִים, *peleytim*, the ‘survivors,’ the ‘resurrected from the grave of Babylon’ (**Ezekiel 37**), therefore could now possess the glad assurance that they had indeed inherited eternal life. They were persuaded of this because God’s re-creative love had now been acted out in history—now, in their lifetime and experience—so that their eternal destiny was no mere speculative philosophical hope.

“The end that this chapter deals with then is not merely something to happen in the distant future. It has happened now, because it has been an act of the eternal God. It is an event that, since it has occurred in history, speaks of the greatness and eternity of God’s loving purpose for human life...

“If we today hope to understand Isaian theology, we must rid ourselves from the influence of speculative ‘Greek’ thought and of the millenarian sects that have flourished down the centuries. One such end and resurrection had now occurred in history, that foreseen by Amos in 760 B.C.E. (**Amos 8:2**,

And He said, What are you seeing, Amos?
And I said, A basket of summer-fruit.
And YHWH said to me,
The end came / is coming to My people Israel!
I will not again pass over for him!).

Consequently, the end and then the resurrection that took place in C.E. 33—of God’s people Israel once again, but now in the person of one representative Israelite—is to be understood as the ultimate revelation of the nature and purpose of the living God.” (Pp. 117-18)

Achtemeier comments on **verses 22-24** that they are “appropriate to the whole of **Third-Isaiah**, a combination salvation-judgment oracle...The promise of new heavens and a new earth is picked up from **65:17**...and used as the basis of Yahweh’s guarantee to the faithful. Just as the new, transformed universe will last forever and never be destroyed, so the descendants of the faithful and the name of the faithful which they bear shall continue forever, in generation after generation (compare **56:5**). The thought is not of eternal life for the faithful (in contrast with **John 10:27-29**; **1 Peter 1:4**), but for the one form of immortality that the Hebrews knew at the time—namely,

(continued...)

וְהָאָרֶץ הַחֲדָשָׁה
אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה עִמָּדִים לִפְנֵי נְאֻם־יְהוָה
כִּן יַעֲמֹד זְרַעְכֶם וְשִׁמְכֶם:

Because just as the heavens, the new ones,
and the earth, the new one, which I am making¹³⁹

¹³⁸(...continued)

perpetuation of one's name and person in one's children and one's children's children (compare **59:21; 61:9; 65:9, 23**). The community of Yahweh's new chosen people will now continue forever.

“In that community will be included representatives of peoples, and **verse 23** pictures their procession up Zion to worship Yahweh on the occasion of every month's festival and every week's sabbath (compare **19:21, 23; 45:22-23**). The whole world now centers in Jerusalem and pays homage to God in His temple.” (P. 150)

Oswalt comments on these three verses that in them “the interchange of judgment and hope reaches its final climax. Here the issues of the **book [of Isaiah]** appear in their starkest simplicity...Only two categories of people exist: those who fall down before Him in worship, and those who foolishly rebel against Him. This in turn means that only two fates are possible for the human race. Those who worship Him will live forever, their seed and their name secure. But those who rebel against Him will die forever, their worm and their fire unending.” (Pp. 690-91)

¹³⁹Where our Hebrew text reads הַחֲדָשִׁים, “the new ones,” many Hebrew manuscripts and editions of the **Hebrew Bible** spell with **chatef-patach** instead of **chatef-qamets**, הַחֲדָשִׁים. The variant spelling makes no difference for the meaning.

Here the vision returns to the earlier statement in **65:17-25**, concerning new heavens and a new earth.

Oswalt states that “the new heavens and the new earth take the reader back to 65:17 and the note of rejoicing...that is sounded there. Thus the final segment begins and ends on the theme of joyous re-creation.” (P. 691)

The phrase with the qal present participle אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה, “I am making,” occurs in the **Hebrew Bible** at:

Genesis 18:17, what YHWH is doing, or is about to do, to Sodom and Gomorrah;

(continued...)

–are standing before Me¹⁴⁰ –a saying of YHWH--¹⁴¹

¹³⁹(...continued)

Exodus 34:10, YHWH is making, or is on the verge of making a new covenant with the apostate Israelites;

Isaiah 5:5, what YHWH is doing, or is about to do, to His vineyard that has yielded only bad grapes, not good grapes;

Isaiah 66:22, here; YHWH is making, or is about to make / create enduring new heavens and new earth;

Jeremiah 29:32, Shemaiah will not see the good things that YHWH is doing, or is about to do, for His people;

Ezekiel 22:14, the days which YHWH is making, or will make, on which He will deal with Jerusalem;

Ezekiel 36:22, YHWH is not acting, or about to act, for Israel's sake, but for the sake of His name among the nations, **32**, same;

Malachi 3:17, the day when YHWH is making, or will make, His treasured possession, **21**, the day on which YHWH is acting, or is about to act;

Nehemiah 2:16, the officials did not know what Nehemiah “is doing”;

Nehemiah 6:3, Nehemiah sends his opponents the message that “I am doing a great work...”

Motyer calls this qal active participle “a participle of the impending future, ‘going to make.’” (P. 543) We agree that this is probably the case—that the present tense is used of the immediate future—but it seems inappropriate if something more than half a millennium distant is intended.

Motyer comments that “The new creation and new city is the climax towards which all is moving. It has not happened yet but it has the certainty and perpetuity of something settled *before Me* and affirmed by the Word of the Lord.” (P. 543)

¹⁴⁰The phrase עֹמְדִים לְפָנָי, “standing before Me,” involves another qal active participle. The statement means that the new heavens and the new earth that YHWH “is making” already exist, that they are “standing before Him.” What should we take this to mean?

Is Motyer correct in understanding this to mean something that has not happened yet, but which “has the certainty and perpetuity of something settled” by YHWH's Word?

(continued...)

so your descendant(s) will stand, and your name.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰(...continued)

We are reminded of the **New Testament** affirmation that believers have already come to Mount Zion and to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God (**Hebrews 12:22-24**) but also holds forth the promise of entry into that city as their future hope (**Revelation 21-22**). How do you understand this?

Achtemeier evidently takes it to mean “will remain standing forever.” She states, “Just as the new, transformed universe will last forever and never be destroyed, so the descendants of the faithful and the names of the faithful which they bear shall continue forever, in generation after generation (compare **56:5** [a long-lasting name that will not be cut off]). The thought is not of eternal life for the faithful...but for the one form of immortality that the Hebrews knew at the time— namely, perpetuation of one’s name and person in one’s children and one’s childrens’ children (compare **59:21** [YHWH’s Word will continue in their mouths and in the mouth of their descendants]; **61:9** [their descendants will be known among the nations]; **65:9, 23**). The community of Yahweh’s new chosen people will now continue forever.” (Pp. 149-50)

What do you think? Do you agree with Achtemeier? Is a genalogical line of descendants the “one form of immortality that the Hebrews knew at the time”? How does **Isaiah 25:6-8**, fit with her statement?

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

Some scholars have denied that this passage is integral to **Isaiah**, and has been added from some unknown later “apocalyptic” source—but there is no textual evidence for such a view.

See in addition statements in **Psalms 22, 23, 49** and **73** that likewise point to immortality / eternal life in YHWH’s presence. It seems quite obvious to us that

Achtemeier’s statement is wrong, even though there are Jewish scholars who would agree with her.

¹⁴¹The phrase is **נְאֻם־יְהוָה**, means “a saying of YHWH.” It occurs more than 250 times in the **Hebrew Bible**.

¹⁴²Alexander states that this verse “is addressed to Israel as a church, from which the natural descendants of Jacob for the most part have been cut off, and the object of this verse is to assure the church that notwithstanding this excision it should still continue to exist, not only as *a church* but as *the church*, the identical body which was clothed in the forms of the old dispensation, and which still survives when they are worn out and rejected...

“The grand error incident to a change of dispensations was the very one which has perverted and obscured the meaning of these prophecies, the error of confounding the two Israels whom Paul so carefully distinguishes, and of supposing that the promises given to the church when externally identified with one race are continued to that race even after their excision from the church. It was to counteract this very error that the verse before us was recorded, in which God’s people, comprehending a remnant of the natural Israel and a vast accession from the Gentiles, are assured that God regards them as His Own chosen people, not a new one, but the same that was of old, and that the very object of the great revolution here and elsewhere represented as a new creation was to secure their perpetuity and constant recognition as His people...

“The Jews themselves understand this as a promise that their national preeminence shall be perpetual, and several of the modern [19th century] German writers give it the same sense in reference to the New Jerusalem or Jewish state after the Babylonish exile.” (P. 479)

Motyer draws the conclusion that “The blessings of salvation cannot be forfeited, because the Lord has promised that their ‘name’ is as durable as the new creation itself.” (P. 543) The text itself does not say this—and we insist that the promises of YHWH to His people are always conditioned on their faithfulness to His Word, their continuing to be “Word-tremblers.”

Watts comments that “This does not promise them eternal life in the **New Testament** sense (**John 10:27-29; 1 Peter 1:23...**), but it does promise permanence through a remembered name and line of children (**51:11; 61:9; 65:9, 23**).” (P. 365) This is similar to Achtemeier’s view, and our response to Watts is the same as we made to her in footnote 140.

Knight comments that this passage tells us that “God’s love for His people and the forgiveness inherent in His nature actually belong to eternity. Because this is so, God’s beloved and forgiven people too will necessarily ‘remain’ to all eternity.” (P. 117)

Knight is reading Greek philosophical ideas into this passage, which does not speak of God’s belonging to “eternity,” nor of His people “remaining to all eternity”—it simply describes them as “standing.”

What do you think? Need it be said that Christian interpreters of **Isaiah** quite often read their Christian theologies (Motyer’s ‘the blessings of salvation cannot be forfeited,’ Knight’s ‘all eternity’) into the text, rather than finding them there? We think

(continued...)

66:23¹⁴³ וְהָיָה מִדֵּי-חֹדֶשׁ בְּחֹדְשׁוֹ

וּמִדֵּי שַׁבַּת בְּשַׁבְּתוֹ

יָבוֹא כָל-בֶּשֶׂר לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לִפְנֵי אֲמֵר יְהוָה:

And it will happen as often¹⁴⁴ as a month (comes) in its month,
a Rest-day in its Rest-day,¹⁴⁵

¹⁴²(...continued)

that whereas Jewish scholars insist on reading Jesus Christ out of the text, Christian scholars insist on reading Jesus Christ and Christian theological ideas into the text. And we ask, can we not, both Christians and Jews, learn to let the text speak for itself?

We say, **Third Isaiah** believes and proclaims that YHWH has a purpose, a plan for the future. It involves new heavens and a new earth—and what YHWH has purposed is standing. It will not fall. But not only will the new heavens and the new earth stand—so will the “Word-tremblers,” the faithful people of YHWH who are saved from YHWH’s fiery judgments on the unfaithful. YHWH has a future for them that will not end!

¹⁴⁴Alexander states that “A slavish copy of the original would be, ‘from the sufficiency of new moon in its new moon, and from the sufficiency of sabbath in its sabbath.’” (P. 479) The phrase מִדֵּי, **middey** is the combination of two words, “from” and “sufficiency” (מִ / דֵּי, construct form), which results in a compound preposition with the idiomatic meaning, “out of the abundance of,” or “as often as.” Alexander states that “But although the form is so peculiar, there is no doubt...as to the essential meaning, that is, ‘from new moon to new moon or at every new moon.’” (P. 480)

This poses a difficulty for Alexander, as he holds that the prophet is describing worship under the new “economy” or “dispensation,” in which the Mosaic laws have been abrogated. He explains that “the Prophet, in accordance with his constant practice, speaks of the emancipated church in language borrowed from her state of bondage...Thus understood, the verse is a prediction of the general diffusion of the true religion, with the stated observances and solemn forms.” (P. 480)

We think this is an attempt to force the text to say what Alexander wants it to say. What do you think?

¹⁴⁵Where the Masoretic Hebrew text reads בְּשַׁבְּתוֹ, “on its (masculine) rest-day,”

(continued...)

¹⁴⁵(...continued)

1QIs^a reads **בשבתה**, “on its (feminine) rest-day.” The noun **shabbath** is sometimes considered masculine, sometimes feminine.

Watts notes that “*From a new moon to its (following) new moon* means every month. *Sabbath to...sabbath* means weekly.” (P. 365)

The people who enjoy YHWH’s new heavens and new earth, and who live in the new Jerusalem, are those who observe monthly and weekly times of worship. Here we think of the “new moon festivals” and the weekly “rest-days” of the Jews, turned into more than just Jewish observances, expanded to universal celebrations.

Knight states that “The new heavens and the new earth are now described finally in terms of God’s Own sabbath, God’s eternal rest (**Genesis 2:3**). But in so saying, Knight is again reading philosophical ideas into the Hebrew text. **Genesis** does not speak of “God’s eternal rest,” but rather of God’s rest on the seventh day of creation.

Motyer holds that those who enjoy the new creation “are specifically the people of the *new moon* and the *sabbath*,” and adds that “**Isaiah** ends with the perfect keeping of the two feasts whose corruption distressed him in **1:13** [because they were filled with iniquity!]. They are feasts, not fasts: the days of mourning are over (**65:17-19**). Also, the emphasis throughout **chapters 56-66** on the sabbath arose from the fact that this is the commandment which more than any other necessitates the submission of the practical planning of life to the Lord’s timetable, a searching test of practical holiness (**58:13-14**). The addition of the new moon, the celebration and hallowing of each month as it comes, increases the pressure to give first place to the Lord in the ordering of life. Only a true commitment of heart and no mere conformist motive can accomplish this.” (P. 543)

Contrast with this the **New Testament** passage, **Colossians 2:16-17**, which describes the Jewish new moons and sabbaths as “a shadow of things to come,” in an apparent warning to Christians not to observe them.

Oswalt comments that “Calvin is probably correct when he says that the point of the language here is to say that worship is not confined to specific days but is continuous [but, we ask, why does the text state specifically ‘new moons’ and ‘sabbaths’? Why not say ‘from time to time’?]. In the prophet’s vision people do not merely come up to Jerusalem at the time of the three great feasts, but every week [sabbath], and on the first day of every month as well...

“This is obviously symbolic language, since the possibility of people from all over a world like ours traveling back and forth to Jerusalem every week is ludicrous [but in fact, this is what the text depicts!]. But what is being symbolized is anything but ludic-

(continued...)

all flesh¹⁴⁶ will come to worship before Me¹⁴⁷—said YHWH.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵(...continued)

rous. The prophet envisions a day when the Spirit of God makes His home in every heart and where every heart is in Jerusalem. If the barriers between priests and commoners, between Jews and Gentiles are broken down, how much more the barrier between God and humans is broken down...

“No longer is God behind a great veil, accessible only to a small coterie [small, exclusive group] of elite [superior people]. Now all flesh can revel in the sight of His face.” (P. 692) What do you think?

¹⁴⁶The phrase כָּל־בֶּשֶׂר means much more than “all Jews.” It is a universal term, meaning “all human beings.” In **Isaiah**, see this phrase at **40:5, 6; 49:26; 66:16** and **23** (here).

Here the purpose of YHWH is expanded to include far more than just the Jews—it is a depiction of “universal salvation.” Motyer describes this as “the redeemed humanity.” (P. 543).

Watts notes that “*All flesh* is a term used three times in **chapter 40** [see **verses 5, ‘all flesh,’ 6, ‘all the flesh,’ 17, ‘all the nations’]** and three times in **chapter 66** [**verses 16, 23 and 24**] to describe Zion’s congregation representing all mankind.” (P. 365) We see no reason for saying that “all flesh” means “Zion’s congregation representing all mankind,” unless that is meant to say “Zion’s congregation is made up of all mankind.”

Oswalt asks concerning **verse 23**, “To whom are the promises given? Just to the people of Israel? Hardly. They are given to those of all flesh who worship Him from month to month and Sabbath to Sabbath. This is the ultimate end of Israel’s religion. That everyone should have the opportunity of joining Israel in worshiping the one God...

“Israel is not to be separate so that it can revel in its separateness, but so that its faith can survive to be declared. When separation becomes an end in itself, it has become just a more arcane [mysterious, secret] form of idolatry. But if Israel had allowed itself to be absorbed into the pagan religions around it, as it was constantly in danger of doing, there would have been no faith to declare.” (P. 691)

Ezra and Nehemiah would applaud this comment by Oswalt, but not **Third Isaiah!** **Third Isaiah** teaches powerfully that the returnees of Israel, instead of separating themselves from the people of the land and foreigners and those declared “unclean” and unworthy of entrance by legalistic interpreters of the **Torah** like the “proto-Pharisees” Ezra and Nehemiah, should reach out to all the peoples of the land, including foreigners and those cast off and excluded, to lovingly serve them as their neighbors, even to the point of dying on their behalf, as “suffering servants,” holding that this is the way into the future, which will result in the nations seeing in them the light of God at work, and come streaming to their God. This is the way, we believe, that

(continued...)

¹⁴⁶(...continued)

Jesus Christ understood **Third Isaiah**, and gave His ministry and finally His life to embody. What do you think?

Achtemeier comments that “In that community will be included representatives of all peoples [but where does the text mention ‘representatives’?], and **verse 23** pictures their procession up Zion to worship Yahweh on the occasion of every month’s festival and every week’s sabbath. Compare:

Isaiah 19:21, 23 [the Egyptians and the Assyrians will join with Israel in worship];

Isaiah 45:22-23 [turn to Me and be saved, all the nations; every knee will bow and confess].

“The whole world now centers in Jerusalem and pays homage to God in His temple.”
(P. 150)

Of course, such a literal universal worship service every week and every month would be impossible; the earthly city of Jerusalem or the Land of Israel as a whole could never accommodate such crowds—not in the time of Third Isaiah, and certainly not in the 21st century!

For the **New Testament** understanding, such worship is fully possible, as the physical, geographically limited city of Jerusalem is transformed into the spiritual Jerusalem, the Jerusalem lifted up above the hills and mountains, a universally accessible Zion / Jerusalem. See **Hebrews 12:22-24**:

22 But rather, you people have come (perfect active) (to) Mount Zion,
and (to) a city of (the) living God,
a heavenly Jerusalem,
and myriads / tens of thousands of (heavenly) messengers,
to a festal gathering,
23 and to an assembly / church of first-born people,
having been registered in (the) heavens;
and to a Judge, to God of all people;
and to (the) inner-most beings of righteous people,
having been made perfect / complete,
24 and to a Mediator of a new covenant, Jesus;
and to a blood of sprinkling,
speaking better (things) than the (blood of) Abel.

Do you think this interpretation of the new Jerusalem in the **Book of Hebrews** is valid, where the finite, limited earthly City of Jerusalem has been transposed into an infinite, limitless “heavenly city,” which has room for all flesh, for all humanity? If not,

(continued...)

¹⁴⁶(...continued)

why not? If so, how so? We think Second and Third Isaiah's use of Jerusalem / Zion lends itself to this kind of understanding.

¹⁴⁷The implication of this statement is that this universal worship of YHWH will take place in one particular place—and we assume that **Third Isaiah** understands that there will be a new temple in the new Jerusalem, to which the universal people of YHWH will come weekly and monthly, to join in their celebrations. If he is thinking of the temple built by the returning exiles from Babylonia, his prediction is impossible of fulfillment, since that temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 C.E., still today in the 21st century not having been rebuilt. And again we say that no matter how large and elaborate such a temple in the City of Jerusalem might be, it could not accommodate weekly and monthly “universal” crowds.

Motyer states that “The context requires that the locus of this worship is the new Jerusalem. That ‘all flesh’ could come to one city shows that **Isaiah** is running beyond the concept of a single location. This is the world city of the redeemed which we met in **chapters 25-26** following the fall of the world city of meaninglessness (**24:10**). Just as the latter described the whole world organized around humankind and excluding God, so the former, the new Jerusalem, is the new creation organized as the ‘city’ where the Lord dwells among His people; open and available to them in holy fellowship. The motif of pilgrimage adds the thought of their commitment to come to Him, their desire to be where He is.” (P. 543)

What do you think? Is Motyer reading all of this “running beyond the concept of a single location” into the text? We understand why he says this, as a world-wide community composed of all God's people throughout the ages coming both monthly and weekly to Jerusalem to worship strains credibility, being apparently impossible of fulfillment. But this is what the text states. What do you think?

Should we think of a “heavenly Jerusalem,” lifted up high above the mountains and hills, existing wherever humble “Word-tremblers” exist?

¹⁴⁸**Isaiah's** vision of the future includes monthly and weekly sabbath-day (“rest-day”) observance and worship of YHWH, the exact observances that YHWH declared Himself as hating in **Isaiah 1:14**, because of their being accompanied by iniquity. Obviously, the temple-ritual is implied, since some of those coming to Jerusalem will be made priests and Levites—which would be unnecessary unless the temple-sacrificial rituals were to continue. See **verse 21**.

In John's vision in **Revelation 21-22**, there is no such thing as “priests and Levites,” and no separate building used for a temple. Rather, the whole cube-shaped city is one gigantic “Holy of Holies,” where both God and the Little Lamb are constantly present. We assume that John's depiction is based on this passage in **Isaiah 66**, but going far beyond it, seeking to overcome its geographical impossibilities, but even with its enlargement, it seems far too small in the light of history.

¹⁴⁹Achtemeier comments on **verse 24** that here, the book closes “on a terrible note. As the worshipers leave the holy place, they see, on the city’s refuse heap, the dead, unburied bodies of the unfaithful in Judah...They have not only been slain but have suffered the ultimate indignity, for the Hebrew mind, lack of proper burial. At the city’s dump, their bodies feed worms (compare **14: 11**, [where the king of Babylon is told, ‘All your pomp has been brought down to the grave...רְמֹהֶר, maggot(s) are spread out beneath you and תּוֹלְעָה, worm(s) cover you”]...) and fire...and they serve as a source of disgust and aversion to all true worshipers of God...God’s enemies will be destroyed, and His new realm will come.” (P. 150)

What do you make of this? Is this, in fact the biblical “hell,” if taken literally, no larger than Old Jerusalem’s city-dump? Or is this symbolical language?

Oswalt comments on **verse 24** that “Although the promises of God are universal in scope, they are not universal in depth. No one dare ever think that because hope is always God’s intended word, one may sin with impunity. God will not force anyone to obedience against one’s will; the one who persists in rebellion has no hope...Hope is finally for those who accept the rationality of God’s arguments (**Isaiah 1:18-20**)...Those who refuse to do so will not merely be devoured by the sword (**1:20**), but will be devoured by fire and the worm.” (P. 692) Compare:

Isaiah 14:11, where it is said to the fallen King of Babylon,

Brought down to *sheol* is your exaltation,
the music of your guitars!
Spread beneath you for a bed are (the) maggots,
and for your bedspread, worms!

Job 17:14,

To the pit, I called out, You are my father!
My mother and my sister! to the worm!

Both of these passages are descriptive of *sheol*, the grave, where the physical body is eaten up by worms. They are not descriptions of an eternal “hell,” with unending, conscious suffering. We assume that the same thing is true of this depiction in **Isaiah 66:24**.

Knight comments on **verse 24**: “That ‘hell’ includes the concept of separation from God through the disintegration of the human personality is revealed to us in the autobiographical report of the young Isaiah in Isaiah 6. There he exclaims in horror, ‘Woe is me! For I am disintegrated (as the Hebrew means),’ finally ‘lost’ and annihilated (**6:5**). That terrible experience, like the reason behind the cry of desolation at

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Psalm 22:1, God answered; but He answered it by grace alone, as we see when we read on. Isaiah could do nothing for himself, he had reached the 'end.' But God sent, as an extension of Himself, a burning emissary (the meaning of *seraph*), 'having in his hand a burning coal which he had taken with tongs' (because it was too hot, with the heat of God Himself, even for a 'burning angel' to hold in his hand, though he himself was a flame of fire; [compare **Psalm 104:4**,

One making His messengers winds
His servants flaming fire(s).]

'from the altar'—that is, from the very heart of God (Isaiah 6:6). It was that terrible act of God which actually recreated Isaiah from dissolution, from being returned to *tohu*, to 'chaos,' to negation [compare **Jeremiah 4:25**,

I saw, and look—the human being was not!
And every bird of the heavens fled!]

It was of course forgiveness that created the renewal: 'Your guilt is taken away, and your sin forgiven' (**Isaiah 6:7**). It is not time or space that separates people from God; it is sin. But God's 'mission' does not end here. At once He sends Isaiah in mission to His people, Israel, even as He sends Israel to the world at 66:19. That which the young Isaiah had experienced existentially was, of course, an act of God. And so the reality of newness which he met with belonged with the eternal God in eternity. In other words, it 'remained' (**Isaiah 66:22**).

"Trito-Isaiah can thus confidently draw to a conclusion his 'completion' of the whole Isaian theology into which he had been born.. He does so by making plain the one reality that God has in store for all people. Mankind may suppose—even redeemed Israel may suppose—that death is the 'end' of the wicked. Just to the southwest of the city and over Jerusalem's wall there burned night and day in the Valley of Hinnom the rubbish dump of the city. But there was more to the smell from it than that of rubbish., for along with that went the terrible smell of roasting flesh. Jerusalem's citizens could go outside for a walk at any time, go forth and look on the dead bodies' there of unwanted babies, convicts, suicides, and all such as were beyond the pale, outside the covenant. The historical *Ge-hinnom*, which becomes 'Genenna' in New Testament Greek, was thus of eschatological significance because it revealed the severity of the judgment of God here and now and always. In fact, it was a kind of acted parable of the terrible reality of the eternal judgment of God.

"But Trito-Isaiah knew that obliteration in its fires cannot be the 'end' of the wicked, for it had not been the final end of the young man Isaiah; and God does not change over the generations. The end can only be God Himself, for He is the first and the last...

(continued...)

כִּי תוֹלְעֵתָם לֹא תָמוּת וְאִשָּׁם לֹא תִכָּבֵה

וְהָיוּ דְרָאוֹן לְכָל-בָּשָׂר:

And they¹⁵⁰ will go out, and they will look on (the) corpses of the men, the ones transgressing against Me—¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹(...continued)

“As Isaiah had said at **9:7**, the zeal of the Lord, His ‘burning’ perfectionism, would inevitably bring about the consummation of the Divine plan, that every knee should bow to Him (**45:23**). The love of God of Isaian theology is inexorable [imposs-

ible to stop or prevent]...It is known throughout the **Old Testament** by the Hebrew word chesedh (חֶסֶד)...It is the love that will not let us go.” (P. 119)

¹⁵⁰Alexander states that while the “they” of the plural verb is indefinite, “in so vivid a description it is certainly more natural to give the verbs a definite subject...that is, the worshipers assembled from all nations to do homage in Jerusalem.” (P. 480) Oswalt says that it means “the worshipers going out of the temple after worship.” (P. 692)

¹⁵¹Motyer comments that “Remarkably, there is a cemetery beside the city. Always as they come to worship, the redeemed deliberately make themselves face (*go out and look*), vividly, horribly, the fate from which they have been spared. Such grimness is not out of place in these final chapters of **Isaiah**.” He is referring to:

Isaiah 59:17-18, YHWH wears a garment of vengeance, repaying wrath to His enemies and retribution to His foes;

Isaiah 61:2, the day of vengeance of our God; **63:4**, same;

Isaiah 66:16, with fire and sword YHWH will execute judgment upon all; many will be slain by YHWH.

“In the truest sense of the word, the scene is too awful in its ceaseless corruption (*their worm will not die*) and unending holy wrath (*nor will their fire be quenched*).” (Pp. 543-44)

Those whose corpses are being consumed in the cemetery are identified as **בִּי הַפְּשָׁעִים**, the ones rebelling (a qal active participle) against Me.” This implies that the cemetery is not yet full—those rebelling are continuously being added to it.

Oswalt comments that “‘The worm not dying’ and ‘the fire not going out’ are apparently Isaiah’s ways of saying that as the worship of the righteous is perpetual (**verse 23**), so is the punishment of the rebellious.” (Pp. 692-93)

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because their worm will not die,¹⁵² and their fire will not be quenched;¹⁵³

¹⁵¹(...continued)

¹⁵²This phrase, תֹּלְעָתָם לֹא תָמוּת, “their worm will not die,” and the next, have been taken as a proof-text for the doctrine of “eternal, conscious suffering in hell.”

This passage was quoted by Jesus according to **Mark 9:48**, where He equates it with γέεννα, shorthand for “Valley of (the sons of) Hinnom.”

It is to be noted that there is not a word in the text concerning “hell,” or “Valley of the Sons of Hinnom” (although this is possible, since the cemetery is just outside the gates of Jerusalem, and this is the view of Jewish commentators such as Rashi and Slotki), nor is there a mention concerning conscious suffering. It is the consuming worm that doesn’t die, and the worm is consuming the corpses of dead people, not of living people. It is a picture of total extermination—not of conscious suffering.

What do you think? Do you take the phrase “their worm will not die” to mean they will live forever in terrible, agonizing suffering? We take it to mean that their suffering is being depicted as final.

¹⁵³This phrase, אֲשֶׁם לֹא תִכָּבֵּה, “their fire will not be quenched,” means that the fire that cremates the dead does not go out—it can’t be quenched. But that is not a depiction of eternal, conscious torment. It only has to do with the nature of the fire that cremates, burns up the corpses of those transgressing against YHWH. The reason that it does not go out, is that the corpses of those rebelling against YHWH continue to be added to the crematorium.

What do you think? Do you take the phrase “their fire will not be quenched” to mean they will continue to exist in burning flames forever and ever? This is the way the phrase has been understood in traditional Christian interpretation, and used, unfortunately, to “scare the hell out of people.”

Motyer describes this as an “endless state” (p. 544), but we think this is unfounded. What do you think?

Oswalt comments that “Isaiah assures his readers that the true servants of God, whether they be Jew or Gentile, will indeed triumph, and the rebels, likewise Jew or Gentile, will be manifestly defeated...If God’s Own people will come before Him with joy perpetually, those who rebel against Him will die perpetually [this is Oswald’s phrase, not that of the text!].”

“Some may say that this is an unworthy attitude for Christians, but one should remember that the most frequent statements about hell in the **Bible** come from the lips of Jesus. It is certainly unworthy to hope that the enemies of the gospel will never

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and they will be an abhorrence¹⁵⁴ to all flesh.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³(...continued)

repent and be saved, but it is not unworthy to be grateful that there is justice for them if they persist in their enmity [but the statements attributed to Jesus all use the phrase γέεννα, gehenna, from גַּיְהֵנָה (גַּיְהֵנָה), shortened from בֵּן־הַנְּחָשׁ (אֵי) “Valley of the Son of Hinnom,” a ravine south of Jerusalem. There, according to later Jewish popular belief, God’s final judgment was to take place. In the gospels it is the place of punishment in the next life, just as in this passage, **Isaiah 66:24**; we say, Jesus is depicted as reaffirming the teaching of this passage—see **Mark 9:43-48**]...

“Thus Isaiah’s great **book** comes to its end in ways not unlike those in which it began, with a reaffirmation of the great choice that lies before the human race: judgment or hope.” (P. 693)

¹⁵⁴The noun גַּיְהֵנָה “aversion,” “abhorrence,” “loathsomeness” occurs only here and at **Daniel 12:2**,

And many from those sleeping (in the) ground / dust will awake;
these to long-lasting life,
and these to the reproaches for long-lasting aversion / abhorrence.
(Here, in **Daniel**, it is translated by the Greek as ὄρασις, “a vision,” “a sight,” the same translation that is given here in **Isaiah 66:24**.)

In contrast to **Isaiah 66:24**, **Daniel 12:2** describes resurrection from death, with the contrasting alternatives of long-lasting lives and long-lasting abhorrence, evidently describing conscious, long-lasting suffering.

Just as we have stated that to take the Zion and Jerusalem of this prediction as a literal prediction of the future is today no longer possible—for the earthly Zion and Jerusalem are far too small for all humanity to gather, so we also say of this noun used by Jesus—the Valley of Hinnom is far too small for an eternal hell inhabited by all sinners. Jesus must be using the phrase symbolically, warning against the possibility of His followers committing the same kind of apostasy that led to the destruction of Jerusalem. It was what the Jewish kings, Ahaz and Manasseh did in the Valley of the Sons of Hinnom, sacrificing their children to the Near-Eastern Gods (Baal and Asherah), burning their bodies there, that gave rise to the horrifying view of Divine punishment.

But whether taken literally or symbolically, the warning is clear—there is a fate worse than death—we need to do all in our power to escape the never dying worm and the unquenchable fire! What do you think?

Alexander states that “This sublime conclusion has been greatly weakened and obscured by the practice of severing it from the context as a kind of moral application, practical improvement, or farewell warning to the reader. All this it is incidentally, and

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with the more complete effect because directly and primarily it is an integral part of the 'great argument' with which the whole **book [of Isaiah]** has been occupied, and which the Prophet never loses sight of to the end of the last sentence...

"The grand theme of these prophecies...is the relation of God's people to Himself and to the world, and in the latter stages of its history, to that race with which it was once outwardly identical...

"The great catastrophe with which the vision closes is the change of dispensations, comprehending the final abolition of the ceremonial law, and its concomitants, the introduction of a spiritual worship and the consequent diffusion of the Church, its vast enlargement by the introduction of all Gentile converts to complete equality of privilege and honor with the believing Jews, and the excision of the unbelieving Jews from all connection with the church or chosen people, which they once imagined to have no existence independently of themselves...

"The contrast between these two bodies, the rejected Jews, and their believing brethren forming one great mass with the believing Gentiles, is continued to the end, and presented for the last time in these two concluding **verses [23 and 24]**, where the whole is condensed into a single vivid spectacle, of which the central figure is Jerusalem, and its walls the dividing line between the two contrasted objects. Within is the true Israel, without the false. Within, a great congregation, even 'all flesh,' come from the east and the west, and the north and the south, while the natural children of the kingdom are cast out (**Matthew 8:12**). The end of the former is left to be imagined or inferred from other prophecies, but that of the latter is described or suggested in a way more terrible than all description...

"In the valley of the son of Hinnom, under the very brow of Zion and Moriah, where the children were once sacrificed to Moloch, and where purifying fires were afterwards kept ever burning, the apostate Israel is finally exhibited, no longer living but committed to the flames of Tophet. To render our conception more intense the worm is added to the flame, and both are represented as undying. That the contrast hitherto maintained may not be forgotten even in this closing scene, the men within the walls may be seen by the light of those funereal [appropriate to a funeral] fires coming forth and gazing on the ghastly scene, not with delight as some interpreters pretend, but as the text expressly says, with horror...

"In its primary meaning, it is a prophecy of ruin to the unbelieving Jews or apostate Israel, to whom the Hebrew phrase here used, **הַפְּשָׁעִים בִּי** [the ones transgressing / rebelling against Me] is specially appropriate. But as the safety of the chosen remnant was to be partaken by all other true believers, so the ruin of the verse becomes descriptive of the final doom of the ungodly...

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“Hell is of both worlds, so that in the same essential sense although in different degrees, it may be said both of him who is still living but accursed, and of him who perished centuries ago, that his worm dies not and his fire is not quenched.” (Pp. 481-82)

Motyer comments that “The purpose of visiting the cemetery is not to gloat, not even to pity (though who could restrain pity?), but to be repelled. To see and constantly refresh the memory that these are the consequences of rebellion, and so to turn in revulsion from such a thing and to be newly motivated to obedience by seeing that the wages of sin are indeed death.” (P. 544)

Motyer concludes his commentary on **Isaiah** by writing, “There is a grandeur about **Isaiah** not found elsewhere even in the most majestic of the rest of Scripture, a majesty full of glory and of solemnity, plain alike in the revelation vouchsafed to him and the language in which he was inspired to express it. But with the grandeur went a stern resoluteness, that if the glory does not win us to the life of obedience, if visions of the coming King, the sin-bearing Servant and the liberating Anointed Conqueror will not suffice, then maybe the unmistakably horrible rewards of disobedience will drive our wayward hearts to tremble at the Word of the Lord.” (P. 544)

Watts concludes his commentary as follows: “The vision [of **Isaiah**] has affirmed God and His purpose as revealed in His original creation. It has recognized the persistence of sin as rebellion and its terrible consequences. It has affirmed God’s continuing efforts to establish a new order. It has recognized divisions, even in Israel, between believers and unbelievers. It has affirmed God’s commitment to resist the rebels and support the humble, meek believers. The Vision has recognized the rebels as the religious conservatives of that day: the priests and the teachers of **Torah** who looked for God in the past. The Vision has affirmed that God is to be found in the new. He is out front in the future turning His back on the old ways. The Vision affirms His opposition to institutions and authorities, be they kingdom or temple, sacrifice, priesthood, or king. It affirms His commitment to open His city to ‘all flesh’ who want to worship and meet Him there.” (P. 366)

We both agree and disagree with Watts. Yes, the **Book of Isaiah** teaches its readers that YHWH God, the Creator, is still creating—bringing into being His new heavens and new earth, making it a “good” creation, fulfilling His will. But we doubt that **Isaiah** is as specific as Watts thinks, naming the “religious conservatives,” “the priests and the teachers of **Torah** who looked for God in the past.” In fact, **Isaiah** teaches its readers to look both to the future and to the past; the two views are held together in tension. God is certainly to be found in the new, but the God **Isaiah** worships is also the God of the past.

We also think Watts has greatly overstated the Divine opposition to institutions, sacrifice, and priesthood—and that **Isaiah’s** criticism is not of those things as such, but rather their magical use and perversion—especially their exclusion of foreigners and

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humble “Word-tremblers” from participating in them. It is not the temple itself that **Isaiah** rejects—but a temple that is closed to foreigners, and that is treated as the exclusive possession of a religious hierarchy—exactly what Jesus fought against in the final week of His life, and that caused His death. What do you think?

¹⁵⁵Here again, we raise the question concerning the nature of the prophetic vision. We are reminded of the teaching of **Numbers 12:7-8** and **1 Corinthians 13:9-12**, with their insistence that the prophetic vision, seen in dreams, is enigmatic, partial, and “seen through a mirror darkly.”

And we ask, are we to understand that **Isaiah 65-66** presents an exact, factually correct depiction of the future, with its new heavens and new earth? Or, should we take the vibrant hope along with the warning seriously, but still, recognizing the limitations of the prophetic vision of the future, not attempt to take every word and every detail of the vision as exact reality? What do you think?

There can be no doubt of the deep faith and conviction that undergird this prophetic vision, with its depiction of a future for the faithful people of YHWH (including Jews and non-Jews together), and their world-wide mission of making YHWH known to the nations. There can be no missing of the prophet’s conviction that YHWH Who created the first heavens and the first earth, is still at work, creating new heavens and a new earth, doing new things, creating a wonderful future for His people, including more than just the Jews, refusing to be bound by the narrow restrictions that characterized legalistic Judaism.

But, we ask, is **Isaiah’s** vision of a cemetery just outside the gates of the new Jerusalem a photographically correct picture of YHWH’s judgment on the wicked? If it is the literal Valley of Hinnom that is being described, with never-dying worms and unquenchable fire, is that tiny valley large enough for what so many call “hell”?

Are all the other details of Isaiah’s vision correct? Will they harmonize with the vision of John in **Revelation 21-22**? Is the life-span of God’s people in the new Jerusalem limited to only slightly over one hundred years? And will sinners still be present in that city?

Achtemeier comments at the close of **verse 24**, “Thus this book, which dreamed of a Jerusalem whose people could all be righteous (**60:21**); which envisioned all nations streaming out of the darkness into the light of a faithful and transformed city (**60:1-3**); which envisioned God’s purpose fulfilled for Israel, a blessing in the midst of the earth (**61:9**); which longed for God’s everlasting Presence with His Own as Comforter and Redeemer and King (**chapters 61, 62**), ends with Jerusalem divided and her first covenant come to nought; with a new, elect few remaining who have known how to worship God in humility and contriteness of heart; with the necessity of new heavens and a new earth to overcome humanity’s evil ways. God’s purposes of bringing salvation and of establishing His kingdom on earth do not fail. His Word stands forever sure.

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But human beings make awful and decisive choices about their places in that coming kingdom.

“It has seemed to be ever so in Jerusalem. Almost six centuries later, when God’s Son rode into His holy city, He wept again over its divisions, grieving that it did not know the things that would bring it abundant life (**Luke 19:41-42**). And He had to cleanse His temple again and quote the words of **Third-Isaiah (Luke 19:46)**.

“So too today, He comes surely to His people, the church. And He tells us that there will yet be a final division, in which some will enter into everlasting life and some into eternal punishment (**Matthew 25:14-46**). It is not an announcement we like to hear. We block it out by easily assuring ourselves that we will all be forgiven; and to be sure, God holds out hands of forgiving love to us in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, just as He held out His hands all the day to Israel in **Third-Isaiah’s** time, and called out, ‘Here am I, here am I! (**65:1-2**). But we have to respond to His call in faith and humility and obedience. It is that choice of which **Third-Isaiah** reminds us. It is that response to which **Third-Isaiah** summons us.” (Pp. 150-51)

We have deeply appreciated Achtemeier’s work on **Isaiah 56-66**. Especially, we have been deeply impacted by her honest statement which we have quoted before:

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

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

“The amazing fact, however, is that the final editors of the canon included all of these opposing views in our **Bible**. If the priestly writers [who centered their ministry and lives in the temple and its sacrifices] edited the **Old Testament**, they nevertheless did not exclude **Third-Isaiah**, despite its virulent attack upon them. They honored **Third-Isaiah’s** views. They let them stand. They affirmed, ‘Yes, this too is the word of God, and therefore it must be included along with His other words to us.’

In short, the Priestly editors found that these words of **Third-Isaiah**, which so

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judged their cultic ways, also mediated to them the truth of God and sustained their life in relation to Him. They therefore were willing to be corrected and judged by **Third-**

Isaiah for the sake of their relationship with God. [Achtemeier is thinking of the formation of the 'canon' of the **Jewish Bible**, the 'Old Testament.']

"Whenever we read the **Bible**, we must approach it in the same manner. We may find much in the **Bible**, especially in the **Old Testament**, that we do not like. We may encounter many passages that level awful judgment upon us and upon our ways. We may find views in the **Old Testament** that we think are contradictory to the views of the **New Testament**. But all such discoveries should not thereby be discarded. Rather, we should emulate the Priestly writers and preserve all the traditions, keeping them and pondering them in our hearts...

"Across the centuries, the church has found in its experience that these words of God in our canon give a true revelation of God and sustain us in our relationship with Him. For the sake of that relationship, we must be willing to listen to the total canon [We ask, is that all we should listen to? Should we not listen as well to Israel's other literature, the so-called 'Pseudepigrapha,' and should we not listen to the voices of other religions, who claim to have heard a Divine message? Should we not listen to the voice of modern science and culture, the voice of poets and philosophers and "rap" artists? Why should we exclude any voice?], for in that relationship alone can we have abundant and eternal life...

"We should have no illusions about the writers of the **Bible**. Like us, every single one of them was a sinful human being. There were no pure and undefiled authors of our Scriptures, writing Divine words dictated from heaven and untouched by human folly. There were only communities in a people called Israel, which found itself visited by the living God [We ask, were there not other communities, such as Syria and Philistia and Ethiopia, that found themselves visited by the living God? See **Amos 9:7**; and we ask, have not generations of Native Americans claimed to have heard the voice of God?]- communities of faithful folk who heard God speaking to them, who saw God at work in their midst, and who passed their testimonies to that working and speaking on to the next generations, until finally the word has come down to us in the form of our canon...

"Despite all our sin and shortcomings, and despite those of the biblical writers, God's word that He speaks through the scriptures is nevertheless so powerful that it truly mediates His presence and activity to all of us who open our hearts to it in faith."
(Pp. 154-56)

Yes, in a marvelous way, when we take up the **Bible**, the entire **Bible**, and study it seriously, listening to its divergent, sometimes contradictory, sometimes questioning, sometimes doubting, sometimes mistaken voices, we "enter the theological circle," and

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begin a dialogue with the writers of scripture, and with our own hearts, and with our God--learning to prayerfully ask serious questions, being led to form ever deeper and more faithful views, growing in our relationship with the living God, learning to say "both / and" where we have formerly dogmatically said "either / or."

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

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

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

Knight, at the close of his commentary on **Isaiah 56-66**, has a postscript, including the following observations:

(1) "The word "Jew" never occurs in the whole **Book of Isaiah**...Trito-Isaiah was aware that 'our father Abraham' was not a Jew but a Gentile. The Israelites of the exodus had been a 'mixed multitude' (**Exodus 12:19, 38**)...Trito-Isaiah knows that he and they were all members of a Theocratic society, rooted in God's choice of Abraham, with God as Father and with Zion as Mother. Moreover, he shows that all peoples, races, nations, and tongues are invited to join with Him in God's 'covenant fellowship'; he did not expect them to become 'Jews.'

"The **Book of Ezra**, which tells of the return to Zion, is basically a historical document. In it, Ezra reverts to the use of the term 'Jew.' Trito-Isaiah, on the other hand, gives no historical references whatsoever. He is not speaking or writing as a historian about a people known to history as Jews; his concern is with the work of God over the space of two hundred years in and through God's covenant people for the sake of the whole world of mankind.

"Thus the **Book of Isaiah** is not a 'Jewish book,' as has only too often been declared. It is a book of revelation meant for all who come after, whether Jew or Christ-

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¹⁵⁵(...continued)

ian. It thus provides the Jew, the Christian, and the Muslim with a common basis for faith, and in this way forms a meeting place for all three faiths.” (Pp. 120-21)

“(2) The amazing wholeness of the theology of ‘Isaiah’ alerts us to the folly of seeking to formulate a Christology or indeed a theology of the **New Testament** of any kind without reference to the **Old Testament**. Such an attempt must by its very nature be false, for it ignores—and thus acts in rebellion (פְּשָׁע, *pesha'* [our ‘transgression’], Isaiah’s word) against—the covenant which binds all the acts of God from Abraham to Paul into a purposeful, developing, and creative whole. Trito-Isaiah in particular, as the apex or crown of the **Book’s** sixty-six chapters, provides us with an insight into the nature of God that requires only the person of Christ to incarnate it and so to make it complete, and to perform it on the cross and so to render it effectual for all time and for eternity...

“‘Isaiah’ provides us with a picture, a pattern of revelation, hewn out of the facts of history. It is a picture of God’s saving love for mankind within the covenant that He Himself has given to the world in and through His historical, factual, empirical people Israel. This means that if ‘Isaiah’ has indeed produced a true theology, then our biblical faith is based, not on speculation, but on fact.” (P. 121)

“(3) In **The Origin and Goal of History**, Karl Jaspers declares that in the period about 550-500 B.C.E. we find the rise of what he names ‘axial man.’ According to Jaspers, the ‘axial religions’ that developed into Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, and others in the Near East, even including Greece, all began with a great urge in mankind to search for God and to find salvation for the human soul. Only Israel, as we can see, of all the people of the known world, thought otherwise. Israel’s spokesmen [prophets] in that period were Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah, along with the priestly group of scholars who were then completing the **Book of Leviticus**.

“We can see how the ‘Isaian’ prophets ignored this world movement. They declared, and only they, that mankind had no need to search for God, because God had already found mankind, in that He had already broken through the barrier that exists between the Divine and the human by forgiving mankind for the sin which separates them from God. Mankind in consequence was now able to *shubh* (שׁוּב, ‘come back,’ ‘repent’), thereby rendering irrelevant any kind of search for God.

“Sinful mankind had only to accept God’s gracious offer of life and to enter the covenant that God had first initiated with His ‘peculiar’ people—peculiar because they alone were not ‘axial man.’ Those already within the covenant were then to show to ‘axial man’ that God had found them too.

“That, then, was Trito-Isaiah’s basic insight. Parallel with it, moreover, was the priestly understanding of the covenant. The **Book of Leviticus** shows all people, both

(continued...)

¹⁵⁵(...continued)

those born with the covenant and those who enter from without, how they may *stay* within it and so continue to possess the fellowship of God.

“The law of the covenant, Trito-Isaiah shows, is a demanding one. It demands trust and obedience; for it is only in obedience that a person finds life and joy. That is why the offer of the law is accompanied by a threat to all who contract out of it. If a person does so, then the covenant partner turns into an opponent. It is God’s faithfulness to the covenant that obliges him to be a jealous God. God is therefore bound to be against those who refuse to accept His will for equal justice for all His creatures, equal distribution of the land, equal access to the sources of food, drink, and clothing. The foreigner, ‘coming in’ from outside, ‘who has joined himself to the Lord,’ must necessarily learn all this. Consequently it is for those already ‘in’ to teach the stranger about the will of God. What is required of the ‘resurrected,’ the ‘new’ Israel, is not so much to show ‘faith’ as to live in ‘faithfulness.’” (Pp. 121-23)

“(4) Finally, in Trito-Isaiah’s work we have much emphasis laid upon *the land*... Israel’s land is the great ‘sacrament’ of the covenant...Trito-Isaiah is no Platonic philosopher, separating soul from body, mankind from their environment, even as did the mystery religions also in the early Christian centuries...

“Since a person’s body is composed of ‘the bread and the wine’ which grows out of the land (as **Hosea 2**), the new heaven and new earth, or ‘land,’ must necessarily contribute to the new person’s wholeness. This is the wholeness not only of the New Jerusalem, but also of the One Who epitomises the resurrected Israel in the world to come.” (P. 123)

1. **The Interrogative Phrase הַיְשָׁרָה , “Where Is This?” in the Hebrew Bible**

1 Samuel 9:18,

And Saul approached Samuel in the gate’s midst,
and he said, Tell me now / please, where is this, the seer’s house?
(Rahlfs translates the phrase by ποῖος , “what kind of?”)

1 Kings 13:12,

And their father said to them, Where is this, the way / path he walked?
And his sons saw the way / path which (the) man of the God walked who
came from Judah.
(Rahlfs translates the phrase by ποῖα , “what kind of?”)

1 Kings 22:24, (2 Chronicles 18:23, same),

And Tsidqiyahu, son of Kenanah approached,
and he struck Miykayehu upon the jaw / cheek.
And he said where is this, YHWH’s spirit passed over from me to speak with
you?
(Rahlfs translates the phrase by one word, ποῖον , “of what kind?”)

2 Kings 3:8,

And he said, Where is this, the way / path we should go up?
And he said, (The) way / path of Edom’s wilderness.
(Rahlfs translates the phrase by ποῖα , “what kind of?”)

Job 38:19,

Where is this, the way / path (where) light dwells?
And darkness, where is this, his place?
(Rahlfs translates by ποῖα , “what kind of?” and ποῖος , “what kind of?”)

Job 38:24,

Where is this, the way / path light is divided,
east wind is scattered upon earth?
(Rahlfs translates by πόθεν , “from what place?” “where?”)

Ecclesiastes 2:3,

I searched in my heart to draw out my flesh with the wine,
and my heart guiding with the wisdom,
and to take strong hold on folly,

until I would see where is this--good for the children of the human--
that they should do beneath the heavens, throughout their lives' few days.
(**Rahlfs** translates by ποῖον, "What sort of?")

Ecclesiastes 11:6,

In the morning, sow your seed,
and to the evening you shall not let your hand rest.
Because you are not knowing whether this will prosper,
this one or that one--
and if both of them, as one, good ones!
(**Rahlfs** translates by ποῖον, "what sort of?")

Isaiah 50:1,

In this way YHWH spoke:
Where is this--your mother's writing of cutting-off / divorce which I sent
her?
Or who from among my creditors to whom I sold you people?
Look--by the iniquities of yours you were sold;
and by your transgressions your mother was sent away!
(**Rahlfs** translates by ποῖον, "what sort of?")

Isaiah 66:1,

In this way YHWH spoke:
The heavens--My throne; and the earth--footstool of My feet!
Where is this--a house / temple which you (plural) will build for Me?
And where is this--a place of My rest?
(**Rahlfs** translates by ποῖον, "What sort of?" and ποῖος, "What sort of?")

Jeremiah 6:16,

In this way YHWH spoke:
Stand upon (the) paths / ways and see,
and ask for (the) long-lasting pathways--
where is this, (the) path / way, the good one?
And walk on it, and find a rest for your innermost-beings!
And they said, We will not walk (on it)!
(**Rahlfs** translates by ποῖα, "What sort of?")

2. **Occurrences Of The Noun מְנוּחָה, "Rest," In The Hebrew Bible:**

Genesis 49:15, in Jacob's predictions of his sons' futures, he depicts Issachar as a
"raw-boned donkey" who saw a resting-place that it is good, and a land that it is
pleasant, that is, the area in the promised land where his tribe would settle;

Numbers 10:33, the ark of the covenant traveled with the Israelites through the wilderness, spying out, or seeking for them a resting-place, that is, a stopping place on their journey;

Deuteronomy 12:9, in the Arabah, east of the Jordan, Moses explains to Israel that they have not yet reached the resting-place and the inheritance that YHWH was giving them; that is, the land of the Canaanites to the west of the Jordan, which was intended to be Israel's final "stopping-place," or "resting-place";

Judges 20:43, probably the name of a place near Gibeah;

2 Samuel 14:17, the noun occurs in the mouth of a woman addressing King David, evidently meaning something like David's decision giving her "rest";

1 Kings 8:56, King Solomon blesses YHWH, "Who gave a place of rest to His people Israel"; this is different from the temple's being YHWH's place of rest;

Isaiah 11:10, in the time when the "Branch" or "Root" out of Jesse's stump comes-- obviously the promised King of the future--to whom the nations of earth will rally, his resting-place will be glorious; we naturally ask, where will that be? Jesus, the Messiah, says, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest", **Matthew 11:28**. Jesus Himself is the resting-place!;

Isaiah 28:12, God has said to Israel, "this is the resting-place, let the weary rest," and "this is **הַמְנוּחָה**, the place of repose, a synonym of **הַמְנוּחָה**"--but Israel would not listen;

Isaiah 32:18, And My people will dwell in peaceful settlements, and in secure homes, and in secure resting-places;

Isaiah 66:1, here; YHWH asks, "Can a building on earth truly be YHWH's resting-place?", implying that any building on earth is too small, and cannot be such, because the heavens are His throne, and the earth is the footstool of His feet!;

Jeremiah 45:3, Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, complains that he has found no resting-place, evidently meaning a home and security;

Jeremiah 51:59, the "whispering wizard" editor informs the reader that Seraiah was **שַׂר מְנוּחָה**, "chief of resting place(s)," probably meaning officer in charge of arranging camps for Israel's captives;

Micah 2:10, people are being driven out from their resting-place, their pleasant homes;

Zechariah 9:1, strangely, this passage states literally in Hebrew that YHWH's Word is in Syria, and that Damascus is His resting-place; English translations refuse to translate this way;

Psalm 23:2, “In pastures of grass (YHWH my Shepherd) causes me to lie down; beside waters of resting-places He leads me”; his personal relationship with YHWH means the psalmist has found guidance and provision for his deepest needs; the psalmist is using the metaphor of shepherding to describe religious realities; he has found his “resting-place” in YHWH; compare **Matthew 11:28-30**;

Psalm 95:11, Israel is called to worship God their Shepherd; but a prophetic voice speaks in the midst of their worship, warning that they must listen to His voice, and not have hardened hearts like Israel in the wilderness at Meribah and Massa; for forty years YHWH was disgusted with their fathers, and swore in His anger, “they will not enter into My resting-place”—meaning that the wilderness generation would not be able to enter into YHWH’s promised resting-place, the land of Israel; this is the key text from the **Hebrew Bible** in **Hebrews 3:1-4:13**;

Psalm 132:8, speaking of the bringing of the ark of the covenant from the fields of Jair to the moveable sanctuary in Jerusalem, to its resting-place, where Israel will worship at YHWH’s footstool;

Psalm 132:13-14,

13 Because YHWH chose Zion;

He desired it for a dwelling-place for Himself.

14 This is My resting-place until until [so, the Hebrew text literally];

Here I will dwell, because I desired it.

(Is this the kind of belief that **Isaiah 66:1** is questioning? We think it is.)

Ruth 1:9, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law that they should return to their mothers’ homes, and asks YHWH’s blessing on them that they may find a resting-place in the home of another husband;

1 Chronicles 22:9, YHWH tells David that his son Solomon “will be a man of a place of rest, and I will give rest to him from all his enemies from (all) around”;

1 Chronicles 28:2, David tells how he had it in his heart to build a house (or ‘temple’) as a place of rest for the chest / ark of the covenant.

3. Occurrences Of The Masculine Plural Noun שְׂקוּזִים, “Detested Things” In The Hebrew Bible

Deuteronomy 29:16^{Heb} / **17**^{Eng}, And you saw their detestable things, even their idols-- wood and stone, silver and gold—which were with them,” that is with the nations

in Egypt and the people through which they passed on their way to the promised land. It seems apparent that here the two nouns שְׂקוּצֵיהֶם and גִּלְלֵיהֶם are synonyms, and that “detested things” means “idols”);

1 Kings 11:5, Solomon followed after “Milkom, detested idol of the Ammonites”;

1 Kings 11:7, 7, Chemosh, detested idol of Moab and Molech, detested idol of the Ammonites; note here the change from Milkom to “Molech.” switching from a root meaning “king” to a root meaning “filth”; **2 Kings 23:13, 13** (similar; Josiah’s reform removed Ashtoreth, detestable idol of the Sidonians Chemosh and Molech), **23:24** (Josiah also got rid of all the detestable idols and practitioners of their worship in Israel);

Isaiah 66:3, here; the worshipers have chosen “abominations” to worship;

Jeremiah 4:1, Israel will be blessed by YHWH if she will put away her detestable idols;

Jeremiah 7:30, Israel has set up detestable idols in the temple in Jerusalem; **32:34** (similar);

Jeremiah 13:27, YHWH has seen sexually immoral Jerusalem’s detestable idols in her valleys;

Jeremiah 16:18, “...their defiling my land with [the] carcass of their detestable idols, and (with) their abominations (another synonym for idols) they filled My inheritance”;

Ezekiel 5:11, My set-apart place you (singular) defiled with all your detestable idols and with all your abominations”; similar to **Deuteronomy 29:16 (17)**);

Ezekiel 7:20, images of their abominations, their detestable idols, they made”; (again using the two synonyms); **11:18** (similar), **21** (similar);

Ezekiel 20:7, 8, שְׂקוּצֵי appears along with גִּלְלֵי מִצְרַיִם, “idols of Egypt” as in **Deuteronomy 29:16, 30** (verses 17 and 31 in English), “their detestable idols”;

Ezekiel 37:23, and they will not defile themselves again with their idols even with their detestable idols;

Hosea 9:10, “they came (to) Baal-Peor, and they were consecrated to the shame (a play on words; **baal** is pronounced **bosheth**, ‘shame’), and detestable idols became like they loved them”;

Nahum 3:6, “and I will throw your (Nineveh’s) detestable idols upon you”;

Zechariah 9:7, “and I will remove his blood from his mouth, and his detestable idol(-food)s from between his teeth”;

Daniel 9:27, the phrase “and upon wing of detestable idols, one making desolate”;

Daniel 11:31, “and they will remove the continual (burnt offering), and they will (re)place (it with) the detestable idol making desolate”; **12:11** (closely similar);

2 Chronicles 15:8, upon hearing the prophecy of Oded, Asa removed the detestable idols from the land of Judah.

4. **Barren Lady Zion Gives Birth To The New Jerusalem**

2 Kings 19:31; Isaiah 37:32, because from Jerusalem will go forth a remnant, and escapee(s) from Mount Zion–YHWH of Armies’ jealousy will do this! (part of Isaiah’s message to Hezekiah at the time of the Assyrian Sennacherib’s coming invasion);

Isaiah 54:1-8, 11-13,

- 1 Give a ringing cry, barren woman—(who) did not give birth;
break forth a ringing shout, and cry out, (you who) did not have labor-pains!
Because more (are the) children of her who is desolate,
than the married woman’s children!
YHWH said (it).
- 2 Enlarge your tent’s place,
and your dwelling-places’ curtains, spread out—don’t hold back;
lengthen your cords,
and strengthen your tent-pegs!
- 3 Because you will spread out to (the) right and (to the) left;
and your descendants will possess nations!
And desolated cities they will inhabit!
- 4 Do not be afraid,
because you will not be put to shame;
and you will not be humiliated--
because you will not be caused ashamedness!
Because your youth’s shame, you will forget,
and (the) reproach of your widowhood you will not remember again!
- 5 Because (the) One marrying you (is) your Maker--
YHWH of Armies (is) His name;
and your Redeemer / Next-of-kin (is) Israel’s Set-apart One--
“God all the earth” He will be called!
- 6 Because like a forsaken woman and pained of spirit, YHWH called you,
and a wife (married in) youth that will be rejected,
said your God.
- 7 For a small moment I forsook you;
and with great compassions I will gather you together!
- 8 In a flood of wrath I hid My face from you (for) a moment
and with long-lasting steadfast-love I had compassion on you!
said your Redeemer / Next of Kin, YHWH!...
- 11 Poor woman, storm-driven, one not comforted,
look—I (am) laying down your stones with the [mortar for precious stones]
and I will built your foundations with the sapphire-stones!
- 12 And I will place your pinnacles like the precious-stone,
and your gates for sparkling-stones
and all your boundaries for stones-of delight.
- 13 And all your children—learners of YHWH;
and great peace / prosperity (for) your children!

Without going into detail in discussing this beautiful passage, we simply note that this is exactly what **Third-Isaiah** is referring to here in **Isaiah 66:8-9**, as well as being one of the sources for the prophetic vision of **Revelation 21:10, 18-21**. YHWH God is continuing His new creation, building His new Jerusalem out of the barren and the desolate, the forsaken and rejected, the storm-driven, in spite of their former shame and reproach—and in spite of their being rejected as “unclean” by the Ezra / Nehemiah

movement!

5. **Peace, Welfare, Security in the Book of Isaiah**

Isaiah 9:5-6^{Heb} / 6-7^{Eng}, “To us a child is born...the prince of peace...Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end,” a promise for the future;

Isaiah 26:3, “a decided (or ‘leaned,’ ‘rested’) mind / purpose You will keep in peace—peace, because in You it trusted”; **JPS 1917** has “The mind stayed on Thee Thou keepest in perfect peace; because it trusteth in Thee”; **Tanakh** has “The confident mind You guard in safety, In safety because it trusts in You”; **New English** has “You keep completely safe the people who maintain their faith, for they trust in You,” something that can be enjoyed in this life—here and now--through trust in YHWH;

Isaiah 26:12, “YHWH, You will establish peace for us; because also, all our deeds You have done for us,” an expression of Israel’s hope for the future, not based on any proud claims;

Isaiah 27:5, 5, YHWH says, “let them, the thorns and briars, make peace with Me, yes, let them make peace with Me”—a metaphor for something possible in the present;

Isaiah 32:17, 18

- 17 And the work of the righteousness--peace;
and the labor of the righteousness—to be quiet, and security until long-lasting time.
- 18 And My people will live in a habitation of peace,
and in dwelling-places of confidence,
and in resting-places at ease (a possibility in this life, produced by righteousness; but also a hope for the future);

Isaiah 33:7, “the envoys of peace weep bitterly”;

Isaiah 38:17, Hezekiah’s prayer says that his bitterness was for his **shalom**, welfare;

Isaiah 39:8, Hezekiah thinks, “There will be peace and security in my lifetime,” obviously something that can be enjoyed in this life;

Isaiah 41:3, evidently meaning Cyrus goes on his way in welfare, something he enjoys in this life;

Isaiah 45:7, YHWH claims that He is the One “forming light and creating darkness; making peace and creating evil—I, YHWH, Who does all these!” (This is a passage that radically rejects dualism. It affirms that YHWH makes peace in history—as well as creating evil, forming light and creating darkness. There is no way to more emphatically state the biblical view of radical monotheism!);

Isaiah 48:22, There is no peace, says YHWH, for the wicked (—a present reality);

Isaiah 52:7, How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation

(something being proclaimed as having come to people in this life-time);

Isaiah 53:5, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him (the suffering servant—those benefitting from the sacrifice of the servant have received peace as a result);

Isaiah 54:10, Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet My unfailing love for you will not be shaken; nor My covenant of peace be removed (something that YHWH continually wants His people to enjoy);

Isaiah 54:13, All your sons will be taught by YHWH, and great will be your children's peace (a wonderful promise for Israel's future);

Isaiah 55:12, You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace (another promise for the future);

Isaiah 57:2, Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death (something entered into by those who walk uprightly, and that continues in death);

Isaiah 57:19, Peace, peace, to those far and near, says YHWH (this is what YHWH desires for all people);

Isaiah 57:21, There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked (peace cannot come apart from righteousness);

Isaiah 59:8, The way of peace they do not know (a present reality);

Isaiah 60:17, I will make peace your governor, and right relationship your ruler (YHWH's promise for the future of His people).

7. Occurrences of “Fire” in the Book of Isaiah

Isaiah 1:7, here; Judah’s country is burned by fire as part of YHWH’s judgment on her insipid religion;

Isaiah 4:5, in the day of YHWH’s “Branch,” YHWH’s fire by night will protect Zion, just as in the wilderness wandering;

Isaiah 5:24-25, fire burns the enemies of YHWH among His people Israel;

Isaiah 9:4^{Heb} / 5^{Eng}, warriors’ clothing is to become fuel for the fire, as a child bringing peace is born;

Isaiah 9:17-20^{Heb} / 18-21^{Eng}, wickedness burns like a fire by the wrath of YHWH of Armies—a description of internecine warfare in Northern Israel;

Isaiah 10:16-17, YHWH will send a fire against the proud ruler of Assyria;

Isaiah 26:11, a prayer—let YHWH’s fire, reserved for His enemies, consume them!;

Isaiah 29:6, YHWH of Armies will come with fire against the hordes of enemies of His people;

Isaiah 30:27-28, YHWH comes in judgment, His tongue like a consuming fire, shaking the nations in the sieve of destruction; note that **Hebrews 12:29** states “Our God is a consuming fire”!;

Isaiah 30:31-33, YHWH will shatter Assyria, fighting against her to music; a topheth / burial place for children sacrificed and cremated to the fertility Goddess, filled with fire, has been prepared for the Assyrian king;

Isaiah 33:11-14, the sinners / missers-of-the-mark in Zion have to endure consuming fire, long-lasting burning;

Isaiah 37:19, Hezekiah in his prayer admits that the Assyrian kings have laid waste peoples and lands, and have thrown their hand-made Gods into the fire, destroying them;

Isaiah 43:2; YHWH will protect His people from the fire when they walk through it;

Isaiah 44:16-20, a log from the forest is used by the idol-maker for two purposes: some for a fire to cook with, and some to shape into an idol to be bowed down to;

Isaiah 47:14, Babylon’s magic and sorceries are worthless—like stubble the fire burns up; the magicians and sorcerers cannot save themselves from the power of the flame;

Isaiah 50:11; whereas those who trust in YHWH can walk in the dark, those who light

fires for themselves and walk in their light will lie down in torment;

Isaiah 54:16; Look—I, I created an engraver, one blowing on a coal-fire, and one bringing forth an instrument for his work; and I created a destroyer to destroy!;

Isaiah 64:1, the verse division here is faulty; the last half of **63:19** should go with **64:1**, as **New International** has done; O that You, YHWH, would tear the heavens apart--(that) You came down, mountains trembled before You, as when fire sets brushwood...;

Isaiah 64:10^{Heb} / **11**^{Eng} House of our set-apartness and our beauty / glorying, where our fathers praised You, has become to a burning of fire; and all pleasant things has (so the Hebrew) become to a desolation! (there can be little doubt that this statement was uttered after 586 B.C.E.);

Isaiah 65:5, people claiming to be too holy to touch are smoke in YHWH's nostrils, a fire burning all day long;

Isaiah 66:15-16, YHWH will come with the fire...and His rebuke in flames of fire! Because with the fire YHWH is judging...;

Isaiah 66:24, As pilgrims from all over the world who have come to the new Jerusalem to worship leave the city, they will see the corpses of people, whose worm will not die, and their fire will not be quenched.

8. Occurrences Of The Noun **אַף**, “Nose / Anger” In The Book Of Isaiah

Isaiah 2:22 (nose);

Isaiah 3:21 (nose);

Isaiah 5:25, 25 (YHWH's anger);

Isaiah 7:4 (human anger);

Isaiah 9:11, 16, 20^{Heb} / 12, 17, 21^{Eng} (YHWH's anger); **10:4** (same);

Isaiah 10:5 (the Assyrian is the rod of YHWH's anger);

Isaiah 10:25 (YHWH's anger against His people in Zion);

Isaiah 12:1 (YHWH's anger has turned away);

Isaiah 13:3 (YHWH has summoned His warriors to carry out His anger);

Isaiah 13:9 (the day of YHWH is a day of fierce anger);

Isaiah 13:13 (YHWH of Armies' burning anger);

Isaiah 14:6 (rulers in anger struck down peoples);

Isaiah 26:8 (used as a conjunction, denoting addition, especially of something greater, "also," "yea"), **9** (same), **11** (similar); **30:27** (YHWH's burning anger), **30** (same); **33:2** (conjunction, "also"); **35:2** (similar); **37:29** (YHWH will put a hook in Sennacherib's nose!); **41:10, 10** ("surely"), **23** (same), **26, 26, 26** (all three, the same);

Isaiah 42:13 (YHWH's anger roaring against His enemies), **25** (similar);

Isaiah 43:7 (conjunction, "surely"), **19** (same); **44:15, 15** (similar), **16** (same), **19** (similar); **45:21** (similar); **46:6, 7** (both similar), **11, 11, 11** (similar);

Isaiah 48:9 (YHWH's delayed anger);

Isaiah 48:12 (conjunction "also"), **13** (conjunction, "surely"), **15** (similar);

Isaiah 49:23 ("noses" of kings and queens bow to the earth as they take "foster care" of the returning Israelites);

Isaiah 63:3 (YHWH's anger), **6** (same);

Isaiah 65:5 (people who are smoke in YHWH's nose);

Isaiah 66:15 (YHWH's anger).

9. **The Sword of YHWH In The Hebrew Bible**

Exodus 22:22-24, “Do not take advantage of a widow or an orphan. If you do and they cry out to Me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless”;

Leviticus 26:25, “I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant.” (See **verses 33, 36, 37**);

Deuteronomy 32:39-42,

39 See now that I, I am He,
 and there is no God besides Me!
 I, I will put to death,
 and I will make alive!
 I wounded, and I, I will heal.
 and there is no one delivering from My hand!
 40 When I lift up My hand to (the) heavens, and I will say,
 As I live into long-lasting time,
 41 if I sharpened My sword's lightning,
 and My hand took hold in judgment,
 I will return vengeance to My adversaries,
 and I will fully repay those who hate Me!
 42 I will make My arrows drunk with blood
 and My sword will devour flesh
 from (the) blood of (the) fatally wounded and captives,
 from (the) head of enemy leaders (?);

Deuteronomy 33:29 , YHWH is your Shield and Helper and your glorious Sword;

1 Chronicles 21:12, the spokesperson Gad tells David to choose between 3 years of famine, 3 months of being swept away by enemies, and 3 days of YHWH's sword—explained as “days of plague.” David chooses the sword of YHWH—the plague in which 70,000 people died;

Psalms 7:10-13,

10 My Shield is God Most High,
 Who saves the upright in heart.
 11 God is a righteous Judge,
 a God Who expresses His wrath every day.
 12 If He does not relent,
 He will sharpen His sword;
 He will bend and string His bow.
 13 He has prepared His deadly weap-ons;
 He makes ready His flaming arrows;

Psalms 17:13, Rescue me from the wicked by Your sword!;

Isaiah 27:1, In that day, YHWH will punish with His sword, Leviathan, the gliding serpent...;

Isaiah 31:8, Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man; a sword, not of mortals, will devour them. They will flee before the sword...”;

Isaiah 34:5-6, My (YHWH's) sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed. The sword of YHWH is bathed in blood...;

Isaiah 66:16, “with the fire YHWH entered into judgment, and with His sword, with all flesh, and the ones slain (by) YHWH will be multiplied;

Jeremiah 9:16, I will pursue them with the sword until I have destroyed them (the Jews who have forsaken YHWH’s law);

Jeremiah 12:12, for the sword of YHWH will devour from one end of the land to the other;

Jeremiah 14:12, ...though they offer burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Instead, I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague. (Compare **15:3**; etc. etc.);

Jeremiah 47:6, Ah, sword of YHWH, you cry, how long till you rest? Return to your scabbard; cease and be still. But how can it rest when YHWH has commanded it...?;

Jeremiah 49:37, I will pursue [Elam] with the sword until I have made an end of them;

Ezekiel 5:2, I (YHWH) will pursue them with the drawn sword. (Compare **5:12**, etc., etc.);

Ezekiel 21:3, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15, 28: the entire **chapter 21** is about Babylon, YHWH’s sword of judgment used against Jerusalem, the Land of Israel, and Ammon;

Ezekiel 30:24-25, I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand... See **32:10**; **33:2**, etc., etc.;

Amos 4:10, I (YHWH) killed your young men by the sword. Compare **9:1, 4, 10**.