

ISAIAH

ISAIAH 57:5-10, ISRAEL'S IDOLATRY REBUKED

In these verses, the Israelites are rebuked by Yahweh through the prophet. The nation's history has been one of rebellion in various ways, but none more important and more evil than Israel's participation in idolatry. For a people specifically created by God to be His people, they turned their back on Him and embraced the most evil of pagan practices. What is not of God is of Satan, and Israel certainly turned to Satan in the performance of many detestable pagan worship practices.

Isaiah 57:5 ⁵Who inflame [אִמְנָה] yourselves among the oaks, Under every luxuriant tree, Who slaughter [חַטְּפוּ] the children in the ravines, Under the clefts of the crags?

The Israelites were participating in the fertility rites that took place in the groves where pagan rituals were held to, in their thinking, ensure the fertility of their families, their crops, and their livestock. "Those who practiced these fertility rituals believed that divine blessing and fertility would come not from keeping the covenant with Israel's God but from imitating the sexual prowess of the Canaanite god Baal" [Gary V. Smith, "Isaiah," *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 551]. You can imagine the draw for this. Men, operating according to the morality of a satanic world system, periodically visiting the groves and the high places to participate in sacred fertility rituals with sacred fertility ritual prostitutes in order to ensure that the gods looked upon them with favor in terms of children, crops, and livestock were simply using those things as excuses to indulge the lust of the sin nature. Pagan women also participated in this practice with at least pagan priests if not with other men there. Actually, some sources claim that women were the primary actors in these fertility rites. None of this is to suggest that they did not believe these things; they did. But it is also quite apparent that fallen man is very susceptible to this type of religion that turns sexual sin into pseudo holy religious rituals.

Inflame, אִמְנָה, in general terms means to be hot or warm, or physical heat resulting from a source such as the sun, the human body, clothing, an oven, etc. "It is used chiefly of a corporeal substance which receives or gives out heat or warmth, and communicates it to another body of the same substance and nature" [William Wilson, s.v. "heat, hot; 3. אִמְנָה" *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*, 213]. But in this context, it is used figuratively in terms of sexuality meaning to be warm, to become warm, to be made hot, burning with lust. In this verb form (Niphal participle) followed by אֲ [“in,” translated “among” in NASB and nearly all English translations; “under” in NKJV], it means to burn with lust, as a prelude to sexual behaviors. The sense of the word is to feel strong lust, and the word's verb form means that they are inflaming themselves with lust. "The terebinths are introduced here ... as an object of idolatrous lust: 'who inflame themselves with the terebinths;' אֲ denotes the object with which the lust is excited and inflamed" [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 7, Isaiah, 7:544*]. The words “burn with lust” are used in several translations to interpret this word (CSB, LEB, ESV, RSV, NIV), and that is probably the most accurate way to understand the word in this context.

The use of this word highlights an important element of pagan, human sexuality in fertility cult worship practices, and that is that it is not all about their religion. I have no doubt that they believed that what they were doing was supposed to ensure the fertility of human beings, livestock, and crops, but it also highlights the satisfaction of carnal, sexual lust that flows through mankind which originates in the sin nature and was readily available through these fertility cult "worship" practices. What better way to act out in socially approved immoral ways, than to make those practices the elements of a "religion." Is it any wonder that the fertility cult mindset was so deeply entrenched in human societies for so long?

Trees hold special significance in pagan religious practices in all types of religions and all around the world. Some think it relates to the scarcity of trees in Israel, but that is not tenable. First of all, there were more trees in ancient Israel than there are now, and the modern state of Israel has been planting trees to reforest formerly wooded areas. Furthermore, trees played a role in the fertility cults around the world in places where trees were plentiful. It seems rather obvious that there is phallic significance to trees and poles that make worshipping that particular aspect of the creation a primary factor in this situation.

Romans 1:25 ²⁵For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

In the Canaanite fertility cults, the high places were associated with trees, the "oaks" and "every luxuriant tree." Asherah poles were carved from wood, apparently from tree trunks, although individual trees also served to represent pagan gods.

Deuteronomy 16:21 ²¹"You shall not plant for yourself an Asherah of any kind of tree beside the altar of the LORD your God, which you shall make for yourself.

The following expression, 'under every green tree,' is simply a permutative [sic] of the words 'with the terebinths' in the sense of 'with the terebinths [oaks, NASB], yea, under every green tree' ... one tree being regarded as the abode and favourite [sic] of this deity, and another of that, and all alluring you to your carnal worship" [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 7, Isaiah, 7:544].

I mentioned in the previous lesson that some people think the child sacrifices characterized by the term "pass through the fire" refers not to death, but to the child walking between two fires or jumping over a fire in a pit. However, the word used here, which is translated "slaughter," to characterize what happens to the children proves that theory false.

Slaughter, *שחט*, means to slaughter, to kill, to offer, to slay. Primarily it refers to slaughter. "The verb is also used to describe the process of a human sacrifice to Yahweh ... When used in the context of a human sacrifice to false gods, the verb describes the actual process being carried out ..." [Baker and Carpenter, s.v. "*שחט*," *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: Old Testament*, 1120-1121]. The verb is a Qal participle construct leading to a literal translation of "[The] slaughtering of the children in the valleys." This relates the slaughter specifically to the children. This really leaves no room for the claim that the children were not killed. The Word of God makes it very clear that the Israelites were, in

fact, sacrificing their children to idols. Jeremiah and Ezekiel both made it perfectly clear that to “pass through the fire” was a reference to killing the children as sacrificial offerings to pagan gods.

Ezekiel 16:20–21 ²⁰“Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? ²¹“You slaughtered [טָּחַטְּ] My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through *the fire*.

Ezekiel 23:37 ³⁷“For they have committed adultery, and blood is on their hands. Thus they have committed adultery with their idols and even caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through *the fire* to them as food.

If Solomon did not actually sacrifice his sons to Molech and Chemosh, which the Bible does not say he did, he certainly built high places to do that, and those high places lasted for several hundred years. Certainly, the Scriptures make it clear that the Israelites used those high places to sacrifice their children. Other kings of Judah, Davidic kings, did sacrifice their sons in the fire. The godly king Jotham's son Ahaz sacrificed his sons in the fire (2 Kings 16:3; 2 Chron. 28:3), as did the godly king Hezekiah's son Manasseh (2 Kings 21; 2 Chron. 33:6) who sacrificed sons in the fire.

The leadership also led the people into sacrificing their children in the pagan fires (Jer. 32:16-44), which was the primary reason that God finally destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple and sent the people into captivity.

Jeremiah 32:35 ³⁵“They built the high places of Baal that are in the valley of Ben-hinnom to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through *the fire* to Molech, which I had not commanded them nor had it entered My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

The references to the trees, the ravines or valleys, and the clefts in the rocks is an indication that the immorality of the fertility cults, including the sacrifice of children, was practiced everywhere. It permeated the nation, and some of the Scriptures we have looked at in the last two weeks have indicated how pervasive pagan worship had become. It had even invaded the Temple (cf. Ezek. 8).

The creature worshiping the creation continues with the worship of stones.

Isaiah 57:6 ⁶“Among the smooth [הַלְקֵי] stones of the ravine [בְּנֵהַל] Is your portion [הַלְקֵי], they are your lot [גִּזְרֵיךָ]; Even to them you have poured out a drink offering, You have made a grain offering. Shall I relent [נָחַם] concerning these things?

These smooth stones, rounded and smoothed as the result of tumbling in flowing water, were in some way used for worship.

Smooth, הַלְקֵי, is a reference to smooth stones that are possibly large boulders smoothed by the fast-flowing water of flash floods that could have been used as an impromptu altar upon which to place objects of worship. This line of thought then allows for the use

of a wadi or streambed as a place of offering rather than as an offering to the rocks themselves. Alternatively, the rocks themselves could have been objects of worship as idols. There is also a thought that that these smooth stones were formed into an object of worship resembling a person, a god, an animal, etc.

The fact that these are water smoothed stones is reflected in the use of the word translated "ravine" in the NASB, but, if "smooth stones" is the correct interpretation, then it is better translated stream (KJV, NKJV, NET Bible), wadi (CSB), or brook (YLT, LSV). Ravine, נַחַל, means a river, stream, brook, wadi torrent (i.e., flash flood) referring to a moving body of water of various sizes which greatly varies on volumes of rain that may or may not flow year-round. It can mean a valley, gorge, wadi, or a ravine that refers to a depressed land formation often with a flow of water in it at least part of the year. While ravine is a legitimate translation of the Hebrew word into English, the context suggests it should be "stream" or something similar which leads to a better understanding of the verse in the English language.

The text reads as though the rocks themselves had become objects of worship whether they were left in their water-smoothed state or fashioned into something that resembled another aspect of the created order. The drink and food offerings were being made "even to them" referring to the smooth stones themselves. These are acts of worship.

Constable suggested that "As mountaintops became places of worship because they were close to heaven and the gods, so wadis and valleys became places of worship because they were close to Sheol and the dead" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 166]. Young also stated, "Possibly there is a figurative reference to the worship of Moloch, which occurred in the Hinnom valley" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:403]. If this is true, then the drink and grain offerings are being offered to the dead, and their inheritance will come from the dead and not from God.

This seems to be based on a claim that Semitic roots in the Akkadian and Ugaritic languages "means 'do die, destroy, perish.' Thus one can translate 'with the dead of the valley is your portion/inheritance. ... Ugaritic has this word parallel to the word 'death' and that Akkadian has 'to be destroyed'" [Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 552, 552 n. 109, quoting Koole, *Isaiah III, Volume 3: Isaiah 56-66*, 60]. I am not inclined to agree with this interpretation based on other Semitic roots, at least not without further corroboration, and I would not develop this doctrine based on that alone.

Fruchtenbaum believes this to be a reference to "stone gods" which fits the context better than death. [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: The Book of Isaiah: Exposition from a Messianic Jewish Perspective*, 606].

If all the Israelites wanted to worship was trees and rocks, then that would be their inheritance. For all but the believing remnant, that is exactly what happened and what continues to happen to this day.

Portion, חֵלֶק, means portion, tract, territory, allotment referring to a share or a part of something implying it is assigned. In this context, it refers to the nation's association or part or sharing in another group or way of life. In this case the other group is pagan and the way of life is paganism.

Lot, גֹּזֶל, refers to things allotted such as land. The allotment of some amount by dividing something.

God is not going to honor participation in pagan worship activities. "Portion" may also refer to a reward. By means of application, believers who depart from the Lord and engage in pagan activities are going to be losing rewards at the Judgment Seat of Christ. You can serve pagan gods or you can serve Yahweh, but you can't do both at the same time, and you can't keep going back to worshipping pagan gods and expect to be rewarded. You cannot be working for the Lord's glory while engaging in pagan worship practices; those are mutually exclusive pursuits.

"... they are your lot" is literally, "They, they, lot of you." The repetition of the personal pronoun is a grammatical marker of emphasis. This is an emphatic way of saying that worshipping the trees and the rocks will result in those being their lot—which is nothing compared to the lot they could have in Yahweh by remaining faithful to Him.

Drink and grain offerings were being offered to the trees and the rocks, although, the offerings are usually not considered to be to the object itself, but rather to the god that the object represents.

"[T]he prophet says in effect, if that is what you want, what you are willing to settle for, that is what you may have. Throughout the Bible, it is the Lord who is Israel's portion. He gives them the land as an inheritance, but this is always to point to him. Those who know him receive the land with joy, but if it comes to a choice between him and the land, there is no contest; he is their portion. But here the people have made creation their creator, they have chosen creation as their lot, and God lets them have it. If they would prefer to have as their gods the grotesquely shaped and smoothed rocks of the wadis, then they could have them. the intensity of feeling on the Lord's part is indicated by the emphatically repeated they, they are your lot" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 478].

God then asks a rhetorical question, "Shall I relent concerning these things?" that demands a "no" answer.

Relent, נָחַם, means to relent, that is to cease a particular course of action usually with a focus that a gracious act has occurred with a possible implication that one grieves or has sorrow over an object or event. This verb form is reflexive, "Shall I Myself relent ...?" that is, to be sorry or have compassion. This word may also mean to take comfort, to console oneself, to encourage, to offer support. In this verb form the sense is to comfort oneself by enacting divine temporal discipline on the wayward nation.

God's justice demands that Israel answer for the nation's rebellion. God cannot relent in terms of imposing His promised divine temporal disciplinary action. "In the light of such

base abominations should God be comforted or should He not take vengeance? The thought expressed by the rhetorical question is whether in the light of Israel's idolatry God should be satisfied, show pity and take comfort, or whether He should not rather take vengeance" [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:403]. Oswalt quoted Young identifying the sense of God's question: "'Shall I take comfort? No, I will take vengeance!'" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 478 n. 34].

Given the literal nature of the inherently sexual elements of fertility cult worship, God condemned the Israelites for "mak[ing] their bed" on the high places. They not only went up there to engage in immoral activities, but they went up to worship those false gods and to make sacrificial offerings to them. This spirit of pagan worship had become pervasive in Israel.

Isaiah 57:7 ⁷"Upon a high and lofty mountain You have made your bed. You also went up there to offer sacrifice.

We may be tempted to relate all the talk about adultery and fornication to be metaphorical, figurative language, and these things do reveal spiritual truth, but the sexual practices of the fertility cults that ensnared the Israelites were also quite literal. "The Israelites also worshipped idols on the mountains, as the pagans did to get closer to their gods. Such worship constituted infidelity to the Lord and adultery with loved idols. Thus Israel had made her bed and slept with another man when she worshipped as she did. Isaiah's language was more than figurative since worship of these nature deities involved sacred prostitution" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:166].

"But of course more than imagery is involved. The heavily sexual orientation of the Canaanite religion meant that ritual prostitution was a fundamental part of worship. This is not merely imagery when it is said that those who went to the high places to offer their sacrifices placed their bed there" [John N. Oswalt, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, 478].

It has been mentioned a few times that the high places and the ziggurats signified man's attempt to get closer to the gods. Like all of Satan's thought, this is only a mere imitation of the truth; Yahweh is the only God and He is, in fact, said to be high and lifted up. By the time history culminates, only God will remain high and lifted up, while everything that is imitating God's position on the high places will be brought low.

Isaiah 2:2 ²Now it will come about that In the last days The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it.

Isaiah 2:14, 17 ¹⁴Against all the lofty mountains, Against all the hills that are lifted up, ... ¹⁷The pride of man will be humbled And the loftiness of men will be abased; And the LORD alone will be exalted in that day,

The immorality of the fertility cults continues to be the focus of God's condemnation of Israel's participation in the licentious practices of pagan worship. The people have removed themselves from Yahweh and placed themselves into the camp of pagans which is rebellion. Their loyalties have been displaced; they have gone from good to evil. The actual meaning of verse 8 is difficult to discern, and there have been many different theories presented to interpret it.

Isaiah 57:8 ⁸“Behind [אַחֶר] the door and the doorpost You have set up your sign [זִכְרוֹן]; Indeed, far removed from Me, you have uncovered [גָּלִיתָ] yourself, And have gone up and made your bed wide. And you have made [כָּרַתָּ] an agreement for yourself with them, You have loved their bed, You have looked on *their* manhood [יָדָ].”

Fruchtenbaum believes that the *mezuzahs* the Israelites were commanded to affix to the doorpost of their homes (Dt. 6:9, 11:20) was replaced by “memorials to other gods” [cf. Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: Expositions from a Jewish Perspective: The Book of Isaiah*, 606]. Others similarly believe they removed the *mezuzahs* to the inside of the doorframe and replaced them with pagan memorials [cf. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:546]. The thinking here is that they would not be reminded of their unfaithfulness and shame. That seems untenable; the *mezuzahs* were still present. They would see them while going out instead of going in and while in their homes; therefore, they would see them even more and be reminded of their shame if they were inside the house on the doorframe. That presumes that the people felt shame over their pagan practices which is extremely doubtful. Others think this may be a reference to memorials inside a public, pagan temple [cf. Gary V. Smith, *The New American Commentary: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture: Isaiah 40-66*, 553-554].

The most likely explanation is that they were setting up pagan memorials inside their homes behind the *mezuzahs* that were located on the outside of the doorframe. It refers to “the placement of the pagan symbols within their homes” [Michael Rydelnik and James Spencer, “Isaiah” in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, 1094]. “Their homes were supposed to be centers of learning about the Lord, but the people had made them places of idol worship and adultery” [John A. Martin, “Isaiah” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, 1112]. “The unfaithful Israelites were evidently setting up memorial objects to the idols in their homes as well. The Scripture portions that they were to place on their doorframes were to remind them of the Lord, but they had installed rival reminders inside their homes” [Thomas L. Constable, “Isaiah” in *Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel*, 4:166].

People pass through the front door leaving the *mezuzahs* behind them at their backs and on the outside and enter into an atmosphere dominated by paganism which is much more visible than a simple *mezuzah* nailed to the outside of the doorframe.

Behind, אַחֶר, means behind referring to a position which is behind relative to another position. The sense is to be behind or in the rear.

Sign, זָכָרוֹן, means a memorial, remembrance or commemoration, a record, a reminder referring to a place or an object to remind one of something. The intention of the memorial is to commemorate a person or event by preserving and/or provoking their memory.

There is no end to the number of guesses theologians have made about the nature of these memorials, but the Bible does not identify them. They may have been standard fertility cult memorials, or they may have been individualized according to the whims of the individuals placing the memorials in their homes.

What we do know is that the Israelites had far removed themselves from Yahweh and uncovered themselves with pagan consorts.

Uncover, גָּלָה, means to uncover, remove, to reveal oneself, to expose referring to laying bare, exposing, or stripping off. The sense is to uncover the body by removing all or part of a person's clothing.

This represents the literal truth of the sexual immorality attached to the fertility cults' worship practices, but it is also a metaphor revealing Israel's spiritual idolatry which uncovering themselves represents.

Israel went up to the high places into the sphere of pagan influence to make the nation's bed wide which seems to be a reference to the presence of many lovers invited into Israel's marriage bed that was supposed to be for Yahweh alone. The Israelites were inviting many different facets of pagan thought into their nation. We know they were worshiping the fertility cults in various iterations. They worshiped Baal (2 Kings 21:3), Asherah (2 Kings 17:16), Tammuz (Ezek. 8:14), and probably many more including the gods, Molech and Chemosh (1 Kings 11:7) who demanded human sacrifices. They worshiped the sun, the moon, and the stars (2 Kings 23:5). They worshiped the creeping things and the beasts of the created order (Ezek. 8:10).

Not only did they invite pagan lovers into their bed, they jumped into the beds of their pagan lovers as well. This is, of course, a reference to the high places where the cult prostitutes worked on behalf of their pagan gods. "The Lord's 'wife' had turned her back on Him and had gone to bed with other lovers. She had been unfaithful to her covenant with Yahweh and had covenanted to worship idols, since she loved the physical aspects of their worship" [Thomas L. Constable, "Isaiah" in Thomas Constable's Notes on the Bible, Volume IV: Isaiah-Daniel, 4:166]. For those theologians who want to deny the plain truth of this Scripture, the phrase, "you have looked on their manhood" is pretty self-explanatory, although the word used in Hebrew is confusing because it is יָד, which is the word for hand. Egyptian and Ugaritic languages use the word "hand" as a euphemism for male genitalia which is the reference here. "The point is that Israel has become so infatuated with her idol lovers that she has lost all sense of restraint. Moreover, the relationship has become one that is fixated on the physical aspects" [John N. Oswalt, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66, 480]. This relates back to the idea that the Israelites inflamed themselves with lust for the pagan fertility cult rituals involving sexual immorality (v. 5).

“Idolatry is thus described as adulterous intercourse. It is not merely unchastity or fornication but actual adultery, for Israel is faithless to the One who has espoused her and has committed spiritual adultery with the gods of those nations that were in strong enmity with Israel's own God. To commit adultery with a friend of the husband is wicked; to do with an enemy who would destroy the husband is the height of abandoned wickedness. Israel has uncovered herself, but her action reveals how far she is from her Lord” [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:404-405].

This verse also reveals an agreement made between Israel, the covenant community of Yahweh, with the pagan fertility cults. Cut, כָּרַת, translated “agreement” in the NASB, means to cut, but the word covenant is not in the NASB text, but it is in the KJV, NKJV, ASV, ESV, YLT, TANAKH. However, other translations use the concept of making a bargain (CSB, RSV) or making a pact (BSB, NIV, ISV) with the pagans. This is not a reference to some formal covenant arrangement. The language used here is unique; it is “from them” rather than “with them” as one might otherwise expect and as the NASB translates it. This is very hard to interpret, but the idea is not that of a formal covenant, but along the lines of a switching of allegiances from Yahweh to the pagans.

“[T]he whole phrase shows not that an actual covenant had been made, but simply the close relationship between Israel and the idolatrous worship. Israel has been like an adulterous woman who has prepared her own couch for her lover, and has in turn loved the couch of those heathen lovers. Not only have they come to her, but she has gone willingly to them. Instead of the covenant of God's grace Israel has willingly chosen pacts with idolatrous lovers who could only bring destruction to the nation” [Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: A Commentary*, vol. 3, 3:405].

The next verses reveal the fact of political alliances facilitated by idolatrous affiliations. There is another option, and that option is the worship of the pagan god Molech. This verse is also difficult to accurately translate; either way is possible. It could be a continuation of the rebuke for the nation's idolatry as it was specifically related to Molech, or it could be a rebuke for the nation's unfaithful political alliances that were in and of themselves acts of rebellion against God's leadership of the nation. If the latter, then both their idolatry and their politics were acts of prostituting themselves to entities other than Yahweh.

Isaiah 57:9-10 ⁹“You have journeyed to the king [מֶלֶךְ] with oil And increased your perfumes; You have sent your envoys a great distance And made *them* go down to Sheol. ¹⁰“You were tired out by the length of your road [דֶּרֶךְ], Yet you did not say, ‘It is hopeless [אִשָּׁה].’ You found renewed strength, Therefore you did not faint.

Some theologians and some translators believe that “king” should read “Molech.” “While the Jewish people worshipped many gods in general, their favorite idol was Molech.... The Hebrew term for ‘king,’ *Melech*, is sometimes rendered as the proper name *Molech*. So, instead of translating the phrase as ‘you went to the king with oil.’ The worship of this Ammonite god required human sacrifice, specifically that of babies. Hence, the children who were mentioned in verse 5 were sacrificed to Molech. By doing so, the Jewish people debased themselves to Sheol” [Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Ariel's Bible Commentary: Exposition from a Jewish Perspective: The Book of Isaiah*, 606].

The problem with that thinking is that the Masoretic Text reads king, מֶלֶךְ, and not the name of the pagan god, Molech מֹלֶךְ. We also have to acknowledge that in the original text, there were no vowels. The only difference in the two words is between a short “e” vowel or a long “o” vowel following the first consonant. When the vowel pointing system was developed, the translators had to decide whether the text meant “king” or “Molech,” and most of them must have determined that “king” was the appropriate meaning. That would explain why the Masoretic Text reads “king.” Either is possible. I think we must concede that the context has been about dealing with Israel’s relationship with pagan gods including those gods who demanded human sacrifice, specifically children. “Since the context refers to idolatry and child sacrifice (v. 5), some emend מֶלֶךְ (*melekh*, ‘king’) to ‘Molech.’ Perhaps Israel’s devotion to her idols is likened here to a subject taking tribute to a ruler” [NET Bible, s.v. “Isaiah 57:9,” 1313, n. d]. Of the texts I normally use for comparison purposes, only the RSV, NIV, and ISV translate it as “Molech.” Fruchtenbaum added the NLT, Berean Study Bible, Contemporary English Version, and the Good News Translation.

My opinion is that context has to have priority; therefore the pagan worship context suggests that “Molech” is probably the preferred translation, but this is the minority view, and I certainly would not get dogmatic about it.

The case can also be made for using “king” as the appropriate translation. The immediate context of verse 11 refers back to this king and suggests that a human king is the subject. “[A] single glance at v. 11 is sufficient to show that the words refer to a servile coquetry from the fear of man, and therefore to a wicked craving for the favour of man; so that ‘the king,’ is not Baal, or any heathen god whatever, but the Asiatic ruler of the world” [C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:546]. Ezekiel 16 and 23 record the facts of Israel’s and Judah’s alliances with the Assyrians and the Babylonians which included worshiping their pagan deities. Keil and Delitzsch think that Ezekiel 23 is a commentary on Isaiah 57:3-10 [cf. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, 7:547]. I don’t necessarily support that thought, but they are certainly dealing with the same issue. “Israel ‘prostituted herself’ (apostasized (sic) from the Lord, gave her loyalty to others) to secure military clout’, to have the ‘great powers’ on her side” [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 355].

The use of oil and perfumes may also be understood in two ways. The Israelites could be taking gifts to their illicit pagan lovers, or they could be perfuming and grooming themselves in order to appear more desirable in the sight of their pagan paramours.

Ezekiel 23:40–41 ⁴⁰“Furthermore, they have even sent for men who come from afar, to whom a messenger was sent; and lo, they came—for whom you bathed, painted your eyes and decorated yourselves with ornaments; ⁴¹and you sat on a splendid couch with a table arranged before it on which you had set My incense and My oil.

Never satisfied, the Israelites go great distances to satisfy their lust for participating in pagan practices.

In Isaiah 28:15, the prophet compared making a covenant with a foreign power as a pact with Sheol and a "covenant with death." This could be a reminder that these unfaithful alliances with foreign powers were going to result in Israel's destruction which will hasten the entry of the unfaithful ones among the Israelites into Sheol. "[S]igning covenants with the nations is signing your own death warrant. *You went*: literally 'you descended', i.e., abased yourself below your dignity as the Lord's people, the dignity of faith in such a God, to the demeaning work of currying worldly favours" [J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 355]. Another figurative thought is that this language is a bit of hyperbole to indicate the extreme measures Israel was willing to stoop to in order to serve their own secular humanistic reasoning rather than relying on Yahweh. Verse 10 sums up Israel's attitude. No matter how wearying chasing after worthless idols became, Israel was always up for keeping it going. "And somehow, when the demon of do-it-yourself salvation grips people, though evidence mounts that it is a burden we do not have strength to bear, an unachievable goal, there always seems to be strength for one more try!" [J. Alec. Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, 355].

"Your road" or "your way," דִּרְכֵךְ, is a reference to all the things the Israelites were doing to facilitate their association with paganism of all types. There was nothing the nation would not do to keep it going. Nothing was going to discourage them from pursuing their illicit relationships. They never gave up, they never fainted, and they kept their strength up so that they could keep going their own way.

Hopeless, שָׁוְיָ, means to be despairing of, to be without hope, to give up hope. The sense is to abandon hope or to lose heart. The text negates that thought meaning it never happened. The Word of God reveals that there were many times when the Israelites thought God had abandoned them (cf. Judges 6:13), or at least was not there for them, but they never gave up on worshiping worthless idols which could do nothing for them at all. Rather than get discouraged or fainting, they strengthened their hand and kept worshiping their idols. Nothing was going to deter them—until it did in the form of destruction and captivity at the hands of the Babylonian Army.

Having said that nothing would deter Israel from abandoning God in pursuit of idols, we have to consider that the Babylonian destruction of the Temple and the captivity did cure them of their overt idolatrous pursuits. That was true in terms of what we commonly think of as false gods and their associated images, but it is not true that they did not find idolatrous substitutes such as career, wealth, family, and so on. They still rebel against their God, and most of them are atheist, agnostic, or mired in legalistic, Pharisaic types of Judaism; they just do it differently now than they did then.

Oswalt likened Israel's affinity for pagan fertility rites to an addiction. When you consider that sexual immorality is involved and the Israelites are described as being inflamed with lust (v. 5), that is probably an accurate assessment of the situation. "The constant quest for new gods with which to prostitute oneself is exhausting; the way is very long. But an addiction has been created. Having refused the only one who can really satisfy, and having replaced him with the creation, an insatiable thirst has been aroused. To say *It is useless* is not possible. As with any addiction, the memory of former gratification drives one on, even when the gratification grows steadily less and less" [John N. Oswalt, *The*

New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66, 481].