

The New Exodus in Second Isaiah

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The return of the exiles from Babylon to their homeland and the restoration of Jerusalem are themes, which immediately emerge after a casual reading of Second Isaiah. The reader gets the impression that the overall message, the good tidings of this anonymous exilic prophet comprises primarily, if not solely, in the salvation of the exiles, understood as liberation from Babylonian captivity, return to the homeland, restoration of Jerusalem, and rebuilding of the Temple.

In this article, I will consider the theme of the exiles' return and show how Second Isaiah described it in the language of the Exodus event.

The Prologue

The theme of the exiles' return to their homeland is already indicated in the prologue. After the command to comfort the exiles has been announced, another order is issued by a voice¹ that cries out (40:3-4):

¹ In the prologue, at least three commands are issued: "comfort" (v. 1a); "prepare" (v. 3a); and "cry out" (v. 6a). However, it is not clear who issued the commands. Do they come from the one and the same person or from three different persons? It has been suggested that the heralds who issue the commands are heavenly beings "conversing in God's heavenly council". R.N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66* (New Century Bible; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 48; R.J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading* (New York: Paulist Press), 72-74; A.S. Herbert, *Isaiah 40-66* (Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge: University Press, 1975), 17-19. The concept of Yahweh's heavenly council is referred to in 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Jer 23:18.22;

*A voice cries out:
In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord,
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be lifted up,
and every mountain and hill be made low;
the uneven ground shall become level,
and the rough places a plane.*

The two commands expressed by the *piel* imperative verbs are parallel:

prepare	the way of the Lord	<i>pannu derek Yhwh</i>
make straight	a highway for our God	<i>wasseru mesillah lelohenu</i>

On the one hand, as rightly observed by Simian-Yofre,² the expression “way of the Lord”, *derek Yhwh*, when it is compared to its other occurrences (e.g., Gen 18:19; Judg 2:22; Prov 10:29; Jer 5: 4, 5), is used here not in the physical, but in the figurative sense, which refers to an “ethical” way, a manner of behaving for man in following God.³ Thus, the command to “prepare the way of the Lord” points to moral and religious renewal. On the other hand, the expression “highway for our God”, *mesillah lelohenu*, speaks about a physical road, in line with the usages of *mesillah* elsewhere (Isa 11: 16; 19:23; 33:8; 2 Chron 9:11; Ps 84:6). It refers to the construction of a physical road through the desert, which will serve as a passage-way for God and his people Israel. Consequently, contrary to Simian-Yofre’s assertion that Isaiah 40:3 should be read only in its ethical sense, this study affirms *both* the evident allusion to the Exodus

Job 1:6; 2:1). Cf. F.M. Cross, “The Council of Yahweh in Second Isaiah,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12 (1953): 274-278.

² H. Simian-Yofre, “Exodo in Deuteroisaías,” *Biblicum* 61 (1980): 534-36. In his reexamination of the so-called exodus texts, Simian-Yofre concludes that “ni el significado propio de *derek YH'* o de *pannu derek*, ni el contexto inmediato de su uso autorizan a pensar en una interpretación física: preparar un camino en el desierto por el cual pueda partir el pueblo en su segundo éxodo. Cada vez las expresiones nos remiten al mundo ético. Hay que preparar un camino por el cual pueda llegar Yavé, y la preparación de ese camino es la disposición del corazón.”

³ K. Koch, “derek” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. III, eds. G.J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-), 289-90 [Hereafter *TDOT*]. He notes that the *derek* on which Yahweh will lead Israel means much more than the physical road on which the exiles will return to Palestine.

event⁴ and the ethical demand on the exiles as integral parts of the imminent saving deed of God.

The command is reminiscent of the festal processions in which the Babylonian gods were carried⁵ or of the pre-exilic festivals in which the Ark of the King of glory is carried in procession to the temple (cf. Ps 24:7-10).⁶ But, the "way of the Lord in the wilderness, a highway for our God in the desert," in the prophet's mind, does not refer to these Babylonian processions or to these pre-exilic festivals, even if it can be shown that they influenced him. For the prophet, it is the way through the desert on which the Israelites, led by Yahweh, will pass as they return to their homeland.

Geographically speaking, there lies a vast wilderness between Babylon and Judah. The normal route between these two nations

⁴ See C.R. North, *The Second Isaiah* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964)), 75.

⁵The highway has its own peculiar place in the Babylonian hymns; the layout of the city of Babylon is itself a proof of the importance of the great processional highway. The highways of the gods and the highways of the kings meet:

*From hostile Elam he entered upon a road of jubilation,
a path of rejoicing ... of success to Su-an-na.
The people of the land saw his towering figure,
the ruler in (his) splendor.
Hasten to go out, (Nabu), son of Bel,
you who know the ways and the customs.
Make his way good, renew his road,
make his path straight, hew him out a trail.*

Quoted in C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* (London: SCM Press, 1969), 38 from Stummer, 'Einige keilschriftliche Parallelen zu Jes. 40-66,' *Journal of Biblical Literature* 45 (1926), 171-89 and from E. Ebeling, *Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts*, No. 104. See C. Stuhlmüller, *Creative Redemption* (Analecta Biblica 43; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970), 74-82.

⁶ Ps 24:7-10 and 132 were sung on the anniversary of the entry of Yahweh Sabaoth into Zion where he had chosen to dwell. It points to the event recorded in 2 Sam 6, when David went to Qiryath-Yearim and brought back the Ark, captured by the Philistines. The transfer was done in a religious procession, with shouts of joy, and the noise of trumpets. Whether the celebration of the anniversary involves a procession of the Ark is not indicated nor mentioned in any OT passage. In his studies of the Psalms and from comparative religion, S. Mowinkel has theorized that the procession of the Ark forms part of a feast for the enthronement of Yahweh. His arguments, however, have not stood the test of critical scrutiny very

does not cut through the desert, but rather goes round about it. From this perspective, most commentators hold that in this instance the prophet has in mind the earlier passage of God's people through the wilderness in connection with the Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land under the guidance of Yahweh. Accordingly, the liberation from Babylonian exile and the return of the Israelites are presented in the imagery of the Exodus event. Moreover, as it will be shown by the consideration of the other "exodus texts" they are even presented by Second Isaiah in a spectacular and marvelous language that far surpasses the description of the Exodus event among the Pentateuchal sources.

It is clearly stated in the prologue that the "way in the wilderness" or the "highway in the desert" is the "way of the Lord" or a "highway for our God". Does it mean that the highway is for Yahweh, and not for the exiles in Babylon? Does this not point to the glorious return of Yahweh to his chosen dwelling place, after he has departed from it, as the prophet Ezekiel has witnessed? If the wilderness spoken of here is the Arabah, south of the Dead Sea, geographically speaking, the highway that approaches Jerusalem through this desert comes from the east. This can refer to the tradition on Yahweh's coming from Sinai or from Edom (Isa 34; 63:1-6). Thus, if Yahweh is the one who travels the road that comes from the east, it is Yahweh who is returning to Jerusalem to dwell there once again (in view of his abandoning the city, cf. Ezek 9-11). In that case, the comforting news for Jerusalem is Yahweh's return, not the exiles' liberation and homecoming.⁷ If it is Yahweh who is to return to Jerusalem, and therefore, to travel through this highway in the desert, then how can the Exodus event be alluded to in this text? If vv. 3-4 focus on a divine theophany, how is the Exodus referred to?

In response to these questions, it should be noted, first of all, that the command to prepare a highway follows immediately the first order issued: *nahamu, nahamu ammi*, "Comfort, O comfort my people" (40:1). The Hebrew root *nhm*, in this instance used in the

well. See R. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965), 502-506; S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (Oxford: University Press, 1956).

⁷ See J.D.W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word Books, 1987), 80.

piel form, does not only mean to comfort or to console, but to ease or to free from any displeasing object. With this in mind, the command to comfort Jerusalem should include the idea of an active intervention of freeing the people from the discomfort of the exile. The news announcing the possibility of return to Jerusalem is comforting to the ears of the exiles. But a return to the homeland is not possible unless the exiles are released from their captivity. Thus, the command to “comfort, comfort my people” (i.e., “free my people from their captivity”) is now being acted upon through another command that calls for the construction of a highway in the desert through which the exiles will pass when they return to their homeland.

Therefore, the way that is ordered to be constructed is meant as a passageway for the exiles. Yet, it is also the Lord’s way inasmuch as it is he who will lead his people back home. It is only later in the prologue (40:10-11) that the exiles are mentioned indirectly through the image of the flock being fed, gathered and led by Yahweh, the shepherd:

*See, the Lord God comes with might,
and his arm rules for him;
his reward is with him,
and his recompense before him.
He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms,
and carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead the mother sheep (40:10-11; cf. 49:10; 52:12).*

The explicit mention of Yahweh leading his people in a “new” exodus through the desert is made later in the book (49:10; 52:12). The emphasis in vv. 3-5 is the divine theophany, the revelation of God’s glory to all people.

It has been mentioned above that the command to build a highway for Yahweh is reminiscent of the Babylonian festal processions. However, in contrast to the triumphal highways where the glory of the gods of Babylon is displayed in the visible form of their graven images, the highway where Yahweh leads his people reveals his glory, *kabod*, in the saving act that he accomplishes in liberating his people from Babylonian exile and in leading them home to Jerusalem. Thus, the way is for Yahweh since it is the way

in which his saving deed for the sake of his people reveals his glory as the God of creation and history.

*Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed,
and all people shall see it together,
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken (40:5).*

*so that all may see and know,
all may consider and understand,
that the hand of the Lord has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it (41:20; cf. 43:21).*

The So-called Exodus Passages

Aside from 40:3-11 in the prologue, allusions to the Exodus event are easily discernible in the following passages: 41:17-20; 42:14-17; 43:1-7; 43:16-21; 48:20-21; 49:8-12; 51:9-10; 52:11-12.⁸ In these passages, certain images undoubtedly point to one or other feature of the first Exodus as narrated in the Pentateuchal traditions.⁹

1. *Isaiah 41:17-20.* This text is considered by Westermann as a "proclamation of salvation"; it immediately follows an oracle of salvation (41:14-16)¹⁰ which contains words that speak about "threshing the mountains" and "making the hills like chaff." They are reminiscent of the command to level mountains and hills in the construction of a highway in the desert for the Lord (40:3-4). Seen in this context, the present text continues to develop the theme of the desert highway, which is now transformed by Yahweh into an oasis with springs of water and trees (vv. 18-19):

*I will open rivers on the bare heights,
and fountains in the midst of the valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
and the dry land springs of water.*

⁸ C. Stuhlmueller (*Creative Redemption*, 272) presents a table that shows a comparison among 15 authors who recognize the Exodus motif in Second Isaiah. Aside from the passages listed here, his list includes 44:1-5; 44:27; 50:2; 55:12-13.

⁹ Exodus 7:8-15:21

¹⁰ Westermann, *Isaiah* 40-66, 79.

*I will put in the wilderness the cedar,
the acacia, the myrtle, and the olive;
I will set in the desert the cypress,
the plane and the pine together ...*

In the Exodus story, the people murmured and complained against Yahweh and his servant, Moses, because of the absence of water. And God had brought out water from the rock (Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:1-3). In the "new" Exodus, Yahweh will do more by opening rivers and fountains, by making springs and a pool of water. In addition, trees will spring up along the way to give shades of coolness to the exiles that pass along the way. The travelers will not experience the scorching heat of the sun in the wilderness, because trees will provide them with shades of comfort.

Simian-Yofre rejects the allusion of this text to the Exodus. According to him, the mention of *wilderness (midbar)* or *dry land (eres siyyah)* is not enough to affirm a reference to the Exodus event. When the other occurrences of these words are examined (e.g., Isa 35:1; Jer 50:12; 51:43; Hos 2:5; Joel 2:20; Zeph 2:13), they rather point to the idea of punishment.¹¹ Simian-Yofre is correct to see the idea of punishment in these words. But, considering their present context, the emphasis is on the miraculous transformation of the wilderness and dry land into an oasis. Thus, the shift of emphasis brings about a shift in meaning, namely: a reversal of punishment into salvation, realized in the Israelites' release from exile and return to Jerusalem, concretely expressed in the command to comfort and acted upon in the construction of the desert highway (cf. 40:1-5).

2. *Isaiah 42:14-17*. In the Old Testament, the figure of a woman in labor is associated with one who suffers a punishment or a catastrophe (Isa 13:8; Jer 6:24; 22:23; 30:6; 49:24; 50:43; Mic 4:9-10; Ps 48:7). But here, since the subject is Yahweh, it is an unlikely metaphor of him. Schoors rightly observes that in this instance the association is not with the *condition* of a woman in labor, but in her *act* of crying.¹² Yahweh, after having restrained

¹¹ H. Simian-Yofre, "Exodo en Deuteroisaiás," 538.

¹² A. Schoors, *God Your Saviour* (Vetus Testamentum Supplement 24; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 91. The point of comparison, missed by Simian-Yofre, is the very *act of crying*, not the *kind of cry* (e.g., the cry of pain of a woman in labor).

himself, now cries, not in pain but in anger: "I will gasp and pant (in anger)."¹³ The result of this rage against the enemies of Israel (cf. v. 17) is outlined in v. 15 and is exactly the opposite of what Yahweh will do for his people (cf. 41:18-19). The allusion to the Exodus event lies in v. 16:

*I will lead the blind by a road they do not know,
by paths they have not known I will guide them.
I will turn the darkness before them into light,
the rough places into level ground.
These are the things I will do,
and I will not forsake them.*

Yahweh will guide his people (cf. 49:10), turn the darkness into light and rough places into level ground. In the first Exodus, the guiding presence of Yahweh was made visible through the column of clouds by day and of fire by night (Exod 13:21-22; 40:34-38; Num 9:15-23; cf. Kgs 8:10-11). The leveling of the rough places echoes the command in the prologue to build a highway in the desert for God and his people (cf. 40:3-4).

3. *Isaiah 43:1-7*. This text is an oracle of salvation, composed of two parts (vv. 1-4; 5-7). In the first part, Yahweh assures the Israelite exiles of their release and safe journey. Here the prophet uses the imagery of the Exodus event (v. 2):

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,
and the flame shall not consume you.*

The spectacular event of the exodus was the miraculous crossing of the people through the sea. By Yahweh's power, the waters divided and the people walked on dry land (Exod 14:21-22). In the

¹³ Reading the verb *essom* as derived from the root *nsm* whose derived noun, *nisamah*, is used to refer to the anger of God (Isa 30:33; Ps 18:16), and the verb *es'ap* as derived from the root, *s'p*, which is spoken of an enraged person. Cf. *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979).

same manner, the exiles will traverse rivers and waters and they will be unharmed (cf. 43:16-17; 44:27; 50:2; 51:10).

An additional image is employed: the exiles redeemed by Yahweh will not be burned even if they walk on fire. In the Old Testament, fire is often employed as a symbol, aside from its use in domestic life, and as a frequent implement of war. Metaphorically, it is used to describe theophanies (e.g., Gen 15:17; Exod 3:2), in connection with the cult since it consumes the offering on the altar, or to represent God's divine action on earth. Of the last, the more common usage of fire is to symbolize God's destructive punishment as his wrath (e.g., Amos 7:4,27; Isa 9:17-18; Jer 4:4) and his purification of his chosen people.¹⁴

North and Whybray hold that in this instance, fire is presented, in general, as a danger that will not cause any harm to the exiles in the journey to their homeland.¹⁵ But, since the Babylonian exile can be considered as a purification of Israel's sins by fire, the exiles walking on fire unharmed can be interpreted as their being freed from the Babylonian exile.¹⁶

4. *Isaiah 43:16-21*. The present pericope is a proclamation of salvation, like 41:17-20 and 42:14-17. A clear allusion to the Exodus is evident in vv. 16-17. Likewise, the sequence of events closely follows the standard narration of the event (Exod 14).

*Thus says the Lord,
who makes a way (derek) in the sea,
a path (netibah) in the mighty waters,
who brings out chariot and horse,
army and warrior;*

¹⁴ In the Old Testament, *es* can be used to symbolize afflictions and cleansing judgments (Isa 1:22, 25; Jer 6:27-30; Ezek 22:17-22; Mal 3:2; Zech 13:9; Ps 66:10; Prov 17:3; Sir 22:5). See F. Lang, "pur," *TDNT*, V: 928-48; V. Hamp, "es," *TDOT*, I: 418-28; P.D. Miller, "Fire in the Mythologies of Canaan and Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 27 (1965) 256-61.

¹⁵ See C. North, *The Second Isaiah*, 120; R.N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 82. A. Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour*, 71, does not see the connection of the fire imagery with the Exodus event.

¹⁶ E.M. Good, "Fire," in *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 2, ed. G.A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 269.

*they lie down, they cannot rise,
 they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:
 Do not remember the former things,
 or consider the things of old.
 I am about to do a new thing;
 now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
 I will make a way (derek) in the wilderness
 and rivers in the desert.
 The wild animals will honor me,
 the jackals and the ostriches;
 for I give water in the wilderness,
 rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people,
 the people whom I formed for myself
 so that they might declare my praise.*

The Exodus event is a thing of the past; a "new" exodus is to be brought about by Yahweh. For this, he will set up a way (derek) in the wilderness and put rivers in the desert that are meant for the Israelite exiles in the journey back to their homeland. Not only will Yahweh set up a highway across the desert; he will transform the wilderness into an oasis (cf. 41:18-19). The mention of wild animals, jackals and ostriches is reminiscent of the paradisaical condition of the peaceful kingdom mentioned in Isaiah 11:1-9.¹⁷ The language and imagery of this pericope is even closer to another oracle on the return of the redeemed to Zion in Isa 35:5-10.¹⁸ Undoubtedly, the way in the wilderness refers to the route of the exiles in the "new" exodus that Yahweh is to bring about.

5. *Isaiah 48:20-21.* This text is one of the songs of praise that serve to conclude the larger units in the book of Second Isaiah.

¹⁷ The imagery depicted here of a blissful final age cannot be found elsewhere in Isaiah's genuine oracles. For this reason, many scholars regard this passage as non-Isaianic, coming from a later date. See O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 319.

¹⁸ Isaiah 34-35 show a deliberate contrast between the destruction of the nations, particularly Edom (ch. 34), and the glorification of Israel (ch. 35). Their imagery shows affinity to Second Isaiah's oracles. It is suggested that Isa 40-55 has influenced the author of Isa 34-35. The earliest date of their composition is placed at the end of the sixth century B.C. See Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, 327-8; R. Rendtorff, *Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1982), 192.

In this instance, the song concludes 45:9-48:19 and, at the same time, it closes the first main part of the book, namely, the Jacob-Israel part that focuses on the exiles' imminent liberation through the pagan king Cyrus and on the power of Yahweh as creator and lord of history. The song explicitly calls the exiles to go forth from Babylon in anticipation of the actual event.

*Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea,
declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it,
send it forth to the end of the earth;
say, "The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!"
They did not thirst when he led them through the deserts;
he made water flow for them from the rock;
he split open the rock and the water gushed out.*

The "water from the rock" is evidently an allusion to an experience in the first Exodus, when Moses struck the rock and water came out abundantly (Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:1-13). There is one difference: in the second exodus God himself is the one who makes water flow from the rock (cf. Ps 78:15-16).

6. *Isaiah* 49:7-12. According to Westermann,¹⁹ this pericope is a proclamation of salvation, which is appended to the second of the so-called Servant songs (49:1-6). It speaks about Yahweh's favor for his exiled people, expressed particularly in their return. Here the miraculous preparation for the journey is given emphasis. Allusion to the Exodus event is manifest in vv. 9-11:

*saying to the prisoners, "Come out,"
to those who are in darkness, "Show yourselves."
They shall feed along the ways,
on all the bare heights shall be their pasture;
they shall not hunger or thirst,
neither scorching wind nor sun shall strike them down,
for he who has pity on them will lead them,
and by springs of water will guide them.*

¹⁹ *Isaiah* 40-66, 213-16. He proposes the transposition of v. 7b to follow v. 12, and the omission of "thus says the Lord" from v. 8.

*And I will turn all my mountains into a road (derek),
and my highways (mesillati) shall be raised up.*

In v. 10, the theme of the miraculous transformation of the desert into an oasis is repeated (i.e., abundance of water and presence of trees, cf. 41:18-19; 43:20; 48:21). In v. 11, the theme of the highway (*mesillati*) or road (*derek*) across the desert reappears, together with the image of leveling of the ground, which is a procedure in building a highway (cf. 40:3-4; 42:16; 43:19). These images are discussed above as allusions to the Exodus event.

There is, however, another interesting image in v. 9b that depicts the travelers as a flock that pasture along the way. It is reminiscent of Ps 23, where Yahweh is characterized as a shepherd who leads the righteous man in safety and comfort with abundance of food and drink: "I fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me. You prepare a table before me ... my cup overflows" (vv. 4-5). This image assures the exiles of the constant help and guidance of Yahweh in their journey home to Jerusalem.²⁰

7. *Isaiah 51:9-11*. Westermann²¹ regards this passage as the first section of a long poem (51:9-52:3) that he identifies as a proclamation of salvation. In this context, followed by Schoors,²² vv. 9-11 serve as the community lament. Most commentators see an allusion to the Exodus event is in v. 10b-11.

*Awake, awake, put on strength,
O arm of the Lord!
Awake, as in days of old,
the generations of long ago!
Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces,
who pierced the dragon?
Was it not you who dried up the sea,
the waters of the great deep;*

²⁰ In this case, Simian-Yofre ("Exodo en Deuteroisaias," 547) concedes on the interpretation of Yahweh's promise to help and guide the return of the dispersed to Jerusalem. Yet, he rejects allusion to the Exodus event and reference to a "new" Exodus.

²¹ *Isaiah 40-66*, 239-43.

²² *I am God Your Saviour*, 122-24.

*who made the depths of the sea a way (derek,
for the redeemed to cross over?
So the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.*

Here Second Isaiah has combined the creation tradition ("Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon...") and the Exodus tradition ("... who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to cross over?") in describing the joyful return of the exiles from Babylon. Through a review of God's great deeds in the past, namely, creation and deliverance from Egyptian bondage, Second Isaiah proclaims the imminent liberation of the Israelite exiles with the assurance of God's power to save, as he did in the past.

8. *Isaiah 52:11-12.* This short text gives the final order in connection with the command given at the beginning of the book, "Comfort!" (40:1). The first verse describes the journey of the exiles as a sacred procession that requires the total separation from all that is unclean, especially the contamination with a foreign culture and religion. The allusion to the Exodus event, with a difference, is evident in the second verse:

*Depart, depart, go out from there!
Touch no unclean thing;
go out from the midst of it, purify yourselves,
you who carry the vessels of the Lord.
For you shall not go out in haste,
and you shall not go in flight;
for the Lord will go before you,
and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.*

²³ C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 223-25, does not consider 50:2-3 as an allusion to the exodus. He sees in this passage an apocalyptic description of God's transforming action as a response to Israel's accusation that God no longer has the power to save her.

In the “new” Exodus, the Israelite exiles will depart not in haste, not in flight; it will be a journey in peace and security since God will lead and protect them (cf. Exod 14:19). In the first Exodus, the people fled Egypt in haste and in fear, like fugitives being pursued by their captors; and they took goods from Egypt (Exod 12: 31-36). It was a journey beset with dangers of all sorts – hunger, thirst, enemies, and internal unrest of the people. In the “new” Exodus, however, the exiles will take nothing from Babylon, except the vessels of Yahweh.

In addition, there is a possible allusion to the ninth plague (Exod 10:21-29) when Second Isaiah says of God to have “clothed the heavens with blackness and put sackcloth on them as a covering” (50:3).²³

Conclusion

From the preceding examination of the prologue and the so-called Exodus texts, allusions to one or the other of the features of the Exodus event have been pointed out. Accordingly, it is undeniable that the prophet Second Isaiah has the conscious intention to describe the return of the exiles from Babylon to their homeland as a “new” exodus that Yahweh himself will work out for the sake of his people. As it has been pointed out, the return of the exiles will be a reenactment of the Exodus, but with differences suggesting that the “new” exodus will be greater, more spectacular than the first. □