

# Unexpected Grace and Hope to the Outsiders: Enter the Foreigners and the Eunuchs

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**Abstract:** The opening of Trito Isaiah inaugurates the entrance of eunuchs and foreigners, new members in the restored Temple of Zion. These former outsiders by law (Dt 23, 2-9) are granted admittance among the joyful congregants in YHWH's Temple, now henceforth called to be the house of prayer for all peoples (Is 56,7). What holds this new multi-national congregation in unity? How have been the former barriers delineated by the former law abrogated or hurdled? Membership is no longer by bloodline with the Patriarchs, but fidelity to the covenant with YHWH. The intermingling of these multi-nationals with the exiled people of YHWH in a melting pot must have created a positive bond and understanding among them. The nations through the witness of the exiles must have learned about the faithful and holy character of YHWH. These are the pre-portal conditions that have given birth to the desire to be numbered among the faithful of YHWH. The returning exiles have neither reason to fear nor to be jealous of these members. On the contrary all, the newly returned exiles and the newly admitted members, are invited to joy by YHWH who has gathered them together in his temple.

**Keywords:** Foreigner, Eunuch, Salvation, Temple, House of Prayer, All Peoples, Covenant, Sabbath, Servants, Blessed

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## Introduction

A similar prevailing literary texture, tone, and emotional ambience, so to speak, of assurance and consolation are present in the opening verses of Trito Isaiah similar to that of Deutero Isaiah. But whereas in Deutero Isaiah the object of YHWH's consolation is the exiled Judahites; in Trito Isaiah, the foreigners and the eunuchs have become recipients of His consolation. The announcement of Yahweh's coming salvation has been addressed to Judah (Is 46,13; 51,5; and 62,11). Is 56,1 is an exception where surprisingly, it is addressed to *enosh* and *ben adam* – man and the son of Adam and to the *saris* – the eunuch and *ben hannekar* – the son of the foreigner. This opens, so to speak, a door to universalism. This open door has brought indescribable joy to both eunuch and foreigner and has extinguished the languishing sorrow caused by the closed door of legalism which invades even the inner world of these outsiders. Why are these former outsiders met with consolation? These would-be servants are consoled, encouraged, and invited to trust in YHWH's unfailing word to bring about salvation. From where has this desire to be numbered among YHWH's servants come? Surely it has not come from a vacuum. Conditions must have been present to have brought these unexpected groups to the portal of belief in YHWH, so strong a desire that they want to be numbered as part of the worshipping congregation in the Jerusalem Temple. To deny the fulfillment of such an ardent desire brings about a profound despondency much alike to a resignation bordering on despair. Why are they promised an *inter pares* spiritual status among the Judahites? Is this not likely to provoke jealousy? Would the Judahites be as enthusiastic as YHWH to welcome these outsiders? Would not YHWH have provided the conditions whereby the Judahites would be so predisposed to open the Temple doors to the foreigners and eunuchs? No doubt, YHWH could prevail over his former people to accept these newcomers, but this is likely to breed resentment among the exiled Judahites. How would such suppressed resentment be capable of generating a rejoicing congregation of believers, now composed also of foreigners and eunuchs. How has YHWH, then, convinced his people of this strange and surprising plan? Would not such welcome be effective if it were to come both from below and above? From below - from the mutual positive experience of the exiled Judahites with their host country and from above - from the express will of Yahweh himself. There is no doubt that a paradigmatic shift has occurred. Allegiance to YHWH is no longer a matter of bloodline – of being a physical descendant of the Patriarchs. How are we to understand this theological paradigmatic shift?

## The Emotional Intelligence of YHWH

YHWH must have been aware of the emotional world of the persons he is engaging with. Invitation for change rarely takes root by mere orders. It is well

known that *costringenda odiosa sunt* – subjects who are obliged without any motivation or reason proffered would perceive such commands as disruptive and violent, with the end result that the invitation goes to waste and is rejected.

The Prophet Isaiah, thus, presents YHWH as one who knows the terrain of the heart and most capable of recruiting the forces of the human emotions. In an agricultural parable YHWH is presented as a farmer with the know-how to prepare the terrain where he would plant his salvation – making justice and righteousness sprout (Is 28, 24-29). Cognizant of his people’s fears, expectations, hopes, and delusions, YHWH knows how to console them when they are discouraged. He revives their flagging spirit by recruiting their imagination through the means of lively visions - of a world renewed out of the devastation of the exile. He encourages his would-be partners that this vision is within the reach of their possibility. God could connect with them because he knows them and what they bear in heart. They are invited to trust in the Lord’s word, that it is efficacious and would bring about what it has promised – the longed-for salvation. The word is likened unto water, rain, and snow that is sure to bring forth vegetation from the earth (Is 55,10-11).

Whenever the announcement of immanent salvation is heralded, Yahweh invites trust and counts on the fidelity of his people to participate in the task of his life-giving plan for them and surely usher for them the blessings of bounty. In Is 46,13, He predicts a reversal of fortune: the chastisement of Babylon, its demise and the restoration of Judah – “salvation within Zion and the glory of Israel.” To those who persist in their unbelief, he reminds them that he is the Creator and the Lord of history.

### **The Emotional Sincerity of YHWH**

YHWH for his part, is not ashamed and sincere to reveal his emotion of displeasure or pleasure at the actions of his covenant partners. His anger is not the last word, but a move to reinstate his covenant partner to a right relationship with him. His justice is tempered by mercy. The exile proves to be a means of purification, “See, I have refined you like silver, tested you in the furnace of affliction” (Is 48,10). He begs them to renounce injustice and unrighteousness, to embrace conversion, and to trust in the sure hope he is offering them. He warns them of the voice of the false prophets and more so, of the vain recourse to idols. He condemns such betrayals. He directs them instead to visions, by firing their imagination, so to speak. He leads them in their imagination to admire robust verdant trees growing where once there were thorns (Is 55,13), of a repopulated Zion as a mother of many children (Is 66,7-14). These are images of the blessings he plans to shower his people and the abundant joy that he wishes them. He

presents himself as one who offers potable water and provides truly nutritious food - non-adulterated grain, wine, and milk. Indeed, a table of bounty (Is 55,1-2). But to realize these visions YHWH takes them to task, to engage them as his partners, to be his faithful servants.

### **Jarring Juxtaposition**

Isaiah is wont to place contrasting icons side by side. The Jewish Rabbis by tradition would not end the reading of Isaiah at the last verse Is 66, 24 - a picture of horror where undying worms will consume the cadavers of the wicked amidst unextinguishable fire; but end with the idyllic previous verse where from Sabbath to Sabbath all knee would worship Yahweh (Is 66, 23). The figures of the faithful eunuch and foreigner are juxtaposed with the drunken leaders as mute dogs and a lascivious woman idolater. The blessed stands side by side with the unblessed, the faithful with the unfaithful.

### **The Emotional Contour of Is 56, 1-8**

The first eight verses of Trito Isaiah are highly charged with a wide gamut of emotions. First, comes the calm reassuring and hope generating voice of the Lord that he will accomplish his plans for salvation and redemption, the salvation theme we already have encountered presented in various literary imagery (Is 55). But then, as we are expecting in the following chapter the voice of a Judahite in reply, a strange personage enters - a foreigner. Knowing his situation vis a vis the Law, he voices in a spirit of resignation, a lament of auto exclusion from the Congregation of the Lord.

Then stranger yet, comes the cry of the nearly hopeless the eunuch: for him, his physical mutilation makes it impossible to construct a family, a new generation of sons and daughters who would perpetuate his name. In a chiastic structure, the Lord responds first to the eunuch and then, to the foreigner with a consoling reversal of what they both fear – exclusion and the deep sadness of not belonging. Astounding as it is, in fact, they will be numbered among YHWH's servants. A place is assured for them in the worshipping community in the temple of the Lord. What has begun as a lament is then, overturned to joy as both are welcomed and receive blessings in the present and in the time to come. Yahweh proves himself to be a God who is indulgent in hope. And as YHWH has promised, there are yet more of an ingathering to come to be joined to this joyful community of worshipers.

YHWH issues a strange promise of rejoicing hope to the foreigner and eunuch; but surely, such promise raises an eyebrow of incomprehension, for the

Judahite. Is the exiled and returning Judahite, thus included in this promise? Why name the foreigner and eunuch; while the Judahite's presence is at the most only implied in the Prophet himself as Judahite, or in the now more inclusive definition of the servant of YHWH as the Enosh Adam who pledges his allegiance to YHWH through the observance of the Sabbath and in working out in his daily life YHWH's plan of justice and righteousness. The Judahite presence may be assumed in the original Abrahamic nucleus of the Lord's Congregation. The Judahite's voice is, indeed, muted in these verses, although the last verse assures us that the dispersed of Israel shall be gathered and YHWH himself carries that very title as one who gathers Israel.

### **The Eunuch Bemoans His Condition**

Although the foreigner first cries his lament of auto-exclusion (Is 56, 3a), it is to the second cry of the eunuch, "See, I am a dry tree" (Is 56, 3b) that YHWH responds first. His mutilated condition brings him a double woe – he will never have sons and daughters of his own and he could not be admitted to YHWH's Congregation.<sup>1</sup> A dry tree is bereft of life itself and could not be lifegiving to the fauna that depends on it for nourishment.

Consider the terracotta representation of the Mother Goddess, later identified as Asherah in Figure 1, dating from 1300 BC and discovered in the western Shephela of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Her facial expression shows her at the moment of birth pangs. Two baby-twins Shahaar and Shalem are suckling milk from her breast – the fruit of the body; two trees from which are goat-like animals, the ibex are grazing, are depicted on her legs – the fruit of the earth. The trees symbolize her fertility which she demonstrates by opening her pudenda. The fruit of the body, or more literally, the fruit of the womb and the fruit of the earth are considered as supreme blessings that YHWH grants his faithful covenant partners (Dt 28,4-12).

This coupling and connection between body and earth's life producing capacity interestingly appears in a diagnostic test for the fertility of a woman. A Greek medical papyrus directs a woman to urinate on a plant at night. If the following morning the plant dries up, she is sterile; if instead it remains green, she is fertile.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, (The Old Testament Library, Louisville 2001) 458. Bachelors who have died without issue are considered to have their names cut off. Childs cites the case of Absalom, the rebel prince and the prophet Jeremiah. The would-be assassins of Jeremiah expressly say that they would have his name cut off (Jer 11,19). There has been an error in book's citation giving the reference as (Jer 17,19) instead.

<sup>2</sup> Othmar Keel, *Jerusalem and the One God* (Minneapolis 2017) 56.

<sup>3</sup> Candida R. Moss and Joel S. Baden, *Reconceiving Infertility: Biblical Perspectives on Procreation and Childlessness* (Princeton 2015) 204.

It is the loss of fertility which the eunuch laments about. No son or daughter will issue from the loins of the eunuch. His name will not be perpetuated by a new generation.

Unlike the female body which may be healed from barrenness to fertility through a miraculous intervention, and Scriptures are full of narratives about this, there is no recounted reversal for the eunuch. A male who has undergone the operation of emasculation could not be un-emasculated, a eunuch could not be un-eunuched. There is almost no expectation on the readers' part that it be so.

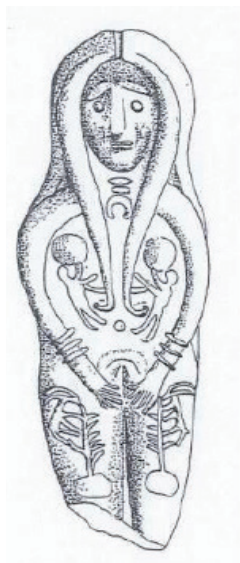


Figure 1

### Eunuchs Made by Men

To be employed as a eunuch, before a boy hits puberty, he is castrated. The physical effects of this mutilation are dramatic in the adult age: beardless, a huge barrel chest, a boyish treble voice, and a height of more than average. Although such mutilation is prohibited by the Torah, exceptions have been accommodated to employ eunuchs in the Royal Court of Jerusalem, observes de Vaux.<sup>4</sup> The lyricist Osbert Sitwell chose to open “Belshazzar’s Feast,” a sacred oratorio by the composer William Walton with the harrowing prophecy of Isaiah to Hezekiah that the royal begotten sons of Judah will become eunuchs in the palace of the King of Babylon (Is 39,7), and then the invitation to howl and wail at the Lord’s coming severe judgment (Is 13,6).<sup>5</sup> It is surely meant to evoke terror at the crude physical operation of mutilation and thus, generate pity for the boy prince who undergoes it. To emasculate the royal sons of Hezekiah is surely a way to endanger the guarantee of succession to the throne. Maybe it is a less cruel measure to control the increase of royal sons than that of the Egyptians who would have all male babies born to Hebrews be killed by midwives at the moment of birth (Gen 1,16).

Needless to say, sexual intimacy and reproduction are precluded powers to the eunuch. Being asexual, the eunuch’s primary employment is in the harem. There, the eunuch must above all, see to it that the women residents, especially the virgins, follow the beauty regimen of being treated with oil of myrrh, perfumes,

<sup>4</sup> Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London 1973) 121. De Vaux hesitated if the commander defending Zedekiah’s royal party against the troops of Sennacherib was indeed a eunuch. It comes as a relief then that the King’s singers are truly male and female p.225. There was no need to resort to a castrato unlike the Vatican which employed castrati in its choir until 1922 when it was finally abolished. Vatican’s last castrato was Alessandro Moreschi.

<sup>5</sup> Osbert Sitwell, *Belshazzar’s Feast* (London 1931) 1.

and provided with cosmetics (Est 2,12). Eunuchs are to maintain peace and order among the competing wives and concubines of the king. It is known that eunuchs may become divided into parties as they take the side of one beauty over the other. In the story of Esther, we see eunuchs faithful to the deposed Vashti and to Esther, the rising favorite of King Ahaseurus (Est 1,10 – 2,4).

They may also be entangled in the power politics of the court. Two royal eunuchs Bagathan and Thares have plotted against King Ahasuerus (Est 2,21), Two or three eunuchs gladly threw out of the window their Queen Mistress Jezebel at the instigation of the rebel Jehu (2Kgs 9, 30-33). The Cushite eunuch Ebed-melek pleaded King Zedekiah for the life of Jeremiah languishing in the muddy cistern (Jer 38,7). YHWH rewards this eunuch and foreigner by preserving his life during the siege of Jerusalem (Jer 39, 15-18).

Although there are exceptions as we have encountered above, Xenophon (*Cyropaedia*, Book 7, 7.5. 61-65) writes that the eunuch's fidelity to his master is much praised and well known. Without attachment outside of the royal court and possibility to create a dynasty of his own, his service is focused on the monarch. His prowess, though inferior in bodily strength, in the field of battle, could sometimes outmatch the normal soldiers, "making the weak equal to the strong."

Of course, the beauty care of women is not the only occupation of the eunuch. N' Shea's study of Akkadian has shown that *Saris*, the Hebrew adopted word for eunuch is originally from Akkadian *sha reshi* and literally means "he who is of the head," a personal servant. He is distinguished from the other male servants of the king – "the bearded one," *sha ziqni*.<sup>6</sup> What has puzzled some scholars is why some eunuchs are entrusted with manly tasks - of going before the king to bear his arrows, shield, or armor; to lead troops, and administer provinces in the name of the king. These more manly tasks have left some scholars utterly puzzled. This puzzlement has led them to translate *saris*, as courtier, rather than eunuch. In the end it is a choice to translate *saris* as courtier or as a eunuch intending it to be a castrato.

What would become of the oratorio "Belshazzar's Feast" if the opening line would be, "Thus, spake Isaiah, thy sons that thou shalt beget will be taken away, and be courtiers in the palace of the King of Babylon (Is 39,7)?" It would lose its shock value, would it not? There would be no reason to howl and wail. It would, on the contrary, be a good augur to Hezekiah that his future descendants would be employed as courtiers. Omar N' Shea writes, "far from being effeminate or third gender, eunuchs validate their claim to masculinity."<sup>7</sup> In fact, Assyria

<sup>6</sup> Omar N' Shea, "Gender Archeology," *Near Eastern Archeology* 79/3 (2016) 214.

<sup>7</sup> See OMAR N' SHEA, "Gender Archeology," *Near Eastern Archeology*, 79/3, Number (2016) 214-221.

has had a Eunuch King Sin-shumu-lishir for six months. His signet ring depicts him as a beardless male wrestling with a lion. Consider Figure 2 which depicts the handshake between Shalmanesser III of Assyria and Marduk-zahir-shumi of Babylon and behind them their respective eunuch arm bearers.<sup>8</sup> Notice how the eunuchs are beardless; but here, as arm bearers they are not performing the tasks of harem keeping. We see them here in a diplomatic setting.

In a military setting as we see in the bas relief uncovered in South West of Nineveh, a beardless eunuch is using the arrow while his master carries the shield.<sup>9</sup> If his master would forgo of the shield to throw a long-range projectile like the lance and use both hands and it would be the eunuch's turn to take the shield and protect his master. The warrior – arm bearer tandem is very important in warfare. E. Matthews observes that Jonathan's military success of bold incursion, almost a suicide mission of two against the many, into the Philistine stronghold is attributed to the skill of his armor bearer as well (1 Sam 14,6).<sup>10</sup>

Based on the prophecy of Isaiah, there must have been a considerable number of Judahites made eunuchs by their sovereigns. J.J. Collins conjecture that Nehemiah must also have been a eunuch and not only a cupbearer to King Artaxerxes, the same position he holds for Daniel and his companions aside from being courtiers of the king of Babylon.<sup>11</sup> Nehemiah, Daniel, and his companions, in fact, have no known sons and daughters. Is the admission of eunuchs in Isaiah



Figure 2

a move to rehabilitate the eunuchized exiled sons of Judah? Are the eunuch foreigners, then, barred from admission? The coupling of foreigners and eunuchs in the past as seen in Dt 23, 2-9 seems to imply that now based on Is 56, 4-5, even the foreign eunuchs may be admitted in the Temple Worship in Jerusalem.

<sup>8</sup> Othmar Keel, *The Symbolism of the Biblical World* (London 1978) 96.

<sup>9</sup> See E. LeBron, "Armor Bearers," *Holy Land Illustrated Bible* (Brentwood, Tennessee 2020) 400-401. Le Bron's article concentrates on the role of the armor bearer and not on the eunuch per se. The bas relief, though, clearly shows a beardless eunuch together with his master in the frontline followed by two master-armor bearer pairs.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> J.J. Collins, *Old Testament Interpretation II* (Lecture 13) YouTube.

## Eunuchs from Birth

Male descendants of Aaron who have any birth defect are barred from offering food to YHWH, though they may consume and partake of the food offered (Lev 21, 16-23). Included among the excluded are those whose testicles are damaged or crushed, *meruach ashek*. Biblical prudery sometimes does not permit naming the male private parts directly and would rather resort to euphemism. For example, the woman who in defense of her husband has held the testicles of his opponent, the text would prefer the use of *mebushim*, that is shameful parts (Dt 25,11). Excluded from the Assembly are those who have been emasculated by crushing or cutting *petsuah dakka* or *kerut shofkah*, that is, wounded by crushing or being-cut-of genital (Dt 23,1). Eunuchs made by men and eunuchs at birth were explicitly not to be admitted in the Assembly of YHWH.

## The Unlikely Reversal of YHWH

YHWH hushed the eunuch not to say his lament anymore, for he reverses his bitter fortune (Is 56,3b-5). He gains admittance to his Temple, his House, and within he will receive a memorial, literally a hand – *yad*, and a name – *shem*, better than sons and daughters. Memorial and name seem to be redundant. Koole proposes a more fitting translation of *yad* as a share, a sign of fellowship, or strength.<sup>12</sup> According to Blenkinsopp and Goldingay, it is a memorial and name akin to the mausoleum of the bachelor rebel Absalom.<sup>13</sup> But that it is in within the confines of YHWH's residence poses a difficulty. Rather than a grave memorial, the eunuch's name will be eternal for another reason, for YHWH who remembers him is eternal. It is not incumbent upon the succeeding generations to remember the name of YHWH's faithful eunuch, for YHWH himself remembers.

In contrast to the castrato, the born eunuch - *saris hamma*, could have sons and daughters by adoption which the castrato is prohibited to have.

Yahweh has thus, given the eunuch, man-made or born, greater than his modest expectation. He is promised an everlasting memory and the joy of participating in the renewed Jerusalem Temple.

<sup>12</sup> Ian L Koole, *Isaiah III* (Historical Commentary of the Old Testament, Leuven 2001) 16.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56-66* (Anchor Bible 19B; Garden City, NY 2003) 45. Blenkinsopp insists that it must be more than a grave mausoleum to be assured of eternal remembrance. Moreover, Absalom is not a wise and just man, but an infamous rebel prince who usurped the throne from his father David.

## The Foreigner as Messiah

The priests of Marduk in Babylon enthusiastically hailed Cyrus' conquest of their Empire and rejoiced over the demise of their King Nabonidus who neglected the cult of Marduk in favor of the mood god Sin. In a clay cylinder they declare Cyrus to be Marduk-favored and sent to restore order to Babylon. Exiled peoples other than Judahites are allowed as a policy from the Cyrus government freely to return to their lands of origin with the images of their gods and rebuild their temples.

Isaiah would insist, though, that it is YHWH through his servants, the prophets; not Marduk and his priests, who has foretold this event. YHWH has foretold the chastisement of the Chaldeans by the coming king from the north (Is 41,25) and then, subsequently specifically named him Cyrus. Although YHWH is unknown to Cyrus, surprisingly he is declared by YHWH to be Messiah and Shepherd for his people (Is 44,28; 45,1). YHWH challenges the inert idols who cannot inspire neither fear nor awe, neither have knowledge, reason, nor understanding that comes from the heart and mocks the idolaters (Is, 44,18). Although these exiled idols have been carried on the shoulders of their enthusiastic devotees to their respective and would be restored sanctuaries, they have no power and are lifeless.

There will be no resurgence neither of a Neo-Assyrian Empire nor a Neo-Babylonian Empire, notwithstanding the return of their gods and the renewed cult offered to them. Why would still some Judahites persist to betray YHWH for these idols after having experienced his judgment in the exile and at present the fulfillment of his promise of liberation is something which is downright incomprehensible to YHWH. It is YHWH who accompanies them into this new exodus and gathers them back from the dispersed parts of the known world. Why then, should they place their trust on these lifeless idols? Yahweh is the creator of the world and through historical events he is showing himself more than to be the local God of the Judahites. He is in fact the Lord of history and directing the events according to his plan. Even the exile itself is not the impotence of YHWH to save, "His hand is not short to save" (Is 59,1); but it is people's continuous sins that have brought the tragedy on themselves. Hezekiah is advised by Jeremiah to surrender to the Babylonians to save his royal family and Jerusalem, but he refused and thus met his cruel end and the destruction of the city (Jer 34,4 -21).

Thus, the betrayal and refusal to trust of the returning exiles despite palpable evidence of YHWH's power to save, indeed, enkindles his wrath and calls for his severe chastisement and eventually exposes the recalcitrant idol worshipper to his shame (Is 65,3-7). Notice how the woman idolatress' worship is graphically

sexual, “Behind the door and the doorpost you placed your indecent symbol. Deserting me, you spread your high, wild bed; And of those whose embraces you love you carved the symbol and gazed upon it” (Is 57,8). In the religious imagination YHWH is the husband of Israel. Thus, idolatry here is tantamount to adultery.

The battle for YHWH and the idols still rages in the minds of the Judahite survivors of the exile. Even this remnant still has to be purified. YHWH insists, “Come and assemble, gather together, you fugitives from among the gentiles! They are without knowledge who bear wooden idols and pray to gods who cannot save” (Is 45,20). Contrary to what some scholars who consider the polemics against idols as pre-exilic, such polemics continue, well even in the post exilic time of Trito Isaiah.<sup>14</sup> YHWH invites a new generation of faithful servants who would partner with him to usher a new era.

### Xenophobia or Filoxenia?

The foreigners are often considered as potential enemies of the nation. The Egyptian response, as we see it in their bas-relief iconography, is to humiliate the conquered foreigners. The iconography, rather than being propaganda, magically revitalizes for eternity Pharaoh’s power over the hostile forces and assures the viewer of



Figure 3

the perduring conquered status of Pharaoh’s enemies. Consider the celebratory art of Amenophis III’s triumph over the Nubians. The conquered are “mocked and scorned” by having four of them between the reins of the horse, one as footstool for the Pharaoh, and another seated on the chariot shaft.<sup>15</sup>

Not all foreigners demonstrate hostility and thus, considered as enemies. Indeed, foreign countries who fall under the influence of the Pharaoh may gladly present tribute to demonstrate their gratitude for the stability and order ushered by their conquered status or alliance with Egypt. Such alliance fosters trade and commercial exchange. Here we view the exchange of presents from the representatives of the allied nations. Rather than the often thought of onerous tributes, there is an atmosphere of joyous giving. We have here, the joyful dancing

<sup>14</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66* (ICC; London – New York 2014) 117.

<sup>15</sup> Othmar Keel, p. 105.

Negroes presenting themselves to the Pharaoh alongside their gifts. Keel writes, “The joyous dances of the Negroes indicate that the delivery of tribute was not so sad an occasion as one might think.”<sup>16</sup>

In Isaiah, the foreigners will be joyous at the return of the exiled people of YHWH in Zion. They will be likened to trees that will clap their hands, to mountains and hills that will break out in song (Is 55,12).

### The Foreigner Vocabulary Camp

Resident foreigners who live amicably with the Israelites are guaranteed legal protection and regarded as equal to the natives. They are not to be mistreated. The people having experienced being resident aliens themselves in Egypt must be sensitive to the needs of these foreigners – *ger* (Ex 22,21; 23,9). YHWH, himself loves the alien (Dt 10, 17-19). They are to be given hospitality if needed.

The nations are commonly known as *goyim* and the individual citizen belonging to them is called *goy*. We find the *goyim* streaming to Zion as the Messianic Capital to learn the Lord’s ways (Is 2,2).

For the *nokerim* – foreigners who live in the Land, but did not assimilate with the Israelites or foreigners passing by, may find themselves to be legitimate buyers of animals found dead, whereas such animals are prohibited to be sold to the natives (Dt 14,21 and Lev 17,15)! Solomon in his dedication of the Temple interceded before YHWH for the transient foreigner who prays there. Trito Isaiah has chosen to employ the word *nkr*, to emphasize the strangeness of physiognomy, ways and customs which the foreigner bear. There would be a vocabulary and thematic linkage with Is 28, 7-21 where YHWH speaks in a foreign tongue to his people and carries out his *nokerah* – “strange” work.

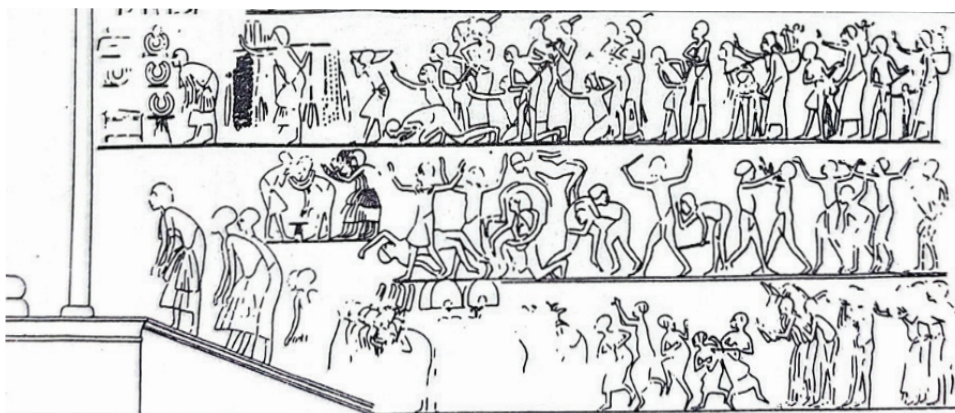


Figure 4

<sup>16</sup> Othmar Keel, p. 305.

What is uppermost, though, in the Judahite thought world is the potential threat of idolatry which the intermingling foreigners may pose to the community. They may, indeed, groan under the yoke of a foreign power, but it would be a far greater tragedy to lose the Faith. It is greatly feared that the intermarriage of Judahites with other peoples will compromise their faith in YHWH. Deuteronomy is adamant that the sons and daughters of Israel are not to be given in marriage to the sons and daughters of the surrounding pagan nations (Dt 7 3-4). Ezra and Nehemiah have adopted the intolerant attitude of an absolute prohibition to intermarriage with foreigners (Ezr 9-10 and Neh 13). To preserve the Faith, they decided that the Judahite menfolk who have been married with foreign wives, repudiate them alongside their children.

### **The Foreigners for And against the People**

Unbeknown to them, foreign kings and their servants have been employed by YHWH to realize his plan either in judgment, in the chastisement of his people; or liberation from the oppression of conquerors. The liberator granted them freedom to return from exile, and enabled them to begin the task of rebuilding and forging anew the social and religious life in their homeland. They could again, then, live as a nation with sworn allegiance of fidelity to YHWH. These foreign liberators have favored the cause of the people of YHWH.

In Dt 23, 8-9; the Edomites are considered to be the related brother to Israel and are thus, granted admittance after a waiting period of three generations, as well as the Egyptians who have hosted the people in time of famine. Having left a positive historical memory, albeit with reserve, in the case of the Egyptians, for the forced labor they imposed on the Israelites, they may be admitted to worship YHWH after a period of probation.

Otherwise, is the situation of those who demonstrated hostility: the Ammonite or Moabite who has refused food and water to the people in their entrance to Canaan may never be admitted to the community. Moreover, in comparison with the Ammonites, Moabites are greatly hated for employing Balaam to curse the people (Dt 23, 4-7).

In the time of Isaiah, the emotional wounds inflicted by the savage cruelty and excess of the Assyrians and Babylonians still smart in the historical memory of the Judahites. Passage of time may be needed for a purification of this painful memory. Yet in Isaiah, unlike in Deuteronomy where there is a definite exclusion *in saecula saeculorum* of foreigners who have been malevolent to YHWH's people, there is a strange rehabilitation and opening of membership towards the Assyrians. Assyrians and Egyptians will have access to the worship of YHWH through a

highway from the Canaanite speaking regions of Egypt. The rehabilitation of the Babylonians is not explicit in Isaiah as it is in Psalm 87.

### **Witness to YHWH During the Exile**

There must have been a genuine witness to YHWH of the exiled community in Egypt that have so inspired the local people, and perhaps the migrant Assyrians who have lived there that they have become enamored of the God of the Judahites. YHWH himself responds by imparting this bold blessing, “Blessed be my people Egypt, and the work of my hands, Assyria, and my inheritance, Israel” (Is 19,24). We may consider this as a predisposition of the community of exiles in Heliopolis as a movement coming from below - the positive experience of mutual respect and esteem among the community and the natives and immigrants of Egypt. Terence Donaldson asserts that there has been a sympathization among the foreign nations that have lived and co-mingled with the exiles. Then, with time comes a conversion to know YHWH and confess him as the one God who demands holiness and righteousness – an ethical monotheism. And with this life changing decision a share in the blessings with the ingathered people of YHWH in the restored City of Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup> The experience of the exile’s contact with the nations has widened the theological horizon of Judah. Donaldson writes, “...when God should act in a final way to vindicate Israel and to establish the anticipated era of righteousness and peace, Gentiles would abandon their sinful ways, turn to the God of Israel, and thus be granted a share in the blessings of end time.”<sup>18</sup>

We find that the word as water which has proceeded from the mouth of YHWH follows the same dynamics as the exiles who are sent to the dispersed corners of the known world and returns to Zion. The parallel implies that the exiles are like to the word of YHWH, it shall not return empty (Is 55,10-12).

The Judahites must have also fostered a solidarity among the peoples who have been likewise subjugated by the superpowers – Assyria, Babylon, and Persia; these foreigners sympathetic to Judah acknowledge the liberating work of YHWH in restoring Jerusalem.<sup>19</sup>

As for Babylon, although severely condemned, reviled, and so detested that her fall has become an occasion of great rejoicing for the conquered peoples under her, the prophecy of her demise is strangely preceded by God as gathering the nations, of every knee bending before him, and every tongue confessing faith in him (Is, 45,23). Is it implied then, that a later period Babylon shall be rehabilitated

<sup>17</sup> See Terence L. Donaldson, *Judaism and the Gentiles: Jewish Patterns of Universalism* (to 135 CE) (Waco, Texas 2007) 478-505.

<sup>18</sup> Terence L. Donaldson, 501.

<sup>19</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66* (ICC; London-New York 2014) 517.

and, in fact, as Ps 87, 4-5 joyously proclaims, she will be numbered as one of Zion's children. Isaiah is not explicit on the matter; but the prior prophecy must have opened the door for Babylon to enter at a future time.

Surely, the benevolent Cyrus and his court, the good acquaintances among foreigners who have, in one way or the other, helped or shown goodwill to the Judahites during their exile are worthy of great gratitude. But will such gratitude open to them the temple gates of YHWH's sanctuary? Reward them with membership as congregants in the worshipping community of YHWH? The goodwill and benevolent actions in favor of the exiled Judahites must have forged an amicable relationship among them and created a certain disposition in YHWH's people to receive these benevolent foreigners, much more so for foreigners who surprisingly have declared their intention to be numbered among YHWH's people.

### **Servanthood Re-defined by YHWH From Above**

The blessedness of faithful service to YHWH now includes a broader *Bene Enosh* – son of man in comparison to the restrictive sons of the Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Such an expansion is not a mere logical Aristotelian categorical admittance, but a paradigmatic shift. No longer membership in YHWH's community be by bloodline, but by lifelong allegiance and fidelity to YHWH. Yet, it must not be forgotten that the Patriarchs themselves have embarked on a life-changing decision to be servants of YHWH. The former wandering Arameans who have formerly worshipped idols have been found by YHWH and asked to bind themselves to him by a covenant.

The entrance of eunuchs and foreigners is not brought about merely by accidental socio-political events, but is already implied by the vocation of Abraham to be a blessing to all nations (Gen 22,18). The dedication of the First Temple by Solomon has envisioned the foreigner praying YHWH and Solomon himself pleaded that the foreigner's prayer be heeded (1Kgs 8,41). In fact, in Isaiah YHWH intends it, he plans it, shapes historical events to open the Temple to the foreigners. When challenged by mockers that YHWH does things haphazardly, YHWH echoes their saying, in what may be the most hilarious poetry in Isaiah – “*tsav latsav tsav latsav qav laqav ze'ir sham ze'ir sham*, command on command, command on command, rule on rule, rule on rule, here a little, there a little” (Is 28, 13a). YHWH's strange work would include the entrance of foreigners, “his strange work – *avidato nokriyah*” (Is 28,21). He even speaks in a foreign tongue to make his point (Is 28,11).

The servant, then, whether of Judahite origin, foreigner, or eunuch becomes YHWH's agent of change. He is attentive to YHWH's plan and purposes for his

renewed Temple, his holy mountain, the new Zion. He is constantly strengthened from week to week by the celebration of Sabbath. Keeping the Sabbath holy and not profaning it means that he dedicates this day in seeking the Eternal in time. Abraham Joshua Heschel aptly describes the Sabbath as the Jewish Cathedral in time.<sup>20</sup> He rises above the economic concerns and the humdrum of everyday living to declare that he is free to celebrate a feast for YHWH. He is free, not a slave, not merely a *homo economicus*; for life is more than selling or buying.

Ezra and Nehemiah have had a difficult time to re-instate the Sabbath among the newly arrived exile. Economics seem to be far more attractive to the new home-comers than celebrating the Sabbath for YHWH. They are more eager to see the Sabbath ends so that they may begin to buy and sell again, rather than anticipate the coming of Sabbath. To ban commerce on the Sabbath, the radical measure of closing the city gates of Jerusalem has to be imposed (Neh 13,15-22). Sabbath seems to be the first to be neglected and the first to be picked up again for a spiritual reawakening to YHWH. Nehemiah reminds the newly returned exiles if they have forgotten easily that it has been through the negligence of the Sabbath that judgment and disaster have come upon Jerusalem.

Sabbath keeping as one scholar views belongs to the first tablet of the law, while the orthopraxis of doing justice and righteousness belongs to the second. True may that be, Isaiah has a symbolic representation of both, and thus, more memorable. Such symbols may have helped the *Adam Enosh*, the *saris*, and *neker* – the son of man, the eunuch, and foreigner give their assent and obeisance to YHWH.

Sabbath to be kept and made holy, and not profaned, surely, this vocabulary camp appertains to the language of the temple.<sup>21</sup> Sabbath, then, is symbolized by the Temple, and becomes the Temple in time. He who is a servant of YHWH has to guard, to keep watch that nothing unholy profanes the precepts, surrounding, and interior of this Temple. In this task, the servant becomes the priest. He is also called blessed for keeping the Sabbath. The *asre* saying likewise belongs to vocabulary camp of the temple language even of Egypt.<sup>22</sup> It comes as no surprise, then, that YHWH having employed of the foreigners as servants, would select among them priests and Levites (Is 66,21). Respecting, of course, the physical

<sup>20</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York 1951) 6.

<sup>21</sup> Ingrid Faro, “Defining Evil from the Hebrew Text of Genesis,” *New Blackfriars* 105/6 (2024) 594-609. Faro concludes that the servant has to keep, be vigilant not to let the unholy pollute the holy grounds of the Temple. In this task, he is acting as a priest. Evil is to against the express will of YHWH or his design and plan for his covenant partner.

<sup>22</sup> Cazelles traces the origin of the word to the reward which the Egyptian temple servant receives for his faithful service. See H. Cazelles, “Asre,” *TDOT* 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 447.

integrity of the priest and Levite candidates, thus the foreign eunuchs are excluded from this office.

Justice and righteousness take an architectural metaphor, “I will make of right a measuring line, of justice a level” (Is 28,17). YHWH is constructing an edifice that is stable and will weather the hail and rain, while the edifice of the drunken leaders shall crush down and prove to be a false refuge, because it is bereft of justice and right in its foundation.

Instead of using the concept of grace,<sup>23</sup> the *berit* – covenant remains a good heuristic tool to explain the relationship between YHWH and his servant. The covenant is a valid binding bond between YHWH and his servant, who both give their mutual consent to a common task of obligations. The servant gives his free assent and binds himself to YHWH’s intention of realizing his justice and salvation. YHWH describes his covenant as a covenant of life for its blessing filled gifts, in contrast to the corrupt leaders who made a covenant with death and indeed, hapless is he who has put his trust in them (Is 28,17b-20). To love YHWH belongs to the mature years of having experienced him as a sure and faithful covenant partner. What is required of each group, the son of man, the eunuch, and the foreigner holds for all. What we observe is a movement of maturity in learning to love YHWH. It is a psychological truth that he who has thought what would never be, but surprisingly embraced in welcome by YHWH into his House, would respond more in love, gratefulness, and fidelity.

### The House of YHWH

The foreigners will be taken to the holy mountain. Notice again here, the temple vocabulary. It comes as no surprise, that from there he is taken to YHWH’s house, a house of prayer where he is made joyful (Is 56, 7a). Made joyful, for obtaining what he thought was impossible – gaining admission and being numbered in the worshipping community of the newly composed servants and praising YHWH for the realized salvation and justice promised in the first verse (Is 56,1). His full membership is expressed in the *comunio in sacris* together with his newly returned, or rather, “ingathered“ Israelite brothers. YHWH, then, emphatically reaffirms that his house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Is 56,7). The renewed Temple is thus opened to welcome the eunuch and the foreigner *inter pares* with the Judahites who temporally remain *primus inter pares*.

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<sup>23</sup> John Oswalt, *Isaiah 40-66* (NICOT Grand Rapids, Michigan 1998) 465. Oswalt asks whether the servant has to respond with active service to the invitation of YHWH. If it were grace, it would be YHWH’s sole work and the servant need not exert himself in active obedience. But then, this is not the dynamics of *berit* – of the covenant.

Consider the mosaic from Santa Sabina. Notice how the *Ecclesia ex Gentibus* - Church from the Gentiles is symbolized by a matriarch holding a scroll with a curving free flowing script of Latin and how the *Ecclesia ex Circumcisione* – the Church from the Circumcised is symbolized by a matriarch holding a parchment with the square script of Hebrew. The Christians from early on see that their church is a fulfillment of Isaiah that YHWH’s house will be a house of prayer for all peoples.



Figure 5

We have begun this paper with the eunuch’s lament of being a dry tree. Zion, on the contrary, is presented at the end of Trito Isaiah as a happy mother with many children gathered around her, the many servants of YHWH from various nations “Oh that you may suck fully of the milk of her comfort, that you may delight at her abundant breasts” (Is 66, 11). It is almost a pain-free delivery of a male child. It is YHWH who assures of the fruit of the body. He challenges the doubtful with a question, “Shall I bring a mother to the point of birth, and yet not let her child be born?” (Is 66, 9a). Now contrast this with the nation separated from YHWH represented as a pregnant mother who has in great pains given birth to wind! “We conceived and writhed in pain, giving birth to wind; Salvation we

have not achieved for the earth, the inhabitants of the world cannot bring it forth” (Is 27,18).

We may find it surprising that Trito Isaiah seems to abruptly change the subject when he shifts to deal with the corrupt leaders in Is 56, 9 ff. But by now, we should be familiar as we have seen that Isaiah jolts us by showing us the stark reality of the wounded situation where we are. Indeed, the reality is far removed from the promising vision that we have been presented before (Is 28, Is 56, and Is 66). Because of the dismal end of Is 66,24; the Rabbinic tradition would read the previous verse 23 to finish the reading of the Book of Isaiah with an optimism and joyful tone.

## Conclusion

YHWH has employed a grammar of assent. He used symbols, recruited reason, imagination, and emotions to convince his would-be servants and make them participants in constructing a new and joyous Jerusalem now composed of many sons and daughters of many nations together with the ingathered Israelite. He has been clear of what he expects of the sons of the Patriarchs, of the eunuch, and the foreigner. Israel has been gathered from the dispersed corners of the known world. From their efforts to keep their identity as the people of YHWH, the nations have learned from them the wisdom, justice, and holiness of YHWH and thus enamored of him, they intentionally want to be numbered among YHWH’s people. It has taken the crucible of exile to make the people realize first, that God is the guarantor of life – of the fruit of the body and fruit of the earth, and not the vain idols, and second, that YHWH is not the mere local god of Israel and Judah, but the Lord of History who judges the nations, and third, that YHWH distinguishes between those who are his faithful servants and those who mock him (Is 65,1-16). YHWH’s Temple would be a joyous house of prayer open to these peoples who would celebrate their new found brotherhood by making the ingathered Israelite, the *primus inter pares* glorious. The Judaite need not fear these newcomers, he retains his birthright in receiving the double portion of the firstborn (Is 61,7); the foreigners will be joyful con-celebrants of his return to Zion. The converted foreigners will be for them. The new found peace would inaugurate a commerce which would make the riches of the nations flow to Zion. But more so, these riches are brought as offerings and homage by the nations to YHWH. It would take time from new moon to new moon, from Sabbath to Sabbath, but the fulfillment of new heavens and new earth will be sure as a mother

who gives birth to a child (Is 66, 7, 22). Judahites, eunuchs, and foreigners will find their home in the restored Jerusalem and YHWH's Temple resounding with joy for what the Lord has accomplished – his salvation. It is that same salvation in which the Patriarchs have experienced when they accepted YHWH's invitation to be his people. The love-smitten servants of YHWH composed of the foreigners, eunuchs, and Israel would enact through righteousness and justice the surprising shower of blessings upon the restored City of Zion.**PS**

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