

Second Isaiah's Servant of Yahweh Revisited

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This study proposes an interpretation of Second Isaiah's Servant of Yahweh based on the following assumptions: that the so-called Servant Songs fit into their present context, in line with recent structural studies of the book, contrary to the usual practice of isolating them, and that there is a marked division of the book of Second Isaiah into two main parts, namely, 40-48 and 49-55.

Second Isaiah used skillfully various literary genres for his purpose, which he already formulated in the prologue (40:1-11) — to proclaim to the Israelites living in exile that they have served their term and paid the penalty for their sins (v. 2), that Yahweh will bring them on a way through the wilderness (vv. 3-5) to Jerusalem and, like a shepherd, he will lead those who are freed from exile (vv. 9-11). Likewise, the epilogue (55:10-13) confirms this proclamation — Yahweh's word will be accomplished (v. 10-11) and those who are freed will return home in joy and peace amid the jubilation of creation (vv. 12-13).¹ Evidently, the prologue and the epilogue serve as the framework within which the whole book is set. This betrays a deliberate arrangement of materials, which are set within the major ideas announced in the prologue.

By following the principle laid down by StuhlmueLLer² that "ideas control form" and not *vice-versa*, one can easily distinguish in Isaiah

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¹R. Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (London:SCM Press, 1982) 194.

²C. StuhlmueLLer, "Deutero-Isaiah: Major Transitions in the Prophet's Theology and in Contemporary Scholarship," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 42 (1980) 4.

40-55 two main parts, excluding the prologue and the epilogue.³ The first part (40:12-48:22) is described as the Jacob-Israel part. Its poems are concentrated on Babylon, the city of exile and the exodus from it. Here Cyrus is presented as Yahweh's instrument in the realization of his plan in history, namely, Israel's deliverance from exile. Since the first part presents the exiles on the verge of liberation, it is possible to date it between the conquest of Lydia and before the fall of Babylon (i.e., 547-539).⁴

The second part (49:14-55:7) is called the Zion-Jerusalem part. It focuses on Jerusalem, the city and spouse of Yahweh, and on the new age to be inaugurated by the glorious liberation of the Israelite people. Here the tone is more sober as compared with the more exuberant and confident hymnic style of the first part.⁵ Moreover, themes that are dominant in the first part, like the warning against idolatry, the polemic against foreign gods, and the fulfillment of prophecy through Cyrus, do not appear here in the second part. Most probably, there has been a change in the *Sitz im Leben* of the second part, which is generally placed in the time after the defeat of Babylon and after Cyrus had issued his edict permitting the exiles to return to Jerusalem.⁶ Bonnard suggests that at this point Second Isaiah addresses a small circle composed of his loyal disciples who were quite discouraged because the

³Among recent commentators, the division of the book into two main parts is followed by J. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*. Anchor Bible 20 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968); A.S. Herbert, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah 40-66*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975); C. Stuhlmueller, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah*. *Analecta Biblica* 43 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970); A. Bonora, *Isaia 40-66. Israele: servo di Dio, popolo liberato* (Brescia: Editrice Queriniana, 1988); P.E. Bonnard, *Le Second Isaïe, son disciple et leurs éditeurs* (Paris: Gabalda, 1972).

⁴J.A. Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1989) 368. He interprets כִּבְיָזָא (Isa 40:2) as military service which lasted for forty years. Thus, he arrives at about 547 from a starting point of 587, the fall of Jerusalem. However, most commentators read כִּבְיָזָא in conjunction with Job 7:1 and 10:17 and refer to the physical hardship in the enforced exile. Moreover, the count must begin in 597 when the first deportation to Babylon took place.

⁵Stuhlmueller, "Major Transitions," 17.

⁶M. Haran, *The Literary Structure and Chronological Framework of the Prophecies in Is XL-XLVIII*. *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 9 (1963) 127-55. According to Haran, Second Isaiah joined the return of the first group and continued his prophetic ministry in Palestine. Chs. 49-66 are derived from this later ministry.

first return to Jerusalem thoroughly disappointed them.⁷ The precarious situation of Shesh-bazzar and his party of returnees was insignificant compared to the marvelous prophecies of the prophet. Because of this discrepancy, Second Isaiah and his disciples might have become the object of scorn and derision by the other members of the exilic community.

In this structure, the so-called second Servant song (49:1-6), with its expansion (vv. 7-12) and concluding hymn (v. 13), serves as the bridge that connects the two major parts and provides the transition of thematic focus.⁸ The expansion of the song (vv. 7-12) reviews the dominant themes of the first part, such as the lowly status of Servant Israel as an exiled nation (v. 7), whose fortune is now reversed due to the saving deed of God (v. 8), which is described in the imagery of the Exodus event (vv. 9-12). The hymnic conclusion (v. 13) calls for jubilation because God has comforted his people (i.e., the exiles who were now released by Cyrus) and he will show compassion to his suffering ones *וְאֵלֵינוּ*, who, I suggest, refer to the prophet and his disciples who were now despised by the exilic community.

The investigation of John Goldingay on the arrangement of Isaiah 41-45 lends important support to the arrangement and structure proposed by this study.⁹ In his article, he identifies certain parallels and sequences in form, motif and vocabulary in the chapters he studied. He posits the parallelism between sequences A-B (41:1-20 and 41:21-42:17) and C-D (42:18-43:21 and 43:24-8). The first parallel sequence "begins to open up the tension between Israel's servant calling and her own need."¹⁰ Here Servant Israel is defined, not only as a privilege of being God's own, but as a responsibility of being God's agent in establishing justice and bringing release to the captives.

⁷P.E. Bonnard, *Le Second Isaie*, 26-27, 44.

⁸T.N.D. Mettinger, "Die Ebed-Jahwe-Lieder: Ein fragwürdiges Axiom," *Annual of Swedish Theological Institute* 11 (1978) 72-75. Cf. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah* 40-55. Beihefte zur *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 141 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976) 92-123; E. Nielsen, "Deuterocesaja. Erwägungen zur Formkritik, Traditions- und Redaktionsgeschichte," *Vetus Testamentum* 20 (1970) 190-205.

⁹J. Goldingay, "The Arrangement of Isaiah XLI-XLV," *Vetus Testamentum* 29 (1979) 289-99.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 294.

At the outset of the second parallel sequence, however, Israel is presented as incapable of functioning as God's servant. He is caught in double bondage: physically, he is in exile; spiritually, he is blind in faith and trust in God's power. To fulfill the servant role, Israel needs double deliverance. The first half of the deliverance is imminent. Israel is about to be liberated and restored through Cyrus' victory over Babylon. The second half of Israel's bondage becomes the focus of the prophetic proclamation in the succeeding chapters of the Jacob-Israel part, where Israel is presented as resisting Yahweh through his rejection of the prophet's message. This resistance to the proclamation of Second Isaiah is immediately palpable in the woe section (45:9-13) that follows Goldingay's second parallel sequence C-D (42:18-43:21 and 43:24-8).

Another sign of deliberate and orderly arrangement is the parallelism and contrast between the first and the second parts. Both parts start with poems arising from disputations (40:12-31 and 49:14-26). In the first part, the Cyrus oracle (44:24-45:7) occupies a prominent place (framed by two hymns, 44:23 and 45:8) and presents Cyrus as God's instrument of salvation. In the second part, the oracle is paralleled by the suffering Servant song (52:13-53:12), which occupies the same prominence and presents the suffering Servant as God's instrument of salvation. However, both are contrasted as to how they play their roles as instruments of salvation.

Finally, in the first part, God's salvation is prophesied by Second Isaiah as liberation being accomplished through the unfolding of contemporary historical events (e.g., Cyrus' victory and subsequent release of exiles). In the second part, particularly Chs. 54 and 55, the proclamation is not of salvation as the actual liberation itself, but of the conditions that characterize the new state of salvation after the actual liberation.

In his commentary, Westermann identifies Second Isaiah's use of the song of praise or cry of exultation (42:10-13; 44:23; 45:8; 48:20-22; 49:13; 51:3; 52:9-12; 54:1-3) as a response in faith to the proclamation that immediately precedes it, and therefore, as a concluding hymn for larger units.¹¹ When these hymns are employed as demarcations, the

¹¹Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*. Old Testament Library (London: SCM Press, 1969) 19-20. Bonora, *Isaia 40-66*, 45-64, follows the approach of Westermann. But, he identifies only four passages (42:10-12; 44:23; 49:13; 52:9-12) that serve as demarcation signs, and calls them as "*brevi dossologie o brevi inni con invito alla lode*." Thus, the

following schema is the resulting structure of chapters 40-55:¹²

Prologue	40:1-11			
Part I	40:12	–	42:13	42:10-13
	42:14	–	44:23	44:23
	44:24	–	45:8	45:8
	45:9	–	48:22	48:20-22
Bridge	49:1-13			49:13
Part II	49:14	–	51:3	51:3
	51:4	–	52:12	52:9-12
	52:13	–	54:3	54:1-3
	54:4	–	55:9	
Epilogue	55:10-13			

Holding that the songs must be related to their context, Torrey¹³ argues that the Servant is always the personified Israel, which varies in different contexts, but is “always an individual considered not merely as an individual, but as the representative of the nation.”¹⁴ His view agrees in essence with that of Wheeler Robinson¹⁵ and Eissfeldt,¹⁶ who independently arrived at the theory of “corporate personality,” which in Hebrew thought refers to the frequent transition from the individual to the corporate. “The whole group, including its past, present and future members, might function as a single individual through any one of those members conceived as representatives of it.”¹⁷ In this way of thinking, there should be no tension between the individual and the

body of the “book” is divided into five long discourses (40:12-42:12; 42:13-44:23; 44:24-49:13; 49:14-52:12; 52:13-55:5) and called a “pentateuco profetico.”

¹² Rendtorff, *Old Testament*, 194. See R. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40-55* and T.N.D. Mettinger, *A Farewell to the Servant Songs. A Critical Examination of an Exegetical Axiom* (Lund: Gleerup, 1983).

¹³ *The Second Isaiah: A New Interpretation* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928).

¹⁴ H.H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays* (London: SCM Press, 1965) 40.

¹⁵ *The Cross of the Servant: A Study in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: SCM Press, 1926); “The Hebrew Conception of Corporate Personality,” in *Werden und Wesen des Alten Testaments. Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 66 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1936) 49-62.

¹⁶ “The Ebed-Jahwe in Isaiah 40-55,” *Expository Times* 44 (1932-33) 261-86.

¹⁷ H.W. Robinson, “Corporate Personality,” 49.

group; the individual is identified with the group it represents. Thus, in the interpretation of the Servant, the fluidity of transition between the servant as an individual representing the nation and the servant as the nation can be understood not as unnatural, but within the Hebrew conception of corporate personality. Thus, "there are some features in the Servant songs which clearly suggest that the Servant stands for the nation Israel, and also ... other elements which equally clearly suggest that it is an individual which is in mind."¹⁸

The Servant in the Jacob-Israel Part

In their collaborative study, Wilcox and Paton-Williams point to the consistent conception of Israel as the Servant of Yahweh throughout chs. 40-48.¹⁹ Except in an instance (44:26), the twelve occurrences of the word עֶבֶד *servant* outside the first Servant song (41:8, 9; 42:1, 19 [bis]; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21 [bis]; 45:4; 48:20) undoubtedly refer to Jacob-Israel. Thus, the anonymous Servant in the first song (42:1-9), viewed within the context, is undoubtedly the Servant Jacob-Israel mentioned outside the song. This identification is further supported by the application of the same vocabulary to the servant outside and the servant within the first song. In his structural analysis, Goldingay notes the parallelism between 41:8-10 (where Jacob-Israel is first addressed as "servant") and 42:1-9. Both pericopes speak of God's servant (עֶבֶד) whom he chose (בָּחַר) and upholds (תָּמַךְ). Both speak of one whom God called (קָרָא), of whom he took hold (הִחֲזִיק), and with whom he acts in צֶדֶק.²⁰

8 But you, Israel, my <i>servant</i>	1 Here is my <i>servant</i>
Jacob, whom I have <i>chosen</i>	my <i>chosen</i> one
10 I will <i>uphold</i> you	whom I <i>uphold</i>
9 and <i>called</i> from its farthest	6 I have <i>called</i> you in righteousness
corner you whom I <i>took</i> (41:8-10)	I have <i>taken</i> you by the hand (42:1-9)

¹⁸Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord*, 41.

¹⁹P. Wilcox and D. Paton-Williams, "The Servant Songs," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42 (1988) 83. W.A.M. Beuken identifies the object of the servant's mission in the first song, *mishpat*, as the vital link of the first song with its immediate context and with the other songs. Following the same direction, P. Stern establishes the transition of the concept of the servant from the immediate context to the first song till the fourth song by his analysis of the "blind servant" imagery Deutero-Isaiah employs ("The First Servant Song and its Context," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 [1972] 1-30).

²⁰J. Goldingay, "The Arrangement of Isaiah XLI-XLV," 290-91.

Who is this Servant Jacob-Israel explicitly named in chs. 40-48? This servant Jacob-Israel is the empirical Israel, now in exile. He is the corporate person of the people to whom Second Isaiah addresses his oracles. A defeated and humiliated people, Servant Jacob-Israel is chosen by Yahweh (41:8, 9; 42:1), endowed with his spirit and summoned to bring forth justice to the nations (42:1; cf. 44:3b), to be a light to the nations (42:6). In the first Servant Song, Jacob-Israel's mission inherent in, and corollary to, his being "chosen people" is reiterated by the prophet, not only to remind them of their privileged status and mission as Yahweh's chosen people, but to awaken them from despair and indifference caused by their present situation as exiles in Babylon. Through the first song, Second Isaiah exhorts the exiles: "Jacob-Israel, you are God's chosen people. You have a mission to fulfill. Wake up from your despair and indifference. Be what you are; embark on your task. And Yahweh who chose you will be glorified in you!"

However, a problem immediately arises and Second Isaiah acknowledges it. How can Servant Jacob-Israel be God's chosen people and perform his task when he is still blind and deaf (42:19), comparable to a worm who lives in darkness (41:14)? In response to this, the prophet assures the people of Yahweh's initiative. First, Servant Jacob-Israel is assured of God's forgiveness for his sins of the past (44:21-22):

- 21 Remember these things, O Jacob,
and Israel, for you are my servant;
I formed you, you are my servant;
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by me.
- 22 I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud,
and your sins like mist;
return to me, for I have redeemed you.

Second, God has already set into motion his saving plans for his liberation from Babylon and the restoration of Jerusalem and its temple (cf. Cyrus oracle, 44:26-45:7).

Therefore, in spite of his blindness and deafness, Servant Jacob-Israel is still summoned by Yahweh to be a *witness* to his creative and redemptive power (43:10). And by acting as witness to God's power as creator and lord of history before the nations, he himself will come to know, believe and understand Yahweh's workings for his welfare in the whole span of his history as a people (43:10-13), and in particular, Yahweh's plan to liberate him from exile and restore him to his homeland (43:14-21). Though blind and deaf, Servant Jacob-Israel is called

to this task because Yahweh has redeemed him; he has swept away his transgressions. His present status as an exile neither takes away nor forfeits his mission, which is inherent to his being a chosen people, elected by God in a covenant relationship.

In the Jacob-Israel part of the book, Servant Jacob-Israel's task is described as bringing God's justice and transforming the world not with the noisy rhetoric of propaganda (42:2). In fact, he is a *mute* witness (42:2) to the glorious manifestation of God's glory in the saving deed that liberates Jacob-Israel himself from exile and brings him home through the desert, according to God's plan which has been proclaimed long ago (43:8-13). Indeed, Servant Jacob-Israel, by being a beneficiary of God's saving act, becomes a witness, "a light to the nations," though he is not the source of light. The light comes from the glory of God's saving deeds. As a light to the nations, Servant Jacob-Israel radiates God's glory and power so that other nations can have a glimpse into the light, be cured of their blindness and be liberated from darkness (cf. 42:6-7). It is God's saving power that shines in and through Servant Jacob-Israel that enlightens the nations to acknowledge Yahweh's unique divinity and sovereignty over all creation.

It is objected that, since the character of the servant outside the song and the servant within the song are *not* identical, they are not one and the same servant. In other words, the servant of the song is *not* Jacob-Israel but somebody unknown. It is true that the character descriptions of the two are not identical. But it is due to the fact that the character description of the servant outside the song is what the servant *is* (i.e., the actual life-situation of the people Jacob-Israel in exile). On the other hand, the character description of the servant within the song is what the servant *ought to be* (i.e., the true status and mission of the people Jacob-Israel as God's chosen people). And here the servant's "*ought to be*" does not mean the *metahistorical*, but it refers to the concrete and lived manifestation of Jacob-Israel as "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6) in its *fullest* sense.

This leads to the next question. Is Servant Jacob-Israel ready and willing to "return to Yahweh" (44:22), to follow God's saving plan for him, and take upon himself his mission as servant of Yahweh?²¹ In other words, is he ready and willing *to be* what he *ought to be*, to live

²¹ Cf. C.R. North, *Isaiah 40-55* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 35; J. Goldingay, "The Arrangement of Isaiah," 292.

out his being God's "priestly kingdom and holy nation" in the fullest sense? The answer indicated by Second Isaiah is negative. The disputation summarized in ch. 48 exhibits a negative response on the part of the Israelite exiles (vv. 3-5, 8, 18-19):

- 3 The former things I declared long ago,
they went out from my mouth and I made them known;
then suddenly I did them and they came to pass.
- 4 Because I know that you are obstinate,
and your neck is an iron sinew
and your forehead brass,
- 5 I declared them to you from long ago,
before they came to pass I announced them to you,
so that you would not say, "My idol did them,
my carved image and my cast image commanded them." [...]
- 8 You have never heard, you have never known,
from of old your ear has not been opened.
For I knew that you would deal very treacherously,
and that from birth you were called a rebel.

It appears that the people's idolatrous attitudes, their predilection to ascribe God's deeds to the action of idols, still remain unchanged. The sins of the past which caused the nation's defeat and deportation still persist. Furthermore, the reference to Yahweh's choice of Cyrus as an instrument for the release of the exiles from Babylon (vv. 14-15) reiterates the gravity of the Israelite opposition to the wisdom of Yahweh's plan.²² Second Isaiah's optimistic oracles regarding Yahweh's plan for the liberation of the exiles seem to be met with disapproval, as is evidently stated in vv. 17-19:

- 17 Thus says the Lord,
your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel:
I am the Lord your God,
who teaches you for your own good,
who leads you in the way you should go.
- 18 O that you had paid attention to my commandments!
Then your prosperity would have been like a river,
and your success like the waves of the sea;
- 19 your offspring would have been like the sand,
and your descendants like its grains;
their name would never be cut off
or destroyed from before me.

²²R.E. Watts, "Consolation or Confrontation," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990) 41-49.

It appears that Servant Jacob-Israel is not yet ready to follow God's plan of salvation for him; he is not yet willing *to be* what he *ought to be*. And before the prophet closes the first major part of his oracles, he issues a final appeal to the exiles (vv. 20-22):

- 20 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!"
- 21 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.
- 22 "There is no peace," says the Lord, "for the wicked."

The last line (v. 22) is a warning signal, a symptom of the situation of division and strife within the exilic community caused by Second Isaiah's lofty description of a pagan king designated as God's anointed who will set the exiles free.²³ This subtle indication of division and strife within the exilic community will gradually come out to the open (cf. 50:11; 53:1ff).

The Servant in the Transitional Song

As pointed out earlier, there is a marked thematic transition between the two main parts of the book (40-48 and 49-55). This transition in Second Isaiah's prophecies certainly indicates a change in their *Sitz im Leben*,²⁴ and most probably, a change in audience.²⁵ What brought about this marked thematic transition in Second Isaiah's proph-

²³Westermann considers these final words as a later addition by a reader (*Isaiah* 40-66, 205). Whybray suggests that its occurrence here and in 57:21 was a device to divide chs. 40-66 into three equal parts (*Isaiah* 40-66. New Century Bible [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981] 134).

²⁴Through a statistical analysis of terms normally used by the prophet in speaking of God's people, Wilcox and Paton-Williams have shown the marked thematic transition in the prophecies of Second Isaiah as a whole. However, they have not indicated the occasion, which brought about this shift.

²⁵P.E. Bonnard, "Relire Esaïe 40-66," *Etudes théologiques et religieuses* 50 (1975) 353-4. Bonnard explains that the transition is accompanied by a change of audience: "Mais surtout ce changement de conjuncture doit s'accompagner d'un *changement d'auditoire*: les infidèles obstinés, persécuteurs, sont menacés de la pire détresse; les fidèles, au contraire, persécutés, sont encouragés et formés en vue de leur double rôle: devenir les réanimateurs d'Israël et les missionnaires des nations."

ecies? According to StuhlmueLLer, the second part of the book (49-55) reflects the second major stage in the prophet's career after the fall of Babylon and the initial return. Working under the principle, "ideas control form," and looking closely into the theological themes, he identifies the shift of focus from chs. 41-48 to chs. 49-55. He observes in the second part a silence on warnings against idolatry and on the prophecy's fulfillment through Cyrus and an emphasis on the new role given to Zion-Jerusalem in a new vision of life.²⁶ The sober tone in chapters 49-55 and the greater use of lament or consolation genres are symptomatic of rejection and persecution, which are perceptively evident in the remaining three servant songs.²⁷

In addition to the bitter experience of the exile, the rejection and persecution, particularly referred to in this transitional passage, come from within the exilic community itself. As discussed in the previous section, the disputation in 45:9-13 is interpreted to reflect the questioning, and even utter rejection, of the wisdom behind Yahweh's choice of the pagan king Cyrus as the exiles' liberator, as proclaimed by the prophet.²⁸ Furthermore, the discrepancy between Second Isaiah's prophecy of a marvelous return and the impoverished situation of the first returnees should have caused disappointment even among the exiles. In fact, there never was a glorious and miraculous return of all the exiles to the homeland. It is claimed by historians that only a small number returned and those who returned faced much difficulty. The country which had been unpopulated and partly destroyed for decades could not take in large quantities of people in a short time. According to Josephus (*Antiquities*, XI, 8), many of the exiles did not in fact return because they did not want to abandon their possessions. Furthermore, the restoration project did not go forward due to economic crisis, aggravated by drought and a plague of locusts, and due to difficulties with the local population (Ezra 3:3; Josephus, *Ant.*, XI, 114).²⁹ All these

²⁶StuhlmueLLer, "Major Transitions," 5.

²⁷Ibid, 16-18.

²⁸If A.S. Kapelrud's interpretation of 45:24 is correct, the Israelite exiles are the ones "who were incensed" against God for his choice of Cyrus as liberator ("The Main Concern of Second Isaiah," *Vetus Testamentum* 32 [1982]).

²⁹J.A. Soggin, *An Introduction to the History of Israel and Judah* (London: SCM Press, 1993) 273-299; P.R. Aykroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (London: SCM Press, 1968) 138-152.

factors should have greatly denigrated the prophet's authority and following within the exilic community. In the eyes of the general public, Second Isaiah's prophecy was a failure.³⁰ As a result, the prophet has either been isolated by the large number of Israelites or else he deliberately restricted himself to a small group of remnant-disciples who remained faithful to him. With this audience, he was not in conflict but in the closest rapport.³¹

In line with this transition, this study proposes that the prophet's presentation of the Servant of Yahweh has also undergone a transition. Here the concept of Servant Jacob-Israel does not refer to the whole empirical community anymore, but is narrowed to the community of the prophet's faithful disciples.³² This conceptual delineation is sustained by Williamson's suggestion that in 49:3 (עֲבָדִי אֱתָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל) the word "Israel" is not a vocative (You are my servant, O Israel), but an appositive or parallel predicate noun (You are my servant, [You are] Israel).³³ In this reading, "You are Israel" becomes an act of designation, by virtue of which Yahweh commissions the prophet's faithful disciples as *Israel*. This interpretation is supported by the fact that in this instance "Israel" is not used in parallelism to "Jacob" as it is usually done by Second Isaiah when he refers to the entire exilic community. This unique incidence has been noted previously by Westermann, who employs it as a strong argument to support his opinion that "Israel" is a later gloss.³⁴

³⁰On this issue, see R.P. Carroll, "Second Isaiah and the Failure of Prophecy," *Studia Theologica* 32 (1978) 119-131.

³¹Stuhlmüller, "Major Transitions," 18. In his study of the social matrix of post-exilic apocalyptic (*The Dawn of Apocalyptic* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975], P. Hanson detects the existence of, and the conflict between, two groups of Israelites who returned to Jerusalem: the disciples of Ezekiel with the Priestly tradition (who later became the dominant spirit in the whole postexilic period [e.g. Haggai, Zechariah 1-8 and Joel]) and the disciples of Second Isaiah (responsible for the revision of Deuteronomy, the collection of Third Isaiah, and the redaction of the entire book of Isaiah).

³²Wilcox and Patton-Williams correctly point out the change of the Servant's identity in line with the transition in Second Isaiah's prophecies as a whole. However, I do not follow their identification of the servant in the last three servant songs as the prophet Second Isaiah himself.

³³H.G.M. Williamson, "The concept of Israel in transition," in R.E. Clements (ed.) *The World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1989) 144-47.

³⁴Isaiah 40-66, 209.

In this song, therefore, the community of faithful disciples (= remnant) is designated as Servant Israel and is given a mission to Israel (= whole nation). Because Servant Jacob-Israel is not ready and willing to accept God's saving plan for him and to renew himself into God's chosen people, he forfeits his servanthood which is now being transferred to *Servant Remnant-Israel*, whose mission is for the renewal of the whole nation of Israel and for the salvation of other nations (vv. 5-6).

The Servant in the Zion-Jerusalem Part

Isaiah 49:14-55:13 belongs to the second major stage in Second Isaiah's prophetic ministry. It has been noted that there is a thematic transition from the first part to the second part of the book. Dominant themes in the first part, such as release from Babylon, the fulfillment of prophecy through Cyrus, polemic against the gods, do not appear in the second part. They are replaced by such themes as the restoration and rehabilitation of Jerusalem, and the blessings of the new age of salvation. The tone and mood has become sober. In this part, the term עֶבֶד "servant" occurs only three times: in the appendix of the third song (50:10); in the fourth song (52:13; 53:11). In 54:17, it is in the plural form. In this context, how is the Servant of Yahweh to be interpreted?

In the third servant song (50:4-9), Servant Remnant-Israel continues to suffer rejection and persecution. But, in spite of this opposition and the apparent futility of holding fast to God's words, Servant Remnant-Israel is not rebellious (vv. 5-6). He perseveres in listening to and learning from the creative and redemptive words of Yahweh (v. 4). In his obedience, he hopes for vindication (vv. 8-9); in his suffering, he places his trust in God's help (v. 7). The appendix (vv. 10-11) indicates the contrast between Servant Remnant-Israel who walks by faith in darkness and his persecutors who are warned that their self-centered efforts will result in judgment.³⁵

The persecutors of Servant Remnant-Israel are described as "kindlers of fire, lighters of firebrands." They are warned that their evil deeds will return to them. "Walk in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that you have kindled! That is what you shall have

³⁵F. Duane Lindsey, "Isaiah's Songs," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (1982) 226.

from my hand: you shall lie down in torment" (v. 11). The mention and description of this adverse situation and suffering are not without previous indication. In fact, the last verse of the first part states that "There is no peace for the wicked" (48:22). As explained, it is an early indication of the prevailing tension and division within the exilic community. The "kindlers of fire, lighters of firebrands" (50:11) can be identified with the "wicked" (48:22), namely, those among the exiles who persist in their idolatrous attitudes (48:3-5), and those who reject Second Isaiah's preaching (48:17-19). In fact, earlier in the second song (49:1-7), it is mentioned that the servant's preaching has failed, has fallen on deaf ears (49:4). Likewise, the concluding song of praise (49:13) of the transitional section insinuates the situation of rejection and persecution of the suffering ones (עֲנִי), who will be vindicated by Yahweh's compassion. Here the faithful disciples (= remnant Israel) is identified as the עֲנִי, the suffering ones. It is probable that the "sufferings ones" are the "servants of the Yahweh" (עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה) in 54:17, whose vindication comes from the Yahweh.

This situation of rejection and opposition is further reflected in the oracle (51:7-8) that comes after the third song:

- 7 Listen to me, you who know righteousness (צַדִּיק),
you people who have my teaching (תּוֹרַתִּי) in your hearts;
do not fear the reproach of others,
and do not be dismayed when they revile you.
- 8 For the moth will eat them up like a garment,
and the worm will eat them like wool;
but my deliverance will be forever,
and my salvation to all generations.

The phrase, "you who know righteousness (צַדִּיק)," is an apt description of the Servant, who in the first part is upheld by Yahweh's צַדִּיק, (41:10) and called in Yahweh's צַדִּיק (42:6). In like manner, the phrase, "you people who have my teaching (ytir'AT) in your hearts," fits the Servant's description as one who brings Yahweh's teaching (תּוֹרַתִּי) to the coastlands (42:4) and as one who is instructed in it morning by morning (50:4). In this oracle, the Servant is assured: "Do not fear the reproach of others, and do not be dismayed when they revile you."

The increasing individualization of the Servant's description in this song has led many to compare his sufferings with that of Jeremiah, and therefore conclude that this song is autobiographical, if not a description of an individual historical person (e.g., Jeremiah, Jehoiachin,

or Zerubbabel). However, in view of the principle of corporate personality, this study holds that the Servant's description, highly individualized it may be, is applied to the Servant as he incorporates or represents the prophet's faithful disciples, who, together with the prophet himself, experience opposition and harassment from those who reject the prophet's message, and ultimately, Yahweh's plan of salvation. Therefore, the use of the first person singular and prophetic terminologies (e.g., tongue of a teacher, to sustain with a word) is understandable since the prophet is describing his and his disciples' shared communal experience in a situation of rejection and suffering. The prophet is a part of the remnant community, the corporate person. Therefore, he is also embodied in the servant. In a way of speaking, he is also the servant, as his faithful disciples are, as individuals or as a community.

Of the four Servant Songs, the fourth (52:13-53:12) is the most difficult to interpret. It is partly because in places the text is corrupt and also because the song is full of deliberate ambiguity.³⁶ However, by examining closely the occurrences of repeated keywords, Raabe concludes that the repetition of keywords marks the key phrases of the poem. These key phrases confirm and highlight the two important contrasts which are essential to the precise understanding of the poem, namely: 1) the servant's humiliation vs. his exaltation; and 2) the speakers' mistaken opinion vs. their true confession about themselves and the servant.³⁷ These two contrasts further clarify the identity and role of the Servant in Yahweh's plan of salvation.

The highly individualized language and vivid imagery of the song portray the Servant as an individual. However, when this individual figure is considered under the light of corporate personality, the Servant is understood as the embodiment of the faithful ones, who undergo humiliation and are misunderstood by others (both unrepentant Israelites and the nations). Yet, in the end, the faithful ones are vindicated by Yahweh. Their suffering and death become the salvation of others. Therefore, the Servant of the fourth song is the instrument of God's salvation; he accomplishes this role by his suffering and death (53:4-9):

³⁶Wilcox and Paton-Williams, "The Servant Songs," 94.

³⁷P.R. Raabe, "The Effect of Repetition in the Suffering Servant Song," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 103 (1984) 77-84.

- 4 Surely he has borne our infirmities
and carried our diseases;
yet we accounted him stricken,
struck down by God, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.
- 6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
- 8 By a perversion of justice he was taken away.
Who could have imagined his future?
For he was cut off from the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people.

When the fourth song is examined further in the context of the Zion-Jerusalem poems, a new dimension in the understanding of the identity and mission of the Servant is revealed. The fourth Song (52:13-53:12) is located between the final summons to participate in Yahweh's new exodus (esp. 52:9-12) and the expansive poem which describes the restoration of Zion-Jerusalem (54:1-17).³⁸ The relationship between these two units appears to be that of promise and fulfillment. In this case, the intervening fourth Song should be considered as a link between promise and fulfillment.

The two lengthy Zion poems that sandwich the fourth song have been spliced into parts by various commentators in different ways. However, with regards to their literary genre, most of the smaller units have been identified as proclamations of salvation,³⁹ a literary genre, which Westermann differentiates from the oracle of salvation. It is not a coincidence that the texts identified by Westermann as proclama-

³⁸Westerman (*Isaiah 40-66*, 28) already noted the "exceptional nature of chs. 54 and 55 whose subject of the proclamation of salvation is not the actual liberation itself, but the conditions that are to obtain in the new state of salvation after it."

³⁹For example, Schoors, *I Am God Your Saviour*. *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 24 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973) 121-145, 154-166.

tions of salvation belong to the Zion-Jerusalem part (49:14-26; 51:9-52:3; 54:1-10; 11-17; 51:1-5).⁴⁰ Compared to the oracle of salvation, the proclamation of salvation is future-oriented. Its point is more in the announcement of coming salvation. Schoors observes that in the proclamation of salvation, Yahweh's intervention or turning in favor is mostly formulated in the imperfect tense, unlike in the oracle of salvation, where the actuality of God's help is pointed out by a participle or by a *perfectum executionis*.⁴¹ From the use of this genre, it can be safely inferred that the description of salvation in 51:1-52:12 as a promise and in 54:1-17 as its fulfillment is future-oriented. If these observations are correct, it follows that the identity and role of Servant in the fourth song must also have a futuristic dimension.

For Second Isaiah, the bitter experience of the exile, aggravated by the opposition of unrepentant Israelites within the exilic community, is a judgment to which the whole nation Israel is subjected. However, a remnant, the community of his faithful disciples, survives the judgment. Thus, the sum-total of sufferings experienced by Israel, as a nation and as a remnant community, is transferred to the individual figure of the Servant according to the idea of corporate personality.

On the one hand, therefore, the Servant is a figure of the past and of the present. His description is drawn from the past and present experience of the people. He incorporates in him the totality of Israel's sufferings in its history as Yahweh's chosen people.

On the other hand, the Servant is also a figure of the future. The futuristic dimension of the Servant is a projection into the future of how Yahweh's judgment and salvation must be realized. This projection into the future takes on the form of a challenge to the nation Israel to accept the Servant as its embodiment, as its corporate person. As H.H. Rowley puts it, "the mission which the Servant fulfills is still not merely his own, but Israel's, and Israel is still called to enter in some measure into it, so that the Servant may really be Israel's representative."⁴² Thus, the Servant becomes an instrument of Yahweh's salva-

⁴⁰Westermann, *Prophetic Oracles in the Old Testament*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) 42-66.

⁴¹Schoors, *I Am God Your Servant*, 170.

⁴²H.H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord*, 56.

tion, in so far as he is the exemplar of soteriological suffering. In the future, the definitive renewal of Israel will be realized by Israel's incorporation and willing participation into the Servant's suffering. Second Isaiah, therefore, insists more on the corporate nature of the Servant's suffering than on its soteriology.

If this Servant in the fourth song is the corporate person of the "priestly kingdom, holy nation" of Yahweh in its *fullest* sense (Exod 19:6), then he is given the mission to testify to God's saving power and presence for the benefit of Israel, even at the cost of losing all earthly power and prestige. He fulfills this task by living out the demands of God's teachings, even to the point of suffering. By this faithful witness, he becomes a light, which so enlightens the nations that they come to understand the saving deeds of God; he becomes a covenant to the people, a visible sign of God's faithfulness and commitment for the salvation of humanity. In the end, the nations of the world will come to recognize Israel's God as the only true God, and therefore, come to Jerusalem to worship him in his temple. Only with a renewed Israel, "a priestly kingdom and a holy nation" in its *fullest* sense, will God's promise to Abraham be finally fulfilled: "and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:3b). □