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THE MESSAGE OF DEUTERO-ISAIAH

Although Deutero-Isaiah's teaching is expressed in the form of a series of short oracles rather than of a single, systematic treatise, it possesses remarkable consistency of thought; and it is not difficult to derive from it a fully articulated theology. However, this should not be regarded in too abstract a way. His message to the exiles cannot and must not be separated from the forms of speech in which it is expressed, which themselves reflect the particular circumstances which prompted him to address them as he did. It is necessary for the student to keep these circumstances in mind if Deutero-Isaiah's theology is to be perceived for what it actually was: not an abstract exposition of doctrine, but a vital, urgent and timely message proclaimed in a time of disillusionment.

It has already been remarked that Deutero-Isaiah had two roles: that of Yahweh's messenger, conveying to the exiles what Yahweh had to say to them, and that of persuader, endeavouring to convince them of the authenticity of that message. His teaching can therefore be conveniently divided into two parts: the central message of salvation and the supporting arguments.

The Prophet's Call

But before he could even expect to gain a hearing, Deutero-Isaiah had first to present his credentials: he had to give a convincing account of how he had been called by Yahweh to be a prophet. There was nothing new about this: the books of Amos (7:14-15), Isaiah (6), Jeremiah (1:4-10) and Ezekiel (1:1-3:15) all contain accounts of those prophets' initial call to prophetic activity. Such 'call-narratives' were not mere anecdotal reminiscences but were composed in response to an urgent necessity for the prophet to authenticate his claim to be a

true prophet of Yahweh, in the face of hostility or unbelief. This was equally a necessity for Deutero-Isaiah.

His account of his call stands at the beginning of the book, in 40:1-8. It differs from the call-narratives of earlier prophets in that the prophet's dialogue is apparently not with Yahweh himself but with a heavenly being or angel. In the later prophetic literature the concept of angelic intermediaries between Yahweh and his prophets, which is first discernible in Ezekiel, was to come into even greater prominence. There is however no implication that Deutero-Isaiah's authority was less directly held than, or in any way inferior to, that of earlier prophets. This is merely a shift in the way in which the mode of divine communication was understood. Deutero-Isaiah's frequent use of the messenger-formula 'Thus has Yahweh said' leaves no room for doubt that he was claiming no less an authority than that claimed by earlier prophets.

40:1-8 is set in the heavenly realms where Yahweh holds court surrounded by his heavenly servants. Deutero-Isaiah's implicit claim to have been present at this 'heavenly council' was itself a claim to prophetic status. It was at the heavenly court that Isaiah had offered himself and had been accepted as Yahweh's messenger to his people (Isa. 6), and at an earlier time still it is reported in 1 Kings 22:19-23 that the prophet Micaiah had been present in the heavenly court and had listened to Yahweh's deliberations with certain 'spirits' which attended on him. There are, moreover, two verses in the Book of Jeremiah (23:18, 22) which seem to suggest that unless a person had 'stood in the council of Yahweh' he could not be a true prophet (see Cross).

In 40:1-8 Deutero-Isaiah, like Micaiah and Isaiah before him, hears, or overhears, what is being said there. Yahweh, apparently, is not present, or at least does not speak: 'says your God' in verse 1 is part of a speech by a heavenly being, telling others 'what God is saying.' The imperatives in verses 1-3 are in the plural, addressed not to the prophet but, it would seem, by one angel to others, conveying to them Yahweh's instructions to make preparations for his return to Jerusalem accompanied by his exiled people. But in verse 6 the imperative 'Cry!', that is, 'Proclaim!', is in the singular, and is answered (following a slight and generally accepted textual emendation) in the first person: 'And I said, "What shall I cry?"' This can only be the voice of Deutero-Isaiah himself: he asks what message he is to proclaim, and receives his commission. In doing so he becomes a prophet of Yahweh.

Whether Deutero-Isaiah, like some of the prophets of earlier times, has left behind him any account of later encounters with Yahweh is a question which depends on the interpretation of those passages commonly known as the 'Servant Songs.' If the person referred to, and in two cases represented as speaking, in these passages is in fact the prophet himself, they record his relations with Yahweh at various times in the course of his career. These passages will be discussed further in a later section of this Chapter.

The Central Message

Deutero-Isaiah's central message is neatly summarised in the scene in the heavenly council (40:1-8). Its essential features are:

1. The exiled people are to take heart because their sins have now been expiated and their term of punishment is over (verses 1-2).
2. Yahweh is now about to come to the aid of his people in such a decisive fashion that the whole world will be astonished at this revelation of his glory (verses 3-5).
3. The guarantee of this message of hope and restoration is the word of Yahweh spoken through the prophet, which is all-powerful, and compared with which all human activity is ludicrously impotent (verses 6-8).

This central message is spelled out in detail in other passages, especially in the salvation oracles, but also in other passages which speak of Yahweh's choice of Cyrus as his instrument, Cyrus's imminent conquest of Babylon, the release of the exiles, their triumphant return home, the rebuilding of their cities and their subsequent peaceful and prosperous life which will never again be disturbed.

The Supporting Arguments

1. *Cyrus*. The Persian king is named twice in the book, in what is probably a single oracle, 44:24-45:7. But many other passages refer to him: 41:1-5; 41:21-29; 45:9-13; 46:9-11; 48:12-16 and probably 42:5-7. These passages are of various kinds, including hymnic self-praise, disputation and trial scene. In at least one passage (45:1-7; possibly also 42:5-7) Cyrus is directly addressed and given his commission to carry out Yahweh's purpose. In all these passages Yahweh is the speaker. The meteoric military career of Cyrus, with the threat which

this posed for Babylon, was a material fact of the first importance which Deutero-Isaiah put to good use in his attempt to convince his hearers of the truth of his central message. The various types of argument which are used in this connection—arguments from prophecy, from history, from Israel's belief in Yahweh as creator of the world—will be discussed in detail later in this Chapter. But the purpose of them all was the same: to make the point that the future lay in the hands of a great and irresistible conqueror who, however, was simply an instrument of Yahweh, created by him in order to carry out his good purpose towards Israel.

Deutero-Isaiah went to great lengths to emphasize the complete dependence of Cyrus's achievements on the support given him by Yahweh. Yahweh not only calls him 'my shepherd' (44:28), a title used both in Israel and elsewhere in the ancient Near East of kings who ruled by divine appointment, but even his 'anointed one' (*māšiah*, 45:1), a title which had previously been reserved exclusively for the reigning kings of the dynasty of David; he also states that he 'loves' him (48:14). The idea of Yahweh's making use of foreign kings to carry out his purpose for Israel was not in itself new; but in the past this had been in order to punish Israel for its disloyalty to Yahweh: Assyria had been 'the rod of Yahweh's anger' (Isa. 10:5-6), and Nebuchadnezzar, as Yahweh's 'servant' (Jer. 25:9; 27:6) had been sent to destroy the nation altogether. Now it was Cyrus who had been chosen as Yahweh's instrument; but Yahweh's intentions towards his people were now wholly good, and it was Babylon which was to receive the divine chastisement (48:14). The use of the title 'anointed one' is astonishing, and was no doubt intended to administer a salutary shock to those who heard it: the exiles had no anointed king of their own who could save them; but Yahweh who could do all things (45:9-13) had created one out of the unlikely material of a foreign ruler, who was already poised to deliver the blow which would open the prison gates, set the captives free (42:7; 45:2, 13; 48:14), rebuild Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah, and even lay the foundations of a restored Temple (44:26-28). The fact that Cyrus was a pagan who 'did not know' Yahweh (45:4) and might be expected to attribute his successes to his own gods was of no consequence; in any case, together with the world at large, he would eventually come to acknowledge him (45:3).

2. *The appeal to history.* Israel's pre-exilic narrative traditions, now incorporated in the biblical books from Genesis to Kings, comprised

accounts of Yahweh's great deeds in the past: his creation of the world, his guidance of the human race in its infancy, and finally his creation of Israel as his special people and his subsequent dealings with them. The Babylonian exile, because this story had now been brought to an abrupt end, was a time for reflecting on the meaning of this history, bringing together the various strands of tradition into comprehensive and theologically orientated literary works, and attempting to draw lessons, and perhaps hope, for the future from it all. Such an attempt, for the period from Moses onwards, was made at about this time by the Deuteronomist in his work which stretches from Deuteronomy to Kings; and a comparable attempt was made for the early period then or a little later by those who were responsible for the so-called 'priestly' edition of the Pentateuch. Deutero-Isaiah, who was evidently familiar with much of this material and also with some other historical allusions such as are now found in the Book of Psalms, was no exception. But his use of these traditions was somewhat different from that made by the historians: he used them as the raw material of an *appeal to history* which forms an additional argument to support his main message.

Other prophets before him had used examples from past history to illustrate their teaching, especially as dreadful warnings (e.g. Jezreel, Hos. 1:4; Sodom and Gomorrah, Isa. 1:10; the fall of Shiloh, Jer. 7:12-15; 'parables' of Israel's history in Ezekiel). Deutero-Isaiah used his examples in various ways, but above all to remind the exiles of incidents in which Yahweh had shown his power not in anger but in love towards mankind or to his people, so that his hearers could take heart and be brought to a state of mind in which they could accept that Yahweh was both willing and able to perform such deeds once more. In this he had to some extent already been anticipated by Jeremiah and Ezekiel. But in the range and number of his historical allusions—some of which are indirect, but nevertheless unmistakable—he is unequalled.

Deutero-Isaiah's use of Israel's *creation traditions* will be considered in a later section of this chapter. Apart from them, the first incident to be noted in chronological sequence is the *Flood* (54:9-10). In this passage (54:7-10) Yahweh is speaking. The question at issue is Yahweh's reliability. His aim is to persuade the exiles, who believe that, despite his covenant with them, he has forsaken them, that it is now his intention to return to them and to behave towards them with a love which will never cease: 'My steadfast love shall not depart from you,

my covenant of peace shall not be removed.' In order to convince them that he will keep the oath which he has sworn to them, he uses the analogy of the oath which he swore to Noah after the Flood, that he would never again send a flood which would destroy mankind. That oath he has kept; he can therefore be relied on to keep the new one.

The next historical references are to *Abraham*. (48:18-19, a somewhat negative passage, is a reminiscence of the promises to Abraham in Gen. 22:17 and to Jacob in Gen. 32:12, but is not the work of Deutero-Isaiah.) In 51:1-3 the prophet, addressing a dispirited audience convinced that there is no hope for them in their wretched and depleted state, used the traditions of the miraculous parenthood of Abraham and Sarah and the marvellous gift to them of numerous and prosperous descendants to support the new promise that Jerusalem (Zion) will again soon be filled with a prosperous and numerous population. What Yahweh once did for their ancestors he can and will now do for them.

The other reference to Abraham (41:8) occurs in a series of epithets attached to the names Israel and Jacob at the beginning of a promise of salvation (41:8-13). This use of epithets, whether of Yahweh or of Israel, is a characteristic of Deutero-Isaiah's style. He used them to remind the exiles of facts which might dispose them to believe the promise which follows. The description of Abraham as Yahweh's 'friend' (literally, 'the one whom I loved'), which occurs again in 2 Chron. 20:7, reminds the exiles both of the intimacy and the constancy of Yahweh's love for them, which stretches back to their most remote ancestor. Deutero-Isaiah's use of the traditions about Abraham reflects a reawakened interest in the Patriarchal traditions in the period of the Exile: Abraham is never mentioned in any of the authentic oracles of the pre-exilic prophets; but Ezek. 33:24 shows that with the loss of the land of Palestine Abraham came to the fore as the ancestor whose claim to its possession remained valid for his descendants. Deutero-Isaiah's use of the Abraham traditions, however, is of a somewhat different order.

The only other reference to the patriarchal traditions is in 43:27: 'Your first father sinned.' This is almost certainly a reference to *Jacob*. Its negative view of him is also reflected in Hos. 12:3-5. The passage in which this reference occurs has already been considered (p. 35f.). In defending the Exile as a just punishment, Yahweh points out that Israel's sinful tendency manifested itself almost from the beginning. This throws an even greater emphasis on the marvel of

Yahweh's forgiveness (verse 25). 41:8 and 43:27 complement one another.

The period of Israel's history from which Deutero-Isaiah most frequently drew lessons was that of *Israel's beginnings*: the release of the nation's ancestors from slavery in Egypt, their crossing of the Red Sea, and their journey, under Yahweh's guidance, through the wilderness. These events—frequently referred to loosely as the '*Exodus events*'—offered an obvious analogy to the picture which the prophet was presenting to the exiles of what was about to happen to them. The theme had already been touched upon by Ezekiel (especially Ezek. 20:32-44), but in a very different way. Deutero-Isaiah made it his own. As with his use of other historical themes, his purpose was to convince the exiles of the truth of Yahweh's promises about the immediate future by reminding them of his great deeds in the past; but he went further than this. He taught that the 'new Exodus' (to use a convenient modern term for this theme) would be even more spectacular and lasting in its effects than the first Exodus; so much so that he could claim that Yahweh was saying (43:18-19):

Remember not the former things,
nor consider the things of old.
Behold, I am doing a new thing.

52:11-12 has the form of a command by the prophet to his fellow-exiles to begin their journey home. This is a projection into the future: he speaks as if Babylon has already fallen, or is falling, to Cyrus. They are to leave the city, preceded by the priests carrying the sacred vessels stolen by Nebuchadnezzar (verse 11), as their ancestors had been preceded by the Ark on their wilderness journeys (Num. 10:33-35). The reference to the Exodus is even clearer in verse 12. The departure from Egypt had taken place secretly, by night, and in haste. (The word 'haste' or 'hurried flight' (*hippāzōn*) used here occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament only in connection with the Exodus events—Exod. 12:11; Deut. 16:3). The departure from Babylon, on the other hand, will be more like a ceremonial procession. This verse also alludes to another Exodus motif: that of the *pillar of cloud* which went before the Israelites to guide them (Exod. 13:21-22) but moved and stood behind them to protect them against attack (Exod. 14:19-20).

Another clear allusion to the Exodus is to be found in the announcement of salvation in 43:14-21. In verses 16-17, in a series of epithets

attached to the messenger-formula, Yahweh refers in plain terms, closely following the account in Exod. 14:21-29, to his *action at the Red Sea* when the Israelites were enabled to cross on dry ground while the Egyptians were drowned. This is a prelude to the admonition 'Remember not the former things': the 'new Exodus' will be far more glorious. The oracle ends with the promise proper (verses 19b-21), which speaks of a repetition of the feeding of the people of old in the wilderness during the period after the crossing of the Red Sea, rendered even more marvellous by the motif of the homage of the animal world (verse 20). Finally the crossing of the Red Sea is referred to in 51:10; but this, as has already been pointed out, is a quotation from a lamentation preceding an announcement of salvation (verse 11 is an interpolation). The latter does not specifically take up the Exodus reference from the lamentation, except perhaps in verse 15 where Yahweh speaks of stirring up the sea.

The theme of *divine guidance during the journey through the wilderness* has already been touched upon in connection with 52:11-12 and 43:19-21. It is found also in other passages. 40:3-5 and 40:9-11 speak of a triumphant march to Jerusalem led by Yahweh himself, returning to his holy city in triumph like the victor after a battle. Here the theme of guidance and protection in the wilderness has been combined with that of the divine warrior. We also find the theme of miraculous feeding during the journey again in the announcement of salvation in 41:17-20, where the miracles of the time of the old Exodus are repeated more splendidly, with the wilderness becoming a pool of water and trees springing up miraculously to provide shade. And in 42:14-17, another announcement of salvation, the whole landscape is miraculously transformed (as also in 40:3-5) to make the journey both easier and more spectacular, while darkness is turned to light (perhaps a reminiscence of the pillar of fire). There is also a reference to miraculous feeding in 48:21, which is probably, together with the previous phrase ('They thirsted not . . .'), the hymn which the returning exiles are to sing on the journey.

One further point remains to be noticed about these passages. In Exod. 14:31, after the account of the crossing of the Red Sea, it is stated that 'Israel saw the great work which Yahweh did . . . , and the people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh.' This theme of *Yahweh's glory and its effect on the beholders* is a major theme of Deutero-Isaiah's. As has been said, it was his purpose through these historical allusions to inspire confidence in the new promises which

Yahweh was now making. But this was not enough. For him the salvation of Israel was not an end in itself: the ultimate purpose was the manifestation of Yahweh's glory to the world. Deutero-Isaiah was clearly determined to turn the thoughts of the exiles away from their preoccupation with themselves to a deeper acknowledgement of the transcendent Saviour-God. It is significant that three of these passages emphasize this theme: 'And the glory of Yahweh shall be revealed' (40:5); 'that men may see and know . . . that the hand of Yahweh has done it' (41:20); '... my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself, that they might declare my praise' (43:21).

Deutero-Isaiah makes very few direct references to the *period of the monarchy*. For him as for his predecessors this was essentially a time of apostasy leading to the disruption of the kingdoms and to the Exile. Apart from a confused passage in prose (52:3-6), of which he is almost certainly not the author, which refers to the deportation of Israelites by Assyria, and an obscure reference to the fate of the Jerusalem priesthood in 43:28, the only period to which he refers directly is that of *David* (55:1-5). In this passage, in which Yahweh appeals to the exiles to detach themselves from their preoccupation with their present mode of existence and to accept the promise which is being offered to them of true satisfaction as a people restored to their own land and living in prosperity, he speaks of an 'everlasting covenant' which he will make with them, and links this with his 'steadfast, sure love for David,' the great leader of the past, whose greatness had been acknowledged by the surrounding nations. The mention of this 'golden age' of the time of David was intended to evoke the same feelings as were evoked by the references to Abraham: confidence that Yahweh who in the past had made Israel great and prosperous could and would now do so again. There is no promise here of the restoration of the Davidic dynasty: rather it is the whole people who will now be united with Yahweh, as David had been in the past, in an everlasting covenant.

As one looks back on this survey of Deutero-Isaiah's references to past history, it is clear that he had a remarkably detailed knowledge of the nation's historical traditions, and in a form which corresponds even in quite small details to the accounts which were eventually incorporated into the biblical books. Moreover, although his use of them was necessarily selective, it is equally clear that he was able to see the history of Israel as a continuous whole. He was very aware that, despite the terrible interval of the Exile, there was a continuity

in Yahweh's dealings with his people: it was not Yahweh who had ceased to love and care for his people, but Israel which had ceased to love Yahweh. Yahweh is consistently pictured as always ready to demonstrate his love for Israel, and now even more abundantly than before.

3. *The interpretation of Israel's sufferings.* It was not enough for Deutero-Isaiah to draw these lessons from the past. It was above all the sufferings and disappointments of the present which made the exiles reluctant to believe in the readiness of Yahweh to help them. Deutero-Isaiah had to interpret these sufferings: he had to account for them, and also to convince his audience that they were now coming to an end.

Firstly, he emphasized that it was Yahweh who had inflicted them: it was not the Babylonian kings, who were only Yahweh's instruments, and certainly not their seemingly all-powerful gods. The point was not a new one: it had been made, *mutatis mutandis*, by both the eighth and the seventh-century prophets both in warnings and in comments on past disasters. Deutero-Isaiah made it in a characteristic way in 42:18-25, sometimes classified as a trial scene against Israel. In verses 18-20 he depicts a nation so stupid that they had been unable to see that what was happening to them was the result of their sin. A similar point is made in 43:22-24 (on this passage see above, pp. 35f.).

But to tell the exiles that they deserved what they had got was to risk leaving them in despair, and also to leave them still with the feeling that Yahweh was unfair to them, since the generation whose behaviour had led to the Exile was now dead, and the new generation felt (as we learn from other exilic writings such as Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2-4; Lam. 5:7) that they were being punished for their parents' sins. Deutero-Isaiah's answer was to assure them that it was precisely the new generation which was to be treated differently from that of their parents. The sufferings of the Exile had never been intended by Yahweh to last for ever. He had always intended that they should have a limit; and that limit had now been reached. The 'sentence of imprisonment' had been served: and the exiles were therefore about to become free men again (40:1-2). This is also the point of the passage about the supposed 'divorce' between Yahweh and his people (50:1, also part of a supposed 'trial scene'). Hosea (2:2), Jeremiah (3:8) and Ezekiel (16) had all used the metaphor of divorce to stress that Yahweh had rejected his people and broken the relationship

between him and them. They had, it is true, envisaged the possibility of a reconciliation. Deutero-Isaiah, however, seems in 50:1 to have denied that there had ever been a real divorce: since there is no 'divorce certificate' (see Deut. 24:1-4; Jer. 3:8), there had only been a temporary separation.

Another problem which had much exercised earlier prophets, especially Ezekiel, was the question of repentance. The pre-exilic prophets had made repentance a condition of reconciliation with Yahweh. But there was not really any sign that the people had repented. How, then, could it be asserted that Yahweh had forgiven them? In answer to this problem Deutero-Isaiah stressed the *grace* of Yahweh which does not wait for repentance. Here, as so often, he comes closer to the New Testament than any other Old Testament teacher. This is most clearly seen in 43:22-28, which has been already discussed, where in verse 25 a declaration of free pardon is given in an oracle which begins as an oracle of judgement. Deutero-Isaiah's theology is a theology of grace which outweighs all other considerations.

To sum up: Deutero-Isaiah dealt with the problem of Israel's sufferings in exile by asserting that these were not due to external powers which Yahweh was unable to control, but to Yahweh himself; by interpreting them as a divine punishment justly inflicted; and by claiming that they were intended to have a limit, which had now been reached. He also overcame the argument that there can be no reconciliation with God without national repentance by preaching a doctrine of the unconditional grace of a God who continues to love his people and will always do so.

4. *Yahweh as creator and only God.* In spite of their traditional belief, expressed in psalms and creation-narratives, that Yahweh was the creator of the world, the Jewish exiles in Babylon, surrounded by the grandiose worship of the Babylonian gods, to whom of course the Babylonians attributed their conquests, were easily tempted to wonder whether their own beliefs were mistaken: whether their humiliation was due to Yahweh's having been defeated by gods more powerful than himself. These doubts would have been nourished by the celebration of the annual New Year Festival at Babylon, a festival which commemorated the creation of the world by Marduk, his installation as king of the gods, and the supremacy of his city, Babylon. Although the actual rites of this festival were celebrated in private, there were public processions along the great sacral way, and the festival was the occasion of public rejoicing. Moreover it is probable that the Babylonian

creation myths such as the 'Creation Epic' (*Enuma Elish*), which describes Marduk's exploits (Pritchard, 60-72; *Thomas, 3-16), were familiar to the ordinary citizens through public recitation. Festivals and myths alike must have seemed to the Jewish exiles to correspond to the political reality of Babylon's supremacy.

How could Deutero-Isaiah combat the effects of this pro-Marduk propaganda? It can of course never be proved beyond doubt that one religion is true and another false. All that the prophet could do was to set the mythological tradition of Babylon against the more sober theological tradition of Israel, and to attempt to show in point after point that the latter was more credible than the former. In addition to rational argument, he also used his poetical skill to evoke the mood of joyful confidence in Yahweh's incomparable power and majesty which had been the keynote of the Judaeen festival cult in the days when Yahweh's kingship had been celebrated in Jerusalem. It was in the performance of this task that Deutero-Isaiah produced some of his finest poems.

In 40:12-31 he used the disputation form as the vehicle for his arguments. In the first of these disputations (verses 12-17) he restated the Israelite creation tradition in a series of rhetorical questions in order to make the point that if it is indeed Yahweh who created the world of nature with such skill (verses 12-14) he must also possess absolute control over his human creatures, and so over the historical process (verses 15-17). The implication, clear though not directly stated, is that Babylon, far from being the undisputed mistress of the world, is in fact powerless and insignificant, no obstacle to Yahweh's plans. This theological point, arguing from belief in Yahweh as creator to belief in his control of history, may seem obvious now. But it was not always obvious; and although the link between the two themes had not gone entirely unperceived before the time of Deutero-Isaiah, it had never before been so clearly expressed.

But this disputation also puts forward an argument to show that the Israelite creation tradition itself is superior to that of Babylon. In verses 13-14 the question is asked, rhetorically, whether Yahweh had needed help to carry out his work of creation. This is an indirect allusion to the Babylonian polytheistic tradition such as is found in *Enuma Elish*, where Marduk, himself appointed as king by a 'committee' of gods, nevertheless received help in his creative work from the wise Ea, his father, who is in fact alone credited in one passage with the creation of mankind. None of the Babylonian gods therefore

could be 'God' in an absolute sense as was Yahweh, to whom therefore Deutero-Isaiah can simply refer absolutely as 'God' (e.g. in verse 18). The implication is clear: the Israelite tradition of a sole creator is the one which has the ring of truth.

40:18-26 (omitting verses 19-20 which have been interpolated) also begins with a question (verse 18) which raises even more specifically the issue of Yahweh's incomparability. The background, once more, is Babylon's polytheism, whose gods, in spite of their different characteristics, were all comparable to one another in that they all belonged to the category 'god.' It would have been easy for the Jewish exiles similarly to come to regard Yahweh as a 'god' like any other: to reduce him to the level of one 'god' among many.

In verse 21 comes a series of further questions, which are in fact reproaches: Deutero-Isaiah asks his audience how they can possibly be in any doubt about Yahweh's incomparability. Surely they know their own tradition! In verse 22 he reminds them of that tradition, using the participial style and vocabulary of the creation hymn (cf. Pss. 136 and 104, especially 104:2b, which is almost identical with part of this verse). Then, as in verses 12-17, he turns from the theme of the creation of the world to that of Yahweh's power over the rulers and nations of the world: since it is Yahweh who created the world, the political power of Babylon (and other nations) must also be entirely subject to him and can be brought to an end whenever he wishes.

The concluding verse (26) about Yahweh and the heavenly bodies may at first seem to be an anticlimax; but in fact it is equally polemical. In *Enuma Elish* (Tablet V) the heavenly bodies are not Marduk's creatures: they are the great gods themselves. Marduk established them in the heavens with their prescribed movements, but they were still gods. Marduk was neither an absolute monarch nor a sole god. Against this polytheistic belief Deutero-Isaiah set the monotheistic Israelite tradition. The heavenly bodies are simply Yahweh's creatures. He uses the special word *bārā*, 'create,' here, a word which is used only of divine creation, and so makes an absolute distinction between creator and creatures. Having created the heavenly bodies Yahweh put them, as it were, 'on parade,' bringing them out to shine 'by number.' 'Not one is missing.' Yahweh, then, really is incomparable: for him there are no divine rivals. It is interesting to note that the 'priestly' writer, Deutero-Isaiah's contemporary or near-contemporary, made exactly the same point in Gen. 1:14-18, and that he too used the verb *bārā* for exactly the same purpose.

In the final disputation in this series (verses 27-31) Deutero-Isaiah appeals to the traditional understanding of Yahweh as creator in order to answer a specific complaint, similar in form to many complaints in the lamentations in the Book of Psalms: that Yahweh either does not know about the exiles' situation, or is ignoring it. The first of these charges he dismisses as ludicrous. As for the second, for the creature to demand immediate action from the creator in this way is a presumptuous denial of his essential unknowability and betrays a lack of trust. Those who 'wait for him' will find that he will not fail them.

The polemic against Babylonian polytheism is taken up again in 43:10-13, part of a trial scene (verses 8-13) in which Yahweh is the speaker. Yahweh's claim, which follows Israel's traditional belief, is that 'Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me' (verse 10). This is a clear allusion to Babylonian mythology, according to which Marduk belonged not to the first but to the fourth generation of gods (*Enuma Elish*, Tablet I), his father, Ea, and his mother Damkina being mentioned by name. Marduk himself had children: so there were gods before Marduk was born, and gods after him. Deutero-Isaiah is, by implication, asking his audience which they would rather believe: the fairy-tale mythology of Babylon, or their own tradition of Yahweh who had existed since eternity and would always exist: the only god, without birth and without sexuality. The phrase 'I am He' (verse 13 and repeated frequently in other passages) means in effect 'I am the Only One.' Deutero-Isaiah pursues the argument: the sole creator must also be the sole saviour: there is no other god to hinder him from saving his people. A similar point is made in 44:6-8; 44:24; 45:5; 46:9; 51:6.

The Israelite belief in Yahweh as creator is also made the basis of some of Deutero-Isaiah's other leading arguments. As has already been pointed out, he used it in 45:9-13 (a disputation in which Yahweh is the speaker) to defend Yahweh's right as creator to do whatever he wishes with his creatures, as does a potter with his pots or a father with his children. The point here, as the final verse makes clear, is Yahweh's choice of the foreign king Cyrus as his instrument in the salvation and restoration of Israel, a choice which will certainly have needed some defence. Again in 54:16-17, in a passage (verses 11-17) promising the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the blessedness of the life of the future restored community, he assures the sceptical exiles that they will never again have to fear enemy attacks because Yahweh is the creator both of every imaginable enemy and also of all swordsmiths whose

products might be used against Israel: once again, creatorship is held to imply total control over the actions of the creature.

Finally Deutero-Isaiah used the doctrine of creation to support his teaching about the efficacy of the prophetic word. In 45:18-19 he began from the purposefulness of Yahweh's act of creation of the world: he created it not to be a chaos but to be inhabited—a very different view of mankind from that of the Babylonians, for whom man's sole duty was to act as slave to the gods. Deutero-Isaiah argued that the same purposefulness is to be seen in the word which Yahweh speaks through the prophets. The references to 'speaking in secret' and in 'a land of darkness' are probably allusions to Babylonian divination, in contrast to which Yahweh has always spoken out clearly and openly. The conclusion is that the exiles can rely on what he is saying through his prophet now. The use of the argument from creation in 55:8-11, where an analogy is drawn between the fertilising activity of the rain sent from heaven and Yahweh's prophetic word, has already been referred to (p. 38).

Deutero-Isaiah, then, used the Israelite creation traditions in a number of different ways in his attempt to convince the exiles of the truth of his basic message of imminent salvation: he used them to expose the absurdity of Babylonian polytheism, to show that it was Yahweh who possesses sole control over world history, and to stimulate trust in Yahweh and in the word of promise which he was speaking through his prophet.

5. *The argument from prophecy.* As a further way of showing that it was Yahweh and Yahweh alone who possessed control over history and therefore could claim to be the only true God, Deutero-Isaiah devised a test: if it could be shown that a god knew in advance that certain events would take place, then it could reasonably be claimed that it was he who had caused them to happen. That proof Deutero-Isaiah found in the phenomenon of prophecy, a phenomenon which was to all intents and purposes unique to Israel. The Babylonians, of course, claimed control over history for their own gods: Nebuchadnezzar, for example, claimed on his memorial stelae that it was Marduk who had given him his victories. But what proof could they offer?

Deutero-Isaiah's own argument, based on Yahweh's prediction of events through his prophets, is set out in the trial scenes to which reference has already been made. 41:21-29 will serve as an example. First, the scene is set (verse 21). This is, as has already been said, a

kind of 'fact finding tribunal' at which the question 'Who is the true God?' is to be settled. Yahweh is the convener, and he begins by addressing the heathen gods. They are invited to show how in the past they had predicted the future; or, if they cannot do that, at least to make an attempt to predict the future now. This will show them to be gods (verse 23). But they are silent; and it must therefore be concluded that they are 'nothing.' This imaginary scene provides a suitable setting for Yahweh to state his own case (from verse 25). He refers to the career of Cyrus, asks who predicted it (verse 26), and himself gives the answer: no-one but himself. This evidently refers to some earlier prophecies; and this reference creates a problem, since it is not possible to point with certainty to such prophecies of the career of Cyrus within the extant prophetic books of the Old Testament. Nevertheless we can take it for granted that Deutero-Isaiah's listeners must have been familiar with such prophecies, since otherwise the passage makes no sense. Such prophecies would, in any case, be entirely consistent with the predictive activity by prophets of future events of which there are many other examples in the Old Testament. The trial scene concludes (verses 28-29) with a reiteration of the conclusion that the heathen gods are 'nothing.'

Similar arguments are to be found in other trial scenes in the book, some of which contain additional features: for example, in 43:8-13 the tribunal summons witnesses to support the arguments, the worshippers of the heathen gods on one side and Yahweh's witnesses, that is, Israel, on the other.

6. *The argument from idol worship.* Attacking Babylonian religion from another angle, Deutero-Isaiah, following the precedent of earlier prophets, seized upon an essential difference between Babylonian and Israelite worship: the absence, in the latter, of a divine image. Although the Old Testament frequently speaks of tendencies towards idolatry and even, at certain periods, of its widespread practice in Israel, these were departures from the norm, the prohibition of divine images set out in the Decalogue (Exod. 20:4-6; Deut. 5:8-10). Imageless worship was thus a fundamental characteristic of Israelite religious practice, and Deutero-Isaiah realized both its theological significance and its polemical value. Most if not all the other religions of the ancient Near East involved the making and worship of the statues of their gods, and the Babylonians in particular attached great importance to this.

It would be inappropriate to ask here whether the Babylonians and

other ancient peoples identified the statues of their gods totally with the gods themselves: religious beliefs are usually complex and intuitive, and cannot easily be reduced to simple logical formulae. But Deutero-Isaiah did ask that question, and he answered it, rightly or wrongly, in the affirmative. The Babylonians did, after all, make images of their gods and offer worship to them. To an Israelite for whom the divinity and sovereignty of the one true God was symbolized precisely by his invisibility and intangibility, such behaviour was not only blasphemous but also ludicrous.

Deutero-Isaiah inherited a tradition in which worshippers of idols were mocked for 'worshipping the works of their own hands' (Isa. 2:8; compare Hos. 13:2; Hab. 2:18-19; Ps. 97:7 and—though probably from a later period—Ps. 115:4-8; 135:15-18). He carried the mockery further by describing in some detail the effort put into the manufacture of idols (40:19-20; 41:6-7). These descriptions bear some similarity to a Babylonian text (Pritchard, 331-2) which contains instructions to craftsmen pursuing this craft; and it has even been suggested that the prophet may himself have witnessed such men at work in some small idol-factory. The tone is contemptuous. He lays great stress on two facts: that the idol owes its existence to nothing more supernatural than the market demand, and that it is rigid and unable to move. (44:9-20 is an even more explicit satire on this subject, though this passage, which is in prose, is probably not the work of Deutero-Isaiah himself.)

Finally there is a rather different, and theologically more important, passage on this subject in 46:1-4. This is one of the most effective of Deutero-Isaiah's poems. It consists of two contrasting sections. Verses 1-2 are concerned with the two principal Babylonian gods, Bel (Marduk) and Nebo (Nabu), verses 3-4 with Yahweh. The contrast between the two sections is brought out by the use of the verbs 'carry' and 'bear.' The scene depicted in the first part belongs to the immediate future which has been promised: Babylon is falling; and the worshippers of its gods are loading them—that is, their statues—on beasts of burden in an attempt to escape from the city with them. The point is cleverly made that these gods, who have always been worshipped and revered as great gods who by their immense power will always act to protect the city, are in fact so useless that they have now become a burden to their own worshippers: they have to be carried—and very heavy they are! The Hebrew here contrives to convey the impression of men sweating and grunting as they try to move these dead weights.

In contrast with this scene, in the second section (verses 3-4) Yahweh speaks to his people and reminds them that, far from being a burden to them, *he* has always carried *them*—that is, he has protected and helped them: they have been his burden. The passage concludes with a promise that he will continue to ‘carry’ them: ‘even to your old age.’ Here as elsewhere in the book the themes of Yahweh’s power to save and his willingness to do so are linked together against the background of the uselessness of the outwardly splendid and victorious gods of Babylon.

7. *The redeeming God.* The most profound of all the arguments which Deutero-Isaiah used to persuade his fellow-exiles to believe his message was based on the nature of Yahweh himself. Over and over again, in direct address to the exiles, Yahweh reveals his inner motives. It is not merely that he is able to help his people, or that he is willing to do so, or that he can point to his record of earlier kindness towards them. His true motive springs from something mysterious and inexplicable: his inexhaustible love for them. In the desperate situation in which the exiles find themselves at present, this love must and will find its expression in the nation’s redemption and restoration. For Deutero-Isaiah, then, Yahweh is above all a redeeming God: a God who without waiting for national repentance will take the initiative and, simply out of love for his people, act to save them.

This note of *unconditional* love for a sinful and still unrepentant people is hardly to be found in the pre-exilic prophets, except perhaps in Hosea, who pictures Yahweh as offering a new betrothal to his faithless wife Israel (Hos. 2:14-17). Otherwise, in those passages generally regarded as authentic, these prophets represented Yahweh as offering a hope of rescue or restoration only on condition of a whole-hearted return to him in submission to his will. In the exilic period, with Jeremiah (31:31-34) and Ezekiel (36:25-27; 37:1-14), the note of divine grace was sounded more clearly. In these passages, with their images of a new heart, a new spirit and a new covenant, there is a recognition that Israel is incapable of taking any steps to save itself, and that therefore redemption can only take the form of something quite new: a new beginning, the creation of a new Israel, whose nature will be innately disposed towards obedience to its creator. This teaching clearly foreshadows that of Deutero-Isaiah.

Nevertheless, in Ezekiel at least, this new creation is not attributed to feelings of tenderness and love on the part of Yahweh. Rather Ezekiel represents him as acting according to his own interests: ‘It is

not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned’ (Ezek. 36:22). There is an echo of this in Isa. 48:9, 11; but this passage is almost certainly an interpolation and not the work of Deutero-Isaiah. It is not representative of his teaching. For him all the emphasis is on Yahweh’s love for his people which moves him to come to their aid. It is true that the ultimate goal of his redemptive activity lies beyond the confines of Israel: it is his intention that ‘they [i.e. mankind] may see and know . . . that it is the hand of Yahweh who has done this’ (41:20). Nevertheless Deutero-Isaiah again and again, in passages too numerous to list here, stresses Yahweh’s love and forgiveness towards his people.

Like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah apparently saw no real sign of repentance on the part of the exiles. Passages like 42:24-25 should perhaps be understood as referring principally to past generations rather than to the present one; but throughout the oracles, especially in the references to their lamentations and in the disputations, the exiles are explicitly or implicitly reproached for their lack of faith; and in some passages (e.g. 55:6-7) they are addressed as not yet having sincerely submitted themselves to Yahweh. But, again like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Deutero-Isaiah did not regard repentance as a precondition for Yahweh’s forgiveness; rather it would be the consequence of forgiveness: ‘Return to me, for I have redeemed you’ (44:22).

The verb *gā’al*, rendered in the above passage by ‘redeemed,’ is used several times by Deutero-Isaiah to refer to Yahweh’s action in rescuing his people. Particularly striking is his frequent use (41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8) of the related noun (strictly a participle) *gō’ēl*, ‘redeemer,’ as a kind of title of Yahweh, indicating that his redemptive role is not an exceptional or a secondary one, but one which belongs to the essence of his relationship with Israel: Yahweh is ‘the Redeemer of Israel.’ In Israelite family law (see especially Lev. 25:25-55) the *gō’ēl* was the kinsman who rescued his relatives from economic difficulties which might otherwise lead to enslavement for debt. The application of this term to the action of Yahweh in coming to the rescue of his people is virtually peculiar to Deutero-Isaiah; and the degree of condescension shown by Yahweh in assuming this role is further emphasized by the fact that in these passages Yahweh is also described by the exalted title of ‘the Holy One of Israel’: ‘your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel’ (41:14).

Elsewhere in the oracles other comparable terms are used to express this redemptive role: Yahweh is Israel's helper or 'saviour' (*mōšia'*); he is like a shepherd to them, etc. The prophet also speaks explicitly of his 'great compassion' and his 'everlasting love' (54:7-8). Like Hosea and Jeremiah he speaks of Israel as the estranged wife whom Yahweh will restore to himself (e.g. 54:5-6). The keynote which is struck in the very first oracle (40:1-2) with its message of comfort and assurance of forgiveness dominates the entire book right to the end.

It has already been pointed out that Deutero-Isaiah used the Israelite belief in Yahweh as the Creator of the world as a basis for his demonstration that he possesses the power to redeem his people, and also that he saw the coming act of redemption as the creation of a new Israel. So it may be said that a further aspect of his understanding of Yahweh as Redeemer is that, for him, Yahweh's redemptive and creative actions are parts of a single whole. Yahweh was Creator of the world, creator of Israel, and also creator of the 'new things' which were now being announced. In a number of passages (42:9; 43:18-19; 48:3, 6) these 'new things' are contrasted with the 'former things' which Yahweh had done in the past. The latter, though in themselves wonderful, now merely serve as foils for the even greater 'new things' about to be done. The word 'new' is a key word in Deutero-Isaiah's doctrine of redemption, and even when the word itself is not used the idea is often present. The modern phrases 'new Exodus,' 'new creation,' 'new Israel' are not Deutero-Isaiah's own; but their use is justified in that they express succinctly what Deutero-Isaiah was saying.

The ultimate aim of Yahweh's redemptive activity, however, is the manifestation of his glory (40:3-5; 41:17-20; 43:5-7). In 42:7-9 Yahweh states specifically that he is jealous for his reputation and that he will not allow other gods to take his glory from him. God is all; man exists to glorify him. Man's enjoyment of his favour is not an end in itself.

A Mission to the Gentiles?

What place, if any, were the other nations of the world to be given in this scheme of redemption? Many scholars, following an interpretative tradition of great antiquity, have held that Deutero-Isaiah believed Israel to have been entrusted by Yahweh with a 'mission to the Gentiles,' to convert them to the Jewish faith. H.H. Rowley, for example, wrote of his 'conception of Israel as the Servant, charged with a mission to bring all men to the true religion' (Rowley, 1952, 53).

Others (e.g. de Boer, Orlinsky, Snaith) have equally denied this. The view of Israel as a missionary nation is to a large extent dependent on a particular interpretation of the figure of Yahweh's 'Servant' in Deutero-Isaiah, a matter which will be considered below. But his oracles contain numerous references to the nations which are unconnected with the role of the Servant, and these must be given due weight in the discussion.

The majority of the references in the book to the nations are either contemptuous or hostile. Some refer to Cyrus's conquests, carried out through Yahweh's enabling power (41:2-3, 25; 45:1-3; 48:14), or to the imminent fall of Babylon (43:14; 46:1-2). Chapter 47, addressed to Babylon, shows no pity for its inhabitants. Other oracles are expressed in more general terms. A number of passages speak of the discomfiture of any enemy, present or future, who may attack Israel (41:11-13; 49:26; 51:7-8, 23; 54:15). 49:7 and 49:22-23 go further: here it is predicted that foreign kings and rulers, conquered by Israel, will present themselves as suppliants in chains, prostrating themselves to Israel and becoming its slaves. There is a similar picture in 45:14. In 43:3-4, in highly imaginative imagery, Yahweh goes as far as to say that Israel is so precious to him that the other nations are expendable, fit only to be used as counters to be exchanged in order to save Israel, which is now held to ransom. Such passages seem to hark back to the imperialist days of David and Solomon rather than to look forward to an era in which the other nations will share Yahweh's protection equally with Israel. Indeed, several oracles culminate in statements difficult to reconcile with the latter idea, e.g. 'I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory' (46:13); 'In Yahweh all the offspring of Israel shall triumph and glory' (45:25).

Some passages, however, have frequently been interpreted in an universalistic sense. One of these is 45:14, mentioned above. Here a number of foreign nations acknowledge the God of Israel as the only God. But as this confession is made by prisoners of war kneeling in chains before their Israelite conqueror, the situation can hardly be seen as an example of Israel's mission to the nations. This is rather an example of Israelite imperialism, spiritual as well as military. In contrast, 44:5 does refer to foreigners who, seeing Israel's prosperity, will seek membership of the chosen people. However, it is clear that they come as individuals. This is an example, not of the mass conversion of the nations, but of what was later to be called the admission of proselytes to the fellowship of Israel. On the other hand 45:22,

though frequently so interpreted (e.g. by Westermann, 1969) is not in any way concerned with religious conversion, national or individual. This trial scene (45:20-25) emphasizes the triumph of Yahweh together with that of Yahweh's chosen people Israel. That this triumph will be acknowledged by the whole universe is one of Deutero-Isaiah's recurring themes (compare, for example, 40:5); but this is not the 'universal salvation' envisaged by some interpreters. There is no good reason to take the phrase 'all the ends of the earth' as referring to the nations: if it refers specifically to human beings rather than to the whole created universe, the most probable reference is to the Jews now scattered among the nations (compare its use in 43:6-7). The situation envisaged is the same as in 55:5. (On this question see the discussions cited in my commentary, 111-112.)

It may be thought that the passages which refer to Cyrus and his special dependence on Yahweh (see above, pp. 45ff.), especially the statement in 45:3 that Cyrus, though now unaware of this dependence (verse 4), will eventually come to recognize it, have a universalistic flavour. But it is significant that Deutero-Isaiah makes nothing more of this theme. He does not say that Cyrus—or his people the Persians, who are never mentioned—will abandon his own religion in favour of the worship of Yahweh. Cyrus's eventual acknowledgement of Yahweh's universal power is mentioned only as an example of the submission to Yahweh's dominion of the whole of creation. Deutero-Isaiah's interest in Cyrus is confined to his role as the instrument of the exiles' liberation and restoration.

The texts which more than any others have given rise to the view that Deutero-Isaiah thought of Israel as a missionary to the nations still remain to be considered. Two of them (42:1-4 and 49:1-6) belong to the group of passages known as the 'Servant Songs.' A third, 42:5-9, is generally considered to be an independent oracle, although some scholars have held it to be a continuation of 42:1-4. The identity of the 'Servant' will be discussed below. However, his supposed missionary role, whether he stands for Israel or is a historical individual, may legitimately be examined independently of this question. The issue turns on the interpretation of particular words and phrases in the following sentences:

He shall bring forth 'judgement' (*mišpāt*) to the nations
(42:1)

Until he has set 'judgement' (*mišpāt*) in the earth (42:4)

The coastlands shall wait for his 'law' (*tōrāh*) (42:4)

I have made you a 'covenant of (the) people' (*b'rit 'ām*), a light of nations (42:6)

I will make you a light of nations, so that my 'salvation' (*yēšū'āh*) may reach to the end of the earth (49:6)

It is difficult for a modern reader to dissociate these phrases from their traditional Christian interpretation; yet in fact none of the words rendered by judgement, law, light, salvation in the above quotations necessarily suggests, in the original Hebrew, a mission to convert the nations. Judgement and law most naturally refer to Yahweh's universal sovereignty; 'salvation' in Deutero-Isaiah frequently means 'victory'—that is, the victory which saves Israel from a state of slavery. 'Covenant of the people' would require a somewhat forced translation of a singular noun (*'ām*, 'people') to make it refer to a plurality of nations; and 'a light of the nations' is obscure and not an obvious term for religious conversion.

The above examination of the relevant texts reveals very little evidence in favour of the view that Deutero-Isaiah saw Israel as commissioned by Yahweh to be a missionary people. Even in 44:5, in which he prophesies that foreigners will plead to be permitted, as individuals, to enter into the full membership of the chosen people, he is clearly concerned to depict Israel as the envy of the world rather than to see this development as in itself the fulfilment of Yahweh's universal purpose.

The Servant of Yahweh

It is one of the special features of the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah that Israel as a nation is frequently referred to as Yahweh's 'servant' or 'slave' (*'ebed*). This epithet of Israel, though virtually peculiar to Deutero-Isaiah, does not call for special remark. Both in the Old Testament and in the literature of the ancient Near East generally, those who 'served,' that is, acknowledged and worshipped, a particular deity were commonly referred to as that deity's 'servants.' In the Old Testament the term is especially used to designate individual persons whose attachment to Yahweh was especially noteworthy, such as Abraham, Moses or David. It is also used of prophets (1 Kings 18:36; Amos 3:7; Jer. 7:25). Deutero-Isaiah's designation of the nation Israel as Yahweh's servant is an example of his general tendency to personify the nation as a single individual. He used this term especially in the salvation oracles (e.g. 41:8-10) to remind the exiles of their special

relationship with Yahweh and so to give them confidence in his good will towards them.

The Servant Songs

There are, however, a number of other passages which speak of a Servant of Yahweh but do not unmistakably identify him with Israel. Some of these refer to him in vivid personal terms and attribute to him an active role which is in marked contrast with that assigned to the Servant-Israel in the first group of passages, which is simply to wait expectantly for Yahweh to come and save him. This raises a question of fundamental importance for the interpretation of the oracles as a whole: is the Servant always Israel despite this duality of role, or was Deutero-Isaiah speaking in this second group of oracles about a different figure—perhaps about some individual person who, like a Moses or a David or one of the prophets, merited this exceptional title? Such a person would clearly be a key figure in Deutero-Isaiah's conception of Israel's redemption.

The interpretation of the Servant in some passages as an individual is at least as old as the question put by the Ethiopian eunuch about the interpretation of Isa. 53:7-8 in Acts 8:34. But in 1892 Bernhard Duhm put the matter in a new and precise way. He singled out four passages (42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12) in which a single *individual* 'Servant of Yahweh' is to be seen, sharply distinguishing these from the remainder of the book, in which the Servant is Israel. These four passages he called 'Servant Songs' (*Ebed-Lieder*). Although his view about the identity of this individual Servant has not met with general acceptance, his theory that these four passages constitute a distinct group within the book has been so influential that all subsequent discussion of the Servant of Yahweh in Deutero-Isaiah has been obliged to take it into account. Some attempts have been made since to add further passages to the list or to include additional verses (e.g. extending the first 'Song' to 42:7), but these have not been generally accepted. The discussion which follows will therefore be restricted to Duhm's original four. (Further study of this question should begin with North, 1948.)

The following summary of the contents of the 'Servant Songs' is intended to illustrate Duhm's theory and also to provide a basis for the discussion of the identity of their central figure.

1. 42:1-4

Yahweh here makes a declaration (to an unnamed audience) in support of his Servant: he has chosen him himself and is confident that, in the strength of his own Spirit, which he has bestowed on him, he will be able to carry out the task which he has assigned to him. This is to give to the nations of the world *mišpāt*, probably 'judgement' rather than 'justice' (see pp. 64f. above), and 'his *tōrah*,' that is, his (the Servant's) authoritative instruction or law (verses 1b, 4). He will work quietly and gently (verses 2-3), but nothing will prevent his success (verse 4a). Nothing is said in this passage about a task to be performed for Israel, unless the phrases 'bruised reed' and 'dimly burning wick' (verse 3) refer to the weak state of the exiles' faith in Yahweh.

2. 49:1-6

Now the Servant himself speaks, addressing the inhabitants of the world. He refers first to his earlier experiences, beginning with his summons by Yahweh to be his Servant, which took place even before he was born (verses 1b, 3). In verse 2 he refers to the work which he was empowered to do: to speak words of power, comparable to using a sharp sword; he describes himself similarly as a sharp arrow. The purpose of this task was that Yahweh's glory should be made known. He then (verse 4a) reports that his earlier work had ended in apparent failure, though he had never doubted that Yahweh was on his side (verse 4b). Finally he announces that Yahweh has now spoken to him again, confirming his original task (verses 5a, 6a) but also giving him an additional and greater one (verse 6b). The original task had been given him solely for the benefit of Israel—for the revival of the stricken nation; the new one (virtually the same as is described in 42:1-4) was to impose the recognition of Yahweh's sovereignty on the whole world. It seems clear that these two passages belong to different stages in the career of the same person.

One important point remains to be noticed in 49:1-6: in verse 3 the Servant is specifically identified with Israel. But the matter is not as simple as it might seem, for a not inconsiderable number of scholars believe that the word 'Israel' here is a later addition to the original text. The reasons for this opinion will be discussed below (pp. 70f.)

3. 50:4-9

In this passage the Servant (though here not specifically so designated)

again speaks of his task and of his trust in Yahweh's support. As in the other two passages his task is to speak words given him by Yahweh (verses 4, 5), but now these are words of consolation addressed to 'the weary' (who are not further defined). He again reports apparent failure, but this time in specific terms: his message has been received with open hostility and physical assault (verses 6-8).

4. 52:13—53:12

There are many unsolved problems regarding the interpretation of several parts of this passage. First in 52:13-15 (which some interpreters, unlike Duhm, regard as a separate oracle) Yahweh himself speaks (part of verse 14, from 'his appearance' to 'sons of men,' has been misplaced from the end of 53:2). He promises the Servant a future status so exalted that even kings will be astonished at him. Then in 53:1 a group of people ('we') begin to speak about the Servant. They first express their astonishment at some news which has just reached them: the Servant, whom they had always believed to be a wretch afflicted by God with a particularly horrible punishment, has now been rescued from danger by Yahweh himself ('the arm of Yahweh') (53:1-2; 52:14b; 53:3). In the light of this news they confess their earlier erroneous assessment of him (verses 4-6): they now realize that there has been a divine purpose in his suffering, and that from this they have in some way benefited. The situation is the reverse of what they had supposed: they are the guilty ones, while he is innocent. They then refer (verses 7-9) to his suffering, and also (according to many interpreters) to his consequent death. The Hebrew text of verse 10 as far as 'an offering for sin' is unfortunately very muddled and impossible to translate with any certainty; but verses 10b-12 return to the subject of the Servant's future triumph in terms reminiscent of 52:13-15. Yahweh is once more speaking; and he promises the Servant the reward of a happy life for his willingness to bear, and to bear to the end, an undeserved penalty for sins committed by others.

Who is the Servant?

However one evaluates the traditional Christian view that the portrait of the Servant is in some way the portrait of Jesus of Nazareth who lived many centuries later than the author of the Songs, it is reasonable to suppose that Deutero-Isaiah's primary intention was to portray a figure which had some immediate significance for his own contemporaries.

The problem of identification faced by subsequent generations of readers is due mainly to the loss of the key to the language in which the Servant Songs are couched. Like many other ancient poetical texts which presumably presented no difficulties to their original readers, the Songs have become obscure to those who do not share their background. The author described the Servant in such a bewildering assortment of images that many different interpretations can each find its own textual support. Some scholars (e.g. Westermann, Clines) consider that the imprecision of the outlines of the figure is deliberate, and that no simple identification was ever intended. Others have propounded composite interpretations so complex that they attribute to the prophet either a profound subtlety of mind or an inability to express his meaning clearly. There is, however, a further possibility: it may be that of the various features of the Servant portrayed here only one set is directly descriptive, while the others are allusive and intended to present him as embodying in his person all that was positive in Israel's earlier traditions. The problem remains: which of these features describes the real Servant?

The Servant is represented in the Songs as an individual person who acts, speaks and suffers and who is addressed by God and referred to by himself and others in individual terms, expressed as singular verbs and pronouns. But how much of this language is to be understood in a literal sense? Poetical language is very frequently figurative; and in the poems of the Old Testament nations and smaller human groups are commonly spoken of in terms of personification: that is, they are spoken of as if they were one single individual. This device is not confined to the use of the names of eponymous ancestors like Israel, Judah and Jacob to designate the nation. Ezekiel, for example, personified Samaria and Jerusalem as two women, Oholah and Oholibah (Ezek. 23). Outside the Servant Songs Deutero-Isaiah himself frequently used this device. He not only addressed the Babylonian exiles as 'Zion,' portrayed as a wife and mother, but he also, as has been seen, applied to them the term 'Yahweh's Servant.' One of the fundamental questions, therefore, with regard to the Servant in the Songs, is whether these four passages are an exception in this respect: whether here and only here the Servant is to be understood literally as an individual man, or whether here also the figure is a personification of the nation Israel or at least of some part of Israel.

Collective interpretations

The view that the Servant is a *personification of the people of Israel* is a very ancient one which continues to find support among contemporary scholars (e.g. de Boer, Snaith). Apart from the explicit identification in 49:3 (see below), its main strength lies in the resemblance between the events of the Servant's career—call, special status before Yahweh, suffering, imminent restoration and (according to one interpretation) mission to the world—and the history of Israel pictured by Deutero-Isaiah elsewhere in his oracles. Its adherents also claim for it the advantage of simplicity: the Servant's identity remains the same throughout the oracles. Deutero-Isaiah, however, did not, it seems, elsewhere regard such simplicity as a virtue, but rather delighted in applying the same epithets to quite different persons in different oracles, e.g. to Israel (43:1) and Cyrus (45:3, 4).

A number of objections can be raised against the identification of the Servant with Israel.

1. In 49:5-6 the Servant refers to a divine commission which he has received to restore Israel's fortunes. This is a difficult concept if the Servant and Israel are identical. Again in 53:1-6 the speakers ('we') refer to the things which the Servant ('he') has done for them. Who are the 'we'? The view that they are the foreign nations and kings mentioned in 52:15 is difficult to reconcile with their confession in 53:4-6, which appears to imply that they are representatives, or at least members, of the people of Israel. But if this is so, the Servant cannot himself be the embodiment of the nation.

2. In the Songs the Servant is represented as completely devoted to the service of Yahweh and as a wholly innocent sufferer. This is in marked contrast with what Deutero-Isaiah (not to speak of earlier prophets) says elsewhere about Israel, which according to him has thoroughly deserved its punishment. If the Servant of the Songs were a personification of the nation, Deutero-Isaiah's whole message would appear inconsistent.

3. Apart from the word 'Israel' in 49:3, to be discussed below, the Servant is never named in the Songs. It appears to be taken for granted that his identity is known to those addressed. Such an absence of identification by name is extremely rare in Old Testament passages in which a corporate entity is personified. But particularly significant is the absence of such identification in the two Songs (49:1-6 and 50:4-9) in which the Servant himself is the speaker. In the prophetic

books it may be assumed that speech in the first person singular other than that of Yahweh is that of the prophet himself, unless the contrary is specifically indicated by the naming of another speaker in an introductory phrase (e.g., 'But Zion said,' 49:14) or in the body of the speech, or by the context. That a personified Israel should be the speaker in these two Songs without any such specific indication is therefore improbable.

Against these objections must be weighed the occurrence of the word 'Israel' in 49:3. This text reads: 'And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I shall be glorified".' If the word 'Israel' here belongs to the original text, the identity of the Servant is clear. But there is some reason to suspect that it may be a gloss, that is, a comment by an early reader of the Book of Isaiah which later became incorporated into the text. If this were the case it would constitute an early, and not necessarily correct, *interpretation* of the identity of the Servant. It is curious that it occurs precisely in a passage (49:1-6) which otherwise provides some of the clearest evidence against his identification with Israel. There are several criteria which may be employed in determining whether the word is a gloss.

a. *The context.* Both in this and in the final Song the Servant is represented as standing apart from the corporate entity of Israel, having a task to perform on its behalf. This contextual argument does not, however, by itself constitute an adequate basis for textual emendation.

b. *Grammar and metrics.* Here the evidence is ambiguous. Neither the syntax nor the metre would be either seriously impaired or improved by the omission of the word 'Israel.'

c. *Textual variation.* All the ancient Versions agree with the standard Hebrew text in containing the word 'Israel.' One late Hebrew manuscript, however (Kenn 96), lacks it. Much discussion has taken place about the possibility that this may be not simply a careless omission by the scribe who made this copy of the Book of Isaiah, but an original reading which had come down to him and which he preserved.

d. *The existence of other similar interpretative glosses.* If 'Israel' is a gloss expressing a particular interpretation and not part of the original text, it does not stand alone, for two other glosses of precisely the same type occur in some manuscripts of the Greek (Septuagint) text of 42:1, which is part of the first Servant Song: there, whereas the

Hebrew text has simply 'my servant' and 'my chosen one,' the Greek text has 'Jacob my servant' and 'my chosen one, *Israel*.' Here the words 'Jacob' and 'Israel,' which if original would seriously have overloaded the metre in the version of the Hebrew text which lies behind the Greek translation, are universally regarded as glosses. Although these examples are extant only in the Greek text, they witness to the existence of early glosses offering interpretations of the identity of the Servant in precisely this group of passages, and thus greatly strengthen the theory that 'Israel' in the Hebrew text of 49:3 is a gloss of the same type.

The difficulties attending the simple identification of the Servant in the Songs with Israel led some scholars (e.g. S.R. Driver, Skinner, Blank) to suggest that he stands for *a section of the nation*: a righteous remnant, 'ideal Israel,' or something similar. Such a righteous group would have been specially chosen by Yahweh as his agent in the redemption of the great mass of sinful Israel. Although this type of theory may at first seem plausible and would resolve some of the difficulties set out above, it is difficult to point to a single text in Deutero-Isaiah which clearly speaks of such a distinction within the nation.

An attempt was made by H.W. Robinson and O. Eissfeldt (1932-3), working separately, to reconcile the portrayal of the Servant as an individual with the corporate features observable both in the Songs and outside, by means of the concept which Robinson called *corporate personality*. According to this theory, which Robinson applied also to other aspects of Hebrew thought, the prophet's 'primitive psychology' enabled him to speak now of himself and now of Israel as the Servant of Yahweh: 'The Servant can be both the prophet himself as representative of the nation, and the nation whose proper mission is actually being fulfilled only by the prophet and that group of followers who may share his views' (Robinson). Whatever truth there may be in this hypothesis—and the validity of the concept of corporate personality as a way of describing the mentality of ancient Israel has been seriously questioned—it ought probably not to be classified, as is frequently done, as a corporate theory but rather as a variation of that in which the Servant is interpreted in the Songs as being the prophet himself.

The most recent of the corporate theories is that of Eaton, who, while pointing to certain supposed *royal* characteristics of the Servant

in the Songs, believes that he stands, not for any individual king, but for the *Davidic dynasty*. His theory depends on the view that the pre-exilic autumnal festival as celebrated in Judah had included a rite in which the Davidic king was ritually humiliated and then restored to his throne. This theme, together with others drawn from the festival, was used in Deutero-Isaiah's oracles as a symbol of the fate of the whole Davidic dynasty: after a period of divine favour it had been humiliated by the Exile, but was about to be restored by Yahweh. The main message of the book is the coming restoration of the nation, after humiliation, by a divine act of salvation; and the restoration of the Davidic monarchy is an integral part and symbol of this restoration. Apart from its dependence on a particular and disputed interpretation of the autumn festival, this theory makes two assumptions which need further substantiation: that the Servant of the Songs is in fact primarily described in royal terms; and that the fate of the Davidic dynasty (explicitly referred to only in 55:3-4) played a significant role in the thought of Deutero-Isaiah as a whole.

Individual interpretations

The wealth and variety of the imagery employed in the Songs to describe the Servant's character and role have provided the basis for a wide range of interpretations of the figure as an individual. Different scholars have seen him as a new Moses, as a prophet, as a teacher of the law and as much else besides. Moreover the temporal imprecision of the modes of the Hebrew verb especially in poetical language has also made it uncertain whether the Servant, if he is an individual, was a contemporary of Deutero-Isaiah or a figure yet to come. Some phrases in the Songs have even suggested to some interpreters that he is a figure from the *earlier* history of Israel such as Moses or Jeremiah. However, such figures from the past could clearly not have occupied a central place in Deutero-Isaiah's message to his contemporaries. The phrases in question can only have been intended to contribute to the picture of the Servant by seeing him as a '*new* Moses,' a '*new* Jeremiah' or the like. Thus von Rad, for example, believed that the prophet looked forward to a future Servant who would be a prophet 'like Moses' but greater than he.

The view that the Songs are predictions of a figure who has not yet appeared has very ancient roots in the history of both Jewish and Christian interpretation. During the present century it has been

given new life (especially by Gressmann, Engnell and Nyberg) as a consequence of the study of ancient Near Eastern myths, especially the myth of the dying and rising god and its supposed re-enactment in fertility cults. It is supposed—to take one version of this type of theory—that the description in chapter 53 of the humiliation and subsequent restoration of the Servant is a prediction of a Messianic figure, whose career and functions are expressed in terms derived from the sequence of events in the cultic myth of Tammuz. This myth could have been familiar to Deutero-Isaiah either directly through Babylonian sources or through Canaanizing elements in the pre-exilic cult of Jerusalem. (It should be noted that this type of theory can equally be used in conjunction with the view that the Servant is the nation Israel.) Theories of this kind have however lost support in recent years because the evidence both for the existence of a cult of a dying and rising god and for influence of this kind on the Israelite cult of Yahweh now appears very fragile (though Eaton's recent defence of it should be noted).

The projection of the Servant entirely into the future involves other difficulties. It might be possible to interpret 42:1-4 as a prophetic anticipation of the commissioning by Yahweh of a Servant who has yet to appear; but it is difficult to interpret 49:1-6 and 50:4-9, in which the Servant himself speaks of his past tribulations, in this way. Even less does chapter 53 make sense as a prophetic prediction of a wholly future series of events. Unless *some* of the events described here are events which had already taken place and were known to Deutero-Isaiah's audience, such detailed prediction could hardly have had any relevance to their own situation.

Deutero-Isaiah as the Servant

There remains the possibility that the Servant was a contemporary of Deutero-Isaiah, well known to him and to his audience. Duhm, Mowinkel (at one time) and more recently G.R. Driver believed that he was an *anonymous contemporary of the author of the Songs* of whom no mention is made elsewhere in the Old Testament. It would, however, be strange if a person so remarkable and so important to the author of the Songs had remained anonymous and had left no other memorial. However, if the Servant was a member of Deutero-Isaiah's own generation, there is an alternative possibility: that he was none other than *the prophet himself*. If this were so, the Songs

would occupy a similar place in the body of the prophecies to that occupied in other prophetic books—notably the Book of Jeremiah—by reports of personal messages from Yahweh to the prophet, dialogues between Yahweh and the prophet, and narratives about the prophet. This view, which is a very ancient one, is that of a number of scholars today including von Waldow, Fohrer, Kutsch, Orlinsky, Schoors and Whybray.

What evidence do the Songs offer in support of this theory? The evidence that the Servant was a prophet is strong. In 42:1-4 the terms in which Yahweh affirms his choice of the Servant, promises to support him in his assigned task, and assures him of success despite opposition suggest the commissioning of a prophet and are strongly reminiscent of the calls of Jeremiah (1:8, 17-19) and of Ezekiel (2:3-7; 3:4-11). Again, like Jeremiah (1:5, 10) the Servant is to be Yahweh's instrument in the establishment of his sovereignty over the nations. This Song, however is not the call-narrative (which is found in 40:1-8) but a subsequent oracle confirming the prophet's claim to speak with Yahweh's authority.

In 49:1-6 the Servant's claim to have been called and chosen before his birth again echoes that of Jeremiah (1:5). A further prophetic feature is that Yahweh has made the Servant's mouth like a sharp sword (compare Jer. 1:9; Ezek. 3:2-3, 27), since it is the prophet's speech which is his most characteristic function. Finally the Servant's subsequent sense of failure, followed by a renewal of confidence in Yahweh's support, closely parallels the experiences of Jeremiah (e.g. 20:7-12).

In 50:4-9, where the opposition to the Servant has turned to active hostility and persecution, the resemblance to the experiences of Jeremiah (e.g. 11:18-23; 15:15-18; 18:18-23; 20:7-12) is even closer. Further, the opening words of this Song, in which the Servant describes himself as a pupil of Yahweh who learns from him how to speak words of comfort to the weary, strongly suggest the role of a prophet.

In 52:13-53:12 it may be inferred from the astonishment of the speakers (53:1) that an even later stage in the career of the Servant has been reached. After passing through such intense suffering and humiliation that he was regarded by others as singled out by Yahweh for especial punishment (verses 2-4), he has now in some unexpected way been rescued by the intervention of the 'arm of Yahweh.' The allusive language of the Song makes it impossible to be sure what was the

nature of this rescue; but if, as may now be reasonably supposed, the prophetic figure of the Songs is Deutero-Isaiah himself, it may be conjectured that it was release from a Babylonian prison consequent on the fall of Babylon to Cyrus, which he had predicted. Even here there is a parallel with the career of Jeremiah, who (Jer. 40:1-6) had similarly predicted the fall of Jerusalem and was released by the Babylonians when they captured the city. If this interpretation is correct, this last Song is not the word of the prophet himself but was composed by his friends or disciples to express their thanks for his miraculous deliverance and at the prospect of his future prosperity and happiness.

Not all the scholars who identify the Servant with Deutero-Isaiah himself accept the above interpretation of the final Song. The traditional view that the Song was composed after his death by his followers still commands support. 53:7-9 are held to refer to his death, while 53:10b-12 promise his future resurrection.

It is undoubtedly possible to interpret verses 7-9 as a literal description of the prophet's death. Such an interpretation, however, does not take account of the way in which the language of death is used in Israelite psalms of lamentation and thanksgiving, a category to which this Song belongs. In some of these psalms (e.g. Ps. 22:15; 88:4-6) the psalmist, in describing the severe sickness or other calamitous state into which he had fallen, used language which if interpreted literally would mean that he was actually dead. It is therefore possible that the speakers in 53:7-9, referring to the prophet's previous extreme danger, used the same kind of language.

But even if these verses are interpreted literally the references to death are not as clear as they might at first seem to be. We may discount the reference to the 'lamb to the slaughter' in verse 7, since this is manifestly no more than a simile and is in fact used also by Jeremiah (11:19) with reference to his own, non-fatal, sufferings. But even the expressions 'taken away' and 'cut off from the land of the living' (verse 8) may refer simply to confinement in prison; the preparation of the grave in verse 9 probably refers not to actual burial but to the gleeful anticipation of the prophet's death by his enemies (compare Ps. 35:25; 41:5, 8; 88:4-5); the phrase 'in his death' in the same verse is now universally regarded (see the Jerusalem Bible and the NEB) as a corrupt reading; and 'poured out his life to death' in verse 12 probably means 'risked his life' rather than 'died.' This interpretation of these verses, which is supported by Orlinsky,

G.R. Driver, Soggin and Whybray (1978), is strengthened by the fact that verses 10b-12, which speak of the prophet's happy future, nowhere hint at a restoration to life after death, which would be a most unlikely belief in the sixth century B.C., but are most naturally interpreted as speaking of a dramatic change for the better in the prophet's fortunes after his terrible experiences.

Against the identification of the Servant with Deutero-Isaiah—or indeed with any merely human figure—it has been argued that the Servant's character and role, especially as described in chapter 53, far transcend those conceivable of ordinary humanity. To this it may be replied that the concept of prophecy in the Old Testament—for example, in the Book of Jeremiah—is an exceptionally exalted one. Only in one respect could it be plausibly maintained that the Servant transcends this: in his supposed role of 'vicarious sufferer.' Certain phrases in the final Song (in 53:4-6, the final line of 8b, and 10-12) have been interpreted in traditional Christian exegesis as stating that the Servant suffered vicariously for others: that is, that through his own unmerited suffering he enabled others to escape the divine punishment which they had deserved. This is still the view of many scholars; but it has recently been questioned (Orlinsky, Whybray).

It would indeed be astonishing if these verses stated that the prophet had suffered so that his fellow-exiles might go scot-free. For in fact they had not gone scot-free, and, as has already been noted, Deutero-Isaiah's message depended to a large extent on this fact: the people had already suffered, and suffered in full, for their sins. Moreover, Yahweh had now pronounced their forgiveness. No vicarious suffering, therefore, was required. Apart from this, the idea of vicarious suffering, as Orlinsky has shown, is totally alien to Old Testament belief. For Yahweh to accept the punishment of the innocent and to acquit the guilty would be an unthinkable infringement of the principle, maintained consistently throughout the Old Testament, that 'He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to Yahweh' (Prov. 17:15).

What, then, is the meaning of such phrases as 'he makes himself a sin-offering' (53:10), 'upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole' (53:5) and 'he bore the sin of many' (53:12)? The statement that the Servant became a sacrificial victim ('*āsām*, 'sin-offering') has greatly influenced the christological interpretation of the Servant; but the whole of the first part of this verse is extremely corrupt in the Hebrew and virtually unintelligible. It would be wrong to base any

serious conclusions about the role of the Servant on it. If in fact it did make the Servant into a human sacrifice acceptable to Yahweh by equating him with an animal sacrifice, this would be totally contrary to the principles of the religion of Yahweh as understood in the Old Testament.

The other statements referred to above must be understood in the context of the life and times of Deutero-Isaiah. It is clear (e.g. from 53:9b) that he was an exceptionally righteous man and that his exceptional sufferings were undeserved. They were caused solely by the fact that he had accepted the prophetic office and so undertaken the proclamation of a politically dangerous message: the prophecy of the fall of Babylon. He thus 'bore the sins of many' not in the sense of suffering instead of the many—which, as we have noted, was not the case—but of enduring additional and exceptional suffering. This suffering, as in the case of other prophets, was the consequence of the nation's sin, for it was the nation's plight which had made his prophetic activity necessary. At the same time it could be said that his sufferings led to their restoration to 'wholeness' or their 'healing'—that is, to their release from exile: for had he not persevered in his dangerous work at the risk of suffering and death, the divine word which, like a sharp sword in Yahweh's hand, brought about the fall of Babylon would not have been pronounced.

The portrait of the Servant of Yahweh which emerges from the Songs on the basis of the above interpretation is not one of a person who transcends ordinary humanity, but of an exceptionally faithful prophet of Yahweh who, like his predecessor Jeremiah, endured great suffering in the course of his ministry but also experienced the intervention of Yahweh on his behalf to deliver him from danger. His ministry was entirely bound up with the life of his people, and it may well be that his rescue from death was regarded by those who composed chapter 53 as the turning-point in the fortunes of their community.

Evaluation of Deutero-Isaiah's Message

The bright future which Deutero-Isaiah held out to his fellow-exiles was conceived and expressed in concrete terms, not as a distant hope but as an imminent reality. His picture of the future life of the nation after its restoration to its homeland was indeed of a life lived under ideal conditions; but there is no apocalyptic cataclysm here, no new

heaven and earth. The fantastic speculations of some of the later prophets (not to speak of the apocalyptists) are wholly absent: there is, for example, no unnatural fertility such as is predicted in Amos 9:13, no abrogation of the functions of sun and moon as in Isa. 60:19-20, and no miraculous river flowing from the restored Jerusalem as in Ezek. 47. The picture is essentially a sober one involving no essential change in the conditions of life.

In order to establish this new state of affairs there will indeed be a miraculous intervention; but this will not differ in principle from the marvellous deeds already performed by Yahweh in the past. Indeed, the sequence of events anticipated—overthrow of the tyrant, release of the captives, march through the desert, miraculous provision of food and drink, settlement and reconstruction, dominance over the nations—is clearly modelled on the historical traditions of Israel's earlier progress from exodus to empire. The 'new things' will certainly be even more glorious than the 'former things'; but they will not be different in kind.

When Israel is restored to its land its enemies will be eliminated (41:11-12; 54:15-17) and the nations will come to do homage (45:14; 49:7, 22-23); Jerusalem and its temple will be restored to a state more glorious than before (44:28; 49:16-17; 54:11-12), and Israel will be the envy of the world (44:5). Both city and land will enjoy a wonderful prosperity, with a large and thriving population (49:17-21; 51:3). Much of this picture is derived from a combination of the themes of the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham and of the restoration of the glories of the reign of David. There will, however, be one new feature: Yahweh's favour and blessing, once restored, will never again be taken away from his chosen people. The life of blessedness will be eternal (45:17; 54:10, 15-17).

This is a remarkable expectation; but it is not an apocalyptic one. Deutero-Isaiah believed that Yahweh intended shortly to bring about a fundamental change in the political scene which would somehow bring Israel to dominance. How this would be done is not clear: no connection is made in the oracles between these predictions and the role of Cyrus. But this is clearly what he expected to happen. The fact that it did not happen constitutes a major problem in the evaluation of Deutero-Isaiah as a prophet.

Some of Deutero-Isaiah's expectations were admittedly fulfilled. Cyrus did conquer Babylon and permit the exiled peoples to return to their homes. The temple at Jerusalem was rebuilt, though only on

a modest scale and after an interval of some twenty years. (The restoration of the city itself was delayed for more than a hundred years.) But there was no massive, triumphant return of the exiles, no new and more glorious Exodus, no miraculous journey across the desert. Few, it seems, took immediate advantage of the permission to return home: many preferred to remain. Life for those who did return was hard; and prosperity did not return until several generations had passed. Above all, there was no return to the glories of David's reign, or even to political independence. Never again until modern times was there to be an independent Jewish state, except for a brief period four centuries after the time of Deutero-Isaiah. We learn, indeed, from the literature of the early post-exilic period—Trito-Isaiah, Malachi, Zechariah, Haggai—that the failure of expectations such as those which Deutero-Isaiah had promoted constituted one of the greatest problems of that time.

Was Deutero-Isaiah, then, a false prophet? Some modern scholars, notably Torrey, rejected the entire hypothesis of an exilic 'Deutero-Isaiah' because they believed that it entails such a conclusion. It would be absurd, they argued, to suppose that the oracles of a 'prophet' so utterly discredited by the failure of his prophecies would have been preserved by succeeding generations and enshrined in the canon. Isa. 40-55 must be accounted for in some other way.

None of the alternatives proposed by Torrey or by others has, however, been able to shake the consensus of modern scholarship that the oracles contained in these chapters are the words of an exilic prophet. The arguments supporting this consensus, which have been briefly set out in this book, remain valid. The solution to the problem is to be found rather in the nature of Hebrew prophecy itself. If Hebrew prophecy were the art of accurate and detailed prediction of the future there would be little true prophecy in the Old Testament. But this is not the case. Prediction of the future was only a small part of the prophetic task, as the prophetic call-narratives, including that of Deutero-Isaiah, testify. Deutero-Isaiah did not fail to comfort his people by proclaiming the message which he had heard in the heavenly council that Yahweh had pardoned his people and that their time of punishment was ended (40:1-2); and this was a true message. It was the word which the nation needed to hear at one of the greatest crises in its history, when its very existence as a people was in the balance. The fact that the Jewish people and their faith survived, and survived alone among the peoples and religions of the ancient Near East is due

to the tenacity of their sense of being Yahweh's chosen people and to the firmness and maturity of their faith. By stimulating that sense of being the people of God, and by deepening that faith through his teaching and his personal example, Deutero-Isaiah played a crucial role in ensuring that survival, and so fully deserves recognition as a true prophet who faithfully proclaimed the word of God.

Further Reading

On Deutero-Isaiah's teaching in general see:

- *S.H. Blank, *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah*, London: A. & C. Black, 1958 / Wayne State University Press, 1967, chapters 4-9
- *P.A.H. de Boer, *Second Isaiah's Message* (Oudtestamentische Studiën, 11), Leiden: Brill, 1956
- *J.H. Eaton, *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah*, London: SPCK, 1979
- *Muilenburg, 398-406
- *Von Rad (1968), chapter 17 (or *Theology* II, 238-62)
- *N.H. Snaith, 'Isaiah 40-66. A Study of the Teaching of the Second Isaiah and its Consequences,' in H.M. Orlinsky and N.H. Snaith, *Studies in the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah* (VT Suppl. 14), Leiden: Brill, 1967 (reprinted 1977), 135-264
- *Von Waldow (1968)

For a full account of the various interpretations of the Servant of Yahweh see especially:

- *C.R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah. An Historical and Critical Study*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948

As examples of some different interpretations of the Servant Songs, see:

- D.J.A. Clines, *I, He, We and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (JSOT Supplement Series, 1), Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1976
- G.R. Driver, 'Isaiah 52,13-53,12: the Servant of the Lord,' in *In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, BZAW 103 (1968), 90-105
- *O. Eissfeldt, 'The Ebed-Yahwe in Isaiah xl-lv in the Light of the Israelite Conceptions of the Community and the Individual, the Ideal and the Real,' *Expository Times* 44 (1932-3), 261-8
- I. Engnell, 'The Ebed Yahweh Songs and the Suffering Messiah in

- "Deutero-Isaiah", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 31 (1948), 54-93
- J. Lindblom, *The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah. A New Attempt to Solve an Old Problem*, Lund: Gleerup, 1951
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