

Commentators debate among themselves at length about the exact nature of the historical analogues to the highway imagery (cf. Elliger). Was it a processional highway prepared for the triumphal entry of a god or king, such as pictured from Babylonian sources? Was there originally a cultic setting for the imagery? Within Second Isaiah the theme of a highway is part of a larger set of images describing the transformation of the wilderness into a garden (41:18ff.; 42:15ff.) in order to facilitate the return of the exiles. Equally important for the biblical imagery is the appropriation of the language of the exodus from Egypt (11:16; 51:9ff.; 52:11ff.), as the two events are fused into a single all-encompassing paradigm of divine deliverance. It is thus a crucial move in establishing the intertextual connection between chapter 40 and First Isaiah to note that already in chapter 11 the promise of the return of the "dispersed of Judah" (v. 12) is portrayed in terms of a highway from Assyria. Chapter 40 again signals the fulfillment of this promise, but adjusts the geography to include also the wilderness separating the Babylonian exiles from Zion.

However, the strongest intertextual tie with 40:3-5 is found in chapter 35. The chapter addresses the return to Zion expressed in terms of a highway, called the Holy Way (v. 8), of the seeing of the glory of the Lord (v. 2), and the coming of God to save his people (v. 4). Especially noteworthy are the large number of exact verbal parallels: highway, way (*derek*), wilderness, and glory. Of course, these parallels have long been noticed, but the critical response has often been simply to transfer chapter 35 to the corpus of Second Isaiah (cf. Torrey, McKenzie) with little awareness of the hermeneutical effect of the positioning of chapter 35 within the collection of First Isaiah's oracles.

The theme in v. 5 of the revealing of the glory of God reflects also a close connection with the theophany of chapter 6. The glory of God (*kē bôd YHWH*) is that aspect of the divine image which is made visible to human perception. The prophet first spoke of "seeing Yahweh" (6:1), but immediately the language is rendered more precisely to indicate that it was only his glory that was rendered accessible. The prophet overhears the liturgy of the seraphim bearing witness to the whole earth's being filled with God's glory. However, the point of his experiencing God's presence in chapter 6 is that only to the prophet was the revelation disclosed. However, in chapter 40 a sign of the inbreaking of a new age of salvation is that the glory of God will now be revealed to all flesh.

When 40:3-5 is read in light of chapter 35, then the prologue signals not just a general expectation of a coming redemption, but points explicitly to the end of God's judgment upon Judah, symbolized by its blindness and inability to see: "Then the eyes of the blind will be opened" (35:5). Moreover, these who return are not merely refugees, but are the "redeemed" (35:9), those who have been ransomed and transformed in order to walk in the Holy Way. Verse 5 closes with a stereotyped formula that usually functions to close an oracle. Is it possible in the context of the prologue that another note is also echoed? What the

mouth of the Lord has spoken in vv. 3–5 is the message already sounded in chapters 1–39 (cf. Kamano, 16).

[6–8] In an earlier section on establishing the context of chapter 40, the problem of sorting out the different voices in vv. 6–8 was reviewed. According to the interpretation of Seitz, the voice in v. 6b raises an objection to the prior command to cry: “What shall I cry?” The issue turns on how there can be a proclamation of a coming salvation when God’s devastating judgment preached by Isaiah has surely been fulfilled: “All flesh is grass. . . . The grass withers, flowers fade when the breath of the LORD blows on them” (cf. 28:1–4). The response in v. 8 first repeats a line of the objection affirming the truth of the prophetic judgment—indeed, “the grass withers, flowers fade,” but then it defends the call for salvation by appealing to the steadfast word of God which stands forever. Seitz interprets this appeal to the enduring truth of the word of God, spoken by an anonymous angelic voice, to be a new word unrelated to Isaiah’s proclamation, which he assigns to the old age, now passed.

Yet from what has already been seen of the use of intertextuality in the prologue as a means of describing the message of the new age according to the prior prophecy of Isaiah, it is reasonable to inquire whether this appeal to the steadfast word of God in v. 8b could also be related to Isaianic prophecy. Seitz has made a strong case that Isaiah’s preaching of judgment has been summarized in 40:6b–7 by means of an intertextual reference to 28:1–4. However, if one takes notice that in 28:5–6 there is a promise made that “in that day” (an eschatological formula paralleled in 12:1) “the proud crown of the drunkards of Ephraim and its fading flower” would be transformed by Yahweh of hosts into “a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty . . . and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgment.” If one then pursues the logic of the intertextual exegesis of 40:8, it seems reasonable to assume that v. 8 is appealing to the promise of 28:5–6 as evidence that an Isaianic word of salvation followed his prophecy of judgment. In sum, the steadfast word of God is a reference to Isaiah’s proclamation of the coming new age. A continuity is thus established between First and Second Isaiah, both in terms of the old and of the new things. This conclusion also explains why from a modern redactional perspective large portions of Second Isaiah have been retrojected into First Isaiah. It was simply assumed that the two canonical collections shared the same substance in their prophetic messages.

[9–11] In an earlier section the question was raised of whether vv. 9–11 form a separate oracle because of the change in genre, or whether they constitute an integral part of the prologue. The ensuing exegesis of vv. 1–8 would seem to confirm the latter interpretation. Zion and Jerusalem are now personified as the evangelists of the good tidings. They are appointed to proclaim the news to the cities of Judah.

Some decades ago a position regarding the translation of *me baššeret šiyôn* as an accusative object (= "herald to Zion") was strongly defended by R. W. Fischer. He argued that the messenger is not only a prophet, but Second Isaiah himself. In the light of my exegesis of both vv. 1-8 and vv. 9-11, I do not find this interpretation of v. 9 a convincing option.

Once again the key to the interpretation of vv. 9-10 is found in the use of intertextual exegesis linked to First Isaiah. (I am indebted to Kamino for this initial insight.) The connection with 35:3-4 is exceedingly strong and shares a verbal identity of key words and phrases. Compare, for example:

35:4: "say to those who are fearful"
(*'imrû*)

40:9: "say to the cities" (*'imrî*);

v. 4: "be strong" (*hizqû*)

v. 10: "in power" (*hāzāq*);

v. 4: fear not (*'al-tîrā'û*)

v. 9: "do not fear" (*'al-tîrā'î*)

v. 4: "behold, your God"
(*hinnēh 'elōhêkem*)

v. 9: "behold your God"
(*hinnēh 'elōhêkem*)

v. 4: "he will come" (*yabô*)

v. 10: "the Lord GOD comes"
(*yabô*).

We have already seen the intertextual link of chapter 35 with 40:3-5 in the use of the highway imagery and the revelation of the glory of God. In 35:3-4 the imperative is given in the masculine plural to strengthen the weakhearted with the proclamation of God's coming with vengeance and recompense to save. In chapter 40 the perspective has shifted. Zion and Jerusalem are not portrayed simply as awaiting the coming of imminent salvation. Indeed the emphasis is not primarily on the return of the exiles, but focuses foremost on the coming of God. Jerusalem and Zion are now described from the perspective of having already received redemption. Their task is rather one of the proclamation of the good news to the remaining cities of Judah. The genre of vv. 9-11 is a military one, of instructions to a herald. The imperatives are thus given in the feminine singular form to Zion as a personified herald of good news or "evangelist" (cf. the LXX's rendering of the Hebrew *biššar*).

There are several other significant changes to note in chapter 40's intertextual relationship to chapter 35. In 35:4 the command "fear not" is addressed to those who in consternation still await the coming of God in salvation. However, in 40:9 the command not to fear is directed to the heralds of good tidings as if the reality of God's return had already been experienced. The command not to fear relates to their task of proclaiming to others the good news of the divine advent. The heralds are to have faith in the power that they have already received. There is another alteration in the way in which God's coming is portrayed. From the perspective of First Isaiah (chapter 35), God comes to save, but with vengeance and requital (*gēmûl*); however, in chapter 40 both the terminology and focus have

shifted. God comes with “his reward” (*s'ekārô*) and “retribution” (*pe'ullâtô*). Of course, in another context Second Isaiah can also speak of “requit to his enemies” (*gemûl*), but in chapter 40 the stress is fully on the coming of God for salvation and on the inbreaking of the new era of joy. His strength is manifest as he leads his flock like a shepherd, carrying in his arms the weak.

3. The Canonical Function of the Prologue

The primary role of the prologue (40:1–11) is to announce God's new purpose for Israel in bringing forth totally new redemptive events on its behalf, which serve as evidence for the faithfulness of God's word standing forever. Melugin (85) has observed that from a formal perspective the prologue reflects the structure of chapters 40–55 in miniature. Verses 1–8 are a microcosm of chapters 41–48, with their use of the image of the highway and new exodus; whereas vv. 9–11 correspond to chapters 49:14ff., with the themes of the return of Yahweh as ruler in Zion, the voice of the messengers, and the victory of Yahweh's arm. There is also widespread agreement that chapter 55 is an epilogue bringing the prophetic collection to an end by returning to the prologue's theme of the word of God accomplishing unfailingly the divine purpose (55:10–11).

Yet even more crucial for understanding the canonical function of the prologue is to recognize its role in establishing the theological relation between chapters 1–39 and 40ff. This achievement has been carried out by means of intertextual exegesis of chapters 1–39. The radically new word of chapter 40 has been announced through a fresh understanding of the earlier Isaianic corpus. Chapter 39 marked the historical change in the agent of God's destruction from Assyria to Babylon. The prologue of chapter 40 assumes this knowledge of God's former purpose when it sets forth the new intent.

Yet the relationship established is a subtle one, often dialectical (cf. 43:18; 46:9). The prologue confirms the truth of Isaiah's prophecy of judgment: the grass has withered and the flower has faded. Yet at the same time it also confirms the truth of Isaiah's prophecy of salvation: “the word of our God stands forever.” No new prophet is called in chapter 40, but rather the word of God through Isaiah continues to work in order to fulfill the promise. According to the superscription of the book (1:1), Isaiah's ministry ended with the reign of Hezekiah. In chapter 39 Isaiah informs the king that the judgment on Israel which he had prophesied by the hand of Assyria had been transferred to Babylon in the period after the king's death. Implied in this final narrative of First Isaiah is also the death of Isaiah, who never reappears after chapter 39. The point of the prologue is therefore to affirm that Isaiah's prophetic word continues to work in fulfilling God's purpose, but apart from the historical *persona* of the prophet. In spite of the multitude of modern commentators on the book of Isaiah, Delitzsch appears to have been the last to have sensed this subtle

hermeneutical issue when he described the prophet Isaiah's role in chapters 40ff. to be "like a spirit without visible form" (2:124).

The final aspect of the canonical function of the prologue of chapter 40 to be discussed turns on its role within the New Testament. According to the Synoptic Gospels, John the Baptist came proclaiming the imminent coming of the kingdom of God, which he linked to the prophecy of Isaiah 40: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Matt. 3:1-3; Mark 1:2-3; Luke 3:2-6). What are the theological warrants for this usage of the Isaianic prologue within the category of prophecy and fulfillment?

The function of the prologue of chapter 40 was to confirm the truth of the word of God regarding the promise of divine salvation. The temporal sequence relating the promise and the fulfillment was reinterpreted in the light of a fresh understanding of God's purpose. Judgment on Jerusalem was executed by the Babylonians, not the Assyrians, and only after the destruction of Babylon was the new age of salvation to appear. The credibility of the prophecy was not undercut by an adjustment within the historical sequence because the truth of prophecy could only be measured by its faithfulness to the substance of the divine reality of which it spoke. In contrast, the events of human history remained fragile and transitory. Thus, to the objection raised in the prologue against the call to preach God's imminent salvation, the prophetic response was to affirm that "the word of our God stands forever." The truth of God's promise did not depend on its conformity to a specific temporal sequence within human history.

When John the Baptist linked the appearance of Jesus with the prophet's call to "prepare the way of the Lord," he was not making a mechanical connection with an ancient prediction of Isaiah. Rather, the reality of God's salvation was manifest in Jesus Christ in such a way that his advent provided a perfect morphological fit according to its redemptive substance with the Old Testament promise. In a word, the salvific significance of Jesus Christ was understood in the light of the Old Testament prophecy, while, conversely, the Old Testament promise gained its true meaning from the revelation of the Christ in the fullness of God's time. (Cf. the commentary of Grimm and Dittert, *Deuterojesaja*, 61ff. for further reflections on the New Testament.)