

the wilderness is metaphorized or spiritualized even further (e.g. 57:14 cf. 30:21) and is linked with the traditions of Israel's uneven progress through the wilderness after leaving Egypt (see especially Barstad 1989). Viewed within the context of the book of Isaiah as a whole, the figure of the way or the journey indicates a broader development from historical particularities to an eschatological and, eventually, apocalyptic perspective.

What are those addressed by the seer being called on to do? A route, a highway has to be cleared (*pnh* Piel cf. 57:14; 62:10) and graded, leveling out the uneven ground (*‘āqob*, the only appearance with this meaning) and the rough places (*rēkāsîm* hapax). The location is described as wilderness (*midbār*) and desert (*‘ārābā*), more or less synonymous terms that can have a broad spectrum of meaning, by no means confined to such regions as the Sahara Desert, the great Arabian Desert, or the Arava south and east of the Dead Sea. This "way through the wilderness" is more often than not identified with the route that the Judeo-Babylonian immigrants are presumed to have followed in returning to Judah. As the crow flies, this would have taken them through the central Arabian desert, but a moment's reflection will show how unlikely, not to say suicidal, such an itinerary would have been. The probability is that immigrants from southern Mesopotamia would have taken the well-traveled northerly route along the course of the Euphrates into Syria, then south to Damascus, then either along the coastal route or the central ridge to Jerusalem.

More to the point, the emphasis in these chapters is not just on constructing a highway but also, and more prominently, on the theme of ecological transformation, rendering the land devastated by the Babylonian conquest once again not only habitable but superabundantly fertile. So, for example, 35:1:

Let the *midbār* and parched land be glad,
the *‘ārābā* rejoice and blossom.

Similar predictions can be found throughout chapters 40–66 (41:17–20; 43:19–21; 49:8–13; 57:14; 62:10–12) in which a major motif is the provision of water (35:6; 41:18–19; 43:19; 44:3; 48:20–21; 49:9). Isaiah 51:3 speaks of Zion's *midbār* and *‘ārābā* being comforted, the comfort consisting in their transformation into a Garden of Eden. This creates a significant though not insuperable problem for the many commentators who assume, generally without argument, a diasporic, Babylonian background for these chapters.

The point of all of this activity is to prepare for the revelation of the glory or radiance of Yahveh to be witnessed by all humanity (v 5). This theologoumenon (Hebrew *kābôd*, Greek *doxa*), used throughout the book of Isaiah, embodies an attempt to combine transcendence and immanence, to give symbolic expression to the real presence of the invisible God.

What is important for the present context is that it is essentially associated with the sanctuary, the place where the deity resides and where the deity's presence can be experienced. When the ark was captured by the Philistines the

wife of the priest Phinehas lamented that "the glory has departed from Israel" (gālā kâbôd miyyiśrā'ēl 1 Sam 4:21-22) and called her child Ichabod (perhaps "where is the kâbôd?"). After the recovery of the ark and its installation in the newly-built Jerusalem temple, we are told that the glory of Yahveh filled the building (1 Kgs 8:11). Exploiting the idea of mobility, Ezekiel represented the departure of the kâbôd by stages from the doomed city and temple (Ezek 9:3; 10:4, 18-19; 11:22-23), its eventual appearance in the Babylonian diaspora (1:28; 3:23), and its anticipated return (43:1-5; 44:4 cf. Hag 2:7; Zech 2:9[5]). In doing so, he made a decisive break with the idea of a territorial and locative deity. The God of Israel can now appear and be experienced outside the land in which his own writ runs.

Closely related to these representations is the mobile sanctuary that served Israel in the wilderness and with which, according to the Priestly writer (P), the kâbôd was closely associated (Exod 40:34-38 etc.). That all humanity, indeed all living creatures (literally, "all flesh"), will witness and acknowledge the triumphant return of Yahveh to his defeated and dispersed people is the first of many indications in these chapters of the prophetic defiance of political realities (cf. 49:26; 66:16, 23-24).

The following stanza (vv 6-8) is linked with the preceding one by the catchword *kol-bāśār*, literally, "all flesh," meaning all humanity or all living things, depending on the context. This expression is of frequent occurrence in the P source, conspicuously in the account of the great deluge (Gen 6:13, 19; 7:15-16; 8:17). The identity of both the speaker and the one addressed has long been discussed, with many modern interpreters opting for a conversation between heavenly beings, as in Micaiah's vision (1 Kgs 22:19-23) and the opening scene in Job. But if this were so, we would expect both the speakers and the scenario to be more clearly indicated; and, if the speaking voice in the previous stanza is Yahveh's, we would expect the same to be the case here. That Yahveh is referred to in the third person in both stanzas is no obstacle to this solution, since this is common in prophetic *oratio recta* and a normal form of prophetic self-dramatization. But it is also possible that in vv 7-8 we have a commentary on the oracular statement in v 6b, a not uncommon feature of prophetic discourse.

In this second instance the seer is told to proclaim or preach (the term preferred by Smart 50, following Luther) the message that, expressed in many different ways, is at the heart of biblical prophecy: the transforming power of the prophetic word ("the word of our God") contrasted with, or pitted against, the political powers and principalities, which appear to be indestructible but are in reality impermanent. In this sense, at least, the seer can be considered the heir of Isaiah of Jerusalem.

But the message is not a vague, moralizing statement about human frailty, as the combination "grass" and "flower" might suggest (cf. Ps 37:2; 90:5-6; 103:15), and even less is it a lament for the helpless situation of the Babylonian diaspora from which the seer is speaking. It takes aim at the Neo-Babylonian

Empire, then under terminal threat from the victorious progress of Cyrus II. It therefore prepares for the (literally) central theme of chs. 40-48—namely, a new impulse delivered to the stalled historical process with the commissioning of Cyrus as the instrument of Yahveh's designs for his people.

GOOD NEWS FOR THE CITIES OF JUDAH (40:9-11)

(Holter 1996; Stoebe 1984)

TRANSLATION

- 40 ⁹Climb to the top of a mountain,
Zion, herald of good news;^a
lift up your voice with power,
Jerusalem, herald of good news;^a
lift it up without fear.
Say to the cities of Judah:
"See, here is your God!"
¹⁰See, Yahveh^b is coming with power,^c
his strong arm affirms his rule;
see, his reward is with him,
his recompense^d precedes him.
¹¹Like a shepherd he tends his flock,
he gathers them together with his arm,
the lambs he lifts into his lap,^e
the ewes he gently leads on.

NOTES

^a *Mēbaššeret* is in apposition to *šīyyôn/yěrûšālāyim* as e.g. Isa 41:14 *tôla'at ya'ăqob*; Amos 5:2 *bētûlat yiśrā'ēl*; and not fem. sing. construct (GKC 122s), on which see the commentary; ^b omitting *'ădonāy* metri causa, since the line is otherwise overloaded, and in spite of *'ădonāy YHVH* elsewhere in these chapters (48:16; 50:4, 5, 7, 9); ^c MT *bēḥāzāq* = *beth essentiae* (GKC 119i), "as/in the guise of a powerful man," but the reading of 1QIsa^a *bḥvzq* (*bēḥozeq*) and the versions (LXX *meta ischuos*), "with strength," is more probable; ^d 1QIsa^a has pl. *vp'ltyv* cf. Tg. "all those whose deeds are disclosed before him"; ^e most commentators find the meter problematic, resulting in rearrangements, omissions, or the assumption that a phrase with two accents is missing (Elliger 32); the simplest solution is to omit the conjunction attached to *bēḥêqô* (11b), with Aquila and Symmachus, leaving two 3:2 lines, as in the preceding two verses.

Several commentators have found the image of Zion, also known as Mount Zion, being ordered up a high mountain to proclaim good news singularly inept or even, according to Duhm (1922, 290), "ein groteskes Bild." Whether grotesque or not, this is what the text says. The alternative, familiar from Handel's *Messiah*, "Oh thou that tellest glad tidings to Zion," though perhaps permissible as a feminine-singular collective, is ruled out by the five feminine imperatives following. Furthermore, postulating a female herald would be without parallel in the book. But Torrey is right in taking Duhm to task at this point, since there is nothing inappropriate in supposing that "Zion personified is commanded to assume the office of a herald, and proclaim to her sister cities the joyful news" (Torrey 1928, 306-7).

Beginning in the Neo-Babylonian period, we detect an increasing emphasis on Jerusalem as an entity distinct from Judah. This is not as much in evidence in chs. 40-48, where the people is referred to more often than not as Jacob or Israel. But Jerusalem also serves as a designation for Judeans or Jews in general; in fact, it is explicitly stated that they are to be named for the city (48:2). In the next major section—chs. 49-54(55)—Jerusalem, as it were, emerges from the shadows and speaks and is spoken to in her own name (49:14-26; 51:16-23; 52:1-2, 7-10; 54:1-17), and Israelites are now said to be her children (54:13 cf. 66:8).

In the final section—chs. 55(56)-66—control of Jerusalem and of the temple ("my holy mountain," 56:7; 57:13; 64:9 cf. 11:9) is of central significance. The distinction between Jerusalem and the other "cities" (in reality, settlements, farms, and villages) of Judah is present from the beginning (44:26, 28) but comes increasingly into view and is encapsulated in the designation "Judah and Jerusalem," standard in texts from the late Persian and early Hellenistic periods (2 Chr 11:14; 20:17; 24:6, 8; Ezra 9:9; 10:7; Isa 1:1; 2:1). It is therefore unsurprising and unexceptional if Jerusalem is called on to proclaim good news to the cities of Judah.

The present stanza, 40:9-11, is loosely connected with 1-8, though we detect the usual casual linkage by sound and sense: the voice calling out (vv 6, 9), perhaps also *habbāšār* v 6 ("flesh") and *mēbaššeret* v 9 ("herald"; Koole 1997, 70). There is no more justification for postulating an emissary of the heavenly council here than in the preceding passage.

Zion/Jerusalem does not stand for the people here, as in 40:2, and is not to be thought of as a sentinel posted on a hill to look out for Babylonian diaspora Jews on the last leg of their journey back to the homeland. She is on the hill-top so that her voice may be heard far and wide, proclaiming the good tidings that God and the salvation of God are near at hand. This is the core of the message of these chapters which this stanza shares with the preceding one (40:5). Melugin (1976, 84-86) also makes a clear distinction between 1-8 and 9-11 and adds the interesting suggestion that the juxtaposition of these two introductory passages reflects the structure of chs. 40-55: vv 1-8 encapsulate chs. 41-48;

and vv 9-11, chs. 49-55. It would be tempting to think of a conflation of two originally independent introductions, but Melugin does not go this far.

Throughout chs. 40-54(55) the good news is always the same, though expressed in different ways: the revelation of God's glory or radiance (40:5), the coming of Israel's God (40:9-11), Yahveh coming to redeem his people (48:20), the establishing of God's rule (52:7), and the coming of Yahveh to Zion (52:8). The OG rendering *euangelizomenos* for MT *mēbaššeret* also helps to explain both the adoption of the Gospel form in early Christianity and the essential content of the gospel—namely, the advent of the kingdom or rule of God through the agency of Jesus, as expressed in the first statement attributed to Jesus in Mark's Gospel (1:15).

What is behind this language is the ancient connection between kingship and salvation, the figure of the savior king. The basic image here, therefore, is that of a royal *parousia*. Yahveh is a royal figure (41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7) ready to impose his will, by force if necessary. The metaphor of the arm that wields the sword or the scepter (51:9; 53:1; 59:16; 62:8), the arm bared for combat (52:10), connotes struggle against political forces opposed to God's purposes, and also echoes traditional liturgical language hymning Yahveh as king in the so-called Enthronement Psalms (Pss 47, 93, 95-99).

The arm imagery also recalls the liberation from Egyptian bondage—"with a mighty hand and outstretched arm" (e.g. Deut 4:34). It is therefore understandable, if textually questionable, that Ibn Ezra emends to *bēyād ḥāzāqā*, "with a strong hand," in 40:10a. We will see in due course how the language of royal power and warfare in evidence throughout chs. 40-54(55) coalesces around the presentation of Yahveh's royal and creative attributes as a mirror image of the Neo-Babylonian ideology of power expressed in the *akitu* or New Year Festival.

The reward and recompense that Yahveh brings with him are sometimes understood as Yahveh's own reward, recompense, or booty won in battle, consisting in Israelites ransomed from captivity, who now accompany him on the return journey (e.g. North 1964, 79; O. Kaiser 1959, 45). The terms used here, *šākār* and *pē'ullā*, do in fact connote wages and work done for wages, respectively, but both can also be used in the more generally metaphorical sense of recompense or reward (Gen 15:1; Ps 109:20; 127:3; Isa 61:8; Jer 31:16), and *pē'ullā* can denote vindication of the righteous by God (Isa 49:4).

While, therefore, the idea of the reassembly of Israelites dispersed in Babylon and elsewhere may be alluded to in the gathering together of the sheep in the following verse, the more natural sense of v 10 is that Yahveh's *parousia* will make up for past sufferings and reward those who have persevered. The repetition of this statement in 62:11 and the similar statement in 35:3-4 point unmistakably in the same direction.

The metaphorical shift from the imperial *parousia* to the shepherd caring for his flock is less sudden than might appear to the modern reader, since the topos of king as shepherd of his people was entirely familiar at that time and in that place. David shepherded his people (2 Sam 5:2), and it is anticipated that

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Cyrus will do the same, with special reference to Judeans (Isa 44:28). The representation of Yahveh as shepherd, familiar to many from Ps 23 but also appearing frequently elsewhere (Gen 49:24; Ps 78:52; 80:2; Ezek 34:1-31) is a slippery metaphor that, given the association of sheep with passivity and fecklessness in general, carries potentially unflattering implications for the shepherd's charges. The original intent of the metaphor, however, was to temper the image of absolute royal power with a concern for justice and care for society's losers and outcasts, and in this sense the figure of the good shepherd was taken up in the Gospels (Luke 15:3-7; John 10:1-18).

A DISPUTATION ABOUT THE POWER OF ISRAEL'S GOD (40:12-31 + 41:6-7)

(D. Baltzer 1987; Couroyer 1966; Fitzgerald 1989; Gosse 1993; Korpel 1991; Kuntz 1997; Labuschagne 1966; van Leeuwen 1997; Melugin 1976, 31-36; Naidoff 1981a; Ruppert 1991; Trudinger 1967; Westermann 1964b, 127-32; Whybray 1971 passim; Williamson 1986)

TRANSLATION

i

- 40 ¹²Who has measured out the waters^a with the hollow of his hand
or marked off the sky by handbreadths^b
and enclosed the earth's dust in small measure?^c
Who has weighed the mountains in a balance,
the hills on the scales?
¹³Who has taken the measure of Yahveh's spirit
or advised him as his counselor?^d
¹⁴With whom did he consult to be enlightened?
Who taught him the right way to go?
Who imparted knowledge to him^e
or showed him the way of discernment?
¹⁵Observe: the nations are but drops from a bucket,
they are reckoned as dust on the scales.
Observe: the islands weigh^f no more than specks of dust.
¹⁶Lebanon yields not fuel enough,
its beasts do not suffice for burnt offerings.
¹⁷All the nations are as nothing in his presence,
they are reckoned as less than nothing,^g
as void and empty in his sight.^h

ii

- ¹⁸To whom, then, will you liken God?
What form compare with him?
¹⁹An image that a craftsman casts,