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THE PROPHET'S SUFFERINGS AND RELEASE

53 : 1-12

The person referred to throughout this chapter is the same as the 'servant' of the three earlier 'Servant Songs', 42 : 1-4; 49 : 1-6; 50 : 4-9—that is, the prophet Deutero-Isaiah himself. Except in verses 11*b*-12*a*, on which see below, Yahweh is referred to also in the third person. The speakers, who refer to themselves throughout as 'we', are a group of the prophet's fellow-exiles, possibly an intimate group of his disciples, though they speak for the whole exilic community.

It is held by most commentators that the passage refers to the Servant as one who has been put to death by his enemies, but who will, astonishingly, be restored to life by Yahweh, who accepts his suffering and death as vicariously atoning for the sins of others. This view might be tenable if the Servant were an allegorical figure representing the nation of Israel, though it would then ascribe to Deutero-Isaiah a view of the mission of Israel to the world which would be quite unparalleled. But it has already been argued (see on 42 : 1-4; 49 : 1-6) that the Servant in this group of passages cannot be Israel. If on the other hand this passage is interpreted as referring to a historical individual whose death is regarded as bringing atonement for the sins of others, the difficulties are even greater. The concept of an innocent person's suffering the death penalty so that the guilty might go free would not only be an unheard of and inexplicable innovation, but would also be contrary to the principles of justice constantly reiterated in the *OT*. Further, who is it that goes free? The speakers can hardly be representatives of the heathen nations; and if they are Israelites, they have *not* escaped punishment for their sins, but have on the contrary, as Deutero-Isaiah frequently states elsewhere, paid in full. A further difficulty concerns the supposed resurrection of the Servant. As a metaphor of the restoration of Israel after exile this might be conceivable (cf. Ezek. 37 : 1-14), but with reference to an individual it is totally foreign to the Judaism of the sixth century BC. All these difficulties are removed, however, when it is realized that the supposed references to the Servant's vicarious suffering and death and resurrection are illusory, due partly to a misunderstanding of the language of a particular kind of religious poetry and partly to the

determination of Christian interpreters to find here a prefiguration of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. See especially H. M. Orlinsky in *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah* (VT Suppl. 14), 1967; G. R. Driver, *In Memoriam Paul Kahle* (BZAW 103), 1968, pp. 90-105.

The basic form of the chapter is that of the thanksgiving of the individual for deliverance from trouble, with the unusual feature that it is not the former sufferer himself but his friends who give thanks. This feature is not, however, entirely unique: according to Ps. 22 : 22-25 (MT 23-26); 35 : 27 it is the function of the 'great congregation' to offer such praise, and Ps. 107 is in fact such an act of thanksgiving for the rescue of others from trouble, though expressed in general terms, while in Ps. 118 there is a dialogue of praise in which both the former sufferer and the congregation participate. In Isa. 53 the allusiveness of the language does not permit us to say precisely what was the occasion of this giving of thanks, but it may be surmised that it was the release of Deutero-Isaiah from a Babylonian prison, where he had been subjected to the suffering of which the third 'Servant Song' (50 : 4-9) also speaks. The reason for his release is not known; but it would appear that his friends took it as a miracle and as a sign that the tide of their own sufferings had turned, and that the deliverance of the exiles which he had constantly promised was about to begin. This, together with his exalted role as the bearer of Yahweh's word, would account for the exalted language in which they speak of him.

1. As in Ps. 34, where an individual expresses his thanks for his own deliverance from affliction, and Ps. 107, where as here it is others who speak, the speakers throughout this chapter do not address Yahweh directly, but simply narrate the sequence of events which has led to the happy conclusion, referring both to Yahweh and the sufferer in the third person. This is therefore not a prayer, but an act of confident faith in Yahweh based on the knowledge of what he has done. Since this is something totally unexpected, they begin with a rhetorical question which stresses their intense and joyful astonishment. **Who has believed:** probably better, 'Whoever would have believed?' (cf. Ps. 118 : 23). **what we have heard:** that is, 'what we have just heard'. This may refer to the news of Deutero-Isaiah's release; the setting is probably an act of worship at which the prophet has just told the

tale of his miraculous deliverance. We may compare the reception of the news of Peter's release from prison in Acts 12 : 12-17. The deliverance is seen as the manifestation of the **arm of the LORD** (cf. 52 : 10; Ps. 98 : 1) to, or **upon** ('al) the prophet.

2-9. These verses correspond to the narrative section in the individual thanksgiving, in which the speaker describes his lamentable state before Yahweh rescued him, using the language of the individual lamentations. Much of the language used here is similar to that of those two types of psalm.

2-3. In these verses we encounter for the first time one of the main difficulties in the interpretation of the chapter: that of determining which phrases are to be understood literally and which as poetical hyperbole in the manner of the individual lamentation. These two verses should be interpreted in relation to the expression of astonishment in verse 1. They are concerned to make the point that the speakers—or those on whose behalf they speak—had formerly failed to recognize any special qualities in the prophet, and consequently had not been moved by his acute distress.

2. The similes of the **young plant** and the **root growing out of dry ground** are examples of a symbolism commonplace in the ancient Near East, including Israel: just as the man who has the divine blessing and consequently prospers is compared to well-watered vegetation, so the man from whom the divine blessing has been withheld is like a parched plant destined to wither and die (cf. Ps. 1; Jer. 17 : 5-8). There is no justification for the contention of H. S. Nyberg (*Smärtornas Man*, 1942) and I. Engnell, ('The "Ebed-Yahweh Songs"', *BJRL* 31, 1948, pp. 54-93) that the language used here and elsewhere in the Servant Songs is derived from the pagan fertility-mythology concerning Tammuz. **he grew up:** this is not a reference to the Servant's early life. **grew up** is simply a metaphor taken from plant life. The emphasis is on the apparently blighted career of the Servant. **before him** (*l'pānāw*): the obvious meaning of this phrase is 'in Yahweh's presence'; but some commentators have emended it to *l'pānēnū*, 'before us', on the grounds that **before him** would imply that Yahweh was seen to give the Servant his special protection, which is the contrary of what the speakers intend to say. But this emendation, which has no support from the mss or Versions, is unnecessary. **before him** simply means that Yahweh was aware of

the Servant's misfortunes, yet appeared to do nothing to remedy them. The earlier contention of G. R. Driver that *l'pānāw* should be translated 'straight up' has now (*In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, pp. 92, 103) been withdrawn by its author.

In the second half of the verse (**he had no form . . . desire him**) the speakers refer to their own former reaction to the person of the prophet. They do not state that his appearance was repulsive, but only that he lacked any impressive appearance (*tō'ar, mar'eh*: not **form** and **beauty**) or majestic manner (*hādār*: hardly **comeliness**) which might have commanded their attention or attracted their devotion. **that we should look at him**: in MT this word is taken with the words which follow; but the sense is greatly improved by the punctuation given in RSV. On the lines, **his appearance . . . sons of man** in 52:14, which probably originally stood here, see above on 52:14-15.

3. This description of the Servant's rejection by his fellows, suffering, and ostracism is clearly dependent both in thought and vocabulary on similar descriptions in the individual lamentations and thanksgivings: cf. Pss. 22; 38; 69. **rejected by men** (*hādāl 'išēm*): some scholars maintain that 'shunning the company of men' is a preferable translation. **sorrows; grief**: rather, 'pain(s)', 'sickness': the results of his ill treatment. **acquainted with** (*yēdūa'*): this use of the passive participle Qal raises difficulties if the verb is *yāda'* = 'know'. 1QIs^a, supported by the Versions, has the act. part. *yōdēa'*, 'knowing'. But MT may be retained if the theory of D. W. Thomas is accepted that there is another *yāda'* in biblical Hebrew, cognate with Arabic *wadu'a*, which would here yield the meaning 'humbled by'. **and as one from whom men hide their faces** (*ūk-mastēr pānīm mimmennū*): literally, 'and like a hiding of face from him' (or, 'from us'). This is hardly acceptable Hebrew. Skinner compares it with Job 17:6, 'I am a spitting in the face'; but even so *mimmennū* remains a difficulty. *mastēr* may be a defective spelling of the Hiphil participle *mastēr*, which, in addition to its usual meaning 'one who hides', might perhaps have the sense of 'one who causes (others) to hide': the Servant would then be 'like one who causes (others) to hide (their) faces from him'. Alternatively, J. Heller (*Communio Viatorum* 1 (1958), pp. 263-6) has suggested that *kē* may have the sense of 'as if', and that Targ. and Aquila are right in taking Yahweh to be the (unexpressed) subject: 'And as if (Yahweh)

were hiding his face from him': cf. Ps. 22:24 (MT 25). **he was despised** (*nibzeh*): here we should perhaps read *nibzēhū* or *nibzēhū*, 'we despised him': cf. 1QIs^a and Syr.

4-6. The speakers now go further and recognize that the prophet's suffering was an integral part of a ministry which brought Yahweh's healing word to them. The distinctiveness of this ministry of suffering is brought out in a series of clauses which make a sharp contrast between **he** and **we**.

4. **Surely** (*'ākēn*): or perhaps, better, 'Yet'. **griefs; sorrows**: see on verse 3. The speakers now recognize that the prophet's suffering, though more intense than theirs, was fundamentally due to the same cause. They speak of his identification with them in their suffering: there is nothing to suggest that he suffered in their place. They—that is, the whole exilic community in whose name they make their confession—had previously thought of him quite differently, dismissing him simply as a person who had undergone unusually intense misfortune, with the implication (though **smitten by God** perhaps means no more than 'terribly smitten') that he had brought divine punishment on himself through his own wickedness—possibly as a false prophet. See further on **he bore the sin of many** in verse 12.

5. **for our transgressions; for our iniquities**: these phrases are usually interpreted as implying vicarious suffering: the people sinned, but the Servant was punished. But this is made improbable by the choice of the word translated **for**. If the author had intended to imply such a transference of guilt, he would almost certainly have used the particle *bē*, which denotes an exchange. The fact that he chose instead the particle *min* indicates that he regarded the Servant's ill treatment as the *result* of the people's sin but not as a *substitute* for the punishment which they had deserved. If there had been no sin, and consequently no exile, the prophet's dangerous vocation would not have been necessary. He suffered with his fellow-exiles, but his prophetic calling exposed him to additional and peculiar danger, whose cause was ultimately derived from Israel's sin. We may compare the experiences of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who also suffered from a similar cause.

In the second half of the verse the speakers assert that the prophet's suffering has not been in vain. In saying that they have been **made . . . whole** and **healed**, they are summarizing

Deutero-Isaiah's own essential message, that Yahweh has forgiven them and is on the point of rescuing and restoring them. They affirm their faith in this message, and recognize that without his readiness to suffer in the course of his prophetic duty, the prophetic word, which was the means used by Yahweh to achieve his purpose (55: 11), would not have been pronounced.

6. All we like sheep: the use of the word **All** indicates that the speakers identify themselves with the whole community. The simile of the straying **sheep** is found frequently in the OT. **laid on him** has overtones lacking in the Heb. *hipḡia' bô*, which probably simply means 'caused him to suffer', while the following word (*'āwôn*) would be better translated by 'punishment' here. The point is that the whole people had deserved to suffer, but only he had borne the full measure of suffering. See on **he bore the sin of many** in verse 12.

7-9. The speakers now emphasize that the prophet, though innocent, accepted his misfortunes uncomplainingly. This may well be a historical fact; but the occurrence of this theme in Ps. 38: 13-14 (MT 14-15) suggests that it may also have belonged to the stock of themes available to authors of individual psalms of lamentation or thanksgiving.

7. He was oppressed: the word (*niggaš*) denotes physical brutality. **and he was afflicted:** probably better, 'although (or, 'but') he made no resistance'. In the similes of the **lamb . . . led to the slaughter** and the **sheep . . . before its shearers** the point of comparison is the silence of the victim. The fact that only one of the similes speaks of **slaughter** shows, if proof were needed, that there is no implication here that the Servant was put to death. Jeremiah, in referring to plots against his life which had failed, says of himself, 'But I was a gentle lamb led to the slaughter' (Jer. 11: 19). **so he opened not his mouth:** commentators are divided on the question whether the phrase was deliberately repeated by the author for poetical effect or whether the duplication is a copyist's error.

8. By oppression and judgment he was taken away: every word in this phrase is of uncertain meaning. In view of the context it is probably best to give to *'āšer* (RSV **oppression**) a specific meaning such as 'arrest' or 'imprisonment'; the verb *'āšar* is used in both these senses. Since one of the meanings of *mišpāt* (RSV **judgment**) is 'trial', the most probable meaning of

the phrase is 'after arrest and trial he was led away'. There is no reason to suppose that this verb (*luḡḡāḥ*) means 'died' or 'was executed'. The passive Qal of *lākaḥ* is never used of death in the ordinary sense, although it is used once of God's mysterious removal of Elijah, who was 'snatched away' into heaven (2 Kg. 2: 10). Deutero-Isaiah uses it elsewhere (52: 5) of the taking of the Jewish people into exile, and here it probably has a similar meaning: the prophet was taken away to prison.

as for his generation (*w'eṭ-dôrô*): the particle *'eṭ* normally designates the object of a verb. But 'who considered his generation?' makes little sense. We should probably accept the suggestion of G. R. Driver (first made in *JTS* 36 (1935), p. 403) that *dôr* here corresponds to Accadian *dûru* and Arabic *dauru(n)* and means 'fate' or 'plight'. We may then translate 'but who gave a thought to his plight?' The following word *ki* (RSV **that**) should then be translated 'for'. **cut off out of the land of the living:** interpreted literally, this phrase almost certainly means that the Servant died. But a literal translation is not mandatory. In the psalms of lamentation and thanksgiving reference is frequently made to severe suffering in terms of death; and in Lam. 3: 54 the worshipper says of himself: 'I have been cut off' (*nigzārti*; RSV 'I am lost'). So here the speakers are concerned to emphasize the Servant's nearness to death: he was 'as good as dead' (see also on verse 9). **stricken:** Heb. has 'a blow to them' (*neḡa' lāmô*), which makes no sense. We should probably read something like *y'enugga' / nugga' lammāwet*, a reading suggested by LXX. A literal rendering of this would be 'he was smitten to death'; but 'death' here may be used simply as a superlative: 'he was grievously smitten'. See D. W. Thomas, *VT* 3 (1953), pp. 219-22; *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 44 (1968), p. 84. **for the transgression of my people** (*mippeša' 'ammî*): see the note on **for our transgressions; for our iniquities** on verse 5 above. **my people** (*'ammî*): 1QIs^a has 'his people' (*'ammô*). Possibly the suffix *-î* (**my**) was intended to be the first letter of the next word, which, as has been suggested, may have been *y'enugga'* (imperf.). If so the phrase would read, 'for the people's transgression he was grievously smitten'.

9. they made: the sing. verb *yittēn* here has an impersonal sense. 1QIs^a has the plur. A better translation would be 'they assigned'. The Servant was regarded as being 'as good as dead'; and as a convicted criminal he was to be buried among the

criminals. This, for a Jew, would have been a terrible fate. But in fact it is not stated that he died. One of the features of the descriptions of past suffering in the psalms of lamentation is that the worshipper's enemies had gleefully supposed him to be at the point of death. Compare also the line 'My grave was waiting, and my funerary paraphernalia ready' from the Babylonian *Poem of the Righteous Sufferer* (W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*, 1960, p. 46). **and with a rich man** ('*āšir*): that the burial places of rich men and criminals should have been identical is highly improbable, and makes the lines meaningless. Of the emendations which have been proposed, '*ōšē ra*', 'doers of evil' and '*šerīm*', 'demons', are the most plausible, but the text may be correct: it has been suggested that '*āšir* here is unconnected with '*āšir* meaning 'rich', but related to an Arabic word meaning 'refuse, rabble'. **in his death**: MT has the meaningless *bēmōtāw*, 'in his deaths'. Most modern scholars, following W. F. Albright (*VT* Suppl. 4 (1957), pp. 242–58) now accept an ancient emendation to *bāmātō*, 'his burial mound', a reading which perhaps gains some support from 1QIs^a. The line would then mean 'and his burial mound among the dregs of society'.

10–12. The main concern of the speakers in these verses is to express their joy and thanks that Yahweh has delivered his Servant from danger of death to enjoy a long and prosperous life, and to reiterate their newly found appreciation of his prophetic ministry. Unfortunately, however, the text of verses 10–11 is seriously corrupt and its meaning in some places not clear in spite of many attempts to restore it.

10. The first half of this verse (to **sin**) is particularly obscure. As translated in *RSV* it appears to continue the account of the Servant's sufferings and to assert that these were part of the divine plan. But this translation glosses over a number of difficulties. **he has put him to grief** (*heḥēlī*): it might just be possible to render this word by 'he made (him) sick'; but the irregularity of the form and the absence of the pronominal object make this unlikely. LXX may have understood it as an adverbial phrase, 'with sickness' (perhaps *heḥēlī*). But the introduction of a reference to sickness is strange at this point. It would seem that we have here the first of a group of words (up to **offering for sin**) whose letters have been accidentally jumbled at a very early stage (before the LXX translation was made). **when he makes him-**

self an offering for sin: the Heb. has 'if' ('*im*), not **when**; but this conditional clause is difficult to reconcile with earlier statements that the Servant's suffering is past. J. Begrich (*Studien zu Deuterjesaja*, 1938, p. 58; reprinted in *Theologische Bücherei* 20, 1963, p. 64) regarded the words *heḥēlī 'im-tāšim 'āšām napšō* as a corruption of *heḥēlīm 'et-šām 'āšām napšō*, 'he healed him who made his life a guilt-offering'. If this is correct, the thought of Yahweh's desire that the Servant should suffer disappears from this line; and it may be that this is true of the previous line also: here Begrich proposed the reading *dakkā'ō*, 'his crushed one', for *dakkē'ō*, 'to crush him', so 'But Yahweh was pleased with his crushed one'; while G. R. Driver, who earlier accepted Begrich's emendation, now suggests that the Piel of *dākā* here may mean 'declare innocent' (a late spelling of *zākāh*) rather than 'crush' or 'bruise'.

The above emendations remain conjectural; others are even more radical. In view of the great uncertainty about the text, it is unwise to press the significance of the reference to the Servant's having been made **an offering for sin** ('*āšām*). Although the majority of commentators retain this statement in some form some scholars (e.g. Marti; H.-P. Müller, *ZAW* 81 (1969) pp. 377–80) regard it as a later interpolation, while others (e.g. Duhm; I. Sonne, *JBL* 78, 1959, pp. 335–42) have eliminated the word '*āšām* altogether in their textual reconstructions. Nowhere else in the *OT* is it stated that a man's life can be a guilt-offering, whether in a literal or a metaphorical sense, and the idea would appear to be entirely foreign to *OT* thought. If the author had intended to introduce such a novel and astonishing idea, we should expect him to have stated it more clearly. (It should also be noted that even if the verse *did* speak of the Servant as having in fact made himself an offering for sin this would not necessarily imply more than that he was *ready* to die: for example, both Begrich and Driver hold that the poem does not speak of his death, and that he was still alive when it was written. See on 'he poured out his soul to death' in verse 12.

his offspring: Heb. has simply *zera'*, 'seed', without the pronominal suffix **his**. **he shall prolong his days** is a relative clause: the whole line might be paraphrased 'he will live to see his own descendants living to a great age'. This implies an exceptionally long life for the Servant himself. A long and happy life was the greatest

blessing imaginable to the Jew of this period. **the will of the LORD** (second occurrence): perhaps better, 'Yahweh's cause'. **in his hand** (*beyādō*): that is, through his agency as a prophet. The phrase *beyad*, 'by the hand of', is frequently used of the prophetic function of the communication of Yahweh's word to the people.

11. he shall see: both IQIs^a and LXX add the word 'light' (Heb. *ôr*), and this is certainly correct. The word was probably omitted by a copyist who was confused by the similarity of the consonants *wr* with those of the previous word, *yr'h* (**see**). **the fruit of the travail of his soul** (*mē^amal napšō*): better, 'after his terrible suffering'. *napšō* (RSV **his soul**) simply indicates the intensity of the suffering. So the whole phrase may be translated, 'after his terrible suffering he will see light': that is, he will resume his normal happy life. It has been suggested on the other hand that *yr'eh* here does not mean 'see', but is an alternative spelling of *yirweh*, from *rāwāh* meaning 'be filled, saturated': so NEB, following Driver, renders the phrase by 'he shall be bathed in light'.

and be satisfied . . . accounted righteous: these lines are exceptionally difficult, and no attempt to elucidate them can be regarded as more than tentative. It is difficult to understand how the Servant's **knowledge** should **make many to be accounted righteous**; and the proposal to take **by his knowledge** with the preceding phrases ('he shall be satisfied through his knowledge') is hardly an improvement. A further difficulty is the position of *šaddik*, **the righteous one**, which, as an adjective, ought to follow rather than precede the noun **my servant**. The proposal of D. W. Thomas that the word *da'a* here does not mean 'knowledge' but 'humiliation', being derived from a verb *yāda'* cognate with Arab. *wadu'a* rather than from the more familiar *yāda'* (cognate with Accadian *idū*), 'to know' (see on **acquainted with** in verse 3) would greatly alleviate the first of these problems. The second problem might be solved by the omission of *šaddik* as an accidental repetition of the last five consonants of the previous word *yašdik*; but it may simply have been misplaced. If it preceded *yašdik* instead of following it it would be possible to take it with the previous phrase: literally, 'after his humiliation he shall receive satisfaction as a righteous (i.e. innocent) person'. This would also improve the metre and, in addition, produce a parallel couplet:

after his terrible suffering he will see light;
after his humiliation he will be vindicated
(declared to be entirely innocent).

my servant: it would seem that Yahweh begins to speak at this point a divine oracle which continues, probably, until **strong** in verse 12, reasserting the prophet's status and making a formal declaration of his innocence. Such a divine oracle, confirming the confident faith of the worshippers, is rare but not entirely unknown in the psalms: cf. Ps. 46: 10 (MT 11). **make many to be accounted righteous** (*yašdik . . . lārabbīm*): elsewhere the Hiphil of this verb means either 'acquit' or 'render justice to'. But here, since the **many** are presumably the Jewish exiles who are guilty and being justly punished for their sins, it can hardly have either of these meanings. To 'acquit the wicked' (*hišdik rāšā'*) was not a virtuous action but a heinous crime, comparable with condemning the righteous. *God* might *forgive* the wicked, but *man* must not *acquit* him. The best answer to this problem is probably that of Mowinckel, who regards *yašdik* as a so-called 'internal Hiphil'. The meaning would then be 'he showed himself to be righteous with regard to the many' (the imperf. being rendered as a past tense). The oracle of Yahweh picks up the word *šaddik*, 'righteous, innocent', from the words of the previous speakers and gives their statement the weight of divine authority. **and he shall bear their iniquities:** this verb (an imperf.) should also be rendered as a past tense. This statement, like **he bore the sin of many** in verse 12 (see below), is usually interpreted as a statement that the Servant's suffering was vicarious and atoning. But there is no evidence for this. The phrase 'bear iniquities' (*sābal 'awōnōt*) occurs in only one other passage in the OT: 'Our fathers sinned, and are no more; and we bear their iniquities' (Lam. 5: 7). Here it is clear that although the speakers complain that their punishment is the *consequence* of their dead ancestors' sins, they can hardly claim to be vicariously atoning for them. So also here the Servant, though innocent, has suffered punishment which is the consequence of the sins of others, and which should rightly have fallen only on his guilty compatriots (compare verses 2-6); but he has not suffered in their stead. The meaning of the phrase is 'yet *he* suffered punishment which only *they* deserved'.

12. Therefore (*lāḵēn*): see on 51: 21. Yahweh now announces the reward which the prophet is to have for his faithfulness. **I will divide him a portion** (*ʿaḥalleḵ-lō*): the words **a portion** are lacking in the Hebrew. Either the object is to be understood without need for its specific mention, or **the spoil** functions as the object of both verbs. The phrase *ḥilleḵ ṣālāl*, 'divide the spoil', is primarily a military expression denoting the apportionment of captured booty among the members of a victorious army. But **spoil** (*ṣālāl*) can also have a general sense of 'profit, gain' (Prov. 31: 11), and the phrase itself has a non-military sense in Prov. 16: 19. Here **spoil** is to be taken in a metaphorical sense, simply as 'reward'. The nature of this reward has already been described in verses 10–11. **he shall divide the spoil**: the word **divide**, indicating the distribution of spoil, is on both occasions in the Piel. But in the second occurrence it is probable that the vowels of the Qal were intended: *yahʾlōḵ*, 'he will receive', rather than *yḥalleḵ*, 'he will distribute'. (So Driver). **with the great; with the strong**: each of these two adjectives (*raḥ*, *ʾašūm*) can mean either 'many' or 'strong'. Here the latter meaning is intended: the triumph of the Servant and his new strength are contrasted with his former reputation as pitifully weak. The one who had appeared to be crushed beyond hope of recovery will now take his place among the **great** ones (*bārabbīm*) and with the **strong** ones (*ʿet-ʾašūmīm*) of the world. The choice of metaphor is probably an indication of the fact that the author saw in the triumph of the Servant an anticipation of the coming triumph of the Jewish exiles as a whole. (The fact that the word *rabbīm* later in this verse and also in verse 11 means not 'great' but 'many' does not constitute an objection to the above interpretation: double meanings of this kind are characteristic of Deutero-Isaiah himself, and it is not surprising to find the same trait in the work of one of his close associates.)

because: what follows may be a continuation of the divine oracle, but is more probably a final comment by the earlier speakers. **he poured out his soul to death**: better, 'he exposed his life to (danger of) death'; or perhaps, following D. W. Thomas' interpretation of *lammāwet* (see on **stricken** in verse 8), simply 'to the uttermost'. **was numbered**: perhaps better, 'allowed himself to be numbered' (Niphal tolerativum). **he bore the sin of many** (*ḥēṭ-rabbīm nāsā*): see on **and he shall bear their iniquities**

in verse 11. Like other expressions in verses 4, 6, 11, this phrase has frequently been interpreted as referring to the Servant's suffering and/or death as vicariously borne for the sake of others. Yet the phrase 'bear sin' (*nāsā ḥēṭ*), which occurs almost exclusively in the laws of Exodus and Leviticus, always refers to a person's responsibility for his own sin, and is never used in connexion with atoning sacrifice. Here it means that the Servant shared with others a penalty which was appropriate for them but not for him.

It may be noted here that several phrases in this chapter—**he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows** (verse 4); **and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all** (verse 6); **and he shall bear their iniquities** (verse 11); **and he bore the sin of many** (verse 12)—have been discussed by some commentators as if they were identical in meaning with another phrase, *nāsā ʾāwōn*, 'bear guilt' or 'bear punishment', which does not occur in this chapter. But even if we can assume that the phrases are virtually interchangeable, *nāsā ʾāwōn* does not in fact refer to vicarious punishment or suffering. In the four passages from the laws (Exod. 28: 38; Lev. 10: 17; 16: 22; Num. 18: 1) which have been cited as proof of this meaning, the subject of the verb 'bear' is not involved in suffering at all. Rather these passages express a belief that certain ritual actions neutralize or take away a punishment which would otherwise fall on the people. They have nothing in common with the idea of one person's suffering instead of another. Further, in Ezek. 4: 4–6, where the prophet Ezekiel 'bears the punishment' of the house of Israel, his suffering is in no sense a vicarious punishment: on the contrary, it is a sign of the punishment which the people are themselves called upon to bear. The roles of Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel are here similar in the sense that both share the suffering of the people rather than suffering in their stead.

and made intercession (*yapḡlā*) **for the transgressors**: in verse 6 this verb is used in the sense of 'cause to suffer'; but here it means 'plead for, intercede', as in Jer. 15: 11. Both passages illustrate the prophetic role of intercession with God on behalf of the people.

FUTURE EXPANSION AND PROSPERITY

54: 1-10

This passage resembles 49: 14-23 in theme and also to some extent in form. Zion is addressed, though not specifically named; and the reassurances about her future prosperity which are made are Yahweh's answer to her specific lamentations, which underlie the whole passage, although they are not expressed directly. Zion has cast herself in the role of a barren woman and of a forsaken wife (verse 1); she laments that she has been humiliated and put to shame (verse 4); and that Yahweh has forsaken and forgotten her (verse 6; cf. 49: 14). The reply to these complaints has basically the form of a promise of salvation, although other forms have also been used. The poem may originally have ended with verse 8: verses 9-10 introduce a slightly different theme, although one not entirely unconnected with what precedes.

1. The exhortation to **Sing** is characteristic of the hymn of praise (cf. 44: 23; 49: 13; 52: 9). **into singing**: some commentators wish to omit this word (*rinnāh*) as superfluous to the metre. It is not strictly necessary to the sense. Yahweh's answer to Zion's complaint of barrenness takes the same form as in 49: 19-23. The paradox of the last half of the verse may have been taken by Deutero-Isaiah from a stock of hymnic motifs: cf. 1 Sam. 2: 5; Ps. 113: 9.

2. As in 49: 19-20 the promise is given that the returning exiles will be so numerous that there will hardly be room for them. This is first expressed in the form of a command to Zion, now pictured in the role of wife and mother in a family of tent-dwellers, to enlarge the family **tent**. New sections (**curtains**) must be added, and the ropes (**cords**) lengthened and the tent-pegs (**stakes**) strengthened to support the more ponderous structure. All this was women's work. The nomad's tent was a complex affair with many compartments. **let . . . be stretched out**: the Heb. has *yattūl*, literally 'let them stretch out'. Possibly either the passive *yutūl*, 'let . . . be stretched out' or the fem. imperative *haffi*, 'stretch out', may have been the original reading.

3. The fem. forms show that Zion is still being addressed, but the promise is now put into plain language. **you will spread abroad**: the same verb is used in Gen. 28: 14, where Yahweh promises the land of Canaan to Jacob. This promise was probably

in Deutero-Isaiah's mind: the return from exile was to be the definitive fulfilment of Yahweh's promise of the land to the patriarchs. **to the right and to the left**: it is not certain whether this means 'to the north and to the south', or simply 'in all directions'. **will possess the nations**: better, 'will dispossess (drive out) the nations'. Some commentators hold that this is a promise of a future imperial rule by Israel of the nations beyond the borders of Palestine: a revival of the old Davidic empire; but this is improbable: the phrase 'dispossess the nations' (*yāraʿ (hag)gōyīm*), which occurs elsewhere only in Deuteronomy, always refers to the conquest of Canaan itself by Israel, in the course of which they will drive out the 'nations' or peoples formerly in possession of that land. It should also be noted that the phrase here is parallel with **people the desolate cities**, which certainly refers only to the cities of Palestine itself.

4. Yahweh now announces the end of Israel's humiliation, still under the figure of Zion as a woman who feels that her troubles are due to her abandonment by her husband. **Fear not**: see on 41: 10. **the shame of your youth**: this probably refers not to Israel's bondage in Egypt in days gone by, but to more recent events such as Israel's oppression by Assyria during the period of the monarchy. **the reproach of your widowhood**: this clearly refers to the present, that is, to the Babylonian exile. The form *ʾalmēnūtayik* (**widowhood**) is slightly anomalous.

5. The reason is now given why Zion need no longer feel shame. **your Maker is your husband**: better, 'your husband is your Maker'. The point in both parts of the verse is that the husband whose absence Zion laments is not absent through any coercion which has been placed on him: he is **the Holy One of Israel** and **the God of the whole earth**. It therefore cannot be that he is *unable* to come and rescue his wife. (In verses 6-8 the further point is made that he is not only able, but also *willing* to do so.) **your Maker**: compare the similar statements in 43: 1, 15. **your husband**: MT has *bōʾalayik*, 'he who marries you'. Possibly *bōʾalayik*, 'your husband', was intended ('plur. of excellence', G-K §124k). The following word (*ʾōsayik*) has what appears to be a plur. form also, but this is probably not so (G-K §93ss). In this and the following verse Yahweh refers to himself in the third person.

6. The precise nuances of this verse are elusive. Perhaps *kē* (**like**) should be regarded as the so-called *kaph veritatis* (G-K

§118x): 'called you who were truly a wife forsaken'. *kî* (**when**) should perhaps be given the sense of 'although': Yahweh regards Zion as if she were a fresh young bride (**wife of youth**), although in fact she had already been 'married' to him and subsequently separated from him. **has called you** would then be a promise (the 'prophetic perfect') that Yahweh would now recall Zion once more to himself.

7. Yahweh now replies to Zion's complaint that Yahweh has forsaken her. As in 50: 1 he does not deny that the Exile constituted a separation from him, but he emphasizes that this separation was not only not permanent, but even insignificant in comparison with the immensity of the love with which he will take her back.

8. **for a moment** (*bēšēp*): the word *šēp*, which was no doubt chosen for reasons of alliteration (*bēšēp kēp*), occurs only here in the OT, and its meaning is unknown. But this is no reason for omitting or emending it. North's suggestion that it may be related to the verb *šāp*, 'to cut, slash' in rabbinic Hebrew may be right: a meaning such as 'a fragment of time' would fit the context, and is perhaps supported by Aquila's 'in an atom of time'. The idea that God's wrath is only momentary is found in Ps. 30: 5 (MT 30: 6) in an individual thanksgiving, and may therefore have been part of the liturgical stock on which Deutero-Isaiah was able to draw.

9-10. In these verses Yahweh seeks to assure his people that his promises may be relied upon.

9. Yahweh reminds his listeners of the promise which he made to **Noah** (Gen. 8: 21; 9: 1) after the Flood, and now swears a similar oath (the second *nīšba' tî* should be translated by 'I swear' rather than by **I have sworn**). The two situations were indeed analogous: fears of the repetition of a terrible disaster allayed by a divine promise. Deutero-Isaiah was evidently familiar with the patriarchal traditions, though not necessarily in exactly the form in which they now appear in Genesis (where nothing is said specifically about an oath), and used them in an extremely effective way: cf. his use of the Abraham traditions in 41: 8; 51: 2. **this** (*zō't*): that is, 'the present situation'. **like the days of Noah**: Heb. has 'For this is the waters of Noah (*kî-mē nōah*)'. RSV follows a widely accepted emendation to *kîmē*, 'like the days'.

10. It may be the thought of the disappearance of the mountains

beneath the waters of the Flood (Gen. 7: 19-20) which inspired the prophet to make this second comparison: the story of Noah shows that God protects those who enjoy his favour even when the mountains, usually regarded in the OT as symbols of strength and permanence, disappear. But the thought itself is independent of the comparison with the Flood, and is found also in 51: 6. Although the verse is not eschatological in the sense of envisaging a period of eternal blessing after the end of the world, it expresses a view of divine transcendence which goes beyond earlier OT theology. **For**: perhaps better, 'Although'. **my covenant of peace** (*berit šelômî*): the story of Noah is still in the prophet's mind. In Genesis the earlier reference to Yahweh's promise to Noah after the Flood (Gen. 8: 22, J) becomes in the later version (P) an 'everlasting covenant' (Gen. 9: 8-17). Here Deutero-Isaiah is close to the Priestly writer, and uses his 'covenant theology' in his affirmation about the new era which is about to begin. Yet again God will make an eternal **covenant**, this time guaranteeing not merely the survival of mankind but his eternal favour towards his own people. The basis of the covenant is his **steadfast love** (*hesed*) or faithfulness to his promises. Deutero-Isaiah's near-contemporary Ezekiel also prophesies a 'covenant of peace' (Ezek. 37: 26); cf. also Jeremiah's 'new covenant' (Jer. 31: 31). The word *šālôm* (**peace**) has a much more positive meaning in Hebrew than its counterpart in English, and signifies well-being of every kind.

THE NEW JERUSALEM

54: 11-17

Some commentators have suggested that these verses comprise two originally independent pieces, but the lack of agreement about the extent of these shows that a division of this kind can hardly be made. The passage deals with two closely related themes: the glory of the new Jerusalem which is to be built, and its protection by Yahweh from all harm. The first line of verse 14 (**In righteousness you shall be established**) appears to mark the point of transition from the first theme to the second. Yahweh is the speaker throughout, and he addresses Zion as the devastated city which is to be built more glorious than before. At the same time the image of Zion as the forsaken wife who is to be

restored to her former dignity and beauty underlies some of the language used. The passage has some of the characteristics of the promise of salvation, but, as Westermann has pointed out, the last part (verses 14-17) has the form of the divine blessing, a form which lays stress not merely on the imminent act of salvation itself but on the permanent quality of life which will be conferred on God's people by his constant protection.

11-12. This description of the dazzling beauty of the new Jerusalem may to some extent have been inspired by the idea that even the beauty and luxury of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon, now doomed, would be outshone by that of the city which Yahweh would build for his people. It is also possible that the motif of precious stones may be connected with a Paradise myth like that preserved in Ezek. 28, especially verse 13. In some sense what is promised here is Paradise Regained. The theme of the New Jerusalem was taken up in later literature, especially Tob. 13: 16-18; Rev. 21: 19-21. It should be noted that Deutero-Isaiah here makes no mention of a rebuilt Temple: his thought is entirely concentrated on the renewed community itself.

11. O afflicted one: the same phrase is found in 51: 21, where it is preceded by 'Therefore hear this'. Some such introductory phrase may have originally stood here also. **not comforted:** once more the oracle of salvation takes up the exiles' own words of complaint: cf. Lam. 1: 16; 2: 13. **antimony:** in 2 Kg. 9: 30; Jer. 4: 30 this word (*pūk*) means a kind of powder used by women for darkening the appearance of their eyes, and it may have been chosen here to suggest, together with the mention of jewels in verse 12, the image of Zion as a splendidly groomed woman; but in 1 Chr. 29: 2 it seems to be a kind of mortar for setting stones in a mosaic pattern, and this is probably the primary meaning here. **sapphires:** probably the semi-precious *lapis lazuli*, as suggested by RSV mg.

12. agate; carbuncles: these two stones cannot be identified with certainty. Both words suggest a reddish or fiery colour.

13. taught: this probably refers to the skills required for the building of the city, which Yahweh will supply as needed, rather than to some deeper or more religious kind of knowledge. It has been suggested that the first line of verse 14 originally followed **the LORD**. This would provide a better parallelism in both verses. **your sons** (second occurrence): it is unusual for the same

word (here *bānayik*) to occur in both parts of a parallel couplet. In 1QIs^a the word has been corrected on its second occurrence to *bwnyky*, i.e. *bōnayik*, 'your builders', and this is probably correct. Deutero-Isaiah is again playing on the sound of words: Zion's sons and her builders are in fact the same people.

14. In righteousness: Zion (Jerusalem) seems to have been traditionally known as the 'city of righteousness' (cf. 1: 26). Elsewhere in Deutero-Isaiah this word (*ṣēdāqāh*) is equated with salvation, and this meaning is certainly intended here, as it stands in parallelism with *šālôm* (**prosperity**) in verse 13. But a moral sense is probably also included. **you shall be established** (*tikkōnānī*): on the form see G-K §54c. **you shall be far from:** in Heb. the word is imperative (*raḥāḳī*). The effect of this imperative is to emphasize the force of the divine promise (cf. G-K §110c), and no emendation is necessary. **for it shall not come near you:** cf. the similar divine promise in Ps. 91: 9-16 (MT 10-17).

15. The Heb. of this verse is difficult, but the wholesale emendation proposed by BHS is hardly justified. **stirs up strife:** the verb in both occurrences is *gūr*, which is not otherwise attested in this sense. It may be an alternative form of *gārāh*, which can have this sense in the Piel. **not:** one of the functions of 'epes is to indicate a negative: cf. Isa. 5: 8, 'ad 'epes māḳôm, 'until there is no place'. **from me:** *mē'ōfī* is found elsewhere as a variant of *mē'ittī*, and no emendation is necessary. **because of you** ('ālayik): this is probably a better translation than 'upon you'. Attacks on Zion will fail because she is what she is, a city under God's protection. The meaning of the verse is therefore that Yahweh promises that he will never again incite enemies to pick a quarrel with Jerusalem; and consequently any attempts to do so are bound to fail.

16-17a. These verses explain the reason why no attack on Zion can succeed. Both the smiths who forge weapons of war and the warriors who use them are Yahweh's creatures and therefore under his control. Since he will never permit them to attack his people, Jerusalem will always remain secure.

16. Behold: Kethib has *hēn*; Qere and 1QIs^a *hinnēh*. The meaning is the same. **for its purpose:** this is a better translation of *l'ma'asēhū* than 'for his (the smith's) purpose'. Each type of weapon has its own purpose. **the ravager** (*mašḥūt*): the word is

simply descriptive of the function of the warrior, and does not necessarily refer specifically to the Babylonians or to any other of Israel's former enemies.

17. and you shall confute . . . judgment: the power of the tongue, here used in making false accusations, was considered to be as great as that of the sword, and Yahweh also promises protection against this. **in judgment:** better, 'in court' (to be taken metaphorically). The last part of the verse (from **This is the heritage . . .**) rounds off the whole poem. **heritage** (*naḥlāh*), originally the land given by Yahweh to his people, probably means no more here than 'free gift' (cf. Ps. 127: 3), though the idea that Yahweh is now about to repeat his gift of the land of Palestine to the returning exiles may lie in the background. **the servants of the LORD:** the use of this word in the plur. to designate Israel is characteristic of Isa. 56-66, and may perhaps indicate that the author here is not Deutero-Isaiah. **vindication** (*šēdāḳāh*): or, 'deliverance, salvation'.

THE EVERLASTING COVENANT

55: 1-5

Here Yahweh addresses his people, urging them to detach themselves from their involvement with the daily life of Babylon and to accept the promise which he gives them of true satisfaction in their own land, when they will once more take their place, under his protection, as a prosperous and imperial nation, as in the days of David.

1. The form of the address is unique in Deutero-Isaiah. It has been compared on the one hand with the invitation made by Wisdom to passers-by to enter her house and partake of the 'banquet of life' (Prov. 9: 1-6) (Begrich) and on the other with the cry of the water-seller, familiar in the Near East (Volz). The phraseology suggests that the prophet may have had both these models in mind. In any case the point of the metaphor lies in the paradoxical theme expressed in the words **buy** and **without money**. Volz suggested the possibility that the prophet may have been thinking of the action of a rich man who, in time of famine, buys up all the food available and then generously offers it to the people free. The lesson is that Yahweh requires no payment for the grace which he offers.

There is some repetition here. **come** (literally, 'go': *l'kū*) occurs three times; **buy** twice; **no (without) money** twice. It has been argued that such repetitions are natural in the speech of a street vendor (Westermann); but the metre is overloaded, and it is perhaps best to accept the reading of 1QIs^a, which is partly supported by some of the Versions, and omit **and eat! Come, buy**.

2. Here the metaphor is continued, and some hint is now given of the nature of what Yahweh has to offer. The **what is good** and the **fatness** (i.e. rich food) are not entirely metaphorical: Yahweh's promise to Israel includes material gifts; but the verses which follow make it clear that these are symbolic of further gifts. A more difficult problem is the meaning of **that which is not bread** and **that which does not satisfy**. It can hardly mean material things as opposed to spiritual ones, since this modern contrast would have no meaning for the ancient Israelite. The 'good life' included both, and Yahweh is in fact offering both. It is more probable that the reference is to the exiles' preoccupation with the everyday concerns of life in Babylon, to which they have become accustomed. Such a life, lived away from the holy city and among unclean people (52: 1) can never offer true satisfaction.

3. The metaphor is now dropped, and Yahweh explains what he is offering in plain language. **that your soul may live:** the Christian concept of the **soul** was unknown to the ancient Israelites. The word so translated here (*nepeš*) means either a living being, life, or the 'self'. But it is frequently used, as here, in place of the personal pronoun to add a note of emotion or of intensity to the verb. Thus Deutero-Isaiah could have said 'that you may live'; but the addition of *napsēkem* intensifies the thought: 'that you may have the very fullness of life'. The quality of this life is then expressed in terms of **an everlasting covenant** (*berit 'ōlām*; cf. 54: 10), and further defined by God as **my steadfast, sure love for David** (*ḥasēdē dāwīd hanne'emānīm*). **steadfast . . . love** (*hesed*) is faithfulness to a covenant (see again 54: 10); but here it is in the plur., referring to the many acts of faithfulness which God performed for David in protecting him and giving him victory and success. The phrases **everlasting covenant** and **my steadfast, sure love for David** both recall God's promises to David and his line in 2 Sam. 7: 8-16; 23: 5;

1 Kg. 8 : 23-26; Ps. 89 : 27-37 (MT 28-38). But these verses contain no promise of the restoration of the Davidic monarchy in the person of one of David's descendants; rather what is stated here is that the covenant promises, originally made to David as the leader of the nation, are now to be transferred directly to the whole people. Deutero-Isaiah thus differs from that other line of exilic and post-exilic prophecy which looked forward to a 'new David'.

4-5. Behold . . . Behold (*hēn . . . hēn*): the repetition of this word serves to draw attention to the similarities, and also to the differences, between the past glories of the time of David and the age which is about to dawn. What was once given to the individual David will now be given to the people as a whole.

4. In speaking of David as **a leader** (*nāgīd*) **and commander for the peoples**, Deutero-Isaiah is simply drawing upon the historical tradition of David's imperial power. But nowhere else in the *OT* is he spoken of as **a witness to the peoples** (*'ēd l'ē'ammīm*). However, the idea that his conquest of other nations constituted a witness to them of the power of Yahweh is found in Ps. 18 : 43-50 (MT 44-51), and also, with regard to other periods in Israel's history, elsewhere in the *OT* (e.g. Exod. 15 : 14-16; Jos. 2 : 9-11). Deutero-Isaiah uses the word **witness** (*'ēd*) of Israel in 43 : 10, 12; 44 : 8. In the phrase **witness to the peoples** some commentators have proposed the emendation of *l'ē'ammīm*, **the peoples**, to *l'ē'ammīm*, on the grounds that the repetition of the same word is improbable in parallel couplets.

5. you shall call: although the verb is in the sing., it is Israel which is addressed. As in the days of David, other **nations** (*gōy*, sing., stands for plur.) will be Israel's servants, and will **run** to him when he summons them. There is no reason to suppose that this domination is purely spiritual: as elsewhere, Deutero-Isaiah envisages political domination by Israel. **because . . . glorified you:** this line is very similar to 49 : 7b.

YAHWEH'S IRRESISTIBLE WORD

55 : 6-13

This passage stands here as an epilogue to the book of Deutero-Isaiah. Like the prologue (40 : 1-8) it has the effect of summarizing his message, so that the rest of the book is enclosed between

passages which set the tone for the whole. It is not entirely clear whether this was originally a single poem, or whether verses 12-13 are to be distinguished from what precedes. But in its present form the passage possesses a logical structure. In anticipation of the imminent appearance of Yahweh to save his people, the prophet urgently calls upon them to prepare themselves by repentance (verses 6-7). Then, in order to persuade the doubters, he supports his assertion of imminent salvation by means of two arguments: those who object that they see no signs of a reversal of Israel's fortunes are reminded that God 'moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform' (verses 8-9); and those who doubt God's power or the credentials of his prophet are silenced by a solemn divine assurance that it is his Word to which they are listening, and that nothing can prevent its effective operation (verses 10-11). Finally the promise of salvation is set out in specific terms (verses 12-13). An oracle of Yahweh (verses 8-11) has been enclosed within the prophet's own words of assurance to his people.

6. Seek the LORD: in pre-exilic times this was a technical expression for the sacrificial worship of Yahweh or his consultation through an oracle; but already in Amos it had acquired a more spiritual or moral sense (Am. 5 : 4, 6; cf. Am. 5 : 14). In the literature of the exilic period it is made clear that Yahweh can be sought, and is to be found, through prayer by those Israelites who seek to do his will, and that, when appealed to in this way, he will restore their fortunes (Dt. 4 : 29; Jer. 29 : 12-14). What Deutero-Isaiah is saying here is that the appropriate moment has arrived (cf. 49 : 8): now is the time when **he may be found**, when **he is near**: he is about to manifest his redemptive power to those who genuinely seek him.

7. Some commentators (e.g. Duhm, Westermann) regard this verse as an interpolation by a pious reader, on the grounds that it seems to set conditions for the operation of God's grace. But it is rather to be seen as a call to the exiles to prepare themselves through personal repentance for the awesome approach of the holy God. See especially on this verse and on the whole passage H.-G. Troadec, 'La parole vivante et efficace', *Bible et Vie Chrétienne* 11 (1955), pp. 57-67.

8-9. The point of the contrast between the **thoughts** and **ways** of God and of his human servants is that the inability of the

latter to imagine, from their knowledge of earthly events and circumstances, that divine salvation is at hand is entirely irrelevant to the truth of the divine message. The events of history are set in motion by Yahweh, whose **thoughts** (better, 'intentions, purposes') and modes of operation are entirely concealed from human observation. Apparent lack of external evidence is therefore no reason to doubt the truth of the prophetic message.

9. For as the heavens are higher: MT has the perfect tense and nothing corresponding to **as** (*kī-gāb'hū*). We should probably accept the reading presupposed by LXX (*kig'bhōah*), or possibly that of 1QIs^a (*k'gōbah*, 'according to the height of . . .').

10-11. The reliability of the prophetic **word** is further demonstrated by a comparison with another of God's gifts, of the **rain** and **snow**. Neither the idea of the fertilizing activity of the rain as sent by God, nor that of his sending his creative word on the earth (cf. Gen. 1) was new; but it was the achievement of Deutero-Isaiah to link the two and so to make the most profound statement about God's word to be found in the OT (cf. also 40 : 8). What God has spoken cannot fail to achieve its purpose.

10. but water the earth: probably better, 'without watering the earth'. Similarly in verse 11 it seems to be implied that Yahweh's **word** *does* return to him, but it does not return *empty*: that is, it achieves its purpose first, and then returns to him who has spoken it. So also in Job 36 : 26-29 it would seem that the rain returns to heaven. This idea seems to have been dimly perceived by the ancient Israelites, even though the mechanism of evaporation was probably unknown to them.

11. goes forth (*yēšē*): some commentators prefer to point this word as the perfect *yāšā*, 'has gone forth'.

12-13. The prophecy ends as it begins (40 : 3-5) with a promise of the return of the exiles to their own land.

12. That nature rejoices at the presence of Yahweh is part of the tradition preserved in the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 96 : 12-13; 98 : 8). See on 44 : 23. Nature is now to join in rejoicing at the triumphant revelation of Yahweh's glory (cf. 40 : 5) as he leads his people home.

13. In this final verse, with which we may compare 41 : 19, the theme of nature's rejoicing is carried still further. Here we have a transformation of nature which reverses the curse upon nature pronounced in Gen. 3 : 18: Israel's return home will be

'Paradise Regained'. **cypress** and **myrtle** are among the trees listed in 41 : 19. The precise identity of the **thorn** (*nā'asūs*, which occurs elsewhere only in Isa. 7 : 19) and the **brier** (*sirpad*, which occurs only here) is uncertain, though the context gives a general indication of their nature. In the final lines the promise is backed by a further assurance: the miraculous fertility of the desert region through which the exiles are to travel will not be a merely temporary phenomenon: the region will be preserved in that state for ever as a kind of 'national park', as a reminder (**memorial**: *šēm*, literally, 'name'; **everlasting sign**: *'ōt 'ōlām*) not only to Israel but also to Yahweh himself, of the promise which he has made. The idea is similar to that of the establishment of the rainbow in Gen. 9 : 8-17 (P), where some of the same terminology is used: there **sign** (*'ōt*) and 'everlasting covenant' (*berit 'ōlām*, verse 16), correspond to Deutero-Isaiah's *'ōt 'ōlām*, and the phrase **shall not be cut off** (*lō' yikkārēt*), which in Deutero-Isaiah refers to the permanence of the sign, is used in Gen. 9 : 11 of the recipients of the promise. The prophecy ends on a note of firm confidence which epitomizes Deutero-Isaiah's whole message.