

CONSOLATION OR CONFRONTATION? ISAIAH 40-55 AND THE DELAY OF THE NEW EXODUS

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I. Introduction

For most of this century Isaianic scholarship has largely concerned itself with form-critical analyses of either 'first', 'second' or 'third' Isaiah. In the last decade or so, however, and while not necessarily repudiating the fruits of earlier scholarship, there has been an increasing interest in the compilational motives that gave rise to the present form of the book as a whole.¹ This paper proceeds from an attempt to synthesize the findings of both of these endeavours.

While chapters 1-39 pronounce judgement upon the nation they are not without a future hope for a purified remnant. However, although the opening verses of 40:1ff imply the imminent fulfilment of this hope, chapters 56-66 make it clear that the reality of the return left much to be desired. How is this to be explained? I would suggest that this 'contradiction' is to be understood in terms of the content and distribution of the forms of speech used throughout chapters 40-55. On this basis chapters 40-48 explain how servant Jacob-Israel's² persistent 'blindness and deafness' led her to reject Yahweh's announcement of deliverance, primarily because of his choice of Cyrus. Chapters 49-55 then describe how Yahweh's New Exodus plan, although postponed as suggested by the speech forms, will be realized through the agency of a new, faithful and suffering servant 'Israel' who will deliver Jacob-Israel and execute Yahweh's plan for the nations. Chapters 56-66 then

¹See the surveys in J. Vermeylen, 'L'unité du livre d'Isaïe' in J. Vermeylen, *The Book of Isaiah* BETL 81 (Leuven: University, 1989) 11-53, and M. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-4 and the Post-Exilic Understanding of the Isaianic Tradition* BZAW 171 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1988).

²Jacob-Israel is the term of address throughout 40-48; e.g. 40:27; 43:1, 22; etc, cf. H. G. M. Williamson, 'The Concept of Israel in Transition' in ed. R. E. Clements *The World of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: University, 1989) 145.

suggest a post-exilic setting where disappointment with the return is beginning to be felt but where nevertheless Yahweh's promises concerning Jerusalem-Zion are re-iterated.

II. Consolation in Isaiah 40–55

Although there has been some debate over the exact nature and form of the compositional unity of chapters 40–55,³ recent commentators have recognized their thematic congruence.⁴ The most universally recognized characteristic of these chapters is the great quantity of salvation words. The contrast to the preceding chapters is such that, 'When one turns from the thirty-ninth to the fortieth chapter it is as though he steps out of the darkness of judgement into the light of salvation.'⁵

a) The Consolation: Announcement of the New Exodus

Exodus typology, of some significance in chapters 1–39, is central to this salvation theme.⁶ Although other canonical writ-

³Sweeney, *Isaiah*, 88, summarizes the arguments for including chapter 55 with 56–66 although he acknowledges that it was first written as a conclusion to 40–54. At most he establishes that 55 serves as a bridge to 56–66. There are however literary-thematic structures that are best understood on the basis of the division 55/56: the structural role of the disputations within 40–55 (see below) and the otherwise neat chiasmic pattern in 56–66 as noted by several commentators: E. Charpentier, *Jeunesse du Vieux Testament* (Paris: Fayard, 1963) 79–80; N. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 308; G. J. Polan, *In the Ways of Justice Toward Salvation* AUS 13 (Series VII) (New York, et al: Peter Lang, 1986), 14–5. E. Hessler, *Gott der Schöpfer. Ein Beitrag zur Komposition und Theologie Deuteronesajas* Diss. Greifswald, 1961, 98, 102, 253ff, sees 40:1–11 and 55:1–13, as prologue and epilogue reflecting the structure of 40–55.

⁴R. F. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55* BZAW 141 (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1976) and C. Westermann, 'Sprache und Struktur der Prophetie Deuteronesajas', in *Forschung am A.T.* ThB 24 (Munich: Kaiser, 1964) 92–170; *Isaiah 40–66* OTL (London: SCM, 1969). P.-E. Bonnard, *Le Second Isaïe, son disciple et leurs éditeurs* SB. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972), R. Lack, *La Symbolique du Livre d'Isaïe* AB 59 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1973) and H. C. Spykerboer, *The Structure and Composition of Deutero-Isaiah* Diss. Univ. of Groningen, 1976, argue for a careful structure while A. Schoors, *I am God Your Saviour*, SuppVT 24 (Leiden: Brill, 1973) 296ff, and K. Elliger, *Deuteronesaja* 40:1–45:7 BKAT XI, 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978) who deny an overall structure, nevertheless recognize a coherence to the prophet's thought.

⁵E. J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* III NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965–72) 17.

⁶To which it is linked by the motif of promise and fulfilment, R. Clements, 'The Unity of the Book of Isaiah', *Interp* 36 (1982) 121ff; 125; Childs, *Introduction*, 328. On the exodus motif, especially B. W. Anderson, 'Exodus Typology in

ings appeal to the Exodus tradition,⁷ here it is elevated to its most prominent status as a hermeneutic, shaping the heart of 40-55 and even replacing the first Exodus as *the* saving event.⁸

Allusions to the Exodus cover the whole gamut of the event, and their appearance in the prologue, the end of the first section (48:20ff) and the epilogue (55:12f) stress its significance. The catalytic event is the call to prepare a *דָּרֶךְ* (or *מַסְלָה*) for the coming of Yahweh (40:3), and its centrality in the prologue (vv. 3, 5, 9, 10, 11) indicates that the emphasis of the New Exodus lies on the return of Yahweh's actual presence. Thus 40:9, in response to 35:4 (the most important New Exodus chapter in 1-39), announces: behold your God (e.g. 52:6 etc).⁹

Yahweh's advent 'in strength' inaugurates the deliverance of his people from bondage among the nations (40:10ff;

Second Isaiah' in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage* ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper and Bros., 1962) 177-195 and C. Stuhlmüller, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah* AnBib 43. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970) 59-98. See also the latter's excellent table summarizing numerous commentators' opinions on exodus materials (which for some reason surveys only half the scholars for 48:20f), 272.

⁷Hos. 2:16-17 (MT); 11:1; 12:10, 14 (MT); 13:4-5; Am. 2:9f; 3:1f; 9:7; Mic. 6:4; Jer. 2:6f; 7:22, 25; 11:4, 7; 16:14f (=23:7f); 31:32; 32:20ff; 34:13f; Ezek. 20:5-10; cited in Anderson, 'Typology', 181.

⁸H. E. von Waldow, 'The Message of Deutero-Isaiah,' *Interp* 22 (1968) 276. For S. Herrmann, *Die prophetischen Heilserwartungen im A.T.* (Stuttgart: 1965) 297ff, however, the exodus tradition has 'nur noch eine relative Bedeutung' and functions instead as reminiscence. Spykerboer, *Structure*, 185-190, seeing 49:20f; 52:11f and 55:12f as later additions, denies that the new exodus provides a major theme. From the perspective of this paper they are to be included. K. Kiesow, *Exodustexte im Jesajabuch: Literarkritische und motivegeschichtliche Analysen* (Göttingen: Univ./Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), denies any consistent perspective to the use of exodus imagery, but fails to recognize that the Warrior and journey-to-shrine motifs are integral to the earliest accounts (cf. Ex 15, Ps. 78), while H. Simian-Yoline's argument, 'Exodo en Deuteroisaias,' *Bib* 61 (1980) 530-53, that e.g. 48:20-1 and 51:9-11 derive from Psalm 78 does not give due weight to the exodus traditions behind the Psalm. H. M. Barstad, *A Way in the Wilderness* JSSM 12 (Manchester: University, 1989) denies that the physical return of the exiles from Babylon was conceived of as a new Exodus. He argues both that 'exodus' language is much less common than usually supposed, and that although borrowed from the Exodus tradition, it is purely metaphorical.

⁹Westermann, *Isaiah*; J. D. Smart, *History and Theology in Second Isaiah. A Commentary on Isaiah 35; 40-66* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965) 22; J. P. Fokkelman, 'Stylistic analysis of Isaiah 40:1-11,' *OTS* 21 (1981) 75f; J. D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66* WBC Vol. 24, 25 (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987), 80f; as King, von Rad, *Theology* II, 243.

51:9ff; 52:10ff). As he had dried up the sea of old (51:9ff) so Yahweh will accompany them through the waters and the fire (43:1–3(-7)), leading the glorious procession (40:10f; 42:16; 49:10; 52:12), and being both front and rear guard in the cloud and in the fire (52:12, cf. Ex. 13:21f; 14:19f). Yahweh will again shepherd his people (40:11; cf. Ex. 15:13; Pss. 77:21; 78:52f),¹⁰ providing food and water (49:9f; cf. 48:21) in a miraculous transformation of the wilderness (43:19f; 49:9ff and Ex. 17:2–7; Num. 20:8).¹¹ As of old the New Exodus will also be accompanied by a revelation of Yahweh's glory (40:5; cf. 52:10).¹²

The goal of the New Exodus is the enthronement of Yahweh in a restored Jerusalem-Zion.¹³ The word of comfort in 40:1ff culminates in a messenger announcing to Jerusalem the good news (40:9f) of her redemption and rebuilding (44:26; 45:13; 54:11f).¹⁴ Yahweh will pour his spirit upon Jacob's offspring (44:3–5) and they will glory in the Lord (45:24f) being taught by him (54:13) and declaring his ownership of them (44:5).

The prophet thus presents a vision of 'Yahweh, (who) after smashing the powers of chaos and making a way through the wilderness, gently leads his flock home to Zion'.¹⁵ This New Exodus is 'guaranteed by YHWH's creative power and

¹⁰Given that 'shepherd' was another name for 'king' in the ancient near-east, this passage should probably be included with those that speak of Yahweh as king; Stuhlmüller, *Creation*, 81. On Yahweh as king, T. N. D. Mettinger, 'In Search of the Hidden Structure: YHWH as King in Isaiah 40–55,' *SEA* 51-2 (1986-7) 148–57.

¹¹Anderson, 'Typology', is probably incorrect in citing 41:17–20 in that this refers to the new-creational restoration of the desolate land.

¹²Stuhlmüller, *Creative*, 81ff, 94ff, perhaps here under the influence of Sinai traditions (Ex. 16:7; cf. Is. 49:26; Ex. 9:16; 14:16ff, Anderson, 'Typology', 183. Elliger, *Deuterjesaja*, 20ff, details this concern with *לְבָרֶךְ* and its relevance to the nations. Eichrodt, *Theology* II, 13, sees here the influence of Is. 6:3.

¹³Just as the deliverance of Israel reaches its climax at Sinai (Ex. 3:12, cf. J. I. Durham, *Exodus* WBC Vol.3 (Waco, Texas: Word, 1987), xxiff), so too here, when Sinai has been subsumed in mount Zion, the new exodus reaches its culmination in the arrival of Yahweh in Jerusalem. 'The prophet thinks of this salvation as a new enthronement of Yahweh at Zion', (52:7; 41:21; 43:15; 44:6; 52:7; cf. Ex. 15:18) Schoors, *Saviour*, 243; cf. Ezek 20:33 where Yahweh will reign as King in the new Exodus. Also Spykerboer, *Structure*, 183, R. Rendtorff, 'Zur Komposition des Buches Jesaja', *VT* 34 (1984) 306f, and W. J. Dumbrell, 'The Purpose of the Book of Isaiah,' *Tyn B* 36 (1985) 111–128.

¹⁴R. Clements 'Beyond Tradition-History: Deutero-Isaianic Development of First Isaiah's Themes', *JSOT* 31 (1985), 108.

¹⁵T. J. M. Roberts, 'Isaiah in Old Testament Theology,' *Int* 36 (1982), 140.

decisive word which can overcome all obstacles to the performance of his will, making wonders in the desert, overthrowing rulers, raising up Cyrus as his instrument, frustrating all the devices of mankind and coming to the aid of his helpless people'.¹⁶ Given that these words are addressed to a disheartened and weary people sunk in despair (51:17-23; 54:11; 40:27; 49:14; 51:17-23; 54:11), it can be seen why there is some justification for calling chapters 40-55 the Book of Consolation. This however is not the whole story.

III. Confrontation: Polemical Forms in 40-55

J. W. Miller has noted the polemical language which betrays an increasing opposition between the prophet and his audience.¹⁷ At the outset, Jacob-Israel's discouragement, 'Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, 'My way is hid from the Lord, and my right is disregarded by my God'?' (40:27), reveals a potentially cynical mentality. Then in 42:18ff Yahweh's own frustration emerges: 'Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send?'. Later, in a surprising outburst given the general perception of these chapters, 45:9ff declares, 'Woe to him who strives with his Maker, ... Woe to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?'. Even more is to come however: 'Remember this and consider, ... you rebels (RSV: transgressors) ... Harken to me, you stubborn of heart, you who are far from deliverance' (46:8, 12), an astonishing assertion in view of 40:1ff! Finally 48:1 declares, 'Hear this O house of Jacob called by the name of Israel, and who came forth from the loins of Judah, who swear by the name of the Lord, and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right'. Jacob-Israel is declared to be Israel in name only in a statement which seems tantamount to divesting Jacob-Israel of her servant office.¹⁸

¹⁶B. Lindars, 'Good Tidings to Zion: Interpreting Deutero-Isaiah Today,' *BJRL* 68 (1986) 479.

¹⁷'Prophetic Conflict in Second Isaiah' in *Wort-Gebot-Glaube* ed. H. J. Stoebe, FS W. E. Eichrodt (Zürich: Zwingli, 1971) 77-85.

¹⁸Also A. S. Kapelrud, 'The Main Concern of Second Isaiah,' *VT* 32 (1982) 51-58.

a) Speech Forms in Chapters 40–55

Although there is some question over the definition of genres and the relative importance of form-critical units in discerning the literary and thematic structure of chapters 40–55, Schoors' analysis, which is the most thorough and perhaps representative of such an approach, helps to reveal the frequency and nature of the polemical material (anti-idol data added from other sources for completeness):¹⁹

Text	Trial Speech against: gods/nations	Jacob-Israel	Disputations, Yahweh as: Creator	Lord of history	[Anti-Idol Polemics]
Chapters 40–48²⁰					
40:12–31			*	*	vv. 18–20
41:1–5	† ²¹				
5–7(8)					*
21–29	†				
42:17					(*) ²²
18–25		*			
43:8–13	† (? cf. vv. 14ff)				
22–28		*			
44:6–8	*				
9–20					*
4–28			†	†	
45:9–13			†		
18–25	*				(vv.16–20)
46:1–2					(*)
5–11(13)				†	vv. 5–7
48:1–11				† (?)	(v. 5)
12–15(16)			†	†	
Chapters 49–55					
50:1–3		*			
55:8–13			*		

¹⁹These are generally agreed by R. J. Clifford, 'The Function of Idol Passages in Second Isaiah,' CBQ 42 (1980) 450–64; J. C. Kim, *Verhältnis Jahwes zu den anderen Göttern in Deuteronesaja* Diss. (Heidelberg, 1962); J. L. Koole, 'De beeldenstorm van deuteronesaja,' in *Loven en geloven*, opstellen aangeboden aan Prof. Dr. Nic. H. Ridderbos, (Amsterdam, 1975) (cited in Spykerboer, *Structure*, 29), W. M. W. Roth, 'For Life, He Appeals to Death (Wis. 123:18): A Study of Old Testament Idol Parodies,' CBQ 37 (1975) 21–47; Spykerboer, *Structure* and Westermann.

²⁰Melugin divides chs. 40–48 at 44:23, with 44:24 beginning a new section, *Formation*, 90.

²¹† = trials which present Cyrus as evidence of Yahweh's lordship or disputations that involve Cyrus as the deliverer of Israel. Although 48:1–11 does not mention Cyrus, it is contiguous with vv. 12–15 where Cyrus is a point at issue. Westermann, 'Sprache', 139f, also sees 44:6–8 and 45:20–25 as announcing Cyrus' rise to power.

²²Parentheses indicate those passages whose identification is less certain.

The most striking observation from Schoors' analysis is the importance of the disputation *Gattung* for the literary structure of the whole. First, disputations immediately follow the prologue's theophanic announcement of salvation (40:12–31), and appear in the conclusions of both the first section (48:1–16; cf. vv. 17–21, espec.: אֵין שְׁלוֹם אֶמֶר יְהוָה לְרָשָׁעִים) and chapters 40–55 (55:8–13). Such a prominence is shared only with the Exodus motif and suggests that the overall function of 40–55 is to be appreciated in this light.²³ Second, after the initial extended disputation, there is a general development of the polemical materials in chapters 40–48 which moves from trials against the nations (41:1–5, 21–29; 43:8–13; 44:6–8; 45:18–25), interspersed with trials involving Jacob-Israel (42:18–25; 43:22–28), toward a series of increasingly strident disputations with Jacob-Israel (44:24–8; 45:9–13; 46:5–11; 48:1–11 and 12–15(16)). A final important observation is the virtual absence of any polemical materials in chapters 49–55.²⁴ How are these phenomena to be explained?

b) Main Polemical Themes

An analysis of the scene-setting first disputation (40:12–31) outlines the critical point at issue: Jacob-Israel's failure to understand (vv. 21, 28). First, she does not 'know' that Yahweh alone is both creator (vv. 12ff, 22) and Lord of history (vv. 15ff, 23ff), and that before him, the nations, and more importantly their idols, are nothing (vv. 15ff, 23ff and 18ff, 25f). Second, Jacob-Israel's complaint that Yahweh has abandoned her אֲשַׁמֶּנֶה proceeds from ignorance of his wise but inscrutable purposes (vv. 27ff). Third, traces of anti-wisdom polemics appear in vv. 13f (cf. vv. 28c) where the prophet declares that no counsellor instructed Yahweh either in knowledge or justice.²⁵ As we shall see this opening disputation serves to introduce Jacob-Israel's three criticisms as addressed in the trials and disputations: Yahweh is unable to help her, Yahweh is

²³Cf. Spykerboer, *Structure*, 184f.

²⁴Exceptions being the concluding disputation and 50:1–3.

²⁵R. N. Whybray, *The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah xl 13–14* (Cambridge: University Press, 1971).

unwilling to help her and, Yahweh's choice of Cyrus is not acceptable.²⁶

(i) Trials Against the Nations

The first set of trial speeches (41:1–5, 21–9; 43:8–13; 44:6–8 and 45:18–25) are directed primarily not against the nations but the gods which epitomize their power and wealth. Given the fact that a nation's gods were expected to save it, Judah's defeat by Babylon apparently gave rise to doubts concerning Yahweh's authority and power which were compounded perhaps by the belief in the inviolability of Zion.²⁷ The trials therefore issue the challenge of a *Weissagungsbeweis* to establish that only Yahweh can predict the future and hence that he alone controls history. Yahweh is first and last (41:4; 44:6; cf. 44:8; 45:21). The significance of this material is to prepare the ground for Yahweh's response to Jacob-Israel's *Klage* by demonstrating that since he alone controls history, Jacob-Israel's present 'slavery' is actually a testimony of his 'lordship.'

Although the anti-idol polemics have raised a number of questions,²⁸ in their present literary context they are sometimes related to the trials concerning the nations and their gods which suggests that they too are concerned with the question of Yahweh's power and ability (41:5–7(8) after 41:1–5; 45:16–20 (?) within 45:18–25 and 46:1f (?) after 45:18–25). These polemics serve further to demonstrate Yahweh's superiority in that his redemptive exercise of his unilateral control of history will result in the idols' total dethronement.²⁹ The presence of these trials and polemics, which are surely for Jacob-Israel's benefit, at the very least arouses the suspicion that the people are judging Yahweh on the basis of idolatrous categories.³⁰

²⁶Bonnard, *Isaie*, also includes the charge of ingratitude, 44:22ff; 21ff.

²⁷For a contrary view, Y. Kaufmann, *The Babylonian Captivity and Deutero-Isaiah* History of the Religion of Israel, IV 1, 2 (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1970).

²⁸See Clifford, 'Function'; Roth, 'Life'; H. D. Preuß, *Verspottung fremder Religionen im Alten Testament* BWANT 12 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1971) and Spykerboer, *Structure* for discussion of the role of these passages.

²⁹H. D. Preuß *Deuterjesaja. Eine Einführung in seine Botschaft* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1976) 62; Clifford, 'Function', 459ff.

³⁰The intensity of these polemics and perhaps the fact that they also appear within disputations with Jacob-Israel (46:5–7 within 46:5–11(13) and possibly 48:5 within 48:1–11(?)) suggests a more serious problem: a faithless turning to

(ii) Trials Involving Jacob-Israel

Interleaved with the above, these trial speeches address Yahweh's supposed 'unwillingness' to help Jacob-Israel, i.e. the charge that he has abandoned his people.³¹

The first (42:18–25) appears to be Yahweh's response to the accusation that he is blind to Jacob-Israel's condition (cf. 40:27: *יַעֲבֹר, וְנִסְתָּרָה*).³² But in truth it is his people who are blind and deaf and who, in spite of his teaching and chastising them, have persisted in obtuseness. It is because of their 'unwillingness' that he gave them up to be plundered and hidden in prisons (42:24).

In the second (43:22–28) it becomes clear that this disposition to rebellion is long-standing. Jacob-Israel is wearied of her God (43:22). But it is Yahweh, not Jacob-Israel, who has justification to be weary, for while he has not burdened them with sacrifices, they have burdened him with their sins.³³ Even though he wipes out transgressions, such is their rebellion that they have not called upon him.

The final trial speech involving Jacob-Israel (50:1–3) is the only trial in the second half and, with the intervening disputations in view, restates that their exile was not due to Yahweh's powerlessness (once again he reminds them of the Exodus) but was willed by him on account of their iniquities and transgressions (cf. 50:1). Yahweh has neither abandoned nor failed Jacob-Israel, but he was forced to punish her because she abandoned and failed him.³⁴

idols, P. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration* (London, SCM: 1968), 124; Stuhlmüller, 'Transitions', 9; Roberts, 'Isaiah', 136; Spykerboer, *Structure*, 158 and Smart, *History*, 22f. If not specifically to idol-worship then at least to idolatrous ways of thinking, a distinction that in any case may be anachronistic.

³¹Westermann, *Isaiah*, 18; Schoors, *Saviour*, 298.

³²Westermann, *Isaiah*, 109; Schoors, *Saviour*, 207; Melugin, *Formation*, 108.

^{49:14} reflects a similar charge.

³³Cf. 40:27 where in response to Israel's accusation that he has not regarded her *עַוְוָה*, Yahweh announces that he does not grow weary.

³⁴One particularly noteworthy theme concerning Yahweh's commitment to Israel is that of the *יְהוָה* redeemer, see espec. Stuhlmüller, *Creative*, 99-123, and K. Krupp, *Das Verhältnis Jahwe-Israel im Sinne eines Ehebundes* (diss., Freiburg, 1972) who sees the role of the marriage bond as the central point of reference in 40-55.

(iii) The Disputations with Jacob-Israel

After the trials which establish both the supremacy of Yahweh over the idols and nations and his faithfulness to Jacob-Israel, attention shifts to the disputations.³⁵ These begin with challenges or affirmations concerning either Yahweh's creative power, or his dominion over history, or both.³⁶ Thus it is affirmed that Yahweh has created the world and its history (e.g. עָשָׂה: 44:24; 45:7, 12; בָּרָא: 40:26, 28; 45:12; יָצַר: 45:7, 18; יָסַד: 48:13) and in particular Jacob-Israel (עָשָׂה: 43:7; 44:2; בָּרָא: 43:1, 7; 44:2, 21; יָצַר: 45:9, 11). On the strength of this evidence, Yahweh announces his intention to use his creative power and wisdom to deliver Jacob-Israel and to restore the land in a New Exodus (51:9–10; 44:27 and 50:2).³⁷

While this is a significant point, much more is made of its corollary, which derives from the awesome grandeur of Yahweh's work: he is the master builder and hence his choice of instruments or his plan should not be questioned (44:24ff; 45:9ff; 48:12ff; cf. 46:9ff; 48:6f). Creation language establishes not only Yahweh's ability but his wisdom and therefore his right to do as he pleases,³⁸ which in this case is to use Cyrus as his agent.

³⁵The disputations presuppose 'the thesis which is defended in the trials against the nations', Schoors, *Saviour*, 298.

³⁶Schoors, *Saviour*, 294, n. 59. Yahweh's sovereignty over history is frequently linked with prediction, A. Schoors, 'Les choses antérieures et les choses nouvelles dans les oracles deutéro-isaïens,' *ETL* 40 (1964) 43. The idolatrous confusion of the creature and natural process with the creator may provide another link, cf. C. R. North, 'The Essence of Idolatry' in *Von Ugarit nach Qumran* FS O. Eissfeldt, ed. J. Hempel et al., BZAW 77 (Berlin: Alfred Töpelmann, 1958) 151–60.

³⁷Stuhlmüller, *Creative*, 82ff, 90ff (cf. Pss. 74:12–22, 89:9–13) notes the merging of creation imagery with the new Exodus. R. Rendtorff, 'Die theologische Stellung des Schöpfungs glaubens bei Deuteronesaja,' *ZTK* 51 (1954) 3–13, notes that in the oracles it is because Yahweh is the creator of Israel that he will use his power to redeem her. The exodus from Egypt is described in creation terminology, 51:9ff; cf. 44:24ff, cf. Zimmerli, 'Ich', 32ff, where the אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ascription is particularly related to the emphasis on the new exodus as a creational event. Also Anderson, 'Typology', 185; Schoors, *Saviour*, 200; Harner, 'Creation', 305.

³⁸Rendtorff, 'Stellung', 8.

IV. The Choice of Cyrus: Yahweh's Vindication and the On-going Debate over Wisdom

Yahweh's call of Cyrus, because of its intimate association with his redemption of Jacob-Israel, is an expression of Yahweh's צַדִּיק (41:1-4; 45:13). It is Yahweh who has raised up Cyrus 'from the beginning' (41:4), through whom he will bring the rulers to nothing (41:1-7; 45:1) and both destroy Babylon (45:1-3; 46:11; 48:14; cf. 43:14) and rebuild Jerusalem (44:26-28; 45:13). Although Cyrus is perhaps likened to Moses as the responsible agent in the New Exodus,³⁹ the most astonishing thing is that Yahweh calls Cyrus מְשִׁיחֹ (45:1) and shepherd⁴⁰ (44:28; cf. 2 Sam. 5:2)⁴¹ and, while it is doubtful that מְשִׁיחֹ is to be read in the later sense of *the* Messiah,⁴² Yahweh is clearly affirming him.

It is also clear, however, that Cyrus becomes the centre of Jacob-Israel's argument with Yahweh, for it is Yahweh's choice of Cyrus which constitutes the consistent climax to which the later disputations build.⁴³ Thus in 44:24-8 after declaring himself the creator of all, the Confounder of the Wise and the one who commands Jerusalem to be built, Yahweh concludes, 'It is I who says of Cyrus, 'My Shepherd' and he will perform all my desire' (v. 28). In 45:9-13 Yahweh announces woe to those who dare to question their Maker, pointing out that he is the creator of all things and finishes by declaring that 'I have aroused him in righteousness' (v. 13). In 46:5-11(13) Yahweh begins by mocking the idea that he can be regarded as an idol, reminding the rebels that he alone knows the

³⁹G. S. Ogden, 'Moses and Cyrus. Literary Affinities between the Priestly Presentation of Moses in Exodus vi-viii and the Cyrus Song of Isaiah xlv 24-xlv 13,' *VT* 28 (1978) 195-203. There are also the similarities with Abraham in ch. 41, cf. Gen. 14, and e.g. G. H. Jones, 'Abraham and Cyrus: type and anti-type?', *VT* 22 (1972) 304-19.

⁴⁰Perhaps, following the first Isaiah scroll at Qumran and the LXX, 'my friend'. It is noteworthy that these titles are not used of the Davidic prince in chapters 1-39.

⁴¹Also Jer. 3:15; 23:1-5. Ezek. 34:23 has a salvific even messianic sense, Schoors, *Saviour*, 269f.

⁴²Pace e.g. J. Begrich, *Studien zu Deuteronesaja* TB 20 (München: Kaiser, 1969, rpt), 128ff.

⁴³Schoors, *Saviour*, 295; von Waldow, 'Message', 279; Spykerboer, *Structure*, 131, 137f, 149, 157f, 161. Melugin, *Formation*, 125, notes that two disputations, 44:24-28 and 45:9-13, bracket the Cyrus oracle.

end from the beginning. He finishes by declaring that he will accomplish his purpose 'calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of my purpose ..' (v. 11). Finally in 48:14, at the end of these two juxtaposed disputations which combine elements of the strongest invective from the previous disputations, Yahweh reaffirms that he 'loves him, he shall carry out his good pleasure on Babylon'.⁴⁴ The fact that Cyrus has already figured prominently in the trials against the nations only confirms his importance.⁴⁵ Although it might be objected that Cyrus is only mentioned by name twice, his activities are easily discerned, and in any case this apparent liability becomes an asset when it is noted that no one else from the period is mentioned even once.

The question is, why this collision between Yahweh and Jacob-Israel over Cyrus? I suggest that when the book is read as a whole, chapters 7–11 and 32, and the New Exodus themes tend to foster the expectation of a glorious Davidic figure perhaps combined with some sort of new Moses. Further, both of these ideal figures improve dramatically on their prototypes, making Israel's future hopes a demanding role to fill. If this is indicative of the case then one could well envisage that Jacob-Israel, disappointed, indignant and perhaps even outraged that a pagan was to be their liberator, flatly rejected Cyrus⁴⁶ – Kapelrud has suggested that כל הַתְּחָרִים בּוֹ (45:24b) refers to those Israelites who were incensed by Yahweh's choice.⁴⁷ If so, then in the face of his credentials, to reject Cyrus is to reject Yahweh.

This appears to be borne out by the emphasis on the fact that it is Yahweh himself who is behind Cyrus' rise to power: 'It is I who says of Cyrus ...' (44:28); 'I have aroused him ...'

⁴⁴It is difficult to imagine who else 46:11 and 48:14 could refer to when 'the action of the release of the peoples held in exile by the Babylonians is *par excellence* the work of Cyrus', R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66* NCB (London: Oliphants, 1975) 76.

⁴⁵Westermann, 'Sprache', 139, sees all of the trials against the nations materials as dealing with Cyrus, the oracle concerning whom constitutes 'the pivot on which all that is said in the book turns', *Isaiah*, 10.

⁴⁶Cf. Schoors, *Saviour*, 263, 266 and the scholars noted there; J. Muilenburg, 'The Book of Isaiah', *IB* 5 (New York/Nashville: Abingdon, 1956) 526; Westermann, *Isaiah*, 154ff, 165ff; Melugin, *Formation*, 125; Watts, *Isaiah*, II, 156ff.

⁴⁷'Main', 57.

(45:13) and 'the man of my purpose ..' (46:11). In the disputations attention is drawn time and again to the fact that this is Yahweh's doing (e.g. 44:26ff; 45:11-13; 46:10f; 48:5-16). R. O'Connell has argued that the oft-recognized lack of a 'vindication' section in the law-suit of chapter one is an intentional departure from the *rib*-pattern designed to heighten an expectation for this 'missing' element that is finally provided in chapters 40-55.⁴⁸ Whether or not such is the case O'Connell has drawn attention to the fact that one of the functions of chapters 40-55 is to vindicate Yahweh in that his purposes for Jerusalem as expressed in 2:1-5 still stand, being established through Cyrus (44:28; 45:13; 46:13).

The second and perhaps more serious matter underlying the references to Cyrus is a refusal to accept Yahweh's wisdom or plan (it may be that Cyrus functions primarily as the catalyst in bringing this conflict into the open). First, this is suggested by the scattered anti-wisdom polemics which also become focussed on Yahweh's action through Cyrus. In the prologue the immutability of Yahweh's word is established (40:7, cf. 45:23) and this is immediately followed in the first disputation by a challenge to those who think they are more knowledgeable than Yahweh (40:12ff), though his understanding is in fact inscrutable (v. 28).⁴⁹ In 44:25ff the creative word of Yahweh, which causes the wise to draw back and turns their knowledge into foolishness, is epitomized in his word concerning Cyrus.⁵⁰ Directly following the Cyrus oracle, Yahweh pronounces woe upon those who dare to criticize his skill and wisdom (45:9ff), concluding with an affirmation of Cyrus as Yahweh's agent. The final disputations of the first half, which, as we have seen, confirm both Yahweh's choice of Cyrus and his instigation of Cyrus' success, are followed by Yahweh's self-designation as the one 'who teaches you', who 'leads you in

⁴⁸*Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah* (unpublished Ph.D., Dallas Theol. Sem., 1989).

⁴⁹Melugin, *Formation*, 31ff, discusses the disputations in terms of Wisdom genre.

⁵⁰S. Terrien, 'Quelques remarques sur les affinités de Job avec le Deutéro-Ésaïe,' *Volume du Congrès, Genève 1965 SVT 15* (Leiden: Brill, 1966) 295-310, who argues that it was the wisdom poem *Job* that 'introduced the motif of creation into the very heart of the existential struggle. Deutero-Isaiah took this theme and applied it to his interpretation of Israel's mission in history' (310).

the way',⁵¹ coupled with a lament over Jacob-Israel's disobedience (48:17ff). Similarly the epilogue warns Jacob-Israel to 'Seek the Lord while he may be found ... for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways' (55:6–9ff).

Second, the anti-idol materials also reflect this debate. The idols are no counsellors (עֲצָתָם לֹא, 41:28f) and those who trust in them are deceived (44:18–20). 45:9–17 exemplifies the conjunction of the inscrutable wisdom of Yahweh (vv. 9f), expressed in the astounding election of a pagan as Jacob-Israel's deliverer (vv. 12f), and the futility of trusting in idols (vv. 16ff, cf. the nations' vain response to Cyrus in 41:5ff). The mockery of great Babylon's helpless idols (46:1–2, 5–7) concludes with a rebuke to stubborn Israel (46:8–11, 12ff) before launching into a taunt directed primarily against Babylon's wise ones (47:9–15). Indeed in 48:3–8 it is because of Jacob-Israel's idolatrous bent that Yahweh has acted in this unexpected way (v. 7). Up to this point, then, it appears that the anti-wisdom polemics, the anti-idol polemics and the disputations become progressively centred on defending the wisdom of Yahweh's choice of Cyrus.

The reason for this 'wisdom' debate, as a further examination of the confrontational materials will reveal, is that Jacob-Israel is still bound by the idolatrous categories of wisdom which led to the exile in the first place. First, however, it is necessary to examine some of the language associated with the judgement of Jacob-Israel's idolatrous wisdom in chapters 1–39.

V. Blindness and Deafness

a) Judgement on Idolatrous Wisdom in Chapters 1–39

What gives added significance to the blindness and deafness language of chapters 40–55 is that in chapters 1–39 it is directly related to Judah's idolatrous stance. R. E. Clements' comment on passages that he sees as later glosses (e.g. 2:18–19, 20–21; 6:12–3 and 17:7–9) is that the 'most striking feature ... is their emphasis ... upon ... faithlessness and idolatry' and particularly 'upon

⁵¹Here with wisdom connotations, cf. Bergmann, Haldar-Ringgrenn, Kock, art. 'נָדָה', *TDOT*, III, 270–93.

the worship of images and the resort to illicit forms of cultus', which is understood to have occasioned Jerusalem's destruction.⁵² Hence although it is true that one of the central lines of Yahweh's indictment of Judah is her injustice, idolatry (which arguably leads to injustice) appears to be the major concern.⁵³

In view of the pre-eminence of idolatry, it is not insignificant that Judah's punishment is a matter of being made blind and deaf. Psalms 115:4-8 and 135:15-8 reflect a tradition that associates the onset of these conditions with the practice of idolatry: those who trust in idols will become like them, they have ears but they cannot hear, eyes but cannot see.⁵⁴ In view of the explanation of the metaphor in Isaiah 44:17ff,⁵⁵ and given also that the nation's salvation will include both her rejection of idols (2:20; 30:22; 31:7) and restoration of sight, hearing and understanding (see below), it appears that the language of blinding and deafening is an ironic judgement upon the sin of idolatry.⁵⁶

This judicial blinding, deafening, and hardening of heart is closely connected with the on-going polemic against the 'wise' ones in which wisdom terminology plays a major role.⁵⁷ These 'wise' ones refuse to accept instruction or teaching

⁵²The Prophecies of Isaiah and the Fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C., VT 30 (1980) 425-8.

⁵³On idolatry: 1:29f; 2:6, 8, cf. 18, 20; 10:10f; cf. 17:8; 27:9b; 30:22; 31:7; and witchcraft: 3:3b; 8:19; 17:8, 10; cf. 2:6.

⁵⁴I am indebted to Dr. G. Beale for this observation (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary lectures 'OT in the NT', Fall 1985).

⁵⁵Cf. Botterweck TWAT III, Spl. 487, 491f.

⁵⁶G. Beale, 'Isaiah vi 9-13: A Retributive Taunt Against Idolatry', forthcoming in VT.

⁵⁷On wisdom in chapters 1-39: J. Fichtner, 'Jesaja unter den Weisen,' TL 74 (1949) 75-80; ET: 'Isaiah Among the Wise' in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom* ed. J. L. Crenshaw (New York: KTAV, 1976) 429-38; J. Lindblom, 'Wisdom in the Old Testament Prophets' in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East* PS H. H. Rowley, SVT3 (1955) 192-204; Martin-Achard, R., 'Sagesse de dieu et sagesse humaine chez ésaïe' in *Hommage a Wilhelm Vischer* (Montpellier: Causse Graille Castelnau, 1960) 137-44; O. Blanchette, 'The Wisdom of God in Isaia,' AER 145 (1961) 413-23; W. McKane, *Prophets and Wise Men* SBT 1/44 (London: SCM, 1965) *passim*; Wildberger, *Jesaja* I, 188f; and especially both J. W. Whedbee, *Isaiah and Wisdom* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), and J. Jensen, *The Use of tôrâ by Isaiah* CBC Mono. 3 (Arlington, Va.: Information Products and Services Corp., 1973).

(חִזְקָה 1:10; 5:24b; 30:9),⁵⁸ scoff at the prophet's warnings (28:9–14; cf. 5:19) and reject Yahweh's word (30:9–12). Preferring to trust their own עֲצָה (29:15; 30:1) they rely on the nations and their idols.⁵⁹ But, Yahweh's plan (עֲצָה 5:19; 19:17; 25:1; cf. יַעַץ: 14:24, 26f; 19:12; 23:9) will come to pass (e.g. 10:12–19; 19:3–11) and the leaders' rejection of this truth brings their doom upon them (7:12–20; 10:5ff; 14:24ff; 30:1ff; 31:1ff):⁶⁰ they are condemned to be incompetent, i.e. blind and deaf etc. (29:9–21 cf. 28:9–14) and hence to pursue policies that will result in the devastation of the land and exile (1:3; 5:13a; ch.'s 7–8; 29:15ff; 30:1–5, 12–17; 31:1–3).

Nowhere is this judicial blinding clearer than in the account of Isaiah's commissioning in chapter 6 where he is both to tell this people (vv. 9f): 'Listen but do not perceive, look but do not understand' and to 'make the heart of this people fat, their ears heavy and their eyes dim, lest they see with their eyes, hear with their ears',⁶¹ and its apparent fulfilment in 29:9f: 'Be delayed and wait, blind yourselves and be blind ... for the Lord has poured over you a spirit of deep sleep. He has shut your eyes, the prophets; and he has covered your heads, the seers'.

J. Jensen makes two particularly pertinent observations.⁶² First, he notes that rebel terminology (סֹדְרִים) is used in 30:1 to describe those who reject Yahweh's עֲצָה. Second, he observes that 'the idea emerges even more strongly in 29:15f., where the leaders of Judah are accused of attempting to

⁵⁸Jensen, *Use*, 135, sees חִזְקָה as referring generally to the wisdom of Yahweh (cf. parallel with חִזְקָה יְהוָה (2:3) and חִזְקָה יְהוָה (2:5)).

⁵⁹2:22; 7:9–13; 28:15; 30:1–5 (6f); 31:1–3; O. Kaiser, 'Die Verkündigung des Propheten Jesaja im Jahre 701,' ZAW 81 (1969) 304–15, sees consultation with foreign powers and their deities as a refuge of falsehoods, cf. 28:14–18.

⁶⁰On the nature and limits of the concept of Yahweh's plan see B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods* CB 1 (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1967) 68–89 (90–97) particularly in view of J. Fichtner, 'Jahves Plan in der Botschaft des Jesaja,' ZAW 63 (1951) 16–33. Albrektson however does not really do justice to some aspects of Isaiah's view of history.

⁶¹L. J. Liebreich, 'The Position of Chapter Six in the Book of Isaiah,' HUCA 25 (1954) 37–40, sees this implemented in the account of Ahaz' blind self reliance in response to the word of Yahweh and his consequent judgement which follows immediately after Isaiah's mission narrative. cf. J. Schreiner, 'Das Buch jesajanischer Schule' in *Wort und Botschaft* ed. J. Schreiner (Würzburg: Echter, 1967) 148 and Jensen, *Use*, 57.

⁶²*Use*, 57.

renounce their status as *creatures* when they initiate 'ṣṣā and ma'āšīm on their own' (my emphasis) and that 'such passages suggest that Isaiah connects this terminology with a conception of Yahweh's lordship of the world and of history' (p.55).

The conjunction of idolatry, judicial blindness and deafness, and the anti-wisdom polemics against Judah's leaders suggests that the issue in chapters 1–39 is the leaders' reliance on a counsel that is constructed on idolatrous categories as opposed to the prophet's revelation of the wisdom of Yahweh. This rejection of creator Yahweh's wisdom by his arrogant creatures is precisely the same concern that we have seen developed in chapters 40–55.

b) Blindness and Deafness in Chapters 40–55

Turning to 40:27, Jacob-Israel is criticized for her spiritual obtuseness, and, similarly in 42:18–20, it is her failure to believe the prophetic word that hinders her recognition of Yahweh's activity. What is striking about the latter passage is the emphatic attribution of blindness (four times) and deafness (three times) to עִקְרָה Jacob-Israel in a noteworthy concentration of terminology which, as we have seen, was characteristic of idolatrous Judah under judgement.⁶³ Descriptions of Israel as blind and/or deaf occur in 43:8; 48:8, 18–20 (cf. 42:7) and often in conjunction with the motif of understanding (42:16, 18–25; and 48:8).⁶⁴ Furthermore, in the extended anti-idol polemic of 44:9–19(20), idolaters are described as those who *לֹא יָדְעוּ וְלֹא יִבְיִנוּ* for Yahweh עֵינֵיהֶם, a phrase that is remarkably similar to 29:10 (cf. 6:9f).⁶⁵ Considering the vigour of the anti-idol polemic, the appearance of related failure-to-understand terminology applied to Jacob-Israel in close proximity to idol materials is highly suggestive (48:8 and vv. 5–6; 46:5–7 and vv. 8f, 12; cf. 40:18–20 and v. 21; 40:25 and v. 28; 46:5–7 cf. vv. 8, 12f; 40:21 cf. vv. 18–20 and perhaps 42:7, cf. v. 8 and vv. 16–25). Further, in view of the use of this

⁶³Seen by Clements, 'Unity,' 125, as conscious allusions to the prophetic commission in 6:9f.

⁶⁴Watts, *Isaiah*, I, liii, also notes the prominence of the terms 'know, understand, hear, see, and turn' throughout 40-55.

⁶⁵For a discussion of this wisdom terminology in 1:2f and 6:9f see Jensen, *Use*.

terminology in chapters 1–39, the use of woe language in 45:9,⁶⁶ of the epithets of ‘rebels’ (46:8; cf. 48:8, ‘I knew that you would deal very treacherously’) and of ‘you who are far from deliverance’ (46:12)⁶⁷ and finally of adjectives such as ‘obstinate’ (48:4, cf. ‘your neck is an iron sinew and your forehead bronze’), ‘idolatrous’ (48:5ff) and ‘deaf, without understanding’ (48:8), together suggest that the problem is much worse than mere discouragement.⁶⁸

The root issue is the conflict between the prophet’s revelation of Yahweh’s plan and the conventional, idolatrous wisdom epitomized in Babylon. As Y. Gitay has shown, the climactic disputation of chapter 48 centres around the prophet’s assertion that it is the people’s idolatrous attitudes, their predilection to ascribe Yahweh’s deeds to the action of idols, that has necessitated the unexpected character of Yahweh’s act.⁶⁹ Nothing has changed. The old sins persist. They are Israel in name and lineage only, no longer worthy of being true Israel.⁷⁰ The first half concludes a few verses later with the terse statement that there is no peace for the wicked (48:22).

To summarize, the trials against the nations and Jacob-Israel challenge Jacob-Israel’s assertions that Yahweh is unable and/or unwilling to help. It is Jacob-Israel, not Yahweh, who has been unfaithful. What is more, in rejecting Yahweh’s ‘plan’, and in particular, his role for Cyrus, the people show themselves to be obdurate and rebellious still, preferring to operate with the same idolatrous categories of wisdom that led to their exile in the first place. Hence the presentation of Yahweh as the incomparable creator and lord of history is increasingly directed toward defending the wisdom of his choice

⁶⁶This in response to Israel’s rejection of Yahweh’s announcement of his creation of righteousness and salvation via Cyrus.

⁶⁷הַרְחִיקִים מִתְּדַכָּה, rendering as ‘from deliverance’ (cf. RSV), Kapelrud, ‘Main’, 53f; Westermann, *Isaiah*; Whybray, *Isaiah*.

⁶⁸Pace Westermann, *Isaiah*, 18, for whom the disputations function merely to shake the exiles out of their depression(!). Given the strength of the medicine one wonders if the cure is not considerably worse than the disease.

⁶⁹*Prophecy and Persuasion: A Study of Isaiah 40–48* FThL 14 (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1981), 216ff.

⁷⁰Miller, ‘Prophetic’, 79f; cf. Spykerboer, *Structure*, 158, 161. Westermann’s observation, *Isaiah*, 18, of the disputations that ‘all of them are finally words of salvation’ tends to miss this increasing rupture between the prophet and his audience over their lack of faith.

of Cyrus. Consequently, I would suggest that it is not accurate to describe Jacob-Israel's condition *simpliciter* as one of discouragement. Instead the increasingly hostile tone reflects a growing awareness on the part of the prophet that the exile has not really changed anything. Jacob-Israel is still as blind and as deaf as ever, still committed to an idolatrous world-view that rejects Yahweh's wisdom.⁷¹ The question however remains as to how Yahweh is to achieve his purposes for a restored Jerusalem-Zion to which the nations will come.

VI. Chapters 49–55: Postponement of the New Exodus and a 'new' Cyrus?

These chapters exhibit a remarkably consistent contrast in both tone and theme. Largely absent are the extended disputations (there is, however, a brief one in the epilogue),⁷² trials (except 50:1–3) and the strident criticisms of Jacob-Israel's blindness and deafness. In fact Jacob-Israel terminology disappears as do Cyrus and the anti-idol polemics. Instead we find the enigmatic 'servant' figure in centre-stage set in a context now almost entirely comprised of salvation words (still using New Exodus imagery) which suggests that the two are linked. Finally, although there is some overlapping of themes and emphases (e.g. the servant terminology in 42:1ff, and salvation words occur throughout), there is nevertheless a striking difference in that whereas chapters 40–48 declare Cyrus' exaltation and the humiliation of daughter Babylon with Jacob-Israel in view, chapters 49–55 deal with the servant's humiliation and vindication/exaltation and the deliverance of daughter Jerusalem-Zion.⁷³

⁷¹For this reason, I disagree with Westermann on 40:6b-8. They are not a reflection of Israel's lament but instead part of the speaker's message. Vv. 3c-4 describe the removal of obstacles, which Westermann sees as a major theme, and vv. 6b-8 focus the issue in their portrayal of the futility of men's activities in the face of God's spirit and word. It is not the speaker's objection that is dealt with here but the fundamental problem underlying Jacob-Israel's despair: an over-estimation of the capabilities, of the wisdom, of men.

⁷²Melugin, *Formation*, 80, quotes Westermann as classifying 49:14-26 as a disputation, but in his commentary W. appears ultimately to regard it as a proclamation of salvation, cf. Schoors, *Saviour*, 106.

⁷³On this contrast, particularly T. Mettinger, *A Farewell to the Servant Songs* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1983) 26; Hessler, *Gott*, 82ff; Melugin, *Formation*, 85, who

a) Who Is the Servant?⁷⁴

On the whole, a consistent picture of עֶבֶד Jacob-Israel is presented: on the one hand her election is affirmed (41:8, 9; 44:1; 45:4),⁷⁵ and on the other, although called to know Yahweh, she is blind, deaf and devoid of understanding. Further עֶבֶד Jacob-Israel is almost exclusively in a passive role of being delivered (41:8ff; 44:1ff; 48:20), little being said concerning Jacob-Israel's task.⁷⁶ Other uses of עֶבֶד terminology that may be more or less readily identified are 54:17 where the plural refers to the righteous,⁷⁷ and perhaps 44:26 which may refer to the prophet (or if the plural reading is preferred, to prophets). This leaves the occurrences in 42:1; 49:3, 5-7; 52:13 and 53:11 (the so-called Servant Songs)⁷⁸ and 50:10 (this last passage, as all commentators agree, is unusually difficult, but for the sake of this paper it will be taken as referring to the Servant figure).⁷⁹

The situation with these remaining עֶבֶד materials is the opposite of those concerning Jacob-Israel: 'his' identity is

sees this prefigured in the prologue; Kiesow, *Exodustexte*, 163; recently P. Wilcox and D. Paton-Williams, 'The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah,' *JSOT* 42 (1988) 82ff; J. Steinmann, *Le livre de la consolation d'Israël et les prophètes du retour de l'exil* Lectio Divina 28 (Paris, 1960) 158, argues that Deutero-Isaiah was disillusioned with Cyrus and hence his disappearance from chs. 49ff.

⁷⁴The literature here is immense. For the most comprehensive recent treatment, H. Haag, *Der Gottesknecht bei Deuterjesaja* Erträge der Forschung 233. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1985). In English see C. R. North, *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah* (London: Oxford University, 1948), and C. Kruse, 'The Servant Songs: Interpretive Trends Since C. R. North,' *SBT* 8/1 (1978) 3-27, who covers material through 1975, also R. N. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet* JSOTSupp 4 (Sheffield: University, 1978).

⁷⁵It is of considerable significance that the much-disputed text of 49:3 does not mention Jacob-Israel especially in view of v. 6; on the integrity of this verse see fn. 88.

⁷⁶41:15f however describe her as threshing the nations, a point North, *Suffering*, 183, fails to mention. Schoors, *Saviour*, 48, sees it as a 'motive (sic?) of confidence'. The Jacob traditions of Gn. 28:13-17 may provide some insight into the prophet's use of the Jacob-Israel nomenclature.

⁷⁷Cf. Zimmerli, *TDNT* V, 661; see below.

⁷⁸I delimit the so-called 'servant-songs' as 42:1-7(9); 49:1-9; 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12. But cf. e.g. Mettinger, 'Farewell', who includes 49:8-13 and 42:18-25; North, *Suffering*, 132ff who limits the first song to vv. 1-4; and Orlinsky, *The So-Called 'Servant of the Lord' and 'Suffering Servant' in Second Isaiah* SVT (rev. ed., Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977) 17ff, who among others has argued against the unity of 52:13-53:12.

⁷⁹Cf. Whybray, *Isaiah*; Westermann, *Isaiah*.

still a matter of considerable debate but a great deal more is said about 'his' task. In the first song the 'unknown' עֶבֶד is to open blind eyes and to deliver prisoners (42:7).⁸⁰ The appearance of עֶבֶד terminology (here for the first time in 40-55) introduces a spate of such references which, given the significance of this metaphor throughout the book, appear to be metaphors for Jacob-Israel's lack of perception and obedience (42:16-25; 43:8-10).⁸¹ J. Goldingay has noted the parallel structure of 41:1-20 and 41:21-42:17 and in particular the correspondences between 41:8-16 and 42:1-9. The parallelism of the two certainly suggests that Jacob-Israel is in view in both, but as described in chapters 40-48 Jacob-Israel seems, at present, hardly in a position to fulfil the role described in 42:1-9.⁸²

I also doubt that this song describes Cyrus. Verses 2ff scarcely seem applicable to a military ruler (41:2ff, 25) but instead have more in common with the quiet character of 49:4; 50:5-9 and 53:7-12.⁸³ Although, as noted earlier, Cyrus is

⁸⁰D. W. van Winkle, 'The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah 40-55', unpublished Ph.D., Cambridge, 1982, 87ff, regards the servant in 42:1 as personalized, transformed Israel, while the addressee in v.6 is the present lowly Israel (70), regarding the infinitives as gerunds of manner (89). However, this means that van Winkle wants to have Israel referred to as personalized 2nd. pers. sing. in v.6b but as 3rd. pers. pl. in v. 7a (89). It seems preferable to see, respectively, an individual and imprisoned Israel, with the infinitives as purpose.

⁸¹Cf. van Winkle, 'Relationship', 88f. 43:8ff is ironic in that Yahweh's witness, עֶבֶד Jacob-Israel, who was called to know that Yahweh alone is God, is blind and deaf. Although S. M. Paul, 'Deutero-Isaiah and Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions' in *Essays in Memory of E. A. Speiser* ed. W. W. Hallo AOS 88/1 (New Haven: J. H. Hurst, 1968) 182, argues on the basis of royal cuneiform inscriptions that 42:7a is 'a metaphor for the releasing of the imprisoned or 'dwellers in darkness'', the wisdom element in the book should be allowed to be determinative.

⁸²J. Goldingay, 'The Arrangement of Isaiah XLI-XLV,' VT 29 (1979) 289-97; Israel has her own problems with עֶבֶד; she is bruised and fading and she is blind and deaf. On the possibility of Israel filling this role later, van Winkle, fn. 80 above; Wilcox and Paton-Williams, 'Servant', 85ff.

⁸³Orlinsky, *So-Called*, 77 especially in view of Cyrus' rapid rise to power; cf. Goldingay, 'Arrangement'; Wilcox and Paton-Williams, 'Servant', 86f; W. Berg, 'Jes 42,1-7: Der Gottesknecht, Freudenbote für Jerusalem' in J. Scharbert *Der Messias im Alten Testament* Skripten des Lehrstuhles für Theologie des Alten Testaments Heft 7, Ausgewählte Themen der Theologie des AT Teil III (München, 1984) 108f, who notes the following parallels: a. 41:1-7//41:21-9: Gerichtsrede: Yahweh, Kyros-geschehen, Götzenpolemik; b. 41:8-16//42:1-4: Knecht, Erwählter; c. 41:17-9//42:5-7: Heilsbeschreibung für die Verbannten; argues because of this parallel structure that Cyrus cannot be the עֶבֶד.

forthrightly described as מְשִׁיחוֹ (45:1) and shepherd (or friend, 44:28), the title עֶבֶד appears to be pointedly avoided and, in view of the meaning of הוֹרָה elsewhere in the book, it appears highly unlikely that Cyrus will establish it, especially if this is in any way related to עַם בְּרִיתָהּ and אֱלֹהִים.⁸⁴ Furthermore, in view of the similarities in the descriptions of the עֶבֶד in the four songs, it is more than passing strange that Cyrus disappears from view at the very time both the עֶבֶד materials and the salvation words to Jerusalem-Zion become prominent. Admittedly these latter arguments are from silence, but they nevertheless raise questions that Cyrus proponents should consider. Hence I hold 42:1–9 to refer to the delivering activity of the ‘unknown’ עֶבֶד.⁸⁵

Along the same lines, the final summons to participate in the New Exodus and the concluding song of restoration of Jerusalem-Zion (which is the most expansive such description in 40–55), perhaps seen together as promise and fulfilment, are separated by 52:13–53:12. This suggests that the fourth song describes the way in which Yahweh’s ultimate agent, the unknown עֶבֶד, will realize the New Exodus,⁸⁶ and this in terms that are both in contrast to the military might of Cyrus and

⁸⁴D. W. Van Winkle, ‘The Relationship of the Nations to Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah XL-LV,’ VT 35 (1985) 446–58, (cf. G. F. Oehler, *Theologies des Alten Testaments* 2 (2nd. ed., Stuttgart, 1882)) offers the most recent defence for these terms having a positive salvific content for the nations.

⁸⁵This understanding of the Servant as the Messianic agent of the new exodus is present in Tg. Is. 42:1–7 according to the First and Second Rabbinic Bibles, Antwerp Polygot, Reuchlinianus, and Ms. Jews’ College; cf. B. D. Chilton, *The Isaiah Targum Aramaic Bible* 11; Stenning. Chilton, 81, notes, ‘The servant is a figure of judgement (vv. 1, 3, 4), caring for the righteous ‘poor’ and ‘needy’ (v. 3, cf. ... in a messianic context, 11:4); he is to release exiles by breaking the Gentile dominion (v. 7, cf. 10:27; 14:29; 16:1), and teach the law (v.7, cf. chapter 53)’ to an Israel blind to the law (v.7, cf. 42:16; 35:5). The fact that this text is frequently understood as describing Cyrus (e.g. Whybray, *Isaiah*) is indicative of like traits. The mingling of the characteristics of Cyrus with those of the עֶבֶד suggest that both are to be seen as royal deliverers, cf. North, *Suffering*, 139ff.

⁸⁶J. F. A. Sawyer, *From Moses to Patmos* (London: SPCK, 1977) 115; Dumbrell, ‘Purpose’, 126; R. J. Clifford, *Fair Spoken and Persuading: An Interpretation of Second Isaiah* (Paulist Press: New York et al, 1984); von Waldow, ‘Message’, 284, where the עֶבֶד is the key figure of the new Exodus.

consonant with 42:2ff.⁸⁷ Indeed 53:5 appears to announce the restorational healing of Israel as foretold in 30:26 (cf. 1:6).⁸⁸

There remains, however, the matter of 49:3 where the 'unknown' עֶבֶד is addressed as Israel.⁸⁹ To begin with it is important to note that while similar language is used to describe both Israel and the 'unknown' עֶבֶד,⁹⁰ there are important differences.⁹¹ עֶבֶד Jacob-Israel is blind, deaf, and incapable of understanding (42:18ff) but the 'unknown' עֶבֶד hears and obeys God's instruction (50:4ff), i.e. shows himself obedient to Yahweh's wisdom.⁹² Jacob-Israel's lack of faith reveals itself in criticism of Yahweh's dealings with her (e.g. 40:27ff) while the עֶבֶד faithfully trusts Yahweh to vindicate him (50:7ff). Guilty Jacob-Israel deserves her punishment, but the עֶבֶד is innocent (50:5-9; 53:9). Further evidence against identifying the 'unknown' עֶבֶד with Jacob-Israel is in 53:4-6 where he bears the wounds of Israel's discipline (כְּחַד כְּחַד cf. 1:6, מַכָּה), resulting in her healing (נִרְפָּא-לָנוּ).

Another distinction, although a matter of debate, is that Jacob-Israel suffers at the hands of the nations but the עֶבֶד is spurned, apparently by his own people (cf. 49:4; 50:8; 53:8)⁹³—perhaps related to his 'failure' to return Jacob to Yahweh

⁸⁷This is congenial to the views of Begrich, *Studien*, 63ff, who first offered the insight that this is a thanksgiving Psalm, and of Whybray, *Thanksgiving*, who recently argued that it reflects deliverance, and more importantly, that the obdurate rejection of the עֶבֶד by the speakers has ceased.

⁸⁸Sawyer, *Moses*, 117.

⁸⁹On the integrity of this text, N. Lohfink, 'Israel' in Jes 49, 3' in *Wort, Lied und Gottesspruch*, FS J. Ziegler (Stuttgart: Katholisches Biblewerk, 1972) 217-29; Wilcox and Paton-Williams, 'Servant', 90ff; but cf. also Orlinsky's (*So-Called*) unnecessarily polemical treatment for arguments against this view.

⁹⁰Mettinger, *Farewell*, 31ff, among others argues largely on this basis for their identity.

⁹¹Cf. Orlinsky's discussion, *So-Called*, 21, 23ff.

⁹²J. M. Ward, 'The Servant's Knowledge in Isaiah 40-50' in *Israelite Wisdom* FS S. Terrien ed. J. G. Gammie *et al* (New York: Scholars Press, 1978) 121-36.

⁹³While there is little question that the Servant suffers, there is no clear indication as to who inflicts it. However as i. the focus of these chapters concerns Jacob-Israel, not the nations, ii. similarly it is Jacob-Israel, not the nations, who are being castigated for rejection of Yahweh's word, iii. characteristically it is Israel not the nations who rejects Yahweh's prophets, and, in the face of any clear evidence to the contrary, I hold the source of this rejection to be, at least, the unfaithful in Israel. Cf. Miller, 'Prophetic', 79ff, Begrich, *Studien*, 153; W. A. M. Beuken 'MISPAT The First Servant Song and its Context,' VT 22 (1972) 1-30; Orlinsky, *So-Called*, 53f.

(49:4, 6; 50:4–9).⁹⁴ Why this opposition? W. A. M. Beuken has argued that Israel's **חֲשֵׁקָם**, violated by the nations which seem to enjoy the protection of their gods, and apparently disregarded by Yahweh, is the issue at stake throughout Is. 40:12–41:29'.⁹⁵ It is this **חֲשֵׁקָם** that, according to 42:1–9, the 'unknown' **עֶבֶד** is to establish. But it will not be as Israel, perhaps on the basis of expectations associated with a new Moses or David, expects in that it will not involve a vigorous display of power, but is characterized instead by silent action and mercy for the weak i.e. *both* Israel and the nations.⁹⁶ If this is so, then it may be that the same 'blindness' that led to Israel's rejection of Cyrus causes the rejection of the similarly unconventional **עֶבֶד**.⁹⁷

How is the relationship between Jacob-Israel as servant and the 'unknown' servant to be resolved? The remnant motif may provide the hermeneutic. In chapters 1–39 Israel's future hope was pinned on the existence of a purified remnant, but in 40–55 this remnant has shown itself to be as blind and as obdurate as the old Israel. The fact that, 1) **עֶבֶד** Jacob-Israel terminology is absent from chapters 49–55 (conspicuously so from 49:3), and 2) 49:1ff is an installation oracle, suggests that a new Israel is designated whose task is **לְהָשִׁיב** Jacob-Israel (remnant of 1–39) (49:6).⁹⁸ It appears that to the extent that Jacob-Israel as a collective failed in its servant calling, to that extent it ceased to function as **עֶבֶד** Jacob-Israel, and it is to that extent reduced to the core of the faithful, remnant **עֶבֶד**.⁹⁹

⁹⁴Westermann, *Isaiah*, sees 50:4–9 as the lament of a mediator upon whom grievous assaults have been made.

⁹⁵'MISPAT', 23ff.

⁹⁶Clearly Israel, but also the nations in that the coming of this **חֲשֵׁקָם** will in fact reveal their impotence. As to the reconciliation of this with passages such as 41:15ff, see Van Winkle, 'Relationship', VT.

⁹⁷Interestingly, the first description of the **עֶבֶד** also involves an appeal to Yahweh's creatorship (42:5). Consequently, Beuken is probably correct in seeing that the **חֲשֵׁקָם** mentioned in the last three songs is no longer a matter between Israel and the nations but between the rejected and abused **עֶבֶד** and his oppressors, Jacob-Israel.

⁹⁸Melugin, *Formation*, 70f; Williamson, 'Concept', 146f; Van der Merwe, *Pentateuchtradisies* (cited in Spykerboer, *Structure*, 52).

⁹⁹Cf. J. Jeremias, 'Mispāt im ersten Gottesknechtelied (Jes xlii: 1–4),' VT 22 (1972) 41, 'der Knecht an Israels Stelle tritt und dessen unerfüllte Aufgabe ausführt,' following M. Buber, *Der Glaube der Propheten* (Zürich: 1950) 313.

In cognizance of the individual traits of the עֶבֶד,¹⁰⁰ it would appear that true Israel has been reduced to one (cf. 53:6 and ch. 48).¹⁰¹ It is significant that from chapter 49 on up until after the עֶבֶד's realization of the New Exodus (54:1ff), the term עֶבֶד is not clearly applied to anyone except the enigmatic figure under consideration. But, and this is the crucial point, immediately following the description of renewed Jerusalem-Zion and the well-being of her children (54:13ff), and for the first and only time in 40-55, the plural term יְהוּדֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם appears (v. 17). The expression refers to those Israelites who have been returned to Yahweh (49:5f) and suggests that the עֶבֶד terminology can now be applied to that group which has been restored to Israel's original calling as a result of the 'unknown' עֶבֶד's work.¹⁰² No longer is there just one עֶבֶד, and Yahweh is thus shown to remain faithful to his election of Israel.

While there is something to be said for the view that the עֶבֶד is the prophet himself, (not least the language which implies an individual and the accounts of rejection and suffering), it is not without difficulties. The picture presented in chapters 56-66 is hardly congruous with the successful completion of the New Exodus, even allowing for poetic license: returned Jacob-Israel persists in her rebellious behaviour, demonstrating that she is not healed, and the nations appear blissfully unaware of the whole affair.¹⁰³ In view of the parallel between Cyrus and the עֶבֶד, one is struck by the contrast in the clear identification and historicity of the former and the enigmatic hints in the case of the latter.¹⁰⁴ If Cyrus can

¹⁰⁰I will not recite the standard evidence here, cf. North, *Suffering*, 205ff, also Clines analysis (*I, He*). If I am correct in seeing the עֶבֶד as the counterpart and replacement of Cyrus then this may also suggest an individual.

¹⁰¹North, *Suffering*, 216.

¹⁰²Cf. עֶבֶד in 53:11.

¹⁰³Orlinsky, *So-Called*, who sees the servant as the prophet also maintains, 'Israel will dazzle the nations with her God-given triumph and restoration; the whole world will behold this single beacon ..' 117.

¹⁰⁴Cf. North, *Suffering*, 180f, 206ff. Whybray's (*Thanksgiving*) historical reconstruction lacks any evidence whatsoever, and this is particularly noteworthy when, given the oft-quoted similarities between the materials in Jeremiah and chapters 40-55 (cf. Bonnard, *Second*, 75: 'Plus encore que Isaïe, c'est Jérémie qui a été la maître de notre prophète'), there is no counterpart to the narratives of Jeremiah's imprisonment. See further the prudent observations of Westermann, *Isaiah*; Childs, *Introduction*, 335.

be so plainly named, in spite of the opposition thus aroused, why should the prophet hesitate if he knew who the עֶבֶד was (cf. 44:26)? The same can be said for those who speak in chapter 53, especially as they now 'understand.' Finally, if the ultimate form of the book as a whole is the result of a later redaction, as most critical scholars believe, why then is there no indication of who this enigmatic עֶבֶד was or is expected to be? On the other hand if for some reason, perhaps because of the failure of the return, his name has been suppressed, how has the redactor/s intended this figure to be understood? Again these are arguments from silence, but surely such significant silences should be accounted for. Goldingay comes close to the mark when he admits that the servant 'has become a role seeking someone to fulfil it'.¹⁰⁵

b) Postponement of the New Exodus?

At this point C. Westermann's distinction between the salvation oracle and the proclamation of salvation may be significant.¹⁰⁶ The former tends to be general and perfective, an announcement of an event conceived as already present, while the latter is promised for the future. It is noteworthy that the

¹⁰⁵Goldingay, 'Arrangement', 292. Westermann, *Isaiah*, 93, argues that the songs 'neither tell nor intend to tell us', followed by Clines, *I, He*.

¹⁰⁶Die Heilswort bei Deuterocesaja', *EvTh* 24 (1964) 365; *Isaiah*, 11, 13. Westermann is supported by Schoors, *Saviour*, 42ff, (in considerable detail); Melugin, *Formation*, 19; Whybray (review of Schoors, *JTS*, 25, 469ff) and largely by P. B. Harner, 'The Salvation Oracle in Second Isaiah,' *JBL* 88 (1969) 418-23. Although Harner expresses reservations about a 'sharp differentiation' between future and past which he sees combined in the Oracles he appears to accept the future orientation of the Proclamation while Schoors recognizes that the boundaries between the two are often blurred, 171. Westermann's views have not gone unchallenged: J. Schüpphaus, 'Stellung und Funktion der sogenannten Heilsankündigung bei Deuterocesaja,' *ThZ* 27 (1971) 161-81; and briefly in Stuhlmüller, *Creative*, 19f n.58; von Waldow, 'Meaning', 267 and Barstad, *Way*, who curiously cites Schoors and Harner as rejecting Westermann's views. E. W. Conrad, 'The 'Fear Not' Oracles in Second Isaiah,' *VT* 34 (1984) 127-152, has recently challenged Begrich's analysis of the *Heilsorakel Gattung*, arguing that the first two 'fear not' oracles are War Oracles offering encouragement in the face of impending battle (133ff) and the remainder are Patriarchal Oracles which deal with the restoration of offspring (143ff). Strangely, Wilcox and Paton-Williams, 'Servant', 81, cite Westermann (*Isaiah*, 11-14) to the effect that 'the promise and the proclamation of salvation: . . .are . . .heavily, though not exclusively, concentrated in 40-48'. I could find no such assessment in Westermann and in fact the opposite is more the case: 38 verses in 40-48 compared to 55 in 49-55.

great bulk of the salvation words after the end of the climactic disputations of 48:1–11 and 12–15 (16) are Proclamations.¹⁰⁷

Chapters 40-48			Chapters 49-55		
Text	Oracle	Proclamation	Text	Oracle	Proclamation
41:8-13	*		49:7-12(13)		*
14-16	*		14-26		*
17-20		*	51:1-8		*
42:14-17		*	9-16		*
43:1-4	*		54:4-6 ¹⁰⁸	*	
5-7	*		7-10		*
16-21		*	11-17		*
44:1-5	*		55:1-5		*
46:12-13		*	56:12-13		*

A comparison of the content of both reveals that this is not simply because a different event is being foretold, but instead suggests that there has been a postponement of the full hopes of the New Exodus.¹⁰⁹

Content	Oracle	Proclamation
Destruction of enemies	41:11-12, 15-16	42:15-16; 49:25-26; 51:8, 22-23
Deliverance	43:3	49:25-26; 51:14
Protection: - general	43:2	
- on the march		41:18-19; 42:15-16; 43:19-20; 49:8-11
Return from Diaspora	43:5-7	49:12, 22-23
Promise of fertility	44:3-5	49:17-20
Restoration of land/city		49:8-11, 17-20; 51:3; 54:11-17
Lasting covenant	54:9-10; 55:4-5	

It may be argued that this could not be the case because the return is seen as imminent. Such a view however fails to take into account the impact of Jacob-Israel’s rejection of Cyrus with the attendant shift of emphasis to a bondage exemplified by Jacob-Israel’s obduracy.

The scenario appears to be as follows: the prophet announces the deliverance of Jacob-Israel with Cyrus as agent. Jacob-Israel’s response however makes it clear that she is still rebellious and obdurate and therefore incapable of fulfilling the servant role. Although Cyrus carries out the word of Yahweh and the return from Babylon takes place, the glorious hope of the return as expressed in 1–39 and 40–55 is not fulfilled as chapters 56–66 make abundantly clear. The new servant who

¹⁰⁷Cf. Melugin, *Formation*, 85, who sees this prefigured in the shift in tenses between 40:1-8 and 9-11.
¹⁰⁸Albeit considerably modified, Melugin, *Formation*, 85.
¹⁰⁹Schoors, *Saviour*, 170.

will both deliver Jacob-Israel from its 'blindness and deafness' and execute Yahweh's purposes for the nations is thus presented.

Who is this deliverer? The prophet simply does not know, but he recognizes that he will need to be an exceptional figure, which may account for the idealistic portrayal. When will he appear? Again the prophet simply does not know as is evidenced by the near-total movement in 49–55 from oracle to proclamation. It seems to me then that the riddle of the servant thus arises from two grounds. On the one hand although Jacob-Israel has failed in its task as servant, Yahweh must remain faithful to his election commitment. On the other hand, although the prophet's conception of the עֶבֶד probably owes much to his own experience and his knowledge of Yahweh's servants of the past, the identity of this as-yet future servant is unclear simply because Yahweh has not revealed it.

VII. Conclusions

Chapters 40–55, answering to the promises of chapters 1–39, open with a proclamation of comfort to Jerusalem that announces both the removal of her iniquity and the imminent coming of Yahweh to his people which will occasion the new deliverance of his people. Servant Jacob-Israel's response however is not positive. She doubts Yahweh's ability, his willingness and most of all the wisdom of his choice of Cyrus as agent of this deliverance.

Yahweh's response is to show in a series of trials, on the one hand against the nations, that he alone controls history and, on the other against Jacob-Israel, that is it they, not he, who have been unfaithful. But it is over Cyrus, who is astonishingly called 'my anointed' and 'my shepherd', that the tension increases to become an impasse of stubborn refusal. In a series of disputations Yahweh appeals to Jacob-Israel on the basis of his authority, power and wisdom as demonstrated though his creation of the cosmos, of history and of herself, to trust the wisdom of his choice. But, as in chapters 1–39, Jacob-Israel rejects Yahweh's wisdom, preferring instead to lean on her own counsel. עֶבֶד Jacob-Israel is still blind and deaf, still idolatrous and unfaithful, and is Israel in name only.

In chapters 49–55, responding to this failure of Jacob-Israel to fulfil its role, the New Exodus in its fullness is postponed (cf. 56–66)¹¹⁰ and the prophet looks to the future when the as-yet-unknown but faithful servant will both deliver Jacob-Israel from its blindness and deafness and implement Yahweh's **דָּבָר** over the nations in accordance with the promises made to David. In both cases -- Cyrus and the servant -- the central issue is the debate over wisdom.

How then do these chapters function within the book as a whole? In my view chapters 40–55 represent an explanation for the failure of the return from exile. While it is true that the New Exodus is announced, the central fact seems to be that Jacob-Israel's idolatrous blindness has led her to reject Yahweh's plan on her behalf through Cyrus, and that it is her failure to respond that explains why the glorious hopes contained in the promises of 1–39 and announced as imminent in chapter 40 have not materialized. So while all is not lost in that Yahweh is still committed to his plan for Jerusalem-Zion (2:1–5; 56:6ff and 66:18ff), and hence chapters 56–66 continue the appeal for the nation to prepare itself for the day of New Exodus return inaugurated by the warrior-Yahweh (59:15b–18; 63:1–6), it is nevertheless true that within the context of the book as a whole, the New Exodus is still future.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰For the idea of the delay of the new exodus, see P. Churgin's assessment of the absence of any festival in the Bible to celebrate the Return in L. Smolar and M. Auerbach, *Studies in Targum Jonathan to the Prophets* LBS (New York: KTAV, 1983), xxv.

¹¹¹The author would like to thank Drs. H. G. M. Williamson, G. Davies, D. J. A. Clines, and his compatriots at Tyndale House for their helpful criticisms and suggestions.