GOOD TIDINGS TO ZION: 
INTERPRETING DEUTERO-ISAIAH TODAY

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"Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (Is. 40.1 f.). Thus abruptly begins the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah. There is no heading, like "the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz" in 1.1a, and no indication of date, like "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah" in 1.1b. Moreover it is not clear where the prophecy terminates, though since the work of B. Duhm (1892) it has been almost universally agreed that it stops at the end of chapter 55, which brings the prophecy to a well-rounded conclusion, even though there is no new beginning in what follows in chapter 56. The dating of these chapters in the Exilic Age, long after the time of Isaiah, is not so recent, for it was already proposed by the Jewish scholar Ibn Ezra in the twelfth century, and suggested afresh in the eighteenth century by Eichhorn and Döderlein. For the bulk of the prophecy presupposes the conditions of the Babylonian Exile, and the great burden of the prophet is to announce to the captive people the good tidings of their impending release.

This being so, the first question that is bound to arise is why this prophecy has been included in the book of Isaiah as if it were part of the oracles of Isaiah himself. It is easy to look at the book of Isaiah and to see it from a literary point of view as a short work

1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library on Wednesday, 9 October 1985.
2 B. Duhm, Das Buch Jesaia (Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament) (Göttingen, 1892, 1968).
which has grown and grown by having successive additions tacked on to it. Disregarding the signs of a more complex history in chapters 1-34, we can see a concluding oracle to the Isaiah collection in chapter 35, which seems almost as if it comes from the hand of Deutero-Isaiah himself (some scholars have thought that it actually did so). Then comes an historical section, the Isaiah legend, which has been lifted bodily out of II Kings 18.13-20.11, and included here, with some slight alterations, to form chapters 36-39. It is then tempting to think of Deutero-Isaiah (40-55) as tacked on after that, with finally the addition of yet further oracles in chapters 56-66 (referred to as Trito-Isaiah, but now generally regarded as stemming from more than one hand). This makes a neat literary history. The books of Kings were completed during the Babylonian Exile, and so would have been available to provide the concluding historical material at any time from that period. Deutero-Isaiah could then have been added quite soon after the return from exile.

However, the literary history of Isaiah is now considered to be far more complex than this. R. E. Clements has claimed in a recent article that it is "one of the most complex literary structures of the entire OT". It is inevitable that this judgment on the book of Isaiah as a whole should also embrace the chapters which we term Deutero-Isaiah.

What happened is this. Historical criticism in its hey-day of the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries aimed chiefly to uncover the original nucleus of the prophet's message. Anything which could not be attributed to the prophet himself was discarded, being regarded as secondary in importance. The chief criterion for making this kind of judgment was the historical situation implied by any particular unit of tradition. Indeed it is precisely an approach of this kind that led to the separation of Deutero-Isaiah from the rest of the prophecy. Seeing that there is a gap of at least 150 years between the latest prophecies of Isaiah of Jerusalem and the beginning of Deutero-Isaiah's work, the contents of the whole Isaiah collection clearly span a long period. In fact the period is much longer because the so-called Isaiah Apocalypse of Isaiah 24-27 has been dated even as late as the

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Hasmonean period (second to first century B.C.). Thus it was long realized that Isaiah has been subject not only to growth by additions to the end of the book, but also to interpolation at many points within the book. But the emphasis on the recovery of the original Isaiah drew attention away from the later elements. More recently, however, various theories have been put forward to explain the growth of the book as a whole. The idea of an Isaiah "school" has been put forward, an ongoing group of disciples continuing the great prophet's work. But the length of the period, covering several hundred years, makes this inconceivable. The problem is then better seen in relation to the preservation and promotion of the prophetic books in general. The Exilic Age was a time of salvage of the national literature, and a great work of editing and revision was then undertaken. The Deuteronomic school of this period shows a marked interest in the prophets—for they saw the disaster as vindicating the prophetic warnings, and tried to promote reading of the prophets as part of their programme of moral renewal. With this in mind a number of recent scholars have taken the view that the expansion of a book such as Isaiah belongs to the continuing effort to relate the prophecies to changing circumstances over a long period. Historical criticism is applied diachronically, and the effort is made to relate all the separable units to historic periods, and then to see them whole. Thus A.A. Macintosh has argued that eighth-century oracles, attributed to Isaiah and incorporated in Isaiah 21, were understood later to have been fulfilled in the fall of Babylon in 539 B.C. They were then updated to accord with this interpretation, and to some extent expanded with additional material. Thus the critic has to reckon not only with interpolation or additions, but also with adaptations of the earlier text.


It has to be admitted that, though the idea is excellent, the attempt to reconstruct the history of the text on the basis of it is fraught with difficulty in practice. J. Vermeylen distinguished as many as ten stages in the process, from Isaiah himself to the third century B.C. Kaiser takes it even later, to the last possible moment when we must think of a final fixing of the text of the book if we are to allow for the Septuagint translation and the earlier Isaiah scroll from Qumran, which both attest the full text as we know it. Needless to say, Vermeylen and Kaiser often disagree in their assignment of dates and circumstances to particular oracles. But though there is evidently room for further research to try to bring greater precision, it is already clear that this approach is likely to make a permanent contribution to the solution of the problems of this great book.

Seen in the light of this approach, Deutero-Isaiah becomes part of the process of updating the Isaiah collection. One can say very simply that it was perceived as the fulfilment of Isaiah’s warnings to Jerusalem. Destruction came and exile to Babylon, as forecast in the Isaiah legend, which has been inserted from II Kings at 39.5-8. However, it is not certain that this passage had been incorporated before the addition of Deutero-Isaiah, for it may have been inserted at this point precisely because it seemed to fit the implications of what now follows in chapter 40. Once we have conceded the principle of large-scale interpolation into the book of Isaiah in order to make it relevant to the needs of a later time, we can allow that the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah might have been added to it because of certain similarities of theme without this specific reference. Both are concerned with the city of Jerusalem, and Is. 7.3; 10.21 f. speak of the return of a remnant—only a remnant, perhaps, but still a hope for the future in the eyes of the later editors, who added in so many of the hopeful passages. R. E. Clements has gone further than this, claiming not only that the

13 The terminus ad quem for the inclusion of Is. 40-66 is fixed by Ecclus. 48.24, which alludes to Is. 40.1 and 61.2 immediately after referring to Hezekiah’s sickness (Is. 38.8). This is generally reckoned to have been written between 200 and 180 B.C. In fact, a much earlier date seems probable. Ecclesiasticus implies that the completed Isaiah has already acquired quasi-canonical status. This forbids the assumption that the text was still subject to drastic changes at the end of the third century B.C.
oracles of Deutero-Isaiah seemed to fit well into the developed Isaiah book, but that it was specifically compiled for inclusion in the same scroll.¹⁴ In his view the Deutero-Isaiah oracles have been arranged and edited to create a deliberate sequel to the earlier prophet. For instance, the theme of the blind and deaf people, which recurs in Deutero-Isaiah at 42.18 f.; 43.8; and 44.18, is intended to carry forward the emphasis on the blindness and deafness of the people in 6.9 f. The theme is now related to the removal of these disabilities in the coming salvation by God. The theme recurs even later than Deutero-Isaiah in 29.18 and 35.5, the latter being directly dependent on Deutero-Isaiah itself.

Now, if Clements is right in this suggestion, it means that the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah have been subjected to alteration, adaptation and expansion in much the same way as the whole book of Isaiah of which it forms a well defined block. Deutero-Isaiah has such a strong unity of theme and such a clearly marked style and vocabulary that its integrity has been rarely questioned. But the more recent developments of criticism of the prophets have begun to threaten its integrity. In fact the ground had already been well prepared for this.

In the first place the fundamental study by J. Begrich of the literary forms in Deutero-Isaiah,¹⁵ followed up in the commentary of C. Westermann,¹⁶ has shown that the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah conform to a number of distinct literary types. These include salvation oracles, trial speeches and disputations, to name only a few of the various forms. These three forms in particular have been the subject of a special study by A. Schoors.¹⁷ This approach makes the oracles complete in themselves as individual units of tradition. They relate to various situations for which different forms are appropriate. The grand sweep of Deutero-Isaiah’s vision begins to disappear, as the prophet’s work disintegrates into a mass of short pieces. The collection and arrangement of these oracles need not have been the work of the prophet himself. Much more likely it was the work of one or more of his disciples. This allows the possibility that the collection contains extraneous items.

It also makes it impossible to use the present order of material as a
guide to understanding the prophet's intentions. To take an
obvious example, Duhm had isolated the four so-called Servant
Songs as a work different in character from the rest.\(^{18}\) They are
united by a common theme, the personal vocation of the Servant
of the Lord. But from a form-critical point of view they are
separate from each other, and do not comprise a connected series.
They can only with difficulty be related to the prophecy as a
whole, in spite of close connections of vocabulary and style,
because they have an individual character which is foreign to the
main thrust of the prophecy. But because of their difference of
literary form they no more make a connected series than the rest
of the poems of Deutero-Isaiah.\(^{19}\) Thus the effect of form-critical
analysis has been one of disintegration. These superb poems do
not hang together as a connected whole, but are more like an
anthology. And if that is the case, there can be no certainty that
they all stem from the same hand and the same situation.

Secondly, the collection of the oracles of Deutero-Isaiah has
been the subject of intensive study. It has been usual to consider
them as loosely strung together according to subject matter. At
least chapters 40-48 are more concerned with the prospect of
release from captivity, 49-55 with the results of return to
Jerusalem. But this can be no more than a broad generalization,
because there is very considerable overlap of themes. Those who
have worked on the matter in more detail have assumed that the
collector used a kerygmatic principle, endeavouring to make the
oracles as a whole conform to a definite plan and purpose. Eva
Hessler took up the highly unusual and characteristic element of

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18 Generally reckoned to be Is. 42.1-4; 49.1-6; 50.4-9; 52.13-53.12, though
some scholars include one or more adjacent verses, or (in the last case) remove
52.13-15.

pp. 64-74, characterizes them as follows: (i) the commissioning of a person with a
special function; (ii) another commissioning account, this time incorporating
elements of the psalms of thanksgiving and lament; (iii) a psalm of confidence;
(iv) an announcement of salvation encapsulating a psalm of lament. Thus (ii) and
(iv) are mixed forms. This cuts across the division into first person, (ii) and (iii),
and third person, (i) and (iv). Clearly the designation of these compositions as
"songs" is not a proper form-critical description, but they will be referred to here
as Songs (always with capital S) to accord with convention and avoid confusion.
See also J. L. McKenzie, *The Second Isaiah* (The Anchor Bible) (Garden City,
the trial speech, and made it the key to the whole.\textsuperscript{20} In her view the units were arranged in such a way as to make each half of the prophecy (40-48; 49-55) into an extended trial scene. Melugin notes that this allows for a plan without the necessity of continuity between one poem and another, as they belong to successive episodes in the trial. He rejects the notion of a trial as pattern for the whole, however, as being too artificial. But he does take up the notion that an individual unit may give a clue to the process of arrangement of the whole. In his view the collector placed 40.1-8 (a single, complete poem) at the head of the collection as the account of the prophet's call. It is not, of course, a description of an actual call, such as we get in Jeremiah 1 and Ezekiel 1-3, but an announcement of what the prophet is to say. From this point of view it is significantly similar to the opening sequence of Isaiah 1, which presents the main themes of the collection which follows. Thereafter the oracles are grouped together in such a way as to present the theme of good tidings to the exiles, guaranteed by Yahweh's creative power and 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. To begin with, the sequences of poems which express this theme can be fairly easily defined, as they build up to hymnic conclusions. Two excellent examples are 41.1-42.13, ending with the hymn of 42.10-13, and 42.14-44.23, ending with the short hymn of 44.23. A rather shorter sequence then follows in 44.24-45.8, consisting of a salvation announcement (44.24-28) which introduces the raising up of Cyrus as its climax, followed by an oracle to a king (addressed to Cyrus in person, 45.1-7), and ending with a lyric response in the style of a hymn (45.8), which exceptionally has Yahweh himself as the speaker at its conclusion. Thereafter the sequences become less well defined. But the important point is that (if we stick to this short sequence of 44.24-45.8) while the three elements of which it is composed need to be regarded as three distinct poems on form-critical grounds, nevertheless they have been brought together to make a larger announcement of salvation which conforms to the purpose outlined in the opening of 40.1-8(11). By this means poems of a very different

character can be put together antithetically. An oracle on the
punishment of Israel, describing vividly the humiliated condition
of the people, in 42.18-25 is joined to an assurance of salvation in
43.1-7 by the clearly editorial addition of the words “But now”.
The two poems thus balance one another, and each gains greater
significance by the juxtaposition, as the contrast between present
distress and coming reversal of fortune is thrown into relief.

These observations are important for the interpretation of the
Servant Songs, because, though they must be recognized as
independent units like all the other material in Deutero-Isaiah,
they have been incorporated at various points, and so must be
presumed to be intended by the collector to relate to the surround-
ing context in each case. Melugin is of the opinion that they are
creative poems only loosely modelled on the types which are
assigned to them by form-critical analysis. To take one example,
42.1-4 is certainly a commissioning oracle, but it is impossible to
decide on purely formal grounds whether it is the commissioning
of a king (which would suit a messianic interpretation) or the
king’s herald (so Begrich) or a prophet (many modern scholars
think of the Servant as the prophet Deutero-Isaiah himself). But,
of course, in its present context within a sequence of poems, this
ceases to be concerned with commissioning. It can be related to
Yahweh’s “herald of good tidings to Jerusalem”, just mentioned
in 41.27. But looking further back we find that Israel has been
addressed by Yahweh as “my servant” in 41.8, so that there is
definite allusion to the calling of the nation. What the servant is to
do in 42.1-4 is also comparable to the vocation expressed (without
mention of the Servant) in 42.5-9, to be “a covenant to the people,
a light to the nations” (42.6). In the larger vision of the total
prophecy this function of bringing light is one aspect of the major
theological contention of the prophecy, that the act of Yahweh in
delivering Israel proves his unique power and that this will be
recognized by all peoples. This is the substance of the herald’s
good tidings to Zion and it is the vocation of the Servant, whether
he is the prophet or the people considered collectively to be
Yahweh’s instrument to achieve it. Thus Melugin’s analysis leads
to the conclusion that, whatever was the original meaning of this
first of the Servant Songs, in the hands of the collector it is applied
to the people of Israel.

Melugin recognizes, moreover, that the units of tradition which
lie behind the Deutero-Isaiah collection are in some cases com-
plex, implying a pre-history with which he does not wish to deal. This has been done (for chapters 40-48 only) by R. P. Merendino in immense detail.\textsuperscript{21} So here we move from the atoms to the subatomic particles. Merendino’s analysis, in fact, has much in common with the work of Kaiser and Vermeylen on Isaiah 1-39. Within individual units verses, lines or short phrases are bracketed as additions due to the updating process of applying the oracles to fresh circumstances. For example, in a sequence defined as 41.1-42.17 Merendino isolates five original units, from which much additional material has to be removed. But he goes further than this, in as much as some of his units overlap each other, so that they have to be disentangled as well as being freed from additions.\textsuperscript{22} These additions include references to the folly of idols, but also the first Servant Song (42.1-4), which Merendino believes has been added (along with the other Servant Songs) to the book at a late stage, after the redaction of the five units, from an entirely separate source. It is added here in connection with the polemic against the idols. God’s act, begun with the conquests of Cyrus, will be brought to its full religious conclusion in the witness of the Servant to the universal justice of God against the nothingness of the idols. Thus the interests of this section of Deutero-Isaiah—the rise of Cyrus with its consequence in the release of the exiles, the polemic against the idols, and the witness of Israel to the justice of God given through a Servant of the Lord—are assigned to different situations in relation to the historical background of the prophecy and so to different layers in the composition of the book.

I have to say that I find Merendino’s analysis arbitrary and lacking in respect for the text. In particular, the interweaving of poems by a redactor is not at all a convincing proposition. But the attempt to see the text of Deutero-Isaiah diachronically, whereby the original nucleus has been expanded in the light of later conditions, must be regarded as feasible, even if the overall unity of style and diction forbids the kind of complexity which seems to


\textsuperscript{22} The five units are summarized on pp. 273-4 as follows: (1) 41.1-4, 25-26ba, 27; 42.5aa (without “God”), 6a, 6b (without “a light to the nations”), 7-8ba. (2) 41.8aab, 10a, 11, 12, 13-14, 15 (without “sharp”), 16. (3) 41.17 (without “the poor”), 18-20. (4) 41.21-24a, 26bβ, 28-29a; 42.8bβ(-9). (5) 42.11, 13, 14-16 (without the first “that they know not” and “before them”).
be required in much of chapters 1-39. From this point of view the work of the critic is not confined to the problem of the composition of the book, or to redaction criticism in its usual sense of investigating the process whereby the individual units uncovered by form criticism have been united to form a single book. It has moved on into a third phase, that of the subsequent history and interpretation of the book.

So we come, thirdly, to the newer approach of canon criticism. This is concerned with the effect of the reception of the book into a canon or body of sacred literature. But for Deutero-Isaiah we are thinking about a book within a book, as we have both the problem of the relation of it to the book of Isaiah as a whole, and the interpretation of it as part of that whole, and also in relation to the other books of the Old Testament canon with which it is associated. The diachronic theory of the formation of the book allows an overlap between the composition of it and the effect upon it of its inclusion in a body of sacred literature in process of becoming canonical. Merendino thinks of the origin of Deutero-Isaiah in a cultic setting, i.e. prophetic preaching to the exiles in cultic assemblies, so that the interspersing of oracles with hymns of praise arises from the use of the material in acts of worship. But cultic use also explains its attachment to the oracles of Isaiah, which were being updated in connection with the same sort of liturgical usage. Clements, as we have seen, has very recently argued that the collection of Deutero-Isaiah was made with direct reference to the Isaiah tradition, to which it was deliberately attached. However the kind of interpolations claimed by Merendino bear no relation to the issues which appear in the updating of Isaiah 1-39. This suggests that Deutero-Isaiah was not subjected to the same processes. In fact the same object was achieved, not by insertions into the text of Deutero-Isaiah, but by the addition of yet more material which is to some extent inspired by Deutero-Isaiah, but which clearly relates to later circumstances. This is true of the interpolated chapter 35 and of part of the added material of 56-66. Somehow Deutero-Isaiah enjoyed a relative integrity once it had entered into the Isaiah corpus, miraculous though it may seem.

However, canon criticism may provide us with an answer to the problem. Deutero-Isaiah has escaped alteration after its attachment to Isaiah—or at least had different kinds of alteration from the rest—because it did not need the same kind of treatment.
Brevard Childs, who has pioneered a canonical approach to the Old Testament, has pointed out that those responsible for the addition of Deutero-Isaiah clearly believed that Jerusalem's "warfare was ended and her iniquity pardoned" (40.2), in other words, that the oracles of destruction uttered by Isaiah in the eighth century had now been fulfilled in the disaster of the sixth. But they did not necessarily regard the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah as fulfilled, in spite of the return from exile. This was not simply because the event had fallen far short of the expectation, so that much still remained to be achieved. It was because it provided theologically for hope following disaster, regardless of the precise historic circumstances. The oracles of Isaiah were warnings to the present generation. But beyond disaster there is hope, and this is expressed superbly in Deutero-Isaiah. The oracles of Isaiah 1-39 were subjected to updating to impress upon the hearers their continuing relevance in new situations. The oracles of Isaiah 40-55 do not need updating, because they are always future in relation to the stance of the later editors of the book. But Childs insists that, from the beginning when they were incorporated in the book, they were deprived of other more definite historical allusions, so as to make them fit the continuing function of the Isaiah collection. On the other hand, one motive for updating can be suggested. Whereas the main burden of Deutero-Isaiah is the return from an exile in one particular place, the later use will be likely to take cognizance of the widespread diaspora of Judaism in the ancient near east. Thus we do find passages which are concerned with the gathering of the diaspora. In the later oracles which appear to be inspired by Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 35; 60-62) the gathering of the dispersion of Jerusalem replaces the concept of return from a particular place of exile. Some of the passages which contain this theme in Deutero-Isaiah itself (43.5-7; 49.12, 22f.) could also be additions to the original prophecy. Thus the possibility of some development of Deutero-Isaiah after its inclusion in the Isaiah

24 The idea that chapters 49-55 might be later than the rest is not new, but there are too many links with 40-48 for this to be a rigid division, cf. Eissfeldt (1965), pp. 337-8. For the theme of the pilgrimage of the nations (or of the Jews of the dispersion) to Zion, cf. G. von Rad, Old Testament Theology, ii (Edinburgh and London, 1965), 294-7.
collection, and therefore in relation to its meaning and function within that collection, cannot be altogether excluded.

The canonical approach of Childs emphasizes the theological unity which is achieved by the updating process. The book as a whole contains calls to repentance and warnings of divine retribution, along with promises of salvation and a glorious future for those who repent. These are progressively detached from their original historic occasions, and blend into a unity by being related to new situations, or indeed generalized to fit any situation. But a clear distinction must be made between the process of updating of the text and the continuing process of reinterpretation which may be undertaken after the text has become fixed and unalterable, which is the ultimate stage of the canonization process. Both of these are dynamic methods of handling the text, but there is a fundamental difference between them. Before the text becomes unalterable, it is always subject to improvement, and that means that matter may be discarded as well as added, and in any case the updating of the text in a targumizing style effects a reinterpretation which is virtually equivalent to discarding the original, even though the later editor may honestly believe that he is bringing out what the text (as a word from the Lord) really means. But when it is viewed as a dynamic process, it begins to appear less reprehensible than we may instinctively feel at first sight. For, though the integrity of the original is lost, which creates considerable difficulty for the modern historian, who wants to use the text as an historical source, in fact the text is being kept alive by being put to fresh use. And the important thing is that something new and of great importance may break out in the process. For the later editor may well perceive a hint in the text which fires his imagination and produces a genuinely creative idea, which may qualify as the inspired word just as much as the original prophecy.

It is with this positive approach to the growth of the Isaiah tradition that I want to turn now to two issues which have already come to our notice and which are always associated with Deutero-Isaiah. These are the Servant of the Lord and universalism.

The four Servant Songs remain an insoluble problem. As already shown, from a canonical point of view they must be understood in relation to their larger contexts, and so it is

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inevitable that the Servant should be identified with captive Israel, to whom the prophecy is addressed. It can be argued that the name Israel has been added into 49.3 precisely for this reason, though it appears to conflict with the Servant's vocation to Israel in verse 6. This then allows the possibility that this Song, like the others, was originally addressed to an individual. There is today a growing tendency to assume that these poems originally concerned the prophet's own vocation, exemplified in the prophecy as a whole. From this point of view the prophet gives the deeper meaning of his message of release to the exiles by showing how it relates to his personal vocation as Yahweh's prophet.

The greatest difficulty with this form of individual interpretation—and one which touches on our other issue of universalism—is that the first and second Songs ascribe to the Servant a purpose beyond the message of release to exiled Israel, to preach righteousness and salvation to the nations also: "I have put my Spirit upon him, he will bring forth justice to the nations" (42.1b); "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (49.6b). We have to ask ourselves in what way might such a purpose be achieved. It is very difficult to think of a prophet, whose ministry according to 42.2-3 consists in such a quiet and gentle performance of his task that "he will not cry or lift up his voice in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench" (42.2-3a), actually being in such a position that the nations could hear his message at all! Moreover there is no suggestion in this first Song that the message to the nations will be a separate ministry after his ministry to the exiles is completed. On the contrary, it is precisely the message to the exiles which is the message to the nations. The same is true of the second Song (49.1-6), where the Servant complains that he has toiled in vain, but is then assured that, so far from failing in his mission to Israel he will also be a light to the nations, as just mentioned. But no hint is given of a separate, subsequent ministry,

26 Similarly the names Jacob and Israel have been added into 42.1 in the LXX. This LXX reading has been claimed as original by N. L. Tidwell, "My Servant Jacob, Is. xlii.lW, in Supplements to VT 26 (1974), pp. 84-91.

27 It lies outside the scope of this article to review the very large number of individual identifications of the Servant which have been proposed in both ancient and modern times. For a full account cf. C. R. North, The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah, Oxford, 1948.
and it is left to the reader to guess that the achievement of the task for Israel carries with it the enlightenment of the nations, so that the toil of the Servant is more than compensated in the magnificence of the result.

But how can the message to the exiles be also the mission to the nations? When we separate these poems from the rest of the prophecy, we have no key to understand what is in the prophet's mind, so that we are left to the endless speculations which the poems have aroused. But in fact the answer is provided in the rest of the prophecy, in a theme which is central to the prophet's theological vision. Again and again, in trial speech, disputation, and salvation oracle, he hammers home the point that the return of the exiles will redound to the honour of Yahweh. Yahweh alone has predicted this coming act of salvation. All the idols and the gods of the nations are useless. When the prediction is seen to come to pass, then the nations will recognize the futility of their gods and acknowledge that Yahweh is the only God. Thus the prophet sees the mission to the nations in terms of the stunning effect of the reversal of the fortunes of Israel.28

Are we, then, to conclude that the collective interpretation, in which the Servant is a personification of the exiled people as a whole, is right after all, in spite of the difficulty of 49.5f., where the Servant's mission is to Jacob/Israel? Here I should wish to commend the study of D. J. A. Clines on the Fourth Song, who points out that literary analysis of the poem along the lines of the contemporary structuralist approach leads to the conclusion that there may be multiple meanings, so that there is no single "correct" interpretation.29 It is, of course, obvious that it is the prophet himself who enunciates the theology of salvation which provides the solution to our dilemma. But it is also true that it is in the exiled people that the theology is realized, and this would fail if the people omitted to render heartfelt thanks to the saviour God. Only if the people return to Zion and there sing the praises of Yahweh will the lesson reach home to the nations, Thus in the First Song (42.1-4) the "justice" (mishpāṯ) which the Servant is to bring forth is not just the activity of a good ruler, or the true

28 Cf. Is. 40.5; 41.20; 42.17; 43.9; 44.23; 45.6, 14, 22-25; 48.20; 49.7, 22, 23, 26; 51.4-5; 52.10; 55.5.
29 D. J. A. Clines, I, He, We, and They: a Literary Approach to Isaiah 53 (JSOT Supplement Series 1), Sheffield, 1976.
religion preached by a prophet, but it is something very specific and concrete, the vindication of God’s character as a just God in his saving action on behalf of Israel. It is also his “law” (tôrâh), because it expresses the moral character of his own action, a moral stance which he also requires of all those who acknowledge his rule. Thus the restoration of Israel is the focal point of the message of the Servant. It thus comes about that the Song can be read with a double interpretation, both aspects being equally valid. It can be read as the commission of the prophet to explain the function of Israel in God’s purposes, which goes beyond Israel herself to embrace the nations. At the same time it can be read as the commission of captive Israel herself to see her humiliation and coming restoration as the actual event which effects God’s purpose for the nations.

This double interpretation works splendidly for the first Song. In the second Song the mention of Jacob/Israel as the recipient of the Servant’s work may seem to make it more difficult. But in fact a literary approach demands that we give full value to the poetic imagery. The restoration of Jacob/Israel is an idea, an ideal, as much as it is a practical expectation. The restoration of the captives and their return to Zion is the act which puts into effect the restoration of Jacob/Israel as an ideal, and enables the renewal of the historic existence of the nation. At the same time it brings light to the nations because it is the demonstration of God’s power and of his justice.

The third Song (50.4-9) need not detain us, for it is concerned only with the Servant’s humiliations and assurance of vindication. As it represents a degree of responsiveness to the prophetic calling of Yahweh which is scarcely applicable to the people, it is more difficult to see it in terms of the double interpretation which suits the first two Songs. This, however, poses no threat to my position, because it should by now be evident that it is entirely wrong to detach the four Songs and interpret them as a unity apart from the prophecy as a whole. They stand out from the rest, not on

30 A similar double intention has been observed by Melugin (1976) in the opening poem of the Deutero-Isaiah collection (40.1-8): “The ‘I’ who is commanded to ‘cry’ (v. 6) is not unambiguously the prophet. He appears to be in some sense both prophet and people” (p. 176).

grounds of form, because they are by no means uniform from a formcritical point of view, but only on grounds of subject-matter. It is obvious that even from this point of view the third Song stands rather apart from the rest.\(^{32}\)

The real test of any approach to the Servant Songs is, of course, the last one (52.13-53.12). This includes an account by others of the sufferings of the Servant, and they acknowledge that his sufferings have an integral relationship with their own recognition of sin. The poem also appears to speak of the Servant's death. It concludes with Yahweh's commendation of the Servant as one who has “justified many”. As the opening stanza (52.13-15) refers to “many nations” and “kings”, the “many” are most naturally identified with the nations. So here the Servant not only has a vocation to bring forth justice and law for the nations, but by his death secures atonement for their sins. The poem has been applied to the atoning death of Jesus since the earliest days of Christianity, and has had a profound effect upon theology and upon the imagination and spirituality of Christians ever since.

Nevertheless it raises the most acute problems of exegesis. If the Servant is the prophet, how can he speak of his death? Those who take this position nearly always ascribe the poem to the prophet's followers. But that only shifts the major problem to a different writer. For how can it be said that the death of this unknown prophet could have such an astonishing effect upon the consciousness of many nations? How can they claim that this anonymous person from among the exiles has borne their sins and so obtained their reconciliation with God? The same difficulty accompanies any other of the individual interpretations that have been suggested (e.g. Jehoiachin, who died in Babylon before the return).\(^{33}\) One suggestion is that the poet was influenced by the death and resurrection of the god in the vegetation cult of the Babylonian religion, which was a cultic drama in which the part of the god was played symbolically by the king.\(^{34}\) This has been taken to support

\(^{32}\) Mettinger (pp. 33-4) argues for the collective interpretation even of the third Song, pointing to links of theme and vocabulary with other parts of the prophecy.

\(^{33}\) So E. Sellin, *Der Knecht Gottes bei Deuterojesaja*, Leipzig, 1901, and *Das Rätsel des deuterojesajanischen Buches*, Leipzig, 1908. This view is supported today by A. A. Anderson (oral communication).

\(^{34}\) See the work of H. Gressmann, *Der Messias* (FRLANT 43), Göttingen, 1929; I. Engnell, "The ‘Ebed-Yahweh Songs and the Suffering Messiah in
a messianic interpretation of the poem, applying it to a future event when the king is restored to Judah. But to interpret it in terms of a Jewish adaptation of Babylonian liturgy still fails to convince, because the nations are not likely to be impressed by Jewish liturgy, unless they have first taken the point that only in the Lord is salvation, as God says by the prophet elsewhere: "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth!" (45.22).

We thus find ourselves faced with a similar problem to that of the first and second Songs, and we may wish to go for a collective interpretation in terms of the exiled people. From this point of view their sufferings and death are the near extinction of Israel through the disaster, and the thing which persuades the nations that the people's sufferings have redemptive value is their return to Zion. This interpretation eases the central difficulty, because, as before, it corresponds with the leading theological position of the whole prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah, that the unique power of God will be revealed to the nations in the return from exile. It is objected, however, that the Servant is represented as an innocent sufferer, and this is essential for the concept of vicarious suffering to secure the atonement of others. But this is hardly true of the Servant if he is the exiled people, because their suffering was for their own sins, as Deutero-Isaiah expressly recognizes (43.22-28).

But are we right to think of the death of the Servant, and indeed an atoning death for the sins of others, at all? R. N. Whybray has challenged this assumption on the basis of a fresh examination of the text of the Song. In the first place he removes what most people would regard as the first stanza of the poem, 52.13-15, regarding it as a separate oracle. It is, he says, "a short promise of salvation assuring the exiles of a reversal of their fortunes and a new pre-eminence in the world which will astonish the other nations." Thus the Servant here does mean the captive people, as elsewhere in Deutero-Isaiah outside the Servant Songs, but this has no bearing on the rest, which is an entirely separate poem, comparable to the psalms of lament. Without this first stanza,

\[\text{"Deutero-Isaiah"}, \text{ Bulletin, xxxi (1948), 54-93. For a recent interpretation on these lines, cf. J. H. Eaton, Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah, London, 1979.}\]

\[35 \text{R. N. Whybray, Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: an Interpretation of Isaiah 53 (JSOT Supplement Series 4), Sheffield, 1978.}\]

\[36 \text{R. N. Whybray, Isaiah 40-66 (New Century Bible) (London, 1975), p. 169. Note that, following Duhm, he transposes 52.14, apart from the opening clause, to follow 53.2 (cf. NEB), and so retains it as part of the fourth Song.}\]
there is nothing in the rest to suggest a collective interpretation. Whybray applies it to the prophet Deutero-Isaiah himself. But in so doing he questions the two major presuppositions which have guided the majority of interpreters, that the Servant's suffering was vicarious and that the Servant actually died. For the first point he maintains that all the well-known phrases which suggest that the Servant suffered for others or bore their sins can and should be construed to mean that the Servant received his share of suffering for sin along with the rest. It is his solidarity with the rest of the exiles which is emphasized and his faithfulness in interceding for them, which is a normal prophetic obligation. For the second point he claims that apparent allusions to the Servant's death are comparable to similar expressions in the community laments in the Psalms, and do not refer to actual death. Even the statement in 53.12a that he "poured out his soul to death" means only that he risked his life. There is an astonishing similarity to Jer. 11.19, where Jeremiah complains that the authorities of Jerusalem, who are enraged by his prophecies of the fall of the city, make plots against his life:

But I was like a gentle lamb
led to the slaughter.
I did not know that it was against me
they devised schemes, saying,
"Let us destroy the tree with its fruit,
let us cut him off from the land of the living,
that his name be remembered no more."

Whybray suggests that Deutero-Isaiah was similarly imprisoned on account of his prophecy of the fall of Babylon. But he escaped, as if by a miracle, and the fourth Song is an act of thanksgiving for his safety on the part of the exiles, who confess their own sin and acknowledge that his message was true. It should be noted that it still seems necessary to assume that the poem was composed by someone other than the prophet himself. It hardly needs to be added that this interpretation entirely evacuates the Song of its depth and poetic power.

Clines, in his much briefer study of this fourth Song, refuses to allow the removal of 52.13-15, and concludes, as we have already seen, that the poem cannot be tied down in such a specific way, but is open to multiple meanings. The sufferings cannot be attached to particular events, as they correspond with the piling
up of images which is characteristic of the psalms of lament. I think we may well consider seriously the possibility that Jer. 11.19, just quoted, has been a direct literary influence on the description.\(^{37}\) If so, it helps us to see how the very personal character of the poem is not necessarily inconsistent with a collective interpretation. We can also allow that the imprisonment and subsequent improved conditions of Jehoiachin may have contributed to the picture.\(^{38}\) For the collective application, the objection that the people were not innocent sufferers, but deserved to suffer for their sins, is not really insuperable. Deutero-Isaiah does not deny that the punishment was deserved, but he asserts in unequivocal terms at the outset of the prophecy that the punishment that was due has been paid in full (40.2).\(^{39}\) Now the people are to be the recipients of God's special favour. The nations who have oppressed them will see it and acknowledge that the exiles are the bearers of salvation, and they will come and confess it to their own shame (45.24).\(^{40}\) Thus there is evidence elsewhere in the prophecy that the nations are expected to have a sense of guilt. They inflicted suffering, though they deserved it themselves. But the restoration of the exiles opens the way to make amends, and in doing so the nations will know that it is through the humiliation and restoration of the people that they have come to know the true God and received the means of atonement for their sins.

I do not want to press this interpretation, but I hope it shows that a collective approach is feasible in spite of the extremely personal language, and that this view of it accords closely with

\(^{37}\) Mettinger (1983), p. 41, even suggests literary influence of the regulations for the ceremony of the scapegoat on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16.20-22), especially verse 22: "The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him".


\(^{39}\) AV "double for all her sins", but it has been suggested by G. von Rad, "kiphālām in Jes 40 2 = "äquivalent"?", ZAW, lxxix (1967), 80-2, that it means "the full measure for all her sins" (cf. NEB margin). Against this A. Phillips, "Double for all her sins", ZAW, xciv (1982), 130-2, insists that the word must be understood literally to mean twice the amount due, as the prophecy is addressed to the innocent second generation of exiles.

\(^{40}\) Cf. 41.11. The shame theme is generally associated with the idols, who have failed to predict the divinely ordered conquests of Cyrus, leaving their worshippers utterly confounded, cf. 42.17; 44.11, 25; 45.16.
facets of the theology of Deutero-Isaiah outside the Servant Songs. I am willing to allow that the poem has other levels of meaning. I see the influence of the Jeremiah passage, which no doubt touched chords in the prophet's mind, even if he did not have the same degree of sufferings. But, of course, he did suffer in the course of his ministry as we know from the other three Songs, so that we must also allow for the effect of his personal experience in the shaping of his thought. Moreover, the peculiarly symbolic position of Jehoiachin, as the surviving king of the house of David who shares in the suffering of the exiles, should certainly not be excluded. I am fully aware that I am having a bite out of almost every cake that is on offer and at the same time keeping them all, but this is because appreciation of the prophet's vision demands that the multiple influences upon his mind should be recognized.

Moreover the multiplicity of influences creates a poem which surpasses any one of them on its own. It is not only about the prophet himself, and it is not only about the captives collectively.\(^{41}\) It so comes about that it was inevitable that yet further meanings should be discovered in it. The Targum of Jonathan on Isaiah, reflecting Jewish interpretations in New Testament times and later, has an extraordinarily ambiguous paraphrase of the Song, in which the Servant is explicitly identified with the Messiah, but the details of suffering are applied to the people of Israel.\(^{42}\) The interpretation is too full of compromises, possibly deliberately attempting to evade the Christian interpretation, for any reader to feel that in the hands of the Targeman God is breaking new truth. The Christian interpretation, on the other hand, may have its origin in Jesus himself, if, as some scholars think, his approach to the risk to his life was influenced by the prophecy which he must have known very well. But certainly, from the earliest days of the church, the connection was seen, and the prophecy can rightly be regarded as having had a catalytic

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\(^{41}\) Mettinger insists that abandonment of the Duhm hypothesis leaves room only for the collective application. Accordingly he allows no place for Clines' theory of multiple meanings. But while it is true that the meaning of the poem in its context does require the collective application, the richness of the poetic imagery that has gone into the making of the poem prohibits the sensitive reader from remaining content with the surface meaning, as other latent possibilities cry out for recognition at the same time.

effect on the understanding of the crucifixion in terms of an atoning sacrifice.

This interpretative development belongs to the continuing dynamic of Deutero-Isaiah after the completion of the book of Isaiah, at the time when the text was held sacred and no longer open to further updating and alteration. Another development, closely related to the theme of the Servant Songs, is the idea of universalism. Whybray again is amongst those who have contested the generally accepted idea that Deutero-Isaiah preached universal salvation. The prophecy does give a universalist impression by its lyrical quality. Again and again we hear that the nations will recognize that Yahweh is the only God. Moreover, the trees clap their hands (55.12) and indeed the whole creation appears to join in the praises of God. There is no doubt about the universal position of Yahweh himself. But the question for universalism is whether the salvation which he has wrought through Cyrus the Persian for Israel will extend to all the nations. This is far more doubtful. In the crucial chapter 45 it is claimed that Yahweh gives success to Cyrus “that you may know that it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name” (45.3b), and indeed the whole enterprise is “that men may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none beside me” (6a). But to acknowledge Yahweh is not necessarily to participate in the salvation which belongs to his people Israel. We must reckon with the fact that Deutero-Isaiah’s form of universalism does not place the nations on an equal footing with Israel. In 45.14 representatives of the nations are depicted as coming with gifts to do homage. In 45.16f. the idol-makers are thrown into confusion by contrast with Israel. In the concluding trial speech (45.20-25) the survivors of the nations (i.e. those who have survived the conquests of Cyrus) are summoned to recognize that Yahweh is the only God. They must, says Yahweh, “turn to me

44 The implicit suggestion that Cyrus may be included in the scope of salvation is evaded by Whybray (again following Duhm) by deleting the words “that you may know”, but without support of texts or versions.
45 As they are captives, they may be nations subdued by further conquests of Cyrus (cf. 43.3b). Westermann (1969) thinks that the verse is intrusive, and belongs in the context of Is. 60, and so to a later strand of editorial activity.
46 These verses also are held by Merendino to be later insertions, but as part of a larger theory of composition which we have seen above to be questionable.
and be saved" (22a), because Yahweh has sworn that "to me every knee shall bow and and every tongue shall swear" (23). But at the same time their acknowledgement of Yahweh is a matter of remorse. They come as suppliants, bitterly regretting their former hostility towards Israel (24b). There is no suggestion that they will share in the people's glory.

It is precisely because Deutero-Isaiah thinks in nationalist terms that he cannot reach a true universalism. The Servant's task to bring forth justice to the nations (42.1-4), to be a light to the nations (49.6), and even to be the means whereby the nations can find atonement for their sins (53.4-6), does not stretch to putting them on the same level as Israel. In the Zion oracles (which may be a secondary element in Deutero-Isaiah) the role of the nations is to bring back the dispersed people, even licking the dust at their feet (49.22ff.). And just as David of old had enlarged the borders of Israel to include sovereignty over the surrounding peoples, so will the rule of the restored Israel be acknowledged by all nations (55.4ff.). The Zion oracles of Trito-Isaiah (66-62) carry forward the same ideas. Foreigners are included, but only as ploughmen and vinedressers (61.5), while Israel enjoys the wealth of nations (60.11; 61.6b).

Nevertheless, as we move into the post-exilic period, to which these oracles belong, a new element appears. The vision of a universal recognition of Yahweh's sole power and existence begins to find its concrete realization in the accession of proselytes to Jewish faith. This is already reflected in Trito-Isaiah, and is expressed with a marvellous generosity in 56.6-8, including the well known words "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (56.7b, quoted by Jesus in Mark 11.17). This is followed up in the later period by a mistranslation of the Septuagint in one of the Zion oracles of Deutero-Isaiah (54.11-17), involving confusion of two Hebrew roots. Here the Septuagint of 54.15 reads "Behold, proselytes will come over to you for my sake and will take refuge in you". It represents the interpretation of the Jews in Egypt, who felt rather like exiles in the midst of the dominant Greek culture, but were cheered by the accession of proselytes through intermarriage and other factors.

47 I gûr, to sojourn (the participle, gēr, was regularly used of proselytes in the intertestamental period); II gûr, to stir up strife, used in the Hebrew text of Is. 54.15.

When we come to the New Testament, Paul can appeal to Deutero-Isaiah as the charter for the gospel to the Gentiles. Is. 45.23 is applied to the universal lordship of Jesus in Phil. 2.10f., and alluded to in connection with universal judgment in Rom. 14.11. Paul elaborates the missionary task in relation to reconciliation with the aid of Is. 49.8 in II Cor. 6.2. On the other hand the duty to make no compromise with pagan religion is urged in verse 17 of the same chapter by quotation of Is. 52.11. Paul's further references to Isaiah 52 and the Fourth Servant Song of Is. 52.13-53.12 are also concerned with the mission preaching and its response: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" (52.7 in Rom. 10.15); "They shall see who have never been told of him, and they shall understand who have never heard of him" (52.15, LXX in Rom. 15.21); "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" (53.1 in Rom. 10.16). Of course Paul also uses many texts from elsewhere in the Old Testament as divine warrants for the Gentile mission.

We can conclude that the vision of universalism is only a tender plant in Deutero-Isaiah, and needed further influences than those provided by the situation of the Babylonian Exile to make it grow. It takes a leap forward after the Exile in literature which is indebted to Deutero-Isaiah, and this happens in connection with the new impetus towards proselytism. The result of this is that religion is separated from nationalism in a way that was not possible for Deutero-Isaiah, and so the ground is prepared for the full flowering of universalism in the Gentile mission of the primitive church under the vigorous championship of Paul. We may observe by contrast that the nationalist basis continued at Qumran. The War Scroll expects the foreign nations to bow down and lick the dust before victorious Israel (IQM 12.14f., quoting Is. 49.23), and in the Manual of Discipline the community is the chosen of Yahweh (1QS 8.6, alluding to the first Servant Song, Is. 42.1) whose task is to prepare the way of the Lord (Is. 40.3) by withdrawal to the desert as a separatist sect (1QS 8.14; 9.9).

I have concentrated on these two themes of the Servant and universalism, because they can help us to appreciate the dynamic problems (Leiden, 1948), p. 117. The point is vividly illustrated by the Jewish romance of this period, Joseph and Asenath 15, in which Asenath (cf. Gen. 41.45) is converted to Judaism and receives a new symbolic name, City of Refuge (The Apocryphal Old Testament, ed. H. F. D. Sparks (Oxford, 1984), p. 488).
of Deutero-Isaiah. Recent criticism of the Book of Isaiah has shown that its complex growth over a long period is to be explained by its continuing use. The Isaiah collection was valued precisely for what it is, a collection of prophetic oracles. These were held to be still relevant in new situations. This was not always obvious, however, and so they had to be interpreted afresh. These reinterpretations have often been incorporated into the text. Deutero-Isaiah is a coherent collection which has been added to Isaiah as part of this process. But Deutero-Isaiah itself was not immune to adaptation and reinterpretation. Though I think that Clements has not made out his case that this was done in direct relation to Isaiah 1-39, we can see a similar kind of process behind Deutero-Isaiah to what we find in the rest, only it spans a much shorter time and must be regarded as very largely complete by the time that Deutero-Isaiah is inserted into the Isaiah collection. The relevance of Deutero-Isaiah did not need to be signalled by allusions to more recent events, because it was valued by succeeding generations for its references to future glory. This futuristic interpretation has occasionally affected the transmission of the text even after its fixation. Thus in 42.6 and 49.8 verbs referring to the past are vocalized in the Massoretic Text as future (partially supported by both Septuagint and Targum). These past tenses are thus regarded as perfects of decision, but the tendency to change them into actual future verbs suggests that they are still considered to be future in relation to the present time of the copyists.

Thus the continuing use of the Isaiah collection carries along the dynamic interaction between prophecy and present circumstances beyond the final fixation of the text. It continues in the use made of the prophecy in more recent writings, which show its influence and build on its ideas. This creative effect of Isaiah is enhanced rather than blunted by its fixed form in relation to canonical status. Precisely because it is treated as a sacred and untouchable text, it is looked to for inspiration, and there is always the possibility that through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, new truth will break out from it. It is my view that this is what happened in the case of the Servant Songs and the incipient universalism of the prophecy in the light of the Christ-event. But even this is not the whole story, because the dynamic of Deutero-Isaiah does not stem only from its afterlife as part of the Isaiah collection and its subsequent canonization. It is also the result of the influences which lie behind Deutero-Isaiah itself. The prophet
builds creatively on a variety of poetic and liturgical models, and takes up themes from many traditions of Israel. I have indicated this briefly, and indeed quite inadequately, in relation to the fourth Servant Song of the Suffering Servant, because I believe that lack of attention to this aspect of the composition has led to numerous mistakes in interpretation. But it applies also to other parts of the prophecy with equal force. In this way the message of good tidings to Zion brings to a point the religious tradition of Israel in an inclusive and creative new expression of such dynamic quality that it has opened up fresh visions for succeeding generations.