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PARALLEL GUIDE 31
The Second Isaiah

Summary: This chapter reviews the history of Cyrus the Persian's conquest of Babylon and his freeing of the Jews to return to Palestine. Then the chapter introduces Second Isaiah, an anonymous prophet known to us by sixteen chapters (40-55) of the Book of Isaiah. Finally, distinctive passages are discussed, particularly emphasizing the prophet's glorious vision of Israel serving as a "light to the nations," a task which, centuries later, the Christian church adopted as its central mission.

Learning Objectives

• Identify the chapters in Isaiah which are attributed to II Isaiah

• State the theological basis for II Isaiah's message of hope

• Identify by chapter and verse the four Servant Songs

• Define vicarious

• State the major differences between the image of the Davidic Messiah and that of the Suffering Servant

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. Second Isaiah has been known as "the Book of Consolation." Why? How is it a source of consolation to you?

2. This approach to Bible study was developed by Verna Dozier. She is a lifelong educator who concentrates on teaching people to act on the ministry to which they were commissioned by their baptism. (For more information see Equipping the Saints, Verna Dozier, The Alban Institute, Inc., 4125 Nebraska Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20016.)

Study Isaiah 55:6-11. Use more than one translation. In addition to the readings you might use a commentary. Follow the three steps of the Dozier method: Step one—"Clarify what the passage is saying": Read the passage over in two or three different translations. If different words are used, try to determine the reasons for the change. How was this passage used in the readings? How does it fit within the context of the entire Book of Isaiah? Does the commentary shed any light on the passage? Write a two- or three-sentence statement on "what the passage is saying."

Step two—"Clarify why the passage was preserved": "Remember the Bible is the record of the response of the community of faith to the action of God in history." What did this passage say to the community to which it was written? What were the issues that the passage addressed and how did it speak to the issues? Use your readings and commentary to find answers to these questions. Write a short statement on "why the passage was preserved."

Step three—"Reflect on what the passage means for you/the Church today." Once you are clear about the

meaning of the passage and the significance of

the passage, you are ready for your own reflections. Someone once said, “Everyone has the right to his own opinion, but no one has the right to be wrong about the facts.” Steps one and two are designed to increase your knowledge of the facts. Once you have studied the “facts” concerning this passage, then you are ready to venture an opinion of your own. Your reflection will engage your experience and your position. The specifics of your culture will feed into your opinion. In other words, your Bible study will engage the four sources of the model presented in Common Lesson Two. Sit quietly for a few moments as you consider the passage. Reread it once again. Write a paragraph on “what the passage means to you/the church today.”

Preparing for Your Seminar

Select one of the Songs of the Suffering Servant to use for the seminar worship. You might center the service around the themes of the “Songs.” In a multilevel group one of the songs could be used as part of the service.

Additional Sources

Paul D. Hanson, *Isaiah 40-66*, Interpretation Series (John Knox Press, 1995). John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, Anchor Bible Series (Doubleday, 1968). James Muilenburg, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40-66*, The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 5 (Abingdon Press, 1956).

Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, The Old Testament Library Series (Westminster Press, 1969).

Chapter 31
THE SECOND ISAIAH

When the Persian King Cyrus defeated the Babylonians, he imposed a more enlightened kind of domination than that of any other emperor of the ancient Near East. He did not attempt to destroy the cultures of those he had defeated. Instead he allowed the people much of their former independence. While they were held under strict control by governors whom Cyrus chose for their loyalty to the Persian Empire, the conquered nations were allowed to continue the ways of life they had followed before the Babylonian conquest. The Jews who had been brought as captives to Babylon were allowed to return home, their exile ended.

Among the exiled Jews a prophet whose name is unknown saw in the rise of Cyrus the hand of YHWH.

Indeed the prophet called Cyrus the “anointed one,” making him the only non-Israelite to be called “messiah.” It was this prophet’s understanding that through Cyrus YHWH was liberating the people and beginning a glorious new work. Because these sayings are collected in the book attributed to Isaiah (specifically in chs. 40-55), the prophet is usually referred to as “Deutero-Isaiah” or “Second Isaiah.” For Christians particularly, the vision in these chapters of the mission of Israel—to be “a light to lighten the Gentiles”—is one of the high points in the Old Testament.

In this lesson we review briefly the history of Cyrus’ conquest—drawing much of our information from non-biblical sources—and we attempt to characterize the unnamed prophet by examining distinctive passages from Second Isaiah.

Cyrus the Persian

The city of Babylon was the capital of the Babylonian Empire and the place where many of the Jewish exiles lived. King Nebuchadnezzar (604-562 BCE) had made Babylonia the greatest power of the Near East, but his empire stood on shaky foundations. After his death, three kings reigned in a space of six years. Nabonidus, who became king in 556 BCE, was destined to be the last of the Babylonian emperors. Nabonidus apparently paid little attention to the kingdom. He seems to have left it in the care of his son, Belshazzar, while he went off to Arabia to carry out archaeological digs at the site of ancient temple ruins at Tema, or toyed with religious reform, or went insane.

Historians differ, but while Nabonidus was indulging in one of his hobbies, the neighboring kingdoms of Media, Elam, and Persis (Persia), which lay east of the area controlled by the Babylonian Empire, began to stir. Media, the strongest of these three eastern kingdoms, had for some time considered the other two states as vassals. Indeed Elam was hardly more than a puppet of Persis, with a Persian as its king. But in 553 BCE the Persian king of Elam, Cyrus, began a campaign to overthrow the power of the Medes, and by 550 BCE he had achieved success.

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The victory over the Medes established Cyrus as one of the powers of the region, although he still had to reckon with Babylonia. Rather than mount an immediate attack on that empire, Cyrus marched against the smaller kingdoms to the north through Phrygia and west all the way to Lydia at the western end of Asia Minor. During this time the already unstable Babylonian Empire continued to weaken. When Nabonidus returned to the capital, he attempted in vain to muster its defense against the attack that was sure to come. As Cyrus began his invasion of Babylonia, he sent messages ahead declaring that Marduk, the god of Babylon, was sending him to take the throne from Nabonidus. The priests of Babylon, having little respect for their own king—perhaps because of a particular devotion to the moon-god, Sin—seem to have supported Cyrus' claim. For them, the fall of Babylon was less a defeat than a simple transfer of the rule of Marduk from Nabonidus to Cyrus. At any rate, Nabonidus' own people forced him to flee the city and then opened its gates to Cyrus.

With the defeat of Babylon, all the lands of the Babylonian Empire fell into the hands of a more liberal ruler. Cyrus treated his subjects with a regard previously unknown in the history of conquerors, often letting defeated kings keep titles and courts. Peoples uprooted from their homelands by former overlords were allowed to return home; the shrines and temples of native gods were restored. Cyrus retained control over his empire by dividing it into administrative districts under governors whom he appointed, but he commanded allegiance based on loyalty rather than on the heavy hand of oppression.

Second Isaiah

Even before Cyrus reached the gates of Babylon, reports of his victories and his treatment of conquered peoples must have been heard in the city and spread among the exiled Jews. One of those who heard the reports was a poet-prophet, whose name is long forgotten but who is known to us as "Second Isaiah." Second Isaiah may well have been a member of a group of disciples of Isaiah of Jerusalem, who had preserved his oracles and was still studying them a century and a half after his death. Whoever the prophet was or whatever the prophet's connections, Second Isaiah saw the hand of YHWH in Cyrus' victories. The God of Israel was at last putting an end to the punishment of the people and beginning a new stage in the plan of redemption.

The message of Second Isaiah may be found in chapters 40-55 of the present Book of Isaiah. The remaining eleven chapters, 56-66, sometimes called Third Isaiah (or "Trito-Isaiah") were most likely written and collected in Jerusalem after the return from exile. There is much scholarly discussion about the authorship of "Third Isaiah," but there can be little doubt that most of chs. 40-55 were written between 550 and 540 BCE

by one hand. (Exceptions are noted below.) Whether Third Isaiah is by one other disciple of Isaiah—now also a disciple of Second Isaiah—or is a collection of writings by several disciples, remains an open question.

Other theories about these sections of Isaiah abound. The similarities in vocabulary, style, and theology are sufficient to support the possibility, for example, that both 40-55 and 56-66 were written by the same person. There are significant differences as well. Most scholars at present conclude that the similarities may be accounted for by positing a "school of Isaiah" and that the differences can best be explained

by supposing at least two authors writing under different circumstances—one in Babylon during the Exile and the other (or others) some time later in Jerusalem. This is the view that is taken here.

Second Isaiah wrote, then, from the time Cyrus was approaching Babylon until shortly after he had proclaimed the release of the exiled Jews. In order to discern the main features of the prophet's message, we discuss passages according to subject matter. This is not intended to suggest that the chapters do not have their own organization. Of all the prophetic books, Second Isaiah may have the most internal cohesion, the best sense of order. It is highly recommended that you read the whole of chs. 40-55 to get a sense of Second Isaiah's order, before turning to the study of individual and grouped passages which follows.

Isaiah 40:1-8 The Call of Second Isaiah and the Heavenly Court

Second Isaiah may have belonged to a group which had preserved the teachings of Isaiah of Jerusalem. In fact, although the dominant theme of Second Isaiah's message is salvation, the prophet wishes to be understood as in the line of earlier prophets of doom. Echoes of the earlier prophets' calls can be heard in these opening verses (cf. Isa. 6; Jer. 1; also Ezek. 1). Isaiah of Jerusalem had seen in the temple a vision of the heavenly court with YHWH seated among attendants. Here the imagery is not visual—God comes to the prophet in a spoken word—but the context of the prophet's call may well be the same. When God commands that someone speak words of comfort to Jerusalem, God seems to be addressing the heavenly council. A voice from among the court of YHWH expands upon the divine command, ordering that the way be prepared for YHWH's glorious march to the chosen city. Still another voice from the court says, "Cry out!" And now the prophet responds—"What shall I cry?" YHWH among the heavenly court has called one of Isaiah's disciples in much the same manner in which Isaiah himself was called. But there is a difference: Isaiah of Jerusalem stood in need of purging and received a coal of fire to cleanse his lips; Second Isaiah is called to speak at a point in history when the purgation of Judah is complete, the ordeal over.

"Comfort, O comfort my people" (40:1)—the double command indicates intensity of purpose. From these opening words, the Book of Second Isaiah has received the title of "The Book of Consolation," and, while it is more than that, consolation is a dominant theme. Here it is announced that the ordeal of punishment is over. Its conclusion has come suddenly, and there must be no delay in bringing the message of comfort. The swiftness of Cyrus' approach undoubtedly impressed Second Isaiah. The prophet intends the exiles to see the sudden change that is about to occur as the work of YHWH, not as the result of a political or military event. The "warfare" (better translated the "time of service") has ended; the people have been pardoned. This is the meaning of the events. What appears to be merely one more shift of power among the many in the Fertile Crescent is in reality the work of YHWH; the prophet's task is to make YHWH's work known to the people.

Once again a member of the heavenly court speaks. Verses 3-5 describe the setting and the drama for YHWH's new work. The older King James translation, "The voice of one crying in the wilderness. . . ," is misleading. This is not a voice crying futilely and unheard in the desert; it is a "voice" from the heavenly court commanding that

a clear path be made in the desert. The voice calls for the wilderness itself to be prepared so that YHWH's march may be seen by "all people" (v. 5b).

This is a good place to remember that originally neither the Hebrew nor the Greek (in the New Testament) was written with punctuation marks. Thus, there is more than one way to read verses such as these. When the gospel writers were drawing parallels between scripture (what we now call the Old Testament) and Jesus, they used words such as these to fit the new circumstances. Since they identify John the Baptist with "the voice" and John was in the wilderness, it makes sense to locate the voice rather than the highway. Far from being wrong, this provides us with an inner-biblical example of God's word being lively and appropriate to new situations, rather than being limited to an ancient rigidity.

Second Isaiah expects YHWH's new work to be like some earlier work: the return of the exiles to Jerusalem will be like the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. But the "New Exodus" will be unlike the old in one significant way: the first Exodus was carried out under difficult conditions; the new one will be a triumphal procession. All obstacles will be removed from the path along which YHWH and the people will march—valleys will be filled in, mountains leveled, rough places made smooth; all will be made into a clear highway. YHWH will do this. And more: since idolatry was considered the root sin which caused the Exile in the first place, the high places with their Baal shrines will be leveled; the valleys where children were sacrificed to Molech will be filled in. This does not mean that idolatry will no longer be possible—far from it!—but that some of the easy temptations will be removed. What does the "highway" really mean? By now you know this is not an appropriate question, if its intent is to limit either God or the Bible to a single meaning without the possibility of a different interpretation.

This new Exodus restores the exiles to their homeland, but its importance goes far beyond this, for it also reveals the glory of YHWH (v. 5a). The power of YHWH has been called into serious question by the victories of Assyria and Babylon. Not only have "the nations" been taunting YHWH's people with their god's apparent feebleness; the people themselves also have begun to doubt God's power. Ezekiel saw the glory of YHWH departing from the temple (Ezek. 10-11); now all flesh will see YHWH's glory returning to Zion.

All this will come to pass, "for the mouth of the LORD has spoken" (v. 5c). A recurring emphasis in Second Isaiah is the power of the word of God. This is no new teaching; it occurs throughout the prophetic books. For Second Isaiah it becomes the foundation for a consistent theology: the word of God created the entire world, governs all of history, and will bring about the fulfillment of God's purposes. The power of YHWH's word stands in sharp contrast to the weakness, mortality, and unreliability of created things. All flesh is weak and mortal—as fleeting as the grass or the flower—"but the word of our God will stand forever" (v. 8).

Isaiah 40:9-11 Zion, the Herald of Good Tidings

The meaning here is not simply that "good tidings" are to be announced at Jerusalem in order to prepare the homeland to receive YHWH again. Jerusalem and Zion,

personified throughout Second Isaiah, are themselves to announce the good tidings. (The text of the OAB is certainly correct; the translations in the notes are highly unlikely.) These "good tidings" sum up Second Isaiah's message of salvation. The God of the Jews is coming. God is not weak and powerless, but "comes with might, and his arm rules for him" (v. 10). It isn't just the power of YHWH that is emphasized; in this strength there is gentleness. The time of harsh punishment is over; YHWH will now "feed his flock like a shepherd" (v. 11). Therefore, Judah is commanded, "Here is your God!" (v. 9), who has come to restore his

own.

Isaiah 40:12-31 YHWH The Creator

The words of the eleven verses which open the Book of Second Isaiah have become so familiar to us—in large part through Handel's oratorio, Messiah—that the power they packed when they were written can be overlooked. We must remember that religious faith was at a low ebb both among those who had been carried into exile and those who had stayed behind. The prophets had predicted judgment and had explained it by the faithlessness of the people. But the prophets had gone largely unheeded. When the destruction came, the sins of Judah seemed so minor compared with those of the conquering tyrants that many people considered the harsh punishment unjustified. Still, for most the question of the justice of the punishment did not even arise. The explanation was simpler: the gods of the conqueror had proved themselves stronger than the God of Judah.

Second Isaiah's words put the lie to such doubting opinion. World history is entering a new stage under YHWH's direction, and YHWH himself will be vindicated in the immediate future. The long-distant hopes expressed by Isaiah of Jerusalem, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel need be postponed no longer. But it was difficult to persuade the people that this was true. Faith and trust can be maintained only so long in the face of postponement. What assurance was there that YHWH would fulfill the hopes of which the prophets spoke?

Second Isaiah could not simply declare this message, counting on the authority of prophecy to make it acceptable; a "theological argument" was needed to support his claim. The power of the word of YHWH had been shown most fully in the work of creation, and it is to this that Second Isaiah turns first as a basis for the message of hope. Belief in YHWH as creator had long been held in Israel. The JE epic had expressed it long before. But Second Isaiah—perhaps because of the Babylonians' interest in cosmology—develops this belief in a systematic way, relating it to the election of Israel and using it to convince the Jews that the message of hope and comfort is believable.

Isaiah 40:12-17 Greatness of the Creator

Verse 12 has been read in at least two different ways. It has been understood as a statement of YHWH's creative power. In this case, the answer to the rhetorical question is "YHWH." The waters, the heavens, and the earth—the three regions of the universe as it was pictured in ancient times—were all formed and given their assigned places in the total order of things by YHWH, who is so much greater than the universe that he created all effortlessly, almost offhandedly. With one hand YHWH is able to measure the terrifying waters of the deep. A span—the length of an arm—sweeps the heavens into place. With no more effort than that of a merchant weighing out a bag of grain, YHWH dispenses the dust of the earth.

It seems more likely that the questions raised in verse 12 are parallel to those raised in verses 13 and 14. These are ironic and the answer to all is not "YHWH," but "no one." No human being no matter how great, no nation no matter how powerful can compare to YHWH, who, however we understand verse 12, is affirmed here as creator. A sense of proportion is difficult to come by when one is immersed in the troubles of the day. Everything looms so large, and the power to control events seems out of reach. But what seems overwhelming to the eyes of humankind is small compared to YHWH, the creator of heavens, earth, and the deep itself.

Thus Second Isaiah establishes the context for an appraisal of the God of Judah. The prophet calls the people of Israel to reaffirm one of their basic confessions, that YHWH is creator of the universe. In comparison with YHWH no nation can be reckoned important—not even Babylon. God has called on none of the nations, none of their leaders, for guidance. In size they are insignificant; in resources and wealth, even the fabulous

forests of Lebanon and all the cattle, would not suffice for one adequate ritual sacrifice. “All the nations are . . . less than nothing and emptiness” in comparison to God (v. 17). (See below, our discussion of vv. 23-24).

Isaiah 48:18-20 The Insignificance of Idols

It is likely that vv. 19-20 are a gloss, that is, an explanation added by a later editor. Here the explanation does not really fit the context. Verse 18 probably stood originally as a conclusion to vv. 12-17 and an introduction to vv. 2ff. The name El, an ancient title for the divine, is found in many personal and place names (e.g., Bethel: “house of God”). If vv. 19-20 are a gloss, they nevertheless state a theme important to Second Isaiah. (For other passages ridiculing the idols, see 41:21-29, 44:9-20, and 46:1-13.)

In contrast to YHWH’s greatness and power, the idols are as nothing. The prophet ridicules them by pointing out that they are made by artists whose skill is greater than the power of the idols themselves. An artist fashions the idol, adorns it with gold and silver, and when it is completed, it cannot even move! All of its beauty and its value are given it by the one who makes it.

Verse 20a is badly corrupted in the Hebrew. One would expect it to form a poetic parallel with v. 20b, but in the present (NRSV) translation it does not. Perhaps in its original form it spoke of wood that does rot, out of which is made an image that will not move—then the weakness of the idol would be portrayed in both halves of the verse.

The nations may claim that their idols are more powerful than YHWH, and YHWH’s people may be tempted to believe them. But Second Isaiah’s irony suggests that whatever one may think of YHWH, one could not seriously believe in the power of such insignificant things as images made by human hands.

Isaiah 40:22-31 YHWH Is Lord of History

At this point Second Isaiah’s logic reaches its conclusion in a paean of praise. YHWH created the universe and is incomparably greater than the greatest of nations; the idols are ridiculously powerless; finally, YHWH controls all the movements of history. The God who, Israel confesses, created all things, also “brings princes to naught,

and makes the rulers of the earth as nothing” (v. 23). The empires of the earth may look powerful, but “scarcely are they planted . . . when he blows upon them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble” (v. 24). “The doubting Israelites would not think of making the comparison explicit; but when they wonder whether the power of Babylon will endure, they are making it equal to YHWH. Let them look at the stars, which YHWH knows by number and by name” (McKenzie, p. 24). “Because he is great in strength, mighty in power, no one is missing” (v. 26). And surely the stars outlive the greatest of nations: “man placed against the backdrop of the universe [YHWH has made] becomes utterly insignificant. . . . Babylon is not an enduring reality; neither Babylon nor its gods should be compared to YHWH” (McKenzie, p. 24).

The people of YHWH, therefore, have no cause to despair. They need not think that their lives are of no concern to YHWH (v. 27) or that God has tired of the task (v. 28-31). Indeed, they have known all along and should never have doubted that YHWH is lord of history. Twice the prophet asks them, “Have you not known? Have you not heard?” (vv. 21 and 28) It is an old story, told and retold in their tradition. Perhaps with the passage in Exod. 19:4 in mind—“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself”—Second Isaiah assures the people that those who “wait for the LORD . . . shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint” (v. 31).

Isaiah 42:18-43:7 43:16-21 YHWH Is Doing a New Thing Like all the prophets, Second Isaiah builds a particular message out of the old traditions of Israel, but this message is about the new course which salvation-history is about to take. YHWH, the God who fashioned all things at their beginning, who created Israel as a holy people and made a covenant with it, now is about to do something new. Second Isaiah recognizes clearly that the Exile marks the end of an era. The "former things" are done away. A new era is about to begin, and through the prophet, YHWH is calling the people to witness to the new work YHWH is doing.

Isaiah 42:18-25 Hear, You Deaf!

The passages before us seem to begin with a statement of YHWH's judgment on Israel. We are aware from the opening paradox that judgment cannot be the only word, nor will it be the last word.

"Hear, you deaf; and look, you blind, that you may see!"

There are both censure and hope in these words. Israel has been deaf and blind—the servants of YHWH may have seen, but they have not understood; they may have opened their ears, but they have not really heard (v. 20). Now YHWH calls upon the deaf servants to hear and the blind servants to see.

Behind this passage is a "disputation" between YHWH and the people. We must infer the people's complaint from YHWH's answer to it. The people's charge seems to be that YHWH their God has been blind to their suffering, deaf to their pleas for help. But "who is it," YHWH replies, "who has been deaf and blind?" And YHWH supplies the answer. Israel was elected by YHWH that it might serve God, yet she

has failed in her service because she could neither see nor hear. Israel fails even now to understand that present circumstances reflect the righteous judgment of God. The paradox of the opening verse is carried on in verse 20, which best explains what YHWH means by calling Israel "blind" and "deaf." YHWH claims that his action in Israel's history should have opened the people's eyes and ears. Claus Westermann's interpretation is correct: "Israel's historical experience should have empowered her not to be deaf and dumb in her most important crisis, but to observe and hear what God was doing to her in his judgment upon her.... In her history she had seen God's mighty acts and heard his words of promise and instruction; however, she failed to measure up to what she saw and heard, and acted as if she had not seen and heard, that is, as if she were blind and deaf" (Isaiah 40-66, p. 111).

God's judgment on Israel is, of course, the captivity in Babylon. It is that to which v. 22 refers. But the captivity is not YHWH's final word. Verse 23 picks up the opening cry of the passage, "Hear, you deaf!" To accuse God of being blind and deaf to their plight is for the people of Israel to remain mired in the past, to remain blind and deaf when there is a new word to be spoken. Everything depends on Israel's opening her ears to "the time to come."

First Israel must recognize that YHWH participates in all that befalls Israel, all that involves her people.

Who gave up Jacob to the spoiler, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not YHWH, against whom we have sinned. . . ?(v. 24)

Because it is YHWH who governs the fate of the people, judgment will not be the last word. As Westermann points out, "There is an extremely close connection between 42:18-25 and what follows in 43:1-7. The attention and hearing for which [the prophet] calls are to be directed towards the future, yes (42:23); but that future is already at the door" (p. 114). It is so close that Second Isaiah can speak of it as present, perhaps

even as past because it has been accomplished.

YHWH speaks to the people. Out of the past comes the promise of the future, a promise that will gather the people together from all parts of the world and bring them safely home. Though the promise comes out of the past, it speaks a new word that cancels old guilt.

The "oracle of salvation" that is before us in 43:1-7 begins with reference to the creation of Israel as a people. The people are called to remember their beginnings in the deliverance from Egypt, the wandering through the desert, and YHWH's bringing them into the land of promise. But YHWH is not only creator of Israel, YHWH is also redeemer of Israel. (For further discussion of the term "redeemer," see below.) YHWH continues to work in the history of the people, and YHWH will lead them home again. Whatever the dangers —here water and fire represent any danger that might confront the homeward returning people—YHWH will lead Israel to her journey's completion. YHWH will do this because YHWH is their God, "the Holy One of Israel," but particularly as their "Savior" (v. 3). (This rendering of the Hebrew moshia', which was first suggested by Martin Luther, is a good one.)

YHWH's promises continue in 43: 3b-4. But more interesting than the promises are their substantiation. YHWH will give Egypt and Ethiopia and Seba in ransom for Israel, because "you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you." These words take us very close to the center of Second Isaiah's proclamation of salvation. The Babylonian exiles, "a tiny, miserable and insignificant band of uprooted men and women are assured that . . . they, just as they are, are dear and precious in [God's] sight. And think who says this—the lord of all powers and authorities, of the whole of history and of all creation! This incomprehensible turning towards Israel is the basis on which the prophet's proclamation rests (cf. 40:1), and if Israel hearkens to, and accepts, the assurance of salvation which flows from it, nothing can be too miraculous in the way by which her redemption is brought about" (Westermann, p. 118). When the time of deliverance comes, Israel will be able to pass through rivers and walk through fire. Moreover, Israel will be able to see YHWH's hand in the sweep of political movements lead to its return to Jerusalem.

The message is repeated in vv. 5-7. Again, the opening words are "Do not fear." It is YHWH's plan of salvation to gather the people from wherever they might be, east, west, north, or south, "sons from far away" and "daughters from the end of the earth." The new thing that YHWH is about to do involves more than the captives in Babylon. It reaches throughout the entire earth.

Isaiah 43:16-21 A New Exodus

In this passage, we have another oracle of salvation. YHWH, god of creation and history, announces that YHWH is once again about to act in the life of Israel. This is the YHWH of the deliverance from Egypt. Here the episode that initiated the history of Israel as a people is described in two ways: the activity of the creator and the lord of history coalesce (Westermann, p. 127). God creates for Israel a way through the Red Sea (v. 16); God also destroys the Egyptian enemy (v. 17).

This is, however, one of "the former things," a thing "of old." What can Second Isaiah mean, when the prophet says "do not remember" those things? The tradition of the deliverance from Egypt has just been recalled; more than any other prophet, Second Isaiah wants to hold Israel to its traditions. Indeed, the new thing that YHWH is to do cannot be properly understood except in context of the old. For now YHWH plans another deliverance, a new Exodus with a new journey through the wilderness. Second Isaiah is warning Israel not to cling to its past. God is—beyond all expectation, beyond all hope—about to do not necessarily a different, but a new thing. The passage ends with Israel declaring YHWH's praise. YHWH will lead the people through the wilderness, providing them with water beyond their needs—the overflow will supply the fauna of the desert. The beasts will honor him. And the people will praise him. The relationship between God

and Israel will not cease with the end to the exile. The fact that Israel will declare God's praise (v. 21) indicates that God will continue to be active in Israel's life and history.

Isaiah 44:24 45:13-49:7-26, 55:1-13

Second Isaiah does not present a message of the future without a specific description. The "new thing" the prophet declares is to begin with the work of Cyrus, continue to the restoration of Jerusalem, and issue in a new everlasting covenant with Israel.

Second Isaiah leads up to the announcement that Cyrus is YHWH's "anointed" by still another of many recitations of the work of God in creation. Here YHWH himself speaks of his role in creation—YHWH alone "stretched out the heavens" and "spread out the earth." And YHWH speaks also of his lordship over all the events of history.

God frustrates the omens and "makes fools of diviners" (v. 25). The art of divination in ancient Mesopotamia rested on the principle that every event presages the future. "Second Isaiah rejects the principle, which is an implicit statement of fatalism; even the gods were determined by the fates, which could be read in the omens. The course of events is governed by the sovereign will and purpose of YHWH, and only those to whom YHWH has revealed his counsels can interpret events" (McKenzie, p. 73). The course of history will prove this, just as it will disprove the claims of the diviners.

Isaiah 44:24-45:13 Cyrus the Anointed

This same YHWH, Lord of creation and history, is described as Israel's redeemer. The Hebrew word is ga'al, which can also be translated "next of kin." The notion is of one who acts as next of kin; the "redeemer" is one who sets right an offense against kin or tribe-members. The redeemer exacts the price of blood-revenge against anyone who harms family or fellow; the redeemer pays ransom to recover a captured member of the tribe, or storms into the enemy camp to set the captive free; the redeemer pays the debts of one who has been cast in prison by creditors. It was because widows, orphans, and foreign "sojourners" had no "redeemer" that the Law prescribed special consideration and mercy for them. Now YHWH is about to act as the "redeemer" of Israel in precisely this way. The exiles are prisoners, and they can do nothing to bring about their freedom. YHWH is sending Cyrus as YHWH's shepherd to bring about their redemption. Jerusalem will be rebuilt and a new temple founded.

The victories which Cyrus is experiencing are due to YHWH's power. As in former times, YHWH once again marches at the head of an army, defeating all who stand in the way. This time the army is that of the Persian conqueror (45:1-3), but Cyrus' victories are not due to Cyrus' own might, nor are they for the sake of the Persian Empire. It is all "for the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen" (45:4a). Even though Cyrus does not know YHWH, YHWH has called him by name (45:4b).

Not only does YHWH call Cyrus "shepherd" (44:28), a common title for Israelite kings, Cyrus is also referred to as YHWH's "anointed." Nowhere else in the Old Testament is a foreigner referred to as "the anointed." Kings and prophets of Israel are routinely given this title, and gradually the title will be reserved for the future "anointed one"—the Messiah. Isaiah of Jerusalem called Assyria the rod of YHWH's anger (Isa. 10:5), affirming YHWH's use of foreign powers for YHWH's own ends.

But only Cyrus is called the "anointed." Perhaps to forestall the complaints that would arise in response to such a daring use of an almost sacred title, YHWH denies Israel's right to question. "Woe to you who strives with your Maker, earthen vessels with the potter!" (45:9) YHWH has "aroused [Cyrus] in righteousness . . .; he shall build my city and set my exiles free, not for price or reward" (45:13).

Note on 45:7—The verse which NRSV translates, “I make weal and create woe,” can as well be translated, “I make peace [shalom] and create evil” (KJV). The sense is not of God as the active author of evil; nevertheless, in Israelite thought the God who rules all finally must control even darkness and evil. These do not belong to the province of another god.

Isaiah 49:7-26 The Restoration of Judah

The return to Jerusalem will be an event which extends far beyond the release of a few Babylonian exiles. YHWH is returning to the holy mountain, and this will be so obvious and impressive an event that the rulers of all the nations of the world will notice it and bow down before YHWH’s power and glory (49:7). The new Exodus will bring back captives scattered throughout many nations—perhaps the northern Israelites and others who fled before the conquerors. At any rate, “from the north and from the west, and . . . from the land of Syene” (the northern part of Egypt) they will all return (49:8-12; see also vv. 20-22). Jerusalem is described as a woman, but a woman both barren and widowed. How can she bear children at all, much less have more than the city can hold? “It is a paradox that the barren and widowed woman should suddenly have many children for which she cannot account. The ingathering of Israel will be so great and so sudden that no one can see it happen” (McKenzie, p. 113).

The people have given up hope for the future of Israel. The prophet must give voice to YHWH’s reassurances. For YHWH has no more forgotten the people than a mother could forget the child at her breast (49:14-18). The foreign nations who now seem so powerful will themselves bring the people home: “they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders” (v. 22). The conquerors will bow their faces to the ground before Israel. No nation is so powerful that it will be able to resist YHWH’s power. “Then all flesh shall know that I am the LORD your Savior, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob” (vv. 24-26).

This is the first of a series of Zion poems, which comprise most of chapters 49-55. The poems are addressed to Zion and announce its restoration, buildings, and people. The songs carry assurances of YHWH’s power—YHWH is able to do what YHWH says: YHWH will restore Israel and judge the nations. They affirm also the constancy of God’s love—the union of YHWH and Israel cannot be broken even by the infidelity of Israel. The covenant between YHWH and Israel is everlasting. This final chapter of Second Isaiah rings with hope for YHWH’s people. The promise of a new life is stated in many different symbols, and the faithfulness of YHWH to the people is expressed in a new form of the “everlasting covenant.”

YHWH invites the people to a banquet at which there will be water to quench their thirst with wine, milk, and bread in abundance, that all may “delight yourselves in rich food.” And there will be no payment required for it—like the water and manna of the wilderness sojourn, it will all be given from the bounty of God’s grace (55:1-2). The “everlasting covenant” once made with David is now made with the entire nation. Recall that one of the differences between the “royal theology” of the “everlasting

covenant” with David and the older Sinai covenantal tradition was that the earlier covenant had been made between YHWH and all the people, while the later one was solely between YHWH and the house of David. Now an everlasting covenant is to be made with the people themselves. YHWH had made David a “witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples”; but now, “you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you”—it is the nation itself which is glorified (vv. 3-5).

The remaining verses of this chapter express in beautiful poetry the confidence one may have in YHWH. The prophet interrupts YHWH momentarily to issue a call to “seek the LORD” and abandon wicked and

unrighteous ways. To seek forgiveness is to find it. Judah is called to turn again to YHWH, because "he will abundantly pardon." The fulfillment of YHWH's promises is as certain as the fact that the rain and snow which begin their downward fall from the heavens will continue to fall until they reach the earth and bring about the abundance of crops. So shall YHWH's word bring about that which it promises—it shall not return to YHWH empty (vv. 6-11).

In Hebrew the word for "word" and the word for "deed" are the same. So the word of YHWH is dynamic—it acts. "YHWH's words are acts; his acts are also words, for they are intelligible and meaningful, even if, as is stated in vv. 8-9, they escape the comprehension of man. This is the paradox of the word of God, that it is both the most meaningful and the most mysterious of words" (McKenzie, p. 144). The final word of the prophet is one of great joy. The world of nature itself shall give witness to the promises made in the everlasting covenant—mountains and hills will sing, trees will clap their hands, and beautiful trees will grow in the place of thorns and thistles.

The Servant Songs

In four passages in Second Isaiah, there appears a figure called "the Servant" or "the Servant of YHWH." These passages were first identified by Bernhard Duhm in a book entitled The Theology of the Prophets in 1875. Duhm's identification of the passages has been accepted by most scholars, though some debate exists about the exact length of the first one. The so-called "Servant Songs" are as follows: 42:1-7—the Servant's commission; 49:1-6—the mission of the Servant and the Servant's origin; 50:4-9—the suffering of the Servant; 52:13-53:12—the Servant suffers for others.

But who is the Servant? What is the Servant's role? Considerable debate has taken place among scholars. There is little doubt that the early Christian church, and possibly Jesus himself, interpreted the Servant Songs as a prophecy of the Messiah. One of the questions which Old Testament scholarship has tried to answer is whether or not Second Isaiah intended the Servant to be a messianic figure. (To ask the question this way assumes that Second Isaiah is the author of the Servant Songs; a large number of scholars, beginning with Duhm, have concluded they are from another source.) Another major set of questions concerns the identity of the Servant: is the

Servant an individual—and if so, can we identify a particular person as the one the songs' author had in mind—or is the Servant a collective title for Israel or a part of Israel?

Because of their importance to Christian thought, we examine the four Servant Songs in some detail, keeping in mind the two questions—the identity of the Servant and the relationship between the Servant and the Messiah.

Isaiah 42:1-7 The Servant's Commission

It is interesting that the first Duhm considered only vv. 1-4 as part of this Servant Song, but other scholars have maintained that vv. 5-7, with their description of a mission to those who are blind and in prison, also refer to the Servant.

Verse 1 follows the typical form in which a king or a god designated someone to act on his behalf. In II Sam. 7:14 in which the "everlasting covenant" with David is established, YHWH says of the new relationship with David that "I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me." In Psalm 2:7, an "enthronement psalm," a similar format is applied to the newly crowned king: "You are my son, today I have begotten you." The Servant is not here referred to as son, but the formula of commissioning is similar: YHWH designates a chosen one and affirms their close relationship.

three gospels in the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, use a similar formula at the baptism of Jesus. Jesus is called “my beloved son”—recalling the anointing of David and his successors and the “everlasting covenant” with the house of David. The formula concludes with a phrase which occurs neither in the II Sam. passage nor in Ps. 2—“with whom I am well pleased” (Matt. 3:17, cf. Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22). In Isa. 42:1 the Servant is called “my chosen, in whom my soul delights.” It is possible that the New Testament accounts of the baptism of Jesus have combined the Davidic kingly formula, “my son,” with the Servant formula, “in whom my soul delights”—a phrase which bears close relationship to “with whom I am well pleased.” This would indicate the early church’s identification of Jesus as the Messiah with the Servant.

Verses 2-3 speak of the gentleness of the Servant in establishing justice. The Servant will not be a harsh leader, bringing about rule with a great cry and a loud voice, crushing the people with administration. Some have suggested that this portrayal was inspired by the conquering Cyrus, whose rule over defeated nations was remarkably enlightened compared to those who preceded him. Others have seen just the opposite—that the Servant, unlike Cyrus with his triumphant marches and their attendant clamor “heard in the street,” is a quiet and unassuming leader.

In v. 4, both “justice” and “law” should be interpreted in more than a merely legal sense. “Justice” is not simply a properly administered legal system by which courts protect the rights of all. The Hebrew word (mishpat) carries with it the sense of a “way of life” in which people are related to one another so as to promote the value and dignity of each. “Law,” similarly, is more than legal codes. The Hebrew word is torah, and as we have noted before, it is probably better translated as “teaching” or even “life instruction.” The Servant, then, will establish a just way of life on the

earth, and even in the farthest borders of the land, people await the teachings that will bring about this way of life.

Second Isaiah’s depiction of YHWH as the creator may be seen in v. 5. The entire message of redemption is based on the fact of YHWH’s total lordship over all of creation. Human life—“breath to the people” and “spirit to those who walk”—comes from YHWH; therefore human history is subject to the creator.

Verses 6-7, if it is correct to see them as part of the Servant Song, describe the3task given to the Servant as a “covenant to the people, a light to the nations.” Since “people” and “nations” are joined in a poetic parallel, this verse must mean that the Servant is to be “a covenant” to the Gentiles—the non-Israelite nations. Does it follow that YHWH is making a covenant with the Gentiles in Cyrus? Such a message would be so revolutionary in Israelite thought that much more than this one vague reference would be needed to express and defend it. To be consistent with the rest of Second Isaiah, it would have to be Israel—or some person or portion of it—that is commissioned to fulfill this role to the Gentiles.

In v. 7, the Servant is charged to bring sight to the blind, and liberty and light to those in darkness. If the Servant is Cyrus, this refers to his liberation of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. If Israel is meant, it is given the task of bringing the light—of the torah—to the nations who sit in the darkness of their bondage to idols.

The fact that in these few verses it is possible for different scholars to identify the Servant as (a) Cyrus, (b) an individual who is the opposite of Cyrus in the manners of leadership, and (c) Israel itself, shows that the question of the identity of the Servant is a complex one. It is possible that the author of the Servant Songs means somewhat different things at different times.

Isaiah 49:1-6 The Mission of the Servant

This difficult passage has many possible interpretations, none of them completely adequate if taken alone. Verses 1-2 speak of the Servant as one who was called from before his birth—like Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5)—but hidden in YHWH's "quiver" until the time came for the mission to begin. Does this mean that the Servant is an individual? The similarity to Jeremiah's call would lend support to the hypothesis that Second Isaiah—if the prophet is the author—is speaking here of himself—or, at least, that the "I" is an individual prophet whom Second Isaiah has in mind. But then v. 3 seems to identify the Servant specifically with Israel. Some have suggested that the word "Israel" is a gloss, a later scribal addition to the text. But even if the line is too full metrically (i.e., has more syllables than we would anticipate), "Israel" need not be the extra word. Moreover, there is only one manuscript of the Hebrew text—and a questionable one—which omits the "Israel," so removing it cannot be justified on the basis of firm textual evidence.

If the Servant is Israel, how is it to bring about the return of Jacob and Israel (v. 5)? If the song is to be interpreted in a consistent manner throughout, the reference to "Israel" in v. 3 must be somehow qualified. It has been suggested that "Israel" must refer to some idealized segment of the nation, perhaps to the exiles. Or, perhaps,

as David Noel Freedman has suggested, whoever the Servant is, the name of the Servant is "Israel."

Verse 6 repeats the charge to the Servant to recall Jacob and Israel, but it also extends the mission to include the notion found in the earlier Servant Song that light is to be given to the nations and salvation to the end of the earth (49:6b, cf. 42:6b-7). But while this is the most obvious interpretation of 49:6b—a universal mission for the Servant—it is possible that something less sweeping is meant. Possibly here and elsewhere these words should be taken to mean that the Servant is to serve as a beacon light, drawing the Israelites back home to Zion from the many nations where they are now dispersed.

In any case, the restoration of Israel involves more than the fragment Cyrus allows to go home from exile. The prophet's vision extends beyond the history of the near future, perhaps beyond history itself, to the fulfillment of Israel. It is the mission of the Servant to point Israel to that fulfillment.

Isaiah 50:4-9 (10) The Suffering of the Servant

Although the passage immediately before us nowhere contains the word "Servant," the word does appear in v. 10—attached by most scholars to the song as part of a "response" or "addition." Who has paid heed to "the voice of [YHWH's] servant. . . ?" The reference is clearly to the preceding words. The Servant has heard YHWH's word and has not turned away from the speaking of it, despite the insults that resulted. But who is this Servant? Again, we face the question, and again we find more than one possible solution.

If the Servant is the group of faithful exiles, the suffering endured may refer to their sufferings in exile—humiliation at the hands of the Babylonians. Verse 10, which says that the Servant "walks in darkness and has no light," could be seen as paralleling the similar description of the exiles in 42:18-20. But, as McKenzie points out, "If the prophet is alluding to the experience of the Israelites in Babylon, then he is careful not to say so" (p. 117). Certainly the sufferings of the Servant as described here are not great. The mockery of plucking at the beard, even of spitting, forms a "type of insult common in the ancient Near East," probably even "an expected part of the prophetic vocation" (McKenzie, p. 117).

Certainly we are dealing in this song with the Servant as a prophetic figure. The Servant accomplishes the mission given by speech. Having "the tongue of those who are taught" (v. 4), the Servant is a "disciple" (Hebrew, limud), particularly in the sense of a student who commits the words of a teacher to memory. So the Servant repeats faithfully what has been heard. The Servant has not been rebellious (v. 5), but as a

prophet has been faithful in speaking the word of YHWH. This word has an effect—it indicates a choice, and many will not accept the message. Sharing in the fate of most prophets, the Servant is to be rejected and humiliated (v. 6). Nevertheless, vindication by YHWH will come (vv. 7-9).

The prophetic character of the Servant in this passage has led to the interpretation that it must refer to the writer of Second Isaiah. As a disciple of—perhaps even part

of a school of disciples of—Isaiah of Jerusalem, it would be natural that Second Isaiah be characterized as one of the limudim. But even if Second Isaiah wrote the song, there is no reason to believe that it refers to the prophet's own experience. The experience related is a general one. Again, a single, correct interpretation is difficult, if not impossible.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 The Servant Suffers for Others

The mild suffering of the Servant in 50:4-9 in no way prepares us for the suffering presented by this passage. This suffering is not only much harsher—suffering even to death—it is understood as vicarious suffering. "Vicarious" means "on behalf of someone else." The Servant is portrayed as taking on the sufferings of other people, thereby relieving them of the necessity of bearing these sufferings themselves. The Christian church has used this Servant Song to express the suffering of Jesus for the redemption of humankind.

It is possible also to refer the imagery throughout this song to the exiles. The exaltation which is to come to them will be astonishing to nations and kings of nations (52:15a). As a people the exiles are marred (v. 14b), without beauty (53:2), despised, rejected, and sorrowful (53:3). The pain they have endured is a punishment which all of the sinful nation of Judah deserves, for all "like sheep have gone astray" (53:6), but the punishment which all of Judah deserves has been laid upon the exiles alone. They were led away into captivity as a lamb is led to the slaughter (v. 7). They were "cut off from the land of the living." The expression which can mean the death of an individual here is taken to describe a people taken away from the land in which YHWH reigns. All of this has been the will of YHWH. The exiles (the Servant) are suffering as a "sin-offering" for the sake of the entire nation. As a sacrificial animal is offered in the sin-offering to take away or cover over the sin of the people, so the exiles are being offered vicariously for the sake of the nation (v. 10). Unlike the sacrificial animal, however, the exiles will survive their ordeal. They will return and be glorified. Their glorification will come about because of their suffering, not in spite of it. By their suffering, they "bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (v. 12).

Although this interpretation may be consistent, it is no more likely than several others. There is no internal evidence to suggest that the Servant is not an individual. And if an individual, who better than the prophet of YHWH? We have noted already the prophetic role the Servant plays in speaking the word of YHWH to the people. It is worth noting here that prophets from Moses onward were regarded also as intercessors for the people. Moses pleaded with YHWH to punish him instead of the people for the sin of constructing the golden calf (Exod. 32:31-32). Less willingly perhaps, but equally painfully, the other prophets endured the rejection and spite of the people to whom they spoke the unpleasant words of judgment—yet they remained faithful, and there is a sense in which their fidelity effectively interceded for the people. It is possible that whoever wrote the song might have seen Second Isaiah or some other prophet as the "suffering Servant" whose vicarious suffering redeems the nation. It is important to realize that the Servant's suffering represents more than simple intercession. The Servant not only prays for others. The Servant suffers instead of

others. The suffering the Servant unjustly undergoes relieves the pain those others deserve. It is important to

understand that in the thought of the day, suffering was the punishment of the guilty. Although the person who suffered might appear innocent, his or her suffering was a sign of guilt, a judgment of God upon wickedness. The Servant suffers beyond ordinary measure, becoming ugly with afflictions, described in terms of injury, disease, and physical punishment. People turn away their faces, not so much from natural aversion to disfigurement as from fear of what must be the curse of God. If the suffering is God's curse, it is not God's curse on the Servant. The Servant bears the punishment not for personal sins—the Servant is innocent but must bear the pains of others.

God refuses Moses' offer to stand in for the Israelites in their punishment: "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book" (Exod. 32:33). Ezekiel expresses a similar notion (chs. 18 and 33): the righteous and the wicked shall prosper or suffer for their own deeds, not for the deeds of others. But the author of the fourth Servant Song goes back to an older idea of collective responsibility or "solidarity." As John L. McKenzie points out, the idea is not original with the prophet. Both versions of the Decalogue prescribe that the sins of the parents shall be felt in later generations (Exod. 20:5-6; Deut. 5:9-10). In Gen. 18, Abraham proposes that Sodom may be spared for the sake of the righteous who live there, even if they are only a small minority.

The presentation of the prophet differs from the older view only in its admission that the righteous may suffer. If they do, then the unrighteous members of their group may be delivered from suffering because the righteous have sustained it. This was a revolutionary view, for in traditional wisdom suffering was inflicted only upon those who deserved it, the guilty. The prophet takes a higher and more realistic view of suffering; it becomes a medium of salvation to the community. Only the suffering of the righteous could be such a medium, for the suffering of the unrighteous would be no more than the satisfaction of vindictive justice. But the suffering of the innocent righteous has a 'plus' value in the community. The righteous must be the means of salvation for the unrighteous, for the unrighteous cannot be the means of salvation for themselves. The prophet shows an insight into the solidarity of the human condition which goes beyond earlier expressions of this idea in the [Old Testament]. (pp. 134-135)

The Identity of the Servant

From this examination of the "Servant Songs" it should be clear that there is no simple answer to the question of the identity of the Servant. We cannot examine here all the possibilities scholars have suggested. (Refer to McKenzie, pp. xxxviii-lv for a more thorough discussion.) We can indicate the range of interpretation. This range results from the ambiguity of the songs. (In a technical sense the literary critical term "ambiguity" refers to the possibility of more than one meaning, whether the ambiguity is unintentional or intentional. In most cases it is likely that such ambiguity was intentional—truth is sometimes difficult to capture in mere words; sometimes it helps to be able to say things on several levels at once.)

Not only do interpreters discover a variety of meanings among the individual songs, and even within the sections of one song, but the prophet himself appears to have

had more than one meaning in mind. This should not be surprising. Even more than rhyme and rhythm, words which evoke layers of meaning are essential to poetry. So by their very nature the songs, which are poetry, express more than one level of meaning. Moreover, the Hebrew mind moves easily from a picture of an individual to that of a group. Abraham is both an individual patriarch and a personification of the Hebrew people. The twelve sons of Jacob are also the twelve tribes of Israel. For these reasons we should not be surprised if the prophet sees the Servant as sometimes an individual, sometimes a group—or even simultaneously individual and group, ideal prophet and Israel as a whole or in part—perhaps the exiles or an idealized faithful remnant.

We can see then a range of possible interpretations, from a known historical person to the nation as a kind of collective ideal. On the one hand, we must bear in mind that Israelite prophets never strayed far from the immediate historic situation in which they lived. They saw the hand of God at work in their own historical settings and interpreted God's work in terms with which they were familiar. This fact has led some scholars to search the history of the times to discover who might fit the role of the Servant. Cyrus, Isaiah of Jerusalem, and Second Isaiah have been nominated as candidates. To seize upon one name seems finally to be both impossible and misguided.

The tradition that Israel herself was chosen by YHWH to bring salvation to all the world dates from at least the time of the J writer, and the figure of the Servant seems to be drawn in part from this tradition. This has led to collective interpretations of the Servant. The Servant represents the vocation of the entire Israelite people, and passages which suggest an individual person can be taken as typical Hebrew examples of what has been called "corporate personality"—speaking of a group in terms usually reserved for individuals. But collective interpretation also runs into several difficulties. For example, the second song understands the Servant as an agent in the restoration of Israel; the third song, which depicts the Servant as prophet and teacher, must be forced if it is to accommodate Israel as the Servant.

Finally, we must recognize that the Servant has both individual and collective aspects in its "personality." We must recognize that we may never know who the Servant is and that at present we are on firm ground only when we talk about the task of the Servant. The Servant's task is given by God, who anoints the Servant for it. The task embraces both Jew and Gentile and it involves proclamation and mediation. The Servant is to speak the word of God, even if that involves suffering. The Servant will suffer, but this suffering is to be vicarious and "for the many." In his proclamation and his suffering, the Servant seems to be pointing to something new, so the Servant becomes a light to the nations.

By the time of Jesus the expectation of the coming of a figure called "the Messiah" had risen to a peak. As has been noted, the word messiah in Hebrew simply means an "anointed one"; it is used in the Old Testament to refer to both rulers and prophets. Second Isaiah calls Cyrus by this title. In itself the Hebrew word indicates one who is chosen by YHWH for any task or role.

Under the influence of the "royal theology" of Jerusalem, however, the title came to be associated especially with kings of the house of David, and eventually the Messiah was expected to be a "son of David." In Matthew 21:4-11 Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is described in terms of the Davidic Messiah. Jesus instructs two of his disciples to find him an ass colt so that he may fulfill the prophecy of Zechariah—"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! . . . Lo, your king comes to you; triumphant and victorious is he, humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9, cf. Matt. 21:5). The crowds prepare a royal entrance for Jesus Messiah, shouting, "Hosanna to the son of David!" (Matt. 21:9).

In Second Isaiah the Servant is not a king. YHWH is king, and the Servant's role is primarily that of a prophet—announcing the coming of YHWH and interceding, primarily by means of vicarious suffering, for YHWH's pardon of the people. And nowhere in Jewish tradition is there a suggestion that the Messiah would suffer. Some scholars have tried to demonstrate that the imagery of the Messiah and that of the suffering Servant were blended in pre-Christian Jewish lore, and that in reaction to the Christian identification of Jesus with the Messiah, the two images were radically separated in post-Christian-Jewish thought. The only basis for this argument, however, is found in post-Christian writings. Neither the Septuagint nor the Dead Sea Scrolls support it.

In Jewish tradition, it is true, there are many similarities between the Davidic Messiah and the Servant. Both are referred to as servants, though so are countless other figures in the Old Testament. Both have the Spirit of YHWH, but so do Balaam, Joshua, the judges, and many more. Both are called from the womb, but so also is

Jeremiah and Israel itself. These similarities are not sufficient to outweigh the differences between the kingly role of the Messiah and the prophetic and intercessory role of the Servant.

The evidence of the New Testament record makes it even more doubtful that the Servant and the Messiah had been thought of as the same person prior to Jesus. The acclaim of the crowds when Jesus enters Jerusalem as the Davidic Messiah quickly changes to rejection when he is crucified. Instead of becoming convinced that in his suffering for the transgressions of others Jesus is in truth the long awaited Messiah, the crowd jeers at him: “He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him” (Matt. 27:42). The Messiah must be a figure of power, nothing like the Servant who “poured out his soul to death” to “make many to be accounted righteous.”

Not even the disciples of Jesus seem prepared to connect the Davidic Messiah with the suffering Servant of Second Isaiah. According to Mark, Peter is the first person to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. “He asked them, ‘But who do you say that I am?’ Peter answered him, ‘You are the Messiah’” (8:29). Jesus accepts this title (christos is the Greek for the Hebrew messiah) but he goes on to combine it with the characteristics of the suffering Servant: “Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief

priests, and the scribes, and be killed” (v. 31). This Peter cannot accept; his rebuke to Jesus (v. 32) shows that he has never associated the Messiah with Second Isaiah’s suffering Servant.

It seems doubtful that, in the thinking of the Jewish community up to the time of Jesus, the two figures were connected. Joining the two images together seems a new idea to the Jews of that time. Perhaps Jesus himself combined them, offering a new notion concerning the victory and fulfillment which God was about to accomplish in him. More likely the early Christian church did so to account for the surprising and upsetting fact that the one who had brought them redemption and fulfillment as the long-awaited Messiah had turned their expectations upside down and suffered death. Theological reflection within the early church on these upside down expectations brought one to the realization that the Messiah’s death had been suffered on their behalf.

Second Isaiah’s vision for the future of Judah is glorious in its sweep and at the same time astonishingly sensitive in its concern for the nations of the world. At a time when other peoples could imagine national glory only in terms of conquest and rule, Second Isaiah saw Israel’s mission as one of bringing light and redemption, perhaps even through Israel’s own suffering. Rarely if ever has a people so seen itself, even in what we often call our enlightened age. Judah may have been unable to rise to the high calling which Second Isaiah proclaimed—the struggle for bare survival in post-exilic times drowned out the prophet’s message—but it remained in Israel’s tradition as a reminder of its calling. The message of the anonymous prophet of the Exile was taken up by the Christian church as its own mission. But it would not be amiss to suggest that the suffering of the Jewish people throughout the centuries has served—at least occasionally—to bring other nations to repentance and to cause some measure of light to come into darkness.

End of Chapter