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ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS: THE MISSION MOTIF IN THE OLD
TESTAMENT WITH REFERENCE TO THE YAHWISTIC PASSAGES
OF THE PENTATEUCH, TO DEUTERO-ISAIAH AND TO
THE BOOK OF JONAH

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Object of the Study

The object of this study is to investigate the mission motif in the life and thought of the people of Israel in three different periods in the nation's history, namely, the early monarchical period, the exilic period, and the post-exilic period. The inquiry seeks to determine whether or not Israel had a mission to the gentile nations during the Old Testament period, the nature of that mission, and the ways in which that mission was to be carried out. An attempt will also be made to discern the difference in emphasis in the three different periods and how the situations and the needs of a particular time determined the emphasis of that time.

For the author the mission of the church is more important than anything else in the life of the church. He comes from a background where the church is comparatively small in the midst of millions of non-Christians with greatly diversified religious and social backgrounds. So it is necessary for the church to constantly be aware of these factors and to reevaluate its mission strategies and emphases and to adopt new ways by which it can carry out its mission effectively. Though this thesis does not offer any conclusive and decisive patterns and strategies for mission, it is hoped that the findings of this paper will help further understanding on the subject of mission strategies.

Limitations of This Study

Not all the writings which belong to each of the three periods under our purview are taken in this study. The early monarchical period is represented by the Yahwistic passages of the Pentateuch, the exilic period is represented by Isaiah 40-55, and the post-exilic period by the book of Jonah.

This study deals basically with how Israel was called to carry out its mission to the world in given historical contexts. Subjects such as the doctrinal basis for mission, the universalism of the Old Testament, and how the church inherited its mission from Judaism are beyond the scope of this study.

No attempt is made also to deal with the subjects of authorship and date of the writings under our purview except in the case of the date of the book of Jonah.

Israel--A Religious Community

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to trace the history of Israel from its early beginnings to the time of the early monarchy. However, for a proper understanding of Israel's mission to the gentile nations it needs mentioning at this point that Israel was basically a religious community rather than an ethnic one. The formation of Israel as a religious community preceded the formation of the people as a nation. What constituted Israel as a nation was the covenant relationship which God established with them at Sinai.

Prior to the Sinai covenant there was no nation as Israel. There were loosely connected tribes with their tribal organizations. People who belonged to the tribal organizations joined the newly-formed community and identified themselves with the oppressed in Egypt. It is for this reason that the covenant tradition is important in biblical tradition.¹ The participation in the covenant impressed a special character on the loose tribal coalition in which Israel awoke to historical self-awareness. That which constituted the people with a strong sense of solidarity is the will of God. In the name of Yahweh and the covenant they found a unifying force. It created a people with a common law, a common cultus and a common historical consciousness. The requirement for the inclusion into the covenant relationship is not natural kinship, but readiness to submit oneself to the will of the Lord of the covenant.²

Joshua 24 gives further evidence to the fact that it was on the basis of a covenant bond that a people was formed. The covenant established at Shechem was basically religious. The peoples who belonged to different tribes with their tribal gods had to forsake their tribal religions and to accept Yahweh as their God. Thus the people was founded on the basis of worship of Yahweh.³ Joshua made a covenant with the

¹George E. Mendenhall, "The Hebrew Conquest of Palestine," The Biblical Archeologist, XXV (September 1962), 74.

²Walther Eichrodt, The Theology of the Old Testament, translated by J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), I, 39-40.

³Mendenhall, XXV, 84.

Gibeonites (Joshua 9). No details about the conditions of the covenant are mentioned except that it was an agreement that both parties shall live in peace with one another. But it indicates the fact that the concept of covenant was deeply rooted in Israel's life.

Moreover, those who fled from Egypt were themselves a mixed group, all of whom were not descendants of Jacob: "A mixed multitude went out with them" (Ex. 12:38). They were presumably fugitive slaves, perhaps even Egyptians themselves (Lev. 24:10). There was also Midianite blood. Moses' father-in-law was a Midianite, and his clan also marched with Israel (Num. 10:29-32). Their descendants were among Israel at a later period (Judg. 1:16; 4:11). Caleb was a Kennizite (Num. 32:12), and his clan settled in the Hebron area (Joshua 14:13-14; Judg. 1:10-20). Though not Judahites, they were reckoned as Judahites in whose midst they had settled (Joshua 15:13). Like Caleb, Othniel also was a Kennizite who occupied Debir (Joshua 15:16-19). These illustrations show that there were peoples of miscellaneous origin, some of whom were in Egypt and at Sinai, and others had become converts.⁴ The Shibboleth incident (Judg. 12:6) demonstrates that the different segments of Israel did not even speak the same dialect. People of different backgrounds had their place in Israel. Israel was not an exclusive community. The Deuteronomic law presupposes that captive women from non-Israelite cities taken in war will be married by the captor, and

⁴John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1964), p. 121.

there is no indication that it was a religious violation.⁵ From these observations it can be concluded that Israel was not an exclusive community composed of one ethnic group, but a religious community composed of peoples of different origins who accepted Yahweh as their God. From this basic understanding of Israel's beginnings, its mission to the gentiles shall be looked at.

The use of the term "mission" in this paper does not express the idea of sending missionaries from one place to another. It rather expresses the idea of Israel's relationship with, and obligations toward other nations as she stood before others as the recipient of God's grace.

Organization of the Thesis

Chapter II deals with "The Missionary Message of the Yahwist." Following a brief evaluation of the historical and theological background of the Yahwist's message a textual study on the Yahwistic passages is attempted. While making a study on the passages the Yahwist's presentation of the patriarchal history, the meaning of the word blessing, and the understanding of the blessing motif in the context of the covenant relationship are also taken into consideration.

Chapter III deals with "Israel the Servant of Yahweh and the Nations: Isaiah 40-55." Following a brief study on the historical context of Deutero-Isaiah a summary statement on the theology of Deutero-Isaiah is attempted. The Servant-Israel's mission to the nations is

⁵Mendenhall, XXV, 85-86.

dealt with in two sections. The first section deals with the passages other than the "Servant Songs" and the second section deals with the "Servant Songs."

Chapter IV deals with "The Missionary Message of the Book of Jonah." In this chapter features indicative of a didactical interpretation of the book, the date of the book, and the message of the book are dealt with.

Each of these three chapters conclude with a summary statement of the findings.

Chapter V forms the concluding chapter of the thesis. This includes a summary of the findings, conclusions, and suggestions for practical implementations, for further investigations and for further study.

Methodology

The following methodology has been utilized in this investigation. First, the historical and theological background of the literature under our purview is examined with particular reference to conceptions relevant to this study. Then a detailed textual study is made and conclusions are drawn. The contributions of the commentaries dictionaries are consulted, as are items of periodical literature pertinent to the subject. In a number of incidents results of previous works have been adopted as they seemed fit into the subject.

CHAPTER II

THE MISSIONARY MESSAGE OF THE YAHWIST

The Historical Context of the Yahwist

"Authors ordinarily do not write in a vacuum."¹ Like any other author of the Old Testament material, the Yahwist also wrote his masterpiece with a unique message in a particular historical situation. One cannot comprehend his message unless he looks at it in its historical perspective. The background against which the Yahwist produced his material and the needs and challenges of the audience of his time give clues for an understanding of his message.² It is beyond the scope of this thesis to reproduce the views of the various authors regarding the date of the Yahwist or to try to formulate a new theory. It is generally agreed by scholars that the Yahwist wrote in the tenth century B.C., during the reign of David or Solomon.³ Especially during Solomon's reign there was lively literary activity in Israel, probably centering around the temple. At this time

Israel stood just at the end of her historic age, at a point when men naturally are moved to recount the events

¹Peter F. Ellis, The Yahwist, the Bible's First Theologian (Indiana: Fides Publishers, 1968), p. 51.

²Ibid., p. 52.

³Opinions of authors such as Martin Noth, John Bright, G. W. Anderson, and Robert H. Pfeiffer were consulted. Though all people may not agree with this, since no other convincing alternative has been suggested so far, the above theory shall be accepted.

of the past. And Israelites--surely because their faith was rooted in historic events--had a peculiar feeling for history.⁴

The Yahwist's activity comes in this period. A concrete allusion to Solomon's time can be seen in the saying of Isaac concerning Esau in Gen. 27:39-40. This is meant to refer to the Edomite prince Hadad who was able to bring a part of the Edomite kingdom under his control (1 Kings 11:14-22).⁵

Features of the tenth century B.C. in Israel

The period of the reign of David and Solomon may be described as one of tension because of the prestige and prosperity of the kingdom at this period on the one hand and conflicts on the other. At no other time in the history of Israel was its political power so great as it was in this period. The people who had been wanderers were firmly established in the country. Those who were once subject to constant raids and oppressions of the neighboring peoples had become a well-protected monarchy.⁶ God gave victory to David wherever he went (2 Sam. 8:6), and David conquered and subdued many surrounding peoples (2 Sam. 8:1-18; 10:1-19; 12:26-31). When Solomon ascended the throne

⁴John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 198.

⁵Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology, translated by Wilbur A. Benware, XX (April 1966), 135.

⁶The book of Judges illustrates how Israel was subject to constant oppressions.

he was able to rule from the borders of Egypt to the banks of the Euphrates. Philistia, Edom, Moab, Ammon, and the new Aramean kingdom centering around Damascus had come under the control and taxation of the Israelite kingdom. Hiram, the king of Tyre, became David's close ally (2 Sam. 5:11).⁷ Thus people of a humble origin became one of the great powers of the Ancient Near East.

Political stability and success resulted in economic prosperity. In addition to taxation of the subject states, Solomon carried on great commercial enterprises (1 King 9:26-28; 10:22,28-29). His control of the caravan routes running through Ezion-Geber in the South, Damascus and Palmyra in the Northeast, and Megiddo and Hazor in the North brought in great wealth. With such great wealth he was able to carry out his magnificent building operations. Many private individuals, by their service to the king or by other personal efforts, also were able to acquire wealth in this period.⁸ Such people who were benefited by such conditions would normally support the monarchical system.

But the unification and establishment of the kingdom also had adverse effects on the life of the people. From the time of David there were internal struggles. There persisted the old enmity between the Joseph tribes and the tribes of Judah. The support of the northern tribes of Ishbaal and the Benjaminite line of Saul introduced political factions, and "there was long war between the house of Saul and the

⁷Ellis, pp. 52-53.

⁸Ibid., pp. 56-59; Bright, p. 196.

house of David" (2 Sam. 3:1). This is evident in the case of the assassination of Ishbaal, Saul's son and successor, by the supporters of David (2 Sam. 4:5-8), Shimei's curse of David (2 Sam. 16:7), David's deliverance of the seven sons of Saul to the Gibeonites to be crucified (2 Sam. 21:1-9) and the revolt of Sheba the Benjaminite (2 Sam. 20:1-3).⁹ Such animosity did play an important part in the division of the kingdom after the death of Solomon.

For all practical purposes the monarchical system was similar to that of the neighboring countries. There was a standing army, a system of taxation and a bureaucratic system modelled upon Egypt (2 Sam. 8:16-18; 1 Kings 4). But the elaborate administrative system and the magnificent building operations of Solomon led to financial difficulties too. It is no wonder then that these and other factors caused dissatisfaction among one section of the population which intensified the antimonarchical movements. The orthodox section in the kingdom looked upon the monarchical system with suspicion and antagonism. The tribal democracy was weakened and the divisive movements became strong.¹⁰

The structure of the state had an impact on the religious life of the people. With the inclusion of other peoples into the empire the religious life of the people was corrupted. This became a great problem

⁹Ellis, pp. 53-54.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 56; Bright, p. 202.

in Israel and it had grave consequences in the later periods of their history.¹¹

In view of these factors which had their impact upon the entire life of the people many may have wondered and even asked, "Where are you going, Israel?"¹² Two interpretations can be discerned regarding the monarchical system and the new way of life which emerged under it. One group considered the new system as evil and maintained that it was created against the will of God. Chapters 8 and 12 of 1 Samuel reflect this view. Those who favored the system pointed out the success of David and maintained that the establishment of the kingdom was divinely ordained and approved.

It was at this period that the Yahwist gave his message. His purpose was not to produce a masterpiece of literary art or to defend the validity of the establishment of the kingdom and the monarchy. His interest was theological and transcended his political outlook. In the emergence of the new state with a strong monarchy and prosperity he saw the divine purpose within the framework of the whole human history.¹³ Israel's contact with other peoples widened his understanding and he perceived that the new situation presented a challenge for the people of Israel in their relationship with others. The following pages will deal with the kind of challenge he offered the Israelites.

¹¹Martin Noth, The History of Israel (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), pp. 216-217.

¹²Ellis, p. 56.

¹³Noth, pp. 219-220.

The Extent of the Yahwistic (J) Material

Opinions differ among scholars as to the extent of the Yahwistic material. Gustav Holscher traces the Yahwistic material beyond the Pentateuch, through the books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and as far as 1 Kings 12:19. While von Rad preferred to maintain a Hexateuch, Martin Noth traced the material only to the book of Numbers.¹⁴ Wolff adopts the view of Noth, not only on the basis of literary analysis, but also on the basis of the understanding of the Yahwist's theology. This will become clear as we look more closely at the text of the Yahwist. J is not particularly interested in the actual conquest of the land of Palestine because his specific polemic is religious rather than national. He does show that the people of Israel possessed the land, but he does it within the framework of the salvation history, the history which encompasses all the nations of the world. At any rate, no scholar disagrees with the view that the Yahwistic passages go at least as far as the book of Numbers. On the basis of these observations the object of the study in this chapter will be from Gen. 2:4b, the Yahwist's creation account, to Num. 25:5, which ends the Balaam episode.¹⁵

¹⁴Wolff, XX, 133.

¹⁵Ibid., XX, 132-134; Ellis, pp. 31-32.

A Study of the Yahwistic Passages

Theological background

The book of Genesis is generally divided into two main sections, chapters 1 to 11 and 12 to 50. The first section deals with the primeval history and the second with the patriarchal history. The first section forms the background for the understanding of the second; therefore, it is necessary to see what the Yahwist has to say about the primeval history.

According to the generally agreed classification the Yahwistic sections of chapters 1 to 11 of Genesis are as follows: the creation account (2:4b-25), the fall (3:1-24), Cain and Abel (4:1-16), the descendants of Cain (4:17-24), the descendants of Seth (4:25-26), sons of gods and the daughters of men (6:1-4), the corruption of mankind (6:5-8), the preparation for the flood (7:1-10, 12, 16b), the flood (7:17a, 22-23), genealogies (10:8-19, 21, 24-30), the tower of Babel (11:1-9), the descendants of Terah (11:28-30).¹⁶ According to this classification, the Yahwist begins the primeval history with the creation of the universe and the succeeding sections depict the sinful nature of mankind and its consequence. In the genealogical lists he shows how all the families of the earth originated from the same ancestor. His purpose is not to show the unity of mankind as such, rather he is interested in showing how Yahweh deals with the whole world. Thus his outlook is universal in his presentation of the primeval history.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 33.

The Yahwist reviews the primeval history in four main episodes: the paradise story, the story of Cain and Abel, the account of the universal deluge, and the building of the tower of Babel. One can find the account of great sin in all four episodes: disobedience in the first, murder in the second, cohabitation of the divine beings with the daughters of men in the third, and the pride of the builders of the tower of Babel in the last. Each one of them is followed by divine judgement: expulsion from the garden, expulsion from the fertile land, destruction by flood, and the scattering of the people respectively. But these episodes do not end on a note of judgment, nor is grace wanting. Even after the fall Yahweh's grace reached man, as Yahwist clothed him and let him live. Cain was given protection and a family was saved from the flood to begin the repopulation of the earth. While divine grace reaches man in all the first three of the four episodes, it is wanting in the fourth. The story ends with the account of the scattering of mankind. Such an end raises the question, "Is the relationship between God and man completely broken? Is there or is there not any hope for mankind?" The Yahwist provides an answer to the question in Gen. 12:1-4a. In this sense Gen. 12:1-4a is the conclusion of the episode of the tower of Babel.¹⁷ At the same time it is the beginning of a new age in Yahweh's dealing with the world, an age in which Yahweh is going to act in a new way. With this understanding one should approach the Yahwist's presentation of the history

¹⁷Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, translated by D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), I, 163; James Muilenburg, "Abraham and the Nations," Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology, XIX (October 1965), 388-389.

in order to understand the real intention of the Yahwist. If the Yahwist was convinced that Yahweh's purpose was to save all mankind in the call of Abraham, this message would demand involvement on the part of his audience and present a challenge to them. A study on the text will deal with the challenge he presents before Israel in the tenth century B.C.

Textual study

- Gen. 12:1-4a: 1. And Yahweh said to Abraham,
 "Go from your land and your kindred
 and from your father's house to the
 land which I will show you;
 2. And I will make you a great nation,
 and I will bless you and make your name
 great, so that you will be a blessing;
 3. I will bless those who bless you, and
 him who curses you I will curse; and in
 you all the families of the earth shall
 be blessed."
 4a. Abram went as Yahweh had told him; and
 Lot went with him.

One of the literary techniques of the Yahwist is his manner of introducing certain foreshadowing passages to show the direction of

his narrative, to link the various parts together, and to emphasize his doctrinal point.¹⁸

An analysis of the Yahwist's use of the foreshadowing text reveals five characteristics. a) The foreshadowing texts tend to recur in series after the manner of refrain. b) They are usually placed in the mouth of God, a prophet, or some important person. c) They frequently repeat the same basic ideas and sometimes even the same key words. d) They tend to outline the storyline to be followed in the saga. e) The foreshadowing usually proceeds from obscure to clear, from the general to the specific.¹⁹

Ellis calls Gen. 12:1-4a a foreshadowing text because it carries all the characteristics specified above. It is the beginning of those texts which deal with the rise of Israel. von Rad calls it one of the "transitional paragraphs." According to him such transitional paragraphs serve to provide a transition or connection between large cycles of material. They are not mere external ties, but they give the writer an opportunity to articulate theologically programmatic material and are significant for the understanding of the whole.²⁰

Both of these descriptions are apt as we consider the context and meaning of the text. It is foreshadowing because the Yahwist portrays Yahweh as revealing what is going to happen in the future and what he is going to do with Israel and with the world. It is transitional because so far Yahweh has been dealing with mankind in one way and

¹⁸Ellis, p. 123.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 125.

²⁰Gerhard von Rad, Genesis, translated by John A. Marks (London: SCM Press, 1956), p. 160.

from now on he is going to deal in a different way. Though the way he acts is different, the purpose of his acts is the same. He intends to bless all men.

Yahweh's promise to Abraham is a new beginning, extending through the patriarchal stories like a red thread and repeated to every patriarch (Gen. 13:14-16; 15:5, 7, 18; 18:18; 22:17; 26:24; 28:3-4, 13-15; 32:12; 35:9-12; 48:16). It is never again pronounced as clearly and explicitly as in 12:1-3.²¹ All these references demonstrate the Yahwist's technique of repeating the same idea in a series of events.

It should be noted that the Yahwist's emphasis is on a theology which is based on the acts of Yahweh. Since he is not a contemporary of the patriarchs, he is not giving a contemporary witness to the events that happened in their lives. He goes back to "a well-founded tradition authentic in its essential and faithfully conserved by Israel's living memory."²² He makes use of such transmitted materials and molds them in such a way as to fit into his theological theme. So each narrative he uses should be understood for its own value as well as from the point of his broader outlook.²³ He interprets these narratives in order to awaken a right response among the Israelites within their contemporary situation. In Israel the concept of the solidarity of the people with their forefathers was strong, so both

²¹Ibid., pp. 160-161.

²²Ellis, p. 93.

²³von Rad, Genesis, p. 160.

the Yahwist and his audience were aware of the fact that what was told to Abraham applied to the whole people.

The dominant theme in Gen. 12:1-3 is "blessing." In verses 2 and 3a there are five clauses. The first and the third clauses specify the content of the second clause. The content of the blessing is that Abraham will become a great nation and his name will be made great. The second part of the third clause is preliminary to the final clause in verse 3b, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."²⁴ The promise of the land is reduced to a secondary feature of the narrative. The Yahwist had before him the tradition regarding the promise of the land which was attached to Canaanite sanctuaries (Gen. 12:6-7; 28:13). But for the Yahwist that was not decisive and it recedes completely in the introductory words of this section.²⁵ His outlook is universal rather than particularistic. Conquest of the land was an already accomplished fact, but the Yahwist finds Yahweh's purpose beyond that.

Yahweh promises a great nation that will come out of Abraham. The word used for "nation" is *גו*. There is a sharp distinction in the usage of the terms *גו* and *עם* of which the biblical writers were aware. A nation comes into existence when a people become aware of itself as a social solidarity.²⁶ Thus, existence of a people is a

²⁴Terrence E. Fretheim, Creation, Fall and Flood (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), p. 122.

²⁵Wolff, XX, 140.

²⁶Muilenburg, XIX, 387.

precondition to becoming a nation. Speiser has pointed out that whenever Israel is spoken of as the people of God, the term עַם is used, not גֹּיִם. Unlike עַם, גֹּיִם is never construed with Yahweh, and there is no construction such as גֹּיִם יְהוָה. When Israel is spoken of as God's people, the forms עַמִּי, עַמִּיךָ, עַמִּיךָ are used; but גֹּיִם is never used with a possessive suffix.

Israel's faith was based on the relationship existing between God and the people. The Israelites were God's עַם. They were chosen to be his עַם and were treated as such, but they were made a nation to give them stability and status so that they might carry out their task with added prestige.²⁷ The promise to Abraham of a great name and great nation was conceived to have been fulfilled in the period of David and Solomon. In this respect it can be said that the Yahwist validates the establishment of the kingdom and monarchy by demonstrating that it was the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise to Abraham. But that promise and fulfillment had a goal, namely, "so that you will be a blessing." This goal is further exemplified in verse 3. "Chosenness means responsibility."²⁸

The climax of the promise to Abraham occurs in verse 3. The first part of the verse, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse," might seem to indicate that the Yahwist

²⁷E. A. Speiser, "People and Nation of Israel," Journal of Biblical Literature, LXXIX (1960), 157-163, passim.

²⁸Fretheim, p. 18.

is a particularist. But in view of the context and in the light of his theological outlook it becomes clear that particularism is contrary to his spirit. The words "blessing" and "curse" formerly used in the cult become the words of promise spoken by Yahweh, "I will bless" and "I will curse." The Yahwist thus has prepared the way for his ultimate purpose by use of traditional material. His point of interest is not to claim any superiority of Israel over against the gentiles, but to show that the blessing or curse on the surrounding peoples depends on their relationship to Israel and her mission.²⁹ This places Israel under a special responsibility in her relations with other peoples. Moreover, the pronouncement in verse 3a stands between two other statements in verse 2b and 3b in which Yahweh's purpose for the election of Israel as well as her obligation are implied. Therefore, the pronouncement in verse 3a should be interpreted in the light of the context. It can also be noted that the entire section deals especially with blessing, the dominant note of this section, and not curse. This is further carried on in verse 3b.

Verse 3b in Hebrew reads

וּנְבָרְכָה כָּל מְשִׁפְחַת הָאֲדָמָה
 וְכָל בְּרִית וְכָל מְשִׁפְחַת הָאֲדָמָה

The translation preferred in this thesis is, "In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." The first word in the passage is in the Niph'al. Grammatically Niph'al in Hebrew is similar to the Greek middle voice, and it can be translated either with reflexive, reciprocal, or passive meaning.³⁰ The RSV translated this passage reflexively and

²⁹Wolff, XX, 143-144.

³⁰A. E. Cowley, Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1910), pp. 137-138.

renders the translation, "And by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." But in the footnote it suggests that it can be translated with passive meaning (In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed). Scholars generally consider this passage in the light of the parallel passages, Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4 and 28:14. In 18:18 and 28:14 the word בְּכָל is used with the Niph'al with the preposition בְּ; in the other passages it is used with the Hithpa'el. Since scholars think that these parallel passages convey the same idea, they prefer a uniform translation of these passages, and men like Speiser, Muilenburg and Rowley translate all these passages reflexively.³¹ Grammatically, both reflexive and passive meanings are possible; therefore, no strong case can be presented for one or the other on the basis of the grammatic construction alone.

A strong point in favor of the passages in the Niph'al would be on the basis of the Yahwist's theology and his intention to give this particular message to the Israelites. He did not address the gentiles with an apologetic treatise. Rather, he was addressing the people of Israel who had a call through their forefather Abraham. It was an exhortation to realize the meaning of their history in the divine promise to them and to see in that promise their obligation toward the other people. The Yahwist was not interested in justifying the inclusion of

³¹E. A. Speiser, Genesis (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), p. 86; Muilenburg, XIX, 392. H. H. Rowley, The Missionary Message of the Old Testament (London: The Carey Kingsgate Press Ltd., 1944), p. 25.

the neighboring peoples into their empire; he was interested in pointing out the great possibility in that situation of carrying out Yahweh's purpose of extending his grace to all men. Understood this way, one can see that there was clearly a call to involvement on the part of Israel in carrying out her mission. A passive translation of 12:3b carries this idea. According to this Yahweh is the subject of the blessing and the families of the earth are the object of the blessing. Israel plays the role of the mediator or instrument. As Ryle suggests, "in Abraham is impersonated a blessing that shall become universal."³² The use of the passive implies "that the privileges to be enjoyed by Abraham and his descendants shall be extended to the other nations."³³ Israel the possessor of blessing becomes the mediator of that blessing to others. How the Yahwist expounds this theme will be discussed at a later point.

However, the use of the Hithpa'el which is translated in the reflexive form also has validity where it occurs, but its validity depends only on the initial act of Yahweh for which Israel is the mediator. Neither Israel nor the other peoples could effect blessing on themselves. Yahweh is the initiator. But the effectiveness of the blessing depends on the receptive attitude of the peoples. Receptivity does not mean to use the name of Abraham or of Israel as a formula of

³²Herbert E. Ryle, The Book of Genesis (Cambridge: The University Press, 1914), p. 156.

³³Speiser, Genesis, p. 86.

benediction or to make a universal proverb of it. Rather, in their receiving the blessing which is mediated through Israel the people invoke upon themselves the benefits of the blessings. It means more than just making use of the formula, it clearly means receptivity on the part of the hearers. The New English Bible translation of these passages, "all the families on earth will pray to be blessed as you are blessed," is an attempt to compromise the Niph'al and the Hithpa'el use of the verb. Both willingness on the part of Israel to be the mediator of the blessing and the receptive attitude on the part of the nations are involved in these passages. Israel cannot escape from the responsibility.

The term used for other peoples in Gen. 12:3 is בְּנֵי אָדָם which means "families." Of the parallel passages the same term is used in 28:14 and in the other places the term used is גוֹיִם which is translated "nations." Prior to 12:3 the Yahwist uses the term בְּנֵי אָדָם with reference to the families of the Canaanites in 10:8. Thus, it is possible that he is referring to the peoples who were living close to the Israelites with whom they came into contact during the Davidic and the Solomonic periods. In the Old Testament in general, the term "family" "refers to the Hebrew tribes, the nations of Israel and Judah, foreign nations, and all Israel, viewed as a community of faith rather than a nation."³⁴ The blessings of Yahweh then are to be mediated

³⁴O. J. Baab, "Family," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1962), II, 238.

to the community of peoples who are in need of blessing. The responsibility of Israel is not merely toward individuals, but to the people as a whole in their various communal ties. On the other hand, the word **גוֹיִם** means political and social groups rather than those who belong to the same kinship. "The Yahwist historian has so arranged his material that the scattering and mutual alienation of the nations of mankind (Gen. 11:1-9) is immediately followed by Yahweh's call of Abraham."³⁵ The new nation is chosen to receive blessing and then to be the means of mediating the blessing to all the nations.³⁶ In this respect the Yahwist's use of the words **מְשֻׁבָּתִים** and **גוֹיִם** connote the same thing.

Gen. 18:18: "Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed."

The Yahwist further carries on the blessing motive in the subsequent history of the patriarchs and tries to introduce it wherever possible. In Gen. 18:18 he introduces a divine soliloquy. The verdict on the two cities Sodom and Gomorrah has been already fixed by Yahweh, but he intends to reveal his plan to Abraham because in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed and he is in a position to teach his descendants.³⁷ Moreover, "Abraham's role in God's total plan is such that he

³⁵E. J. Hamelin, "Nations," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (Nashville: Parthenon Press, 1962), III, 515.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷von Rad, Genesis, p. 205.

must be privy to the Lord's purposes."³⁸ At the same time the Yahwist shows how Abraham intercedes for the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, though he does not succeed in his efforts. Though the people of those two cities are wicked Abraham plays the role of intercessor on their behalf. By this incident the Yahwist is trying to inculcate the kind of attitude Israel should have toward other peoples.³⁹

The reason for God's amazing intention is given particularly in v. 19: Abraham has the position of teacher for his descendants, and the event at Sodom will contain a special admonitory significance for all time (2 Peter 2:6).⁴⁰

Gen. 22:18: "And by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves"

The promise of great posterity and possession of the land is reiterated in the preceding verse and the promise of blessing to the nations through the descendants of Abraham is repeated in verse 18. At this point the Yahwist makes use of an Elohist narrative and develops it into his theological design.⁴¹ Abraham's only son through whom a great posterity had been promised was at the point of being sacrificed. But it was avoided by the intervention of God.

³⁸Raymond E. Brown and others, The Jerome Bible Commentary I (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 21.

³⁹Wolff, XX, 148.

⁴⁰von Rad, Genesis, p. 205.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 233.

Therefore the Yahwist is showing how Yahweh kept his promises to Abraham so that his plan for the world might be fulfilled through Abraham and his descendants.

Gen. 26:4: "I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven . . . and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves."

The promise made to Abraham is further projected into the life of Isaac and later in the life of Jacob (Gen. 28:14). While Isaac was living in Gerar there was a famine in the land which constrained him to go to the land of Egypt (26:1-5). Then Yahweh's word came to him assuring that Yahweh would bless him. The Yahwist interprets divine protection and providence and the multiplication of the descendants in the light of Yahweh's promise to the patriarchs. It has not only an immediate context, but also the dimension of Yahweh's purpose for the nations of the earth. In a time of danger something like famine does not interrupt Yahweh's plan. The promise becomes the determining factor in the life of the patriarchs, as well as the guiding principle of life.

Gen. 28:14: "And your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west . . . and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

The promise of great posterity, possession of the land and the ultimate goal, which finds its fulfillment in the blessing of the nations is again reiterated in the life of Jacob. Even in Jacob's flight from his father's house the divine plan is revealed. In any event Yahweh's plan cannot be shattered. At each stage in the life of the patriarchs the Yahwist constantly has interwoven his theological point. He points out how the promise has found its fulfillment in the life of the patriarchs. These fulfillments are the anticipation of the promise regarding the promise to the nations through Israel, which should motivate Israel to discern Yahweh's purpose and to carry out her mission to the world.

The Meaning of the Term "Blessing"

The Yahwist's use of the term "blessing" gives some clues for an understanding of his message. The Yahwist depicts the history of mankind in such a way as to show how badly it needs blessing. He does not use the word "blessing" in his primeval history except in Gen. 9:26b, where it does not refer to blessing for men. On the other hand, he uses the word אָרַךְ five times: Gen. 3:14,17; 4:11; 9:25 and 5:29. The objects of the curse were the serpent and the garden, Cain and Canaan. According to the contexts and content of the curse in these sections, under the curse freedom is destroyed; man is expelled from fruitful life; he is driven away into aimless wandering and to the tormenting fear of death, effects degradation, bondage to the dust and exclusion from the community of the free; the ground gives preponderance

to thorns and thistles; and man labours in vain.⁴² Blessing then should bring about the opposite effects.

The Yahwist uses the word "blessing" in three different contexts:

(1) Yahweh confers blessings on man. He promises a great name and a great nation (Gen. 12:2), great posterity (Gen. 22:17; 26:24), and the possession of the land (22:17; 26:4). He blesses the land (Gen. 27:27), makes the land fruitful and gives abundance of produce (Gen. 26:12). He blesses material possessions such as flocks, herds, silver, gold, servants, and camels (Gen. 24:35); gives success in one's undertaking (Gen. 30:27: God blessed Jacob in his undertaking of shepherding his uncle's flocks); gives success in one's life (Gen. 39:2-5: Joseph was blessed in Egypt in whatever he did and became a successful man). When the word "blessing" is used the chief emphasis is always on the material blessing. Success in life is viewed as the manifestation of the possession of Yahweh's blessing.⁴³ (2) Man confers blessing on man. The concept behind this is that the word spoken has power in itself and that it will effect blessing when it is pronounced. It may be pronounced either in the name of Yahweh or without any reference to Yahweh.⁴⁴ It was a custom that one blessed the

⁴²Wolff, XX, 145-146.

⁴³Frederick C. Grant and H. H. Rowley, Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 109.

⁴⁴W. J. Harrelson, "Blessing and Cursing," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), I, 446.

other; for example Laban's household blessed Rebekah (Gen. 24:60). They wished that she have a great posterity and that her descendants possess the gates of their enemies. Isaac blessed Jacob (Gen. 27:27-29) and Jacob blessed Pharoah (Gen. 47:7,10), his grandchildren and children (Genesis 48 and 49). (3) Man blesses God. Melchizedek blessed God (Gen. 14:20); Abraham's servant blessed God (Gen. 24:48). Such an act means praising or giving thanks to God for something he has done. In all these references, the Yahwist recognizes that Yahweh is the source of blessing. Blessing removes the burden of curse. Man enters a free and fruitful life, comes out of bondage, out of vain strife and aimless wandering, out of the hubris of fear of death.⁴⁵ Yahweh thus enables mankind to live a happy and prosperous life free from all kinds of bondage. All these imply the material side of human life. Yahweh chose Israel and promised all these blessings to her in his grace. Israel, the receiver of all these blessings, becomes the mediator of these blessings to all the families of the earth. Thus the Yahwist calls the Israelites of the tenth century B.C. to show their concerns for their neighboring peoples. They are not merely passive recipients, but active conveyors of Yahweh's blessings.⁴⁶

The Yahwist's Presentation of the Patriarchal History

Wolff finds this theme of blessing running through the Yahwist's patriarchal history. In Genesis 13 where the Abraham-Lot narrative

⁴⁵Wolff, XX, 146.

⁴⁶Passages quoted in this section are taken from Ellis' classification of the Yahwistic material.

occurs, Abraham leaves the good portion of the land to Lot. By this narrative the Yahwist calls his contemporaries to enter into peaceful settlement with their neighbors. In Genesis 18 Abraham intercedes with Yahweh for Sodom and Gomorrah though Yahweh's verdict on those two cities had been fixed. This is an indication of the kind of attitude Israel should have toward other peoples. Their commission does not consist in agreeing with the judgment which their neighbors deserve, but in their intercessory activity for them.⁴⁷ Abraham's victory over the kings who defeated the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah results in his encounter with Melchizedek (Gen. 14:18-24). Melchizedek recognizes that Abraham won the battle with the help of God. He blessed Abraham and praised God. Thus the Yahwist points out that other people can come to the recognition of Yahweh's acts in Israel and give praise to him. Thus Yahweh's blessings are mediated to them through his acts in Israel.⁴⁸

In Genesis 26 Isaac comes into contact with Abimelech. The Yahwist presents Abimelech as the king of the Philistines. The Philistines were Israel's old enemies, and David finally defeated them (2 Sam. 8:1). Though Isaac was moved to go to Egypt, Yahweh told him to stay in Gerar. There Yahweh blessed him and he became rich (26:12-16). After a long series of struggles Abimelech exclaims, "We see plainly that the Lord is with you" (verse 28), and "You are now blessed of

⁴⁷Wolff, XX, 147-148.

⁴⁸Cf. footnote 46.

Yahweh" (verse 30). The Yahwist thus points out that other people move into relationship with Isaac as one blessed of Yahweh. A solemn covenant is made between Isaac and Abimelech and peace is established. This is a lesson to the Israelites how they can bring blessing upon others, by leading others to the recognition that Yahweh has blessed his people and by coming into peaceful settlement and establishing peace.

The Jacob-Laban narrative gives further illustration. Laban confesses he has learned that Yahweh has blessed him because of Jacob (Gen. 30:27). The point made in this narrative is that through Jacob (Israel) material blessing is effected among the Arameans. At the end of the Jacob-Laban cycle there is also a covenant of peace between Jacob and Laban (31:51-52). In the Joseph story the Yahwist shows how Yahweh blessed others through Joseph.⁴⁹ Jacob also blessed Pharaoh (47:7,10), which means that he wished God's blessings on Pharaoh. Thus the Yahwist shows that Yahweh's blessings can also be extended to other peoples.

With these observations it can be said that the Yahwist presents his message that Israel can be of blessing to other peoples by coming to peaceful settlement with others, by interceding for others, through economic aid, by leading others to the recognition that Yahweh is with his people, and by wishing God's blessing on others.

⁴⁹Wolff, XX, 148-151 passim.

On the basis of the foregoing discussion one can see that Yahweh is blessing the nations through the activities of the people of Yahweh in their life situation. The material blessings are not an end in themselves. In the above mentioned narratives the Yahwist is calling the attention of his contemporaries to how Yahweh had been active in the life of his people in their relations with others, even with their former enemies. Thus he poses before them during the tenth century B.C. when Israel is in her glorious age. The blessings effected on the peoples through the patriarchs are indicative of the fact that Yahweh is still able to accomplish his purpose for the nations through Israel, and that Israel still has the obligation of carrying out her mission. The end purpose is more than mere material blessings.

Blessing in the Context of Covenant Relationship

The most important aspect of Israel being blessed by Yahweh is that Israel in turn becomes a blessing, that is, the mediator of blessing to the families of the earth. To be made a blessing is in itself a blessing. Yahweh chose her and established a relationship with her, termed "the covenant relationship." The Yahwist as well as the people of Israel were from the beginning aware of this relationship, and the entire history of Israel can be interpreted in terms of this relationship.

The Yahwist and Elohist strata exhibit, partly by explicit statement, partly in the general manner of their presentation of the patriarchal history, a remarkable retrojection of the covenant concept into the earlier period of the national life.⁵⁰

The Yahwist presents the story of divine election in a series of blessings which gave meaning to the entire history of the people of Israel.⁵¹

In his dealing with the patriarchs Yahweh revealed himself and his will for them, their descendants, and the nations of the world. The response he expects is that his people obey his will in faith (Gen. 12:4a), obey his voice and keep his charges, his commands, his statutes and laws (Gen. 26:5), worship him (Gen. 12:6-20; 13:1-5; 26:35) and him alone (Ex. 32:7-10). The covenant relationship demands a life worthy of it. In this relationship Israel has become a peculiar people. In the interpretation of the history of Israel the connection between blessing and covenant are interrelated. Israel who was brought into this relationship is called to be the mediator of Yahweh's blessing to the nations, meaning then that all the nations should be brought into such a covenant relationship. They should be brought to the true knowledge of Yahweh, to the knowledge of his will, to obedient faith, to the worship of Yahweh, and to the obedience of his voice, to the keeping of his charges, his commandments, his statutes

⁵⁰Walther Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), I, 49.

⁵¹Ibid.

and his laws. This is the ultimate purpose of Yahweh's electing and blessing Israel. This means establishment of the right relationship between himself and the nations of the world.

The Yahwist does not say that Israel was engaged in any missionary activity in the sense of sending missionaries to other peoples, but he does point out that Israel could be effective in her missionary task. The Patriarchal narratives show how they could be of blessing to the nation as discussed in the previous section. The Yahwist's main purpose is to present before Israel her challenge during the tenth century and to call the people to involvement in their task.

Summary

The Yahwist speaks to his time when Israel attained dignity and stability in the political life, along with prosperity. At this period they encountered various peoples. The Yahwist interprets these factors in the light of the promises made by Yahweh to the patriarchs which were realized during the time of David and Solomon. He validates the establishment of the kingdom and monarchy and the prosperity they achieved with the divine plan for the world.

The Yahwist's contention is that Israel as the possessor of blessing should be the mediator of divine blessing for all the nations. She thus becomes an instrument of Yahweh in his dealing with the world. The whole people of Israel have this call. The object of her mission is not to a few individuals but to people in groups.

He points out that Israel can become effective in her mission to the world if she submits herself to Yahweh's plan. The incidents in the life of the patriarchs in their relations with others stand as evidence for the goals of her mission. The ultimate concern is to extend Yahweh's blessings to others by bringing them into the covenant relationship. The people of Yahweh who have come into such a relationship, become the mediator of the blessings to the nations.

The Yahwist takes the opportunity when Israel is in her glorious age to present the challenge and the wonderful opportunity provided for his people. But he does not present any specific method to carry out the task. To find any specific method, one has to turn elsewhere in the Old Testament.

CHAPTER III

ISRAEL THE SERVANT OF YAHWEH AND THE NATIONS: ISAIAH 40-55

The Historical Context of Isaiah 40-55

The Yahwist uttered his message at a period when Israel's prestige and prosperity were at their highest point in her national history. Deutero-Isaiah gave his message in a situation which was contrary to the former.¹ If the Yahwist could interpret the history of his time in the light of the divine plan for Israel and for the nations of the earth, Deutero-Isaiah could do the same thing though the situation was different. Chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah reflect the situation of the exilic period, an epoch-making period in the history of Israel.

The destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile mark the great watershed of Israel's history. At a stroke her national existence was ended and, with it, all the institutions in which her corporate life had expressed itself; they could never be re-created in precisely the same form. The state destroyed and the state cult perforce suspended, the old national-cultic community was broken, and Israel was left for a moment an agglomeration of uprooted and beaten individuals, by no external mark any longer a people.²

It is difficult to assess exactly the condition of the people left in Judah as well as of those who were in exile. However, from the

¹Since the author of chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah is unknown, for the sake of convenience the author of this section is called Deutero-Isaiah.

²John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), p. 323.

prophetic and other writings which appeared during this period it is possible to deduce it to some extent.

The condition in Judah

We know virtually nothing of what happened in Judah during the years after the destruction of Jerusalem, before the restoration.³ That the destruction took place is certain, but the nature of the destruction and the extent of the general devastation of the city and of the depopulation remain a matter of debate. Of the first deportation in 597 B.C., 2 Kings 24:14,16 presents two different accounts. Of the second deportation, the book of kings does not give any estimate except a reference to the officials of the temple and to the sixty men who were put to death (2 Kings 25:18-21).⁴ Furthermore, according to 2 Kings 25 the devastation took place on a large scale, the destruction was deliberate, and there was a wholesale depopulation. But according to Jer. 52:28-30 the depopulation cannot be so extensive⁵ since he records the sum-total of the deported as 4,600. If this figure does not include women and children, the number of the deported would be between 12,000 and 15,000.⁶ Therefore, it can be assumed that there

³Ibid., p. 324.

⁴Charles Francis Whitely, The Exilic Age (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press 1957), pp. 62-63.

⁵Peter R. Ackroyd, Exile and Restoration (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 21.

⁶Claus Westermann, Isaiah 40-66, translated by David M. G. Stalker (London: SCM Press, 1969), p. 5.

was a considerable section of the population left in the land. We may also assume that after some time the refugees who had hid themselves during the Babylonian attacks had come back (Jer. 40:7-12).

The poorest of the land were left in the city to be vinedressers and plowmen (2 Kings 25:12); their condition was miserable and precarious (Lam. 5:1-18). Though the temple had been burned down, the site of the temple remained a holy spot, and pilgrims continued to come to this spot to offer sacrifice among the blackened ruins (Jer. 41:5). A cult of some sort was going on, but there was no pure Yahwism (Ezek. 33:24-29; Is. 57:3-13). There were also some godly people who mourned over Zion and longed for its restoration. Psalms 74 and 79; Is. 63:7-64:12 and the book of Lamentation belong to this context.⁷

The condition of those in exile

The life of the exiles in Babylon does not seem to have been miserable. Though they were not free, neither were they prisoners. They were not dispersed among the local population, but apparently placed in settlements of their own (Ezek. 3:15; Ezra 2:59; 8:17). They were allowed to build their houses, to engage in agriculture, to trade and to earn their living in any way they could. They were also allowed to meet together and to continue some sort of community life (Ezek. 8:1; 14:1; 33:30-31). Biblical references and archaeological evidences testify

⁷Bright, p. 325.

to the fact that the Jews in Babylon were able to maintain contact with those who were left in Jerusalem. Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles through the Palestinian ambassadors to Babylon (Jer. 29:31). The false prophets who were in Babylon were also able to send letters to Jerusalem (Jer. 29:26). Therefore it is certain that they had freedom to maintain contact with those in Palestine.

Many people found their way to other places to seek safety. A lot of them went to Egypt (Jer. 44:1). Presumably their descendants remained there throughout the Persian period (Is. 19:18). Many fled to Moab, Edom and Ammon (Jer. 40:11). They were thus scattered among the nations.⁸ "Never again would she be coterminous with any political entity or geographical area. Whatever the future might hold for her, there could be no full return to the pattern of the past."⁹

The exile and Israel's faith

As the Jews were dislocated from their temple, there was a shift in the emphasis of the religious practices. Regular cultic practice, especially according to the standards which the Deuteronomic reformers had set, was impossible as they lived in a foreign land. So other practices received great emphasis. The importance of the sabbath was accentuated (Ezek. 20:12-17; 22:8,26; 23:38). The practice of circumcision was strictly observed. Prayer and the keeping of the law acquired

⁸Ibid., pp. 326-327. See also Whitely, pp. 66-71.

⁹Ibid., p. 328.

new depth and meaning. The synogogue worship probably began during this period. The Jews were not compelled to accept the religion of the Babylonians, so they were able to keep their identity.¹⁰

As the Jews were exposed to other religions and cultures they might have wondered whether Yahweh was really supreme and the only God, because the defeat and humiliation they experienced were interpreted either as the lack of power on the part of Yahweh to protect his people or as unwillingness to help his people. Thus their faith was on trial, and the temptation to apostacize was great. Deutero-Isaiah's polemic against the folly of idols (Is. 44:9-20) and the absurdity of idolatry reflects such a situation. His affirmations of the ultimate triumph of Yahweh's redemptive purpose provided men with a hope to which they could cling.¹¹ In spite of all depressions, there was also hope for the future. Prophecies concerning restoration by prophets like Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel encouraged the people to hope for the future restoration.

The last days of the Babylonian empire and the rise of Cyrus

The immediate situation which aroused the prophet to give his message was the rising of Cyrus. The Babylonian empire was a short lived one. Nebuchadnezzar had been able to hold the empire intact and to enlarge it,

¹⁰James Muilenburg, "Isaiah 40-66," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), VI, 396-397.

¹¹Bright, p. 328.

but with his death in 562 B.C., the empire declined rapidly. Its last king was Nabonidus who was weak. Babylon's most dangerous external threat was the Median kingdom. So, when there was an internal revolt in the Median empire Nabonidus wanted to seize that opportunity to weaken its strength and supported Cyrus, a vassal king of Ansha. In 550 B.C., Cyrus repudiated the sovereignty of his overlord Astyages and incorporated the Medes under his leadership. By 547 B.C., the whole of the Lydian empire came under the control of Cyrus. Finally he became a great threat to the Babylonian empire. Babylon was already weak and rent by internal dissensions and divided interests and thus was unable to resist Cyrus. These events awakened the greatest excitement among the Jews and stirred the latent hopes of release.¹² It was in the midst of these events that Deutero-Isaiah uttered his message. He interpreted the imminent events in the light of Yahweh's intention for Israel and stirred them to respond to his action.

The Message of Deutero-Isaiah

Authors may differ in their opinion regarding the dominant theme of Deutero-Isaiah's message. Westermann considers that the unique feature of Deutero-Isiah's message is the proclamation of salvation.¹³ McKenzie considers that "the dominant theme of Second Isaiah is not salvation,

¹²Bright, pp. 332-335. Whitley, pp. 17-19.

¹³Westermann, p. 9.

but the mission for which the nation is saved."¹⁴ Both of these opinions have some value in understanding the message of Deutero-Isaiah. At that particular period in history Israel needed salvation, and therefore the prophet declares the imminent salvation and exhorts the people of Israel to go forth from Babylon with joy (48:20), assuring Yahweh's blessing for his people. At the same time Yahweh's purpose does not come to an end with the salvation of Israel, but encompasses the whole world. Israel as the chosen people and the recipient of Yahweh's grace is called not to be passive, but to carry out the mission for which she has been called. The salvation which is going to be accomplished for her is but one of the series of events through which Yahweh has been dealing with her. However, this event is significant in her life and gives her the opportunity and motivation to carry out her mission. The theme of salvation and mission are thus inseparably related to each other in Deutero-Isaiah.

The prophet begins his message with a declaration of comfort for the people of Israel (40:1) because their sins have been pardoned and they have suffered more than they deserved (40:2). Now Yahweh is going to redeem Israel. The new turn has been set in motion by stirring Cyrus (41:2-3) who will accomplish Yahweh's will. In order to accomplish his will Yahweh has furnished Cyrus with a world empire.¹⁵ His promises

¹⁴John L. McKenzie, Second Isaiah (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1968), lvii.

¹⁵Gerhard von Rad, Old Testament Theology, translated by D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), II, 244.

for Israel are based on the promises of the past. To assure the people, Deutero-Isaiah is using the election tradition. Because Israel has been chosen by Yahweh and promises have been made to her from the beginning (40:8-9,14), she can be sure that he will fulfill his promises. Related to the election tradition is the exodus tradition, which the prophet also uses. He pictures the new saving event in the form of another exodus (43:16-17, 18-21; 48:20-21; 51:9-11).¹⁶ Thus the actualization of redemption is made plain. What Yahweh does here and now is what he did in bringing Israel out of bondage in the past.¹⁷

The primary concern of the prophet is not to formulate a doctrine about God; however, in order to assure the people of the imminent salvation which forms a part of Yahweh's total plan for the world, he brings into his message the doctrine about God. He asserts that Yahweh is the Creator (40:12-26), and that the Creator is the Redeemer (43:1). For Deutero-Isaiah creation and redemption are co-related.¹⁸ Is. 40:12-26 is not so much a cosmological argument. For the prophet the original creation of the world is not a finished work or complete in itself separate from God's saving activity. It forms a part of the whole activity of God.¹⁹ The redemption which he is going to accomplish is

¹⁶ Ibid., II, 239-241.

¹⁷ Ackroyd, pp. 119-130.

¹⁸ von Rad, II, 240-241.

¹⁹ Christopher R. North, The Second Isaiah (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 13.

described as the "new thing" and it is a new thing insofar as it is related to creation and exodus (43:14-21). The Creator God is also the controller of human history. In the past he had also given Israel such evidences, but she was deaf and blind to perceive those evidences (42:18-20). He had delivered her into the hands of her enemies not because he was incapable to act, but because of her sins (43:27-28). Now he is going to act on her behalf and to save her. It was he who stirs up Cyrus and gives him victory in order to accomplish his purpose for Israel (41:2-3). Therefore, in the political turmoil of Babylon, Israel need not fear. It is Yahweh who raised Cyrus to subdue the nations (45:1-3), and to effect the release of Israel and command Jerusalem and the temple to be rebuilt (44:28).

The prophet goes on to assert that Yahweh alone is God. The situation in the exile, when Israel was exposed to other cultures and religions, demanded such emphasis.²⁰ As the temptation to apostacize was great, Yahweh challenges Israel, "to whom will you liken me?" (44:6) and asserts that he is the only God besides whom there is no other god (44:6,8; 45:5,6,21). He asserts that it was he who proclaimed the future events (41:21; 44:7; 46:9), and the one who accomplishes his purpose (46:10), whereas idols cannot do these things. He depicts the irony of idolatry by showing how the gods have to be carried by men, whereas Yahweh can bear his people (46:1-4). He declares that the

²⁰Whitley, p. 7.

idols are nothing (41:24) and empty wind (41:29). Showing the contrast between him and the idols, Yahweh summons the idolators (41:1-7) and the gods themselves (41:21-29) to substantiate the claims made for them. He challenges them to set their proofs that the gods raised Cyrus, foretold the nature of the future events, or accomplished anything. Then he passes his verdict that the idols are nothing and that he alone is God. This is explicit monotheism.²¹ Since Yahweh is true and the only God, Israel can trust in him and in the salvation he accomplishes.

Assuring his salvation, Yahweh exhorts the people of Israel to return to Palestine (48:20). He promises that he will defer his anger for her sake (48:9) and effect redemption. He declares that he is going to punish Babylon through Cyrus (48:14). So, she can trust that Yahweh is the one who acts in order to accomplish his purpose. He promises the future glory of Zion. Those who were scattered all over will come back to Palestine (43:5-6; 49:22), and the result of the return is that Israel will grow miraculously (48:19; 49:20) and the cities of Judah and the temple will be rebuilt (44:26,28). There will be everlasting joy in Israel and Yahweh will comfort his people (51:11-12). He will remove her shame and the humiliation she experienced from her enemies (54:4). There will be prosperity in Zion and Yahweh will protect her, and the covenant of peace with her will not be removed

²⁰North, p. 16.

from her (54:10). With trust in Yahweh she will return to Palestine with joy and with singing (55:12).

Yahweh's sphere of action does not stop with his dealing with Israel; his saving act has a wider significance. His salvation for Israel is only a part of his total plan. In his saving Israel his glory will be revealed to all flesh (40:5). When Israel's enemies see the salvation of Yahweh for his people they will be put to shame and be confounded (41:11), and they will realize the absurdity of idolatry (42:17). When they see the greatness and the glory of Yahweh in his dealing with his people they will even bring home Yahweh's scattered people (49:22-23). Through the prophet Yahweh invites also the nations to avail themselves of the hour of salvation and to be saved (45:20-23). The result of Yahweh's act is that the nations will come to Israel and confess that Yahweh is with her and that only in him are salvation and strength (45:14-25).²² As Ackroyd put it

The fortunes of Israel so deeply experienced by the prophet, are seen to be part of the large purpose of God. Her restoration will be a recovery of Zion which is the place of God's dwelling as central to the life of the world.²³

Yahweh offers salvation both to Israel and to the peoples of the nations, but he acts toward Israel in a unique way. She stands in a unique relationship with Yahweh as his servant. As the chosen and the redeemed community, she has a role to play in Yahweh's offering salvation

²² von Rad, II, 248-249.

²³ Ackroyd, pp. 136-137.

to the nations. Yahweh's promises to her and his dealings with her give her the motivation to carry out her mission. How she was called to carry out her mission in a period which is of great significance in her history will be discussed in the following sections.

The Servant of Yahweh and the Nations

Israel, the Servant of Yahweh in the passages other than the Servant Songs

Deutero-Isaiah identifies Israel as the Servant of Yahweh in a few places other than in the Servant Songs. Such an identification is specifically made in 41:8-9; 44:1-2; 44:21; 45:4 and 48:20. In this connection two factors need consideration. First of all, there are other passages in chapters 40-55 which are identical with the above passages in content and terminology, even though the Servant-Israel identification is not specifically spelled out. Secondly, the object of this study is to investigate the missionary task of Israel as the Servant of Yahweh. Therefore, such passages which spell out the missionary task of Israel shall also be studied along with the above cited passages.

Israel-Servant

Passages where Israel is identified as Servant:

41:8-9 But you, Israel, my servant,
Jacob whom I have chosen,
the offspring of Abraham my friend . . .
"You are my servant . . ."

44:1-2 "But now hear, O Jacob my servant,
Israel whom I have chosen!
Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen . . . "

44:21 Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel,
for you are my servant.

45:4 My servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen.

48:20 "The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!"

41:8 begins with the word **וְאַתָּה** (but you). Here, *waw* is used as adversative, indicating that in contrast to the idolatrous nations mentioned in the preceding verses, Israel stands in a unique relationship with Yahweh. In 41:8-9 Israel is addressed in a series of appositions which are all centered on Yahweh's dealing with her in the past. It is at this section that the word **עַבְדִּי**, which has tremendous significance, occurs for the first time in Deutero-Isaiah. The Hebrew word **עַבְדִּי** expresses two things: (1) the idea of belonging to someone who protects and gives security; (2) the idea of standing under someone in subordination to him. When Israel is addressed as **עַבְדִּי** in these passages the idea of belonging preponderates. Phrases such as "I have chosen," "the offspring of Abraham my friend," "you are my servant," explicitly bring out this idea. Therefore **עַבְדִּי** means that Israel has a master with whom she can feel secure, whom she can trust, and who cares for her (41:10). She serves him in response to this relationship.²⁴

²⁴Westermann, pp. 69-70.

The other phrases used in apposition to **יְבִרָתִי** in 41:8-9 are "Jacob whom I have chosen," and "the offspring of Abraham my friend." The name Jacob is used by the prophet as a name of the people, and not as the name of the patriarch.²⁵ In other places the phrase "Jacob my servant" is used for Israel (44:1-2; 45:4). So, the words "Jacob," "Israel" and "servant" connote the same thing. 41:8 reads, "Israel my servant," and "Jacob whom I have chosen." But in 44:1 the word order is changed, and it reads, "Jacob my servant," and "Israel whom I have chosen." Yet the meaning remains the same. As the verb "chosen" is applied to Israel, it "takes its particular shade of meaning in the Old Testament particularly from Deuteronomy,"²⁶ in which the "chosenness" of Israel in a unique way is emphasized. "Chosenness" requires right response from the people. Israel is called also as the "offspring of Abraham." Thus her election is carried back to the patriarch. Deutero-Isaiah is making use of the Yahwist's account of election and covenant, and he "presses the origin of Israel's faith back to her progenitor and father" (51:1-2). He grounds it in a more ultimate point in history.²⁷ When Deutero-Isaiah presents the present and the future of Israel's history in the light of her past he is also aware of the implications of this unique position to which she has been

²⁵ McKenzie, p. 31.

²⁶ Westermann, p. 70.

²⁷ Muilenburg, VI, 455.

called. Such a relationship gives her confidence in Yahweh and assurance in his salvation which motivate her to carry out her mission.

Moreover, according to the Hebraic mentality Israel could be addressed as the offspring of Abraham or Jacob in the singular.

According to the Hebrew mind:

The progenitor lives on in those who are his descendants. The social group thus takes the character of the ancestor. This relationship of ancestor to descendants is but one aspect of the psychic unity that pervades Israel's life. . . . Thus the tribe or the people can speak as though it were an individual.²⁸

Thus the promises given to the patriarchs as well as the obligations laid upon them belong to the entire people of Israel.

The meaning of the word "Jeshurun" in 44:2 is obscure. Four Hebrew manuscripts, the Septuagint, the Syriac version and the Targum read "Israel" in the place of "Jeshurun." According to the structure of the passage the word "Jeshurun" stands parallel to Israel. Therefore, the editors of these manuscripts would have preferred "Israel" to the obscure word "Jeshurun." The word יֵשׁוּרֻן may have derived from the word יָשָׁר (upright).²⁹ The ending יָ is a diminutive. "Diminutives are often used to express affection."³⁰ In that case the word "Jeshurun" would indicate the affection of Yahweh for Israel.

²⁸ Ibid., VI, 411.

²⁹ McKenzie, p. 63.

³⁰ North, pp. 132-133.

When Israel is addressed as Yahweh's servant, Jacob, his people or the chosen one, she is reminded of her historic past, Yahweh's affection for her, the covenant he had made with her and the mission to which she has been called. This assertion assures her of the imminence of salvation. In 48:20 the deliverance which Yahweh is about to accomplish is pictured as an already accomplished fact. Therefore, Israel can trust in him and the salvation he offers. The salvation for Israel is not the end purpose of his choosing Israel; rather, it is a means by which he effects salvation for the whole world. With this universal perspective of Deutero-Isaiah, the mission of Israel as the servant of Yahweh shall be considered.

Israel and her mission

Certain authors contend that nothing is required of Israel for the salvation of the world in the passages of Deutero-Isaiah except in the Servant Songs. North believes that "the Servant Israel outside the Songs is the passive recipient of salvation."³¹ Blauw also contends that the missionary message of Deutero-Isaiah is limited to the Servant Songs only.³² Such opinions do not seem to do justice to the message of Deutero-Isaiah in its totality. It is true that the initiative lies in the acts of Yahweh, but those acts demand response from his people through which Yahweh effects salvation for all the nations of the earth. Whether Israel was

³¹Christopher R. North, The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah (London: The Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 182.

³²Johannes Blauw, The Missionary Nature of the Church (London: Lutterworth Press, 1962), p. 31.

faithful to her call in her history or not is a different question. But she had a mission to the world. Both by "being" the people of God as well as by being the active recipient of the salvation which had been wrought by God, she was commissioned to carry out her mission to the world.

Israel is called to be Yahweh's witness (or witnesses) (43:10,12; 44:8; 55:4). The word **עֵד** derives from the verb **עָדָה** which means "to testify." Being witness in the Old Testament means basically two things: to exist as a witness and to act as a witness. To "exist" as a witness means to be a sign. In Genesis 31:44-50, a pillar and a heap of stones served as a witness or reminder of the covenant made between Jacob and Laban (Is. 19:19-20). Such a witness serves as a reminder of a certain obligation on the parties concerned and gives an assurance of the meaning behind it. To serve or act as a witness means to testify to a fact with which one is acquainted. A witness is "a person who has a first-hand knowledge of a fact or an event"³³ (Deut. 19:15; Num. 35:30). When Israel is called to be Yahweh's witness, it means that she is to stand before the nations as a witness to him and to act as his witness before men.

Israel, who is once addressed as a deaf and blind servant (42:18-19), is called to be Yahweh's witness before the deaf and the blind peoples (43:8). 43:10 represents the endorsement of a testimony in a court that

³³M. Greenberg, "Witness," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), V, 864.

Yahweh alone is God. He alone is able to create a future out of the ruined past; through his acts Israel knows that Yahweh alone is the true God. Such knowledge motivates her to become his witness before the nations.³⁴ He had given her such evidences in the past, but she was blind and deaf to his dealings with her. So it was he who gave her up into the hands of her enemies (42:18-25). She did not understand Yahweh's purpose behind that, but now he is going to redeem her so that she might know that it is Yahweh who saved her. The validity of his claim is that it was he who declared the things that would happen in the future and acted accordingly. No other gods declared the former things and acted as he did. Israel stands before the nations as a witness to the fact that Yahweh declared and saved. Knowing this fact she is to testify before men that Yahweh alone is God and that there is no other god besides him.³⁵

Israel is called not only to exist before the nations as a witness to the omnipotent and the omniscient God, but also to declare that message before others (48:6). Yahweh says to Israel that he declared beforehand what he was going to do (48:5); now she has the evidence for that. As she has the evidence, he asks her if she would not declare these things. The word used for "to declare" is אָמַר. It is used of God's declaring the things that will happen. The same word is used for Israel's giving testimony before men. The meaning of

³⁴Westermann, pp. 122-123.

³⁵Supra, pp. 43-45.

the word is וַיִּגְלוּ "to reveal the secret which had been hidden." Yahweh has revealed the secret to Israel. The content of the revelation is Yahweh himself. Now Israel has to reveal the same secret before others as she had the evidence of the validity of the revelation. Thus declaration becomes a part of being witness to him. Witness without declaration is an impoverished phenomenon in the life of God's people.

Israel is to proclaim the salvation which has been wrought on her behalf (43:21). Yahweh is going to perform a new thing, a thing similar to the Exodus event. The new Exodus falls under the divine plan, so she has to respond faithfully to his plan. The proper response to Yahweh's salvation is to go forth from Babylon and to declare that message to the ends of the earth (48:20). "In spite of Israel's historic incredulity, Yahweh declares to it (her) the new deeds he is about to perform."³⁶ He is going to redeem her and to restore Jerusalem (44:26,28). In response to Yahweh's deeds Israel is summoned to go forth from Babylon with faith in him. Disobedience to this summons to go back will impede Yahweh's purpose for Israel as well as for the world. She must go back with joy and with singing and declare that experience before the nations. The verb used is וְהִשְׁמִיעוּ which means that they must enable others to hear this message; this is the purpose of Yahweh's saving and restoring Israel again.

³⁶McKenzie, p. 97.

Besides being witness to Yahweh, Israel is called to be a leader and commander for the peoples (**וְיִגְדֵּל וְיִצְוֶה**) (55:4). Verses 1 to 3 of chapter 55 repeat what is said in the rest of the book. Yahweh invites Israel to receive the salvation freely offered to her. Receiving such salvation she is called to be a commander and leader of peoples. The phrase "a leader and commander for the peoples" stands parallel to the statement "a witness to the peoples" in verse 4a. Therefore, the former statement develops the idea of being witness to Yahweh. Verse 4 looks back to the old covenant made with David, and 5a makes a contrast between that and the new covenant in which the grace bestowed on David is now promised to the people of Israel as a whole. With the chosen people Yahweh intends to make an everlasting covenant. As the token of grace, the blessings vouchsafed to David are the steadfast and sure love of Yahweh (2 Sam. 7:8-16; 23:5; 1 Kings 8:23-26). These promises are to be realized for Israel. The prophet does not comfort Israel by telling her of some supernatural king who will reestablish the kingdom in the future. Rather, he announces that with the imminent act of release the tokens of grace vouchsafed to David are to be transferred to Israel.³⁷ In this passage the emphases is upon spiritual leadership rather than upon political dominion.³⁸ David was made commander and leader of the nations (Ps. 18:44 (43); the victories and conquests of David were a tribute to the God of

³⁷ Westermann, pp. 281-284.

³⁸ North, The Second Isaiah, p. 259.

Israel and to his espousing the cause of his people.³⁹ The Yahwist interprets the victories and prosperity of that age in the light of Yahweh's intention for the whole world through Israel. The same thing is done in this section with a different emphasis. Israel is to be a leader and commander for the peoples in a spiritual way. As she has the evidence of Yahweh's revelation, she has to let it be known to others. This is further exemplified in verse 5 where Israel is said to call the nation which she does not know. No specific nation is mentioned here, so by should be taken collectively. As a result of this call to the other nations, they will come to Israel. This means that they will acknowledge Yahweh and receive the salvation he offers them also. Verse 5b brings this section to its end. Yahweh announces that he will make such a lasting covenant with the result that other nations are brought into the acknowledgement of Yahweh and to salvation because of his own sake. It is an act of grace on the part of Yahweh for Israel as well as the nations. This means that Yahweh glorifies himself through his people; when Israel draws other nations to her she is glorified. The glory envisaged here is not that which had once accrued to her because of David's dominion and his victories. There is an increase in Israel's numbers from abroad. She becomes a witness to the miraculous deeds of Yahweh.⁴⁰ Her leadership

³⁹Westermann, p. 285.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 285-286.

consists in her position as the mediator of faith in Yahweh⁴¹
which is exercised by proclaiming Yahweh.⁴²

To summarize in the passages outside the Servant Songs, Israel is identified with the Servant of Yahweh. She is assured of the salvation wrought by Yahweh. Her unique position is based on her historic past. With the assurance of his promises Yahweh exhorts her to go forth from Babylon and to be his witness both by standing before the nations as a testimony to Yahweh and by bearing witness to him. As she carries out her mission she becomes the leader and commander of the nations.

Israel in the "Servant Songs"

The object of this paper is not to construct any new theory as to the identity of the Servant described in the Servant Songs or to probe into the details of the various interpretations advocated by scholars. "Scarcely any passage of the Old Testament is so widely and so divergently discussed as the Servant Songs."⁴³ North has spent considerable space in his book titled "The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah" to elucidate the developments that have taken place in the interpretation of the Servant Songs. Elsewhere he says, "so much has been written about

⁴¹McKenzie, p. 144.

⁴²Ibid., p. 142.

⁴³McKenzie, p. xxxviii.

the Suffering Servant that it seems an impertinence to write anything more, unless one has something new to say."⁴⁴ No such attempt is made in this paper. The approach taken in this paper is to leave the Songs where they stand in the text and to see what the prophet has to say regarding the Servant's mission to the nations.

The Servant-Israel--The mission of the Servant of Yahweh will be discussed taking "Servant" to mean Israel collectively. This view is taken here basically in view of the scope of the thesis and for the following reasons:

1. Elsewhere in the passages of Deutero-Isaiah, the servant is identified with Israel (41:8; 42:19; 44:1,2,21; 45:4; 48:20). It is improbable that the prophet would use the same title to denote two different objects. Moreover, 49:3 equates Israel with the Servant. Only one manuscript deletes the word "Israel" in this passage.

"Attempts to delete Israel on textual or metrical grounds are without any foundation."⁴⁵ In the Septuagint 42:1 reads "Jacob my Servant . . . Israel my chosen one."⁴⁶ This testifies to the fact that traditionally the Servant was identified with Israel. Hence the Servant of Yahweh is identified with Israel throughout the passages of Deutero-Isaiah.

⁴⁴North, The Second Isaiah, p. 20.

⁴⁵Muilenburg, VI, 410.

⁴⁶The problem of the text will be dealt with under the "First Song."

2. The Servant of the Songs is described as an individual. In the previous section of this chapter it was pointed out that Israel could be addressed in the singular (41:8-9; 44:1-2; 45:4); therefore, even if the Servant is addressed as an individual it can be taken collectively.

3. The Servant of the Songs, as well as of the other passages, is called from the womb (49:1; 48:12), chosen (42:1; 41:8) and upheld (42:1; 41:10) by Yahweh.⁴⁷ Thus the Servant of both sets of passages has the same origin.

4. The Servant has the same mission throughout the passages of Deutero-Isaiah. The Servant of the passages other than the Servant Songs is now a mere passive recipient of Yahweh's salvation. Yahweh's salvation wrought on Israel's behalf gives her the opportunity and motivation to carry out her mission. Her mission is worldwide (43:10,12; 44:8; 54:4; 43:8; 48:6). The Servant of the Songs also has the same mission to the world. If one inquires about the identity of Israel in the passages of Deutero-Isaiah and her vocation in the light of God's total plan of salvation before deciding the identity of the Servant, he can see that the Servant has the same mission throughout the book.⁴⁸ The entire life and history of Israel is interpreted by Deutero-Isaiah with this vision. On the basis of the scope of the Servant's mission in 49:5-6, which includes a mission to Israel,

⁴⁷ von Rad, II, 260.

⁴⁸ Muilenburg, VI, 410.

objections have been raised against the collective interpretation of the Songs. Though this point will be taken up later in this section, it can be said at this point that the emphasis of this passage is on the total mission of the Servant.

5. The same result is envisaged by Yahweh's acting through the Servant. Yahweh is glorified (43:3; 44:23); other nations will acknowledge him and will receive the salvation he offers them (55:5; 52:13-53:12).

6. It must be admitted that the character and attitude of the Servant depicted in the Songs is different from that in the other passages. In the Songs the Servant is one who is obedient and one who suffers vicariously for the sins of others, whereas the Servant described elsewhere is a disobedient one who suffers for his own sin. Various authors have tried to solve this paradox taking the Servant of the Songs to mean "the ideal Israel"⁴⁹ or a strong minority of faithful Israelites.⁵⁰ It should be noted that Deutero-Isaiah makes no distinction between the historic and the ideal Israel. He speaks of Israel as a whole; thus no distinction is suggested in the text. The Servant of the Songs should be taken to mean historic Israel according to her true vocation and destiny. It is possible that the prophet at a later stage

⁴⁹ J. Skinner, Isaiah 40-66 (Cambridge: University Press, 1898), pp. lii-liii.

⁵⁰ Muilenburg, VI, 410.

received new insight into the destiny of Israel and interpreted the historical situation in the light of Yahweh's total plan.⁵¹

Deutero-Isaiah spoke to a historical situation. It was the situation created by Yahweh in order to accomplish his universal purpose. The Servant stands before him as the mediator of the salvation to all nations. If the prophet's message had any relevance to the contemporary situation, then it means that the nation Israel is the Servant of Yahweh throughout the book. It is true that no nation, not even Israel, could measure up to the stature of the Servant in the Songs and that only Christ has done that.⁵² The ultimate fulfillment of the Songs takes place in Christ. But, it does not mean that Israel did not have the mission. What she failed to do, Christ fulfilled. With this understanding of the Servant-Israel, her mission will be viewed.

The Servant-Israel's Mission

The First Song 42:1-4 (7)

Usually 42:1-4 is considered to be the first Servant Song. Since verses 5 to 7 are closely connected to the preceding section and expand the thought, verses 5 to 7 shall be considered with verses 1 to 4.

The Servant's call and equipment--In the first Song Yahweh is the speaker. He introduces the Servant and validates his mission on the

⁵¹ McKenzie, p. xli.

⁵² North, The Second Isaiah, p. 20.

the basis of his being chosen and equipped. The terms "my servant" and "my chosen one" recall the passages elsewhere in the book. The Septuagint adds *Ἰακώβ* and *Ἰσραήλ* along with "my servant," and "my chosen one" respectively. Thus it reads "Jacob my servant, whom I uphold, and Israel my chosen one." It is "an interpretation obviously derived from 41:8."⁵³ It indicates that the Septuagint writers understood the servant to mean Israel. Chosenness is followed by equipment with Yahweh's Spirit. In the Old Testament it is normal for someone who is called to carry out a special task to be endowed with the Spirit. The Servant, who is also being chosen to carry out a special mission to the nations, is equipped with the Spirit.

The Servant's task--The Servant is called and equipped to bring forth justice to the nations. The Hebrew word used for justice is

מִשְׁפָּט. Verse 4 again says that the Servant will establish justice on earth and that the coastlands wait for his law. Justice and law here need not be taken in the judicial sense.⁵⁴ The word

מִשְׁפָּט is used in the sense of vindication or testimony (50:8; 54:17). Yahweh has revealed himself to Israel in the past through his acts. Again he is going to perform a new thing in redeeming her (42:9). Israel has the evidence for the revelation of God, and she stands before the nations as a witness to Yahweh and his acts.⁵⁵ She is to serve as the mediator of the revelation to the

⁵³Muilenburg, VI, 464.

⁵⁴Westermann, p. 95.

⁵⁵Israel's being witness to the nations. Supra, pp. 52-57.

nations, that is, to bring the true knowledge of God to others. This is what is meant by her task to bring justice to the nations.⁵⁶ In 42:4 "law" stands in apposition to "justice." In this context the Servant's task of bringing the law to the nations is closely associated with the task of bringing the knowledge of Yahweh to the nations. The Servant-Israel is not called to execute judgment over the nations or to exercise judicial or political jurisdiction over them. Such an idea is foreign to Deutero-Isaiah. She is called to be the leader and commander for the peoples (55:4) only in the spiritual sense. In the light of the prophet's total message and its position in the text, to bring Yahweh's law to the nations would mean to propagate the divine requirements. In summary: the Servant-Israel's mission is to bring forth the true knowledge of Yahweh and his requirements to the nations. This may be termed as the true religion.⁵⁷

The Servant's mission is further exemplified in verses 6 and 7. He has been made לְבָרִית עִם לְאוּרָהּ ה' (Ləbārit 'im Lə'urāh 'H). Various interpretations are suggested to the phrase בְּרִית עִם : (1) "covenant people," meaning Israel; (2) "the mediator of the covenant with the people," the people to mean Israel and the mediator to mean the Servant other than Israel; (3) "the mediator of the covenant to the peoples;"⁵⁸ (4) "confederation of peoples."⁵⁹

⁵⁶McKenzie, p. 37.

⁵⁷Muilenburg, VI, 465.

⁵⁸North, The Second Isaiah, p. 112.

⁵⁹John. Lindblom, The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah (Lund: Hakan Ohlsson Boktryckeri, 1951), p. 21.

The first suggestion (1) does not seem suitable for the following reasons: (a) The phrase "covenant people" does not give a good parallelism to the succeeding phrase, "a light to the nations."⁶⁰

(b) The prophet is interpreting the entire history of Israel in the light of the covenant relationship that already existed between Yahweh and Israel. He does not introduce a new phenomenon which makes her a unique people at this point in her history.

The second suggestion (2) limits the term "people" to Israel only. This is contrary to the whole thrust of this section (42:1-7), in which the Servant's mission comprises the whole world.

The suggestion given by Lindblom (suggestion 4) takes into consideration the universalism of the prophet's thought, but according to him **בְּרִית יְד** is a confederation of peoples in the sense that they will grow into a large assembly of peoples bound together by the same faith in and subjection to Yahweh.⁶¹ The peoples growing into such an assembly will be only a result of the Servant's mission. Therefore such an interpretation does not seem fit into the context. The interpretation favored in this paper is suggestion 3 given above. According to this interpretation the translation of the phrases would be "a covenant to (of) the peoples and a light to (of) the nations." The term **יְד** is translated in the plural because the phrase **בְּרִית יְד** is placed in asyndetical juxtaposition to **אֹר גּוֹיִם** and because

⁶⁰North, The Second Isaiah, p. 112.

⁶¹Lindblom, p. 21.

it is a collective noun. So the general meaning of the two phrases would be the same.⁶² According to this interpretation the Servant is Israel, and she becomes a covenant to the peoples.⁶³ As Westermann points out, while verse 6a ("I am the Lord, I have called you . . . ") may refer to the first election of Israel, 6b ("I have given you as a covenant to the peoples, a light to the nations") specifies a new function for her.⁶⁴

As pointed out in the introduction, the covenant relationship that God established with Israel was a decisive event in her history. Israel's life and faith were grounded on this covenant relationship. By establishing the covenant relationship God disclosed himself and his will to her. It was grounded on the promise that he would be her God and that she would be his people. This promise provided her a life with a goal and a history with meaning. She became aware of her unique position. The authors of the J and the E strata of the Pentateuch trace the idea of the covenant back to the earliest period of her national life. They understood that Israel's consciousness of her election was based on the fortunes of the Patriarchs. The covenant became the source of her blessing.⁶⁵ The covenant relationship was a gift of grace which at

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³The interpretation given here is in accordance with the position taken in this thesis that the Servant Songs be taken collectively.

⁶⁴Westermann, pp. 99-100.

⁶⁵Walter Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, translated by J. A. Baker (London: SCM Press, 1961), I, 36-50, passim.

the same time gave motivation for a life worthy of his people. It thus became a bond of union between God and his people.

The word "I make you" in verse 6 means that the person addressed is destined to become a means by which God effects something on others.⁶⁶ The people who have been brought into the covenant relationship with God are called to be the mediators of the covenant to the peoples. This may mean that they are to bring the peoples into the covenant relationship with God. This mission involves bringing others into the knowledge of God and of his will which is implied in verses 1 to 4. God provides his people with the opportunity to carry out this mission. He is going to do a new thing in redeeming Israel. He is going to do this according to what he has already declared (42:9). Israel has the evidence that it is he who acts. The other nations also will see what he is going to do in history. In such a situation Israel has the opportunity and obligation to interpret the events as Yahweh's acts, and thereby to bring others to faith in Yahweh, that is, to bring them into the same relationship which she already enjoys with Yahweh. Thus they will be enabled to become participants in the covenant relationship. In this mediatory capacity Israel becomes a bond of union. Being a light to the nations conveys the same idea as that of being a covenant to the peoples. For Israel, being a light to the nations means that through her the nations are to experience light, illumination and salvation.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Westermann, p. 100.

⁶⁷Ibid.

In verse 7 the Servant is called to open the eyes of the blind and to release those who sit in the dungeon and in darkness. In 42:18-20 Israel is called a blind and deaf servant. She was blind and deaf because she failed to perceive the ways of Yahweh. In 51:10 Yahweh addresses those who walk in darkness with no light. Here the ones who walk in darkness are those who do not fear and obey him and trust in him, so "blindness" in Deutero-Isaiah stands for spiritual blindness. The context of 42:7 also confirms this. The opening of the eyes of the blind and the liberation of those who sit in captivity and darkness should be taken in the spiritual sense. "The sense is that God has designated Israel to be a light to the world and to mediate salvation; she is to bring enlightenment and liberation to others."⁶⁸

The method the Servant uses for the mission--42:2-3:

He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it
heard in the street;
a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly
burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice

The Servant will carry out his mission in a way contrasting to the oriental custom of making loud proclamation when a new king succeeds to the throne.⁶⁹ The method he chooses will be gentleness and humility. The "bruised reed" and the "dimly burning wick" are figurative expressions

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 100-101.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 96.

which describe the extraordinary method of the Servant's mission. Various interpretations have been given to this phrase. Skinner suggests that the bruised reed and the dimly burning wick would mean the rudiments of religion existing in the non-Israelite world. According to this interpretation, the Servant, instead of crushing the expiring elements of goodness, will strengthen and purify them.⁷⁰ But Deutero-Isaiah nowhere recognizes any goodness in any other religions. It can be said that the Servant's task is not to destroy that which is at the point of extinction but to save.⁷¹ In the historic context of the message, it would mean that the Servant should have a sympathetic attitude toward others. The gist of the image of the bruised reed and the dimly burning wick is a "litotes (an affirmative expressed by the negative of its opposite) describing the pacifistic mode of the Servant's action."⁷² The Servant-Israel's task is not to pass judgment on others, but to bring them to life through the opportunity that Yahweh gives her in accomplishing her redemption.

The Second Song 49:1-6

In the Second Song the Servant is the speaker. He addresses himself to the nations to whom he had been first commissioned.

⁷⁰ Skinner, p. 27.

⁷¹ Franz Delitzsch, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah, translated from the German by James Martin (Michigan: Wm. B. Eedermans Publishing Company, 1960), II, 176.

⁷² Norman K. Gottwald, A Light to the Nations (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1959), p. 415.

The Servant's call and equipment--The Servant announces to the nations that Yahweh had designated him to his service before he was born. This recalls other passages where the same thing has been said about Israel's call and election (Is. 43:1; 44:1; 44:21). The purpose of the Servant's election is that Yahweh will be glorified through him (49:3; see also 43:7,21; 44:22). The Hebrew text reads יְבָרֵךְ

לְיִשְׂרָאֵל . Those who favor an individual interpretation of the Servant Songs suggest deletion of the word "Israel" from this passage; only one manuscript does so. Therefore textual evidence is not in favor of the suggestion to delete the word. Metrical grounds have been used both for and against the deletion of the word. The metre of the poem is 3:3. If the word "Israel" is deleted the phrase אַתָּה יְבָרֵךְ אֶתְּפִאֵר must be given three stresses. This is possible, but not decisive. So textual and metrical evidences do not support the suggestion to delete the word.⁷³ It is possible that the word "Israel" may be read as a vocative, "O Israel" or as a continuation of the predicate "you are my Servant." But neither of these renderings can support an individual interpretation by itself.

The first Song describes the Servant's equipment with the endowment of the Spirit. In the second Song the Servant's equipment is with the word. The Servant's task is with the word (see also 50:4), and it is

⁷³North, The Second Isaiah, pp. 187-188.

Yahweh who puts his word in the mouth of his Servant (51:16). The metaphors of the sharp sword and the polished arrow would mean that Yahweh has endowed his Servant with an aggressive and offensive word which is powerful enough to penetrate deeply and widely. It is the prophetic word with power (Jer. 23:29; 1:9-10),⁷⁴ and it accomplishes what it utters.⁷⁵ Along with being equipped, the Servant declares that Yahweh hid him in his quiver. This would mean that Yahweh protected and hid his Servant until the time appointed for his service,⁷⁶ or it may mean that Yahweh kept him in readiness until the appropriate time.⁷⁷ In the case of Israel as Yahweh's Servant, Yahweh's redemption for her comes at the appropriate time and gives her the opportunity to carry out her task.

The Servant's despondency and Yahweh's verdict--In spite of Yahweh's equipment, the Servant laments over the apparent failure of his mission (verse 4). No historic reference nor any specific reason is mentioned. But the emphasis is on Yahweh's verdict on the Servant. Being aware of his limitations, the Servant relies solely on

⁷⁴Westermann, p. 208.

⁷⁵McKenzie, p. 105.

⁷⁶Muilenburg, VI, 567.

⁷⁷Lindblom, p. 26.

Yahweh. He is convinced that Yahweh's verdict will be favorable and accompanied with some token of approval.⁷⁸

The Servant's task--The Servant has a two-fold mission: a mission to Israel as well as a mission to the nations of the world. The fact that the Servant has a mission to Israel has been used as an argument against the collective interpretation of the Songs. Though the emphasis is on the Servant's worldwide mission, it can be said that Israel has a mission to Israel also in the same way as the church has a mission to the church.⁷⁹ Israel restored by Cyrus is only a fragment of the people of Israel, but the horizon of the prophet is not limited to the fragment. The people thus restored have a mission to the rest of the tribes of Israel. The prophet's vision lies beyond the historic present which includes all Israel and all nations.⁸⁰ Israel is called to go forth from Babylon and to send forth the news to the end of the earth (48:20). In 49:12 there is a promise that the Israelites will come back from all sides, and as a result, the city which has been desolate will have more people than it can hold (49:19-21). Therefore the exiles in Babylon have a responsibility. The restoration of all the tribes of Israel depends on how the exiles in Babylon respond to

⁷⁸North, The Second Isaiah, pp. 188-189.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 189.

⁸⁰McKenzie, pp. 105-106.

the promise of the restoration. When they respond in faith and with confidence in Yahweh's promises, those around them, Jews as well as Gentiles, will also come back to Palestine. Thus Israel has a mission both to Israel and to the nations.

She is again called to be a light to the nations (verse 6).

The song closes with the grandest statement of universalism since Amos, but whereas Amos leaves Yahweh's relation to the nations unarticulated, the Servant Song envisions Yahweh's message carried to the nations and their worship of him on the same terms as Israel. Indeed, Israel's choice can never be exhausted or justified by the salvation of a small group of Jews; Israel exists rather for the world.⁸¹

That "being light to the nations" and "bringing the message of salvation to them" are parallel is further demonstrated in verse 6: "I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

The Third Song 50:4-9

In verses 4 to 9 the Servant is the speaker and verses 10 and 11 go along in thought with the preceding verses although Yahweh is the speaker.

The Servant's equipment--The Servant acknowledges that Yahweh is the source of his hearing and speech. He also recognizes that he has to be awakened morning by morning in order to hear the word.

⁸¹Gottwald, pp. 415-416.

The Servant's equipment for the prophetic office to which he has been called is the word. His mission is to transmit the word of God to his audience.⁸² (Refer also to Is. 49:2; 51:16 where there is a mention of the Servant's mission with the word.)

The Servant's task--The Servant's task is mentioned in the second line of verse 4, which reads יְצַדִּיק יְהוָה אֶת־יָדָיו לְעֹשֶׂת. The meaning of the word יָדָיו is dubious. This is the only place in the Old Testament that the word occurs.⁸³ Aquila translates this word as ὑποστησάτω. Jerome's translation reads, **SUSTENTARE**.⁸⁴ Following these translations, the Revised Version and the Revised Standard Version read, "to sustain." The Jerusalem Bible translates, "to reply" following some Greek manuscripts. The Authorized Version and the Revised Version margin read, "to speak a word in season." This may have derived from the word יָמִים meaning "time."⁸⁵ The Septuagint reading πορεύειν is thought by some to have come from the word יָנִיחַ, meaning "to answer." This is probably an attempt to interpret a word which is dubious.⁸⁶ The Targum reads יְצַדִּיק, meaning "to shepherd." The New English

⁸²Westermann, pp. 228-229.

⁸³Francis Brown, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), p. 736.

⁸⁴Lindblom, p. 33.

⁸⁵Muilenburg, VI, 583.

⁸⁶North, The Second Isaiah, p. 201.

Bible reads, "to console." This is also an attempted interpretation. The word **נָחַם** in the text is attested by the Qumran scrolls, which renders this reading the most probable one.⁸⁷ In view of the prophetic office of the Servant, the words "sustain" and "console" seem to be probable renderings. This is preferred in the light of the Servant's two-fold mission (see our comment on the Servant's mission in the Second Song). The Servant-Israel has a mission to Israel, who needs encouragement to go back to Palestine trusting in the promises of Yahweh. She also has the mission of mediating the message of salvation to the gentiles. With the word she has received from Yahweh she has to perform her task.

The Servant asserts that as the result of Yahweh's giving him the tongue of the disciples and opening his ears, he is able to be faithful to his calling. He does not claim any merit, rather he relies on Yahweh. With that reliance he asserts that he was neither rebellious nor turned his back, that is, he has not become apostate (Ps. 44:18 19) nor treacherous and unfaithful (Jer. 38:22).⁸⁸

The Servant's persecution and his assurance--On account of his mission, persecutions are inflicted upon the Servant. But he is not to surrender his mission. He is confident that Yahweh will help

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 201.

⁸⁸North, The Second Isaiah, p. 203.

him. Therefore, he has set his face like a flint. It is a figure of determination.⁸⁹ He is supported and upheld by an unshakable

faith.⁹⁰ With such determination he utters a challenge to a legal encounter with the unbelievers (verse 8).⁹¹ He is confident that

Yahweh is פ'תִּשׁ, that is, he who declares him to be פ'תִּשׁ הַיָּמִין, in the right. He anticipates that Yahweh will pronounce his acquittal and deliver him.⁹² Yahweh condemns his own people when they sin and he chastises them. At the same time he vindicates them when they carry out the mission for which they are called. This is a paradox in the life of his people.

The Song ends with a pronouncement of Yahweh (verses 10 and 11), in which he challenges the audience to listen to the words of the Servant. This is a further vindication of the Servant's mission. The invitation to listen to the Servant includes both Israel and the gentiles (51:1,4; 55:1-5), with a warning to those who do not listen to the Servant and walk in their ungodly ways. The Song depicts the paradoxical nature of the Servant Israel, both in her true vocation in God's plan and at the same time in her sinful and rebellious but

⁸⁹Skinner, p. 103.

⁹⁰Muilenburg, VI, 586.

⁹¹McKenzie, p. 117.

⁹²North, The Second Isaiah, pp. 203-204.

pardoned state. "The tenacious but unassuming spiritual stamina of the Servant" prepares the way for the final and culminating Song.⁹³

The Fourth Song 52:13-53:12

As North has stated there is no other passage in the Old Testament, certainly none of comparable importance, which presents more problems than the Fourth Song.⁹⁴ Translators as well as exegetes find themselves perplexed in understanding this Song. As far as the mission of the Servant is concerned, the Fourth Song does not say anything specifically new, something which has not been said in the other Songs as to what the Servant has to "do." The emphasis of this Song is on "what the Servant undergoes" in his own person and its effect on others. With regard to the experience of the Servant, the Fourth Song is a development of the thought in the Third Song.

The Servant's humiliation and exaltation--In 52:13 Yahweh is the speaker, and he introduces the Servant with the words, "behold, my Servant." This harks back to the designation of the Servant in 42:1-4. Almost all scholars agree that 52:13-15 goes along with chapter 53. At the same time the meaning of 52:13-15 becomes more clear if it is taken along with the preceding verses which describe the salvation which Yahweh is going to accomplish for the people of

⁹³Gottwald, p. 416.

⁹⁴North, The Second Isaiah, p. 226.

Israel. Yahweh announces that he had redeemed Jerusalem (Israel) and that all the ends of the earth shall see his salvation (52:10). He exhorts his people to return to Palestine and assures them that he will protect them (52:11-12). This is followed by the statement about the Servant's humiliation and exaltation. In this respect it can be said that the section 52:13-15 is a summary statement and conclusion of what has been said in the preceding section.

Yahweh announces that his Servant will prosper. The word used for "to prosper" is **יִשְׁכֵּל**. This can also be translated as "to act prudently." The idea of "deal prudently" coalesces with that of "success."⁹⁵ But the parallel statements, "lifted up" and "be very high" favor the idea of being exalted or to prosper. The exaltation of the Servant does not depend on the act of the Servant, but on Yahweh's salvation on his behalf. Verse 14 speaks of the Servant's humiliating experience and its effect on the spectators. The Servant's experience of persecution is mentioned in the previous Songs also (49:7; 50:6). But his exaltation startled many nations and kings (verse 15). The word

יִדָּה in verse 15 has been translated in different ways; the Septuagint translates it as "to wonder." Muilenburg thinks that the word **יִדָּה** should be translated "to sprinkle" in view of its usage in connection with the rites of purification (Lev. 4:6; 8:11; 14:7). He thinks that the meaning of the phrase will be that the Servant will

⁹⁵Muilenburg, VI, 616.

purify many.⁹⁶ The word הִתְרַשֵּׁעַ can also mean, "to cause to leap" in surprise.⁹⁷ Moreover, if understood in the light of the parallel words "astonished" in verse 14 and "shut their mouth" in verse 15, one can see that the idea behind the word הִתְרַשֵּׁעַ is "to startle" or "to wonder."⁹⁸ There is no indication as to who the kings and the nations referred to are in verse 15. It is a general statement about the result of the Servant's experience. The Servant's humiliation, the subsequent exaltation and its effect on the spectators very well fit into Israel's experience in the exile and the imminent salvation accomplished by Yahweh (52:10-12).⁹⁹

Though 52:13-15 can be understood in the light of the preceding section, it is related to the following chapter also. In the process of the Servant's exaltation, what is the place and meaning of his suffering? The prophet finds an answer to this question in the redemptive value of the Servant's suffering which he deals with in the following passages.

The Servant's suffering and its results--Chapter 53 starts with a statement of amazement on the part of those who have witnessed the suffering and the subsequent exaltation of the Servant. Chapter

⁹⁶ Ibid., VI, 617.

⁹⁷ North, The Second Isaiah, p. 228.

⁹⁸ Westermann, p. 259.

⁹⁹ One should give credit to the speculations of the prophet in this connection. It does not necessarily mean that the prophet is reporting what he found among the kings and the nations with regard to their experience about the Servant.

52 ends with the same note; and there the speakers are the nations and their kings. Therefore it is natural that the speakers in 53:1 are those mentioned in chapter 52. The dumbness and astonishment of the gentile nations give place to voluble speech.¹⁰⁰ It must also be admitted that the thoughts of these passages are those of the prophet, and they can be appropriate either on the lips of the gentiles or on those of the Jews.¹⁰¹ But the context favors those of the gentiles. The statement of astonishment is followed by a description of the Servant's suffering (verses 2 and 3). He was "like a stunted shrub struggling for existence in an arid soil."¹⁰² He has no regard in the sight of others and was despised and forsaken. He was cut off from any human relationship.

Verses 4 to 6 describes the confession of the people who had come into contact with the Servant. Verse 4b describes the first reaction of the spectators. They are reported to have thought that the Servant was smitten by God because of his own sins. It does not mean that they were arrogant. The prophet reflects here the traditional understanding of the problem of suffering, as represented by the friends of Job, that

¹⁰⁰ North, The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah, p. 151. Though North admits that the speakers are the gentiles referred to in 52:15 he believes that the fact the gentiles are the speakers does not prove that the Servant must be Israel. He is right in saying that. But if we look at this in the context of chapter 52 where the exaltation of the Servant and the restoration of Israel are co-related it becomes evident that the Servant is Israel. We have discussed this in the preceding paragraphs.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. 151.

¹⁰² Skinner, p. 124.

suffering is the consequence of one's own sins.¹⁰³ Deutero-Isaiah at other places affirms that Israel was punished by Yahweh because of her past sins (40:2; 42:24). But it is possible that he got new insight into the problem and came out with a new interpretation. The suffering of the Servant is viewed as a substitution and a means of atonement. He bore the sins of others and gained healing for them.¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, the sufferer must not necessarily be a sinner, because the sins of others have been transferred to his suffering. This recalls the idea of human solidarity also. The prophet applies this idea and comes to the conclusion that by the suffering of the righteous ones the unrighteous ones may be delivered from the suffering due them. Thus suffering becomes a medium of salvation to the community. Verses 4 and 5 do not specify whether the pain the Servant underwent was the pain of illness or that which comes from physical violence. The point in these verses is that the Servant was subject to all kinds of pains. His sufferings are not fruitless; others are released from pains.¹⁰⁵

Verses 7 to 9 speak of the Servant's death and burial. In this section there is nothing suggestive of illness whereas verses 3 to 6 may suggest physical illness. The meaning of the first part of verse 8 is not clear. Different translations have been offered: "carried off from prison and judgment;" "by reason of oppression and judgment he was taken

¹⁰³Westermann, p. 262.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 263.

¹⁰⁵McKenzie, pp. 133-135.

off;" "from protection and right he was taken away." The point in this verse is that the Servant became victim to violent actions by others and no one was concerned about him. The reason for the death of the Servant is not clear, whether it was due to the disgraceful disease (as described in verses 3 to 6) or to violence or to normal condemnation and execution (as described in verses 7 to 9). It can be said that chapter 53 portrays the Suffering Servant as the typical sufferer in terms of the two basic modes of suffering, namely, illness and persecution (Psalm 22). That he was cut off from the land of the living (verse 8b) is similar to what is said in psalms of lament (Lam. 3:54).¹⁰⁶ The Servant being buried with the wicked is a figure of speech to show the low regard in which he was held.¹⁰⁷ It means that shame was attached to his death.¹⁰⁸ To sum up, the Servant is a typical sufferer with both physical and spiritual pains in his life.

Verses 10 to 12 bring the poem to a climax with the description of God's purpose and the Servant's destiny. "Behind the story of the Servant's tragic career--life, death, and resurrection--stands the purpose of God."¹⁰⁹ Yahweh has vindicated him by restoring him. Restoration does not necessarily mean resurrection from death. Deliverance

¹⁰⁶Westermann, pp. 265-266.

¹⁰⁷McKenzie, p. 135.

¹⁰⁸Westermann, p. 266.

¹⁰⁹Muilenburg, VI, 627.

from the danger of death (Psalms 18:45; 69:1-2,14-15; 88:3-6).¹¹⁰

Moreover, the idea of resurrection was a later development in Judaism. Prolonged life and posterity were also regarded as tokens of blessings and divine favor as in the case of Job. The dominant idea of this section is that of the substitutionary death of the Servant. Through his suffering the Servant procured righteousness for many. He poured out his soul as a sacrifice and became the intercessor. To intercede may mean to offer intercessory prayers for others, and in this context most probably means to take the place of others and to undergo their punishment in their stead.¹¹¹ Through his sufferings others are released from punishment. Thus the Servant's suffering is interpreted as God's purpose for the redemption of others.

Israel's experience in the captivity and the subsequent restoration can be described in terms of suffering, death and resurrection. Another prophet of the exile also describes these experiences in terms of death and resurrection (Ezekiel 37).¹¹² Yahweh declares that she has received from his hand double for all her sins (42:2). It is true that Yahweh delivered her into the hands of the Babylonians because of her sins. But the Babylonians have dealt with her ruthlessly; they showed no mercy for

¹¹⁰ McKenzie, p. 135.

¹¹¹ Westermann, pp. 267-269.

¹¹² We have tried to explain in this paper that the restoration of the people is parallel to the exaltation (or to prosper) in our explanation of 52:13-15.

her, and made her yoke exceedingly great (47:6). She has been robbed and plundered, trapped in holes, hidden in prison; she has become a prey and a spoil (42:2). She was afflicted and storm-tossed (54:11). She experienced shame (45:17),¹¹³ and she lived in fear because of the fury of her oppressors (51:13). These and similar passages indicate that the prophet was convinced that Israel suffered more than she deserved and endured unjust treatment from her enemies.

Objections to this position have been raised by many who point to the fact that Israel is depicted as sinful and rebellious, whereas the Servant of the Song patiently endured suffering not for his own sin, but for the sins of others. Theories have been proposed by various scholars to solve this seeming inconsistency between the Servant of the Songs and Israel in other passages. Lindblom tries to solve this problem by making a distinction between the faithful Jews on one side and the apostates on the other. He concludes that it was by the group of the faithful that "Yahweh's sublime plan concerning the salvation of the Gentiles was to be carried out."¹¹⁴ He makes such a distinction on the basis of his allegorical interpretation of the Songs; but on the same basis he comes to the conclusion that the Servant is Israel. His distinction between the faithful and the

¹¹³The verse cited reads, "You shall not be put to shame or confounded to all eternity." This implies that they were put to shame by their enemies.

¹¹⁴Lindblom, p. 49.

apostates comes close to Muilenburg's theory that the Servant is the minority of the faithful men.¹¹⁵ Skinner suggests that the Servant is the ideal Israel.¹¹⁶ Against these theories it must be said that the passages of Deutero-Isaiah do not make such a distinction. In Deutero-Isaiah Israel is sinful, but pardoned; one who deserved punishment, but suffered more than she deserved. Thus such a distinction is not possible. It is not the scope of this paper to deal with all the other theories which identify the Servant with an individual, but it must be said that "no single person is sufficient to bear the burden of what is disclosed in the Songs."¹¹⁷ Israel alone can be called the Servant of Yahweh.

It is not uncommon for a believer to claim that he suffered innocently. Psalm 22 is an example of this fact. Such a claim is not made on the basis of one's own virtues, but with the faith and assurance that God is on his side. Israel can have such assurance. Yahweh has forgiven her (43:25) and redeemed her (44:22). He has promised her that he will not forsake her (41:9) but will uphold her and help her (41:10,12). He vindicates her in spite of her failures (50:9). It is the purpose of Yahweh to glorify himself through her (44:23). As we have seen in the first section of this chapter, Yahweh's oracles assure her of her belongingness to Yahweh and the blessings he offers her. With

¹¹⁵Muilenburg, VI, 410.

¹¹⁶Skinner, p. xxxiv.

¹¹⁷Muilenburg, VI, 408.

such trust in him she can claim that she suffered innocently, not by her virtue, but in her trust and understanding of the unique position Yahweh has offered her.

That Israel has a mission to the world has been dealt with throughout this chapter. It is the prophet's understanding that whatever happens in the life of Israel, either in suffering or in restoration, fits into Yahweh's plan of salvation for the world and Israel's position as the mediator of salvation. Therefore he contends that suffering in the life of Israel is more than just a punitive measure. Since it is the purpose of Yahweh to bring salvation to the world through Israel, she stands before him and the world of nations in a unique position. This privilege places her under greater obligation. Yahweh declares that he refined her . . . and tried her in the furnace of affliction (48:10). So suffering also has a purificatory and pedagogical value. Yahweh does this with her so that he might be glorified (48:11). Thus the prophet gets new insight into the meaning of suffering on the part of God's people. Israel has to suffer for the redemption of the world. What she undergoes in her life is for the sake of the world, and thus she suffers vicariously. How Israel's suffering could expiate the sins of others is beyond our understanding. Only in Christ we see the fullest meaning of the vicarious suffering. What Israel failed to do, Christ fulfilled. According to the prophet's understanding Israel has a mission to the world and suffering becomes a part of her mission.

Suffering appears here for the first time in the Jewish tradition as a positive good. It need not always be the result of sin. If borne as a mission from God, it becomes the means of untold blessing to others.¹¹⁸ "Redemption by suffering is a great reality to the prophet. . . . This is the essence of Israel's mission: failing politically she is to succeed spiritually. . . . Supreme power is in love rather than in coercion."¹¹⁹ Such a message gives Israel the courage to face the reality of life and patience to endure suffering as a mission from God and hope for her future.

Summary

The missionary message of Deutero-Isaiah becomes vivid if it is seen in its historical perspective. The prophet gave his message when Israel was experiencing the pains of captivity, having lost her kingdom and the prosperity she once enjoyed. This is a situation contrast to that of the Yahwist, which accounts for the difference in the emphasis of how Israel is to carry out her mission.

The immediate context which gave the prophet the opportunity to utter his message was the imminent salvation which Yahweh was about to perform for his people. His message is centered around three main factors: Yahweh, Israel, and the nations of the world. In accomplishing

¹¹⁸Gottwald, p. 424.

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 425-426.

the salvation Yahweh gives his people the opportunity to carry out her mission. So in Deutero-Isaiah's oracles the message of salvation and Israel's mission are closely knit together.

Throughout his message, Deutero-Isaiah identifies Israel as the Servant of Yahweh. This title reminds her of her historic past, the basis on which her future lies, and her task in the world. She is called not to be a passive recipient of grace, but to be a mission to the world. The ultimate purpose of her mission is to bring all the nations to the knowledge of Yahweh and the salvation he offers them. In Deutero-Isaiah there is no compromise between Yahwism and the religions of the gentiles. However, Israel has to carry out her mission with gentleness and humility. Her mission may thus be described in the following terms:

1. Israel is to be a witness to the nations, witnessing to what she has experienced.
2. She is to proclaim to the nations Yahweh and his salvation and what Yahweh has revealed to her. Witness and proclamation are given much importance in Deutero-Isaiah.
3. She is called to be the spiritual leader and commander of the peoples.
4. She is called to bring the true religion to the peoples.
5. She is called to be the mediator of the covenant to the nations, and thus to bring them into the covenant relationship with Yahweh. She stands as the mediator of Yahweh's grace to all men.
6. She is called to effect redemption for the peoples. Suffering becomes a part of her mission.

The result of her mission is that she may become despondent as she experiences apparent failures, but she is assured of Yahweh's verdict on her side. He is the one who enables her to carry out her mission and equips her. He vindicates her and ultimately gives her victory. Yahweh will be glorified among the nations, and they will acknowledge him and receive his salvation. Yahweh's promises give her the incentive and courage to carry out her mission.

CHAPTER IV

THE MISSIONARY MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF JONAH

To interpret the book of Jonah in its historical context enriches the understanding of the message of the book, and helps to trace the development of thought in a particular period in the history of Israel. Therefore certain points which are conducive to proper understanding of the book will be dealt with in this section.

Special Features of the Book

The form of the book and its place in the canon

The book of Jonah stands in the Old Testament as one of the twelve minor prophets. But the form of the book is decisively different from the rest of the prophetic books. It is in narrative form throughout the only book of this nature of all the prophetic books. Other prophetic books also contain narratives. Events such as a prophet's call and personal experiences are written in narrative form (Hos. 1:1-11; 3:1-5; Amos 7:10-15). But they are predominantly oracular in form. What makes the book of Jonah different from the other prophetic books is not basically the presence of narratives, but the absence of prophetic discourses.¹ The prophet's oracle contains only five words in Hebrew,

יֹדֵד אֶרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְנִינְוָה נָחָּה פָּכַת : (3:4).

¹George Adam Smith, The Book of the Twelve Prophets (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1856), I, 483.

In the other prophetic books personal histories of the prophets concerned are stated briefly, but the book of Jonah is entirely an account of the prophet's own adventures.²

Moreover, the book of Jonah is in prose except the Psalm in 2:2-10, whereas the other prophetic books are essentially poetic in form.

Despite these factors the book is placed among the prophets, and not among the writings (Ketubim). It is placed among the prophets because it is written with prophetic spirit having a particular message for the time of the author of the book. Its place among the prophets would indicate that it should be interpreted didactically. If interpreted otherwise it will lose its significance. On the other hand, if it is interpreted didactically it fits well into the prophetic context.³

Other special features indicative of didactive interpretation of the book

The character of the prophet pictured in the book of Jonah is completely different from that of the other books. There were prophets who confessed their incompetence to be God's messengers, that is Isaiah (Is. 6:5). But there was no prophet who proved himself to be so disobedient as Jonah. He was so unwilling to obey the command of Yahweh that instead of going to Nineveh, he fled to Tarshish (1:3).

²James D. Smart, "The Book of Jonah," The Interpreter's Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), VI, 871.

³Alfred von Rohr Sauer, The Lesson of Jonah (mimeographed), 1965, p. 2.

Moreover, the disobedient prophet is portrayed also as a jealous and unhappy person about the conversion of the gentiles. When he saw that the people of Nineveh repented and were saved, instead of rejoicing at the fruit of his mission he conducted himself as a sulky child and was waiting to see the destruction of the city (4:5). He was angry because God spared the city and the people of Nineveh (4:1-3). He was willing to give his life to save the gentiles in the ship, but he was unable to bear the thought that God should save the gentiles in Nineveh. This also shows the inconsistency of his character.⁴ No other prophet is depicted in such terms in the Old Testament.

No other prophet in the Old Testament was ever called to go to a different country to preach. The other prophets were called to prophesy to the people of Israel. Occasionally they prophesied about other nations, but their primary ministry was to Israel. Jonah, on the other hand, did not preach even a single word to Israel. His commission was only to the gentiles in Nineveh. This aspect of the prophet's ministry is peculiar in the book of Jonah without any precedent in the history of the prophets.

A series of miraculous events happening in succession is not paralleled in the Old Testament. God sending a storm which would cause others to suffer, the lot falling immediately on Jonah, the storm ceasing instantly as he was thrown out, a fish being ready to swallow him and the prophet spending three days in the interior of the fish

⁴Smart, VII, 872-873.

without any harm, the entire population of the city repenting, the gourd growing in one day enough to give shade--all these happenings in succession make the literal interpretation of the book difficult. Especially, it is difficult to understand the conversion account of the city because it is hard to perceive how the entire population, including the king, would listen to a foreigner and repent. Even in Israel there is no record of such success which has brought about such a massive conversion in a prophet's ministry.⁵

The city of Nineveh is described as "exceedingly great," "three days journey in breadth" (3:3). The use of the past tense הָיָה shows that the writing belongs to a period later than 612 B.C. when the city was destroyed. Archaeological evidences show that the city was not as large as the book would indicate. In the later centuries people have tried to explain this difficulty by holding the view that it was thought to have included a large area between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.⁶ If this explanation is accepted then it is still more inconceivable how the prophet could preach to all the people in that area. The possible explanation to this problem would be that the glory of the city was so great that when people talked about it in later centuries the size of the city was exaggerated.⁷ The book of Jonah also represents such a view of the city.

⁵Smart, VI, 872. Also see Julius A. Bewer, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jonah," International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912), XXV, 3.

⁶Smart, VI, 888.

⁷Sauer, p. 5.

Another important feature of the book is that the author neglects a number of things which would normally be expected of him if history had been his aim. There is a reference to a prophet Jonah, son of Amittai, during the reign of Jeroboam II who had prophesied about the restoration of the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the sea of the Arabah (2 Kings 14:25). In the book of Jonah there is no reference to any king in whose period the prophet was sent to Nineveh. Other prophetic books usually bear the name of the king or kings in whose period the prophets were called or the dates of their ministry (Is. 1:1; Jer. 1:2-3; Ezek. 1:1-2; Hos. 1:1; Amos 1:1 and so forth). The name of the king of Assyria is not given in the book either; in fact, he is called by the unusual name "king of Nineveh."

The author says nothing about the nature of the prophet's journey, the place where he was cast off, the language he used in Nineveh, and the specific sins of which the Ninevites were guilty. There is only a general account of Nineveh's conversion, and there is no description of any precise event. The absence of such precise data is characteristic of the book.⁸ Such features further strengthen the argument in favor of a didactic interpretation of the book of Jonah.

⁸Smith, p. 488.

The Date of the Book

There is no reference in the book of Jonah that the same prophet who appeared during the period of Jeroboam II wrote the book. Rather, the book is an account of the mission of the prophet, and not written by the prophet himself.⁹ Moreover, factors such as the use of קִיָּה in 3:3, the exaggeration of the size of the city, and the king of Assyria being called the king of Nineveh suggest a later date for the book,¹⁰ a date long after 612 B.C.¹¹

A number of words and constructions used in the book of Jonah including the use of Aramaisms are found in the later, some only in the latest, writings of the Old Testament. This suggests that the book was written during the post-exilic period.

חֲנָה in the piel form is frequently used in the book of Jonah (2:1; 4:6,8). Elsewhere in the Old Testament it is used only in Dan. 1:5,10,11; 1 Chron. 9:29 and Ps. 41:8. But in the Old Testament Aramaic the piel form for חֲנָה occurs in Ezra 7:25; Dan. 2:24,49; 3:12, and so on.¹² The word יִתְעַשֶּׂה (to think) occurs only in

⁹Bewer, XXV, 11.

¹⁰Supra, pp. 92-93.

¹¹W. Neil, "Book of Jonah," The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, edited by George Arthur Buttrick and others (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), II, 966.

¹²Smith, pp. 486-487.

Jonah 1:6 in the Old Testament and once in the Aramaic Daniel

(Dan. 6:4).¹³ The word דָּוַר meaning "to order" or "to command"

(3:7) is found in the Old Testament only in the Aramaic passages

(Dan. 3:7; Ezra 6:1). לְדַבֵּר (4:10), instead of the usual

דָּבַר is a later usage. לְדַבֵּר ((4:11) for the earlier

דָּבַר is found only in later Hebrew (Ezra 2:64; Neh. 7:66,72; 1 Chron. 29:7)).¹⁴ הַיָּם meaning "ship" occurs only in

Jonah 1:5 in the Old Testament but is common in Aramaic and Arabic.¹⁵

The word שָׁמַט meaning "to be quiet" is found twice in Jonah (1:11,12) and elsewhere only in Ps. 107:30 and Prov. 26:30, a later

usage.¹⁶ The word הַיָּם which means "proclamation"

is an Aramaising word (3:2).¹⁷ Grammatical constructions בְּשַׁלְמִי

(1:7),¹⁸ which means "on whose account?" and בְּשַׁלְמִי (1:12),

which means "on my account," are also Aramaising words.¹⁹ The practice

of calling Yahweh the "God of heaven" (1:9) belongs in general to the

¹³Norman H. Sanith, Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p. 15.

¹⁴Smith, p. 487.

¹⁵Snaith, p. 13.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 19.

¹⁷Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction, translated by Peter P. Ackroyd (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), p. 405.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Snaith, p. 20.

post-exilic period.²⁰ Such linguistic features suggest that the book was written during the post-exilic period.

The book also reflects the situation which developed in Israel during the Persian period. The great prophets had already taught them of God's sovereignty over all men, his punishing sin wherever he finds it and his love and concern for all people. They had also taught Israel the meaning and purpose of their unique position in the world. As seen in the previous two chapters of the thesis, the Yahwist and Deutero-Isaiah had reminded them of their being chosen to be mediators of blessings and salvation to all men. But during the years after exile, as at other times in their history, they began to forget their vocation. They became narrow-minded and embittered in their relations with other people. They had experienced cruelty from the hands of their enemies. They thought that God would punish them, and they believed that the future of their kingdom depended on the overthrow of other nations as depicted in the books of Esther and Obediah.²¹

Reorganization of the Jewish community around the law during the post-exilic period added fuel to such mentality. The reform measures carried out by Ezra and Nehemiah were motivated with the zeal to protect the religious heritage of Israel from syncretism and the infiltration

²⁰Smart, VI, 873.

²¹Smith, p. 490.

of pagan standards.²² But such measures had borne bitter fruits. Since the prophets had explained the calamity which Israel experienced as the penalty for sins they committed against God's law, in the post-exilic period there was great emphasis on keeping the law strictly. Law became central in the life of the post-exilic community. This period marked a great turning point in the life of the community. A new community took shape composed of those committed to the law as promulgated by Ezra. From that time on Israel would be viewed as the people who had rallied around the law. This meant that those who would not live in conformity with the law would not be considered as true Israel. Strict reform measures became inevitable because many of them succumbed to the attractions of the cultural and religious practices of the surrounding peoples. But those measures were taken strictly on the basis of law rather than the spirit of the law in the light of the covenant. It was the stress on the law which imparted to Judaism its distinctive character. Law virtually usurped the place of the historic covenant as the basis of their life. This obscured the implications of the covenant and led to narrow-mindedness and strictly exclusivism. They became so intolerant that they even forbade the Samaritans to join them in building the temple (Ezra 4:1-3). The note of separation was dominant in the literature produced during the post-exilic period. They decided to keep themselves separated from other

²²Neil, II, 966.

peoples (Neh. 10)28). They were forced to divorce their wives whom they had married from among the other people (Ezra 9-10). (Such severe restrictions are evident in literature of the late post-exilic period such as Tobit, Judith, Eccliasticus and the books of Maccabees). This tendency aggravated the hatred and bitterness against other peoples. So they failed to glimpse the glorious future which lay ahead in carrying out their mission as proclaimed by Deutero-Isaiah. However, the vision did not altogether fade away. Passages of Isaiah 56 to 66 and the book of Ruth which were written during this period give evidence of such vision among the faithful ones. The author of the book of Jonah belonged to such a group. The message of the book of Jonah testifies that the book was written to combat the narrow-minded and exclusive tendencies which prevailed among the post-exilic community.²³ It suggests that it was written at a time when the exclusiveness engendered by Ezra's reforms in 444 B.C. had long been at work in the life of the community. At the same time Jonah's name has been included by Jesus ben Sirach as one of the Twelve (Ecclus. 49:10); therefore, it could be concluded that the date of the book would fall sometime between 400 and 200 B.C.²⁴

²³ John Bright, A History of Israel (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1959), pp. 412-430 passim.

²⁴ Smart, VI, 873.

The Message of the Book

The book of Jonah ends with the question, "And should I not pity Nineveh, the great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?" (4:11). Though no answer, either from God or from Jonah, is given at the end, it is implicit in the question itself. The author of the book wanted to illustrate that the love of God embraces all men over against the narrow-minded, prejudiced, and fanatic attitude of his people and thus to awaken them to fulfill their mission to the nations. "He (the author) was led to achieve his purpose by a parable, through which the prophet Jonah moves as the symbol of his recusant, exiled, redeemed and still hardened people."²⁵

Exposure of Israel's attitude

Jonah is pictured as a disobedient prophet in the first place. He disobeyed God's command to go to Nineveh and to preach (1:3). When he was commanded the second time after he was taken to the city, he obeyed (3:3-4), but he did it with prejudice. The content of his preaching was that Nineveh would be destroyed in forty days. He would be happy to see the city destroyed and was waiting to see that (4:5). The reason for his obedience is evident in 4:1-4. He refused to go to Nineveh because he knew that God had intended to do something else

²⁵Smith, p. 502.

than to destroy the city. This instinct sprang out of his knowledge of God, of his mercy and grace to all men.²⁶ He knew the purpose of God for the nations. Yet out of prejudice and narrow-mindedness he showed reluctance to preach to the Ninevites. This depicts the character of the people of Israel. If they failed to carry out their mission, it was not because of their ignorance of the will of God. It was because they knew the will of God that they refused to carry out the mission. They knew that they had a unique heritage; they knew the promises made to the patriarchs and the implications of the blessings.²⁷ They knew the covenant made with them at Sinai which made them a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6). They also had before them the teachings of Deutero-Isaiah, who had taught them that the salvation offered to them by Yahweh gave them the opportunity to carry out their mission. He had reminded them that the future glory of his people did not depend on their political supremacy and the overthrowing of their enemies, but on their being mediators of the message of salvation to the nations. But they were again reluctant to carry out their mission. Their vision was blinded by hatred and spiritual exclusivism and self-containedness, and they failed to enter into the mediatory ministry

²⁶Ibid., p. 504.

²⁷This has been dealt with in chapter II of this thesis on the message of the Yahwist.

for which they were called.²⁸ There was no excuse of ignorance. The picture of Jonah portrays Israel's reluctant disobedience.

The attitude of Jonah in chapter 4 depicts the character of the people of Israel after their return from the exile. Jonah was waiting to see the destruction of the city, and when he saw that God spared it he became indignant and wished termination of his life rather than to live after seeing that God spared the city. He was not able to bear the thought that God was merciful. Like Jonah the people of Israel during the post-exilic period believed that the future of their kingdom was depicted in the books of Esther and Obediah.²⁹

God's love for all men in contrast to Israel's attitude

In order to demonstrate that God's love embraces all men the author of the book chose Nineveh as the arena of Jonah's mission. Assyria, of which Nineveh was the capital, was one of Israel's bitter enemies in pre-exilic times. By choosing Nineveh the author wanted to teach his people that even the cruel Assyrians were the object of God's care. To them he granted repentance and averted the punishment due to them (3:6-10).³⁰

²⁸James Hardee Kennedy, Studies in the Book of Jonah (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1956), p. 61.

²⁹Ibid., p. 490.

³⁰Bewer, XXV, 29.

The "contrast between the petty, narrow, and transient attachment of men and the supernatural and eternally purposeful love of God"³¹ is more vividly portrayed through the lesson of the gourd (4:6-11). While Jonah was waiting to see the fate of the city God appointed a gourd which gave shade to Jonah. He was exceedingly happy because of the plant. But his happiness was shortlived. The next day God appointed a worm to attack the plant so that it withered. This made Jonah angry. Then came the real challenge from God: "You pity the plant . . . And should I not pity Nineveh . . . " (4:10-11). By this question the author sets in focus the supreme issue, the contrast between human selfishness and divine love.³² Jonah pitied the plant for which he did not labor nor did he make it grow. But God is the creator of all men including the people of Nineveh and the cattles. Should he not then pity Nineveh? The question thus posed shows the inconsistency of Jonah. He was willing to pity the plant, but he was not at all concerned about the people in Nineveh. God's love encompasses all men, not a local or national deity, the creator God loves and saves all men.

During the post-exilic period the people of Israel had put great emphasis on keeping the law strictly, which eventually led to spiritual exclusivism. The author of the book does not expressly say anything about keeping the law. But in view of the historical situation it is

³¹Kennedy, pp. 90-91.

³²Ibid., p. 93.

possible that he reacted to this attitude also. It becomes clear in the conversion account of the Ninevites. The king and the people repented for their sins and they were spared from destruction; there is no mention that they kept any of the laws. Even those who did not keep the law according to the standard Israel had set up during the post-exilic period received God's grace. Therefore conformity to the law is not a prerequisite for God's grace. (At this point it should be noted that neither the Yahwist nor Deutero-Isaiah said that Israel was called to teach the nations to keep the law.) The result of Jonah's preaching was repentance and salvation.

Appeal to Israel

The question posed at the end of the book is left unanswered. The question is posed not for a verbal answer from Israel, but for a change of attitude and action based on this change. Israel has to overcome the narrow-minded, exclusive attitude toward the nations. She has to realize that God is the God of all, and that he loves all peoples and his grace embraces all nations. Therefore Israel as the prophet of God has to carry out the mission entrusted to her, the purpose of which is to bring about repentance on the part of the nations. She is reminded that her mission is not to bring men into conformity with her by observing the law strictly. God had taught her that he could bring about repentance even though the gentiles do not adhere strictly to the law according to the standard Israel had set up. Israel has to learn that she should not put unnecessary burdens on the gentiles if

she is willing to fulfill her mission. The only means which she has to use is the word, which is powerful enough to effect repentance. She is also called to rejoice at the conversion of the gentiles, and not to sulk out of prejudice and jealousy.

Summary

The book of Jonah is placed among the minor prophets, and it is to be interpreted didactically. Special features of the book in contrast to the rest of the prophetic books favor such interpretation of the book.

The linguistic features of the book suggest that the book was written during the post-exilic period. The book also reflects the situation which arose during the post-exilic period. It suggests that it was written to combat the narrow-minded, exclusive and fanatic attitude which evolved in Israel after the reorganization of the community by Ezra centered around the law. This situation led them to lose sight of their mission to the nations and to misconceive their vocation. The book was written to awaken their minds to fulfill their mission to the world.

The author of the book points out the absurdity of the attitude of the people of Israel during the post-exilic period by the parable of the disobedient prophet Jonah. He shows them the love of God for all nations over against their attitude toward them and ends with an

appeal. The author depicts that "the God who makes this appeal to Israel is the Lord of the whole earth, whose compassion reaches to all peoples, and the destiny that he has for Israel is to be his prophet to the nations, proclaiming judgment to them that they may repent and live."³³

³³Smart, VI, 894.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

An attempt has been made in this study to find the mission motif in three Old Testament documents, each of which was produced in a different period in the history of Israel. The Yahwistic material comes from the early monarchical period when Israel was enjoying her most prosperous age. Deutero-Isaiah's message comes from a period when Israel's national existence was ended, while she was experiencing the pain of the captivity. The book of Jonah comes from the post-exilic period, when Israel's life was being reconstructed. Each of these documents was produced to meet the needs of its particular period and to enable the people of Israel to face the challenges before them.

When we speak of a mission motif in the Old Testament we do not mean it in the sense of sending missionaries from one country or church to another but in the sense of Israel's relation with other peoples.

In all three documents, which were produced in various periods, the mission motif is dominant. Therefore we can conclude that in Israel there were faithful men who were constantly aware of Israel's mission to the world in various periods of Israel's history.

The primary motif for mission is not that Israel had to convert the gentiles to her faith and her mode of life. Rather, it is God's purpose to extend his grace to all men. This has been expressly

stated in the Yahwist's and Deutero-Isaiah's writings, and tacitly included in the book of Jonah with the question, "And should I not pity Nineveh . . . " (4:11).

Israel stands before God as the mediator of his grace to all men. She has been formed, called, equipped, and saved in order that she may carry out her mission to the world. She is called not to be a passive recipient of God's grace, but to serve as the dynamic mediator of divine grace to all men. Neither the Yahwist nor Deutero-Isaiah nor the author of the book of Jonah addresses one segment of the people or a selected few. Each issues a challenge to the people of God as a whole. Israel should stand before the nations as a single community of faith with one mission.

Israel's mission is to the whole world, and not confined to one people or another. God's blessings should reach all the families of the earth, and his salvation is to extend to the ends of the earth. Israel certainly has a mission to Israel too, even if it is found only in Deutero-Isaiah, but it recedes to a role of secondary importance. It is but a means whereby she is enabled to glorify God before the nations.

Though the mission is the same, emphasis varies from time to time. The situation and the needs of a particular time determine the emphasis of the time. The dominant theme of the Yahwist is "blessing." The prosperity and prestige which Israel enjoys during the early monarchical period are interpreted as the blessing of God. The blessing

is interpreted in the light of her call to be a blessing to the world. The blessings she enjoys are to be mediated to others. Israel at that time is in a position to show concern for others. She is called to work for the well being of others and to wish blessings on them. As she lives by such a standard, others are enabled to acknowledge that God is with her and to wish similar blessings for themselves. This would ultimately result in their coming into a relationship with God like that which Israel herself enjoys, namely, the covenant relationship.

The emphasis of Deutero-Isaiah's message is different. The phrase, "be a blessing" does not occur even once in his message. He does not explicitly call Israel to care for the welfare of the neighboring peoples, possibly because Israel was not in a position to do so. But still she can carry out her mission to the world. She is called to be the spiritual leader and commander of the peoples. By serving in that capacity, she is called to be the mediator of God's covenant to the peoples. The ultimate goal of her mission is to bring the nations to the true knowledge of God and to the salvation he offers them. The way by which she can accomplish her task is to obey God accepting in faith the salvation he offers her, to rejoice in such salvation, to live before the nations as a witness to the fact that Yahweh alone is God and saviour, to proclaim before the nations what she has experienced from God and what has been revealed to her, and to bring the true knowledge of God to others. As she lives as a real

witness to God, she will enjoy the fruits of her mission, and God will be glorified among men.

In the message of Jonah the emphasis is different. The book was written in order to combat the situation prevalent in the post-exilic community which had succumbed to prejudice and jealousy toward others and had adopted a rigidly exclusive character. These narrow people even forbode the Samaritans to join them in building the temple. The emphasis of the book is on God's grace embracing all men and Israel's mission to all, including her arch-enemies. God's grace is not confined to those who strictly adhere to the law, but extends to all human boundaries. It is his purpose to bring all men unto repentance and to life.

Suggestions for Considerations and Further Investigation

The following suggestions are made on the basis of the conclusions drawn from the study of the passages of the Yahwist, Deutero-Isaiah and Jonah which pertain to the mission of the church. The author of the thesis does not claim that the suggestions made here are conclusive, because further light may be thrown on them by further studies of other writings of the Old Testament. However, the church can learn a few lessons from the writings which were taken up in our study.

What Israel failed to do, Christ fulfilled. In Christ we have the fullest expression of God's grace embracing all men. The church as the redeemed community stands before God as the recipient of his grace, and

confronts the world with a mission. It finds the meaning of its existence only insofar as it faithfully carries out its mission. The church is called not to be a passive recipient of God's grace, but to be an active communicator of grace to the world.

The primary motive for mission comes from God, whose purpose is to extend his grace to all men. We often determine the growth of the church or the effectiveness of mission in terms of statistical growth. The primary objective of mission is not converting people to one denominational structure or the other; it is rather enabling people to be recipients of God's grace. The entire life of the community in a locality or in a country is to be influenced by the gospel of grace which enabled men to live a life of freedom. If the church is motivated by this standard, it will set up its priorities and mission strategies in such a way that they will be conducive to the achievement of this goal.

As the church is called to be a mission to the world, there is no place for disparity between the older churches and the younger churches. The church is called to be a single community of faith with one mission, which brings obligations on both sides. The younger churches cannot shrug off their shoulders their call to be a mission. As a church is formed in a place, it becomes a part of the whole process of mission. The younger churches may have to ask themselves how far they have realized this great privilege and the responsibilities involved in it. The older churches may also have to ask themselves how far they

have accepted the younger churches as equal partners in the church's mission. When both of these groups ask themselves how they can work together as one single church carrying out its mission, they may open new ways for achieving the goal.

Another problem in the area of mission which the church has to face is the problem of denominationalism. Especially in countries where the Christian population is comparatively small, denominationalism can cause great repercussions in the mission of the church. This is an area where mission boards and the younger churches have to work together to find ways and means to alleviate the problem and to face the non-christian world as one church with one mission.

In our study of the three documents of the Old Testament we have seen that Israel's mission to Israel is of secondary importance in view of her primary mission to the world. The church, however, also has a mission to the church, even though this may not be the end purpose of the church's existence. It is an important means by which the church is enabled to glorify God before the nations. The churches have to consider how far their programs within the church are directed toward this goal.

Besides the general observations cited above there are a number of lessons which the church can learn from each of the writings in this study and which can show her how she can be an effective mission agent to the world. Each of these writings has a different emphasis in carrying out the same missions. The lesson from the Yahwist is this:

The people who have been enabled to experience the love of God and his blessings have the obligation to mediate such blessing to others. That means not only spiritual blessing, but also physical blessing. The Yahwist does not make a distinction between spiritual and physical. One's whole life needs to be brought under the influence of God's grace and love. It is a life enjoyed in the fullest sense, freed from the effect of curse and bondage. To have concern for those in need is a part of the church's mission to the world. It is not so much social gospel as gospel in action and in love. If the church stands aloof when it sees the needs of mankind, it fails to be a blessing to the world. The church can find innumerable opportunities where it can be of help for the welfare of the peoples. By becoming involved in such activities the church enables others to recognize the love of God in action and thus to wish to enter into a relationship such as the church has with God. To care for the welfare of the peoples is not an alternative to the preaching of the gospel, but a means by which men may be led to a true knowledge of God and to the salvation he offers all men.

That concern for the welfare of the people is not an end in itself is further exemplified by the message of Deutero-Isaiah. The church is in a position to be the spiritual leader of the peoples. Through its witnessing and proclamation the church needs to bring the knowledge of the true God and his message of salvation to all men. There is no alternative to this aspect of the church's mission. The content of the

church's proclamation is that which it has experienced in Christ and the revelation it has received from God. To carry out its mission, the church need not necessarily be materially well off for the very life of the church as it lives in faith in God will be an effective witness before men.

According to Deutero-Isaiah there can be no compromise between Yahwism and the religions of the nations. However, Israel's mission lies not in coercion, but in love. This is true of the church's mission also. There is no alternative to the gospel of grace revealed in Christ; there may be no compromise with other religions. But the way the church has to carry out its mission is with gentleness and humility. The church is called not to condemn, but to save. When the church is involved in its mission, it encounters other religions. Any approach in a sympathetic way will be helpful for the communication of the gospel. It will also be helpful if the church can learn to respect the sentiments of other peoples, their spiritual aspirations and needs, their various social customs and practices. Not all non-western customs and practices are evil and sinful. The church may have to learn to appreciate and even to learn what is good in other social structures. If the church carries out its mission in love and sympathy, it will enjoy the fruits of such a mission.

The lesson from the resentful Jonah indicates that God's grace embraces all peoples, even those of different social, cultural, and caste structures. No one can stop the grace of God from reaching other

peoples. If the organized church fails to carry out its mission to others, God can find other means of reaching them, but the church stands responsible before God. Though Jonah did not wish that the people of Nineveh might be saved--he rather wished their destruction--God granted them repentance and saved them. This is a great lesson and warning to the church. On many occasions the church's mission has been restricted to certain sections of the community or certain caste structures. The lesson of Jonah calls the church to get out of this ghetto mentality and reach all men. The church may have to reevaluate its past and present policies of outreach and find ways and means to reach all men.

Though the three writings under our purview come to us from three different periods with different emphases, the mission is the same. The different lessons we learn from them are applicable to the church of any period. The above suggestions are made for the church's further consideration and action so that God's holy name may be glorified.

Besides the above suggestions the author of this thesis would suggest the following for further studies on the subject of the mission motif in the Old Testament:

1. A study of the mission motif in other documents of the Old Testament which were produced during the same periods as those of the documents under our purview.
2. A study of the development of the mission motif throughout the entire Old Testament period.

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