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The Use of the Exodus in Interpreting History

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Prevallet: The Use of the Exodus in Interpreting History

CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY

The Use of the Exodus in Interpreting History

ELAINE MARIE PREVALLET

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RICHARD R. CAEMMERER

Homiletics

Theological Observer

Book Review

Vol. XXXVII

March 1966

No. 3

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Contents

The Use of the Exodus in Interpreting History ELAINE MARIE PREVALLET	131
Preaching and the Recovery of the Church RICHARD R. CAEMMERER	146
Homiletics	158
Theological Observer	169
Book Review	173

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The Use of the Exodus in Interpreting History

ELAINE MARIE PREVALLET

"A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and He brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey." (Deut. 26:5-9)

This confessional formula, one of the most ancient in the Old Testament, provides the remote background of our study. From her earliest times, Israel remembered this constitutive period of her history; indeed, from that time on she identified her God as Yahweh, "who brought Israel out of Egypt." At frequent intervals, this God, speaking through the word of His prophets, recalled to Israel the key events of her beginnings, and thus made them the basis of His call to fidelity and renewal. Israel's continual reflection upon these events led her to see them—and therefore herself and her God—in ever new light.

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Our study takes the complex of traditions grouped around the exodus as its point of departure. We shall consider the use made of this event at four stages in Israel's history and attempt to determine two factors: (1) whether the prophetic interpretation of the exodus event at a given period in Israel's history has been shaped by the historical situation and (2) whether the exodus event is used to interpret the historical situation. Finally, we may be able to draw some conclusions relative both to the Israelite view and use of history.

ELIJAH

In the 9th century B.C., Israel was enjoying a period of relative political strength and economic prosperity, though the lot of the poor was probably not a happy one.¹ Coalitions had been made with foreign nations—notably Phoenicia—against the rising Assyrian power. But in the wake of these alliances Israel fell prey to a syncretistic attitude, provoked at least in part by the missionary zeal of the Tyrian Jezebel for the cult of Baal. As Bright describes it, "Israel was full of people who, like Jezebel, had no conception of covenant law or, like Ahab, little concern for it."² It was in this situation that the

¹ We will largely follow the historical analysis of John Bright, *History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959). For Elijah, see pp. 220—234.

² *Ibid.*, p. 225.

prophet Elijah arose to incite Israel to a return to the knowledge and worship of the covenant God.

In 1 Kings 19 Elijah journeys through the desert to Mount Horeb, where a theophany takes place. He is miraculously fed (19:6-7) and journeys 40 days and 40 nights (19:8). Textual parallels with the Book of Exodus³ make it clear that there is a deliberate attempt here to portray Elijah as another Moses; the scene is obviously that of the exodus and of Sinai. We must attempt to determine the significance of this reconstruction of events.

We cannot, however, view this scene apart from the wider framework in which it is set. The previous chapter had recounted the dramatic scene in which Elijah engaged in a contest with all the prophets of Baal upon Mount Carmel to determine which god—Baal or Yahweh—was truly God in Israel. Despite their orgiastic frenzies, the prophets of Baal were unable to induce their god to light the fire for the sacrifice which they had prepared. Yahweh, however, hearing the prayer of Elijah, sent a great fire which consumed the offering, the wood, stones, and the water that was in the trench (18:38). Following this contest, the people acknowledged Yahweh as God; rain then came in abundance to allay the drought which had menaced Israel.

It is significant that this scene has overtones of a covenant renewal such as that initiated by Joshua at Shechem (Joshua 24) or of the covenant accounts of the

³ See 1 Kings 19:8/Ex. 34:28 and 24:18; 1 Kings 19:9/Ex. 33:22; 1 Kings 19:11/Ex. 33:22; 1 Kings 19:11-12/Ex. 19:16-19; 1 Kings 19:13/Ex. 33:22.

exodus (Ex. 19, 24).⁴ A covenant violation is clearly involved here: Elijah charges that Ahab had "forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals" (18:18) and that the people had forsaken the covenant and thrown down the altars (19:14). It is a cultic scene: all the people of Israel are assembled (18:19); Elijah repairs the altar (30) and offers sacrifice (36). He identifies Yahweh as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and asks for a mighty act so that the people will believe in Him (37). The people must reject the other gods in favor of Yahweh; they must "choose today" whom they will serve (21, 39; cf. Joshua 24:15). Elijah seems cast in the role of covenant mediator and intercessor, parallel to Joshua or Moses. It is no accident, then, that in the following scene Elijah goes up to Horeb (Sinai) and a theophany takes place.⁵

We must now try to determine the significance of this portrayal of Elijah. We may view the question from two angles: (1) the prophetic desire that the Northern Kingdom reroot itself in the Sinaitic covenant tradition and (2) the refinement and advancement of the revelation which is recorded in these episodes.

⁴ The scene has many similarities with the covenantal forms analyzed by James Muilenburg, "The Form and Structure of the Covenantal Formulations," *Vetus Testamentum*, 9 (1959), 347—365. See also Murray Newman, "The Prophetic Call of Samuel," *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), pp. 86—97; G. E. Mendenhall, *Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955).

⁵ The scene described in 2 Kings 2 is also relevant, since it bears overtones of Moses and the exodus or of Joshua at the entrance to the Promised Land.

After its separation from Judah and the central shrine at Jerusalem, the kingdom of the north would obviously not be wont to emphasize the mystique of the Davidic figure and the absorption by him of the original Mosaic covenantal traditions and promises.⁶ Further, in the Northern Kingdom succession to kingship was not dynastic but rather charismatic—a matter of divine designation and popular consent.

The situation points to prophetic attempts to control kingship: Ahijah designated Jeroboam king of Israel (1 Kings 11:29 ff.); Baasha, too, evidently had prophetic backing (15:30). Elisha would send "one of the sons of the prophets" to anoint Jehu. (2 Kings 9:1 ff.)

The Elijah cycle with which we are concerned pictures Israel in a state of apostasy from Yahweh (1 Kings 18:21: "the people did not answer him a word"). Elijah considers himself the only prophet left to the Lord, though Baal has 450 prophets (18:22). More strongly, ". . . the people of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, thrown down Thy altars, and slain Thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left . . ." (19:14). But it is evidently the king who must bear the guilt, for Elijah says to Ahab (who is, note, a dynastic successor), "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and followed the Baals" (18:18). The scene at Horeb concludes with Yahweh's instruc-

tions to Elijah to anoint kings of Syria and of Israel (19:16-18). Thus underlying the episodes are clear inklings of the need felt—evidently in prophetic circles—to demonstrate the independence of covenant and kingship, to reestablish the religion under the aegis of the Sinaitic covenant tradition and to affirm the prophet as the valid successor of Moses. In this light the portrayal of Elijah as covenant mediator in Ch. 18, and the typified exodus experience of Elijah in Ch. 19 are purposeful and significant on the level both of Israel's societal institutions and her religion.

But we must also consider the historical situation from another angle. Israel was coming to terms with an agricultural way of life. She was confronted on all sides by the vegetation and fertility gods of her neighbors, a situation which was seriously heightened by the zealous Jezebel. The days of the dramatic intervention of Yahweh in history, of miraculous events which proved Him and reenforced their faith in Him, were apparently over. An attitude of syncretism prevailed; the Israelites were learning to respect the cults of their neighbors, whose gods were more evidently suited to their present way of life. There seems little question that the faith of Israel was in jeopardy.

Therefore Yahweh produces a situation which affects precisely this agricultural way of life—that of a drought (17:1). Then in a dramatic scene Yahweh proves Himself superior to the ineffective Baals; the Israelites renew their faith in Him in a covenant renewal, and Yahweh sends rain. Hence in this scene Elijah mediates Israel's realization that her faith in Yahweh is relevant to her present situation: He is the God who is responsible for the

⁶ "We have every ground for assuming that the David-Zion tradition was fostered in Jerusalem and Judah, while the patriarchal-Exodus tradition lived on in the Northern Kingdom." Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), I, 47.

fertility of the earth. Elijah stands at the head of a long tradition in Israelite prophecy which violently rejects Israel's adoption of syncretistic views and practices and acts to combat such infidelity by showing that Yahweh is still, in the present, very much in command.

But should the Israelites always expect such miracles from Him? Here we find the deeper level of meaning in the exodus experience of Elijah and his theophany. It was in the exodus-Sinai events that Yahweh originally revealed Himself to Israel. That revelation had been in the midst of great natural disturbances—thunder and lightning, fire and earthquake (Ex. 19: 16-19). Elijah's theophany presents these phenomena, but God is not in them (1 Kings 19:11-12). Rather, Yahweh speaks to Elijah in a gentle whisper, "a still, small voice." (19:12)

Lest Israel should tend to look for and recognize God only in the extraordinary demonstration of His power, she had to learn to find Him in the ordinary blessing of the rainfall, and in the quiet intimacy in which He communicates Himself to His prophets. God's Word coming to Elijah moves Israel toward an increased spirituality, but such a development could be validated only by identification with Israel's original experience of Yahweh under the guidance of her first mediator, Moses. Hence in this portrayal Elijah graphically catches up the experience of the original Mosaic revelation and adds to it a new depth and refinement, one which is relevant for contemporary Israel. The exodus experience is, then, not just a past event whose value and meaning lie in the past, but it is in some way normative for the present and deepening revelation of God to the faith of Israel. A new historical

situation has seen new meaning in the exodus and has made it serve as grounding for a deepening faith.

HOSEA AND JEREMIAH

We shall sketch briefly the historical backgrounds of only two of the preexilic prophets, Hosea and Jeremiah, and examine their use and understanding of the exodus event. Our intention is simply to provide a bridge between our study of the use made of the exodus in the Elijah cycle and the application which we find in Isaiah 40—66, addressed to a situation 350 years later.

The prophet Hosea lived in the Northern Kingdom during the troubled middle years of the eighth century. Assyria was a rising threat. Hosea pictures a political society torn by intrigue and dynastic instability and characterized by an uncertain national policy. Behind a deceptive economic prosperity lurked egregious injustice and moral decay. Israel had absorbed a Canaanite population which had little knowledge of or interest in covenant and covenant law. Separated as she was from Judah, and in the process of losing the distinctive religious traditions in which her origin as a people was rooted, she was in danger of losing her identity altogether. Paganism was rife; Israel was playing the harlot; worship of Yahweh was compounded with worship of the Baals. The sense of individual responsibility to Yahweh and His covenant was lost; covenant obligations were provided for by mere cultic ceremonies. "Though all the fundamentals of Israel's faith—election, covenant, promise—were still held, all were internally prostituted."⁷

⁷ Bright, *History*, p. 244; see pp. 234—261.

In the midst of such infidelity Hosea recalls Israel to the simple faith of her beginnings. He reminds her that Yahweh is her God since the land of Egypt; He is her only "Savior."⁸ In spite of her defection, he can still say that she "knows" no God but Yahweh (13:4). Israel is God's son (11:1); the exodus period is the time when God first loved and called Israel. The spontaneity and joy of Israel's election is well expressed in 9:10: "Like grapes in the wilderness, I found Israel. Like the first fruits on the fig tree in its first season, I saw your fathers."

But as soon as Egypt was behind, the Israelites forgot Yahweh (13:5 f.). "The more I called them, the more they went from Me; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols" (11:2; cf. also 9:10). Israel has forsaken her commitment to Yahweh. In Chs. 1—3 Hosea describes her relation to Yahweh in terms of the relation between wife and husband, obviously heightening the intimacy and mutuality. But Israel has prostituted herself by going after the Baals.

God Himself will punish her for this infidelity. He will "be like a lion to them" (5:14; 13:7); they will return to Egypt (11:5; 8:13; 9:3). "But all his riches can never offset the guilt he has incurred. I am the Lord, your God, from the land of Egypt; I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast." (12:8-9)

And yet God's love triumphs over His anger. Precisely because He is God, the

⁸ Speaking of the exodus in 11:1-4, Hosea refers to God as Israel's "healer." Though not elaborated, it is interesting to note the rooting of such theologically pregnant terms as "savior" and "healer" in the exodus experience.

Holy One, and not a man, He will pity them:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over,
O Israel! . . .

My heart recoils within Me,
My compassion grows warm and tender.

I will not execute My fierce anger,
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come to destroy. . . .
they shall come eagerly like birds from
Egypt

and like doves from the land of Assyria;
and I will return them to their homes,
says the Lord. (11:8-11)

In juxtaposition to the view of return to Egypt as punishment is the view of the return to the desert as a work of divine love. There is deep theological insight here: God's punishment is but an aspect of His love. Since Israel had not known that it was Yahweh who gave her all the good things of the land, He will take them away from her. He will hedge her in so that she cannot run after her lovers.

Then she shall say, "I will go and return
to my first husband,
for it was better with me than than
now."

Therefore, behold, I will allure her
and bring her into the wilderness and
speak tenderly to her.

And there I will give her her vineyards
and make the valley of Achor a door
of hope.

And there she shall answer as in the
days of her youth,
as at the time she came out of the
land of Egypt. (2:7, 14-15)

Significantly, the desert days are here the image of the perfect response of Israel, days of perfect fidelity and love. God is not punishing but "alluring" Israel; it is not His anger which He expresses, but His tenderness. There, in that state of mutual love, He will return her vineyards to her.

The development is clear. First, Hosea's word depicting the relations of Yahweh and Israel in marital imagery is of considerable theological consequence. The exodus is, in consequence, seen as the time of espousals, the beginning of those relations. There is clearly a certain idealization here: She will respond as in the days of her youth, when she came up from the land of Egypt. Forgotten are the "murmurings" of Israel in the desert; for Hosea this was a time of perfect response.

But this does not represent simply a nostalgic wish for the "good old days" of the past which always seem more ideal in retrospect than they were in actuality. Israel's infidelity consists in "going after" the Baals. Hosea knows of a day when Israel was not guilty of such infidelity: the days of the desert, before she settled in Canaan, before her faith ever confronted the fertility gods of agricultural peoples. This, then, is not simply nostalgia. Compared with the wholesale harlotry of eighth-century Israel, the Israel of the desert was indeed devoted, and her faith ideal; but the ideal element inherent in the desert days could be seen only when one knew what Israel would later become. Hosea, looking at the present, sees new meaning in the past.

But as the prophet looks at the past Yahweh also leads him to find the meaning of the present and the future. The punishment of Yahweh is real punishment, and it entails suffering on the part

of Israel; she will be stripped of all that belongs to her. In that sense, it will be a new exodus, a leaving behind of all that she has and a going forward in faith. But the punishment is the means of her conversion: Yahweh, as in the days of the desert, is alluring her — now as then — into complete dependence upon Him so that she will learn again to love Him. The return to Him is not just a question of human effort, but involves another of the sheerly gratuitous acts of God in history, another exodus. It is clear that this "return to Egypt" which Hosea predicts is not exclusively an event of the objective, historical order but involves also an interiorizing and spiritualizing of the exodus experience.

The historical factors⁹ which have influenced Hosea's thought are evident. Israel has forgotten her covenant and gone over to the Baals. These are fertility gods; the rites of sacred prostitution are practiced throughout the land. It is precisely this imagery which Hosea dares to use in describing the relations of God and Israel. But there is here a return to the deepest roots of the covenant tradition, a return which was desperately needed by Israel. As Hosea well saw, Israel was faced with imminent loss of her national identity; when she forsook the covenant, she was forsaking her own existence. Hosea's view

⁹ We pass over those historical events which are probably the most influential in Hosea's thought, the experience of his relations with Gomer. The incidents related in Chs. 1—3 were certainly the instrument of the prophet's realization of and penetration into "a God who casts off his people only after deep soul-searching, a loving and suffering God, who is resolved that evil shall not at the last prevail." Bruce Vawter, *The Conscience of Israel* (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1961), p. 114. See the discussion of these chapters, pp. 105—114.

does not represent a subtle syncretism, but a most profound conversion of a potentially dangerous cultural symbol; it becomes the vehicle of deepened insight into the nature of Israel's relation to God and a means of returning her to her own original faith. It is its continuity with the exodus which identifies the development as authentic and places Israel's present experience and future hope under the aegis of her past traditions.

The historical background of Jeremiah's activity is somewhat more complicated; history is moving fast. The Judaic kingship had been weak, politically and religiously. There was an attempt at reform and some resurgence during the reign of Josiah; but at his death national and religious hopes were shattered. In 608 a puppet king was put on the throne by Egypt; he appears to have been something of a despot and was bitterly opposed by Jeremiah. In 605 world power passed to the Babylonians; in 597 they laid siege to Jerusalem, took the city, and deported King Jehoiachin and the most influential citizens to Babylon. In 587 the city was again besieged and this time leveled; the temple was pillaged, and a further group deported to Babylon. The state of Judah was destroyed.

It is in this arena that Jeremiah must pronounce God's judgment. Probably he had at first supported the Josianic reform but later, perceiving its spiritual inadequacy, rejected it.¹⁰ If the "return to tradi-

tion" were used as a national instrument, promulgated and enforced within the framework of the state, and if it amounted to only a renewed emphasis on externals and created a false sense of security in its cultic reforms,¹¹ then surely Jeremiah would oppose it as inadequate. Further, by limiting all cultic activity to Jerusalem, even the number of cultic observances was greatly reduced. This situation inevitably brought about a separation between everyday life and religious activity; what emerged was an amalgamation of the religious order and the state.¹² In Bright's view, "the Sinai covenant, its demands supposedly met, became the handmaid of the Davidic covenant, guaranteeing the permanence of Temple, dynasty, and state."¹³ There was a wide range of activity for Jeremiah.

The earliest of Jeremiah's prophecies¹⁴ shows marked similarity to Hosea: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness" (2:2). Here the early devotion of Israel is idealized, the marital imagery used. Yahweh led, Israel followed. "Israel was holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest" (2:3). In this statement there is a clear harbinger of what Israel's relation to the nations is to be: her *raison d'être* is that she be a light to the nations, a means by which other nations will "know the Lord."

¹¹ Bright, *History*, p. 302.

¹² Martin Noth, *The History of Israel*, 2d ed. (New York: Harper, 1960), pp. 275—277.

¹³ Bright, *History*, p. 302.

¹⁴ We here follow the chronology outlined by A. Gelin, tr. *La Sainte Bible: Jérémie, les Lamentations, le Livre de Baruch*, 2d ed. (Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1959), pp. 14—16.

¹⁰ See H. H. Rowley, "The Prophet Jeremiah and the Book of Deuteronomy," *Studies in Old Testament Prophecy*, ed. H. H. Rowley (New York: Scribner, 1950), pp. 157—174. We accept the view of a Deuteronomistic influence on Jeremiah; such passages as 7:22 ff., 11:4 ff., 16:10 ff. are, in this view, to be accepted as authentically Jeremianic.

Yahweh's Word through Jeremiah is grounded in the religious and moral teaching in the exodus and the Sinai covenant:

Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers when I brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying, "At the end of six years each of you must set free the fellow Hebrew who has been sold to you and has served you six years; you must set him free from your service." But your fathers did not listen to Me or incline their ears to Me. (34:13-15; cf. also 11:3-8; 7:22-23)

Not only the early Israelites but the present ones, too, have broken the covenant. Jeremiah attributes the imminent Babylonian invasion to their defection (16:11-13; cf. also 11:9-13). Israel stands condemned by the terms of her covenant (34:17); she will be punished severely for her infidelity. But there is hope for the future, for God will perform an act mightier than that of the exodus from Egypt:

Therefore, behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when it shall no longer be said, "As the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt," but "As the Lord lives, who brought up the people out of the north country and out of all the countries where He had driven them." For I will bring them back to their own land which I gave to their fathers. (16:14)

In Ch. 23 a Messianic Davidic figure is connected with the new exodus. The king will be a wise governor, and his reign will be characterized by justice. Israel and Judah will be safe and secure.

Seeing Jerusalem under siege, Jeremiah knows that exile is coming; but this will be the prelude to a new act of God. Catching up many exodus themes, Jeremiah says:

The people who survived the sword found grace in the wilderness; when Israel sought for rest, the Lord appeared to him from afar. I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! . . . (31:2-4)

The Lord will make a new covenant, *not* like the one of old. In this covenant, "I will put My law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be My people" (31:33). They will be gathered from all the lands to which they have been exiled; Yahweh will bring them back and settle them again in Jerusalem. He will give them only one heart and one way; in their hearts He will put fear of the Lord, so that they will never depart from Him. (32:37-41)

If we examine these texts, we notice that the earliest (2:1-2) is quite similar to the thought of Hosea, with the addition of the elements of Israel as sacred and as "first-fruits." But in the later texts we find the introduction of something new. Jeremiah's teaching is based on covenant law, and his denunciations are against the breaking of this covenant. But evidently the covenant is broken. What is in question now is not a renewal of the old covenant, or a reconstruction of the past exodus-situation, but a completely new beginning. ". . . men shall *no longer* say 'As the Lord lives, who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt.'" Now the Lord will be identified by His new and even more wonderful act of returning the Israelites from exile and resettling them. And a new covenant will be made: this one will not be

a matter of exterior laws but will be within their hearts; they will not need to be taught to know the Lord.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the seriousness of the historical situation which faced Jeremiah. Israel had already been destroyed; the prophet was now confronted with the extinction of Judah. The people would be dispersed, the cities razed, the whole kingdom annihilated. Religiously, too, the faith which had held Israel together and guaranteed her existence appeared lost. Yahweh's covenant was voided, His promises unfulfilled. It was Yahweh's lordship, and not only Israel, that was at stake.

Thus Jeremiah must stress that the end of this era is the beginning of a new one. The new is grounded in the old, for it will again be in the desert that the people find favor with Yahweh (31:2); it is His "everlasting love" with which He loves them; He has "kept" His mercy toward them (31:3). He will restore and rebuild Israel and can even again address her as virgin (31:4)! Hence this restoration is not to be on a political level only, but more importantly it is to effect a very profound spiritual restoration. Again here, as we saw in Hosea, the event of the new exodus is used on a dual plane: it is to be a historical event, but it also entails a concomitant and corresponding spiritual event.

Along with the interiorizing, there is a new emphasis on the individual. With the nation as a political entity collapsing, Jeremiah would be harassed by the question of corporate vs. individual guilt (31:29-30). The nation as nation could not be trusted to ensure the covenant. The new covenant would therefore be individual and interior.

But this is not the only aspect, for the covenant formula still speaks of a people. In this connection, confronted both by the actual inadequacies of previous kings and by the Davidic covenantal promises, Jeremiah prophesies an ideal Davidic figure who will rule justly in the day of restoration and whose rule will endure (23:5-8; 33:14-26). But it will be a cultic community, for it will never lack priests "to offer burnt offerings, to burn cereal offerings, and to make sacrifices forever" (33:18). It will not be the whole nation which will be restored, but "a remnant," "among them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who is in travail" (31:8). Here again, the emphasis is non-political. It was the country's leadership which had been deported, whereas the blind and lame who return do not represent the politically "choice" segment of the population. The experience of the exile will have a purgative effect, and the restored community will be primarily a covenant community.

The tradition of exodus-desert-covenant is still the grounds for the promises of future hope: Israel must begin again at the beginning. Understanding of the past has given Jeremiah both a pattern and a guarantee of his hope for the future; but now addressing the Word of God to the present situation, he prophesies a new direction to Israel's history and a new and deeper content to His covenant intention.

ISAIAH 40—66

In the midst of the exile, Deutero-Isaiah was a prophet of hope to a despairing people.¹⁵ The Jews were free in Babylon;

¹⁵ For the following, see Bright, *History*, pp. 324—341.

many of them made use of the opportunities and thrived. But the crisis which presented itself was, as noted above, not only a political one but much more a crisis of faith. Here in a flourishing culture and civilization the Jews would realize the paucity of their own; here amid a plethora of gods and temples they would question the power and justice of Yahweh. Their national aspirations, so bound to Yahweh's promises, had been totally shattered. Still, there was some hope: a new power was rising. Cyrus the Persian threatened to bring the now weakening Babylonian empire to ruin.

For the Jews the practice of regular cult was impossible. But in its absence other practices and observances, such as circumcision and the sabbath, received all the greater emphasis. It seems likely that the exiles gathered to listen to the reading of the record of Yahweh's past dealings with Israel, so that during this time "Israel's memory of the past received a fresh impulse, and the recollection of the fathers, of the Mosaic covenant, and of the prophets helped them to maintain continuity with their inherited faith."¹⁶ It is in this context that Deutero-Isaiah carries on his prophetic activity.

We should perhaps make a few preliminary remarks relative to the breadth of Deutero-Isaiah's view. For him, God is the Lord of history (46:9-11). His authenticity stands or falls by the effectiveness of His plan; the idols are nothing because they have no knowledge of future events. How often the challenge is presented:

¹⁶ James Muilenburg, "The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40—66," *Interpreter's Bible*, V (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), 396.

"Who among them can declare this and show us the former things?" (43:9; cf. also 43:13; 44:7). His Word is at the beginning and the end of all human history.

Deutero-Isaiah's message of comfort is closely bound up with this view. From of old God has accomplished what He purposed, and He has a purpose for Israel. Precisely because He has chosen Israel and because His plan will not be deterred even by her infidelity, she can have hope for the future. Israel can be secure in her trust, for the Word of the Lord never fails. (55: 10-11)

Another perspective opens with Deutero-Isaiah: the identification of God as both creator and redeemer. "For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is His name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth He is called" (54:5; cf. also 51:16). Works of creation are so closely paralleled with works of redemption that one seems to be a prelude to the other (51:9-10; 45:7-8; 42:5-7). "Redemptive acts are acts of creation; and his creative acts are acts of history. Thus in Second Isaiah's prophecy the *Urgeschichte*, especially the Creation, is inseparably bound to *Heilsgeschichte*. . . ."¹⁷

The poems of Chs. 40—55 seem to be structured upon the events of the exodus. The early chapters speak of the wilderness, of a transformation of the desert, of a journey on an unknown path. The middle chapters clearly image a new exodus, an entry into a new Promised Land and Zion rebuilt. The last chapters speak of a re-

¹⁷ Bernhard W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. B. W. Anderson and W. Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 185.

newal of the covenant. The exodus event was, then, central to his thought.

But the journey through the desert is not to be like the journey of old, for the desert is transformed: it is leveled and made passable (40:3-4); it springs with water and trees (41:18-19; cf. also 42:15 to 16; 43:19-20; 55:12-13). Indeed, the event seems to take on cosmic proportions, so docile is nature to the intent of God to gladden the way for His people.

Still, the journey will demand faith: "I will lead the blind in a way that they know not, in paths that they have not known I will guide them" (42:16). But Israel will have nothing to fear, for the same God who performed wonders in her behalf during the first exodus is with her now:

Fear not, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are mine.
When you pass through the waters,
I will be with you;
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;
When you walk through fire, you shall not be burned;
the flame shall not consume you.
For I am the Lord your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.
(43:1b-3a)

This passage is strongly reminiscent of the Book of Exodus. When Moses asks God: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" God replies, "But I will be with you . . ." (Ex. 3:12; cf. also Ex. 33:16-17; cf. Is. 52:12 and Ex. 14:19). Clearly, then, Second Isaiah sees that in the return of the exiles God is bringing about a new exodus. We notice the recurrence of the theme that God is "with" them, that He has "named"

them as His own. (43:5-8; cf. also 48:20 to 21; 49:8-13)

The new exodus, then, is patterned after the old. But that it will not be an exact repetition of the past is apparent from the differences in details. We have already noted the transformation of nature which will characterize the new going out; other details, too, will differ. This time, "you shall not go out in haste and you shall not go in flight" (52:12), "for you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace." (55:12)

More striking in its import is the passage 43:14-21. Babylon is the Egypt of the first exodus. Second Isaiah recalls the mighty deeds of the first exodus, that Yahweh "opened a way in the sea" for the chosen people but "snuffed out" the powerful army of Egyptians. *Now*, however, He is doing something totally new, so that He says through His prophet,

Remember not the former things,
nor consider the things of old.
Behold, I am doing a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.
The wild beasts will honor Me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to My chosen people,
the people whom I formed for Myself
that they might declare My praise.
(43:18-21)

This is a unique and daring view; no previous prophet has ever dared counsel Israel so boldly not to remember the things of the past. But it is precisely in making the past present — in reconstructing the exodus in terms of the present and future —

that Second Isaiah can now speak the word which directs the gaze of his people solely toward the future.

A new note is also sounded in these passages in the definite purpose which Yahweh has in redeeming Israel. This is a characteristic of Second Isaiah's thought: Israel is a witness to Yahweh. "You are My witnesses," says the Lord, . . . 'that you may know and believe and understand that I am He'" (43:10, 12; cf. also 44:8; 52:9-10). In the Servant songs, too, the theme recurs: "You are My servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (49:3). This witness would seem to be the governing purpose of the covenant (42:6). Interestingly, it is also the purpose of the renewal of the covenant with David. (55:3-5)

A new perspective is added to this second exodus in Ch. 51. Here Isaiah exhorts Israel to look back to her beginnings: "Look to the rock from which you were hewn." Look to Abraham and Sara (51:1-2). Then, describing the future, Isaiah says,

For the Lord will comfort Zion;
He will comfort all her waste places
and will make her wilderness like Eden,
her desert like the garden of the Lord.
(51:3)

The future will, then, be like the beginning; the pledge of Yahweh's power to redeem is His power to create from chaos (51:9-11). The whole of history has a unity and continuity precisely in terms of the one God who as creator and redeemer directs it to a goal. This view could hardly find more powerful and effective expression.

Finally, Deutero-Isaiah speaks of a covenant. He reaffirms with Hosea-like tenderness God's untiring love for Israel:

For the Lord has called you
like a wife forsaken and grieved in
spirit,
like a wife of youth when she is cast off,
says your God.
For a brief moment I forsook you,
but with great compassion I will
gather you.
In overflowing wrath for a moment
I hid my face from you,
but with everlasting love I will have
compassion on you,
says the Lord, your Redeemer.
"For this is like the days of Noah to
Me:
as I swore that the waters of Noah
should no more go over the earth,
so I have sworn that I will not be angry
with you
and will not rebuke you.
For the mountains may depart and the
hills be removed,
but My steadfast love shall not depart
from you,
and My covenant of peace shall not
be removed,
says the Lord, who has compassion on
you. (54:6-10)

But the covenant model to which Second Isaiah returns is not that of Moses on Sinai but that of Noah, notably a more "cosmic" covenant than that of Sinai and one which corresponds to the prophet's view of history. Yet it is coupled with the terms of affection and intimacy used by Hosea. This is surely a unique combination of the cosmic and the deeply personal, conveying at once the vast reaches of God's redemptive designs, as well as its profound personal significance for the individual.

As noted above, Second Isaiah reinterprets the Davidic covenant in terms of Israel's witness to the nations (55:3-5). This, too, is to be an everlasting covenant,

and it is interesting to notice that there is no mention of covenant obligations. The notion of covenant according to Second Isaiah is, then, consonant with the tenor of his message. It is a message to an Israel reduced and suffering, who now needs only to hear that God is still active in history as He has been from the beginning and that His love for her stands unchanged.

We come again to ask in what way this message reflects historical developments. First, it is reasonable that the actual collapse of Israel as a nation would have led to renewed reflection upon the meaning of history—both the history of Israel and that of the world. The prophet's view goes back not to the exodus but to the Creator God, not back just to Israel's beginnings but to the beginnings of the world. His gaze has penetrated to a God who stands at the beginning and the end of all history. Only the hard knocks of her existence among the nations and the consequent questioning of history could have led Israel to see in what her uniqueness lay and to understand that she was not to be a nation among the nations but a nation *for* the nations—or rather, a nation for God.

Secondly, we must take into account the fact that Israel is actually in exile; she is being punished. It is her sins which have led her to this condition (42:22, 24; 43:25). But God is not an avenging God, but rather a forgiving God:

Remember these things, O Jacob,
and Israel, for you are My servant;
I formed you, you are My servant;
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by
Me.
I have swept away your transgressions
like a cloud,
and your sins like mist;
return to Me, for I have redeemed you.
(44:21-22)

The punishment has had a purifying effect: Israel has been "refined like silver," "tested in the furnace of affliction"—not for her own sake, but for God's sake, who wishes to use her for His own purposes (48:9-11). Here there is no need for scolding, for invective, or for reminders of her misdeeds. What Israel needs to know is that she is forgiven, that her God has not deserted her, and that the wicked has only to "return to the Lord, that He may have mercy on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (55:7). Only Israel in exile would be able to understand that her sins had led her to bondage; only in exile could she understand that forgiveness is redemption.

God in Second Isaiah is not so much judge as redeemer, the one who "buys back" a kinsman sold into slavery, who vindicates the family cause, who upholds and restores family solidarity. There is new depth here in the meaning of God's redemptive activity: Israel is His "family," for whom He assumes the responsibility.

We have already noted the differences which will distinguish this second exodus from the first. Details have been heightened, their magnificence excelling the glories of the past. This exodus is to be an historical event, surely, but there is a new spiritual depth. This exodus is redemption, it is forgiveness and restoration. The desire for continuity with Israel's own traditions leads Second Isaiah to find in the first exodus the type for this restoration, but it is viewed from a deepened perspective. Only Israel in exile could learn to understand that God is Redeemer; only in exile, then, does she learn the meaning of the exodus.

On the historical plane, Israel's national existence is again jeopardized; hence the

prophet would turn, as others before him, to that event which had first constituted her a nation. But in this second exodus it is not so much Israel as a nation, a political entity, which returns. This is not excluded; Jerusalem rebuilt is the new Promised Land. But much more, it is Israel as a redeemed people which returns, with a mission not in the political sphere, but with a mission to lead the nations to Yahweh, to be the means of His glory. The exile has indeed had a purifying effect; the exodus now constitutes not Israel the nation among other nations but Israel the redeemed—and in some sense redeeming—people. This was perhaps always latent in the exodus experience; Israel later saw herself even in the first exodus constituted "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). Here is the development of what Jeremiah had seen: Israel is a nation "holy to the Lord, the firstfruits of His harvest" (2:3). Israel, in the eyes of Second Isaiah, goes forth from the exile with a deepened and purified awareness of her own identity. Reflection on the past acts of God has again given her the grounds and pattern of hope for the future, but the events of the present have shaped her understanding of the significance which lay in the exodus experience.

CONCLUSION

We may now draw a brief general conclusion. The stages of Israel's history which we have considered have formed themselves in a pattern: Israel is threatened, politically and spiritually. There is a prophetic call to return her to her origins, to remind her of what she really is—a nation wholly constituted by and dependent upon the elective act of God. The exodus

event is the one most frequently recalled, for Israel saw that this event had been constitutive for her. The prophets repeatedly recall Israel to this event not only to reroot her in her past and thus return her to what she should be, but also to interpret the meaning of present history and to project into the future what she will become. In this process a new and deepened meaning is found in the past and projected into the future. The event becomes both exterior (something which will happen in objective history) and interior (something which she will experience on a spiritual level). The controlling pattern of both is the actual past historical exodus event. This event is, then, somehow normative for the life of the people of God, both individually and socially.

In this process, too, Israel's understanding of herself is deepened. She sees herself not just as God's chosen people, the recipient of a gratuitous choice, but as redeemed by that choice; or rather, she comes to see that choice as initiating the process of her own redemption within history. Finally, she sees herself as redeemed not for herself but for Yahweh, to give Him glory.

The question should perhaps be asked whether this "return to the past" is anything more or less than a cyclic or mythological interpretation of history. Von Rad expresses the difference quite accurately when he says that in Israel we must speak less of repetition than of correspondence between events;¹⁸ we have seen that this is true. He further states that ancient

¹⁸ Gerhard von Rad, "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," *Essays on Old Testament Hermeneutics*, ed. Claus Westermann, trans. and ed. James Luther Mays (Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1963), p. 20.

mythological thought found a correspondence between the heavenly and the earthly and that the latter gained its legitimization through correspondence with the former. The Old Testament witness on the contrary is "inalienably historical" and finds the correspondence on a strictly temporal, horizontal plane.¹⁹ Commenting on this, Anderson says

Here the correspondence is between two temporal termini: the first things and the last things, protology and eschatology. From the standpoint of faith, a consistent purpose runs through history from first to last, undergirding the present with meaning.²⁰

Daniélou would, then, seem to be correct in stating that "prophecy is the typological interpretation of history."²¹ Strangely

¹⁹ Ibid., pp. 18—20.

²⁰ B. Anderson, "Exodus Typology," p. 190.

²¹ Jean Daniélou, *From Shadows to Reality*, tr. Wulstan Hibberd (London: Burns & Oates, 1960), p. 157.

enough, it is precisely the return to the past which gives the forward thrust and vision to Israel's view of history.

Only a consciousness of God can account for this phenomenon, a consciousness which is inchoative in early Israel, which grows as the prophets explain His intentions ever more fully in terms of her own history and as her sense of history thus becomes more refined. It is only because of her faith in one God, who is both the Lord of history and the Yahweh of her covenant, that Israel can view history as a purposive continuity. She can reflect on the past with profit; she can examine the present with realism; she can face the future with hope, for

Who has performed and done this,
calling the generations from the be-
ginning?

I, the Lord . . .

I am He. (Is. 41:4)

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