

CHAPTER I

ISRAEL'S MISSIONARY VOCATION

FROM early times some Hebrew writers passed in thought beyond the boundaries of their own nation to consider the condition and future of other peoples. Abraham is depicted as leaving his home to seek a new land, not merely for the enjoyment of his own tribe, but in response to a command of God which had in view the happiness of all the families of the earth. Even in the times when, according to modern investigators, the Hebrews regarded Yahweh as the God of Israel, and not as the only God, they believed that He had an interest in the moral behaviour of the gentiles. This is evident from the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, according to which the cities of the plain were destroyed for the wickedness of their inhabitants and not for any wrong done to Lot or Abraham.

As the Hebrews learnt that Yahweh was the only God of all the world, their thoughts must have turned into the wide channels of God's purpose for the whole of humanity. It is quite possible that universalistic ideas were expressed boldly before the exile, but the passages which take up this point of view stand out so remarkably from their context that many commentators feel compelled to treat them as later additions. Such are Is. ii. 2-4 (= Micah iv. 1-3) "Many peoples shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, etc.," Is. xix. 24, 25 "Blessed be

Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance," Amos ix. 7 "Have not I brought up Israel out of the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Aramaeans from Kir?" and Jer. iii. 17 "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of Yahweh, and all the nations shall be gathered unto it."

Such universalistic ideas became a steady light in the writings of Deutero-Isaiah. Before we can begin to use those prophecies we must try to decide some difficult questions as to authorship, integrity and date. It is not necessary to argue again the point now generally conceded that at least the main part of Is. xl.-lv. is the work of somebody writing towards the close of the Babylonian exile, that is, shortly before the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus, and encouraging the exiled Jews to make the most of the opportunity to return to Palestine which would shortly be offered. For want of any other name this anonymous writer is referred to as the Second Isaiah or Deutero-Isaiah. The universalistic idea comes out most strongly in the conception of עֶבֶר יְהוָה the Servant of the Lord. But it is just here that the integrity of the chapters is called in question, for the main sections dealing with the Servant of the Lord, xlii. 1-4, xlix. 1-6, l. 4-9 and lii. 13-liii. 12, are thought by many commentators to be the work of another author than Deutero-Isaiah. If that were the case, these so-called "Servant Poems" might be either earlier than Deutero-Isaiah and incorporated by him, or later than he, and interpolated into his work. But in any case, if they are not by the hand of Deutero-Isaiah, we must be careful not to interpret

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the Servant of Yahweh in them by the description of the Servant in Deutero-Isaiah's own writings. On the question of the integrity of these passages, therefore, hangs not only their date but also the interpretation of the central figure, the Servant of Yahweh.

The burden of proof must of course rest upon those who would remove the Servant Poems from their present context. The first argument is based on rhythm, and this will no doubt be differently valued according to the view held as to Hebrew rhythm. The first, second and fourth of the Servant Poems are more or less in trimeters, a rhythm occurring only rarely in the rest of the book; but the metre of the third is different, and approximates to the pentameter, which is common in Deutero-Isaiah. But the rhythm alone cannot be an argument for independent authorship, because there is no reason why the author should not fall into a particular rhythm when dealing with a subject transcending the usual level of his thoughts. The frequent change of rhythm in Deutero-Isaiah makes this all the more possible.

A similar argument against the integrity of the Servant Poems is that they can be cut out so easily without destroying the train of thought. Even if this were really the case it would not prove difference of authorship: the book is not laid out in a regular scheme, but is evidently a collection of prophecies, not spoken or written all on the same day, but produced as the prophet was inspired. And who will be surprised if it was only on a few occasions that his soul was uplifted to the great conception of the Servant of the Lord? Marti writes, "If one says that

these pieces can easily be removed from their connexion, it is to be noticed that this is equally true of other pieces, but that by doing so one tears the heart out of Deutero-Isaiah, and wounds in the most vital part the whole structure of his message of comfort¹.”

The real test that must be applied to the Servant passages is whether they contain anything contradictory to the rest of Deutero-Isaiah's work, or anything which we have good reason to believe he could not have written. It is asserted that the characteristics of the Servant are different from those in the other passages where he is mentioned. We must therefore begin by tracing separately the teaching about the Servant as given in the Servant Poems and in the rest of Deutero-Isaiah.

The Idea of the Servant of Yahweh in Deutero-Isaiah outside the Servant Poems.

xli. 8, 9. Israel is Yahweh's Servant, being the seed of Abraham the friend of God. Abraham was called from the end of the earth, for the purpose that he, *i.e.* his seed, should be God's Servant.

xli. 10–20. Israel, Yahweh's Servant, has no need to fear the nations, for Yahweh will give Israel strength and power to overcome the nations. The wilderness will become a watered land, bearing trees, so that Israel may return, and through this wonderful deliverance the nations will learn the might of Yahweh—“that they may see and know and understand together that the hand of Yahweh hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.”

¹ *Jesaja*, p. 361.

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xlii. 5–9. Apart from the preceding verses (1–4) which are one of the Servant Poems, which for the present we ignore, it is not definitely stated who the person addressed in verse 6 is. But when we compare verse 6 “I, Yahweh, have called thee in righteousness and will hold (or ‘have held’) thy hand” (אני יהוה) קראתיך בצדק ואחזק בידך with xli. 9 “thou whom I have taken hold of...and called thee” (אשר החזקתיך) (אשר קראתיך...), and with xli. 13 “For I Yahweh thy God am holding thy right hand” (כי אני יהוה אלהיך) (מחזיק ימינך), there can be no doubt that the person addressed in xlii. 6 is the same as in xli., namely Israel, the Servant of Yahweh. The section xlii. 5–9 goes much further than xli. 8–20 in delineating the Servant’s work. It begins in the same way by speaking of the call, and how the Servant is held firm in Yahweh’s hand; but then, instead of the idea of the vanquished gentiles learning to recognize the hand of Yahweh in Israel’s deliverance, we find the idea of Israel consciously bringing salvation to the world—“I give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the gentiles, to open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.” The expression “covenant of the people,” ברית עם, has caused difficulty to commentators because they did not expect such a universalistic idea which could conceive of all the nations as one people. But the prophet was only treating the nations as if they were now what they were before the Confusion of Tongues—עם אֶחָד, ‘one

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people' (Gen. xi. 6). The same word for 'people,' but with the article, had just been used in verse 5 with the same meaning of 'the human race.' The "covenant of the people" means that the whole human family is to enter into a covenant with Yahweh just as Israel had entered into a covenant with Him at Sinai. Grammatically it is possible to translate verse 7 otherwise than: is done above, viz. "opening the blind eyes, etc.," making God the subject instead of the Servant, and meaning Israel by the blind. But the ordinary English rendering is better, for after reading 'a light to the gentiles' we expect to find the gentiles described as 'blind eyes' and 'dwellers in darkness.' Verse 7 then continues the thought of Israel's mission to the gentiles which we found in verse 6. The idea of Israel's blindness is however also in the prophet's mind, for in *vv.* 16 and 18 the blind are certainly Israel. Such a conception of an imperfect man being given a work to do for other imperfect men is not new in Deutero-Isaiah. It is as old as Isaiah himself, who, when he was sent with a message to the Israelites, recognized that he himself was a man of unclean lips (Is. vi. 5). There can be little doubt that in developing his idea of the Servant of the Lord Deutero-Isaiah was greatly perplexed as to how imperfect Israel could be God's missionary to the gentiles.

xlii. 18-25. The text of verse 19 is doubtful, and it is even possible that the whole verse is a later addition; but in any case the statement it contains of the Servant being blind and deaf only expands what is said in *vv.* 18 and 20 where Israel is represented as blind and deaf. The pitiable state of the Israelites

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“robbed and spoiled...snared in holes...hid in prison houses” is a punishment inflicted by Yahweh, “against whom we have sinned, and in whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient to His teaching.” It is important to notice the sinfulness of the Servant as here described.

xliii. 1–4. This chapter introduces a change: Israel had, it is true, sinned, but now Yahweh has redeemed him. It is not quite clear in what way Egypt, Ethiopia and Seba have been given as a ransom for Israel (*vv.* 3, 4), but somehow Israel’s sin has been put away. The same thought appears again in xliv. 21–23, and there Israel is spoken of definitely as the Servant. From another point of view Deutero-Isaiah had declared that Israel had received already double punishment for his sins, and that therefore his sins were pardoned (xl. 2). Regarding the sinfulness or sinlessness of the Servant we must bear in mind that those states are not permanent. Deutero-Isaiah does not seem to be very far from the Pauline idea that when a sinner is forgiven by God, God no longer regards him as a sinner. The same thought of Israel’s sin and forgiveness appears again in xliii. 22–26.

xliii. 7. A new characteristic of the Servant is contained in this verse—“everyone that is called by my name, for my glory did I create him.”

xliv. 1–5. Chapter xliii. had ended with a threat against Israel for his sins, but now again Yahweh has completely forgiven him—so completely that He can give him the name of Jeshurun, ‘The Upright.’ Following on directly after the promise of blessings to Israel comes *v.* 5 with its prophecy of men of other

nations coming to join the commonwealth of Israel and to accept Yahweh as their God. It is implied, but not stated, that this is through the activity of the Servant. "One shall say 'I am Yahweh's,' and another shall be called by the name of Jacob, and another shall mark his hand 'To Yahweh,' and shall be surnamed by the name of Israel." With this may be paralleled other passages in Deutero-Isaiah, viz. xlv. 22, 23 "Look unto me and be saved, all the ends of the earth.... Unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear," xlix. 7 "Kings shall see and arise, princes and they shall worship, because of Yahweh that is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel who hath chosen thee," li. 4, 5 "A law shall go forth from me, and my judgment for a light of the peoples. In a twinkling I will bring near my righteousness (reading אֲרִנֵּי: אֲקָרִיב). My salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the peoples; the isles shall wait for me, and on mine arm shall they trust." As Marti says, "For Deutero-Isaiah the boundary of Israel's religion is the boundary of the world."

xlv. 14, 15. The text of these verses is not sufficiently certain to draw sure conclusions from them. But it seems probable that the Egyptians, Ethiopians and Sabeans are depicted as seeking Israel because they recognize that Israel has the knowledge of the true God.

xlix. 23*a*. The thought here expressed of the subjugation of the gentiles to the Jews is foreign to the thought of Deutero-Isaiah, but is the sort of idea largely current later. The whole section

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in which it occurs probably belongs to a later time¹.

l. 10 can scarcely be addressed to heathen people, because Yahweh is spoken of as 'his God.' The people addressed are probably those Jews who are in ignorance of Yahweh, the same sort of people as those spoken of in Ps. lxxxii. 5. The Servant in that case must be not the whole nation, but the teachers or the godly few. This tallies much better with the time when Zerubbabel was spoken of as the Servant (Hag. ii. 23), and it may safely be concluded that the verse, or the reference in it to the Servant, is a later addition.

In li. 4, 5, which has already been mentioned, it is Israel's coming victory that will convince the gentiles of Yahweh's power.

In lv. 4 it is David, *i.e.* the Davidic king, as representative of the people Israel, who has been appointed as "witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples." It is still clearly Israel who will attract the peoples by his knowledge of God: "Behold thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and a nation that knew thee not shall run unto thee, because of Yahweh thy God, and for the Holy One of Israel, for He hath glorified thee" (lv. 5).

*The Idea of the Servant of Yahweh in the
 Servant Poems.*

We turn now to the Servant Poems to see whether the picture of the Servant there given disagrees with

¹ See p. 124 ff.

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or contradicts in any respect the collection of ideas that we have already found elsewhere in Deutero-Isaiah.

The First Poem, xlii. 1-4.

“Behold my Servant, whom I uphold (אֶתֶּמְדֶּבֶר),
 My chosen in whom my soul delighteth.
 I have put my spirit upon him;
 He shall bring forth judgment to the gentiles.”

Cf. xli. 8. “Thou Israel my Servant, Jacob, whom
 I have chosen.”

10. “I will uphold thee” (אֶתֶּמְדֶּבֶר).

xliv. 3. “I will pour out my spirit upon thy
 seed.”

xlii. 6. “I will give the...for a light of the
 gentiles.”

li. 4. “My judgment for a light of the peoples.”

“He shall not cry nor lift up,
 Nor make his voice to be heard in the street.
 A bruised reed shall he not break,
 And smoking flax shall he not quench.”

There is nothing elsewhere quite parallel to this, describing the gentle method of the Servant's work, but it is not necessarily inconsistent with what is said elsewhere.

The Second Poem, xlix. 1-6.

“Yahweh hath called me from the womb,
 From the bowels of my mother hath He made
 mention of my name.
 And He hath made my mouth like a sharp sword;
 In the shadow of His hand hath He hid me.”