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THE SERVANT AND THE SERVANTS IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

1. Introduction



In the City of Soulliac, in the Dordogne, a department in the south-west of France, one can see this marvelous sculpture of a dancing Isaiah. It decorates the portal of the old abbey church of St. Marie. It is a famous sculpture the City of Soulliac is very proud of because it is one of the finest pieces of Roman art, dating from the first half of the 12th century. If you have the opportunity to stay in the Dordogne, do not forget to visit this sculpture and admire its beautiful details.

But why – one might ask – did the church artist picture the prophet Isaiah dancing? I guess the reason is that Isaiah is known for the gospel-like character of his prophecies. The book of Isaiah has even been mentioned in the Early Church already, the Fifth Gospel. For his prophesying of Christ Chrysostom called Isaiah ‘the prophet with the loudest voice’, Jerome designated him as more a gospel-writer than a prophet, and in line with this Calvin understood Isaiah as ‘a very noble ambassador of Christ’. The dancing of the Isaiah of Souillac probably reflects Isaiah’s joy concerning the coming of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of his prophecies. His well-known Immanuel prophecy, related by Matthew to the birth of Christ (Matt 1:22-23) and also his Servant prophecies, which are related to the mission and suffering of Christ throughout the New Testament, are examples of this.

When talking about the Servant of the Lord in the Book of Isaiah, the Christian understanding has always been in line with the preaching of Philip to the Ethiopian court official who had asked him whom the prophet Isaiah was talking about, about himself or about someone else. Philip did not hesitate to proclaim to him the good news about Jesus (Acts 8:35).

In the book of Isaiah, however, the figure of the Servant is a complex one. Sometimes it appears to have a more collective character than an individual one. In some texts the Servant is even explicitly identified as the people of Israel. Within biblical science the Servant texts of Isaiah have been studied intensely and scholars have developed numerous theories to interpret these texts and especially to establish the identity of the Servant within the book. Should the Servant be identified as a prophetic or as a royal figure, an ideal figure or an historical one? Should he be understood as an individual or as a collective? Redaction-critical studies have made it even more complex with hypothetic reconstructions of successive redactions with changing perspectives and identifications.¹ No one is able any more to read all the articles and books on this particular subject.²

2. The Four Servant Songs

It has been the well-known Old Testament scholar Bernard Duhm especially who has stimulated many others to make study of the Servant texts. Duhm came to isolate four texts in particular which he called the Servant Songs: The first in Isa 42:1-4; the second in Isa 49:1-6; the third in Isa 50:4-9 and the fourth, the famous Song about the suffering Servant, in 52:13-53:12. Duhm argued that these so-called Servant Songs had a different style, content and composition from the other Servant texts within the book of Isaiah and could therefore be ascribed to a single author. In first instance Duhm thought the prophet had borrowed these songs from elsewhere and had incorporated them into his book.³ Ultimately Duhm suggested that these songs had been written by a single author in later times and had been incorporated into

¹ Cf. C. Conroy, ‘The “Four Servant Poems” in Second Isaiah in the Light of Redaction-Historical Studies’. In: C. McCarthy & J.F. Healy (eds.), *Biblical and Near Eastern Essays. Studies in Honour of Kevin J. Cathcart*, JSOT.S 275, London 2004, pp. 80-94.

² Cf. H. Haag, *Der Gottesknecht bei Deuteronesaja*, Darmstadt 1985.

³ B. Duhm, *Die Theologie der Propheten als Grundlage für die innere Entwicklungsgeschichte der israelitischen Religion*, Bonn 1875, pp. 288-289.

an already finished book.⁴ This single author thus had to be distinguished from the prophet who had been responsible for the other prophecies. According to Duhm the Servant within these four Servant Songs could not and should not be identified with the Servant the other texts of Isaiah talk about. Outside of these four Songs the Servant had to be identified as the people of Israel, but within these four Songs the Servant is a prophetic figure who is distinguished and distinguishes himself from Israel.

This thesis of Duhm has been of great influence. Old Testament scholars like W. Rudolph, who supposed that Deutero-Isaiah had written these Songs, were certain that he himself could never have incorporated them into the book, for he would have done better than it is now.⁵ S. Mowinckel even thought that it was principally incorrect to try to identify the Servant with the help of the rest of the book, for he interpreted these Songs as representing another form of religious thinking.⁶ Christian interpretation too has made grateful use of Duhm's thesis, excluding his late dating of the Servant Songs, by interpreting these four Songs straightaway as prophecies about Christ. Remarkably the Dutch Bible Society until recently even incorporated the Four Servant Songs theory of Duhm in its Bible translation by using headings which relied upon this assumption. The newest Dutch Bible Translation (2004) has abandoned this practice, and fortunately so, because there has been an important shift of paradigm in the study of Isaiah in the last several decades. Isaiah scholars no longer concentrate on the question of authorship and on studying the several parts of the book of Isaiah independently or even in isolation of each other, but rather try to understand the book of Isaiah as a literary and theological unity. In first instance this focus on the unity of the book effects how the link between the usual divisions of First, Second and Third Isaiah is understood. But this shift of paradigm also has consequences for the study of the Servant texts. The four prophecies that Duhm designated as Servant Songs can no longer be studied in sheer isolation from the other Servant texts within the book of Isaiah, speculating about their origins and way of incorporation within the book. They have to be studied as belonging to one single composition. Thirty years ago already Tryggve Mettinger wrote a book with the unmistakable title *A Farewell to the Servant Songs. A Critical Examination of an Exegetical Axiom*.⁷ In practice, however, many scholars are still working within the parameters of Duhm's outdated paradigm, setting apart and isolating the alleged Servant Songs. Hans Barstad even qualifies this Servant Song hypothesis as 'one of the biggest scholarly myths in the history of biblical exegesis' and as a myth which 'is long, long overdue for demolition.'⁸

⁴ B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia übersetzt und erklärt*, Göttingen 1892.

⁵ W. Rudolph, 'Der exilische Messias. Ein Beitrag zur Ebed-Jahwe-Frage', ZAW 43 (1925), pp. 90-114.

⁶ S. Mowinckel, 'Zur Komposition des deuterojesajanischen Buches', ZAW 49 (1931), pp. 87-112 / 242-260.

⁷ T.N.D. Mettinger, *A Farewell to the Servant Songs. A Critical Examination of an Exegetical Axiom*, Lund 1983. Cf. H.M. Barstad, 'The Future of the "Servant Songs"'. Some Reflections on the Relationship of Biblical Scholarship to its Own Tradition.' In: S.E. Balentine & J. Barton (eds.), *Language, Theology and the Bible. Essays in Honor of James Barr*, Oxford 1994, pp. 261-270.

⁸ H.M. Barstad, 'The Future of the "Servant Songs"': Some Reflections on the Relationship of Biblical

3. The Story of the Servant in the Book of Isaiah

The flipside of this farewell to the Servant Songs, I would argue, is that all the Servant texts in the book of Isaiah are nevertheless part of one story. The book of Isaiah is telling us a story about the Servant. I will try to sketch the development of this story within the book. Of course it will not be possible to give an exegesis of all the Servant texts. I would like to give a roughly painted overview of the Servant Story as I understand it at this moment.

In short, this Servant Story is first and foremost about Israel, a nation presented to the world as the Servant of the Lord and destined to establish righteousness and to be a light for the nations. But Servant Israel itself appears to be blind and deaf. By consequence it painfully fails to fulfill its mission. For that reason, when Israel persists in its blindness, another figure, a prophetic one, is appointed by the Lord to be his Servant. He is called then to be Israel, to restore the survivors of Israel and to make Israel's mission his own mission. From the very beginning, however, this prophetic figure struggles in executing his difficult task. His mission seems to be in vain, because the Israelites themselves do not want to listen to the voice of this Servant. He is confronted by resistance and humiliation. In the end the Servant is even put to death. But then, unexpectedly, the stunning awareness breaks through that the suffering and death of the Servant had been in favor of the people. He had made his life an offering for their sin. This means that the story is not finished with the Servant's death. The story of the Servant continues by focusing on his spiritual offspring. This offspring then is specified as the Servants of the Lord. They share in the profits of the Servant's death.

There are thus two important transitions within this Isaianic Servant Story. The first transition is from the one Servant to the other, from Servant Israel to the prophetic Servant. The second transition is from the prophetic Servant to his offspring, in the plural designated as the Servants of the Lord. I will focus now on these two transitions to give credibility to my understanding of the Servant Story.

4. First transition: From Servant Israel to the prophetic Servant

The first transition takes place at the end of chapter 48 and at the beginning of chapter 49. It has long been recognized that within Isaiah 40-55 there is an important division here. In chapters 40-48 the address of the prophecies is consequently called Jacob and Israel. This address begins at the end of the introductory chapter, Isa 40:27, with the complaint of Jacob/Israel that his way was hidden from the Lord (נִסְתָּרָה), and continues till Isa 48:12, introducing a summary in which the Lord once again proclaims his sovereignty and states that from the beginning He has not spoken in secret (בְּסֵתֶר, cf. Isa 45:19). Jacob and Israel are always mentioned together and nearly always in the same order. In chapters 49-55, however, Jacob and Israel are not addressed any more. The exodus of the exiles from Babylon and the impressive victories of Cyrus are also no longer central motifs. The focus now is on Zion.

Scholarship to its own Tradition'. In: S.E. Balentine & J. Barton (eds.), *Language, Theology, and the Bible: Essays in Honour of James Barr*, Oxford 1994, pp. 261-270.

In my opinion this ending of the Jacob-Israel-address corresponds to an important change in the identification of the Servant at this same point.⁹

Before chapter 49 the Servant can be consequently identified as being the people Israel.¹⁰ Though Israel is in exile, there still is a personal relationship with the Lord. 'My Servant' is a title of honor the Lord gives to Israel confirming its privileged position.¹¹ Starting with Isa 41:8 the Servant is on several occasions even explicitly mentioned as Israel or Jacob. Moreover, it is remarkable that when the Servant is mentioned for the first time, only here the regular order of Jacob and Israel is reversed. This calls for attention. I suppose that this reversal deliberately points the reader of the book of Isaiah to the identification of the Servant here, guiding the reader in the chapters that follow.

The one problematic text within this part of the book has always been Isa 42:1-4. Traditionally Isa 42:1-4 has been interpreted as referring to an individual Servant, above all probably because of the way it is used in the New Testament. In his gospel Matthew explicitly notes that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy by healing many people and ordering them not to make Him known (Matt 12:17-21). Since Duhamel it has even been called the first Servant Song which has reinforced this interpretation of this Servant text as referring to an individual Servant.

This interpretation, however, isolates this text from its context within the book and is based on an outdated paradigm. There is no compelling reason to think that the Servant in Isa 42:1 would be an other than the Israel already mentioned.¹² When understood in relation to the first mention of the Servant (Isa 41:8), it can only be Servant Israel that is formally presented here to the world by the Lord himself. One would expect any other identification as having been made explicitly. This Servant text then describes the mission of Israel towards the nations. It is an enormous mission of a royal character that has to do with the bringing forth of justice and with the establishment of righteousness. Within the following verses Israel's mission is even defined as being a covenant to the people and a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, and from the prison those who sit in darkness (Isa 42:6-7).

⁹ Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, 'The Servant and the Servants in Isaiah and the Formation of the Book'. In: *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, Leiden 1997, pp. 155-175.

¹⁰ Cf. P. Wilcox & D. Paton-Williams, 'The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah', *JSOT* 42 (1988), pp. 79-102: 'all the obstacles to identifying the servant consistently with Israel occur at or after Isa 49.4. Before then, in 42.1-4, and throughout Isa 40-48, a consistent identification of the two is possible.' (p. 81)

¹¹ Before the time of the exile, this title was given to individuals like the patriarchs, kings and prophets who could be presented as chosen by God (cf. Gen 26:24 'my servant Abraham'; Isa 20:3 'my servant Isaiah'; Isa 22:20 'my servant Eliakim' and Isa 37:35 'my servant David'). During the exile prophecy applied this servant concept to the people of Israel (cf. Jer 30:10; 46:27-28; Ezek 28:25; 37:25; see also the use of the designation 'your servants' in the context of prayer: 1 Kgs 8:23, 32, 36; Neh 1:6, 10, 11; Ps 79:2, 10; 89:51; 90:13, 16; 102:15), making use of the vassal concept developed by the great Near Eastern empires. Cf. Antony Tharekadavil, *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah. Isaianic Servant Passages in Their Literary and Historical Context*, Frankfurt am Main 2007.

¹² The Septuagint has even made this identification explicit by inserting the name of Israel in the text of Isa 41:1.

The problem with Israel however is that it itself suffers from blindness and deafness. This is stated immediately in the next Servant text of Isa 42:19 and elaborated upon in the following chapter (Isa 43:8-13). The Lord tries to break through their darkness by announcing his willingness to pay a ransom for his blind Servant, to buy them off and turn them into his witnesses. He also promises to pour out his Spirit to renew his Servant (Isa 44:1-4). For the sake of his Servant Israel God even calls the Persian ruler Cyrus, making him his anointed, to overthrow the Babylonian Empire and free Israel from its exile (Isa 45:4). But in chapter 48 the Lord concludes that Israel still has not listened to Him. Within this chapter the Lord says to Israel that its neck is an iron sinew and its forehead brass (Isa 48:4). They could have heard and they could have seen how the Lord set the world in motion to free them, but they are still not susceptible to it. In Isa 48:18-19 you can sense God's own disappointment when by way of concluding summary He states: *'O that you had paid attention to my commandments! Then your prosperity would have been like a river, and your success like the waves of the sea; your offspring would have been like the sand, and your descendants like its grains; their name would never be cut off or destroyed from before me.'*

His disappointment, however, does not discourage the Lord from redeeming his Servant Jacob. He explicitly calls them to go out of Babylon and proclaim to the world that He has redeemed his Servant Jacob (Isa 48:20). But the Lord apparently does change his strategy now. That's what the Servant text of chapter 49 is indicating and what Isa 48:20 is already preparing for by surprisingly not mentioning the name Israel, though Jacob and Israel were always mentioned together.

In Isaiah 49 a new Servant presents himself to the world. This is the first Servant text in first person language. He claims that the Lord himself has called him already while he was still in his mother's womb. In the preceding chapters things like this were also said already about Servant Israel (cf. Isa 44:2, 24), but now the Servant appears to be a prophetic figure. The Lord made the Servant's mouth like a sharp sword and so prepared him completely for his mission. He even hid his new Servant in the shadow of his hand and in his quiver to be able to present him at the moment He would require him.

Crucial for understanding the Servant Story in the book of Isaiah then is verse 3 of Isaiah 49. In many Bible translations this verse is translated as if the name of Israel again functions to identify the Servant here as being Israel, just as in the preceding chapters. The name Israel is then understood as in apposition to Servant or as a vocative.¹³ The Hebrew text of Isa 49:3 is:

וַיֹּאמֶר לִי עַבְדִּי-אַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-בָּךְ אֶתְפָּאֵר

The New Revised Standard Version for example translates this as: *'And he said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."*' Syntactically this translation is correct of course. But the colometry of this verse is:

וַיֹּאמֶר לִי עַבְדִּי-אַתָּה
יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר-בָּךְ אֶתְפָּאֵר

¹³ In the past many exegetes suggested eliminating the name Israel considering it to be a later interpolation, but there is no serious text critical support for that.

In Hebrew poetry we have a bicolon here with a metre of 3 + 3 feet, in which the device of an ellipsis is used. This ellipsis refers to the words **וַיֹּאמֶר לִי** that are not repeated in the second line. Instead of repeating these words the second line is extended with the relative clause **אֲשֶׁר בָּךְ אֶחְפָּאֵר** thus filling out the second line making it a three feet colon and creating a verse with so-called pivot parallelism (a-b // b'-c; cf. Isa 45:1). Interpreting the name of Israel as a predicate the translation then becomes: *'And he said to me, "You are my Servant. (He said to me:) Israel, in whom I will be glorified."*

Or more specified as a second predicative: *'You are my Servant. You are Israel in whom I will be glorified.'* (cf. Isa 44:21: **עֲבַד-לִי אֶתְּהָא // יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא תִנְשָׁנִי וְ תִנְשָׁנִי** *my Servant, o Israel, You will not be forgotten by me.*) This means that the prophetic figure who is talking here, understands himself as being appointed by the Lord to be his Servant and to be Israel.¹⁴ Here the name of Israel that we missed in Isa 48:20 is surprisingly applied to this prophetic figure. By way of paraphrasing God has said to him: You are my Servant. Now, you are Israel. And you are the one in whom I will be glorified, as I promised before to Israel (Isa 44:23). Now, you are destined to fulfill the mission of Israel, which it could not fulfill by itself because of its blindness. When Isa 49:3 is interpreted in this way, as referring to a prophetic figure appointed by the Lord to be his new Servant and destined to fulfill the mission of Israel, then it is at once clear why the Servant in the verses 5 and 6 immediately is distinguished from Jacob and Israel. This has always been embarrassing for exegetes of the Servant texts. But when a new Servant, a prophetic one, is appointed here, then this distinction becomes clear. It can also be clarified then why in verse 6 this prophetic Servant is promised to become a light to the nations and in verse 8 to become a covenant to the people, after this had already been said to Servant Israel in Isa 42:6. This indicates that the Lord sticks to the mission for which He has called Israel. He is not abandoning Israel now. But this new appointed Servant has to embody Israel and in fact has to fulfill Israel's mission.

5. Identity and Function of the Prophetic Servant

When we try to understand these Servant texts against the exilic background that constitutes the historical context of this part of the book, the question arises as to who this prophetic Servant might be. The Servant says about himself that he has labored in vain and has spent his strength for nothing and to no avail (Isa 49:4). This suggests that he is a prophetic figure that has worked for some time among the exiles in Babylon, but without obtaining the results that he had hoped for. For that reason it is possible, in line with Ibn Ezra, to think of the exilic prophet (or prophetic group eventually) who has often been called Deutero-Isaiah, and who may be the one that addressed Israel and Jacob in the prophecies of the preceding chapters, as the supposed prophetic Servant.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cf. P. Wilcox & D. Paton-Williams, 'The Servant Songs in Deutero-Isaiah', JSOT 42 (1988), pp. 79-102: 'It is the prophet who is called Israel here.' (p. 91)

¹⁵ See for example J. Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55. A Literary-Theological Commentary*, London-New York 2005.

He has worked extremely hard proclaiming the new redemption the Lord was bringing, but the people remained blind and deaf to it.

In my view, however, it is preferable to think of still another prophetic figure. My first argument is that it does not seem very probable to imagine Deutero-Isaiah describing his own death in Isaiah 53. My second argument is that Deutero-Isaiah himself never used first person language from Isaiah 40 onwards (sometimes Isa 40:6 LXX is interpreted in this way) and always keeps himself in the background. It is not until Isa 48:16, a few verses before the Servant text of Isaiah 49, that an anonymous prophetic figure presents himself as being sent by the Lord. In Hebrew he says:

וְעַתָּה אֶרְנֵי יְהוָה שְׁלַחְנִי וְרוּחִי. The first word וְעַתָּה normally marks the beginning of a new text, currently indicating a change of participants within a text, though in Isa 48:16 the Masorettes understood it as the closure of the foregoing paragraph, just as many Bible translations do. This, however, does not match with the first person language of this foregoing paragraph that refers to the Lord himself. For that reason some exegetes have eliminated this phrase as a gloss (B. Duhm, for example) or emended the phrase to make it fit (P. Volz, for example). It is much more probable, however, that this last phrase of verse 16 marks the introduction of the message that follows and is introduced with the well-known messenger formula. The last line of verse 16 can then be translated as: *‘And now, the Lord God has sent me and his spirit.’* The prophecy of Isa 48:17-21 gives a summary of his preaching. By consequence he might be the Servant we meet in first person language in Isa 49:1-6 and 50:4-9. The remarkable use of the divine name אֶרְנֵי יְהוָה which is characteristic for the Servant in Isa 50:4-9, confirms that this prophetic Servant appears on the scene in Isa 48:16b already. In Isaiah research there is a growing tendency now to interpret this prophetic Servant of Isaiah 49 in a collective sense as representing the obedient part of Israel, those exiles who were ready to leave Babylon in contrast to the majority of the exiles.¹⁶ Recently the Indian scholar Tharekadavil identified the Servant as ‘the YHWH alone movement’ that during the exile proclaimed monotheism.¹⁷ Such a collective interpretation need not at once be excluded, but it remains a remarkable fact that from Isaiah 49 onwards this prophetic Servant is painted with growing individualizing colors.

Still the book of Isaiah keeps secret the exact identity of this newly appointed Servant of the Lord. In any case he is presented to us as a prophetic figure that clings to the Lord, although his preaching lacks the effect he had hoped for. He is convinced that his reward is with his God. He is thus the opposite of the people of Jacob and Israel that thought that its way was hidden from the Lord, and that thought its right to have been disregarded by God (Isa 40:27). By not exposing the exact identity of this prophetic Servant, a prevailing mystery is connected with him. This is especially the case when the motive of the suffering of this Servant is further elaborated in the Servant text of Isa 50:4-9 and above all in the Servant text of Isa 52:13-53:12. Paradoxically the more this Servant is personified as an individual character, the less

¹⁶ Cf. Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40-48*, HThKAT, Freiburg 2008, p. 537: ‘die prophetische Gemeinschaft, die als berufener und geläuterter Knecht bereit ist, sich von Babel und ihrem Fremdgötterdienst zu trennen und den Weg in die jüdische Heimat anzutreten.’

¹⁷ Antony Tharekadavil, *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah. Isaianic Servant Passages in Their Literary and Historical Context*, Frankfurt am Main 2007.

he can be identified as an historical person. When we arrive at this most famous of all Servant texts it is clear that it is impossible and useless to search for a prophetic figure in the time of the Babylonian exile. Here prophecy has sung itself more and more loose of any biographically identifiable figure. The words that are spoken then are too ambiguous and also too great to fit within the biography of an ordinary prophet. The exact reference of these Servant texts remains a mystery that awaits the future. Within the context of the book of Isaiah it is useless to try to come closer to the identity of this mysterious prophetic Servant. We do good to remove our sandals, for the place on which we are standing is holy ground (cf. Ex. 3:5).¹⁸

Instead of his identity it is the function of this prophetic Servant that we have to look for. Within the book of Isaiah the function of the prophetic Servant is more important than his exact identity. His function clearly is to embody the people of Israel and to fulfil Israel's mission in bringing forth justice, establish righteousness and be a light for the nations. At first glance it seems that the prophetic Servant will fail in his mission as well. Not because of any failure of his own, as if he himself suffered from blindness or deafness just as Servant Israel did. On the contrary, this prophetic Servant fully has the listening attitude of a disciple as it is described in Isa 50:4. He only seemed to fail in his mission because no one was listening to his voice (Isa 50:10) and because of the suffering he had to endure and of the death he had to face. But surprisingly the suffering and death of this Servant appeared to have a great significance. God appeared to be able to realize his will through the suffering of his Servant.

6. Second transition: From the prophetic Servant to his Offspring

That brings us to the second important transition in the story of the Servant, the transition from the prophetic Servant to his offspring. After the Servant text of Isaiah 53 the book of Isaiah talks no more about the Servant. But that is not the end of his story. In Isa 53:10 it is said that the Servant shall see his offspring and prolong his days. That is why from Isaiah 54 onwards the book of Isaiah focuses on the Servants of the Lord. In fact they are presented as the spiritual offspring of the Servant.¹⁹

In first instance Isaiah 54 prophesies about the children of Zion. Zion will no longer be a barren woman. She shall have a rich abundance of children and is summoned to enlarge the site of her tent for her descendants (Isa 54:2). This abundance of children symbolizes the new future given to her by the Lord. But He not only promises her a lot of children, but also, in verse 13, that all her children shall be taught by the Lord. Or in a more literal translation: that all her children shall become disciples of the Lord. In Hebrew: וְכָל-בְּנֵיךָ לְמוֹדֵי יְהוָה. This phrasing is very important, because in Isa 50:4 it had been the Servant who twice designated

¹⁸ Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66*, Louisville 1998, p. 149: 'Interpretation may legitimately cease in awe, refusing to decode the imagery, because we are very close here to what seems to be quintessential holy ground.'

¹⁹ Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, 'The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah "The Servants of YHWH"', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 47 (1990), pp. 67-87. 'Before the fourth Servant Song, Israel is addressed as "the seed" of the patriarchs (Abraham: 41.8; cf. 51.2; Jacob-Israel: 45.19), which will itself have offspring (43.5; 44.3; 49.19), but from 53.10 on the promise of posterity regards the Servant and the new City (54.3).' (68)

himself as a disciple. In the New Revised Standard Version the Servant says: *'The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens-- wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught.'* I do not know why this translation has chosen the word 'teacher', for in Hebrew the word 'disciple' is used twice, even in the plural form:

וְדַנְי יְהוָה נָתַן לִי לְשׁוֹן לְמוֹדֵי

לְדַרְשֵׁת לְעוֹת אֶת־יְעַקֵּב דְּבָר

יְעִיר בְּבִקֵּר בְּבִקֵּר

עִיר לִי אֵין

לְשִׁמְעַ כְּלַמוֹדִים:

In his speaking as well as in his hearing the Servant has had the attitude characteristic of disciples. But until now the Servant was the only one with such an attitude, for no one was willing to listen to the voice of the Servant (Isa 50:10). By now using exactly the same word to designate the promised children of Zion, the book of Isaiah acknowledges them as the promised offspring of the Servant himself. In the last phrases of the same chapter this offspring of Zion is explicitly referred to as the 'Servants of the Lord' (Isa 54:17). It is the concluding sentence of this current chapter and not the beginning of the following chapter, as sometimes is supposed. The Servants are promised a heritage, namely the heritage that is described in the promises to Zion and her children. It is a heritage of living in great peace without any need to fear oppression or terror. It is the peace as it is described earlier in the book already, in the summarizing prophecy of the Servant himself, that concludes the chapters 40-48. There the Lord God said that He would have given them peace like a river if they had only paid attention to his commandments and that their righteousness then would be like the waves of the sea. Their offspring would be like the sand and their descendants like its grains. But at that moment in the book of Isaiah it is concluded with disappointment that Servant Israel has failed. And by way of warning that part of the book concludes with the saying that there is no peace for the wicked (Isa 48:20). After that saying the book of Isaiah tells us about the new Servant of the Lord, the prophetic one. And immediately after the chapter about this Servant's suffering and death, peace and righteousness is guaranteed to Zion and her children and designated as the heritage of the Servants of the Lord. This means that the suffering and death of the prophetic Servant of the Lord has cleared the way for this peace and righteousness to be given to the offspring of Zion.

They take advantage of the reconciliation with God for which the Servant of the Lord has given his life as an offering.²⁰

7. Identity of the Servants

When the Servants of the Lord participate in such an important heritage, the question arises as to which people may be regarded as these Servants. In Isaiah 54 this offspring of the Servant is identified with the children of Zion. But Zion is promised an abundance of children, for which it would be necessary to enlarge the place of her tent. In the book of Isaiah a chapter follows in which an invitation is expressed that is not restricted to a small group: *'Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...'* (Isa 55:1) With this summarizing invitation the exilic part of the book of Isaiah (Isa 40-55) ends. The remaining chapters are commonly dated to the postexilic period. These chapters focus in fact on the question as to who may be considered Servants of the Lord. The tone is set immediately in Isaiah 56. There a eunuch and a foreigner are mentioned who are both in doubt about their own future. Isa 56:6 states explicitly that foreigners (plural) join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his Servants. Note the conscious use of the plural Servants here and the fear of the foreigner being separated from the people of the Lord (Isa 56:3). In this way the remaining chapters of the book of Isaiah introduce the question as to which people may be designated as Servants of the Lord and take advantage of the reconciliation the Servant has given his life for. The answer is given in Isaiah 56 already in principal. The Lord does not exclude anyone who holds fast to his covenant. Nor any social group of which the eunuch is an example, nor any ethnic group of which the foreigner is an example, is excluded. In Isa 56:8 the Lord even promises in a very general sense that He will gather others besides those already gathered.

The only parameters that are set immediately in the first few of Isaiah 56 concern the maintaining of justice and the doing of right. This means holding fast to his covenant, keeping the Sabbath and not profaning him, and refraining from doing any evil (Isa 56:1-2). This is in accordance with what is said earlier in the book, namely that there is no peace for the wicked (Isa 48:20). This theme is elaborated upon in the following chapters. Those who are contrite and humble in spirit will share in God's presence and the mourners will be repaid with comfort (Isa 57:14-21). For them, those far and those near, there will be peace. But it is stated again that there will be no peace for the wicked (Isa 57:21). These wicked are like the tossing sea that cannot keep still; its waters toss up mire and mud. (Note the contrast with the metaphor in Isa 48:8) It becomes especially clear in Isaiah 65 and 66, the concluding chapters of the book, that the Servants of the Lord are distinguished from people that have chosen for wickedness. Only the Servants will be spared like wine in a cluster (Isa 65:8) and are promised a life in the blessing of the Lord (Isa 65:13-16). It is only for his Servants that the Lord will create even new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17-25), while the wicked shall face his judgment. For by even persecuting the

²⁰ Cf. Cf. W.A.M. Beuken, "The Main Theme of Trito-Isaiah "The Servants of YHWH"", *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 47 (1990), pp. 67-87: '...if these may enter into the peace (57.2), it is thanks to him who bore the chastisement for their peace (53.5).' (70)

Servants of the Lord (Isa 66:5), the wicked have turned out to be the enemies of the Lord himself. By way of summary, therefore, Isa 66:14b states: *'it shall be known that the hand of the LORD is with his servants, and his indignation is against his enemies.'* In the last verse of the book, Isa 66:24, the earlier warnings to the wicked reach their climax, when the Servants of the Lord are finally separated from the enemies of God and look at the bodies of the people who have rebelled against the Lord. The third part of the book of Isaiah then has made clear who may belong to the Servants of the Lord, constituting the spiritual offspring of the Servant. Implicitly it invites its readers to join this offspring of the Servant. The line of separation does not run between Israel and the foreign nations any more, but now runs between those who are contrite and humble in spirit and the wicked. Only the first may appropriate all the promises given to the Servants of the Lord.

8. Conclusion

By way of conclusion I ascertain that it is important not to isolate the Four Servant Songs as identified by Duhm from the totality of Servant texts of which they are part. It is worth reading the Servant texts of Isaiah within the context of the book. Together they tell an important story that is also relevant for understanding the story of Jesus Christ. When in several ways He fulfills the mission of the Servant, He is doing this as the embodiment of Israel and creating by his suffering and death a community that is not restricted to the boundary of Israel. It includes outcasts as well as foreigners, but it excludes those who are not contrite and humble in spirit but prefer to live as the wicked. This community, which in fact presupposes a redefinition of Israel as it is addressed in Isaiah 40-48,²¹ shares in all God's promises of peace and righteousness and may understand itself as the spiritual offspring of the Servant. The Souillac Isaiah thus is surely right when he dances, for the Servant Story is still continuing whenever and wherever one recognizes Jesus Christ as fulfilling the Servant's mission and discovers that he may participate in the community of his spiritual offspring.

Absztrakt

A Szolga és a szolgák Ézsaiás próféta könyvében

Ézsaiás próféta könyvében egy összetett szolga-alakkal találkozunk. A 19. század végétől elterjedt az ún. négy szolga-ének megkülönböztetése a próféta könyvön belül. Éveken keresztül az a felfogás volt általános, hogy ezeknek az énekeknek a szolgája nem azonosítható a próféta által a könyv egyéb helyein említett szolgával. Ez a feltételezés azonban hitelét veszítette. Az Ézsaiás próféta könyvében található összes szolga-szöveg egyetlen történet része. Ez a szolga-történet mindenekelőtt Izráelről szól, arról a nemzetről, mely az Úr szolgájaként adatik a világnak, azzal a rendeltetéssel, hogy igazságot teremtsen és világosság legyen a népek számára. A szolga Izráel azonban

²¹ Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, 'The Servant and the Servants in Isaiah and the Formation of the Book'. In: *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah*, Leiden 1997, pp. 155-175 (see p. 168).

kudarcot vall ebben a küldetésében. Ezért másvalakit, egy próféta alakot jelöl ki az Úr az Ő Szolgájának. Ez a Szolga arra kap elhívást, hogy Izráel küldetését saját küldetésévé tegye. Azonban már kezdettől fogva küzdelmes ennek a próféta alaknak ezt a nehéz feladatot véghezvinnie. Küldetése hiábavalónak tűnik. Ellenállásba és megaláztatásba ütközik. Végül megölik ezt a Szolgát. Ekkor váratlanul megszületik a megdöbbentő felismerés: a Szolga szenvedése és halála a nép javát szolgálta. Ez azt jelenti, hogy a történet nem ér véget a Szolga halálával. A Szolga története a lelki utódaira való összpontosítással folytatódik, ők az Úr szolgálói. Ők részesülnek a Szolga halálának javaiból. Mindezek alapján tehát két átmenettel találkozunk az ézsaiási szolga-történetben. Az első átmenet az egyik szolgából a másikba történik: a szolga Izráelből a próféta Szolgába. A második átmenet a próféta Szolgából az utódaiba. Ez a tanulmány erre a két átmenetre fókuszál, ezzel segítséget nyújtva az Ézsaiás könyve olvasójának abban, hogy a szolga-történetet egyetlen összefüggő egységként értse.