

## Servant and Suffering in Isaiah and Jeremiah: Who borrowed from whom?<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

*In this paper I propose a reading of the fourth Servant Song that goes beyond the alternative of the "suffering servant" as either an individual or a collective body. The search for a combination of these two main approaches is indeed not a new venture.<sup>3</sup> I hope to shed some new light, however, on the question by identifying the group of authors as formerly exiled temple-singers who presented themselves to post-exilic Israel as the suffering, atoning servant – using some elements of the literary portrait of Jeremiah.*

### A WHO WERE RESPONSIBLE FOR ISAIAH 40-55?

As published on different occasions<sup>4</sup> I interpret the chapters Isa 40-55 as an invitation firstly to the exilic community in Babylon – who is depicted from Isa 49 onwards as being home in Jerusalem – to act as a witness for the renewed activity of YHWH in favour of his people and in the sight of the nations. The blind and deaf *Ebed* Jacob/Israel should eventually become the true and truthful servant. One of the key texts in this regard is Isa 43:10a: "You are my witnesses and my servant whom I have chosen."

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<sup>1</sup> This article presents the only slightly revised form of my lecture at the SBL meeting in Atlanta 2010. The oral style is therefore maintained and no exhaustive bibliography is added. For a response to the paper, see Georg Fisher, "Riddles of Reference: 'I' and 'We' in the Books of Isaiah and Jeremiah: The Relation of the Suffering Characters in the Books of Isaiah and Jeremiah," *OTE* 25/2 (2012): 277-291 (this volume).

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Herbert Haag, *Der Gottesknecht bei Deuterjesaja*. (EdF 233; Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993), 153-156 ("Fließende Deutungen").

<sup>4</sup> See Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja 40–48* (HTKAT; Freiburg i.Br.: Herder, 2008); Ulrich Berger, "Farewell to Deutero-Isaiah or Prophecy without a Prophet," *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007* (ed. Andre Lemaire; VTSup 133; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 575-595; Ulrich Berges, "The Literary Construction of the Servant in Isaiah 40-55: A Discussion about Individual and Collective Identities," *SJOT* 24 (2010): 28–38; Ulrich Berges, *Jesaja: Der Prophet und das Buch* (Biblische Gestalten 22; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2010). Spanish Translation "Isaías. El profeta y el libro, Verbo Divino, Estella 2011; the English translation "Isaiah. The Prophet and His Book" is forthcoming (Sheffield Phoenix Press 2012).

Everyone in exile is called upon to accept the mission to be a "prophet to the nations" – in the words of Jer 1:5. Many were called but only a few responded to that call. The majority of the exiled remained in Babylon and the tension between those who opened their eyes and ears and those who remained deaf and blind was constantly growing. This is already visible in the first song (cf. 42:4: "he will not grow faint or to be crushed..."), apparent in the second (cf. 49:4: "I laboured in vain..."), dramatic in the third (cf. 50:6: "I gave my back to those who struck me ... I did not hide my face from insult and spitting") and leading to the extreme in the fourth song (cf. 53:7-8: "he was oppressed – afflicted – like a lamb that is led to slaughter – cut off from the land of the living").

Presenting once again the arguments that brought me to the conclusion to abandon the hypothesis of an individual author "Deutero-Isaiah" and to embrace the hypothesis of an authorial group close to deported Jerusalem temple singers would go beyond the scope of this study. But I would like to stress one matter: when this group of temple singers began to write their drama of renewed hope on Babylonian soil, their primary goal did not consist in continuing the prophetic work of Isaiah ben Amoz, even though they had a certain acquaintance with some of his formulations (especially "the Holy One of Israel"). Their primary goal was to foster and to continue the belief in YHWH under the conditions of foreign cults in Babylon and the rising Persian power in the person of Cyrus the Great. This group was responsible for the first edition of this prophetic script (40:1–52:10\*), using the so-called hymns as structuring elements (Isa 42:10–12; 44:23; 45:8; 48:20–21; 52:9–10). Their prophetic writing was near completion when they returned to Jerusalem in the aftermath of Darius's violent oppression of the Gaumata revolt (around 520 B.C.E.). What they wanted to achieve was certainly to convince their fellow exiles to keep trusting in YHWH but also to encourage themselves to remain faithful to the vocation of being the true offspring of Jacob/Israel.

As already mentioned, the writers and composers of Isa 40–55 used the hymnic tradition of the Jerusalem temple-cult (cf. Pss 96 and 98) to structure their literary drama of renewed hope in the powerful God of Israel. If the dependence were the other way around, then it would be hard to explain why these psalms do not make any usage of other motifs in Isa 40–55 (like the one of the "servant Jacob/Israel"). Thus Henk Leene concludes correctly: "It is difficult to imagine that a psalmist who was inspired by Deutero-Isaiah proceeded so selectively. The opposite is more likely: the composers of Isa 40-55 borrowed from an existent hymnic tradition for certain pivotal points of their dra-

matic composition, or even from these very songs passed on to us in Pss 98 and 96."<sup>5</sup>

It is well known that the sources of Isa 40–55 are not restricted to the Psalms but include a whole range of important traditions in the Hebrew Bible: the narratives of the patriarchs and the exodus are implied as well as the prophetic judgment tradition and elements of the older Isaiah-Jerusalem-composition ("the Holy One of Israel"). Jeremiah (especially the so-called Confessions but also Jer 31:35 in Isa 51:15) and Ezekiel (profanation of the name in Isa 48:11; cf. Ezek 20:9, 14, 22)<sup>6</sup> influenced Isa 40–55 and Deuteronomistic elements can be found in these chapters<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, the Jerusalem cult traditions with the central motifs of Zion, the nations, the refashioned Davidic tradition (Isa 55:3–5) play an important role. Finally, the intimate connection between creation and history is analogous to the priestly stratum of the Pentateuch. In my opinion the combination and amalgamation of these traditions cannot be explained only as a late phenomenon in the prophetic writings ("Spätling in Israels Prophetie"<sup>8</sup>). Rather, these connections are clear signs that Isa 40–55 was not composed by an individual but by a group of writers that had access to the oral and written testimonies of Israel. These allusions cannot be considered merely as literary devices. They have to be seen also as footprints of a group of authorized speakers.<sup>9</sup>

One could object to this collective-reading that even if these chapters were written and edited by a group of literarily skilled singers, it is still possible to think of an individual "Deutero-Isaiah" as "spiritus rector," as a kind of "chef du groupe."<sup>10</sup> This is certainly possible, but one of the central problems

<sup>5</sup> Henk Leene, "History and Eschatology in Deutero-Isaiah," in *Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift Willem A. M. Beuken* (ed. Jacques van Ruiten and Marc Vervenne; BETL 132; Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 221–249 (here 246); Beat Weber, "'Asaf' und 'Jesaja': Eine komparatistische Studie zur These von Tempelsängern als für Jesaja 40–66 verantwortlichen Trägerkreis," *OTE* 22/2 (2009): 456–487.

<sup>6</sup> Dieter Baltzer, *Ezechiel und Deuterjesaja: Berührungen in der Heilserwartung der beiden großen Exilpropheten* (BZAW 121; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971).

<sup>7</sup> Antje Labahn, *Wort Gottes und Schuld Israels: Untersuchungen zu Motiven deuteronomistischer Theologie im Deuterjesajabuch mit einem Ausblick auf das Verhältnis von Jes 40–55 zum Deuteronomismus* (BWANT 143; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> Hans-Jürgen Hermisson, "Deutero-Jesaja," *RGK* 2: 687.

<sup>9</sup> Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Israel in der Perserzeit: 5. und 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Biblische Enzyklopädie 8; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2005), 248: "In the powerful messages of salvation the profile of the community begins to emerge. Heralds and preachers articulate their message, though there is no talk of 'prophets.' Only the literary footprints of the divinely authorized speakers can be discerned." (Translation UB).

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Rainer Albertz, *Die Exilszeit: 6. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Biblische Enzyklopädie 7; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2001), 285–286.

of the Deutero-Isaiah hypothesis would remain unresolved, namely his anonymity. If Deutero-Isaiah had been the leading figure of the group, his anonymity would be all the more puzzling: why did his disciples not preserve his name and identity? If the analogy to the poets of the Psalms holds, one would expect at least the transmission of his name or the fact of his participation in a certain group, such as one finds in the Psalms of "Asaph" or "Korah."<sup>11</sup>

It is particularly significant that there is not only an absence of a personal name, but there are also no references to any personal traits. In contrast to the repeated formula in Ezekiel: "the word of YHWH came to me" (6:1; 7:1; 12:1, 8 etc.), no such example can be found in Isa 40-55. The I-speeches in the second and third Servant Songs (Isa 49:1-6; 50:4-9) cannot be used to fill this biographical vacuum because these texts are written in a conventional style ("formgebundene Sprache") that permits no insight into a personal biography.<sup>12</sup> The suffering and death of the servant-figure in Isa 53 can also not be interpreted as the destiny of an individual. The disapproval of Julius Wellhausen in this respect is still compelling: "It is a hazardous supposition to think of an incomparably great prophet who was martyred in exile, perhaps by his own people — a prophet who then disappeared. The statement does not fit a real prophet. Such a prophet does not have the task of converting all the pagans, still less did a real prophet succeed in that task."<sup>13</sup>

## **B THE LITERARY CONNECTIONS BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND ISAIAH 40-55**

The literary connections between the books of Jeremiah and Isaiah attracted the attention since the beginning of exegetical works in Jewish (cf. Saadyah Gaon †942) and Christian circles.<sup>14</sup> Focusing on passages in Isa 40-55 the majority of exegetes think that these texts depend on formulations in the book of Jeremiah.<sup>15</sup> The fact – mentioned above – that Isa 40-55 has so many connections

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Hermisson, *Deutero-Jesaja*, 684: "The intensive use of the language and genres of the Psalms suggests that Deutero-Isaiah had his roots in the community of cultic singers; his anonymity is consistent with the anonymity of the psalmic poets." (Translation UB).

<sup>12</sup> This is even admitted by Hermisson, who reckons with an individual Deutero-Isaiah; cf. Hermisson, *Deutero-Jesaja*, 684-685.

<sup>13</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Israelitische und Jüdische Geschichte* (Berlin: De Gruyter; 91958, repr., 1981), 152 n. 1, (translation UB.).

<sup>14</sup> See the list of works in Katherine J. Dell, "The Suffering Servant of Deutero-Isaiah: Jeremiah Revisited," in *Genesis, Isaiah and Psalms: FS J. Emerton, 80 birthday* (ed. Katherine J. Dell, Graham Davies and Yee Von Koh; VTSup 135; Leiden: Brill, 2010), here 119-120.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Benjamin Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusions in Isaiah 40-66* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); Benjamin Sommer, "Allusions and Illusions: The Unity of the Book of Isaiah in Light of Deutero-Isaiah's Use of Prophetic

to various traditions of the Hebrew Bible is an important indicator that these chapters are the borrowing and not the giving element in the equation. Concerning Abraham-Sarah (Isa 51:1f), Jacob-Israel or the Exodus it seems to me undisputable that the authors of Isa 40-55 drew on these traditions for their prophetic script. When one considers them as exiled and subsequently returned Jerusalem temple-singers this hypothesis becomes even more plausible, because these literati were closely acquainted with these traditions, perhaps even in their growing literary state.

I cannot conceal that there are some colleagues (among them my friend Georg Fischer) who think the other way around, namely that Jeremiah borrowed from Isa 40-55.<sup>16</sup> In a publication from 2007 (FS Ina Willi-Plein) he stresses first the fact that both prophetic books re-used the narratives of 2 Kgs 18-20 very differently (Isaiah in a positive, Jeremiah in a fully negative way). According to Georg Fischer the Jeremiah text should be seen as a negative reaction to the optimism of salvation in the book of Isaiah:

Der frohe Optimismus, den Jes bezüglich des Wiederaufbaus, des Kults und einer erneut funktionierenden Gemeinschaft der Gläubigen hegt, trifft bei Jer auf Kritik [...]. Mit vielen Ankündigungen von Jes ist Jer nicht einverstanden, und er geht zu ihnen auf Distanz.<sup>17</sup>

As often in matters of literary dependences one-way-explanations are less plausible than crossway-solutions. In my view the complicated redactional processes of *both books* leave enough space for multiple ways of influences – depending on the concrete texts one is looking at. Thus it might be true that Jer 10 is a kind of compendium of the polemic against the cult of other gods in Isa 40-55 (esp. Isa 44),<sup>18</sup> but is this enough to postulate that in all cases Jeremiah

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Tradition," in *New Visions of Isaiah* (JSOTSup 214; ed. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 156-186.

<sup>16</sup> Georg Fischer, "Partner oder Gegner? Zum Verhältnis von Jesaja und Jeremia," in "Sieben Augen auf einem Stein" (*Sach* 3,9): *Studien zur Literatur des Zweiten Tempels*, FS Ina Willi-Plein (ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein and Michael Pietsch; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2007), 69-79; see also: Richard L. Schultz, *The Search for Quotation: Verbal Parallels in the Prophets* (JSOTSup 180; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 307-329 (esp. 322); Beat Huwyler, *Jeremia und die Völker: Untersuchungen zu den Völkersprüchen in Jer 46-49* (FAT 20; Tübingen: Mohr (Siebeck), 1997), 180-191.

<sup>17</sup> Fischer, "Partner oder Gegner? Zum Verhältnis von Jesaja und Jeremia," 79. See now also Georg Fischer, *Gefährten im Leiden. Der Gottesknecht bei Jesaja und der Prophet Jeremia*, BZ 56 (2012) 1-19.

<sup>18</sup> See Angelika Berlejung, *Theologie der Bilder: Herstellung und Einweihung von Kultbildern in Mesopotamien und die alttestamentliche Bilderproblematik* (OBO 162; Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1998), 391.

borrowed from Isaiah?<sup>19</sup>

### C THE PRESENTATION OF THE SUFFERING PROPHET / SERVANT IN JEREMIAH AND ISAIAH 40-55

Now I will concentrate on the presentation of the suffering prophet/servant in both writings. So far I have not encountered the opinion that the authors of the book of Jeremiah used the Servant Songs in Second Isaiah as a *Vorlage* to present their master as a suffering prophet. Instead there seems a broad consensus that the "character Jeremiah served as a Type" for the authors of Isa 40-55.<sup>20</sup> To quote Ben Sommer in this respect:

The life of the prophet Jeremiah frequently serves in Deutero-Isaiah as a paradigm for the experience of both the nation Israel and the servant figures whom Deutero-Isaiah describes. Vocabulary from Jeremiah's dedication scene is repeatedly applied to the people and to the servant of the 'servant songs' (in chapters 42, 49, 50, and 53), and the descriptions of Jeremiah's suffering serve as models for Deutero-Isaiah's depiction of the nation.<sup>21</sup>

This view is not new – already Fred A. Farley wrote back in 1927: "Jeremiah would naturally be thought of as 'The Servant of the Lord'; he would even furnish features for the picture of the ideal 'Servant' or 'prophet.'"<sup>22</sup>

Sheldon H. Blank too in his *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah* (1958/rep. 1967) is of the same opinion: "The bitter experience of Israel, whom the Second Isaiah here personified as servant-prophet, led him necessarily to Jeremiah for the features of his personification – to that prophet within his tradition who, more than any other, had, like Israel, endured reproach and suffering. Inevitably Jeremiah must sit model for his portrait of God's servant-prophet."<sup>23</sup>

Right at the end of his very fine book – nearly hidden in a footnote – Sheldon Blank touches the question of how this dependence could have taken place in reality: "We have no knowledge of how the Second Isaiah came into possession of the words of Jeremiah. Did he belong to some 'circle' in Babylonia which possessed, cherished, and studied the prophetic book?"<sup>24</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Fischer, "Verhältnis," 77: "Dies bedeutet freilich, die beliebte und klassische Reihenfolge, der 'zweite Jesaja' käme zeitlich nach Jer, *aufzugeben und umzudrehen*."

<sup>20</sup> See the subtitle in Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 61: "The Character Jeremiah as Type."

<sup>21</sup> Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 61-62.

<sup>22</sup> Fred A. Farley, "Jeremiah and 'The Suffering Servant of Jehovah' in Deutero-Isaiah," *ExpTim* 38/11 (1927): 523.

<sup>23</sup> Sheldon H. Blank, *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 100.

<sup>24</sup> Blank, *Prophetic Faith in Isaiah*, 220 (note 72).

My hypothesis of formerly exiled temple-singers fits into this picture because we can safely assume that these literati possessed a good knowledge of the literary and oral traditions of Israel. If it is true that the authors of Isa 40-55 came back to Jerusalem after 520 B.C.E.<sup>25</sup> and presented themselves as the faithful servant of God – a mission originally entrusted to the whole nation – then it is conceivable that they used literary features of the presentation of Jeremiah as persecuted and suffering prophet. The literary presentation of Isaiah ben Amoz was not helpful in this regard because the tradition did not present him as persecuted or mistreated (that changed in the legend of his violent death under Manasseh).<sup>26</sup> If we follow the suggestion of Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann<sup>27</sup> that the so called "confessions" do not stem from Jeremiah himself but from Jeremianic circles, then we get hold of a scribal milieu in which the prophetic idealizations<sup>28</sup> of Jeremiah and the suffering servant originated in close neighbourhood to each other.

In my opinion the right question should not simply be: "who copied from whom?," but "are there overlapping interests of different prophetic circles?" The fact that the historical Jeremiah did encounter hostility against his preaching but was justified by YHWH, served not only the Jeremiah-followers but also the authors of Second Isaiah as a steadfast proof of divine help.

#### D THE MAIN VERBAL CORRESPONDENCES BETWEEN THE SERVANT SONGS AND JEREMIAH

The differentiation of Katherine J. Dell in her fine article for the *Festschrift* of John Emerton (2010) seems helpful to me. She distinguishes between "passages with strong verbal and thematic connections" and "passages with possible links to Jeremiah's life and thought." In the first category she puts the following three cases on which I will concentrate:

##### 1 Isaiah 49:1b: יהוה מבטן קראני ממעי אמי הזכיר שמי

(YHWH called me from the belly, from the womb of my mother he named me); cf. Jer 1:5a: בְּטֶרֶם אֶצְוֶרְךָ בֶּבֶטֶן יָדַעְתִּיךָ וּבֶטְרָם תֵּצֵא מִרְחֶם הַקֶּדֶשׁ (From the belly I formed you, from the womb I knew you and before you went out of the womb I

<sup>25</sup> See Albertz, *Exilszeit*, 106.

<sup>26</sup> Berges, *Jesaja*, 161-162, 194-198, 224-226.

<sup>27</sup> Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, *Die Ferne Gottes – Studien zum Jeremiabuch: Beiträge zu den "Konfessionen" im Jeremiabuch und ein Versuch zur Frage nach den Anfängen der Jeremiatradition* (BZAW 179; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1988), 3-111; Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, "Jeremia als Identifikationsfigur im Frühjudentum," in *Literarische Konstituierung von Identifikationsfiguren in der Antike* (Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 16; ed. Barbara Aland, Johannes Hahn and Christian Ronning; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 155-171.

<sup>28</sup> See the formulation of Farley, *Jeremiah*, 523: "The Poems, then, are songs of 'Idealized Prophecy.'"

sanctified you).

Whether there was a borrowing of Isa 49:1 from Jer 1:5 cannot be safely stated but it can be assumed that both verses resulted from a common understanding of the prophetic call. There is also no doubt that Isa 49 does not refer to the vocation of Isa 6 (nor to Isa 40:1-5). Very interesting is the goal of a worldwide mission. In the case of Jer 1:5c (נְבִיא לְגוֹיִם נִתְחַדָּךְ) this comes as a surprise because Jeremiah's preaching was – reading the whole book – not directed to a broader public but to his fellowmen.<sup>29</sup> Is it possible to justify this goal of a worldwide mission with reference to chapters like Jer 25 or 46-51 – as Georg Fischer indicates?<sup>30</sup> Or do we find here an example of a "cross-fertilization" from Second Isaiah to Jeremiah, since the servant in Isa 42:1-3; 49:1-3 (cf. 52:15) has a clear assignment to the nations?

## 2 Isaiah 53:7b: כְּשֹׂה לְטֹבַח יוּבַל וְכִרְחֵל לְפָנָי ג' זְזִיחָה נְאֻלְמָה וְל' א יִפְתַּח פִּי

(Like a lamb led to slaughter and like a sheep silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth). Cf. Jer 11:19a: וְאֲנִי כְּכֶבֶשׂ אֶלּוּף יוּבַל לְטֹבֹחַ (But I was like a gentle lamb led to slaughter).

The proximity of these two verses lies at hand and much argues for a literary dependency.<sup>31</sup> While the metaphor of the gentle lamb in Jeremiah underlines the innocence of the prophet and the malicious behaviour of his enemies, in Isa 53 it expresses the complete silence of the suffering servant who did not open his mouth – neither against his opponents nor against God. This behaviour certainly does not fit Jeremiah whose loud protest is one of his main characteristics.<sup>32</sup>

## 3 Isaiah 53:8b: כִּי נִגְזַר מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים מִפֶּשַׁע עַמִּי נִגַּע לְמוֹ

(For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people); cf. Jer 11:19c: וְנִכְרַתְנוּ מֵאֶרֶץ חַיִּים וְשִׁמוֹ ל' אֲיִזְכָּר עוֹד (Let us cut him off from the land of the living, and his name will no longer remembered).<sup>33</sup>

In Jer 11 the "cutting from the land of the living" comes from the mouth

<sup>29</sup> Is this an example of a cross-fertilization from Second Isaiah to Jeremiah?

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Georg Fischer, *Jeremia 1-25* (HTKAT; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2005), 134.

<sup>31</sup> Risto Nurmela, *The Mouth of the Lord Has Spoken: Inner-biblical Allusions in Second and Third Isaiah* (Studies in Judaism; Lanham: University Press of America, 2006), 82, does surprisingly not recognize any allusions in the Servant Songs (except 49:1; 52:13 in a later development).

<sup>32</sup> See already Martin Buber, *Der Glaube der Propheten* (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1984), 269: "Er redet wie Jeremia von Prophetenberuf und Prophetenleid, nur daß die jeremianische Klage aus seinem Munde nicht laut wird."

<sup>33</sup> There is more shared vocabulary in Isa 53 and Jer 11 (see Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture*, 65f).



of Jeremiah's enemies against whom YHWH proceeds violently in favour of his prophet (Jer 11:20-23). In Isa 53 the position of the enemies is conspicuously vacant; all emphasis is placed on the figure of the servant himself and on his suffering for the healing of others. There is a clear development from the suffering of Jeremiah *because* of the iniquities of his enemies to the suffering of the servant in Isaiah *on behalf* of others. The idea of "vicariousness" (Stellvertretung)<sup>34</sup>, that is the suffering of the faithful servant in the place of the "We" (= the many) that figures so prominently in Isa 53 is totally absent in Jeremiah. He is even prohibited by God to intercede for the people: "Do not intercede with me (אַל-תִּפְגַּע-עָמִי), for I will not hear you" (Jer 7:16). The servant in Isaiah instead bore (*qatal*) the sin of many and intercedes (יִקְטֹל) (*yiqtol*) on behalf of the transgressors (Isa 53:12).<sup>35</sup>

This explanation of the undeserved suffering makes Isa 53 very unique and there are good reasons to believe that this idea of vicarious suffering was put forward to compete with the priestly notion of atonement which developed so strongly in post-exilic times.<sup>36</sup> Farley already came to this conclusion in 1927 (in an article of only 4 pages!):

It is possible to find in Isa 40-55 an exilic vindication of the prophetic as against the priestly party in Israel. Not only is there the characteristic demand for spiritual renewal, but even atonement is regarded as worked out, not by the animal sacrifices in the Temple, but by the self-sacrifice of the prophets themselves.<sup>37</sup>

This interpretation especially makes sense when one sticks to the idea of temple-singers as the authors of Isa 40-55 knowing their priestly colleagues who favoured the establishment of a prosperous sacrificial cult in Jerusalem. At the end of the book of Isaiah the friction between the servants (54:17), namely the offspring of the truthful servant (53:10) and their opponents becomes obvi-

<sup>34</sup> Thus the translation by Daniel P. Bailey, "The Suffering Servant: Recent Tübingen Scholarship on Isaiah 53," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. William H. Bellinger and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg: Trinity Press, 1998), 253-54; see also the article by Bailey in the same volume "Concepts of Stellvertretung in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53," 223-250.

<sup>35</sup> For this observation, see Sebastian Grätz, "Die unglaubliche Botschaft: Erwägungen zum vierten Lied des Gottesknechts in Jes 52:13-53:12," *SJOT* 18 (2004): 204.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Robert R. Wilson, "The Community of the Second Isaiah," in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (ed. Christopher R. Seitz; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 67-68.

<sup>37</sup> Farley, *Jeremiah*, 524; cf. Marko Martilla, *Collective Reinterpretation in the Psalms* (FAT II/13; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 39, asks the central question: "... is it possible that the Servant Songs represent post-exilic collective theology?"

ous.<sup>38</sup> The servants are to be expelled from the community of the temple, certainly also because of their sharp criticism of the enormous expansion of the sacrificial cult.

In this context the end of Ps 69 has to be taken into account, a prayer of a servant of God (v. 18) who is consumed by his zeal for the temple (v. 10). The table of his opponents should become a snare and what was thought to serve their welfare a trap (v. 23). "The supplicant thus requests God to change the sacrificial table of his enemies [...] into a trap and snare which will lead to exactly the opposite, namely causing them to get entangled in their own prosperity and pleasure."<sup>39</sup>

The neighbourhood to Isa 53 is evident when one reads Ps 69:27: "Indeed, the one you have smitten (אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ), they persecute; and they talk about the pain of your slain (מִכְּאוֹב הַלְלִיךָ)." The singular-plural change has to be maintained because it shows that the I-figure is part of the group that seeks YHWH (v. 7), the עֲנֻיִים (v. 33), אֶבְיוֹנִים (v. 34), אֲסוּרִים (v. 34). What distinguishes the persecuted servant smitten by God in Isa 53 from the one in Ps 69 is the fact that the latter does not present his suffering as a substitution or an atonement of the sins of others.<sup>40</sup> In this respect he resembles much more the figure of Jeremiah who was longing for God's vindication.<sup>41</sup> On the other hand the emphasis on the praise of God by singing – and not by the slaughter of animals (v. 31-2) – puts the petitioner(s) of Ps 69 very close to the authors of Isa 40-55. At the end of the book the servants' criticism of the exuberant temple cult leads to their expulsion from the community (Isa 65-66). As Jeremiah was vindicated by YHWH, thus the authors of Isa 40-55 were expecting the same outcome of their suffering. The presentation of Jeremiah as man of God persecuted by his people was taken up by the servant-community to create their own prophetic identity. Perhaps the priestly origin of Jeremiah of nearby Anathoth was an additional link to the temple singers since both the singers and the clergy of the land were put on a lower level by the priestly elite of Jerusalem in post-exilic times.

<sup>38</sup> See esp. Brooks Schramm, *The Opponents of Third Isaiah: Reconstructing the Cultic History of the Restoration* (JSOTSup 193; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995) who modified the position of Paul Hanson (priestly versus eschatological strands).

<sup>39</sup> Alphonso Groenewald, *Psalm 69: Its Structure, Redaction and Composition* (Altes Testament und Moderne 18; Münster: Lit-Verlag, 2003), 112.

<sup>40</sup> Fredrik Hägglund, *Isaiah 53 in the Light of Homecoming after Exile* (FAT II/31; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 176, does not think of an "atoning suffering" in Isa 53, but a "merely vicarious" one.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Groenewald, *Psalm 69*, 117-120.

## E SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The temple-singers, the authors of Isa 40-55 presented themselves – after their homecoming to Jerusalem – as the true and faithful servant of YHWH. They had a mission to Israel<sup>42</sup> as well to the nations, namely to be witnesses of YHWH's renewed action for Jacob and Zion in the sight of the nations. In their presentation of the servant they borrowed from the literary presentation of Jeremiah, prepared by his followers who were also busy building their literary manifesto. One of the major differences is the fact that the servants in Isa 40-55 saw their suffering as literally "re-placing" ('vicarious') the majority of Israel. Even though that is not the main point of my paper, there are good reasons to think that – in reaction to the growing sacrificial cult in Jerusalem – the returned temple-singers thought of their suffering as an atonement for the sins of the people. They were convinced that singing God's praises was equally important than offering bulls and sheep. A glance at Ps 69 shows that this position was strongly communicated – in the Psalter and in the book of Isaiah.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 49:3: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" is not a counter-proof. It sounds more "schizophrenic" than it is because – according to Martilla, *Collective Reinterpretation*, 46 – "it is possible that Deutero-Isaiah (or a later redactor if the Servant Songs are secondary in their present context) considered the Israel released from the exile to have a missionary task towards the rest of Israel which still lived in Palestine."

<sup>43</sup> See already Ulrich Berges, "Die Knechte im Psalter. Ein Beitrag zu seiner Kompositionsgeschichte," *Bib* 81 (2000): 153-178.

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