

# Who are the “servants” (Psalm 69:36c-37b)? A contribution to the history of the literature of the Old Testament

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## Abstract

*Psalm 69:37a refers to the "servants" in the composite "the offspring of his servants". This composite takes up a concept which already appeared as a self-indication of the supplicant of this Psalm, namely in its singular form "servant" (69:18a). The article aims to identify these "servants" (69:37a) who articulated themselves in the voice of the other "person" in Psalm 69. It is postulated that the connections which exist between the servants in Isaiah and the servants in the Psalter are far too distinct to simply regard them as a mere matter of coincidence. The article focuses on the book of Isaiah, as conclusions drawn from Isaiah can shed light on the identity of the "servants" in Psalm 69. Secondly, the focus shifts to the term "servants" in the Psalter, and specifically in book I and II. It shows that the term "servants" not only denotes the pious, but indicates a special group of people who played an active role in shaping the literary heritage of ancient Israel in post-exilic times.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Psalm 69's final strophe (35a-37b)<sup>2</sup> the cosmic praise (35ab) focusses on God's salvatory action towards Zion and the cities of Judah (36ab). The text expresses the confidence that God's cosmic and historical work includes attention to the needs of his faithful servants (36c-37b) – like the supplicant in Psalm 69. When this promise (i.e. the cosmic and historical work) has been accomplished, the servants of God, together with their offspring (37a), will be

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<sup>2</sup> Cf Groenewald (2003:153-175) with regard to the strophic demarcation of these cola.

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able to live in the cities of Judah and possess Zion again. They will take possession of her as their divinely given inheritance. The restored servant community will dwell in a restored land for ever. The servant community is described as “those who love his (God’s) name” (37b), viz those who honour his divine presence and power, and trust it.

Although Psalm 69:36c is syndetically linked to 36ab by means of the conjunction “and”, it also differs substantially from them. Colon 36c, as well as the following cola 37ab, do not describe salvatory act(s) of God anymore, but reveal the consequences of these acts of salvation which have just been described in the preceding two cola 36ab (Sedlmeier 1996:115). Of special importance is the change of subject which has taken place in these cola. In 36ab the subject of both verbs is indicated as third person male singular (“he”); the appellative *Elohim* (“God” – 36a) functions as the subject of both verbs in these cola (“he will save” and “he will rebuild”). In 36c, on the contrary, the subject of the verb is indicated as third person male plural (“they”). The identity of this subject is only made known to us in the ensuing colon, namely “the offspring of his servants” (37a).

The verb “they will live” (36c) is followed by the adverb “there”, which indicates location. This adverb refers back to the nouns occurring in 36ab, namely “Zion” and “the cities of Judah”. In colon 36c another verb occurs, and namely in the final position (“they will possess”). The object of this verb is indicated by means of the pronominal suffix (psf) 3 feminine singular (“her”) attached to it. This psf surely has “Zion” (36a), which is a feminine noun, as its antecedent. The composite “the offspring of his servants”, occurring in 37a, also functions as the subject of this verb.

Colon 37a commences with a construct construction (“the offspring of his servants”). The *nomen rectum* (“his servants”) – a collective concept functioning as genitive attribute of the *nomen regens* – takes up a concept which has already appeared as a self-indication of the supplicant, and namely in the singular form in 69:18a (“your servant”); here referring to Yahweh (69:17a). The construction “the offspring of his servants” (37a), functioning as the subject of this colon, is followed by the predicate (“they will inherit her”), which occurs in the final position. The object of this verb is indicated by means of the psf 3 feminine

singular (“her”) attached to it. It has “Zion” (69:36a) as its antecedent; corresponding to “and they will possess her” (36c).

Cola 37a and 37b are syndetically linked to one another by means of the conjunction “and” (37b). Colon 37b also commences with a construct construction (“and those who love his name”). The *nomen regens* is formulated as a participle male plural; it here functions as the subject. The *nomen rectum*, functioning as a genitive object, has the psf 3 male singular attached to it; this psf refers to *Elohim* (“God” – 36a). The predicate (“they will live”) occurs in the final position. Linked to it, by means of the *maqeph*, is the preposition *beth* with the psf 3 feminine singular attached to it (“in her”); it functions as an adverbial indication of place (cf Jenni 1992:181). Once again this psf 3 feminine singular (“her”) has “Zion” (36a) as antecedent.

Cola 37ab are not only syndetically linked to one another, but also display syndese with the preceding colon (36c); the conjunction (“and”), which occurs at the beginning of colon 37a, link them together. Thematically they also correspond to one another. Furthermore, it has already been stated that these three cola (36c-37b) share the common characteristic that they contain the psf 3 feminine singular (“her”) at the end of each respective colon; this psf has “Zion” (36a) – a feminine noun – as antecedent. Of further importance is the fact that these cola extend cola 33a-34b: they list two more honorary titles describing this group of people who will receive God’s salvation. In cola 33a-34b they were named the “poor”, “godseekers”, “needy” and “his captives”. Over and above these four honorary titles, they are now designated as the “offspring of his servants” (37a) and “those who love his name” (37b).

In the composite “offspring of his servants” the *nomen rectum* does not only refer back to the singular term “servant” occurring in 18a, but as a plural noun it also functions as an extension of this singular form. This is, firstly, an indication of the interdependence of this colon on an earlier colon. Secondly – even more important – this phenomenon is indicative of the process of theological identification of this group (who is referred to at the end of the text with plural nouns) with the “servant” of 18a. The prayer of an individual is thus re-used as a vehicle for the personified group to express their own grief and

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suffering, but also hope as well as confidence. This process of identification helps the community to furthermore define their own identity.<sup>3</sup>

I will now focus in greater detail on the term “servant”/“servants” in order to establish its significance for the text of Psalm 69. The question which at once arises is whether it is possible to identify these “servants” who articulated themselves in the voice of this other “person(s)” in Psalm 69. Were they possibly also at work in another book/scroll? Berges (2000a:1) postulates that the connections existing between the Servants in Isaiah and the servants in the Psalter are far too distinct to purely regard them as just a matter of coincidence. This overview will therefore, first of all, focus on the book of Isaiah,<sup>4</sup> since conclusions drawn from Isaiah can shed light on the identity of the “servants” in Psalm 69, as “... the Servants of the book of Isaiah ... also made their voices heard in some sections of the Psalter ...” (Berges 2000a:17). I will then proceed to reconstruct a possible identity of the “servants” of Psalm 69, that is to say the social group that was responsible for this phase of the textual development. In order to accomplish this aim, a very brief overview of socio-historical developments leading to the latter half of the fifth century will be given.

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<sup>3</sup> This interpretation corresponds with the recent Psalm scholarship which has shown that the “I” of the laments “should not be explained in biographical or functional programmatic (cult or court) terms, but should be viewed rather as a meta-individual and paradigmatic figure” (Beuken 1998:513). On the literary level of the text the experience of the supplicant in his fellowship with God and the people as a theological utterance transcends the subject (Beuken 1998:517-8). Hauge (1995:65) therefore infers “the texts as transmitted – probably also as created – point not only to the very fact of original experience, but also to a *milieu* where the texts were appreciated and used. Whatever the original form of this use, later users have somehow participated in the story of the original experience. That this story has been presented in I-form and re-experienced as the story of ‘I’ could mean that the participants were invited to identify with the experience ... This would imply that the I of the single text, presented as a concrete embodiment of the religious ideal, would have functioned as a paradigmatic figure ... the participants are somehow reliving the experience and have related the experiences of the I to their own reality”. Cf also Marksches (1991:387): “Denn in den KE [Klagelied des Einzelnen – A.G.] hat man es ja ... mit einem *exemplarisierten* Beter zu tun. Das individuelle Ich ist »in Richtung auf das Urbildlich – Exemplarische hin« transzendiert; historisch wird man sich diesen Weg der Typisierung wohl als einen Prozeß in einer *Gemeinschaft* von Betern vorzustellen haben”.

<sup>4</sup> This overview will only touch the contours of the terms “servant”/“servants” in Isaiah. For an extensive explication of the “Servants” in the book of Isaiah, compare Berges (2000a:2-6) and Blenkinsopp (1997:155-75).

## 2. SERVANT/SERVANTS IN THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

It is common knowledge that the *ebadim* (“servants”) fulfill an important role in the book of Isaiah. The language of servanthood recurs throughout Isaiah 40-66 as a dominant *leitmotiv*. In Isaiah 40-48 the singular noun *ebed* (“servant”) alludes almost exclusively – most probably exclusively – to a collectivity, namely the *Gola* (i.e. the exilic people of Israel).<sup>5</sup> A notable shift in emphasis in the way the term *ebed* is used takes place after Isaiah 48 (cf Blenkinsopp 1983:12). In chapters 49-55 the collective reference is the exception rather than the rule. An anonymous prophet is speaking in his own name or at least in the name of a collectivity within Israel which he represents. One can thus accept the viewpoint that this *ebed* is “a corporate personality representing the *Gola*, i.e. that part of the deportees which is willing to return to Zion and to strive for her restoration” (Berges 2001:70; see also Berges 1998:358-68 and Blenkinsopp 1997:164-6).

Of great importance is the fact that the plural noun *ebadim* occurs for the first time near the end of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa 54:17). From Isaiah 54:17 onwards those children of Zion, who are willing to obey the voice of the *ebed*, are called *ebadim*. In this way, according to Beuken (1990:67), the reader of the book of Isaiah gets to know – still within the scope of Deutero-Isaiah – in which form this fundamental theme will continue.<sup>6</sup> This connection is not accidental at all: in the last text on the Servant, he is promised that “he shall see offspring” (Isa 53:10).<sup>7</sup> In Trito-Isaiah only the plural term *ebadim*, as such, is used; they (the *ebadim*) are the promised offspring of the *ebed*. Accordingly, this has supported the view that the *ebadim* take over and are thus now responsible for the task the *ebed* had to fulfill (Isa 52:13) (cf Berges 1999a:169-70). They thus owe their allegiance to this prophetic figure who, on the most probable reading of Isaiah 52:13-53:12,

<sup>5</sup> In the so-called Ebed-songs (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12) the reference is, however, much more complicated.

<sup>6</sup> Cf also Leene (1993:244): “De knechten in meervoud komen, als het nakroost van die Knecht, binnen Jes 40-55 slechts ter sprake in 54, 17 (na het vierde knechtslied!) maar zij zullen een centraal thema vormen binnen Jes 56-66.”

<sup>7</sup> With regard to the term “offspring” Brüning (1992:280) infers as follows: “Segen, Verheißung und Kontinuum, das sind die drei zentralen Inhalte, die mit dem Stichwort *zaera* verbunden sind ... Vielmehr wird mit diesem Wort all das fest zugesichert, was vorher zweifelhaft geworden war: Segen, Heil und vor allen Dingen eine weitausgreifende Zukunft. Begründet ist diese Zusicherung letztlich in Jahwe selbst. Er sichert generationsüberdauernd für die gesamte Nachkommenschaft Segen und Leben zu.”

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suffered persecution and death on an account of his beliefs, under which circumstances, at what time, and at whose hands are not known to us.

In order to establish the identity of the “servants” (*ebadim*), Blenkinsopp (1983:5) first of all considers a prophetic text – Isaiah 66:5 – which definitely points to a situation of conflict and schism in the Judah of the early Persian period. He translates this text as follows: “Hear the word of YHWH, you who tremble at his word: Though your brethren who hate you and cast you out for my name’s sake have said, ‘Let YHWH reveal his glory, so that we may witness your joy,’ it is they who will be put to shame” (Blenkinsopp 1990:7). The person speaking is an anonymous seer addressing a collectivity who have been ostracized or ex-communicated by their brethren, that is to say their fellow-Jews. It is quite clear that at the centre of the problem lies their anticipation of the eschatological demonstration of God’s glory: “the idea that they, and they alone, will rejoice in the parousia evidently thought to be imminent” (Blenkinsopp 1990:8). This ostracism by the official representatives of the community indeed must have included the temple authorities as well.<sup>8</sup> To be ostracized from participation in the cult had significant social as well as economic implications, as the temple was considered to be the primary source of well-being: religious, political and socio-economic. This furthermore included the loss of civic status and, very importantly, title to land.<sup>9</sup> In this regard Berges (2000a:3) states that this context of schism and exclusion from the temple cult even goes beyond what

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<sup>8</sup> According to Rofé (1985:205-17) the enemies of the servants can be no one else than the Jerusalemite priesthood. In this regard he infers as follows: “the rebuke of Trito-Isaiah is thus directed against the priests of this time, and lacking any indication to the contrary, it should be understood that the priests are referred to. His eschatological speech on the future ingathering of the exiles (66:20-22) is also in line with this view ... the diaspora, even those across the seas and furthest away, will be returned to Jerusalem by those nations in whose midst they live. The Lord will take levitical priests from among those returning from the diaspora in order to serve him. The monopoly of the Jerusalemite priests will thus be broken ... In these words also, which announce the establishment of a new priesthood, the antipathy of Trito-Isaiah towards the Jerusalemite priesthood of his time is apparent” (Rofé 1985:212).

<sup>9</sup> According to Blenkinsopp (1997:196) it can be construed from Ezra 10:8 that banning involves not only exclusion from cultic participation, but also forfeiture of the civic status and (presumably immovable) property. This situation helps to explain the frequent references in these chapters to the poverty, misery and insecurity of the pious minority. In addition to Isa. 57:15; 61:1-3; 66:1-2.10, we might think of those Psalms in which the speaker is identified as *'ani* and *'anaw*, and the like (for example Ps 69).

is known about the conflict between the righteous and the wicked in the Psalms. However, it seems that this deduction needs to be modified partially as the text of Psalm 69 also reflects a conflict which even led to a schism in the Jewish community (cf Groenewald 2003). There are indeed traces in the Psalter presenting the intense debate which took place within post-exilic Judaism. However, in contrast to the book of Isaiah (and in this instance specifically Isa 65-66) the discussion in the Psalms is conducted in a more disguised manner; this can – in all probability – be ascribed to the *Gattung* of the Psalms, viz prayer-literature.

Blenkinsopp (1990:10) furthermore infers that Isaiah 66:1-5 presupposes the existence of a pietist and prophetic-eschatological group whose relationships with the parent body had been alienated. The aversion between this group, designating themselves as servants, and their enemies (i.e. the members of the parent body) grows out of proportion, to which Isaiah 65:13-14 attests to.<sup>10</sup> According to Isaiah 65:15-16 these elect (i.e. the servants) will acquire a new name – a familiar eschatological motif – while the name of the opponents (i.e. the reprobates) will be used as a curse. From these two exemplary texts we can indeed deduce a strongly negative attitude to the larger society, a millenarian perspective, the theme of eschatological reversal, and a conviction that the subgroup has taken over the identity and mission forfeited by the larger social entity to which it belonged, namely, the Jewish commonwealth from which the members addressed had been expelled.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It reads as follows: “Wherefore, thus the lord Yhwh has spoken: ‘My servants will eat, but you will go hungry; my servants will drink, but you will go thirsty; my servants will rejoice, but you will be put to shame; my servants will exult with gladness, but you will cry out for sadness, wailing in anguish of spirit’” (Blenkinsopp 1990:10). Koenen (1994:87-8) justly infers as follows: “Was sich im ersten Teil des Buches [Trito-Isaiah – A.G] in einer allgemein gehaltenen Gegenüberstellung andeutet, stellt sich im letzten Teil als Bruderkrieg dar ... Als Frevler müssen die machtvollen Gegner, die ihre Brüder verstoßen haben, von Jahwe vernichtet werden, und umgekehrt dürfen die ausgestoßenen Brüder, da es sich bei ihnen um leidende Gerechte handelt, einer heilvollen Zukunft gewiß sein ... Für die Gerechten, die Jahwe treu verehren, wird dann eine eschatologische Heilszeit beginnen, und zwar die, die Deutero- und Tritojesaja angekündigt haben”. Compare Hermisson (2002:104-5) for a summary of Deutero-Isaian eschatology.

<sup>11</sup> In this regard Crüsemann (1985:219) infers as follows: “... daß die Heimat des tritojesajanischen Kreises in marginalisierten, auch politisch an den Rand gedrängten Gruppen liegt, ist deutlich erkennbar”. See also Koenen (1994:84): “Bei den Knechten Jahwes und ihren angededeten Gegnern handelt es sich um verfeindete Gruppen innerhalb der Gemeinde.”

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A further source of this schism and conflict is the servants' re-definition of the post-exilic concept of Israel. The servants – regarding themselves as the legitimate offspring of the *ebed* – were favouring an enlargement of this concept: all those who accept Yahweh as their only God will be allowed to become part of the people of God (cf Isa 56:1-8; 66:18-23).<sup>12</sup> The mainstream *Gola*-party, on the contrary, wanted to close the ranks: in their view Israel embodied only those who could prove their ancestry to be one of the Judahite or Benjaminite “house of the fathers”, i.e. clans (Albertz 1994:529; Talmon 1988:115). It thus does not come as a surprise at all that people who were not even Yahweh-believers, but were coming from the northern part of the country were consequently accepted to partake in the temple reconstruction (cf Ezra 3-4) (Talmon 1988:116-8). Based on this inner-Jewish conflict Koenen (1994:86) dates the redactionally reworked Trito-Isaiah in the latter half of the fifth century. He infers as follows:

Wenn sich der Redaktor in Jes 56, 3-8 nämlich für die Aufnahme Jahwe verehrender Ausländer in die Gemeinde, ja für deren Partizipation am Kult (vgl 66, 18-22) ausspricht, so richtet er sich damit gegen eine Separationspolitik, wie sie nach unserer Kenntnis der nachexilischen Geschichte Israels zumindest von Esra und Nehemia betrieben worden ist.

(Koenen 1994:86)

Those Jews who thus expelled fellow-brethren from society, and were filled with hatred against them, could be nobody else than those who, as a result of the policies followed by Ezra and Nehemiah, isolated themselves from foreigners as well as from those groups who were open towards these foreigners.

Furthermore, the diatribe against syncretic, sexually-orientated cults presupposes deep fissures within the Jewish community (cf Isa 57:1-13; 58:1-5; 59:1-15; 65:1-7). The direct and open criticism of the temple cult (Isa 65-66)

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<sup>12</sup> Berges (2000a:4-5) and Jenner (2002:131); cf also Schramm (1995:181): “... Third Isaiah redefines YHWH's people as those who abstain from various kinds of traditional, syncretistic cultic acts.”



indeed indicates that the servants had strong reservations with regard to the new cultic activity of post-exilic Israel.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, it is important to take note of the section Isaiah 65:8-12. The parable of verses 8-9 states explicitly the theme of the servants: "As the juice is found in the cluster, and they say: 'Do not destroy it, for there is a blessing in it', so I will do for my servants' sake, and not destroy them all" (cf Beuken 1990:77). The focus is here on the "blessing" the cluster of grapes contains; it is not the separation of good and bad fruits that comes to the fore here. Yahweh does not want to destroy the bunch of grapes, Israel, because in it his servants are the juice, the blessing on which he has put his expectation.<sup>14</sup> In other words, Israel will be spared because of the few elect within its midst who are described as the servants of Yahweh and as the chosen ones, "my people who seek me" (65:10; cf also Ps 69:33b) and "inheritors of my mountain" (65:9).<sup>15</sup> Starting with this nucleus, Yahweh will in due time bring into existence a new Israel which will inherit both the land and temple (Blenkinsopp 1997:167-8). This (brief) overview of the *ebadim* supports the growing awareness of the fact that the term *ebadim* "in Isaiah is not only a term for the pious but a pointer to a special group of

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<sup>13</sup> In this regard it is, however, important to take note of the following: "Die verbreitete Ansicht, Jesaja 66:1-6 böte die Ablehnung jeglichen Tempelkultus geht dabei am altorientalischen Konzept von Tempelrestaurationen völlig vorbei. Danach ist die Restauration und Inbetriebnahme eines Heiligtums kein profaner Vorgang, sondern bringt die Wiederherstellung der gesamten Schöpfung mit sich, die sich im Tempel *en miniature* widerspiegelt, der einen Mikro-Kosmos darstellt ... Der Jerusalemer Tempel war alles andere als ein Haus aus Stein und Holz, sondern die Repräsentation von Himmel und Erde ... Die Ablehnung eines Tempelkultes wäre nach dem kulturellen Code der altorientalischen Umwelt so unsinnig gewesen, wie etwa das Ansinnen, die Schöpfung überhaupt abzuschaffen" (Berges 2002:14-15). This viewpoint resonates by Rofé (1985:207): "... an absolute denial of the cult, which is not found in any prophet's word, and particularly not in Trito-Isaiah (cf Isa 60:7; 66:20-23)". See also Beuken (1989:63): "The tenor of Isa 66.1-6 is not to reject principally the temple as God's dwelling place, but the notion is turned down that He needs the temple and owes it to a benevolent initiative from Israel" (cf also Levenson 1986:51-53).

<sup>14</sup> Leene (2002:6) formulates this assumption as follows: "De knechten worden er vergeleken met zoiets kostbaars als het gistende sap dat nog in de druiventros is onvergebleven". Cf also Berges (1998:501): "Es ist die Knechtsgemeinde, die als Segen (...) das nachexilische Israel vor der völligen Vernichtung (...) bewahrt, ähnlich wie es durch Noach zur Zukunft aus der Katastrophe kam."

<sup>15</sup> According to Hossfeld (1993:26) "in Jes 57,13 wie in Jes 65, 9 sind es die Armen, d.h. die Auserwählten JHWHs, seine Knechte, die das Land und den heiligen Berg erben werden und dort wohnen werden". Cf also Berges (1998:501): "Es ist der frisch gekelterte Wein, JHWHs Erwählte, seine Knechte, die seinen Berg besitzen und Wohnrecht auf dem Zion genießen!"

people in post-exilic times who were active in the shaping of the literary heritage of Ancient Israel” (Berges 2000a:6)<sup>16</sup>.

### **3. SERVANTS IN THE PSALTER**

It has already been referred to that the connections existing between the “servants” in Isaiah and the “servants” in the Psalter are far too distinct to purely regard them as just a matter of coincidence. The focus of the subsequent discussion will, however, not be on the occurrence and functioning of the term “servants” in the whole of the Psalter. Such an endeavour at this point will exceed the objectives set for the present discussion.<sup>17</sup> The subsequent discussion will give an outline of data which is relevant for the comprehension of Psalm 69 – and specifically with regard to the occurrence of the term “servants” in the redactional layer occurring at the end of the text. Simultaneously information, which was given in the overview of the term *ebadim* in Isaiah, will be applied to this Psalm. With regard to the occurrences of the term “servants” in the Psalter, it is remarkable to notice that whereas the singular noun (“servant”) occurs 38 times in the whole of the Psalter (from Pss 18:1-144:10), the plural term “servants” happens to be mainly in the last two books, viz book IV and V.

The term “servants” occurs only twice in book I and II: namely in Psalms 34:23 and 69:37a; both occur in a redactional reworking. This indicates that the position of the “servants” in the Psalter is not arbitrary at all. Psalm 34 is an acrostic, that is, each of its verses begins with the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Verse 23 is certainly a later addition if one considers the fact that this final verse falls outside of the acrostic (Berges 2000a:13-5; Berges 2000b:173-6).<sup>18</sup> By means of their conviction “YHWH is the one who ransoms the life of his servants, all those who take shelter in him are not to be accounted guilty”, the servants bear witness to their belief in the saving power of God

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<sup>16</sup> According to Berges (1998:481-533) the servants were responsible for two subsequent redactional layers in Isa 56-66. In this regard Labahn (1999:150) infers as follows: “Derjenigen Gruppen, aus der der Redaktor der trjes Sammlung stammen mag, galten nur die wahren Jahweverehrer als Erwählte und Knechte Gottes, nicht aber das gesamte jüdische Volk.”

<sup>17</sup> For an extensive explication of the “servants” in the Psalter see Berges (1999b:21-25; Berges 2000a:6-15; 2000b:161-78).

<sup>18</sup> Renkema, however, differs in opinion; he regards this verse as an integral part of the Psalm (see Renkema 1998:59-60 for his viewpoint).

(Berges 2000a:13). Consequently they identify themselves with the poor (*'anawim/'ani*) to whom the Psalm refers in verses 3 and 7.

This redactional reworking in Psalm 34:23 directs us back to Psalm 25:22. This verse is also the final verse of the Psalm and, likewise, lies outside of the acrostic (Psalm 25 is also an acrostic).<sup>19</sup> It is, unlike the other verses, a petition for the corporate body: “redeem Israel, O God, from all its troubles”. What is, however, here of greater significance is the fact that both Psalms 25 and 34 share such a lot of commonalities that they are regarded as “corner-Psalms” of the palindromic composition Psalms 25-34.<sup>20</sup> It is most likely that the servants added a final touch to this composition of Psalms and, indeed, from the perspective of Israel's post-exilic piety favouring the poor (Lohfink 2000b:118-9).<sup>21</sup> In order to summarise, it is important to recognise the fact that in both these Psalms the bicolon – which falls outside of the acrostic – poses a request for the deliverance of Israel respectively the servants of Yahweh (i.e. the true Israel) (Hossfeld & Zenger 1992:23).<sup>22</sup>

Furthermore, one could postulate that if the servants were responsible for putting Psalm 25 between the Psalms 24 and 26 – two Psalms which are characterised by their focus on the participation in the temple cult – they might have done so in order to append the image of the just with their sketch of the contemplative poor (Hossfeld & Zenger 1993a:163). Psalm 24 takes up anew the well-known question – which is already familiar from Psalm 15 (cf Hossfeld &

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<sup>19</sup> Cf Freedman et al (1999:9, 12-13): “What sets Psalms 25 and 34 apart and demonstrates that they form a distinctive, in fact unique, pair (not only in the Psalter but the whole Hebrew Bible), are the deliberate deviations from the established overall patterns ... The second *peh* line at the end of the poem is considered a plus ... the poet in each case has added the equivalent of a whole line to the poem.”

<sup>20</sup> Cf Berges (2000a:13); Botha (1997:191, 195); Hossfeld & Zenger (1992:23); Hossfeld & Zenger (1994:384-6); Lohfink (2000a:74); Zenger (1994:50-1); Zenger (1998:20-2); Zenger (2000:422-4).

<sup>21</sup> Cf also Hossfeld & Zenger (1992:23): “Die beiden Psalmen entsprechen sich dem Inhalt nach und vertreten eine nachexilische Armenfrömmigkeit (vgl 25, 9.16: 34, 3.7). Dabei eröffnet Ps 25 die Komposition mit einer Bitte des Armen um Rettung, Vergebung und Wegweisung, wohingegen Ps 34 mit Dank, Lobpreis und Lehre eines Armen abschließt.”

<sup>22</sup> Cf also Hossfeld & Zenger (1994:386): “In 25,22 geht es ihr um die Befreiung Israels aus inneren und vor allem äußeren Nöten, die durch Fremdvölker verursacht sind ... Schließlich konstatiert Ps 34, 23 die Befreiung der »Knechte JHWHs« und verspricht dadurch den Sieg für Israel in seiner Sendung inmitten feindlicher Völker.”

**Who are the “servants” (Psalm 69:36c-37b)?**

Zenger 1993b:178) – about the conditions for entry into the holy place on Zion.<sup>23</sup> Psalm 24:3 formulates this question as follows: “Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place” (NRSV)? It then answers this question by stating, among other things, as follows: only those people who do not lift themselves up to what is false, may enter the temple (24:4). Noteworthy is the fact that this condition corresponds to the opening of Psalm 25, in which the supplicant says he lifts himself up to Yahweh (25:1). By opening in this way, Psalm 25 declares itself to be a prayer for those people who, according to Psalm 24, gain entrance to the holy place on Zion. The question (24:3.8.10; 25:12) as literary device in Psalm 25 links this text with the text of Psalm 24. Interest in Jacob/Israel (24:6; 25:22) is a further link existing between these two Psalms (cf also Zenger 1994:50). With regard to Psalms 25 and 26, the following is noticeable. Psalm 25 is interwoven with the subsequent Psalm through the theme of law and justice (Yahweh brings about justice: 25:21; 26:1)<sup>24</sup>; through the image of God (God of graciousness and fidelity: 25:5.10; 26:3); through the behaviour of the person praying (trust in Yahweh: 25:2; 26:1); Yahweh will redeem the supplicant(s) (25:22; 26:11) (cf Lohfink 1991:201-2).

This (pro-temple) view would altogether correspond to the stance taken by the Servants at the end of the book of Isaiah.<sup>25</sup> They did not reject temple worship at all, but rather emphasised the need for a sincere motive from the side of its participants.<sup>26</sup> The only passage referring to the servants in Psalm-book II (Ps 69:37a) attests to the critical stance they had with regard to the sacrificial cult. In this regard Berges (2000a:14)<sup>27</sup> infers as follows:

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<sup>23</sup> In this regard compare Lohfink (1999:157-158; 2000a:58f); and Miller (1994:128-9, 139).

<sup>24</sup> Ps 25:21 – which according to the acrostic ends with the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet tav – contains the word *tôm* (“integrity”). This stem recurs in Ps 26:1 and 11 (the second last verse). In Ps 25:21 the supplicant expresses the wish that “integrity” will protect him. In Ps 26:1.11 he twice repeats that he has walked in integrity - in the centre of the Psalm (26:4-10) he justifies this statement.

<sup>25</sup> Compare Berges (1999a:172-3) for a more detailed analysis.

<sup>26</sup> In this regard it is very important to take note of the following inference: “Eine völlige Ablehnung des Tempels liegt hier wohl kaum vor, da das den biblischen Traditionen widerspräche und einer aufklärerischen Kultkritik zugunsten des religiösen Individuums gleichkäme” (Berges 1999a:172).

<sup>27</sup> Cf Berges 2002:11.

The individual lament of a “servant” (!) (Ps 69:18) who speaks of himself as poor and wretched (Ps 69:30) is followed by a promise of thanksgiving (*todah*) (Ps 69:31-32) which devaluates the cult of sacrifices in a manner already known from the book of Isaiah (cf Isa 1:10-17; 66:1-6). It is likely that the statement that thanksgiving is “... more pleasing to YHWH than any ox or bull with horn and hoof” (Ps 69:32) was joyfully accepted by the *anawim* (Ps 69:33) because they did not have the means to engage themselves regularly in that expensive kind of worship.

They surely would have regarded the fact that Yahweh always listens to the needy (*ebjonim*) and does not despise his “captives”, as good news (Ps 69:34ab).

It is furthermore noteworthy that exactly here at the end of this text – respectively redactional reworking – the three terms “offspring”, “servants”, “to live/dwell” occur. We encounter a remarkable pendant to Psalm 69:37ab in Isaiah 65:9 and Psalm 102:29 – once again the last verse – where the three terms “offspring”, “servants”, “to live/dwell” also appear (Berges 2000b:167). The various analogies existing between this redactional reworking and the *ebadim* in the book of Isaiah reach their culmination with the unique expression “offspring of his servants” (69:37a). In the book of Isaiah the servants are those who regarded themselves to be the “offspring” of the *ebed*.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, they saw their destiny to be portrayed in the destiny of the *ebed*. Furthermore, in all probability the Servants also recognised the voice of their master in the prayer of the “servant” of Psalm 69:18a, who regarded himself to be inflicted and wounded by God (69:27a). This to them offered a clear parallel to the fate of the *ebed* in Isaiah 53:4.10.<sup>29</sup> No wonder that they made use of the text of Psalm 69 to add their destiny, viz hope and confidence, to its end.

In order to conclude: this overview of the term(s) “servant”/“servants” has strengthened the growing perception that the term “servants” – in both the book of Isaiah as well as in the Psalter – is not only a term for the pious, but it indeed indicates a special group of people who played an active role in post-exilic times in shaping the literary heritage of ancient Israel. It was stated that the redactionally reworked Trito-Isaiah is to be dated in the latter half of the fifth

<sup>28</sup> Isa 53:10 (cf furthermore 59:21; 61:9; 65:9.23; 66:22 – Berges 2000b:175).

<sup>29</sup> Cf also Leene (1996:72) who connects Ps 51 with the Pss 69 and 102 with the servants from Trito-Isaiah.

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century BCE (Koenen 1994:88; cf also Berges 1998:550). The redactionally reworked Trito-Isaiah reflects a conflict which even resulted in the expulsion of fellow-brethren from society and from the temple.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, when seen against this background as well as in the light of shared commonalities, we can also date these specific cola (69:36c-37b) in the same period, i e in the latter half of the fifth century. Having drawn this conclusion, we will now endeavour to reconstruct a possible identity of the “servants” of Psalm 69, that is to say the social group that was responsible for this phase of the textual development of Psalm 69 (namely 36c-37b).<sup>31</sup> In order to do this, it is necessary to give a very brief overview of socio-historical developments leading to the latter half of the fifth century.<sup>32</sup>

#### **4. SOCIO-HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN POST-EXILIC ACHAEMENID JUDAH**

The possible ground of this specific social problematic (i e the conflict resulting in the expulsion of fellow-brethren from society and the temple) can even be traced

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<sup>30</sup> In this regard Berges (1998:481) infers as follows: “In den Kapiteln 65-66 kommt es zu einer immer deutlicher werdenden Spaltung der nachexilischen Gemeinde ....” He furthermore postulates: “Wie dem Ebed und der Frau Zion weder Leid noch Verfolgung erspart blieben, so sehen sich auch die Knechte einer immer stärker werdenden Diffamierung und Ausgrenzung gegenüber, die sogar bis zum Ausschluß aus der nachexilischen Gemeinde führen (66,5)” (Berges 1998:534). Cf also Koenen (1994:88): “Die an ganz Israel gerichtete Heilsverkündigung Tritojesajas wurde im 5. Jh. von einem Redaktor zum Tritojesajabuch ausgearbeitet. Dieser Redaktor unterscheidet in einer konkreten inner-gemeindlichen Konfliktsituation zwischen Gerechten und Frevlern, zwischen den Knechten Jahwes und ihren haßerfüllten Brüdern. Die Heilsworte Tritojesajas gelten seiner Ansicht nach allein den Gerechten. Den mächtigen Gegnern, die diese Gruppe der Gerechten aus der Gemeinde ausgeschlossen haben, kündigt er den Untergang an.”

<sup>31</sup> This reconstruction only aims at identifying the “servants” who contributed to this part of Psalm 69’s textual development. It has already been stated that the “servants” in the Psalter can be linked to the “Servants” in Isaiah. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily allow one to assume that, as a social entity, they must have concurred completely vis-à-vis one another. They were, in all probability, not just one single homogeneous group in Judaeae society and could have matched different levels of society (cf Crüsemann 1985:219; Schaper 2000:230).

<sup>32</sup> It is hardly necessary to accentuate our lack of knowledge with regard to this period of time. Blenkinsopp (1991:22) words this as follows: “any study of the Judaism which was emerging during the two centuries of Iranian rule (539-332 BCE) calls for an acute sense of the fragile and provisional nature of our knowledge of the past in general and this segment of the past in particular.” Nevertheless, this warning should not restrain us from, at least, pursuing the reconstruction of the historical setting with the material and knowledge available to us.

back to social developments taking place in the Judaeen society of the last part of the sixth century; that is to say specifically the period of the rebuilding of the temple (520-515) and onwards. Beginning in 522, the Achaemenid Persian empire was plagued by political instability which led to revolts all over the empire (Bright 1976:369f; see also Albertz 1994:445f). Throughout his first two regnal years Darius had to fight, without cessation, on one front after another in order to secure his reign. It was probably not until late in 520 that his position was actually secured. Meanwhile, it must have seemed that the Achaemenid Persian Empire was literally flying to pieces. As nationalistic feeling exploded everywhere, Judah was by no means immune to this. Combined with the rebuilding of the temple, which had started in 520, it all sparked with glowing expectations of a revolution in world history and a national restoration which attached themselves to Zerubbabel of the house of David. This situation seemed so dangerous to the Persians that the satrap Tattenai paid a personal visit to Jerusalem to sort things out. Although the rebuilding of the temple was allowed, it was probably done only on condition that Zerubbabel was withdrawn and that the dangerous prophetic movements were stopped or controlled effectively. With regard to the position of Zerubbabel Schaper (2000:211) infers as follows: "Zwischen 520 ... und 515 scheint Serubbabel spurlos verschwunden zu sein; im Kontext der Tempel-einweihung wird er überhaupt nicht erwähnt."

After the rebuilding and inauguration of the temple the Judaeen province embarked on a consolidation phase. The groups which went on to rebuild the community in conscious loyalty to the Persians were, first of all, those elements of the priesthood concerned to construct a cult for which they themselves were responsible, outside the influence of royal supervision (cf Ezek 40ff);<sup>33</sup> and secondly, those of the lay leaders who saw the chance of achieving a

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<sup>33</sup> Schaper (2000:123, 125) infers as follows with regard to this "so-called" vision of Ezekiel: "Hier zeigt sich, daß Ezechiels Verfassungsentwurf die Rivalität zwischen den 'Levitern', d.h. den ehemaligen Landpriestern, und den 'levitischen Priestern, den Söhnen Zadoks', d.h. den Jerusalemer Tempelpriestern, widerspiegelt ... In den im ezechielischen Verfassungsentwurf tradierten, über Jahrzehnte zusammengewachsenen Stellungnahmen zum Thema 'Priester und Leviten' zeigt sich, daß eine anfänglich noch unscharf formulierte, wohl eher funktionale Trennung zwischen zwei Klassen oder Gruppen von Priestern im Laufe der Zeit zu einer rigorosen Unterscheidung zwischen 'Priestern' und 'Levitern' ausgebaut wird, die letzteren nur noch untergeordnete Hilfsdienste zuweist". Schaper furthermore infers: "Wir zeigten, daß es bei der Auseinandersetzung zwischen Priestern und Leviten, die in Ez 40-48 reflektiert wird, auch um wirtschaftliche Frage wie die Sicherung der materiellen Lebensgrundlagen von Priestern und Leviten sowie das Eintreiben von Steuern ging" (Schaper 2000:303). Konkel (2001:315) infers as follows: "... so wird daraus in Ez 44 ein exklusives Recht der einheimischen Jerusalemer Priesterklasse auf das Priestertum" (cf furthermore Konkel 2002:167-70).

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“democratic” self-administration (cf the Jeremiah Deuteronomists) (Albertz 1994:445). However, in spite of the efforts of this second group, the priests succeeded in securing their position. The consolidation of their power was eased by the disappearance of the davidic Zerubbabel, resulting in a situation in which the last claimant of the davidic throne was out of the way. This led to a situation in which the priests were basically unchallenged and took total control of all power. In this regard Schaper (2000:211) infers as follows: “Die Bemühungen um einen Ausgleich zwischen ‘Thron’ und ‘Altar’ waren nun gegenstandslos, und die zadokidischen Priester konnten daran gehen, ihre Position systematisch auszubauen, ohne auf irgend jemanden ... Rücksicht nehmen zu müssen” (cf also Blenkinsopp 1998:41). This development led to a situation in which the Levites were demoted from full participation in priestly functions to *clerus minor*, that is to say, a secondary position with subordinate duties that did not include officiating at the altar<sup>34</sup>. Consequently, the temple became the exclusive domain of the priesthood<sup>35</sup>. This is most pronounced in Ezekiel’s temple vision in

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<sup>34</sup> With regard to the development of the Judaeen priesthood, Blenkinsopp (1998:39-41) concludes as follows: “Another conclusion we draw from the priestly genealogies, supported by a reading of certain evidently paradigmatic narratives in the Pentateuch, is that the progress of the Aaronites to a position of power and privilege in Jerusalem was marked by conflict and was concluded with accommodation between Aaronite and Zadokite priests. Starting from what is less obscure, at the end of the process, we note that the ‘master’ genealogy in 1 Chr 5:27-41 (6:1-15) ... traces the preexilic high priesthood from Levi through Aaron to Jehozadak son of Seraiah, who was executed by the Babylonians after the fall of Jerusalem (2 Ki 25:18-21). There can be no doubt that this genealogy is schematic and, for the most part, fictive. Zadok, David’s priest, occupies the exact central position in it, preceded and followed by twelve generations ... Fragments of Zadokite propaganda from that time have come down to us in a series of passages probably interpolated in Ezekiel 40-48 ... These passages assert the exclusive right of Zadokite priests to the office, privileges, and perquisites of the altar priesthood of Jerusalem, and they demote all others claiming Levitical status to the role of second-order clergy.” Konkel (2001:289) infers as follows: “Von den vier Söhnen Aarons bleiben allein Eleasar und Itamar übrig. Demgegenüber wird in Ez 44,6-16 die Reduktion auf eine einzige Priesterklasse, nämlich die Zadokiden (= Eleasariden), festgeschrieben, denen die Leviten als zum *clerus minor* gehörig gegenübergestellt werden” (cf Miller 2000:171; Rehm 1992:308).

<sup>35</sup> Cf Berges (1998:519): “Wie überall im antiken Vorderen Orient, so war auch der Jerusalemer Tempel nicht nur die Mitte des kultischen Lebens, sondern auch der Wirtschaft. Wer am Tempelkult teilhaben durfte, der war zugleich Mitglied der Polis, mit Recht auf Landbesitz und Eigentum.” With regard to the position the temple and temple officials had in the Ancient Orient Blenkinsopp (1991:29) infers as follows: “As far as we can tell there had always existed a close symbiotic relationship between temple and *polis*. Temple lands, theoretically property of the resident deity, had from the earliest times been administered by city officials ... Priests were civic officials appointed by the city ... The city treasury was often deposited in the temple, which also advanced credit and leased land holdings. Temple privileges were automatically extended to free, propertied citizens who jealously guarded their status and controlled admission to the ranks.”



chapters 40-48,<sup>36</sup> as well as in Chronicles (1 Chr 23:2-6) and the Priestly legislation of the Pentateuch (Num 3:5-10; 8:19.22).

Furthermore, the priests, together with the upper class, were all favoured by the Persian taxation policy. This seems to have been inspired by political reasons. In this regard Blenkinsopp (1991:50-1) infers that “in keeping with a policy pursued in other parts of the empire, the imperial government encouraged the establishment of a dominant elite of proven loyalty in the province of Judah, a politically sensitive region in view of its proximity to Egypt. This new entity was recruited from the Jewish ethnic minority in Babylonia”. He furthermore postulates as follows:

The proposal is, then, that the Babylonian immigrants imported, and succeeded in imposing, the social arrangements with which they had become familiar in the diaspora. They reconstituted their own assembly ... organized according to ancestral houses including free, property-owning citizens and temple personnel, under the leadership of tribal elders and the supervision of an imperial representative, in a cohesive social entity which ... was jealously protective of its status and privileges ... For this new form of social organization to be viable two goals had to be attained. The immigrants had to win back the land redistributed to the peasantry after the deportations ... and they had to rebuild and secure control of the temple as the sociopolitical and religious center of gravity of their existence.

(Blenkinsopp 1991:53)

This policy, naturally, had detrimental effects on the powerless in society, with the result that the social gap in society only widened.

The taxation burden became even worse in the fifth century as a result of the disastrous wars the Persians fought against the Greeks (cf Alibertz 1994:448f). This surely strengthened the position of the upper class. Certainly,

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<sup>36</sup> Konkel (2001:350-1) postulates as follows: “Das Charakteristikum der zweiten Fortschreibung (Ez 40, 38-43.46b; 42, 1-14; 44-46\*; 48, 11f) aus spätnachexilischer Zeit besteht in der Ausweisung des Fremden ... Der Kultbereich wird als exklusiver Raum der zadokidischen Priester noch einmal streng vom Rest des Temenos gesondert. Die architektonische Strukturierung des Raumes wird um eine streng hierarchische Stratifikation der Kultgemeinde erweitert ... Die Leviten werden auf die Seite des Volkes geschlagen (44, 10-15), das nur den äußeren Vorhof betreten darf.”

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some members of the aristocracy were opposed to this development and attempted to keep the general well-being in mind, but from the perspective of the lower classes it only seemed as if the rich had denounced solidarity with them. In the tense social conditions prevailing, it even led to far-reaching conflict of loyalty in the upper class and to a sharp opposition of all fronts in society. In spite of efforts to accord all groups in society a degree of political involvement, the political framework of political and especially economic dependence on Persia and the split in social structure associated with it, unleashed strong forces of disintegration which drove large parts of the population into a social abyss and constantly threatened the community.

This was, broadly seen, the situation which prevailed in the Judaeen province when the latter half of the fifth century got to a start. This brings us to, more or less, the time when Nehemiah – who was a cupbearer of Artaxerxes I – arrived in Jerusalem in 445/4 BCE (cf Bright 1976:380; Donner 1995:454; Schaper 2000:230; Smith 1971:127; Yamauchi 1991:242). The purpose of his mission was to rebuild the city’s fortifications. However, his mission was hampered severely by the split in the Judaeen society caused by the inner-conflict. He therefore had to decide with which side to co-operate in order to reach his goal (Schaper 2000:228ff). Eventually he decided against the interests of the aristocrats – though he nevertheless cooperated with them now and then – and rather in favour of the majority of the population, namely the small farmers, the day-labourer as well as with those who were forced into slavery resulting from indebtedness. His strategy was altogether well-considered: he consequently won over to his side the small farmer, the day-labourer and those who were forced to slavery; and simultaneously, in as far as it was possible, the aristocrats, together with the civil servants and with different sections of the temple personnel as well.<sup>37</sup> This certainly ensured him of the support of the priesthood, in as far as he needed them. From Nehemiah chapter 13 we get the impression that he

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<sup>37</sup> This is a rather unconventional maneuver which, according to Schaper (2000:228-9), could be justified as follows: “Der Grund für diese Entscheidung dürfte Nehemias Wissen darum gewesen sein, daß ohne die Unterstützung der Mehrheit der Bevölkerung sein Programm nicht durchzusetzen war und daß diese Mehrheit sich aufgrund der Schuldknechtschaft in einer unerträglichen Lage befand. Er bewirkte einen Schuldenerlaß und erhielt sich doch zugleich die Unterstützung der Aristokratie und der Beamtenschaft. Dies bewerkstelligte er unter Berufung auf die ethischen Traditionen Israels und durch politisch-militärischen Druck, aber auch durch seine Großzügigkeit als Statthalter und als Leitfigur des gesellschaftlichen Lebens der Provinz”.

supported the Levites substantially. They were also made a kind of special city police force.

The question now arises what rationale could have compelled Nehemia to act mainly in the Levite's favour? Schaper<sup>38</sup> names several reasons which justified his actions. Firstly, the priesthood and the Judaeen aristocracy were, by means of their consanguinity, inextricably linked to one another. Furthermore, they (the priests) were also connected to the Tobiahites (Neh 13:4) and the Sanballatites (Neh 13:28).<sup>39</sup> Although Nehemiah had full authority from the king, he had powerful foes who resented his presence and wasted no chance to put obstacles in his way. Chief among these was Sanballat, who was governor of the province of Samaria; and with him was Tobiah, governor of the province of Ammon in Transjordan, who had connections in Jerusalem. Both he and Tobiah, who considered themselves as Israelites and were regarded as such among influential families in Jerusalem, were aggravated by the fact that Nehemiah took over control of the Judaeen province (Bright 1976:383).

Secondly, we must adhere to the fact that, whereas the subsistence of the priesthood was secured, the Levites had to suffer many privations – caused primarily by the conduct of the priesthood (Neh. 13:10-13).<sup>40</sup> The high priest exercised complete authority over the temple's supplies; accordingly also over the Levites' portion of the temple's income. However, in spite of the fact that he treated his priestly colleagues correctly, he nevertheless contributed to the ousting of the Levites from Jerusalem, which was caused by his failure to supply them with their rightful portions (Neh 13:10). With regard to this text in Nehemiah (13:10) Rofé (1985:215) infers as follows:

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<sup>38</sup> See Schaper (2000:233-45) for an extensive outline.

<sup>39</sup> Cf in this regard Schaper (2000:233-4): "Durch eine lange Tradition als das priesterliche Haus der Monarchie und die Erfahrung bei der Kooperation mit der Aristokratie während der Restaurationszeit waren die Zadokiden gleichsam die natürliche Alliierten der *horim* Judas; wie stark die Verbindung selbst zu den außerjüdischen Verwandten waren, zeigt sich schon daran, daß Eljaschib im Tempel eine Wohnung für Tobia einrichtete (Neh 13, 4-5)."

<sup>40</sup> Cf Schaper (2000:234-5): "Die Priester enthielten den Leviten die ihnen zustehenden Anteile vor oder unternahmen zumindest keinerlei Anstrengung, die *minajôt*, auf die die Leviten zum Zweck ihrer Alimentierung einen Anspruch hatten, einzutreiben (Neh 13:10) ... Eines steht aber fest: Die Priester waren nicht gewillt, den Leviten in ihrer Not zu helfen." In this regard Schaper differs from Kippenberg (1978:75), who infers that only the aristocracy was responsible for the miserable position of the Levites; this assumption totally underestimates the role the priests played.

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... we read of the Temple being emptied of its lower-ranking personnel because of the rulers’ neglect (13:10-13). This class schism echoes in the words of Trito-Isaiah who takes the side of the poor (66:2), the oppressed and humiliated (57:16) against the priests and other aristocrats. In his sermon on a day of fast the prophet expressed poignant indignation over the prevailing social injustice (Isa 58:1-12).

Moreover, it seemed that the rest of the priesthood supported the high priest in his deeds. Obviously this was a gross violation of the religious and cultic laws, according to which a well-proportioned subsistence of the Levites had to be secured. It thus becomes evident that the priesthood not only tried to degrade the Levites, but also to dispel them from Jerusalem. A deep fissure prevailed between the priests and the Levites, and it indeed has become evident that the former were, by no means, interested “an sozialen Institutionen ... die eine Klassenbildung in Israel verhinderten” (Kippenberg 1978:68).

Thirdly, the priesthood did not only favour the diminution of the Levites’ influence, but their interests also coincided with those of the “worldly” authorities.<sup>41</sup> Eliashib and the priests did not only see to it that the Levites’ portion was not given to them, but, in addition, they were also passively supported by the *siganim* (“head/s of a Jewish community”) – with whom they co-operated in matters regarding the temple – who accepted this treatment of the Levites. This co-operation even furthered the anti-levitical policies of the priesthood. It becomes evident why the priests could neglect the collection of the tithes, thereby forcing the Levites to flee the city out of hunger, without falling into financial shortcoming themselves. They, in all probability, were supported by their ‘brothers’, and therefore need not fear any unpleasantness.

The Levites’ support for Nehemiah’s reforms further strengthened the priesthood’s anti-levitical stance. He compelled abolition of interest, release of land and other property already seized for debt, and remission of debts. His reforms indeed had far-reaching consequences for, especially, the aristocracy – as they were the lenders – and the priesthood. Nehemiah’s reforms guaranteed

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<sup>41</sup> In this regard Schaper (2000:243) infers as follows: “... daß die Priesterschaft Jehuds die Interessen der einheimischen Aristokratie teilte: Ein Teil der Priesterklasse tat nichts anderes als die Aristokratie, nämlich das eigene Grundeigentum verwalten und den Heerbann organisieren, während die Mehrheit den eigentlichen priesterlichen Aufgaben nachging.”

freedom to those who were forced into slavery as a result of their indebtedness; and the reduction in taxation lessened the land-owners' income. It is thus not surprising that, after Nehemiah's return to the Persian court, the priesthood grapped the opportunity to cut off the Levites' income. They thus had no other choice than to leave the temple service, which indeed had detrimental consequences for them.<sup>42</sup> They had to flee to the rural areas, fight for their survival, and consequently they lived, scattered about the land, as one of the poorest classes of the population (Smith 1971:134).<sup>43</sup>

After Nehemiah's second return to Jerusalem – of which the date is not sure – he began to carry out a drastic program of social reforms, which also included the temple (Smith 1971:132ff). Since control of the temple was basic to the priest's social position and income, Nehemiah's reforms were seen as a declaration of war, which he immediately followed by striking at the priests' *de facto* control of the temple.<sup>44</sup> Nehemiah, who found the Levites in poverty scattered throughout the Judaeen province, gathered them into Jerusalem, re-established them in the temple, and saw to it that they were financed by a ten percent tax on the agricultural produce of the country (13:10-14). He also used them as a special police in the city to enforce observance of the Sabbath as well as of his purity laws (13:30).

## 5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although it was not the main objective of the preceding outline to analyse extensively the social history of Judaeen society during the latter half of the fifth century Achaemenid rule, this sketch is essential in order to understand the *Umfeld* of the common history shared by the Levites and the priests. The following conclusion puts this to word: "Es ist einsichtig, wie bedeutend das

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<sup>42</sup> In this regard Schaper (2000:235) concludes as follows: "damit waren sie unversorgt und wären bei weiterem Verbleiben im Tempel vom Hunger bedroht gewesen. Sie mußten auf das Land fliehen, um sich dort von den Erträgen ihrer Felder zu ernähren."

<sup>43</sup> Cf also Schaper (2000:244): "Den Leviten blieb nichts anderes übrig, als sich auf ihren Landbesitz zurückzuziehen und von den dort produzierten nahrungsmitteln zu leben, während die Priester in Jerusalem bleiben konnten, weil sie von den Grundeigentümern unter den Priestern mitversorgt wurden."

<sup>44</sup> Cf Schaper (2000:245): "Damit kam der zweite Aufenthalt Nehemias in Jerusalem an sein Ende. Die Priester gingen aus der letzten Auseinandersetzung mit Nehemia geschwächt hervor ... Die Position der Leviten hingegen wurde durch Nehemia erheblich gestärkt."

### **Who are the “servants” (Psalm 69:36c-37b)?**

Verhältnis zwischen Priestern und Leviten für die Entwicklung der israelitisch-jüdischen Religion war” (Schaper 2000:303). It also serves to substantiate the thesis, which now will be put forward with regard to the approximate identity of the *ebadim* who left their traces at the end of the text of Psalm 69. It is to be assumed that the redactors responsible for this section of the text of Psalm 69 (i e 69:36c-37b) – which was designated as a *Fortschreibung* of an already existing text<sup>45</sup> – came from the ranks of the Levites. We have seen that the Levites, as a result of actions taken by the priesthood, had to flee Jerusalem in order to fight for their survival. They suffered expulsion from Zion, viz the temple community. Noteworthy is thus the fact that the levitical tradition, among other things, also included literary reflections on their rivalry with the Jerusalemite priests.

Noteworthy is furthermore the fact that in these three cola we encounter two different streams of Judaeon traditions converging into one textual layer, namely the prophetic-eschatological tradition together with deuteronomic-deuteronomistic language (i e the inheritance of the land). The question is now whether this observation corresponds to the view that these redactors came from levitical circles. According to Smith (1971:166) Nehemiah not only changed the Levites’ social position, but, by winning them over to his side, he also had a big influence on their theology. The deuteronomic code shows much concern for the Levites.<sup>46</sup> This concern was implemented by Nehemiah, whose establishment of the Levites in the temple – without giving them priestly functions – may be regarded as a compromise between the ruling of the code – namely that they may serve in the temple (Dt 18:6ff) – and the objections of the Jerusalemite clergy (2 Ki 23:9). In return the Levites held to the deuteronomic tradition. In this regard Smith (1971:166) infers as follows: “Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah have closer ties with Deuteronomy than with any other book. So does Psalms, which shares with Deuteronomy as with no other book its constant concern for the poor.” In addition to these books, the book of Isaiah should also be added to this

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<sup>45</sup> Cf Groenewald (2003:239-60) for an extensive outline with regard to the *Fortschreibung* which took place in this section of the text of Psalm 69.

<sup>46</sup> Cf in this regard Berges (2000c:241): “... ook de leviëten, die geen aandeel hebben in het land en evenmin erfelijk bezit, mag men niet in de steek laten (Deut 14, 22-27) ... Een apart punt in het sociale programma van Deut. is het voorschrift om de drie jaar een tiende van de jaarlijkse oogst, dat anders werd geschonken aan het centrale heiligdom in Jeruzalem ... nu binnen het gebied van de eigen stad centraal op te slaan, om zo een vaste noodvoorraad ter beschikking te hebben voor leviëten, vreemdelingen, wezen en weduwen (Deut 14, 28-29; 26, 12-15).” Cf also in this regard Dahmen (1996:367-8, 380-383).

list<sup>47</sup>. Furthermore, Chronicles presents the Levites as holding prophecies in high esteem, and they both preserved and manufactured them.<sup>48</sup>

From these three cola (69:36c-37b) we can therefore deduce that the *ebadim* – which have been linked to the marginalized Levites – must have been painfully aware of the fact that they would not live long enough to experience a sure residence in Zion; therefore the expression of the hope for a future restoration which would be extended to their descendants. These three cola were thus added by these marginalized Levites to an already existing text as a new ending, namely a “servants”-adaptation: “and they will live there and possess her; and the offspring of his servants will inherit her, and those who love his name, they will live in her” (69:36c-37b). They – the descendants of the servants – were thus those who were destined to participate in the realization of the promised salvation of Zion. Subsequently, they will take possession of Yahweh’s holy mountain as well as the cities of Judah. We can conclude this article by once again restating the fact that the term “servants” – in both the book of Isaiah as well as in the Psalter - was not only a term for the pious, but it indeed indicates a group of people who played an active role in post-exilic times in shaping the literary heritage of Ancient Israel. It was deduced that the “servants” of Psalm 69:37a can be linked to the marginalized land Levites.

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<sup>47</sup> With regard to the book of Isaiah’s concern for the poor, see Berges (1999a, 1999b, 2000b).

<sup>48</sup> In this regard Smith (1971:168) infers as follows: “The levites may also have tried to include prophecy in their liturgical functions. II Chronicles 20.14 shows a Levite prophesying in the midst of a temple service, but this is slight evidence.” Cf also Tournay (1991:34ff) for a more extensive outline.

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