

STUDIES IN
THE TIMES AND TEACHINGS
OF DEUTERO-ISAIAH

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CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND DATE OF DEUTERO-ISAIAH

Chap. xl. of the Book of Isaiah ushers us into an historic environment entirely removed from that presupposed by chaps. i-xxxix. Proceeding from chap. xl., we immediately become aware that we are moving in a new realm of thought and action, and are conscious that Isaiah - the son of Amoz - speaks no longer. Instead, we hear the comforting and inspiring voice of a new prophet - commonly referred to as Deutero-Isaiah - uttering a divine message to a new age and to a people in exile.

No more do we hear of the struggles of Judah and Israel against Assyria. No longer does the prophet Isaiah of Jerusalem denounce his people in fearless, scathing rebuke, and admonish the nation for its sins. We are introduced into a new world where Babylon is the center, and the conquering Cyrus the dominating figure. Words of consolation and encouragement, proclaiming the dawn of a new day, are spoken by the new bearer of prophecy when he addresses his fellow-Jews in Babylonian captivity.

Not only does a new historic situation confront us, as we pass from chap. xxxix. to the second portion of the Book of Isaiah, but we meet also with new ideas, conceptions, and attitudes, and with important features of style and language characteristic only of the new prophet. These and other generally accepted considerations (which will not be discussed in this paper) have proven conclusively, to critical opinion, that chaps. xl.-lv. are not the work of the early prophet Isaiah, who lived in Jerusalem in the eighth century, but in the main are to be attributed to the prophet whom we know as Deutero-Isaiah.

Deutero-Isaiah is a product of his times. Like all other prophets who preceded him, he is closely related to the historical circumstances of his particular age, although the truths he expounded speak to all ages. In order to better understand the work of our prophet, and to gain a fuller estimate of his teachings, he must be studied in the light of contemporary history.

With the death of Assurbanipal in 626 B.C.E., the great empire of Assyria began to disintegrate and decline very rapidly as a world power. His weak successors were unable to maintain the political integrity of the loosely-knit empire, and to withstand the onslaughts of the hordes of Scythians and Medes who were pouring in from the North and the East. Babylon, a vassal of Assyria, revolted again in 625, and Nabopolassar proclaimed himself king. Seeking complete independence, Nabopolassar formed an alliance with Cyaxares, king of the

Medes, and in the year 606 - Nineveh, the proud capital of the Assyrian empire for three centuries, was laid in ruins by their combined armies. Babylon succeeded Assyria as the supreme power in Asia, and retained this position until the Persian conquest in 538.

Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt, fully aware that Assyria had passed the zenith of its power, determined to acquire one of the rich Assyrian provinces - Syria, before the latter fell into the possession of the conquering Babylonians and Medes. In 608 he marched North, but was opposed by Josiah, king of Judah, who was a faithful vassal of Assyria. Perhaps Josiah had visions of an independent Hebrew state with the passing of Assyrian overlordship, but he was doomed to disappointment. The Egyptian army defeated the forces of Judah at Megiddo, and Josiah was killed in battle. Necho continued to advance victoriously as far as the Euphrates. He made Judah tributary to Egypt, and appointed Jehoiakim - a son of Josiah - as its ruler.

After the fall of Nineveh and the division of the Assyrian empire between Babylon and Media, Necho hastened to protect his northern possessions against Babylon. He was met in battle at Carchemish (in 605), by Nebuchadnezzar, son of the Babylonian king, Nabopolassar, and was utterly routed. Nebuchadnezzar could not pursue his advantage owing to the unexpected death of his father, and he was forced to return to Babylon to secure his succession to the throne. Babylon was now the supreme master of Palestine, and the West.

Judah became a vassal of Babylon, and Jehoiakim was retained as its subject king. He paid tribute for three years, after which he revolted and withheld further payments. Following preliminary unsuccessful efforts to subdue Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar himself took command (in 597) of the Babylonian troops who were stationed before Jerusalem. In the meantime, Jehoiakim died and his eighteen year old son, Jehoiachin, succeeded to the throne. The siege was very short. Jerusalem fell and Jehoiachin surrendered. The young ruler together with his mother, court, and the flower of the nation were carried into Babylonian captivity.

According to the account in II Kings xxiv. 13-16, Nebuchadnezzar carried away all the treasures of the Temple, and took into captivity all the fighting men, nobility, and artisans - in all, approximately 10,000 captives. This account is most likely an exaggeration (Jer. lli. 28-30 mentions a total of 4,600 captives in three deportations), but its essence is undoubtedly true. Jerusalem must have suffered greatly in the loss of its best population, for those who were left behind were "the poorest sort of the people of the land", characterized by Jeremiah as "bad figs".

Judah, at this time, might have recovered to a large degree, from its despairing plight, even under the suzerainty of the Babylonian king, if it had a ruler of strength and vision. Instead, Nebuchadnezzar placed the weak and vacillating Zedekiah (uncle of Jehoiachin) on the throne. For a time, he paid his tribute regularly, but then foolishly sought to throw off the yoke of Babylon. At the instigation of Apries (Hophra),

king of Egypt, and with his aid, Zedekiah revolted in 588. Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. Jeremiah again denounced the foolhardy and faithless leadership that opposed the overlordship of Babylon.

The siege was interrupted for a short time by an Egyptian army, which was quickly defeated by the Babylonian forces. Jerusalem fell in the Summer of 586. The panic-stricken Zedekiah fled, but he was captured and taken to Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters. Here, Zedekiah's sons were put to death in his presence, his own eyes were put out, and he was carried captive to Babylon in chains. The Temple and walls were destroyed and the city was laid waste. Again, a large part of the population (according to Jeremiah the number was 832) was sent into exile, and those who remained were the poorest of the poor - the dregs of the land.

Palestine was by no means depopulated. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, a Jew of noble birth and character, governor of Judah. He was a faithful servant, and with diligence and insight proceeded to bring order out of chaos. He had barely commenced his task, when he was treacherously murdered. Fearing that Nebuchadnezzar would avenge this act, a number of Jews fled and sought refuge in Egypt. There, they probably joined other refugees and Jews, and formed the nucleus of the large Jewish population which is known, from various Aramaic papyri, to have existed in Egypt in the fifth century. It is not stated who succeeded Gedaliah, but Judah, no doubt, was left in a tragic and forlorn condition - despoiled and bereft of its leadership and creative population. The devastated land

now became the prey of the ancient enemy, states surrounding Judah, who plundered and spent their vengeance on the weakened Judeans.

THE JEWISH EXILES IN BABYLONIA

The population of Judah was now torn into three distinct parts. The largest group remained in Judah, but it consisted almost entirely of the poor, illiterate, and disorganized Judeans left behind by the Babylonian conqueror. A considerable body emigrated to Egypt, at different times, and settled there in various communities, which in later times exercised a most important influence on Jewish life and history. The third group was made up of the exiles in Babylonia. Some of them lived in the capital of the empire, Babylon, and ^{others} were scattered in outlying settlements.

At first (in 597) a speedy return of the exiles to Palestine was prophesied by different prophets, but the false hopes they encouraged were not to be realized. Jeremiah knew better. With a keen understanding of the true situation, he counselled his fellow-Jews in captivity (Jer. xxix. 4-7) - to build homes, plant gardens, to marry and rear families, and to seek the welfare of their new land. Jeremiah had good reasons for this appropriate advice. Babylonia was now an empire of great wealth and power, and an important center of civilization. Nebuchadnezzar consolidated and strengthened his empire, promoted agriculture and commerce, and sought the establishment of peace and orderly government in the land.

It was in this environment that many of the Jewish exiles

lived in comparative freedom, and here developed those ideas and ideals which were destined to exercise such a large influence on the subsequent development of Judaism. They lived in a larger world than their Palestinian brethren, and the changed conditions impelled them to a new orientation of life, and to the creation of new points of view in religious and other matters.

Idolatry, with its worship of foreign gods, was the greatest menace to the Jew in his new environment. Large numbers of the exiled Jews succumbed to the lure of Babylonian splendor and prosperity, assimilated, and accepted the worship of the victorious Babylonian gods. Many were also disappointed in their expectations of a quick release from captivity. Deliverance did not come, and hope began to fade. It seemed to these Jews that Jahveh was powerless in comparison with the proud gods of the Babylonian pantheon, and they must have yielded easily to the cultus of Babylonia.

The Jewish remnant was threatened with extinction. Again and again did the prophets Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah inveigh with bitterness and scorn against the heathenism and idolatrous practices, which were undermining Jewish life. It was a critical period in the history of the Jewish religion. Would the latter suffer the inevitable fate experienced by the religious cults of all conquered peoples in the Semitic world, and lose its identity in the cultus of the conquering nation? It was not destined to be so. The religion of the Babylonian Jew (for reasons that cannot be discussed now) triumphed, and

in spite of serious defections in its ranks, the Jewish group in Babylonia survived to make immortal contributions to Judaism.

With the death of Nebuchadnezzar (in 561) the Babylonian empire began to decline, and in two decades it was crushed. He was followed by a succession of feeble monarchs, the last of whom was Nabonidus (555-538). Nabonidus was principally interested in temple construction, and left the military and state affairs of his kingdom to his son, Belshazzar. The doom of the Babylonian empire was imminent. From the Eastern province of Anshan (an Elamite province) arose a new conqueror, powerful and daring - Cyrus, the Persian. He was destined to found another great empire of the East, which survived for two centuries, and to exercise an extraordinary influence on the political history of the world.

Anshan was a dependency of Media, and Cyrus was its vassal prince. With the aid of other Persian forces, Cyrus revolted against his suzerain, Astyages, king of the powerful Median empire, and in the year 549 became ruler of Media. In line with his conciliatory policy, Cyrus quickly consolidated the Persians (Elamites) and the Medes, and continued his conquests northwestward, into Asia Minor. There (in 546) he met and defeated Croesus, the wealthy king of Lydia, and occupied his capital, Sardis, with its fabulous treasures. This was a notable victory, which added considerable territory to his expanding empire.

It was not many years later (in 539) that Cyrus directed

his attention to the rapidly disintegrating Babylonian kingdom. The struggle was not to be a long one. After a preliminary encounter with Belshazzar, whom he defeated, Cyrus marched with his army to the capital Babylon, which opened its gates (in 538) without resistance or bloodshed. The record and account of the capture of Babylon by Cyrus is carefully preserved by the inscription on the Cylinder of Cyrus, now in the British Museum. This event marked the end of the Babylonian empire.

Cyrus, who was a wise and tolerant ruler, adopted a broad policy of liberality towards the subject states of his kingdom. He was interested in maintaining the good-will of all the conquered peoples within his vast empire, and apparently treated all religions with respect. As a matter of state policy, he undoubtedly allowed the restoration of certain of the deported peoples within his empire, to their native lands, but there is no evidence for the common belief that he permitted a wholesale return of all deported populations. The Cylinder of Cyrus, in fact, records only certain towns whose inhabitants and gods were reinstated.

An examination of all the facts, in the light of critical opinion and recent scientific investigation, leads to the conclusion that there was no large exodus of Jews (Ezra ii. 64-65 mentions 42,000 and more) from captivity, during the reign of Cyrus. The compiler of the early chapters of Ezra (recounting Cyrus's relations with the exiled Jews) redacted the latter book about the middle of the third century, and critical investigation indicates that, at best, he was a very poor historian.

"He reveals an ignorance of things Persian; he confuses names, dates, events, and contradicts himself and well-established Biblical data."

The reliable reports of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (vide Haggai and Zechariah i-viii), who were contemporary eye-witnesses to the building of the Temple and zealously strove for its establishment, offer an insight into the actual conditions prevalent in Jerusalem during the Temple construction. Their prophecies make it clear that the Temple was evidently rebuilt (cf. Ezra v. 1-2, and vi. 14-15) during the years 520-516 B.C.E., in the reign of Darius Hystaspis, principally if not entirely through the efforts of the native population. Neither Haggai or Zechariah are acquainted with any other temple-building, and are silent regarding the foundation of a temple in the reign of Cyrus, recorded in Ezra iii. 8-13.

It is also significant that neither their prophecies nor the compiler's sources in Ezra v. and vi. make any reference to the return of the Babylonian exiles, and their supposed leading participation (vide Ezra account) in the rebuilding of the Temple. We need not necessarily conclude with Kesters that there was virtually no return of the exiles in 536 B.C.E., as it is quite likely that Cyrus's broad policy made it possible for some Jews to return to Jerusalem at the beginning of his reign and at scattered intervals thereafter.

Whether Cyrus granted free permission (Ezra i. 1-3) to all the Jewish exiles within his kingdom to return to

Jerusalem or not, the new generation of Jews that did not know Jerusalem undoubtedly preferred the comparative ease of an established life in Babylonia and the strong ties established there, to a strenuous life in Judah. Probably only a fragment of pious and loyal exiles and some of their descendants, clinging to sacred memories and fired by the idealism of Deutero-Isaiah, longed to return to their homeland. The advent of Cyrus did not seem to have a large effect upon the general lot of the Jews, nor is there any evidence that their fortunes changed appreciably in the period (approx. 20 years) intervening between the beginning of the reign of Cyrus, and the reign of Darius (521-485).

Conditions in Judah and Jerusalem at the time of Haggai and Zechariah were substantially the same as in the days following the great catastrophe of 586. Time had wrought little improvement. Jerusalem and its gates were in ruins; the land was neglected and harassed by hostile neighbors. The Jewish exiles from Babylonia comprised, at best, only a comparatively small group with no large influence, and like their native brethern shared the miserable lot of extreme poverty and depression. Haggai offers ample evidence to indicate the economic poverty of the land and its inhabitants, and the wretched state of husbandman and laborer. The rebuilt Temple was a keen disappointment to the struggling Jews - a modest structure, unworthy in comparison with the 'former glory' of the national sanctuary.

It is obvious from the message of our prophet, Teu-

tero-Isaiah, that he speaks from Babylon (place of composition agreed upon by most modern critics) at the close of the Babylonian captivity, when the ascending star of Cyrus was attracting the attention of the whole world. The captivity is taken for granted; Cyrus is already well-known as a conqueror, but Babylon has not yet fallen. The brilliant victories of Cyrus, culminating in the defeat of Croesus and the conquest of Lydia in 546, must have kindled the imagination of the prophet, and inspired him to mark Cyrus as God's instrument to overthrow the Babylonian empire and to restore the exiles to their native land. The various allusions in the prophecy, and the historical circumstances presupposed, set the date of its composition somewhere between the years 546 and 538.

The prophet pictures the Temple in ruins, Jerusalem as a waste city, and his people in exile under the oppressive yoke of Babylon. However, Cyrus, the anointed of the Lord, is God's instrument of deliverance - who "shall build My city, and shall let Mine exiles go free". Israel has already suffered double for its sins and through God's grace will now be redeemed from bondage. The coming deliverance is assumed, for the fall of Babylon and her gods is imminent. But the exodus from captivity is only the prelude to the dawn of a new and glorious day for Zion and Israel. Jerusalem shall be built and the Temple foundations shall be laid. So with eyes turned toward Jerusalem, a new hope and vision loom before the prophet, as he pours out his message of consolation - "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people....."

CHAPTER II

THE GOD IDEA

One is necessarily impressed, as he reads through the prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah, with the large amount of space the author devotes to the teaching about God, His character, and divine attributes. It is clear that the prophet's concept of God is the guiding principle in his entire system of thought; in fact, from it emerges his other significant teachings. With a wealth of imagery and sublimity of expression, the prophet voices, in these chapters, the most exalted doctrine of God to be found in Old Testament literature. It may be true that Deutero-Isaiah's views of the Divine nature do not display distinctively original elements and are founded on those of earlier prophets. Nevertheless, we cannot fail to recognize the prophet's significant advance in his appraisal and larger development of the Divine nature and characteristics. To these, he gives added meaning, a wider and fuller application.

Before we discuss the prophet's ideas about God, it is important to note how, in part at least, they were a natural outgrowth of the circumstances of his time. We have seen that idolatry, outside of other assimilating influences, was the greatest menace to the continued existence of the Babylonian Jews, particularly so, because the latter were exiles in a strange land where idolatry was practiced with great pomp and magnificence. The worship of the conquering

gods with its imposing ritual had a strange fascination for many of the small group of Jews in exile. To them and others, Yahweh must have seemed insignificant in comparison with the grandeur of Marduk and Nebo.

The victorious gods of Babylonia, circumstances appeared to indicate, had overcome the mighty Yahweh, who was powerless to deliver his people from exile. Those who had hoped for deliverance - for the dawn of a better day - became despondent, and discouraged at the trend of events. Their high hopes seemed doomed to disappointment, and trust gave way to skepticism. Would Yahweh forsake his people in exile? Was he powerless to save?

At this crucial moment in the history his people, when the conflict with the proud gods of Babylonia seriously threatened the integrity of the religion of Yahweh and faith was at its lowest ebb, Deutero-Isaiah arose to kindle the hopes of the faint heart, to stimulate the faith of all, and to give assurance that Yahweh would redeem Israel for a great moral purpose. He strove to convey, to this brethren in exile, his own courageous trust and lofty aspirations.

The prophet's first and greatest task was to reestablish the supremacy of Yahweh, in the face of what seemed insuperable difficulties. The false notions of Yahweh, that developed on foreign soil and became rooted in the hearts and minds of the exiles, had to be eradicated. The claims of idolatry were to be challenged and refuted, and the 'nothingness' of idols established. Yahweh was to be restored to his

former glory and pre-eminence. A new courage and a new hope were to be instilled, in the knowledge that Yahweh alone is the true and sole Deity, who will deliver the nation and bring it to a brilliant future.

The purpose of the prophet's whole message is expressed in the opening words of his book of consolation - "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God". Israel's period of affliction is at an end, and the time of deliverance has come (ch. xl. vv. 1-2). With the tenderness of a shepherd, Yahweh Himself will deliver His people from captivity, and lead them in a triumphal march through the desert unto Zion (vv. 3-4, 9-11). Thereby, all the world will see the revelation of the glory of the Lord (v. 5). This is a hope that finds its assurance and comfort in the knowledge that all worldly powers pass away and are transient, whereas God's word alone is eternal (vv. 6-8).

This summary of the first eleven verses - the Prologue - contains the essence of the prophet's message. The idea of a miraculous return from captivity, through the power and grace of Yahweh, is the central and comforting thought. Yahweh's existence is assumed, but with all the tremendous power of his imagination and eloquence the prophet strives to reveal to his people a conception of Yahweh's true Deity. He sets out to establish the proofs of Yahweh's godhead and infinity from nature and history, and repeatedly reverts to this theme in the course of his prophecy.

The prophet turns, first, to the wondrous works of

nature as evidence of Yahweh's omnipotence and creative power,
and asks -

"Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?" (Ch. xl. v. 12)

"Who hath estimated the wisdom of the Lord, and who was His counsellor that he might instruct Him?" (v. 13; cf. v. 14).

These rhetorical questions lead to the inevitable conclusion that no one can approach Yahweh in the all-powerfulness of His creative ability and the perfection of His wisdom.

"It is He who places the earth on a sphere,
And puts its inhabitants as grasshoppers" (v. 22).

He calls out the starry hosts of heaven and

"calleth them all by name; before One abundant in
might and strong in power, not one faileth." (v. 26).

Everything is indeed insignificant in comparison with Yahweh, whether considered in the realm of nature's works or in the history of mankind - for

"Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket" (v. 15),
and He

"bringeth princes to nothing; He maketh the judges
of the earth as a thing of nought...., and when it
blows upon them, they wither, and the whirlwind
taketh them away as stubble." (vv. 23, 24; cf. v. 16).

From the very beginning, 'from the founding of the earth', Yahweh's incomparable power and uniqueness force the instruction

- "And now to whom then will ye liken Me, that I should
be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes
on high, and see: who hath created thee?" (vv. 25-26;
cf. ch. xlvi. v. 5).

In the true knowledge and recognition of Yahweh's transcendence, is there, then, any reason why those in exile should lack faith

and hope? Yahweh is still the God of Israel (v. 27). He is an everlasting God, infinite in power and understanding, who sustains the weak, and gives continued strength to those whose faith abide in Him (vv. 27-31).

The prophet repeatedly returns to the theme of Yahweh's creative power and His supreme control over nature. He constantly enforces his message with this thought, as the occasion requires it, and never permits his people to forget Yahweh, as the incomparable Creator of all things, animate and inanimate. The Creator of heaven and earth (vide Ch. xlii. v. 5; xlv. v. 24; xlv. v. 12, 18; xlviii. v. 13; li. v. 13) also gives evidence of His creative energy and limitless power in the ability to

"open rivers on the high hills and fountains in the midst of the valleys" (xli. vv. 18-19; cf. xlviii. v. 21),

and to

"make the wilderness a pool of water" (xli. vv. 18-19; cf. xliii. v. 20).

Also it is He,

"who maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters." (xliii. v. 16; cf. li. v. 10) - -
 "That saith, to the deep: 'Be dry, and I will dry up thy rivers.' " (xliv. v. 27; cf. l. v. 2).

He forms the light and darkness, and creates peace and evil (xlv. v. 7). Not in vain did He create the earth but to be cultivated (xlv. v. 18), and upon it man was placed (xlv. v. 12; cf. xlii. v. 5; liv. v. 16). Thus He proclaims -

"I am the Lord, that maketh all things" (xliv. v. 24).

Yahweh's sovereignty, clearly demonstrated in His crea-

tive power, should suffice to give comfort to the despairing and assurance to the skeptical, among the exiles. The prophet, however, adduces additional evidence of Yahweh's transcendental position in His control over history and the destinies of peoples. He perceives the controlling will of Yahweh, especially, in contemporary historical events, in the victorious career of the Persian hero, Cyrus, and like the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah before him, he becomes the interpreter of Yahweh's purpose in history.

To the prophet, Yahweh is the supreme Master of history, Who directs all the doings of man in accordance with His own purpose. Yahweh's work and will are everywhere. With prophetic insight, he saw the guiding hand of Yahweh behind the conquests of the great Cyrus, whom he views as one selected by Yahweh to execute **His** purpose in the deliverance of Israel from exile, thereby preparing the way for the establishment of monotheism throughout the world. In fact, the prophet sees the deliverance as an accomplished fact. He is sure that Babylon will yield to Yahweh's chosen hero, and already he pictures her as sitting in the dust, "on the ground without a throne" (ch. xlvii. v. lff.).

After his defeat of Croesus in 546, Cyrus became the dominating world figure, and it is not surprising that his astonishing victories and magnetic personality produced an extraordinary impression upon our prophet and his fellow-Jews in exile. Interpreting the career of Cyrus in terms of Yahweh's purpose, the prophet hails him as the victorious and

invincible hero whom Yahweh has raised up from the East (Ch. xli. vv. 1-4), and chosen in His providential plan to deliver and save Israel. In consequence of this glorious redemption of Israel, salvation will finally come to all mankind in the universal recognition of Yahweh, the God of Israel, as the one and only true God (vide ch. xliv. v. 24-xlv. v. 25).

The prophet portrays Cyrus as the anointed one, the friend of Yahweh, who has been commissioned by Yahweh, Creator and Ruler of the world, to consummate His divine purpose in the deliverance of Israel from exile (Ch. xliv. vv. 24-28). Yahweh addresses Cyrus and assures him of continued victory through His divine aid (xlv. vv. 1-3). Although a stranger to the religion of Yahweh, Cyrus is honored and called to this noble task, not for his personal aggrandizement, but to accomplish Israel's emancipation and to gain, thereby, the universal recognition of Yahweh as the one and only God (vv. 4-7). Yahweh, the omnipotent One, will not brook any dissent to His plan for Israel's redemption through Cyrus, whom He raised up 'in righteousness', saying of him -

"He shall build My city, and he shall let Mine exiles go free". (vv. 9-13)

In Israel, 'saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation', and the medium of His revelation, the nations of the world will find the one true God. The restoration of Israel, heralded throughout the world, will convince all men and nations that Yahweh alone is God, and renouncing idolatry, they will acknowledge and worship Him as the only true Divinity (vide vv. 14-17).

In a series of passages (vv. 18-25), which are dominated by the loftiest idealism, and are remarkable for their singular beauty of thought and noble sentiments, the prophet voices Yahweh's gracious purpose toward all man-kind. Yahweh did not create the earth for a vain purpose, but for cultivation and the welfare of mankind (v. 18). No favorite nation is specified, for Yahweh is a universal God and the moral ruler of the world. Therefore, all people are His children, and all who seek Him will find Him near. Israel's deliverance and salvation are the means whereby the whole world will gain salvation. Universal salvation is consonant with the very nature of God, the Eternal, the Omnipotent One, who guides the affairs of the world and its peoples.

Yahweh summons the "escaped of the nations" - the heathen - whose idols cannot save or offer any evidence of their divinity (vv. 20-21), and in a passage of exquisite beauty voicing one of the grandest messages of universal religion, Yahweh invites them to accept His sovereignty and salvation -

"Turn unto Me, and be ye saved, all the ends of
the earth;
For I am God, and there is none else." (v. 22)

The concept of the true Deity is open to everyone, and all mankind may be redeemed through faith in Yahweh, the only God. Yahweh alone is the source of everlasting and eternal salvation (vide ch. li. vv. 6, 8); He is the only Deliverer and Saviour (v. 21; cf. xliii. v. 11; xlv. v. 15; xlix. v. 26), and it is His purpose that, in due time, all peoples ~~shall~~ acknowledge and worship Him.

"..unto Me every knee shall bow,
Every tongue shall swear." (v. 23)

In the day when all men will pay homage to Yahweh, and share in the spiritual blessings which follow from the worship of Him, then

"Only in the Lord, shall one say, have I
righteousness and strength,....
In the Lord shall all the followers of
Israel
Be justified, and shall glory." (v. 25)

When compared with the mighty Yahweh, how absurd and ridiculous do the gods of Babylon and the nations appear, how unreal is their character in contrast to His true Godhead! The prophet is not content that this conviction should develop, indirectly and only, from his exhaustive appraisal of Yahweh's true character. He would strengthen Yahweh's position, by submitting additional and direct evidence to demonstrate the 'nothingness' and 'vanity' of idols, and the irrationality of idol worship.

The prophet realized that idolatry (Ezekiel also amply testifies to the prevalence of idolatry among the exiles), entrenched in Babylonian life and practiced there with exceeding magnificence, was the greatest peril to the survival of the Jewish group in exile, and to the attainment of a pure monotheistic belief. He knew only too well that his message of consolation would fall on deaf ears unless he could establish the folly and impotence of idols, and could convince that Yahweh was the only true Deity. It is, therefore, not surprising that the prophet avails himself of every means to discredit the empty worship of idols, and engages in a continued polemic against their pretentious claims.

It is hardly an understanding appraisal of the position of our prophet to claim or imply, in effect, as do certain Christian critics, that he did not really regard the gods of other nations as non-existent. In other words, in their opinion, the prophet did not reach the stage of a pure and 'absolute monotheism'. It seems a paradox that such an unusual observation should be made regarding one who, indeed, stands out as the greatest protagonist of monotheism in Old Testament literature. His whole being is mastered by the monotheistic conception, which is the very basis of his entire prophecy. Even the most casual reader must be impressed, in fact overwhelmed, by his God consciousness, and the one embracing thought that Yahweh is the one and only, true God - everlasting and unchangeable - and beside Him there is none else. It is only necessary to point to numerous direct utterances, as -

"Before Me there was no God formed,
Neither shall any be after Me" (xliii. v. 10)

"I am the first, and I am the last,
And beside Me there is no God" (xliv. v. 6)

"Surely, God is in thee, and there is none else,
There is no other God." (xlv. v. 14)

(cf. xli. v. 4; xliv. v. 6; xlv. vv. 5, 18, 21, 22; xlvi. v. 9; xlviii. v. 12)

There cannot be the slightest doubt that the prophet believed absolutely and unequivocally in the non-existence of foreign deities. He identified them with their idols, which became the subject of his bitterest scorn and irony. To the prophet, there was nothing more unreal than the gods of idolatry -

"He is borne upon the shoulder, he is carried,
And set in his place, and he standeth,
From his place he doth not remove" (xlvi. v. 7)

It is unnecessary to labor the point any further, except to note that if the prophet devoted much effort to refute and to ridicule the claims of idolatry, it was because he realized the gravity of the situation which confronted him.

The polemic against idolatry is developed in a number of passages (ch. xl. vv. 17-20; xli. vv. 5-7; xliv. vv. 9-20; xlv. vv. 1-7). The prophet identifies the gods with their idols, and demonstrates the extreme futility of the latter which are made by human hands from metal or wood, then overlaid with gold, and fastened so that they 'shall not be moved'. With bitter sarcasm, he asks -

"To whom then will ye liken God?
Or what likeness will ye compare unto Him?
The image perchance," (ch. xl. vv. 17-20;
xli. vv. 6-7)

Chap. xlv. (vv. 9-20) is the most complete, and ironical exposure of the absurdity of idolatry to be found in the prophecy. Although some scholars delete this passage as a redactor's insertion, there is not sufficient ground to indicate that it is not the work of our prophet, and may be so considered. The prophet pictures the idols and idol-makers as things of 'nothingness', and then with relentless satire and lashing ridicule he describes the details of the manufacture of idols, which in itself demonstrates how utterly absurd and helpless they actually are (vv. 9-17). The idolater 'feedeth on ashes'; he is blinded and deluded by his vain worship -

"A deceived heart hath turned him aside,
That he cannot deliver his soul, nor say:
'Is there not a lie in my right hand?' " (vv. 18-20)

The idols cannot demonstrate their Deity. They lack the attributes of Divinity, and are unable to save (ch. xlv. v. 20; cf. xlvi. v. 7). The Babylonian gods are powerless to thwart Yahweh's purpose and save their city from His chosen servant - Cyrus. Instead, they are fallen in the dust, and are ignominiously carried into captivity. Yahweh, ^{the} Omnipotent and Incomparable One, however, has sustained His people through its entire history, and will continue to do so (xlvi. vv. 1-7).

Unlike Yahweh, the idols cannot adduce evidence of their Godhead, by the prediction of future events. This argument from prophecy is frequently advanced by the prophet as a proof of Yahweh's supremacy. Yahweh alone is the God of prophecy, who has knowledge of the future and events to come.

"Remember the former things of old;
That I am God, and there is none else;....
Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done"
(ch. xlvi. vv. 9-10; cf. xlii. v. 9; xliii. vv. 9-10; xlv.
vv. 7-8; xlv. v. 21; xlviii. vv. 3-7)

The idols know neither the past nor the future, nor can they adduce evidence of predictions made and fulfilled. Yahweh, who controls the history of man and the course of nations, announced the coming of Cyrus and guided him in accordance with His own original purpose. The past history of Israel offers ample evidence to establish Yahweh's power to prophecy the future. Israel itself bears proof to Yahweh's existence and unique Divinity, and are witnesses to His power to predict and fulfill.

"Fear ye not, neither be afraid;
Have I not announced unto thee of old, and declared it?
And ye are My witnesses". (ch. xlv. v. 8; cf. xliii. v. 10)
xliii. v. 12

Yahweh, indeed, is the one and only true God. It is He who is the source of all life and spiritual blessings, freely offered to those who submit to His Divine will.

"Incline your ear, and come unto Me;
Hear, and your soul shall live" (ch. lv. v. 3)

In contrast to a life of worldliness 'which cannot satisfy' and passes away, obedience to Yahweh and trust in Him offer assurance of a life of spiritual blessedness (vv. 1-3; cf. xlviii. vv. 17-19). Yahweh is near to those who seek Him and He will 'abundantly pardon' and have compassion upon those who sin and repent (v. 7; cf. xliv. v. 22). His purposes are not always comprehensible, for 'there is no searching of His understanding' (ch. xl. v. 28) -

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord.
For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts". (vv. 8-9)

Yahweh is ^{the} Creator, the Author of History, the Omnipotent and Incomparable One; He is God alone, the First and the Last, Universal and Eternal, the Savior and Moral Ruler of the world. It was such a God conception that the prophet labored to create or revive among the exiles, and to this task he dedicated himself with all the enthusiasm and persistency of his nature. Inspired by his own profound belief, he strove to stimulate the faith of the despairing and cynical, and to convey to them an exalted conception of the Deity.

Deutero-Isaiah is known as the Prophet of Return, and although he was interested in the physical return of the exiles to their native land, he was primarily concerned with their spiritual return, their return to an unfaltering faith and trust in

Yahweh. The prophet realized that a 'return unto the Lord' was imperative, before his people would heed the call, 'Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence' or the consoling words, 'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people'. To gird his brethren in exile, spiritually, was the great task of our prophet. This accomplished, all else would follow as a matter of course. Then, would they grasp his vision and his hope of a Zion restored - of a glorious future for Israel.

Whether the efforts of our prophet won immediate success or not is unimportant. To the world he gave the loftiest and most sublime doctrine of God ever formulated by man, and a spiritual conception of religion which has influenced every generation down to our own day.

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CHAPTER III

I S R A E L
(A Summary)

The burden of the prophet's entire message is to console his people, Israel, in exile, and to encourage them with words of comfort and hope. Israel is the center of his thoughts. On the one hand, the prophet sees Yahweh as the one and only true God in the universe, and on the other - Israel, as His favorite people. It is Yahweh's gracious purposes toward Israel and His special relations to the latter, which the prophet develops with greatest detail.

A unique relationship exists between Yahweh and Israel, who is designated as Yahweh's 'chosen servant' (vide chap. xli. vv. 8-9; xliii. vv. 10, 12; xliv. vv. 1, 2, 21; xlv. v. 4; xlviii. v. 20). Numerous other expressions used by the prophet is indicative of Yahweh's special love for Israel, and their intimate relationship (e.g., 'My people', 'your God', 'I have loved thee', 'thou art Mine', 'I am thy God', 'I help thee', 'My witnesses', 'Mine elect', 'My nation', 'Mine inheritance', 'thy Redeemer', 'your Holy One', 'thy Savior', 'Israel My called', 'Holy One of Israel', 'King of Israel', etc.). The servant is Israel in exile, which in spite of its defects and shortcomings, is protected by Yahweh and chosen by Him to fulfill a noble and high destiny.

Israel, Yahweh's chosen servant, bears witness (vide

xliii. vv. 10, 12) to Yahweh's sole Godhead and Divinity. This is one of its functions. Its past history and continued existence, in themselves, testify to the fact that Yahweh, alone, is God, and that He alone can save. Now, Yahweh will again demonstrate His supremacy and choice of Israel by restoring the exiles to their native land, through Cyrus - His appointed instrument (Chaps. xliv. v. 24 - xlv. v. 1 ff) Babylon and its helpless gods will fall and be put to shame, but Israel will be emancipated and borne by Yahweh, who has carried Israel from the beginning of its history (vide chaps. xli. - xlvii.).

Israel, Yahweh's chosen people, will be redeemed in spite of its transgressions, and forgiveness will be freely offered by Yahweh, a compassionate God (xlix. vv. 10, 13, 15; cf. liv. vv. 7-8), who will care for His children as a tender shepherd. A new day is dawning (vide chaps. xlii. v. 10 - xliv. v. 24). There is no room for despair.

"When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee,
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee;
When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned,
Neither shall the flame kindle upon thee." (xliii. v. 2)

The past is to be forgotten, and only the present matters (vide xliii. vv. 18-19; vv. 22 ff.). A great and glorious future is in store for Israel and Zion. Zion has not been abandoned. Her period of degradation is over. Yahweh will restore the exiles speedily and Zion will be rebuilt. Her children, scattered over the world, will be gathered together again, and Zion will again become a place of 'joy and gladness'.

(vide chaps. xlix. - lv.).

Israel is destined for a high purpose and special service. Along with the providential deliverance from captivity by Cyrus, the nation will experience an "inward salvation" (xlvi. vv. 12, 13) and will be redeemed from moral and religious guilt. Israel, as Jahweh's chosen servant, is the medium of true religion, and with its redemption, proclaimed throughout the world, idolatry will be abolished and Jahweh will be universally acknowledged as the one and only true God (vide chaps. xliv. v. 24- xlv.). His spirit will be poured out on Israel, and strangers will attach themselves to the restored nation. Israel will then realize its full function as Jahweh's servant (xliv. vv. 1-5).

Salvation, eternal and everlasting, is freely offered to all people who acknowledge Jahweh as the only true God. (vide chaps. xlv. vv. 21 ff; li. vv. 4-7). "Israel's religious mission culminates in a universal and everlasting salvation". Jahweh's special relation to Israel is not incompatible with His universal character, for Israel, His choice, is only the medium of Jahweh's gracious purpose toward all mankind. Through Israel the true knowledge of Jahweh will be mediated to all people.