A Dialogic Reimagining of a Servant’s Suffering: Understanding Second Isaiah’s Servant of Yahweh as a Polyphonic Hero

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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ABSTRACT

A definitive identification of the Servant figure of Second Isaiah is notoriously difficult, as attested by centuries of conjecture and debate. The interpretive obstacles are profuse: the Servant is addressed as Israel-Jacob, but then spoken of in terms that are not consistent with the nation’s experience; in some texts he seems to represent a community, while in others he speaks as an individual; he seems to suffer extreme hardship and persecution, but then is said to experience new life; some of his experiences appear to be historical, while others are best described as idealistic.

But a primary reason the Servant is so difficult to pin down is rarely considered, and that is that there exists no objective image of the Servant anywhere in Second Isaiah. As a literary character he is constituted entirely by dialogue; that is, by discourse addressed to him or directly concerning him, spoken by him, and spoken about him by others in the form of a confession. His actions are never described, and his person is never defined. Scholars have referred to this as his “fluid” nature, but have lacked the methodological tools for a fuller study of this literary curiosity.

The ideas of literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin speak to this type of characterisation. His “polyphonic hero” is a fictional character who is constituted by dialogue, and who embodies a unique point of view of the world. This thesis develops a reading strategy based on Bakhtin’s theories. It reimagines the internal discourse of the Servant in order to comprehend him according to the dialogue by which he knows himself. In the process it discovers that there is only one Servant, Israel-Jacob, whose self-knowledge as the faithful Servant of Yahweh calls empirical Israel to faith in a time of national distress.
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ABBREVIATIONS

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Section I  BACKGROUND AND METHOD
1. **INTRODUCTION**

The curious case of the identity of the Servant of Second Isaiah is at least as old as the dialogue by the desert road between the evangelist Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:25-40). The eunuch’s question, περὶ τίνος ὁ προφήτης λέγει τοῦτο; περὶ ἑαυτοῦ ἢ περὶ ἄλλου τινὸς; is sparked by his reading of Isa 53:7c-8c, and his confusion, as borne out by generations of scholars who have asked similar questions, is well-founded. The problem of the Servant’s identity is not confined to the so-called fourth Servant song. Indeed, the Servant’s appearance

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1. Throughout this study, whenever the term “Servant” is capitalised it refers specifically to the Servant figure of Second Isaiah, in order to distinguish him from other servants. In the absence of a proper name—other than Israel-Jacob—it appropriately distinguishes him as a character in his own right, as distinct from the idea of “servanthood”.

2. The designations “First”, “Second” and “Third Isaiah” (a more contemporary English rendering of Proto-, Deutero- and Trito-Isaiah) reflect the practice among scholars since Duhm (1892) of differentiating between three distinct sections of the final form of Isaiah, each with its own author/authors/editors—chapters 1-39, 40-55, and 56-66. The appellations are convenient in that they remind the reader of the distinct theological and historical perspectives of the component parts of the book of Isaiah, but they are somewhat misleading in that the divisions are by no means so clear-cut. This thesis will follow the convention, without committing itself to one particular set of assumptions regarding the unity or otherwise of the book. However, it is assumed that Second Isaiah reflects an exilic (586-539 BCE) setting.

3. Acts 8:34, English: “About whom does the prophet say this—about himself or someone else?”

4. For ease of reference to portions of a verse in poetic texts the line breaks of the JPS Hebrew text (1999, based on BHS) are followed, with a, b, c, and d referring to the first, second, third and fourth lines in a verse, and so on. JPS inserts line breaks between the poetic phrases in the BHS Hebrew text.

5. Since Duhm (1892) the term “servant song” has been used to describe four passages in Second Isaiah: 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. Duhm argued the four passages did not belong in the original collection of oracles comprising Second Isaiah, but had been inserted secondarily. Duhm’s theory has attracted widespread scholarly support throughout the past century, but has not gone totally unchallenged (see, for example, Metzinger, 1983). Recently, scholars have challenged the theory on a number of grounds, in particular that it leads to a fragmented approach to Second Isaiah. Where this thesis uses the term “Servant song” it does so for the sake of convenience, or where the discussion concerns scholars who hold to the theory, and not because it shares the assumptions among scholars who have followed Duhm’s lead.
throughout Second Isaiah only adds to the confusion. The title of David Clines’ seminal 1976 monograph *I, He, We, and They* may refer specifically to the personal pronouns used in Isa 52:13-53:12, but it also reflects the ambiguity of the Servant’s identity in the larger collection. The Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 40-55 is at times an *I*, at times a *he*, at times a *we*, and at other times a *they*. More often than not he is a *you*. For this primary reason interpreters of Second Isaiah have been unable to identify the Servant definitively or posit a consensus explanation for the ambiguity of his characterisation. On the face of it there are several servants in Second Isaiah: Israel, the prophet, an ideal “messiah” figure, or the group of Judahites (or some of them at least) who were taken into exile in 586 BCE. But there are other reasons for seeing behind the Servant references a sole figure, or at least a single collective. For example, the Servant makes no appearance in either First or Third Isaiah. This suggests one of two things—that he is either a character whose activity is confined to the collection of Second Isaiah, or that the author/s of Second Isaiah had a penchant for using servant imagery. But the Servant also seems to undergo some character development: in the references that occur early in the collection he is presented to onlookers and assigned a task (e.g. Isa 42:1-9), and later his mission is revised (Isa...

6. The plural “servants” of Yahweh is used predominantly in Third Isaiah (63:17; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15; 66:14). However, there is also a reference to the servants of Yahweh in Isa 54:17e. This is seen as an anticipation of the development of the servants motif in Third Isaiah. On this see Beuk en (1989; 1990). See also Sweeney (1997). This subject goes beyond the parameters of this thesis, though where it has a bearing on our discussion of the singular Servant it will be noted.

7. The title “servant” is used in First Isaiah, but never of Israel-Jacob, as it is in Second Isaiah. In Isa 20:3 Isaiah of Jerusalem is referred to as “my servant”; in 22:20 Eliakim the king is given the honour of being “my servant”; and in 37:35 the title is given to David.
49:1-6). He experiences suffering (Isa 50:6), and ultimately it seems that he dies (Isa 53:8c). Indeed, Isa 53:2-10 presents a biography of sorts, from the Servant’s childhood (v. 2) to his demise (vv. 8-9), and even beyond.

But hindering attempts to characterise the Servant in a conventional literary sense is the fact that there exists no objective description of the Servant in the collection of Second Isaiah. He is not constituted in the way that characters are conventionally constituted. By this we mean that he is not described and his actions are not depicted—indeed, the author provides no image of the Servant that the reader can objectively assess. Our only access to the Servant is via discourse addressed to him and directly concerning him, spoken by him, or said about him in the form of confession (as in 53:1-10). In other words, the Servant is constituted at the point of intersection of several lines of discourse. Another way of saying this is that the Servant is constituted wholly by dialogue, and, further, by dialogue that converges upon him, rendering any objective interpretation of him suspect, to say the least.

However, the Servant is named—as the nation, “Jacob”/“Israel” (e.g. Isa 41:8; 44:1; 44:21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3). But even so, identification is not as straightforward as it might be. Four of the main discourses that constitute the Servant suggest that he is an individual: 42:1-4, where the Servant is presented as a prophetic or royal figure; 49:1-6, where the Servant actually speaks; 50:4-9, where a figure

8. Some scholars interpret the term “Jeshurun” (Isa 44:2) as the Servant’s name. This issue is addressed in chapter 4.
who is generally taken to be the Servant recounts acts of abuse that appear to have
been directed at an individual; and Isa 52:13-53:12,\textsuperscript{9} where the Servant is described
in terms that are not immediately consistent with the experiences of Israel related
elsewhere in Second Isaiah. Muddying these already-mirky waters is the strong
historical association between the Servant of Isa 53 and Jesus, an association that is,
again, at least as old as the story of Philip and the eunuch in Acts 8. The association
is so profound that it influences interpretations of not only Isa 53, but all the so-
called Servant songs. Redressing the imbalance to some degree is the strong
association historically between the Servant and Israel among Jewish interpreters,
which tends to be equally myopic when it comes to the Servant’s individualistic
traits.

Even this cursory overview of the basic interpretive problems pertaining to
the Servant of Second Isaiah generates a number of key questions: 1) How are we to
understand the ambiguous, if not intentionally elusive, nature of the Servant’s
characterisation? 2) How are we to interpret a character who is constituted wholly by
dialogue? 3) What advantages might the Servant’s dialogical constitution have over
more conventional styles of characterisation? 4) What is the function of the Servant
within Second Isaiah’s broader message? 5) Does a fresh approach that pays heed to

\textsuperscript{9} Throughout the thesis the final Servant discourse, Isa 52:13-53:12, will be referred to generally as
“Isa 53”, according to the traditional vernacular. This is for convenience’s sake, and where it is
referred to as such the entire poem is in view.
the Servant’s dialogical constitution enable us to better identify the Servant’s identity and purpose in Second Isaiah?

These questions provide the focus and the framework for the thesis. Chapter 2 tackles the first, by reviewing the history of the Servant’s interpretation from the pre-Christian era to the most recent studies, with the specific aim of ascertaining how the ambiguity of the Servant has been addressed. The second question, which essentially is a literary one, is addressed in chapter 3, in which an interpretive method is outlined that engages with recent developments in literary critical techniques. Chapters 4 and 5, in which the method is brought to bear upon the Servant discourses of Second Isaiah, engage the third question, and touch upon the fourth. Chapter 6 covers similar terrain, but from a different perspective. This chapter also broaches the fifth question by positing a fresh approach to the issue of the Servant’s purpose in Second Isaiah.
2. **A HISTORY OF THE SERVANT’S INTERPRETATION**

The history of the interpretation of Second Isaiah’s Servant of Yahweh begins in the pre-Christian era and continues through the early church period, in New Testament, the early Church Fathers and Jewish texts, down to the modern period. We begin our review in the pre-Christian era in order to demonstrate that the questions concerning the ambiguity of the Servant’s identity began with the earliest interpretive communities. These interpretive issues also demonstrate that from the earliest times the Servant was open to *reinterpretation*, which emerges as a feature of his dialogical constitution. The openness of his characterisation invites discrete communities to interpret his identity and purpose in light of their own presuppositions and needs. Before the era of modern scholarship, during which critical methodologies have established some objective distance between interpreters and the Servant, interpretive communities often sought to understand themselves in light of the Servant, rendering their interpretations highly subjective from the outset. It may be that such subjective reading strategies are more appropriate with a character that is constituted like the Servant. We do not see this level of reinterpretation with more defined biblical characters such as David or Abraham, for example. Even so, in general terms, even among pre-critical interpretive communities, the Servant has been understood according to three broad categories: he is an individual (an historical or ideal figure); he is a corporate personality...
(representing either historical or ideal Israel, or elements of both); or, he is both an individual *and* a corporate personality—a fluid figure who is in some texts the nation Israel, and in others an individual who represents the nation, perhaps even the anonymous prophet himself.

2.1. **The Servant in the pre-Christian era**

Examples of how the Servant is interpreted in the pre-Christian era are scarce, and in each case it is somewhat debatable that they refer specifically to the Servant of Second Isaiah. They are limited to a few Old Testament¹ and deuto-canonical texts.

2.1.1. **The Servant in late OT texts**

There are possible references to the Servant in OT texts postdating Second Isaiah in the image of the gentle king who rides into Jerusalem on a donkey in Zech 9:9² and the shepherd of Zech 13:7b³ who is “struck” (יָקָם, cf. Isa 53:4d), both of which would represent individualistic interpretations if the link was effectively demonstrated. The Servant of Isa 53 is possibly behind the image of the “wise”

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1. Hereafter, OT.
2. See the discussion in Hooker (1959: 53). Hooker herself argues the lack of any mention of suffering indicates the figure of the Servant in Isa 53 does not lie behind Zech 9:9.
3. See the discussion in Hengel and Bailey (2004: 85-90), which notes other similarities between the language of Zech 12:10-14 and 12:9-13:1, and Isa 53. They argue the scattering of the sheep in Zech 13:7 evokes Isa 53:6 (sheep going astray), and the image of “the one whom they pierced” (חֲרֵשׁ) in Zech 12:10 was influenced by the image of the Servant who was pierced (קרָשׁ) in Isa 53:5 (see Hengel, & Bailey, 2004: 88-89).
who lead many to righteousness (מְשֵׁרִים) in Dan 12:3,⁴ since the Servant is known as the one who “will act wisely” (כָּפָּרָה) (Isa 52:13) and is described by Yahweh as “my righteous (מְשֹׁרְרִים) servant” in Isa 53:11. If the link is valid then it represents a collective understanding of the Servant.⁵ Scholars also have seen in the servants of Third Isaiah (mentioned in Isa 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13-15, 66:14) an attempt to interpret a righteous element of post-exilic Israel in light of the Servant figure, perhaps as the Servant’s offspring (Isa 53:10).⁶ Also, Bastiaens (1997) has argued that Job 16-19 contain traces of the Servant poems. The Servant poems provide a “frame of reference” for several images of suffering in these chapters, although they do not suggest an identification of Job with the Servant (432).⁷

None of these texts represents a direct interpretation of the identity and purpose of the Servant himself. At best they can be described as allusions or textual echoes of imagery associated with the Servant. They may suggest an idealistic interpretation of the Servant in pre-Christian times, in light of which contemporary figures are seen to fulfil Second Isaiah’s hope—but this would have to be demonstrated in each case.

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⁴ See the discussion in Hooker (1959: 53) and Hengel and Bailey (2004: 92).

⁵ Fishbane argues that “quite certainly, the author of Dan 11-12 wished to stress that his group was heir to the mantle of the suffering servant of YHWH. As that servant suffered, so do they; as he was later glorified (cf. Isa 53:12), so will they be resurrected to eternal life; and in so far as this group read the ‘servant song’ as a description of the historical tribulations of the nation of Israel, the Ḥasidim believed themselves to be the true Israel, the righteous remnant” (Fishbane, 1985: 493).

⁶ See, for example, Wilcox and Paton-Williams (1988), Beuken (1990) and Childs (2001: 546).

⁷ See Bastiaens (1997) for a more detailed analysis of the correspondences.
2.1.2. **The Servant in deutero-canonical OT texts**

The possible allusions to the Servant figure in a number of OT apocryphal books are suggestive, but they are as questionable as the canonical references. In the Wisdom of Solomon, the oppressed “righteous” who provoke repentance in the unrighteous in Wis 5:1-6 suggest the suffering of the Servant and the “we” who look on in Isa 53. Hooker (1959: 53) also highlights possible parallels with the suffering Servant in Wis 2:12-20, in which the unrighteous plot the righteous man’s death and are therefore “led astray” (cf. Isa 53:6); and in 3:1-9, in which the righteous are said to have been disciplined a little, and therefore receive great good. Hooker (1959: 54) also traces parallels with the Servant in 4 Macc. In 4 Macc 1 the deaths of the aged philosopher Eleazar and his fellow martyrs are said to purify the land (v. 11), recalling the suffering of the Servant in Isa 53 which is said to “bring peace” and “heal” (v. 5) the speaking “we” of the poem.

Hengel has drawn parallels between the Servant and the figure of Elijah in Sir 48:10, where the prophet is given a task “to turn the heart of the father to the son” (cf. Mal 4:6) and “to restore the tribes of Jacob” (cf. Isa 49:6). Hengel argues the allusion to the Servant indicates an individual, even a messianic interpretation, but concedes that “it remains questionable whether Ben Sira wished to identify the

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8. This text may not strictly belong in a section on pre-Christian writings, since it may date from as late as the middle of the first century CE.

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Servant directly with Elijah redivivus” (Hengel, & Bailey, 2004: 83, emphases original). Hengel similarly sees a parallel with the Servant in the Son of Man figure of the Similitudes (chapters 37-71) of 1 Enoch (Hengel, & Bailey, 2004: 101). Both figures share a number of traits. For example, they both function as a righteous judge of the ungodly; both share the element of concealment; both are given a name; and both are described as a “light to the gentiles”.

2.2. The Servant in the New Testament

The uses made of the Servant passages by the New Testament writers, particularly Isa 53, range from the direct quotation (e.g. Matt 8:17, quoting Isa 53:4ab) to the allusion (e.g. Heb 9:28, possibly echoing Isa 53:12). Since our task is to ascertain how the NT writers viewed the Servant’s ambiguous identity, we will concentrate on those passages which suggest an attempt has been made to evoke the Servant motif and its related themes.

It is in the NT era that we begin to see the Servant figure identified consistently with an historical figure (Stuhlmacher, 2004: 149). The era is marked by


10. Hereafter, NT.

11. For a useful discussion of the differences between allusion and textual echo and their value in interpretation see Sommer (1998), particularly pp. 6-31.

12. It is not a part of our task to discuss the related issue of whether Jesus saw himself as the Servant, or whether the evangelists sought to make the connection by having Jesus quote passages from Isaiah. For a thorough discussion of those issues see Hooker (1959) and Stuhlmacher (2004).
an almost exclusive association of the Servant with Jesus, perhaps along the lines of
the messianic interpretation of the Servant passages by early Judaism that is reflected
in the Isaiah Targum, which inserts the words “the messiah” into Isa 52:13: “Behold, my servant, the messiah, shall prosper”. 13

2.2.1. The Servant in the Gospels and Acts
The NT texts that associate Jesus with the Servant are divided between those that
claim the identification began with Jesus himself, and those that simply make the
link without reference to Jesus’ claims. 14 Prominent in the former group are two
passages in Mark’s Gospel. In Mk 10:45 Jesus is reported as saying “The Son of
Man will give his life as a ransom for many” (cf. Isa 53:10), and in Mk 14:24 Jesus
is portrayed as describing his upcoming death as the shedding of blood that is being
“poured out for many” (cf. Isa 53:12). 15 The texts suggest that at the very least the
author interpreted Jesus’ death with reference to the Servant of Isa 53. However,
there is no way of knowing whether the evangelist meant to suggest that Jesus
fulfilled the Servant poem, much less that he was the Servant, or whether the author
merely deemed the language of Isa 53 appropriate for describing Jesus’ ministry.


14. The debate between NT scholars on the validity of those passages that make the claim for Jesus’ self-identification as the Servant is ongoing, but it falls outside the boundaries of the present discussion. It is mentioned here because it is worth noting that Jesus may have been one of those in the NT era who identified with the Servant. For a discussion on this issue see Farmer (1998).

15. See Betz (1998: 83-87) for a discussion of the authenticity of these texts.
Likewise, the descriptions of Jesus’ beating in Mk 14:65 (Matt 26:67ff.; Lk 22:63f., cf. Jn 18:22) and Mk 15:15-20 (Matt 27:26-31; cf. Jn 19:1-3) have been linked to Isa 50:6, in which the Servant recounts physical abuse. Several words in these passages echo words in the LXX translation of the Isaiah passage, which falls within the Servant discourse commonly referred to as the third Servant song (Isa 50:4-9). Hooker (1959: 91) challenges the link on the basis that the gospel accounts do not conform precisely to the description of the Servant’s suffering in Isa 50:6: “If their aim had been to show clearly that Jesus was the Servant they would surely have kept more clearly to the original” (Hooker, 1959: 91). Hooker argues a more compelling link to the Servant lies in the description of Jesus’ silence before the high priest (Mk 14:61; Matt 26:63, 27:12), Pilate (Mk 15:5; Matt 27:14; Jn 19:9) and Herod (Lk 23:9).

Some of the clearest references to the Servant in the gospels are in Matthew. Matt 8:16-17 contains a direct quotation from the MT of Isa 53:4ab to draw a link between the healing effects of the Servant’s suffering and Jesus’ healing ministry. One wonders why the author chose to link Jesus’ ministry to this text, if it was not for the desire to link the person of Jesus with the figure of the Servant. Jesus’ healing ministry is in the foreground again in Matt 12:18-21, where Isa 42:1-4 is quoted in its entirety to demonstrate that Jesus’ healing of the sick fulfilled Isaianic prophecy. Hooker argues, with good reason, that without knowledge of the evangelist’s intention it is possible to read too much significance into the quotation:
Whether, in quoting these verses, Matthew was consciously identifying Jesus with the Servant, or whether he was merely concerned with showing that these few phrases were fulfilled in him, is a problem in which our judgement will depend largely upon our understanding of the methods of scriptural exegesis of the period (Hooker, 1959: 84).

The same Servant discourse is possibly echoed in two other key places in Matthew’s gospel—at Jesus’ baptism (3:17) and at the scene of the transfiguration (17:5). Neither text quotes Isa 42:1-4 directly, but both possibly allude to Yahweh’s “delight” in his Servant (Isa 42:1b). Leske supports the view that the Matthew passages parallel those in Isaiah:

In this prophetic context it becomes clear that Jesus’ mission is . . . to exemplify in himself the role of Servant Israel to be a people covenant and a light to the nations; thus he is identified as such in the references to and quotation of Isaiah 42 (Leske, 1998: 165).

One of the few direct quotations of Isa 53 in the synoptics is Lk 22:37, which quotes Isa 53:12d: “And he was numbered with the transgressors.” Hooker has argued the reference is used as a proof text and has no bearing on whether Jesus’ death was understood as a direct fulfilment of the Servant’s sufferings (Hooker, 1998: 92). But the references to Isa 53 continue in the second volume of Luke’s work, the book of Acts. Acts 3:18 refers to the view that the prophets had foretold the suffering of the messiah; Acts 17:2-3 possibly alludes to the Servant’s suffering and apparent rising to life; Acts 26:22-23 apparently repeats the allusion, and in its use of the “light to the Gentiles” motif alludes to the Servant texts in Isa 42:6 and 49:6. The clearest reference is that of Acts 8:32-33, which we have already referred to in our Introduction, which quotes Isa 53:7c-8c in the story of the evangelist Philip and the
Ethiopian eunuch. Clearly, by the time the book of Acts was written a firm association had been made between Jesus and the Servant.16

It is important to note that the ministry of Paul, and on one occasion that of his fellow missionary Barnabas, is also interpreted in light of the Servant passages. In Acts 13:46-47 Paul uses Isa 49:6ef to justify their mission to the Gentiles, taking the Servant passage as a personal divine imperative. This is an intriguing variation on the Christological interpretation of the Servant figure, which, as we have just seen, features prominently earlier in the book of Acts. It is possible that Luke sees a salvation historical continuation of the Servant’s ministry through both Jesus and Paul. The motif of light from darkness, echoing Isa 42:7 and 49:6, is repeated in Acts 26:17-18, again referring both to the ministry of Paul and to the ongoing ministry of the resurrected Jesus. It is evident that at this stage in the Servant’s interpretation he was not exclusively associated with just one historical individual. Indeed, the work of the Servant was apparently being handed on to successive servants: “Jesus had suffered, and thus fulfilled the words of the fourth Servant Song, but Paul was called by Christ to be the ‘light to the Gentiles’, and thus to continue the work of the Servant which had been begun by Jesus” (Hooker, 1959: 115).17 As we have already

16. Hooker, however, argues there is no proof that the use of Isa 53 here suggests the passage was of any particular importance to the early church, but rather the story does “show how the early Church was ready to make use of any scripture which was presented to her, in order to show how Christ’s work had been foreshadowed there” (Hooker, 1959: 113).

suggested, the ambiguity of the Servant’s characterisation makes possible this reapplication of the Servant discourses to new situations.

2.2.2. The Servant in the NT epistles

We find a number of allusions to and quotations of the Servant discourses in the NT epistles. Almost all of them draw some sort of parallel between the Servant and Jesus. But some also draw parallels between the Servant and the writers themselves, and between the Servant and sections of the early Church.

In Rom 15:21 Paul quotes the last words of the LXX of Isa 52:15 to both justify his preaching to the Gentiles, and possibly to draw a parallel between the subject of his preaching—Christ—and the subject of the original text—the Servant.\textsuperscript{18} It is difficult to be certain on this point, since Paul does not explicitly link the Servant of Isa 53 with Jesus here. As Wagner (2003: 334) concedes, it could be argued that Paul did not read Isa 53 Christologically, especially since he does not quote the passage anywhere in Romans. Since Paul quotes from Isa 52:7, 52:15 and 53:1 to justify his own mission to the gentiles, Wagner (335) proposes another possibility:

\begin{quote}
In the context of Romans, the “him” of whom they have not heard or been told, but whom they shall see and understand (Isa 52:15), is Christ (Rom 15:20). The “good things” announced by the messengers of Isaiah 52:7 and the content of the rejected “message” of Isaiah 53:1, according to Paul, is the ἱημα Χριστοῦ (Rom 10:17). Paul completes two stages of the equation: (1) Heralds of Isaiah 52-53 = Paul and other preachers of the gospel; (2) Message concerning the return from exile and
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} See Wagner (2003: 332-336) and Hofius (2004: 175-176) for a more in-depth discussion of the links between these texts.
the servant of the Lord = gospel of Christ. Though the last step of the equation, (3)
Servant = Christ, remains unarticulated, it lingers behind the text as a virtually
unavoidable implication of Paul’s larger reading of Isaiah.

In other words, although Paul does not explicitly say so, he views Christ as
the Servant of Isa 53. This view is supported somewhat by the possible allusion to
Isa 53 in 1 Cor 15:3, where Paul says that Christ died “according to the Scriptures.”
Scholars claim the reference can only be to Isa 53 and the death of the Servant. 19

Links have been drawn between Isa 53 and Rom 4:25, particularly in the use
of the verb παραδιδόμι (“hand over”), which appears three times in the LXX of Isa
53:6 and 12, and the preposition διά (“for”/“because of”), which appears three times
in the LXX of Isa 53:5, 12. Hurtado traces the utterance in Rom 4:25 to circles of
believers pre-dating Paul’s mission (Hurtado, 2003: 128-129), which suggests the
reinterpretation of the Servant’s identity in light of Jesus’ ministry began fairly soon
after that ministry came to an end. According to Hurtado, these believers were
“people who naturally turned to the Old Testament Scriptures for an understanding
of God’s purposes, and who were sufficiently familiar with relevant biblical passages
that this kind of allusive formulation was adequate” (129).

The LXX of Isa 53:4a and 53:12 seems to be behind Hebrews 9:28, which
says of Christ that he had been “offered once to bear the sins of many” (RSV). The
MT of Isa 53:4a reads אֶת לְדָעַת אֲדֹאָם מְדִינָם (“Surely he bore our sicknesses”), while the
LXX replaces מְדִינָם with τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν (“our sins”), echoed in Isa 53:12:

19. For discussion on this point see Hooker (1959: 117).
αὐτὸς ἁμαρτίας πολλῶν ἀνήνεγκεν (“he bore the sins of many”). These words are echoed in those of Heb 9:28: εἰς τὸ πολλῶν ἀνήνεγκείν ἁμαρτίας (“to bear the sins of many”).

The most obvious reference to the Servant in the NT epistles, and possibly the clearest indication of how Jesus’ ministry was interpreted with reference to the Servant of Second Isaiah, is 1 Pet 2:21-25. Hooker argues this is probably the only text in the NT which interprets Isa 53 the way it has been used in the Christian tradition: “Is this perhaps the significant moment in the exegesis of that passage, when it was first interpreted of the meaning of Christ’s death?” (Hooker, 1998: 92, emphases original). It is worth noting again that in this passage, although Jesus’ suffering is interpreted with reference to the suffering of the Servant in Isa 53 (LXX), it is not so exclusively. The parallel between the Servant and Jesus is drawn in order to encourage slaves, inferring that when they are unjustly beaten they too become like the Servant. Vv. 24-25 draw further parallels between the purposes behind Christ’s suffering and those of the Servant, and also parallel the sheep-like behaviour of the epistle’s recipients with the behaviour of the speaking “we” in Isa 53.

There is another possible allusion to the Servant, particularly as described in Isa 42:1-4, in the pastoral epistle, 2 Timothy. In 2 Tim 2:24 the young pastor is

instructed that the “Lord’s servant” (LXX δούλον δὲ κυρίου, cf. Isa 42:19 oĩ δούλοι τοῦ θεοῦ, LXX) “must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.” If the parallel is legitimate then it indicates a continuing application of the Servant beyond Jesus, to ministers of the Church.

2.3. The Servant in the Church Fathers

The vast amount of patristic literature cannot possibly be covered in any great depth in this discussion. This section is included to demonstrate the continuing reinterpretation of the Servant in the period immediately following the NT era, and to highlight any changes in the way the Servant was then understood.

The identification of the Servant with Jesus continues into the writings of the Church Fathers, as one would expect. However, another tendency is evident—that of interpreting the life of the Christian in light of the Servant’s mission and sacrifice. Christoph Markschies has labelled these dual approaches to the Servant’s interpretation the “exemplary model” and the “Christological model” (Märkschies, 2004: 225). Markschies’ focus is Isa 53, and not the broader Servant texts. But his observations appropriately describe the patristic use of the Servant texts in general:

In the first model the Servant is taken as an example of the true Christian and the text [Isa 53] is taken, so to speak, as instruction in ethical behaviour. In the second model Isaiah 53 is understood as a statement about a singular saving act of Christ (Märkschies, 2004: 231).

The First Epistle of Clement (ca. 97 CE) contains one of the earliest extant interpretations of Isa 53 after the NT writings. In chapter 16 Clement apparently
attempts not only to demonstrate that Jesus has fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy of a Servant who would humble himself for his followers, but also to impress the same humility upon divisive elements in the Church:

For Christ is of those who are humble-minded, and not of those who exalt themselves over His flock. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Sceptre of the majesty of God, did not come in the pomp of pride or arrogance, although He might have done so, but in a lowly condition, as the Holy Spirit had declared regarding Him (Clement, 1979: 9).

Clement then goes on to quote Isa 53 in its entirety, and ends with an appeal for the Church to imitate Jesus’ behaviour: “Ye see, beloved, what is the example which has been given us; for if the Lord thus humbled Himself, what shall we do who have through Him come under the yoke of His grace?” (Clement, 1979: 9)

The Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 100 CE) likewise draws attention to the exemplary nature of Jesus’ humility. In chapter 5 of the epistle the writer makes reference to Isa 53.21 Interestingly, Barnabas preserves the awareness that the text was written to Israel before it was made significant for the Church:

For to this end the Lord endured to deliver up His flesh to corruption, that we might be sanctified through the remission of sins, which is effected by His blood of sprinkling. For it is written concerning Him, partly with reference to Israel, and partly to us (Barnabas, 1979: 139)

Barnabas then quotes from Isa 53:5 and 7, in order to show that “the man perishes justly, who, having a knowledge of the way of righteousness, rushes off into

21. Says Markschies: “The exemplary significance of Christ’s humility as the paradigmatic humble person before God remains an important part of the background even here in Barnabas” (Markschies, 2004: 241, emphasis original).
the way of darkness” (139).

Markschies notes that following a number of allusions to the Servant figure in the Martyrdom of Polycarp (ca. mid second century CE) and other martyrlogies, the interpretation of the Servant becomes overwhelmingly Christological. Markschies explains this by arguing that “Christians wished to avoid relativising the exclusive claims of Christ evident in the Christological use of [Isa 53]” (Markschies, 2004: 244).

Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) is one of the few early interpreters of the Servant figure to link a variety of Servant texts from Second Isaiah with Jesus.22 In chapters 49-51 of his First Apology (Justin, 1979b: 179-180), written around 150-155 CE, Justin draws a direct parallel between the passion of Jesus and the suffering of the Servant in Isa 53, clearly interpreting the text as prophecy. He draws the same parallel in chapter 13 of his work Dialogue with Trypho (Justin, 1979a: 200-201), written around 155-160 CE. In chapter 121 (Justin, 1979a: 260) he draws a parallel between Jesus and the Servant of Isa 49:6, and in the following chapter (260-261) interprets the “witnesses” of Isa 43:10a to be Jesus, since Jesus continues, argues Justin, to witness to his believers. In chapter 123 (261), and again in chapter 135 (267), he interprets the Jacob and Israel of Isa 42:1-4 as parabolic names for Jesus.

22. Although Justin leans on many of the Servant passages, Isa 53 is his overwhelming favourite. Markschies (2004: 251) notes that Justin quotes from Isa 53 in almost 30 paragraphs spread throughout 25 different chapters of his 142-chapter Dialogue with Trypho. As well as direct quotations he notes allusions and catchwords, bringing the total number of paragraphs referring to Isa 53 to 36.

To these patristic writers who take up the motif of the Servant we can also add Jerome (345-420) and Cyril of Alexandria (378-444), both of whom wrote commentaries on Isaiah and interpreted the Servant passages as prophecies of Christ.\(^\text{23}\) Likewise, Origen makes a direct link between the Servant as a prophetic figure and Jesus. In *Against Celsus* (chapter 54), Origen argues that Isa 53 was a “prediction” not only of Jesus’ suffering, but also of his reputation among the Gentiles.

It was predicted, moreover, that some from among the Gentiles would come to the knowledge of Him (among whom the prophets are not included); and it had been declared that he would be seen in a form which is deemed dishonourable among men (Origen, 1979: 420).

Elsewhere Origen links the role of Isaiah’s Servant and the servanthood of Jesus. In chapter 37 of his commentary on the gospel of John, Origen paraphrases Isa 49:6 to describe the work of Jesus: “For if He had not become a servant, He would not have raised up the tribes of Jacob, nor have turned the heart of the diaspora of Israel, and neither would He have become a light of the Gentiles to be for salvation to the ends of the earth” (Origen, 1978: 316).

\(^\text{23}\) See the discussion by Childs (2004), particularly pp. 96-97 and p. 124.
2.4. The Servant in Jewish literature

In contrast to the dominant Christian interpretation of the Servant texts as prophecies of Jesus, the dominant Jewish interpretation, at least since the Middle Ages, has been that the Servant represents suffering Israel in exile. This section briefly discusses the interpretations of three medieval Jewish commentators on Isaiah whose variant positions exemplify the range of interpretations across the Jewish tradition. There is no standard Jewish interpretation of the Servant, since, as Schreiner correctly observes regarding Isa 53, even within Jewish scholarship “opinions about the ‘correct interpretation’ can differ just as much as the Christian interpretations do” (Schreiner, 2004: 419).24

Although there have been notable exceptions to the general rule, particularly in the Isaiah Targum (as noted above),25 the dominant Jewish interpretation of the Servant’s identity has not dwelt upon his apparent ambiguity, but has seen him as quite unambiguously the Jacob-Israel of the early Servant discourses. This is certainly the interpretation of renowned French scholar R. Solomon ben Isaac, otherwise known as Rashi (1040-1105 CE). Rashi tends to view the Servant as a corporate personality representing both the nation as a whole and a righteous element within Israel. Paraphrasing Isa 52:13, Rashi inserts the name Jacob after the

24. For more on the history of Jewish interpretation of key Isaiahic texts see Sawyer (1996: 100-125), Driver and Neubauer (1999), and Schreiner (2004).

25. See p. 20.
reference to “my servant” and describes him as “the righteous who are in him” (cited in Driver, & Neubauer, 1999: 37). But concerning Isa 53:3, which speaks of the suffering of the Servant, Rashi says “This prophet speaks constantly of the whole people as one man,” and links this description of the Servant with Isa 44:1, 2, where the Servant is explicitly named Jacob and Israel. Rashi claims that Israel suffered “in order that by his sufferings atonement might be made for all other nations: the sickness which ought to have fallen upon us was carried by him” (cited in Driver, & Neubauer, 1999: 38). Rashi also argues that the image of the Servant being led like a sheep in Isa 53:7 refers to Israel being led to freedom from exile by Cyrus.\footnote{26}{Around 538 BCE.}

The prophet here publishes the glad tidings of Israel’s release, representing the Gentiles as announcing it in the latter days when they see him taken from the confinement in which he had been kept by their hands . . . (cited in Driver, & Neubauer, 1999: 38, emphasis original).

Rashi again has the exile in mind when commenting on Isa 53:9, which says the Servant was “assigned a grave with the wicked.” He argues the “wicked” are the Gentiles, among whom the Jews in exile were buried: “\textit{He} gave himself over to whatever burial the wicked Gentiles might decree: for the Gentiles used to condemn the Israelites to be murdered and then buried like asses in the bellies of dogs,” (quoted in Driver, & Neubauer, 1999: 38).

R. Abraham Ibn Ezra (1093-1168) similarly identifies the Servant with the nation Israel in exile, but is more polemical than Rashi, arguing against the Christian
interpretation of the Servant on the basis that it does not take into account aspects of the text which seem to contradict the identification of the Servant with Christ:

Our opponents say that it refers to their God, supposing the ‘servant’ to signify his body: this, however, is not possible, for the body cannot ‘understand’ even during a man’s lifetime (quoted in Driver, & Neubauer, 1999: 43).

Ibn Ezra also disputes the view that references to the Servant “seeing offspring” and “prolonging days” (53:10), as well as “dividing spoil with the strong” (53:12), can be said of Christ. Rather, the proof of the Servant’s identity, at least in Isa 53, lies in the passage’s context. Immediately before the passage, in 52:12a, “you” refers to Israel, and immediately afterwards, in 54:1a, the “barren woman” also designates Israel: “Similarly my servant means each individual belonging to Israel, and consequently God’s servant, who is in exile” (quoted in Driver, & Neubauer, 1999: 43, emphases original).

Likewise, R. David Kimchi, otherwise known as Radaq (1160-1235), argues that Isa 53 refers to the captivity of Israel, which is called “my servant” as it is in Isa 41:8a. Jewish interpretation of the Servant represented by Kimchi and those who came before him does not allow for two different servants, an individual and a collective. Neither does it allow for the so-called songs to be isolated from their literary context.

The Aramaic translation of Isaiah, the Targum, is a notable exception to the generally accepted Jewish interpretation of the Servant figure. Written prior to the debate between the early Church and Jewish interpreters regarding the perceived
links between Isa 53 and Jesus (see, for example, the aforementioned *Dialogue with Trypho* by Justin Martyr). Tg interprets the Servant, at least the Servant of Isa 53, messianically. The Tg of Isa 52:13 reads “Behold, my servant, the Anointed One (or, the Messiah), shall prosper. He shall be exalted and increase, and be very strong” (cited in Stenning, 1949: 178). However, this is where the identification between the Servant and the Messiah ends. The rest of Isa 53 identifies the figure that suffers as Israel, not the Messiah. It is “they” who are despised and of no account in Isa 53:3, which is at odds with the “he” of the MT. And it is “we”, and not the “he” of the MT, who are accounted smitten, stricken and afflicted in 53:4cd. The distinction between “us” (i.e. Israel) and “he” (the Messiah/Servant) runs throughout the poem—“we” suffer, while the Servant is victorious for our sake.

2.5. The Servant in modern scholarship
Attempts to come to terms with the Servant’s ambiguous characterisation have been as divergent among scholars over the past two hundred years as they have been between Christian and Jewish interpreters since the days of the early Church. In his extensive review of the history of interpretation of the Servant since the 1800s, North (1956) is able to delineate two clear lines of interpretation: the Servant is either an individual, or he is a corporate identity that represents Israel or a section of it. There are complexities to the arguments on both sides, but we can say that those who argue for a corporate identity generally emphasise the Servant discourses outside the
Servant songs, where the Servant is clearly identified as “Jacob-Israel”. Those who argue for an individual interpretation tend to emphasise the songs, which appear to not only describe him as an individual, but as an individual who stands over against Israel (e.g. Isa 49:1-6 and Isa 53).

The case for an individual Servant associated with the songs is usually attributed to the publication in 1892 of Bernhard Duhm’s commentary on Isaiah, Das Buch Jesaia: übersetzt und erklärt, in which Duhm argues the songs originated independently of Second Isaiah. There is a clear attempt by Duhm to minimise ambiguity in the Servant’s characterisation by isolating those discourses that most contribute to it—the seemingly individualistic poems, Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12. Duhm’s thesis had its desired effect—it removed ambiguity by positing not only two discrete servants (the collective Servant, Jacob-Israel, and the individual Servant), but two discrete sets of discourses. So axiomatic was Duhm’s thesis that North’s history of interpretation distinguishes between pre-Duhm and post-Duhm interpretations of the Servant. Still, even before Duhm’s work, scholars differed markedly on their theories regarding the Servant’s identity and purpose.

2.5.1. Pre-Duhm
The idea prevalent among Jewish interpreters, that the Servant is a corporate personality representing the nation Israel, persists into the modern era. North traces the argument among modern scholars back to Heinrich Stephani in 1787, followed
by J.C. Döderlein in the third edition of his commentary *Esaias* in 1789. In his previous two editions Döderlein presents a traditional messianic interpretation. In the third he says Isa 42:1ff. is speaking of Cyrus, and that 49:1 and 52:13-53:12 speak of the entire Jewish people. In his 1794 work, C.G. Schuster describes Isa 53 as an allegory of the fortunes of collective Israel. To this group of scholars North also adds J.F. Telge (1816-18), J. Wellhausen (1883), who famously states “There is no God save Yahweh, and Israel is his prophet”, and B. Stade (1888).

A variation of the corporate personality interpretation views the Servant not as the entire nation of Israel, but as Israel as it should be—ideal Israel. This is one of a number of ways of accommodating the distinction in some of the Servant discourses between the Servant and empirical Israel. J.C.R Eckerman (1790) distinguishes between the state of Israel and its citizens—the citizens have sinned and the state has suffered. W. Vatke (1835) argues that the Servant is Israel “according to its higher religious unity and divine calling”, H. Ewald (1840) that he

27. See North (1956: 29).

28. By “traditional messianic interpretation” we refer to the position that the servant passages are predictive prophecy referring to the coming Messiah. For many scholars Jesus fulfils this messianic hope.


30. Ibid., p. 29.

31. Ibid., p. 30.

32. By the term “empirical Israel” we refer to the nation as it exists in a particular time and place, as opposed to a literary depiction of the nation, or to an “ideal” Israel. See discussion chapter 4.

33. See North (1956: 31).
is Israel according to its true idea.\textsuperscript{34} The first British critic to break ranks and abandon the traditional messianic interpretation was Samuel Davidson in 1863. Davidson describes the Servant as ideal Israel.\textsuperscript{35} T.K. Cheyne followed in 1870 by describing the Servant as the “personified ideal of the Israelitish nation.”\textsuperscript{36}

Another variation of the corporate theory in the pre-Duhm era finds expression in H.E.G. Paulus (1792), who argues the Servant represents a pious minority within Israel. This group “suffered because of the rest of the Jews.”\textsuperscript{37} C.F. Ammon (1794) says the Servant is the “nobler part” of Israel.\textsuperscript{38} This theory seemed to lay dormant until 1832 with Otto Thenius, followed by F.J.V.D. Maurer (1836), D.G.C. von Cölln (1836) and August Knobel (1872). The latter work argues the Servant is “the theocratic Kern of the people.”\textsuperscript{39} A. Keuen (1877) is more explicit: the Servant is “the better portion, the flower of the Israelitish people.”\textsuperscript{40}

A further variation of the corporate theory sees the Servant as the order of the prophets. This was first suggested by E.F.C. Rosenmüller (1799), who later

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., p. 31. To this group North adds Matthew Arnold (1875), Fr. Beck (1840) and P. Kleinert (1862).
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., p. 33. North adds Ed. Reuss (1875), who echoed Ewald; A.B. Davidson (1884, 1903); S.R. Driver (1913); and A. Dillmann (1890). Dillmann said the Servant was “an ideal, which soars above reality” (North, 1956: 35).
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., p. 36.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., p. 36.
\end{flushright}
abandoned the view in favour of the full collective theory. Nevertheless, the theory took hold. W. Gesenius (1821) argues that in the figure of the Servant “the prophets are . . . viewed as a corporate body or moral person.” F.W. Umbreit (1828), clearly recognising the ambiguity of the Servant’s characterisation, combines a number of theories, seeing in the Servant the prophets, the Messiah, and Israel: “In some passages of the prophecy . . . the Servant is Israel as a whole, in others the better elements in Israel, and in yet others the prophets” (cited in North, 1956: 38).

Throughout this period it is evident that the identity of the Servant is bound up with the question of his purpose. If the Servant is deemed to be Israel, then his purpose is to suffer on behalf of the world, to bring God’s justice to the nations. If the Servant is a righteous element within Israel, then his purpose is to restore the relationship between Yahweh and the nation. If the Servant is ideal Israel then his purpose is to call Israel to what it should be: a witness to God’s saving power, and one who suffers on behalf of the Gentile nations.

Alternatively, a number of theories linking the Servant with historical individuals also proliferates among scholars pre-Duhm. The Servant is Hezekiah.

41. Ibid., p. 37.
42. Ibid., p. 37.
43. To this group North adds G.M.L. de Wette (1830), D. Schenkel (1836), J.C.K Hofmann (1841), and C.L. Hendewerk (1843), who “thought of a ‘Messianic Israel’, made up of earlier and later prophets, ‘of whom the greatest was Christ’” (North, 1956: 39).
44. J. Konynenburg (1795).
Isaiah,\textsuperscript{45} Uzziah,\textsuperscript{46} Jeremiah,\textsuperscript{47} Second Isaiah,\textsuperscript{48} Zerubbabel,\textsuperscript{49} or an unknown individual\textsuperscript{50} (see North, 1956: 39-42). The traditional messianic interpretation of his person and purpose continues unabated in this period. However, North notes that from the mid-1800s interpreters took a more liberal approach to messianic interpretations by, for example, attempting to fuse them with the collective interpretations.\textsuperscript{51} The classic expression of this is by Franz Delitzsch (1890), who describes the idea of the Servant as a “pyramid”. On one level the Servant is the whole people (the base of the pyramid), on another he is Israel “according to the spirit” as well as the flesh (the mid-section of the pyramid), and on a third level he is the person of the redeemer (the summit of the pyramid) (cited in North, 1956: 44). Delitzsch is acknowledged for drawing attention to the Servant’s “fluidity”—albeit with a model that was too “static”—in an era when Duhm’s sharp contrast between the individual and corporate Servant would misconstrue the issue (see Childs, 2001: 385). George Adam Smith (1890) puts forward a similar view, arguing that Second

\textsuperscript{45} C.F. Stäudlin (1791).
\textsuperscript{46} J.C.W. Augusti (1795, 1797-1800, 1800).
\textsuperscript{47} Baron C.C.J. Bunsen (1857).
\textsuperscript{48} J.J. Stähelin (1847).
\textsuperscript{49} Samuel Sharpe (1877). North notes that Sharpe anticipated Duhm by attributing only Isa 40-55 to Second Isaiah, who he described as “the Isaiah of the return home” (North, 1956: 42). He assigned chapters 56-66 to various post-exilic writers.
\textsuperscript{50} Schenkel (1836) and Ewald (1840-41).
\textsuperscript{51} For example, V.F. Oehler (1865) and C. von Orelli (1882) (North, 1956: 43).
Isaiah holds “dissolving views” regarding the Servant’s characterisation: he is at first the nation, then a distinction between the nation and the real Servant is introduced. But, ultimately, the “personification of previous passages is at last . . . presented as a Person” in Isa 53 (cited in North, 1956: 45).52 This explanation of the Servant’s fluidity underscores a number of recent commentaries.

2.5.2. Duhm to Mowinckel, 1892-1921

Following Duhm it becomes commonplace to interpret the Servant in the four songs as one figure. North notes that the period from Duhm to Mowinckel (1921) is “notable for strong reaction . . . against the collective interpretation, and the advocacy of a number of theories identifying the Servant with some historical individual” (North, 1956: 47). Duhm himself argues the Servant is a “disciple of the prophets, a teacher of the law and a pastor of souls” (cited in North, 1956: 48).53 Other theories continued to suggest the Servant was one of a variety of historical individuals, some of whom had already been posited—among them Eleazar the

52. To this group North adds Bruno Bauer (1838) and J.A. Alexander (1847), both of whom argued the Servant was both Israel and the Messiah (North, 1956: 45).

53. See Duhm (1892: xviii), where he describes the Servant as “ein Thoralehrer und Seelsorger”. See also p. 285: “Er [the Servant] ist nicht eigentlich ein Prophet, sondern ein Prophetenjünger, ein Thoralehrer.”
scribe,\textsuperscript{54} Zerubbabel,\textsuperscript{55} Jehoiachin,\textsuperscript{56} Moses,\textsuperscript{57} an anonymous contemporary of Second Isaiah,\textsuperscript{58} and Ezekiel.\textsuperscript{59} One writer suggests the Servant is, at different places in the text,\textsuperscript{60} three figures, Hezekiah, Jeremiah and Uzziah, and another that he is Cyrus\textsuperscript{61} (see North, 1956: 48-57).

Despite the reaction in this period against the collective interpretation it does persist, most notably in Karl Budde (1899) and F. Giesebrecht (1902).\textsuperscript{62} Budde’s argument for a collective interpretation is based on his conviction that Second Isaiah is a unity (cited in North, 1956: 58). Indeed, throughout the history of the Servant’s interpretation there is a strong correlation between theories espousing the fragmentary nature of Second Isaiah and individualistic interpretations of the Servant. Giesebrecht’s explanation for the differences between the Servant’s presentation inside and outside the songs is that the songs are written for the

\textsuperscript{54} A. Bertholet (1899).

\textsuperscript{55} Ernst Sellin (1898). Hugo Winckler (1901) argued the Servant was Zerubbabel’s predecessor Sheshbazzar, who was the Shenazzar of 1 Chr 3:18 (cited in North, 1956: 50).

\textsuperscript{56} Sellin (1901; 1908); J.W. Rothstein (1902) who argued the Servant was not the king, but the royal family he represented; W. Staerk (1909), who later abandoned the theory (cited in North, 1956: 52).

\textsuperscript{57} Sellin (1922).

\textsuperscript{58} Rudolf Kittel (1898).

\textsuperscript{59} R. Kraetzschmar (1900).

\textsuperscript{60} L. Itkonen (1916).

\textsuperscript{61} T.H. Weir (1908).

\textsuperscript{62} Cited in North (1956: 57).
prophet’s close circle of disciples, with whom he can be more esoteric (cited in North, 1956: 59). A different spin is put on the collective interpretation by Henri Roy (1903), who says the Servant is always empirical Israel, but that certain passages—42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-51:8 (excluding 50:10-11); 52:13-53:12—were interpolated in the post-exilic period of the diaspora, and therefore reflect a different understanding of Israel’s relationship to the world and to God (cited in North, 1956: 61).

Among interpreters who continue to defend the collective interpretation in the period from Duhm to Mowinckel are those who argue for a narrower understanding of the Servant’s identity and purpose—that the Servant is not the whole of Israel, but a pious minority, 63 or that the Servant represents Israel only in its ideal state. 64

The messianic interpretations also continue. Julius Ley (1893) is recognised as the first to mount a reasoned defence of the messianic approach against modern interpreters, 65 followed by L. Laue (1898), 66 Gerhard Füllkrug (1899), 67 and Ernst Ziemer, who, North notes, advocates the position along strictly fundamentalist lines.

64. J. Skinner (1898), whose interpretation was ultimately closer to the pious minority theory. See North (1956: 64).
65. See North (1956: 64), who notes that Ley obviously did not know Duhm’s commentary at this time.
66. North notes that Laue knew Duhm’s work and conceded the songs were not from Second Isaiah (North, 1956: 65).
67. Füllkrug argued the Servant was a “soteriological” figure rather than messianic (see North, 1956: 67).
This position, which has continued to be defended unabated by fundamentalists throughout the modern period, defends Isaianic authorship of the whole book, and reads the Servant passages, particularly the individualistic songs, as predictions of the Messiah, Jesus. The historical context of the book of Second Isaiah, in this view, is irrelevant (see North, 1956: 67).68

2.5.3. Mowinckel to North, 1921-1956

North assigns the 1921 monograph Der Knecht Jahwäs, by Norwegian scholar Sigmund Mowinckel, a place of prominence in the history of the Servant’s interpretation that it no longer holds. Nevertheless, it is remembered as a landmark work, one that at the time was described by Otto Eissfeldt as a work of “outstanding importance” that “exercised an influence comparable with that of Duhm’s commentary” (cited in North, 1956: 72). The importance of the work for the purpose of this thesis is that it introduced the autobiographical interpretation of the Servant songs. Mowinckel argues that the speaker in the second and third songs has to be either Yahweh or the prophet. Since the Servant of Yahweh cannot be Yahweh himself, he concludes he must be the prophet, Second Isaiah. Mowinckel is typical of scholars who see no ambiguity in the Servant’s characterisation at all, a position that is reaffirmed strongly in his seminal work He That Cometh:

68. North notes that with very few exceptions Roman Catholic interpreters in this period held firmly to the messianic interpretation, among them Franz Feldmann (1907), A. Condamin (1905), and A. van Hoonacker (1932) (North, 1956: 67-68).
The Servant is regarded and described as a specific individual. This is clear, not only from all the purely individual and personal traits in the picture, but also indirectly, since every collective interpretation leads to absurdities (Mowinckel, 1959: 213-214).

Mowinckel’s view immediately attracted the attention of a number of scholars, some of whom abandoned previously-held views to expand upon Mowinckel’s thesis. Among them is Gunkel (1921; rev. 1929):

This explanation of the Servant of Yahweh as the Prophet himself gives a picture so uniform, historically intelligible, and impressive, that we may well take it for granted that, after some lapse of time, it will be widely accepted (cited in North, 1956: 75). 69

The view certainly caught on. Gunkel’s monograph was supported in 1923 by two separate essays endorsing the interpretation. Both were included in a collection of essays presented to Gunkel on his sixtieth birthday. 70 A commentary by P. Volz in 1932 attempted to support Mowinckel’s theory and get around the sticking point of Isa 53, which cannot be autobiographical since the Servant is already dead. Volz says Isa 53 is eschatological and originated in the fourth or third century BCE. 71 The difficulties of fitting Isa 53 into the autobiographical theory are also tackled by E. Sellin (1930), 72 Mowinckel himself (1931), 73 Karl Elliger (1933) and Joachim

69. Original work Ein Vorläufer Jesu (Gunkel 1921).

70. By Emil Balla and Max Haller (see North, 1956: 75): Haller argued Second Isaiah “assigns the task of bringing in the kingdom to two persons: the outward and political to Cyrus; the spiritual and religious he took upon himself.”

71. See North (1956: 78).

72. Ibid., pp. 79-80. According to Sellin the Servant was Second Isaiah, but Isa 53 was written by Trito-Isaiah.

73. Ibid., p. 80. Mowinckel argued Second Isaiah had not been the author of his own “book”, but that his oracles had been gathered together by a disciple.
Begrich (1938), who finally brings the argument full circle by saying Second Isaiah did compose the last song, in anticipation of his own death.

The messianic interpretations continue their prevalence in this period, but with some variations. W. Rudolph (1925) proposes a merging of the historical and messianic approaches by suggesting the Servant, a contemporary of Second Isaiah, was a messianic leader of the exilic people: “The task to Israel is thus, on the one hand, that of a military leader, statesman, and ruler, and, on the other, that of a teacher and prophet” (paraphrased by North, 1956: 86). According to Rudolph, the autobiographical nature of the second and third songs eventuated because Second Isaiah became so united spiritually with the Servant that he could identify completely with him (see North, 1956: 87). Rudolph’s view is supported by that of W.O.E. Oesterley (1937), who proposes that the Servant is an historical, as opposed to an ideal, individual, who Second Isaiah believed to be the Messiah.

The traditional messianic interpretation, which sees the Servant as a forerunner of Jesus Christ, also continues in this period, in the work of H.

74. We make a distinction between the “messianic interpretations” and the “traditional messianic interpretations”. The latter have already been discussed. The former posit that the Servant was a historical, as opposed to an ideal, figure who met Israel’s messianic expectations.

75. Ibid., p. 88.
Gressmann (1929),\textsuperscript{76} Johann Fischer (1939),\textsuperscript{77} J.S. van der Ploeg (1936),\textsuperscript{78} J. Schelhaas (1933),\textsuperscript{79} A.H. Edelkoort (1941),\textsuperscript{80} Otto Procksch (1938)\textsuperscript{81} and Ivan Engnell (1945).\textsuperscript{82}

Other individual interpretations that continued to be defended were those of the ideal figure (North, 1956: 100-101),\textsuperscript{83} and a mythological interpretation that had first come to prominence with Hugo Gressmann in 1905.\textsuperscript{84} Proponents of the latter view attempt to link the figure of the Servant, particularly as he is presented in Isa 53, with the myth of Tammuz, the dying and rising Mesopotamian god. F.M.Th. Böhl (1923) resurrects discussion concerning the commonalities between Tammuz and the coming Messiah, of whom the Servant is a “shadow” (see North, 1956: 102). Lorenz Dürr (1925) develops an earlier theory that the Servant is linked to a

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 90. Gressmann deviated somewhat from the traditional messianic interpretation in that, while arguing that the Servant songs refer to the future, they are not prophecy in the sense of prefiguring Christ.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 97. Fischer took the traditional view that the Servant “prophecy” had been fulfilled in Christ.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p. 97.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid., p. 98.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., p. 98.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p. 98.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 98-99. Engnell argued that the Servant was not the suffering king and divine representative of the Jerusalem cult, but was the Messiah depicted in the categories of humiliation and suffering as described in the Davidic psalms.

\textsuperscript{83} See particularly the work of W.H. Lofthouse (1928) and W. Caspari (1934). The latter argued the Servant was a “servant-to-come” (cited in North, 1956: 101), the product of the “poetic blending” of a number of historical individuals.

\textsuperscript{84} See North’s initial discussion of the mythological interpretation on pp. 69-71.
Babylonian new year festival, and is presented as a contrast to the Babylonian king.\textsuperscript{85}

Finally, proponents of the collective interpretation continued to defend the position, often espousing new theories to explain old difficulties. One of the main obstructions to the collective interpretation has been Isa 49:3-5, in which the Servant is named Israel, but then is sent on a mission toIsrael, on its behalf. H. Wheeler Robinson (1926, 1936) seeks to find a way around the problem by arguing the individual and collective interpretations do not actually stand over against one another. Robinson’s main argument is that to set the two interpretations over against one another is a modern rationale, and is not necessarily true to ancient modes of thought:

We are to think of the prophet’s consciousness as capable of a systole and diastole, an ebb and a flow, so that though he utters his own experience in the service of Yahweh, it is always with the sense implicit or explicit that these things are true of all the devout disciples of Israel, and that they are Israel (cited in North, 1956: 105).

Eissfeldt’s (1933) explanation of the problem is that “Israel” is distinct from “Israelites”, as Zion is from her children; “Israel” is an ideal that “makes demands upon succeeding generations” (cited in North, 1956: 107).

North’s own position has proved remarkably resilient in the years since the publication of his work. His observations are based somewhat on Delitzsch’s theory of the Servant as a pyramid. There is a “fluidity” in the character of the Servant\textsuperscript{86} and

\textsuperscript{85} North (1956: 102).

\textsuperscript{86} North (1956: 215).
a shift in his identity, from collective Israel to an individual. However, North argues that the individual who is represented in the later songs is not an historical identity as such. He is grounded in the historical context of the prophet and the people, but as expectation and hope. The Servant is the Messiah, an individual who is neither the prophet nor anyone else who has lived to that point. North acknowledges the difficulties with the traditional messianic view, namely that it is wedded to a too-mechanical doctrine of inspiration (North, 1956: 207), and that the prophet becomes a mere conduit for a message that will bear no relevance for several hundred years. He argues for a more realistic interpretation, namely that the Messiah-Servant concept is grounded in Second Isaiah’s personal and historical circumstances, and there need not be total correspondence between the prophetic writings and their fulfilment in Christ (North, 1956: 208):

The essential likeness between the Servant and Jesus lies in this: that whereas prophets like Jeremiah suffered in the course of, or as a result of, their witness, for both the Servant and Jesus suffering is the means whereby they fulfill their mission and bring it to a triumphant conclusion.

The casting of the suffering of the Servant in Isa 53 in the perfect tense is a stumbling block to predictive messianic views. North argues that the suffering is past only in relation to a future that has not yet happened, and not in relation to the prophet’s present (North, 1956: 211). The Servant songs, argues North, are “myth—provisional or anticipated history—not allegory” (216). Second Isaiah fully expected

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87. Ibid., p. 216.
the Servant to come.

2.5.4. From North to the Present, 1956 - 2007

Interpreters have continued to defend the major positions in the time since North’s survey. In this section we highlight some of the representative voices of each position, together with a brief discussion of any major deviations from the standard views.

2.5.4.1. Collective interpretations

The collective interpretation has continued to attract a large number of proponents. In the same year as North’s work was published (1956), Muilenburg defended the position on the basis that the Servant songs were an integral part of Second Isaiah’s composition. Therefore, the Servant was consistently Israel-Jacob, as identified in a number of passages. Muilenburg’s commentary is significant because it marks a new era of literary approaches to the book of Isaiah.88 Muilenburg’s own approach is categorised as rhetorical criticism, since it seeks to discover how the text is able to persuade by its use of structure and stylistic patterns of words and phrases.89

88. Muilenburg’s epoch-announcing Form Criticism and Beyond is widely credited with giving credence to the fledgling rhetorical critical school. It was first published in JBL 88 (1969) 1-18, but originally delivered as the presidential address at SBL’s annual meeting on December 18, 1968, at the University of California. It was included in a 1992 volume of works dedicated to the (then) new literary methodologies (see House, 1992).

89. Muilenburg’s argument was that the forms of oral communication known to the prophetic writers was already well-suited to poetic literature, with its repetitions and parallelisms. However, the poems of Second Isaiah are of such a complexity that they are clearly written, rather than spoken—or at least they are elaborations of spoken utterances. The poet/prophet is “the proclaimers of the Word of God as the other prophets were. But he transfigures the prophetic forms into great artistic compositions” (Muilenburg, 1956b: 386). Nevertheless, Muilenburg concedes that many of the poems were
Muilenburg argues that while a variety of individuals have been linked with the Servant,

when all is said, the fact remains that no single person is sufficient to bear the burden of what is disclosed in the songs . . . For the reality that lies within and behind the songs is infinitely greater than any person could exemplify (Muilenburg, 1956b: 409).

Muilenburg argues the Servant’s mission could not have been carried out by any historical individual, and the Servant’s sufferings as described in Isa 53 could hardly have applied to any single person (Muilenburg, 1956b: 409). However, what cannot be said of any one individual can be ascribed to the community of Israel.

We have already seen that the isolation of the Servant songs from their context has become a fundamental aspect of the argument that the Servant within the songs is an historical individual. Norman H. Snaith (1977) argues against the foundational presupposition of a collection of Servant songs, thereby countering the individual interpretation. He argues there is no main body of prophecy in Isa 40-55, merely a collection of oracles—how then can there be a special, distinct group of oracles that should be separated from the rest? Are they not all distinct? Accordingly, Snaith argues the Servant represents the first batch of exiles who were taken with Jehoiachin in 597, with a tendency to include the 586 exiles (Snaith, 1977: 170).

*composed in order to be effective when delivered orally, as the presence of assonance bears out, for example in the forms of onomatopoeia, paronomasia and alliteration. Assonance is only one of the stylistic features of Second Isaiah’s poems studied by Muilenburg. He also notes the regular use of parallelism, particularly in repetitions, climaxes, and the more traditional rhetorical features of exclamation and question, and the use of triadic forms. He notes that the language of Second Isaiah is highly dramatic, and argues that the composition intentionally culminates the “dramatic quality of biblical faith” (Muilenburg, 1956b: 387).*
R.J. Clifford (1984) echoes H. Wheeler Robinson (1926, 1936) in his interpretation of the Servant. He argues that the Servant is Israel “obedient to the divine word” (Clifford, 1984: 153). However, Clifford’s apparent collective interpretation is by no means rigid:

The Servant can of course be an individual but all Israel is called to obey the word through him, and the concept can include those Israelites who are associated with the servant in obedience to the present task.

Clifford tackles the ambiguity of the Servant’s characterisation in terms of Israel’s dialectical understanding of servanthood. Servants were understood in relation to those to whom they were sent: “People and servant were profoundly orientated to each other” (Clifford, 1984: 153). This is why Second Isaiah was able to speak of the Servant Israel having a mission to Israel. That mission is to call Israel back to the word of Yahweh.

John F.A. Sawyer (1989) favours a collective interpretation because of the parallels between the figures of the Servant and the Daughter of Zion in Second Isaiah. Sawyer argues that, like the Servant, the Daughter of Zion can be interpreted both individually and collectively (Sawyer, 1989: 101). However, the Daughter of Zion most frequently represents the exiled people of God. Sawyer argues that, logically, the “same collective interpretation must surely be dominant in the story of ‘Israel, my servant, Jacob whom I have chosen’ throughout these chapters [Isa 40 onwards]” (Sawyer, 1989: 102). With reference to Isa 49 and the difficult issue of the Servant being given a mission to Israel, Sawyer argues that in Isa 40:9 Zion
appears to be given a mission to Zion, and yet there is no doubt that Zion represents the nation, or at least a section of it.\footnote{The translation of this verse is notoriously difficult. Logically it makes little sense that Zion can be described as a bringer of good news to Zion. מִשְׁמַרְרָה מִשְׁפָּרָה might also be translated “O herald of good news to Zion . . .” or similar (“O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion” (ASV); “You who bring good tidings to Zion” (NIV); “O herald of joy to Zion” (JPS); “You that bring good news to Zion” (REB); “Messenger of Zion” (NJB). For translations with Zion as subject, see KJV, RSV, NASB, NRSV, ESV. Similarly, המלךしても could be translated either “O Jerusalem, herald of good news” or “O herald of good news to Jerusalem.”}  

Within the collective interpretations, the theory that the Servant represents “ideal Israel” has continued to attract its proponents. Antti Laato (1992) has argued that the Servant’s purpose in Second Isaiah as the ideal Israel is to lead the people into a right relationship with Yahweh. Laato makes a clear distinction between loyal and disloyal Israel, and it is only the former that is depicted in Second Isaiah as the Servant (Laato, 1992: 111).

That the ideal Israel is described in Isa 40-55 as the group which will inherit the promise of YHWH given to David . . . , indicates that the word of comfort in 43:1-7 is connected with the common tendency in Isa 40-55 to describe the ideal Israel as playing the role of the Davidic Messiah (Laato, 1992: 96).

Following the exile the “ideal community of Zion” (Laato, 1992: 130) includes “ideal Israel” now returned from Babylon, and their purpose is to draw other nations to Yahweh and “the plan of salvation which he has begun to carry through by means of the return of Israel” (Laato, 1992: 130). This includes spreading the law and the justice of Yahweh throughout the world.

Patricia Tull Willey (1997)\footnote{Tull Willey also publishes under the name “Patricia K. Tull”. As works bearing both names are quoted in the thesis, to avoid confusion we will refer to her in the text as “Tull”, while citations will} has taken up the argument that the Servant...
songs should be read in their literary context, and therefore sees the Servant as a single, collective figure. Tull also takes a literary approach to Second Isaiah, and recognises in the Servant’s characterisation an openness that invites the community to understand its experiences of suffering in light of the Servant’s perseverance. With reference to the apparent contradictory depictions of the Servant, Tull acknowledges they are not easy to account for: “Hyperbole and paradox, and the logical tensions that result from them, permeate not only this character, but the entire text of Second Isaiah, and are not easily resolved on a rational level” (Tull Willey, 1997: 177). However, these logical tensions do not stand in the way of a collective interpretation, but alter the nature of the questions interpreters should be asking.

Such questions ultimately leave the interpreter pondering a Servant who is Israel:

While modern scholars (and interpreters throughout the centuries) have posed the question as ‘who is the servant of YHWH?’ the question the text seems bent on answering rather is ‘who is Israel in relation to YHWH?’ The oft-repeated answer in Isaiah 41-45 is, ‘Israel is YHWH’s servant” (Tull Willey, 1997: 176).

More recently, H.G.M. Williamson (1998: 143) has argued the Servant is Israel but with a new, messianic spin. Williamson argues, with reference to Ps 89:4, 21, 40 [3, 20, 39], that the designation “Servant” in Isaiah is a royal title that is transferred to the people.

The regular designation of Israel as God’s servant in Deutero-Isaiah is also a deliberate transfer to the people of a title once ascribed especially (though of course not exclusively) to the person of the king (Williamson, 1998: 129).
Williamson has a foot in more than one camp, however, since he also allows for a fuller traditional messianic interpretation of the Servant in light of Jesus, who, he argues, “fulfills, but does not thereby exhaust, the prophecy” (Williamson, 1998: 143). Here Williamson betrays a more individualistic interpretation of the Servant, but continues to argue that in the text of Second Isaiah, and even in the difficult discourse of Isa 49:1-6 the Servant, at least in principle, is a group (152). Williamson ultimately argues that the focus is not so much on who the Servant is, but on the task he/they will perform. And that task is one that was “previously deemed to be suitable for royalty” (Williamson, 1998: 154).

2.5.4.2. Individual interpretations
With the continued widespread acceptance among modern scholars of Duhm’s Servant song theory it is no surprise that the individual interpretations of the Servant, at least within the songs, has continued. We have already encountered representations of the different positions within this approach: that the Servant was, or was going to be, the Messiah; that he was an historical individual, most likely a contemporary of Second Isaiah; or, that he was Second Isaiah himself. The Servant’s task varies depending on who he is viewed to be. The traditional Christian messianic interpretation views the Servant as someone who will atone for not only the sins of Israel, but for the world as well. The view that the Servant was a contemporary of the prophet usually leads scholars to understand his suffering as the means of Israel’s
liberation from Babylon. Those who suggest the Servant was Second Isaiah himself generally argue that he suffered as a result of his preaching (at the hands of either the Babylonians or the exiles), and that only later was it acknowledged that his ministry was for the sake of the people.

John L. McKenzie (1968) seeks to build a bridge between the corporate and individual interpretations of the Servant. Firstly, McKenzie takes the position that the songs are not related to their literary context, except where the first three songs are responded to in the verses immediately following them (McKenzie, 1968: XXXIX). Secondly, McKenzie traces a progression of thought from one song to the next but argues each is intelligible (or “difficult”) in itself. He discounts suggestions that the Servant is a fluid figure who is first the nation, then an individual. Thirdly, he argues against seeing the Servant as a definite individual who would arise in the future. However, the Servant is an ideal figure, and a corporate personality, and an individual, though McKenzie disagrees with scholars who say the Servant is clearly an individual in some poems and a corporate figure in others:

The corporate personality resolves the tension between the individual and the collective traits. The Servant is conceived as an individual figure, but he is the figure who recapitulates in himself all the religious gifts and the religious mission of Israel . . . Such a figure is not exactly a “fluid” type, as the Servant is sometimes called. The Servant remains an individual, but an ideal who reflects the genuine character of all Israel (McKenzie, 1968: LIII, LIV).

While the Servant songs are not predictions of the future, they are “insights” into the future: “Unless Israel accepts the Servant as its incorporation, it cannot keep faith with Yahweh” (McKenzie, 1968: LV).
Likewise, Westermann (1969) takes the position that the Servant songs form a special strand within Second Isaiah, but argues they originated with Second Isaiah himself, rather than a disciple, as is argued by McKenzie.\textsuperscript{92} And, like McKenzie, Westermann takes something of a middle ground in his interpretation of the Servant’s identity and work, associating the Servant with the prophet himself, thereby leaning towards an individual interpretation, while stressing the cryptic language of the text, which he deems deliberate.

On principle, their [the songs] exegesis must not be controlled by the question, “Who is this servant of God?” Instead, we must do them justice by recognising that precisely this is what they neither tell nor intend to tell us . . . The cryptic, veiled language used is deliberate. This is true of every one of the songs alike . . . (Westermann, 1969: 93).

Writing of Isa 49:6, which he says seems to rule out the collective interpretation, Westermann argues that it is only here that the particular Servant, most likely the prophet himself, can be spoken of as the Servant, among a whole series of servants (Westermann, 1969: 211). The third song, Isa 50:4-9, seems to back this up, since it is clearly a confession by a minister of the Word: “While this does not prove that the Servant is the prophet Deutero-Isaiah, it does show that he regarded his task, his sufferings and his relationship to God as those of a prophet” (Westermann, 1969: 228).

Harry M. Orlinsky likewise favours the view that the Servant was not only an

\textsuperscript{92} McKenzie (1968: XLI) argued the songs were written by a disciple, and so belonged properly to Third Isaiah.
individual but the prophet Second Isaiah (1977: 77). His mission was to Israel in exile, and it was the Jews in Babylon who proved to be the cause of his suffering. Orlinsky admits that some of the references to the Servant in Second Isaiah are to the nation, but that the songs are definitely concerned with an individual. His work includes a close reading of each of the songs, the first three of which constitute “a statement by the prophet himself . . . in which he rebukes his fellow Judean exiles for not having more faith than they do” (Orlinsky, 1977: 90). Orlinsky argues that the fourth song should be limited to Isa 53:1-12, and also argues against one popular reading of the chapter, which views the Servant’s suffering as vicarious:

Once it is realised that the person in 53 did not die but would live to see grandchildren . . . , that his career was essentially the same as that of so many other prophets in the Bible . . . and that he suffered (but not vicariously!) at the hands of the very Israelites to whom he was sent by God to admonish and persuade, then it is only natural that it is our prophet himself, Second Isaiah, who is that person (Orlinsky, 1977: 92).

R.N. Whybray (1983) takes a position similar to that of Orlinsky. Not only was the Servant the prophet Second Isaiah, his death was neither a sacrifice, nor was it vicarious. His suffering came as a direct result of his prophetic call, which included a politically explosive message in the historical context—that Babylon was about to fall. According to Whybray, the prophet bore the sins of many “not in the sense of suffering instead of the many . . . but of enduring additional and exceptional suffering” (Whybray, 1983: 78). Whybray also notes the ambiguity of the Servant’s characterisation, but flattens it by arguing that instead of treating each description as equally valid, only one of them, that of the Servant as an individual, should be
treated as normative:

It may be that of the various features of the Servant portrayed here only one set is directly descriptive, while the others are allusive and intend to present him as embodying in his person all that was positive in Israel’s earlier traditions (Whybray, 1983: 69).

Others from this period who interpret the Servant as an individual, though for different reasons, include F. Duane Lindsey (1985),93 W.A.M. Beuken (1990),94 and Rikki Watts (1990). The latter, while acknowledging the merits of the argument that the Servant is Second Isaiah, actually returns to the view that he is an ideal figure who is yet to come. Watts points to the difference between the clear identification of Cyrus (in Isa 44:28, 45:1 and 45:13) and the obscure depiction of the Servant as an indication that he is not an historical figure. He is an “unknown individual” with a mission to “turn the remnant back to God” (Watts, 1990: 54):

Who is this deliverer? The prophet simply does not know, but he recognises that he will need to be an exceptional figure, which may account for the idealistic portrayal (Watts, 1990: 58).

Anthony R. Ceresko (1994) takes the position that the Servant was Second Isaiah, though Isa 53, the work of the Servant’s disciples, is “a thanksgiving hymn celebrating the vindication of the prophet’s preaching” (Ceresko, 1994: 43). R. Bergey’s (1997) emphasis is on the Servant as an individual who prefigures Christ.

93. Lindsey pursues the traditional Christian messianic view.

94. Beuken discusses the Servant as an individual whose promise of righteous offspring is fulfilled in the servants of Third Isaiah, chapters 56-66. However, Beuken makes no attempt to identify the Servant.
Bergey points to the parallels between their missions—the Servant is crowned with success, while Christ is elevated to the highest position, namely, the right hand of God (Bergey, 1997: 188).

One of the richer interpretations of the Servant to emerge in recent times is that of R.E. Clements (1998), who seeks to understand the fluctuation between individual and collective depictions of the Servant in Second Isaiah by finding parallels in the roles of kingship, prophecy and the Deuteronomic portrayal of Moses (Clements, 1998: 42). Firstly, Clements rejects the idea that the Servant is a literary creation that is meant to personify the nation. He argues the language of the fourth Servant song, in particular, is “too exceptional” and the details of the Servant’s suffering “too precise, for a straightforward poetic device to have led to its creation” (Clements, 1998: 42). Clements seeks to clarify the significance of the Servant’s suffering to the speaking “we” of Isa 53, and suggests that it was related to the absence of the temple in exile and the inability of the people to make sin-offerings to maintain their relationship with Yahweh:

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Now Deutero-Isaiah introduces his boldest of assertions, that God will accept the sufferings of the Servant-Israel, perhaps largely focused on the specific sufferings of the unnamed prophet himself, as the ’ašam by which the restored nation will be purified (Clements, 1998: 51).
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John N. Oswalt (1998) represents the continuing conservative evangelical position on Isa 53—namely, that the Servant, of the songs at least, is an individual, the Messiah, who represents Israel, and whose purpose Christ fulfils. Oswalt argues
that the Servant of the songs is distinguished from the Servant outside the songs by purpose—the Servant outside the songs plays a passive role, and is called only to “witness” to Yahweh (Oswalt, 1998: 109), while the Servant of the songs is actively obedient to Yahweh, and through his service “Israel will be enabled to perform the service of blessing the nations” (108). The presence of the term Israel as a designation for the Servant speaks against the theory that the Servant is the prophet himself, since “no prophet ever thought of himself as the ideal Israel” (Oswalt, 1998: 291). Pointedly, Oswalt concludes that the Servant is no mere human individual. While Oswalt’s interpretation, and the traditional approach that he represents, is widely attacked by many modern scholars, Oswalt does make a point about the servant that is generally agreed upon:

If the expending of so much scholarly effort has produced so little agreement, there must be something about the text itself that resists over neat conclusions (Oswalt, 1998: 377).  

Another scholar who leans towards an individual interpretation, Michael Barré, also highlights a significant aspect of the Servant’s role—that in the last song he does not speak. Barré (2000: 24) essentially argues that the Servant is presented as a wisdom figure in Isa 53, in contrast to the other songs where he is presented as a

95. This precise point was made by David J.A. Clines in I, He, We and They, in which, after reviewing the “multiplicity of interpretation” surrounding the Servant, he argued that ambiguity itself was the key to understanding the most well-known servant song, Isa 53: “What if the force of the poem—to say nothing of the poetry of the poem—lies in its very unforthcomingness, its refusal to be precise and to give information, its stubborn concealment of the kind of data that critical scholarship yearns to get its hands on as the building-blocks for the construction of its hypotheses?” (Clines, 1976: 25, emphasis original).
royal or prophetic figure. However, when it comes to the question of the Servant’s purpose, Barré notes that what is in focus in Isa 53 is not what the Servant does, but what Yahweh does through him:

No speech of any kind is attributed to him in this song . . . His “teaching”—or rather, Yahweh’s teaching through him—consists of what God does to him rather than anything he accomplishes (Barré, 2000: 24).

Finally, Hermann Spieckermann (2004) has given voice to another aspect of the Servant’s depiction—that of his “namelessness”. Spieckermann argues for an individual interpretation, but with some reservations. He argues that the collective interpretation of the Servant is tied up with the “collective consciousness that soon began to develop in the postexilic period” (Spieckermann, 2004: 15), but which, significantly, leaves no redactional traces in the final Servant song, Isa 53, where the Servant is clearly depicted as an individual. Spieckermann argues that the Servant’s “namelessness” throughout Second Isaiah has had certain interpretive consequences that may not have been part of the text’s original intention:

Just as it is true that a precise identification of the Servant is avoided in view of the prophetic background (no individual prophet fits the bill), so also it is true that the Servant’s namelessness could misleadingly imply that the Servant’s task can always be taken up afresh by particular persons in the future (Spieckermann, 2004: 15).

What Spieckermann describes as “misleading”—the idea of the Servant’s openness to being reinterpreted in light of future “servants” who take up his mission afresh—becomes a defining characterisation for those who understand the Servant as a “fluid” character who cannot be defined by either individual or collective.
interpretations, but must accommodate both.

2.5.4.3. Fluid interpretations

A stream of interpretations that have attempted to accommodate the various depictions of the Servant has flowed alongside those of the collective and individual interpretations throughout the modern history of approaches to Second Isaiah. We have grouped these interpretations under the title “fluid”, since, while they approach the ambiguous characterisation of the Servant differently, they have in common the belief that the Servant is changeable, that he is both a group and an individual, though not necessarily at the same time.

H.H. Rowley’s (1965) suggestion represents the most popular approach in this category—that the Servant began as a personification of the nation, but became a person. This approach sees a linear development in the characterisation of the Servant, from the early Servant passages that depict him as Jacob-Israel, to the later passages, culminating in Isa 53, which depicts him as a fully-fledged individual. This view generally regards Isa 49 as the pivot on which the Servant’s identity turns. Rowley notes that the first Servant song is the closest of the four in style to the Israel passages outside the songs, but in the second song the prophet recognises that Israel must be purified—there must be a mission to Israel (Rowley, 1965: 53-54). In the fourth song the prophetic writer realises that suffering will be central to this mission, and that it will focus on an individual. In Rowley’s view this individual was still to
come at the time of the text’s composition:

In so far as the thought of these songs is of an individual Servant, in whom the mission of Israel reaches its supreme point, it seems incredible to me that it can be other than a future figure. To describe in these terms any figure of earlier history of whom we have knowledge seems utterly out of the question; to suppose that some nameless contemporary of the prophet was imagined to justify such language, yet left no ripple on the course of history, is equally beyond belief (Rowley, 1965: 54-55).

Rowley is keen to highlight the differences between his approach and that of Christopher North, who, as we have already seen, views the Servant as a “pyramid” whose foundation was the nation and whose peak was the person of Jesus. Rowley’s position is that the Servant figure oscillates between both the collective and individual characterisations:

I find development from the thought of Israel as the Servant to the thought of an individual Servant par excellence, without abandoning the thought of Israel as still the Servant (Rowley, 1965: 56).

Morna D. Hooker’s (1959) approach is similar. Hooker argues that the Servant represents a number of concepts at any one moment—he is Israel, the prophet, and the Messiah all at once, and although one concept may be dominant the presence of the others cannot be denied:

This fluidity is not . . . a “linear” development, which moves from one idea to another, rejecting one figure and choosing a new one: there is, on the contrary, a continual oscillation between one concept and another, so that various images may be in the poet’s mind at one time (1959: 44).

John Goldingay (1976; 1984; 2005; 2007b) has consistently argued for a more linear development of the Servant figure. What begins as a calling to Israel becomes a calling to the individual because of Israel’s intransigence (Goldingay,
1976: 99). This shift is seen most vividly in Isa 49, where the prophet is named Israel.96 Yahweh points to the prophet and says “You are the one true Israelite who is responding to me, you are the one through whom I will win Israel back to myself and then bring light to the nations” (Goldingay, 1976: 100). In his later work Goldingay argues there is a development within the calling itself. What began as reassurance of Israel’s status with God (Goldingay, 1984: 90) becomes a mission to bring Yahweh’s judgment and a covenant relationship to the world (94).

Peter Wilcox and David Paton-Williams (1988) note that the development of the Servant as a character reflects the shifts in the text of Second Isaiah. Their detailed study of the Servant songs, which Wilcox and Paton-Williams relate to their literary context, contra Duhm, highlights not only that outside the songs the Servant is always Israel, but that only from chapter 49 does the Servant’s identity become an issue. In chapters 40-48 the Servant is unambiguously associated with Israel. After chapter 49 it is the prophet himself who lies behind the Servant (Wilcox & Paton-Williams, 1988: 81).

Henning Graf Reventlow (1998) also sees a development in the figure of the Servant, but not in a linear or literary sense. The growth takes place from one redactional development to the next. For example, in the first layer the Servant is identified with Cyrus the Persian king (Reventlow, 1998: 32). A second redaction

96. Goldingay argues the natural way to read Isa 49:1-6 is as the prophet’s testimony (Goldingay, & Payne, 2007b: 159).
interprets the first two songs collectively, associating the Servant with Israel or Zion. Ultimately, the Servant of Isa 53 is an individual. This, the fourth song, is a commentary on the third, and the Servant’s mission described here is congruent with the commission the Servant received in the first two.

Christopher R. Seitz (2001) reads Second Isaiah as an unfolding literary drama and perceives the Servant’s development in light of it. His position is similar to that of Goldingay. The Servant is announced as Israel-Jacob in the earlier chapters, but is presented by God as an individual from chapter 49 onwards. In this chapter the prophet himself, while never explicitly adopting the title “prophet”, accepts the purpose that had been Israel’s:

It is a recommissioning in the light of developing circumstances at this particular juncture in the discourse, involving the role of Israel, the servant-author, and the nations . . . Language once applied to Israel is now applied to the servant, whose task (though once hidden) has been and remains to Jacob-Israel (Seitz, 2001: 429).

Seitz pays special attention to Isa 53 where, he argues, there is a congruence of the Servant’s various roles, a coming together of his identities:

The servant’s death is reckoned as representative of Israel’s death and suffering at the hands of the nations. Whatever justice was required in God’s judgment of the people, it is also true that, as with Zion (40:1-2), they bore a punishment at the hands of the nations that was overfull . . . and misunderstood and misinterpreted by the nations themselves (Seitz, 2001: 461-462).

Seitz argues that Isa 53 depicts the death of an individual Servant, whose own servants then describe the realisation among the nations that the representation of Israel in the Servant’s suffering has effected the removal of sin (Seitz, 2001: 462).

Childs takes a similar position (2001: 385). His commentary takes the now
unusual step of tackling the book of Isaiah as a whole. By doing so Childs makes no claim for a single authorship—his canonical approach leads him to exegete the text as a unified whole, whose final word is that which resonates with the canonical intentions of the interpretive community that accepted the text as scripture. In that light, Childs views Isa 40-55 as a unified work, and treats the Servant on the basis of both his literary and diachronic development. Like Seitz, Goldingay and others he argues that while the Servant was Israel in the earlier section of Second Isaiah, from Isa 49:3 he is the prophet. The prophet carries not only the title “my servant” but also its office (Childs, 2001: 384). From chapter 49 the “metaphorical usage” of the corporate image of the Servant becomes “more and more strained” (Childs, 2001: 384).

Blenkinsopp (2002) also sees development in the identity of the Servant, but he identifies the Servant of 42:1-4 as Cyrus (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 118). The remaining twelve occurrences of the term “servant” in chapters 40-48 refer to Jacob, as ancestor and representative of the entire nation, and the references from chapter 49 on are to the prophet. Blenkinsopp argues the idea of the prophet taking the place of the nation in its divine commission goes back to the Deuteronomists, for whom Moses “the protoprophet is the pre-eminent Servant of God” (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 118). Blenkinsopp shares with Clements (1998) the idea that the purpose of this individual Servant who now stands in for the nation is as one who suffers violence and death as a substitutionary sacrifice:
The idea would be that now that the temple is in ruins and sacrifice no longer possible, the Servant serves as a substitute for the sacrificial guilt offering, one that is accepted by God (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 120).

Hans-Jürgen Hermisson’s (2004) approach echoes the dialectical approach of Clifford (1984) when he argues that one-sided interpretations of the Servant as “individual” or “corporate” are too simple (Hermisson, 2004: 16). Accepting as axiomatic the presence of Servant songs, Hermisson follows the modern line that the Servant within them is an individual, the prophet himself. However, the prophet cannot complete in himself the mission that Yahweh has given the nation:

The individual prophetic Servant Second Isaiah cannot fulfill his worldwide mission of being a light to the nations without God’s Servant Israel, whom he calls back to God and prepares to be the prime exhibit before the world of God’s saving power (Hermisson, 2004: 16).

It is only in the cooperation between God’s Servant the prophet and God’s Servant the nation that the Servant’s purpose is fulfilled. Hermisson further argues that what modern interpreters see as contradictions or paradoxes (or ambiguities) in the text’s depiction of the Servant is a sign of the history of interpretation of the Servant himself, already under development in Second Isaiah, and throughout the book of Isaiah. The collective interpretation is that of the third or fourth generation of readers:

One must therefore speak of both servants in order to do justice to the phenomenon of a Servant who is spoken of both inside and outside the Servant

97. Similarly, Hengel and Bailey argue in the same volume that the apparently contradictory depictions are different aspects of the same Servant: “Interpretations that seem to us to compete with each other, such as the collective interpretation and the one focused on an eschatological redeemer figure, can stand side by side as different ‘aspects’ of the same text and topic” (Hengel, & Bailey, 2004: 79).
Songs, with the same predicates applied to figures with different tasks (Hermisson, 2004: 19).

These servants include the nation Israel, which is called to follow the highway home, and the prophet, who brings exilic Israel together and gets the journey underway.

2.6. Conclusions

There is a growing awareness in Isaiah scholarship that the old polarities concerning the Servant are not adequate for a full discussion of his identity and purpose. To say that he is either a collective body or an individual, when clearly the text presents him as both, is to risk imposing presuppositions upon the text that skew the final reading and even obscure the interpretive key that could unlock the exegetical treasures of the Servant figure and the purpose of his presence in the text.

Two discrete interpretive streams have emerged from our review of the history of the Servant’s interpretation. The first comprises scholars who argue that the Servant can only be a corporate identity, such as the nation Israel or a section of it, or an individual, such as the prophet himself or some other historical or ideal figure. The second stream comprises scholars who want to account for the apparent contradictory or ambiguous depictions of the Servant by accepting them as aspects of the one character—they understand the Servant as both Israel and an individual. These scholars disagree on the nature of this relationship. Some, such as Childs and Seitz, argue for a linear or synchronic development (that also embraces diachronic developments) associated with the Servant’s calling, while others see a dialectical or
oscillating relationship in which the “Servant” as an office can only be fulfilled by the prophet and the nation together. This “fluidity” in the Servant’s characterisation is not a new observation, but it seems to have become the preferred starting point in many recent studies, perhaps as a direct consequence of the increase in literary approaches to the book of Isaiah, which are more accommodating of concepts such as ambiguity, contradiction and dialectic.

This study also takes the fluid interpretation as a starting point, and in the next chapter explores recent developments in literary studies in order to develop a methodology that advances our capacity to comprehend the ambiguity of the Servant’s characterisation, in the hope of addressing the issues raised in the introduction.
3. A NEW LITERARY APPROACH TO AN OLD INTERPRETIVE PROBLEM

3.1. The problem of the Servant’s constitution

The fluidity of the Servant’s characterisation is caused by the absence of any definitive image of the Servant in the poems and oracles that comprise Second Isaiah. As we said in the Introduction, the author never provides a fixed objectivised image by which we can identify the Servant figure. He is constructed wholly by dialogue. The prophet constitutes the Servant by composing discourses that are spoken to him and by him, and that are spoken about him by others. A particular example of the latter is Isa 53, which comes closest to providing an objective account of the Servant. However, even there we do not actually see what the Servant has done, nor are we given the kind of finalised image that would remove the ambiguity surrounding his identity. The discourse is constructed as a confession, so that what we see is the impact of the Servant rather than the Servant himself.

One of the questions we raised in the Introduction was, How are we to interpret a character who is constituted wholly by dialogue? In tackling the question it will be important to develop a reading strategy that can accommodate the peculiar make-up of the Servant. This is the purpose of the present chapter.

The primary issue facing interpreters is not who the Servant is, but how he has been constituted. Since he has been constituted in an unconventional way,
conventional methods of interpretation have limited value when it comes to tackling difficult issues such as his fluid characterisation. Many scholars are left to merely observe the ambiguity of his characterisation, rather than engage with it as a key to understanding the Servant’s function within the book. This is essentially a literary problem that requires a literary solution. While we are wary of imposing modern literary techniques upon an ancient text that originally functioned in ways quite different from modern literature, it is clear that the figure of the Servant emerges from the text of Second Isaiah in a way that is very different from characters in other forms of (equally) ancient literature, such as Exodus or Samuel. Whether or not the

1. Recent decades have seen a shift towards the application of literary methodologies to the Bible, not only from within traditional biblical scholarship, but also from without, with works by scholars such as Alter (1981; 1985) and Frye (1982). Frye approaches the Bible as a literary critic in order to examine its power as a generator of myth and metaphor, and thereby offer some explanation as to its influence on (particularly) English literature. Alter and Kermode (1987) take a similar approach: to demonstrate that the Bible is a great literary work with a particular literary force and authority, by which it has made a lasting mark on western literature. Anticipating criticism of a literary approach to the Bible from segments of traditional biblical scholarship, Alter and Kermode argue that literary criticism has to precede other methodologies: “Literary analysis must come first, for unless we have a sound understanding of what the text is doing and saying, it will not be of much value in other respects” (1987: 2). In the treatment of Second Isaiah in the same collection, Schökel describes Second Isaiah’s style as “a rhetoric directed to and against the audience, based on an enthusiastic and contagious lyricism” (1987: 174). See also Norton (1993a; 1993b) for an extensive history of the argument for reading scripture as literature.

2. Habel’s warning is appropriate: “The critic . . . must guard against arguing too quickly from modern literary techniques in the assessment of an ancient text like the Old Testament. In ancient times sources of an oral or written nature were normally used without reference to their origin. Many works seem to have been composed by several authors over a long period of time. Editors apparently modified the work of their forefathers so as to bring them up to date or promote a new point of view. Thus the literary critic should also try to relate his literary findings to their historical context” (Habel, 1971: 7).

3. Our approach resonates with Clines’s view that we must submit our reading strategies to those suggested by the specific OT texts themselves; in other words, we must allow scripture to function as literature (1980: 30). See also Clines (1982; 1995).
collection of Second Isaiah originated in oral or written form, this study will demonstrate that the final stratum in the compositional growth of Second Isaiah reveals an intention to craft the Servant figure according to a literary design. If this is the case then how the Servant is constituted is bound up with the question of his function within the collection.

While these issues relate specifically to the Servant of Second Isaiah, they also resonate with the work that has been done on the OT generally by rhetorical critics, who focus not only on the issue of how biblical texts have been constituted,

4. Robert Lowth regarded Isaiah as “the first of all poets for sublimity and elegance” (Lowth, 1971: 166). Lowth’s collection of lectures, De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum (originally published in 1753, with the English translation Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews published in 1787), are among the first published works to apply techniques of literary criticism to the Bible. The question of whether the prophets are poets (writers) is addressed directly by Geller (1995). Geller effectively demonstrates, with an exegesis of Isaiah 40:6-8, that Second Isaiah possessed a skill common to poets: the ability to generate meaning on a duality of layers through the use of ambiguous imagery. But Geller ultimately has to concede that where one critic sees an artist creating potentialities of meaning in the manipulation of imagery, another sees problems to be eliminated. While Geller concludes that Second Isaiah can be a poet, it remains open as to whether he may be a poet while also claiming to be a prophet. Can he be both the one who utters God’s word, and the one who shapes that word as a craftsman shapes any object? Geller’s questions cut to the heart of the dilemma that faces both form and rhetorical critics. But Geller himself provides a clue as to how the two methodologies can be mutually beneficial, when he observes “Literary analysis can only plough a field that has been cleared of stumps and stones by historical criticism” (Geller, 1995: 157).

5. Gitay argues: “It does not matter from the rhetorical perspective if DI wrote his addresses in advance or not. Even if DI wrote his prophecies, they were not read in silence but aloud. Hence, the prophet, in order to appeal to his audience, chose his words carefully for their aural effect” (Gitay, 1981: 45).

6. Muilenburg is credited with being the first to apply a rhetorical critical method to Second Isaiah, though there are variations in the term’s among students of the French rhetorical critical school and the American school that followed Muilenburg (see Meynet, 1998). Muilenburg argues that the units comprising Second Isaiah are poems rather than speeches, and that they exhibit signs of literary craftsmanship. They are “so elaborate in their composition and in the detail of technical devices that they must have been written rather than spoken” (Muilenburg, 1956b: 386). A school of Isaiah scholars whose work can be categorised as rhetorical criticism has followed Muilenburg’s lead, though their methods are often quite different. See, for example, Exum, whose stated goal is to study the “effect produced when the material under scrutiny is read as a literary whole” (1982: 108); Kuntz (1982: 143), who argues rhetorical criticism, by emphasising the synchronic aspects of a text as well as its unique features, can “further the work of the form critic with his penchant for highlighting
but also on how the text’s constitution contributes to its hortatory impact—that is, how the text is able to persuade its audience to “act and think according to its [the Bible’s] norms” (Tull, 1999: 160). They examine both a text’s constitution and the way it interacts with its literary (and sometimes historical) contexts in order to ascertain how texts persuade their audiences. Tull is one of a number of scholars to have put forward the ideas of Soviet literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin as a way of opening up new interpretive possibilities in this area. Bakhtin’s ideas are grounded in his heterogeneous view of life, and speak directly to the dialogic interaction of texts

7. Persuasion was the prophets’ goal. Trible (1994: 44), citing John Barth, says the prophets sought to justify to their hearers the ways of God with the world: “That goal required rhetorical acumen because the correlations between historical events and divine ordering were neither obvious nor necessary.”

8. “Dialogic” is Bakhtin’s term. In Bakhtin’s view all utterances are oriented dialogically to their linguistic contexts, and to the “apperceptive background” of the reader/audience (Bakhtin, 1981: 279). Tull clarifies this idea: “Bakhtin calls attention to three loci where some sort of dialogue is operative. All three are points of intertextual exchange affecting the text and its reception by the reader. The first is the existence of a variety of other, foreign, even competing utterances already present in the environment into which the text enters, that attach themselves to the subject about which the text wishes to speak; the second, an internal dialogism operating within the text as it responds to the utterances in its environment; and the third, the active, sometimes competing responses of the audience” (Tull, 1999: 166-167).
with their literary, cultural, and ideological contexts. We have identified already that
the major obstacle to a definitive identification of the Servant in Second Isaiah is the
presence in the text of multiple discourses, or voices, by which the Servant is
constituted. Since Bakhtin’s theories speak directly to this type of literary
phenomenon our study looks to Bakhtin for a methodology that will contribute a
fresh voice to the ongoing dialogue regarding the Servant’s identity and function in
the collection of Second Isaiah. This is done with some caution, since Bakhtin’s
theories arose out of his critical work on Fyodor Dostoevsky’s prose fiction. It is
legitimate to question whether it is appropriate to apply Bakhtin’s theories to the
biblical text, which is neither wholly prose nor wholly fiction, and, secondly, how
appropriate it is to apply them to the predominantly poetic texts of Second Isaiah.

9. Bakhtin’s influence in literary criticism, and more recently in biblical criticism, has grown
posthumously. He was born in November 1895, and died in March 1975. Although much of the work
that has brought Bakhtin to prominence in the west in recent years was begun, in varying forms, in the
1920s, he was not discovered in the English-speaking world until 1953, when an American scholar
This was prior to his re-discovery in the Soviet Union. From the 1920s until the 1950s he remained in
relative obscurity—even during the productive years of 1924-1929, during which he is supposed to
have written a number of books under associates’ names, Bakhtin was prominent chiefly among
participants of the so-called Leningrad Circle, a group of Leningrad intellectuals, philosophers, artists
and religious thinkers, among whom Bakhtin was recognised as a central figure. On this see Todorov
(1984: 5-11). Scholars debate the extent of Bakhtin’s contribution to a number of books signed by
others. Only the undisputed Bakhtin book written during this period, the Dostoevsky book, was
received with any enthusiasm at the time, and this was shortly after his arrest in 1929. Bakhtin’s
subsequent exile put paid to any further recognition of his theories. Bakhtin would have remained in
obscurity if it had not been for the tenacity and resourcefulness of a Moscow University student,
Vadim Valerianovich Kozhinov, who had become fixated on getting Bakhtin’s work published.
Because of his efforts, and despite Bakhtin’s own relative ambivalence, the revised and expanded
Dostoevsky book was published in 1963, followed by a work on Rabelais two years later. The
subsequent national and international acclaim afforded Bakhtin had what has been described as a
“tunnelling” affect (Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 96), or a collapsing of the biographical and
bibliographical details of his life and work into one short period, so that a sense of “belatedness”
(Clark, & Holquist, 1984: viii) pervades the impression one has of his career.
Some of these issues have been addressed by the work of a growing number of biblical scholars who have brought Bakhtin’s theories to bear on a range of texts.\footnote{Combrink, for example, for whom Bakhtin is “definitely relevant” to the polymorphous character of the Bible, says: “It can be appropriate to use a dialogic model acknowledging the heterogeneous textuality of the Bible where narrative segments and other forms like laws, songs, proverbs interact in the form of a dialogue, of statement and response” (Combrink, 1996: 119).}

The following section is a sample of their different approaches.

### 3.2. Bakhtin and biblical criticism

In his work *Dialogues of the Word: The Bible as Literature According to Bakhtin* (1993) Walter L. Reed uses Bakhtin’s theories of dialogical relations for a fresh perspective on the issue of the Bible’s unity and diversity. An important aspect of Bakhtin’s dialogism is that a multiplicity of unmerged voices is essential for dialogical truth to be generated. Unity in such cases is the dialogic event itself, not the merging of voices into a singular monologic point-of-view. Reed’s fresh contribution to the discussion of the Bible’s unity and diversity is in seeing the Bible through Bakhtinian eyes, and describing the Christian canon as a dialogic event—the interaction of numerous distinct voices. He speaks of the “conversation” between “the Bibles”, by which he means the Hebrew and Christian canons (Reed, 1993: 112).

Carol A. Newsom has argued that an understanding of Bakhtin’s dialogism is not only helpful when studying the Bible but is essential for breaking the monologic impasse that often arises between theologians and biblical scholars.
Newsom addresses this impasse in her article *Bakhtin, the Bible and Dialogic Truth* (1996). She argues biblical scholars have discovered that many of the monologic assumptions made by theologians are at odds with the diverse voices in the text, but instead of proposing new ways of reading that reflect these multiple points of view scholars have sought to isolate the voices from each other:

Driven by the ‘self-evident’ claims of monologic truth . . . biblical criticism attempted to disentangle the various voices, so that one could identify the different individual monologic voices. That seemed to be the only way to deal with the phenomenon of a text whose multivoicedness contradicted the reigning notions of authorship (Newsom, 1996: 293).

The approach of both theologians and biblical scholars reflects their incapacity to think of the Bible in dialogic terms. But the Bible, argues Newsom, while very different to the type of literature that gave rise to Bakhtin’s theories of dialogism, certainly is not monologic: “There is no single ‘author’ who coordinates and controls meaning across the whole. One can easily identify a plurality of unmerged voices in the Bible” (Newsom, 1996: 296).

Newsom’s justification for using Bakhtin’s theories in biblical studies is based on two assertions. The first is that, as already noted above, Bakhtin’s dialogism is neither confined to literature, nor is it merely descriptive:

It is a prescriptive model for understanding persons and communities and for the conduct of discourse. This double orientation of his thinking makes it particularly fitting to bring to a problem of how to understand the Bible in relation to theological discourse (Newsom, 1996: 293).

Secondly, dialogism is the key to a new, richer dialogue between theologians and biblical scholars:
Since polyphonic texts by their nature draw the reader into engagement with the content of their ideas, this way of reading the Bible might also lead to nonmonological forms of biblical theology that could provide a way around the impasse that frequently develops between biblical studies and theology (Newsom, 1996: 296).

Newsom points out that neither theologians nor biblical critics need Bakhtin to tell them there are multiple voices in the text. But Bakhtin can help “conceptualise the unity of the text as an event of dialogic truth” (Newsom, 1996: 301).

One of Barbara Green’s specific concerns in her monograph *Mikhail Bakhtin and Biblical Scholarship: An Introduction* (2000) is the relevance of Bakhtin’s theories to the field of OT scholarship. Since the social and historical rootedness of an utterance was so important to Bakhtin, Green questions how appropriate it is to attempt a reading of the OT based on his thought, when the reconstruction of the social matrix of the text is so troublesome. As Green points out, the field of OT scholarship

is faced with severe challenges to recovery of adequate, clear information for understanding well the referents of production and setting . . . Additionally, despite or because of the difficulty of historical access, (Hebrew) biblical studies has been so dominated by historical reconstruction and genetic issues as to leave shriveled the questions of language that also interested Bakhtin (Green, 2000: 28).

This issue is germane to the subject of this thesis, since not only are historical referents rare in Second Isaiah, but even assuming that the historical context of the

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11. Newsom’s case for a Bakhtinian reading of the Bible is advanced in her monograph, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations* (2003). In it, Newsom argues scholarship has found it difficult to find a way around the problems associated with the contradictory theologies reflected by the different genres within Job, but a Bakhtinian reading views these not as problems to be harmonised but as “elements of a rhetorical strategy essential for the creation of a polyphonic text” (Newsom, 2003: 24).
book is the Babylonian exile, the reconstruction of that context is difficult. Green answers her own concerns by arguing that “the most fruitful use of Bakhtin involves not simply exegeting and explicating his work but developing it while simultaneously appropriating it” (Green, 2000: 58). In other words, we are invited to test Bakhtin’s theories on OT texts and see what happens. Bakhtin’s theories invite application. At the very least they guard the biblical scholar from the trap of making “abstract and timeless theological assertions that are generated off the Bible” (Green, 2000: 65).

Bakhtin himself hoped that his theories would be relevant beyond the field of literary criticism, so it is legitimate to apply Bakhtin’s theories to texts that are different from those that generated them. Although the collection of Second Isaiah is predominantly poetry, the heterogeneous nature of the final form of the text invites theories that accommodate multivoicedness. The application of Bakhtin’s thought to the difficult issue of the composite dialogical nature of the Servant is a heuristic exercise that offers the potential for new understanding. Before proposing a methodology that is based on Bakhtin’s ideas, it is appropriate to review the main lines of thought that provided the framework for his theories, and to highlight those theories that most inform this study.
3.3. Bakhtin’s thought

Bakhtin’s theories were concerned with the worlds, and utterances, of both fictional characters, and flesh and blood people. As Emerson points out, Bakhtin did not use his thought to illuminate literature, but used literature, “quite selectively, to illustrate the course of his thought” (Emerson, 1997: 74). Bakhtin saw himself primarily not as a literary theorist but as a “thinker”, a philosophical anthropologist (Clark, & Holquist, 1984: 3) whose fundamental principle was that “it is impossible to conceive of any being outside of the relations that link it to the other” (Todorov, 1984: 94). As Emerson summarises, Bakhtin’s assumption was that “genuine knowledge and enablement can begin only when my ‘I’ consults another ‘I’ and then returns to its own place, humbled and enhanced” (Emerson, 1997: 26). How this idea impacts the relations between authors and characters, and between readers and characters, can be seen taking shape in Bakhtin’s early essay (ca. 1920-1923).  

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12. Todvor (1984: 11-12) breaks Bakhtin’s “intellectual biography” down into six periods: 1. Before 1926, characterised by writings of a “general theoretical nature”; 2. 1926-1929, described as Bakhtin’s “sociological” period, in which he was working out ideas that would feature more prominently in the decade following; 3. 1929-1935, during which Bakhtin was in exile, developing his theories concerning the utterance and dialogism; 4. 1936-1941, which gave birth to Bakhtin’s works on the chronotope and literary history; 5. 1942-1952, during which Bakhtin taught full-time but produced no texts (or, at least, any that have been discovered); 6. 1953-1975, during which time Bakhtin revised older works for publication. The theories that inform this thesis were developed in periods 3. and 4., but the works in which they were finally published may have originated much earlier. The first versions of Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, for example, were written as early as 1922 (Todorov, 1984: 12).

13. Emerson says that Bakhtin regarded himself as a myslitel’, a “thinker”, which, in its original Russian context, describes “an intellectual with eclectic interdisciplinary interests and a philosophising bent” (Emerson, 1997: 73).
and Hero in Aesthetic Activity (Bakhtin, 1990: 81-87).

One idea is said to undergird much of Bakhtin’s thought—that of *simultaneity*, that *identity* encompasses differences not through a process of homogenisation, or by being *the same as*, but by being *simultaneous with*, thereby allowing for difference, variety, freedom and unpredictability. Clark and Holquist (1984: 9) see simultaneity as the larger category behind Bakhtin’s theories of polyphony in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Bakhtin, 1984),<sup>14</sup> and heteroglossia<sup>15</sup> in *The Dialogic Imagination* (Bakhtin, 1981,<sup>16</sup> both of which inform this thesis. Bakhtin’s own ideas of simultaneity were informed by Dostoevsky, whose artistic vision, Bakhtin observed, was not categorised by evolution, or progression along a temporal line, but by *coexistence* and *interaction*: “He saw and conceived his world primarily in terms of space, not time” (Bakhtin, 1984: 28).

Despite the prominence of simultaneity as an idea in Bakhtin’s work, Clark and Holquist caution against the search for an overarching idea in Bakhtin, whose thought emphasised variety, difference, heterogeneity, dialogue, performance, actuality, the carnivalisation of authority, unpredictability, uncertainty, unfinalisability, and the centrifugal forces of existence, which “compel movement,

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14. Hereafter referred to as PDP.

15. Heteroglossia (other voices) is Bakhtin’s way of describing how every utterance is shot through with other, alien voices. It is “another’s speech in another’s language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way” (Bakhtin, 1981: 324).

16. Hereafter referred to as DI.
becoming, and history” and “long for change and new life” (Clark, & Holquist, 1984: 8). Bakhtin viewed existence as a struggle between these forces and the centripetal forces of stasis, homogenisation, sameness, and death. He denounced monologism—the idea that truth can be contained in a single belief system, god, text, or person—because such “truth” can be controlled and manipulated. He located meaning in the community: “My voice can mean, but only with others—at times in chorus, but at the best of times in dialogue” (Clark, & Holquist, 1984: 12). Bakhtin’s development of the idea of dialogism, from within the Soviet system that was committed absolutely to the ideals of monologism, seems to have been both a reaction against that system, but was achieved also in response to the uncertainties and heterogeneity of life. His belief was that these vagaries were not to be feared and managed, but acknowledged and celebrated.

3.3.1. Polyphony and dialogism

Polyphony is the word used by Bakhtin to describe a literary design unique to the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky.17 For a work to be polyphonic it must be comprised of a dialogic conception of truth, and the author must assume a position relative to the

17. Bakhtin rejects suggestions by fellow literary critics that Shakespeare’s plays display polyphony, and his grounds for doing so are helpful in defining what polyphony is. His grounds are that: drama is alien to polyphony, since it can not contain multiple worlds; there is essentially only a single full-fledged hero’s voice in each of Shakespeare’s plays, while polyphony requires a plurality of full-fledged voices within a single work; and, the voices in Shakespeare’s works are not points of view on the world (they are not ideologists in the full sense of the word) in the same degree as they are in Dostoevsky (Bakhtin, 1984: 34).
novel’s characters that enables a faithful expression of that sense of truth through the characters’ individuality and unique perspectives on the world. These two concepts require further explanation.

Dialogical truth is best encapsulated by the *conversation*, in which several voices come together to create something that is quite separate from each of them, but nevertheless requires their participation. In the process their voices do not merge—they do not surrender their individuality. Indeed, a multiplicity of distinct voices is essential for a conversation to take place. Even when those voices are competing with one another the dialogue retains its integrity. Likewise, a multiplicity of voices is essential for dialogical truth to be generated, since dialogism reflects multiple and distinct perspectives (ideologies) on the world. Another way of saying this is that dialogical truth requires a “plurality of unmerged consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1984: 9).\(^\text{18}\) A polyphonic work is one in which the author has intentionally created such a multivoiced environment.

Dialogical truth has a personal, embodied and unrepeatable quality, since the utterances which comprise it are unique to the people who have made them. Indeed, for words to become an utterance, Bakhtin argues—to move beyond the logical and semantic relationships that constitute simple statements—they must be embodied,

\(^{18}\) Bakhtin characterises the monologic world as ‘Ptolemaic’: the earth, representing the author’s consciousness, is the centre around which all other consciousnesses revolve. The polyphonic world is Copernican; as the earth is but one of many planets, the author’s consciousness is but one of many consciousnesses (Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 240).
they must be uttered: “They must enter another sphere of existence: they must become discourse, that is, an utterance, and receive an author, that is, a creator of the given utterance whose position it expresses” (Bakhtin, 1984: 184, emphases original). Bakhtin calls these utterances “voice-ideas”, since they express a unique idea of the world. Voice-ideas represent “a unity of idea and personality: the idea represents a person’s integral point of view on the world, which cannot be abstracted from the person voicing it” (Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 237). In a polyphonic work the characters and their voice-ideas are integrally bound together, and emerge from the dialogue. We come to know the characters as they come to know themselves, as their voice-ideas engage with other voice-ideas. Each voice-idea is ideologically independent, even from the author. Propositional statements are not voice-ideas, since they are monologic in nature. They are not embodied, since they mean the same whether spoken by one person or by another. Neither do they require a plurality of voices to “mean”; they can be understood and expressed fully by a single consciousness. A conversation, on the other hand, can never fully be comprehended by a single mind. When “monologic thinkers” overhear a dialogue between voice-ideas they “usually try to extract just such a finalising proposition, but in doing so they are false to the dialogic process itself” (Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 237). So,

19. Bakhtin observed this personal characteristic of dialogical truth in Dostoevsky: “In Dostoevsky’s work each opinion really does become a living thing and is inseparable from an embodied human voice. If incorporated into an abstract, systemically monological context, it ceases to be what it is” (Bakhtin, 1984: 17).
dialogic truth cannot be systematised, since a system requires finalised propositions. What emerges from the dialogue is not a system but an event, the event of distinct voices interacting dialogically.20

Dialogical truth is also open-ended. The final word can never be said, since each utterance or voice-idea that comprises the dialogue is both a response to an already existing word and in itself contains an implicit invitation to dialogue. So, dialogic truth is “unfinalisable”.

Fundamental to the design of a polyphonic work is the peculiar position of the author in relation to the dialogic event. The author of a polyphonic work retains no knowledge that is “surplus” to that of their characters (Bakhtin, 1984: 75). He or she knows only what the characters are able to know and utter concerning themselves and their world. The author surrenders the conventional divine-like position of privileged knowledge in order to confront their characters as equal dialogic partners:

The new artistic position of the author with regard to the hero in Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel is a fully realised and thoroughly consistent dialogic position, one that affirms the independence, internal freedom, unfinalisability, and indeterminacy of the hero. For the author the hero is not ‘he’ and not ‘I’ but a fully valid ‘thou,’ that is, another and other autonomous ‘I’ (‘thou art’) (Bakhtin, 1984: 63).

Of course, the author of a work is always in control of it. Bakhtin does not suggest that an author is not involved in the polyphonic design, only that the author

20. “‘Event’ rather than ‘system’ gives dialogic truth its unity, a dynamic, not a propositional unity” (Newsom, 2003: 23).
intentionally constructs a dialogic event in which he or she is a participant, in the same way the characters are participants. In his earlier work Bakhtin described this process as a meeting of consciousnesses, the author’s (the I’s) and the hero’s (the other’s) (Bakhtin, 1990: 89). The best way to understand this design, argues Bakhtin, is by looking at Dostoevsky’s example: “Dostoevsky . . . creates not voiceless slaves . . . but rather free people, capable of standing alongside their creator, capable of not agreeing with him and even of rebelling against him” (Bakhtin, 1984: 6, emphases original). Dostoevsky intentionally gives his characters’ discourse the freedom to develop its own inner logic and independence as “someone else’s discourse” (Bakhtin, 1984: 65). In other words, he creates polyphony “not by giving up his power of design but by changing the nature of the design” (cited in Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 239). The author of a polyphonic work is not hidden or voiceless, nor does he or she suppress their own self-awareness. But they do not allow their consciousness—of themselves, their world, or their characters and the world of the text—to objectify the awareness of the characters, or to attach finalised, objective definitions to them (Bakhtin, 1984: 68). The author does not stand at a distance from the characters and finalise them with personalities, hopes, ideologies and back-stories, frameworks within which they then construct dialogue. The author is aware

21. Bakhtin has not gone unchallenged on this point. Critics have argued that Dostoevsky also created characters that had no voice at all, and that, on occasion, Dostoevsky was also wont to assume a superior authorial position as occurs in a conventional (monologic) novel. It is not the purpose of this paper to establish the validity of Bakhtin’s theories with regards Dostoevsky, but, rather, whether those theories can add anything to our understanding of Second Isaiah’s Servant figure. For a thorough discussion of the debate concerning Bakhtin’s “discovery” of polyphony in Dostoevsky, see Emerson (1997: 127-161).
only of that which enters the consciousness of the characters and is spoken by them. Therefore, the characters themselves have the power to mean directly, which is the reason why, Bakhtin argues, so many literary critics refer directly to the ideology of an Ivan Karamazov or a Grand Inquisitor (both characters from *The Brothers Karamazov*) (Bakhtin, 1984: 5). In a monologic work this power to mean belongs to the author alone. But polyphony subverts monologic conventions—it up-ends the world of the conventional text by making multiple points-of-view not only possible but as valid as those of the author. To summarise:

The polyphonic author . . . necessarily plays two roles in the work: he creates a world in which many disparate points of view enter into dialogue, and, in a quite distinct role, he himself participates in that dialogue. He is one of the interlocutors in the “great dialogue” that he himself has created (Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 239).

From this overview of the general features of polyphony we focus now on two sub-theories that will inform our study: the *polyphonic hero*, and *double-voicing*.

### 3.3.2. The polyphonic hero

The polyphonic hero is distinguished from the characters of a conventional, monologic work by his\(^{22}\) dialogic design. The hero is constituted primarily, if not wholly, by dialogue—by what he says, and by how he responds to what others say to him, and concerning him and his world. Dialogue is fundamental. The hero must be spoken to, pressed to make himself known, both to himself and to others, since the

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\(^{22}\) A polyphonic hero can be male or female, of course, but since we will be talking about the Servant as a polyphonic hero we will use the masculine pronoun in the present discussion to avoid ambiguity.
reader only accesses the hero via his internal discourse. Bakhtin points out that this mirrors life itself, in which the depths of the human consciousness can only be revealed dialogically. He argues it is impossible to understand humanity by objectifying people—they must be spoken to, and they must speak, in order for their hiddenness to be revealed: “Only in communion, in the interaction of one person with another, can the ‘man in man’ be revealed, for others as well as for oneself” (Bakhtin, 1984: 251-252).

Consequently, there exists no firm, external or predetermined image of the polyphonic hero. The author does not begin with an image of the hero that is then fleshed out. The author engages dialogically with the hero in order to provoke a response by which he may become known. The hero does not answer the question “who is he or she?” but only “who are you?” and “who am I?”: “Authorial discourse cannot encompass the hero and his word on all sides, cannot lock in and finalise him from without” (Bakhtin, 1984: 251). This does not mean to say that the author or another character cannot observe the polyphonic hero objectively, only that those observations must become part of the hero’s self-consciousness:

All the stable and objective qualities of a hero—his social position, the degree to which he is sociologically or characterologically typical, his habitus, his spiritual profile and even his very physical appearance—that is, everything that usually serves an author in creating a fixed and stable image of the hero, ‘who he is,’ becomes in Dostoevsky the object of the hero’s own introspection, the subject of his self-consciousness; and the subject of the author’s visualisation and representation turns out to be in fact a function of this self-consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984: 48).

The author is active in this process. He or she intentionally discards any
surplus information they may want to possess regarding the hero:

The author retains for himself, that is, for his exclusive field of vision, not a single essential definition, not a single trait, not the smallest feature of the hero: he enters it all into the field of vision of the hero himself, he casts it all into the crucible of the hero’s own self-consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984: 48).

So, the polyphonic hero is self-aware, a fully realised individual. Nothing is said about him or his world that does not enter into his self-consciousness and become an element of his voice-idea. The unique ideological position that the polyphonic hero occupies in the text is the primary reason for his presence in the polyphonic work—to embody the idea, to flesh it out, and to enable others to engage dialogically with a point-of-view that can be uttered only by the hero. Through the polyphonic hero the author is able to hear words spoken that he or she could never utter. Says Bakhtin:

The hero interests Dostoevsky as a particular point of view on the world and on oneself, as the position enabling a person to interpret and evaluate his own self and his surrounding reality. What is important to Dostoevsky is not how his hero appears in the world but first and foremost how the world appears to his hero, and how the hero appears to himself (Bakhtin, 1984: 47).

For this reason, the polyphonic hero cannot be finalised like a conventionally-constituted literary character. Since there exists no fixed, objectivised image of the hero the final word concerning him can never be said. To be comprehended they must be engaged with dialogically, and the opportunity for this dialogic event remains open. The polyphonic hero is oriented dialogically to a future that has not yet been spoken, since he stands at the threshold of new dialogic encounters.

Clearly, the Servant of Second Isaiah shares the polyphonic hero’s peculiar
characteristics. He is constituted by dialogue; there exists no fixed image of him anywhere in the collection; and he remains unfinalised and open to fresh dialogic encounter, as demonstrated by a history of interpretation in which readers have consistently seen themselves and others in light of his voice-idea (even if they did not use that precise terminology).

3.3.3. Double-voicing

Double-voicing is Bakhtin’s term for discourse that has appropriated the discourse of another, in order to restate it with the intonation of the new speaker. Double-voiced discourse

serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions (Bakhtin, 1981: 324).

In the event of double-voicing, two voices sound simultaneously, creating a multi-levelled dialogic text. The voices can be those of the author and a character, or a character speaking with words that have originated in other texts or traditions. The possibilities for double-voiced discourse are endless, because no word is spoken in isolation from other, competing words. Bakhtin argues that both voices in this dialogue—that of the original utterance, and the double-voiced discourse—know of each other, “just as two exchanges in a dialogue know of each other and are structured in this mutual knowledge of each other” (Bakhtin, 1981: 324). This means that in the event of double-voiced discourse the original utterance retains its semantic
integrity even as it is being used in another, alien discourse. The heteroglossia—other, competing voices—that infuse the original utterance are embraced by the new discourse and are brought into direct dialogic encounter with not only the new utterance, but with the audience of that utterance, so that in one discourse two dialogic plains converge. Double-voicing represents “refracted” discourse, in that an author’s intentions are served by co-opting the discourse of authors that had different intentions. So, double-voicing makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his [the new author’s] own new intentions, to serve a second master. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectivised (Bakhtin, 1981: 299-300).

This insight will be invaluable in our exegesis of the Servant discourses, since, as Tull points out about Second Isaiah, it was created by a prophet who was trying to assert “a new understanding of the divine will in the exilic situation” with all its competing voices—the traditions, theologies and ideologies of both Israel and Babylon (1997: 67). It was not created in a vacuum, but “in full awareness of the multiplicity of other possibilities, and it was designed to answer, anticipate, and overcome those alien words” (Tull Willey, 1997: 67-68). The use of double-voicing can be a powerful rhetorical tool, since by the commandeering of discourse that is, in its original form, an accepted conveyor of signification, a speaker can hang on the coattails, so to speak, of already-persuasive imagery. An example of this in Second Isaiah is the use of exodus imagery to describe the hoped-for restoration from
Babylonian exile (e.g. Isa 43:2).  

3.4. Defining the task

If Second Isaiah was written by Dostoevsky then the Servant, as a polyphonic hero, would literally reflect on the words spoken to him and about him. He would take all such words into his consciousness, even anticipate them in his own self-awareness, and subsume them within his own internal discourse. Nothing would be said that the Servant would not make part of his own self-reflection. Even the objective world around him would be drawn into his introspection. In this way the Servant would remain outside the finalising control of others’ words. But Second Isaiah is not literature like the works of Dostoevsky, and the Servant does not reflect on every single utterance that is addressed to him, or that is said about him. However, that he is constructed entirely by discourse implies that all that we know about him he also knows about himself. Just as in the novels of Dostoevsky, in which the author’s discourse about the hero is actually oriented toward the hero, so in Second Isaiah all that is said about the Servant is oriented toward the Servant—toward the Servant’s discourse. Although we are not given the Servant’s response to each utterance, we are told nothing that the Servant himself does not have access to.  

23. On this, Garrett notes: “The collective memory of the exodus from Egypt shaped accounts of God’s past acts of redemption and provided the archetypal expression for all future hope (Garrett, 1990: 657). That the trajectory of this theme can be tracked into the NT, which is Garrett’s purpose in drawing attention to it, demonstrates its place of importance in Israel’s redemptive history.

24. Except perhaps in Isa 53, where it is implied that the Servant is dead, and therefore has no chance to reflect on what is said about him. More is said about this in chapter 5.
given the Servant’s response to the discourse is obviously of prime importance, since it gives us a window into his internal discourse, his unique voice-idea.

This thesis is entitled *A Dialogic Reimagining of a Servant’s Suffering* since, in the absence of the Servant’s thoughts about himself, we must seek to reimagine how the Servant comprehends himself and his world in response to the discourse of others. Our primary thesis is that the Servant is constituted dialogically and that this requires us to engage with him differently than we would a conventionally-constituted literary character. Traditional approaches to the Servant have been based on monologic reading strategies—that is, they have asked the question “Who is he?” on the assumption that the “author” of Second Isaiah has in mind an individual or group that is represented by the Servant. The assumption has been that an objective reading of the available textual data should reveal the Servant's identity and purpose. Or, in a quite separate, though still monologic approach, some commentators have concluded that the texts comprising Second Isaiah are so disparate that an identification of the Servant is impossible.25 Neither approach takes seriously the Servant’s dialogical constitution. A reading strategy that pays heed to Bakhtin’s theories will invite the Servant to reveal what he knows about himself and his world.

25. This is monologic since it assumes a singular, predetermined definition of “unity”. Any texts that fall outside the parameters of this definition are said to have no unity, which makes the search for the Servant’s “identity” redundant, since he is constituted by numerous, disparate texts, which may not have been written by the one author. But there is more than one definition of unity, as Bakhtin argues. There is, for example, the unity of simultaneity, which does not require texts to have been written by a single author for them to be “unified”.

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This is essential, since a polyphonic character, as discussed above, does not project a fixed image that we are meant to view objectively. A polyphonic character has been written in such a way that he represents a very specific point of view on the world that is unique to him. He is less a fixed image, and more a doorway to this world. This doorway is constructed dialogically. Only by engaging with the dialogue that constitutes the hero can we hope to view the world as he sees it. As we engage the dialogue we must constantly ask, What does this discourse contribute to the Servant’s self-awareness, and his knowledge of the world? For Bakhtin there is a higher form of reading that seeks to break down the monologic world that is conventionally erected by an author and shared by the reader, in which they both view the characters from a privileged position and make judgments on a finalised image of a character they have constructed in their imagination.

The hero as a point of view, as an opinion on the world and on himself, requires utterly special methods of discovery and artistic characterisation. And this is so because what must be discovered and characterised here is not the specific existence of the hero, not his fixed image, but the sum total of his consciousness and self-consciousness, ultimately the hero’s final word on himself and on his world (Bakhtin, 1984: 48, emphases original).

Bakhtin suggests a method of reading (with specific reference to polyphonic texts) that seeks to dialogue with the consciousness of others:

Every true reader of Dostoevsky, who perceives his novels not in the monologic mode and who is capable of rising to Dostoevsky’s new authorial position, can sense this peculiar active broadening of his consciousness, not solely in the sense of an assimilation of new objects (human types, character, natural and social phenomenon), but primarily in the sense of a special dialogic mode of communication with the autonomous consciousnesses of others, something never before experienced, an active dialogic penetration into the unfinalisable depths of man (Bakhtin, 1984: 68).
Our method seeks to apply such a reading strategy to the discourse that constitutes the Servant. This study engages with the Servant discourse in order to hear it as he would have heard it, and as he uttered it. We stand beside the Servant in order to engage the discourse from the place he occupies in the textual world of Second Isaiah, to hear his voice-idea from within the discourse. Although Bakhtin does not set out a formula for reading polyphonic texts, this method is consistent with his approach in *PDP* (Bakhtin, 1984: 47-77). It is a creative and imaginative reading strategy—a dialogic reimagining of the Servant and his function in Second Isaiah. It is not a literary flight of fancy. Our reimagining is fixed upon the text, according to established exegetical practices. We situate ourselves beside the Servant in the unique space he occupies only by engaging with the text itself, since this is where the Servant is (dialogically) constituted. Of particular importance in this regard is the event of double-voicing in the Servant discourse. The identification of double-voiced discourse aids our reading, since it suggests how the Servant hears the discourse of others by highlighting the referents of the Servant’s own discourse.

The possibility that the Servant is a self-aware literary character in the vein of Dostoevsky’s polyphonic heroes offers new insight into the Servant, his identity, and

26. We do this with great caution, acknowledging the dangers of an overly subjective reading. However, we also suggest that the “I” of the reader is an integral dialogue partner in any reading exercise. Nevertheless, caution will be exercised, particularly in the area of identifying double-voiced discourse and texts that are related dialogically. For more on this difficult issue see Claassens, who says: “In this regard, one should acknowledge the subjective nature of this pursuit. It is the reader who sees these logical connections between texts. However, the success of this undertaking is dependent on the reader’s ability to persuade others of these connections. These connections cannot be totally random, but should be guided by signs in the text” (Claassens, 2003: 137, emphasis mine).
his function in Second Isaiah. It is not conventional practice to place oneself in the position of the Servant and consider what it is that he understands himself to be. This particular notion is what sets a Bakhtinian approach to the question of the Servant's fluid nature apart from other methods. It asks not “Who is he?” but “Who am I?” The “I” in the method proposed here is not the “I” of the reader but the “I” of the Servant. The method is essentially synchronic. It takes the final form of the text as a starting point, but acknowledges the presence in the Servant discourses of multiple generic voices that are rooted in a variety of different life situations, texts and traditions.

Our Bakhtinian method will also dictate the scope of the study. Our history of interpretation demonstrated that assumptions regarding the unity or otherwise of Second Isaiah as a collection usually influenced how the Servant was interpreted. Typically, proponents of the view put forward by Duhm, that the songs were a later addition to the collection, favoured an individualistic interpretation of the Servant. A reading informed by Bakhtin’s dialogism, however, would tend to approach discrete textual units in a different way, as the following section outlines.

3.5. **Defining the Servant discourse**

The Servant of Yahweh makes a number of appearances throughout Second Isaiah, and never outside it.27 Some scholars have also highlighted the peculiarity that he is

27. See n. 7, p. 11.
referred to as the nation, Israel-Jacob, only within chapters 40-48. In chapters 49-53 he both speaks, and is addressed, apparently as an individual, as he is in 42:1-4.

There are two ways of approaching this peculiarity, and the methodology chosen determines how the Servant texts are exegeted. The first way is to approach the text of Second Isaiah as a unified work, thereby attempting to trace within the collection a structural logic and a development of literary and theological themes and motifs. Muilenburg, for example, sees Second Isaiah as a “continuous series of poems by a single author” in a work that has “epic qualities” (1956b: 382). The Servant, in this approach, is likely to be understood as a character that develops in the course of the work. The Servant texts are understood as having some chronological and thematic shape to their arrangement, so that the Servant in the latter poems is a more developed figure than the one that is introduced early in Second Isaiah. But the assumption that Second Isaiah is a unified work is debated, as is the issue of the unity of the whole book. Form critics have approached Second Isaiah on the basis


that it is a collection of short, generic textual units that may or may not be related thematically.\textsuperscript{31} The task of determining how the Servant is constituted in this approach is made quite difficult, since the Servant who is addressed in chapters 40-48 may not be the same Servant who speaks or is spoken about in later chapters. Indeed, the identity of the Servant may change from unit to unit, so that it becomes impossible to speak of his “constitution” by Second Isaiah.

The question that arises is whether it is possible to build a unified picture of the Servant from the whole of Second Isaiah, while at the same time paying due regard to the work by form critical scholars on the smaller units that comprise the final form. Bakhtin offers a way of reconciling both approaches—though “reconciling” is perhaps misleading, since a Bakhtinian reading holds both discrete approaches in dialogic tension. A Bakhtinian reading welcomes the view that multiple textual units, genres, voices, traditions and ideologies have gone into forming the final work, since this reflects multivoicedness, the presence of multiple voices that each reflect their own socio-political, cultural, traditional and ideological contexts. In dealing with the text’s final form a Bakhtinian reading would seek to avoid flattening the text or reducing its multivocality to a final, overarching editorial voice. It would also hope to avoid disengaging the diverse voices in the text so that they no longer dialogue. It would hold diverse voices in dialogic tension, and would

\textsuperscript{31} See Merrill (1987) for a survey of form-critical approaches to Isaiah 40-55, from Cobb (1882) onwards.
welcome the interplay that is introduced only when multiple voices are brought together in a single work. From a Bakhtinian perspective, we only see the complete picture when we recognise the uniqueness and the individuality of the voices in the text, while also attempting to hear the dialogue they generate. Applying Bakhtin’s theory to Second Isaiah, we can say that a Bakhtinian reading acknowledges that while this or that text makes mention of the Servant, quite different traditions may be behind the use of the term in each one. However, it attempts to hear the dialogue that those texts, heard *simultaneously*, generate. A Bakhtinian reading does not support a purely synchronic approach, since such an approach would muffle the individual voices and traditions in the text. A diachronic awareness is also required, since only then are we in a position to overhear and engage with multiple voices.

Our task will be to honour the different voices that speak of the Servant in Second Isaiah—and then let them dialogue with one another. This is a literary exercise for heuristic purposes that takes the final form of the text as a starting point, since only in the final form of the text do we find the multiplicity of voices that are necessary for the text to be polyphonic. The Servant discourses upon which we will focus are those passages in Second Isaiah that refer to a Servant explicitly. It remains to be argued whether all Servant references are to the same figure. During the course of the study we will acknowledge and discuss the views of form critics with regard to the boundaries of units that comprise the Servant discourses, but we will be guided by the stylistics of discourse rather than form. By this we refer to rhetorical
features such as linguistic and thematic repetitions, inclusio, parallelism and chiasm, and features that emphasise the text’s dialogic nature, such as the speaker-hearer relationship in each utterance, and parallel subject matters. For example, if Yahweh addresses the Servant in one discrete unit, but continues his discourse with him into another, despite the differences in form we will take the whole section as a single discourse, in order to bring both units into dialogic tension. Likewise, if the Servant’s role as witness is the object of dialogue in two juxtaposed units, the entire section will be read as a single discourse.

On that basis our focus will be on ten discourses. The merits of isolating these as Servant discourses will be further argued on a case by case basis in subsequent chapters, but they are introduced here in order to establish the limits of our study.

3.5.1. Isaiah 41:8-16

The larger unit of 41:1-20, in which Yahweh speaks throughout (he identifies himself in 41:4), has as its central theme the calling of Israel as Yahweh’s Servant.

32. “Inclusios” act as linguistic or thematic bookends at the beginning and end of textual units, signifying “deliberate continuity” between the beginning and end (Trible, 1994: 33). Chiasm is a poetic structure in which words and themes in the first half of a unit are inverted in the second, often pivoting on a point of prime importance. Chiastic structure “aids memory, enhances argumentation, and shapes totality of thought” (Trible, 1994: 35).

33. This is highlighted by Watts, for whom 41:1-20 forms Scene 2 of Act VII of the grand play that is the book of Isaiah (Watts, 1987: 97). Watts entitles the scene “Israel Affirmed as Yahweh’s Servant.”
Westermann (1969: 62ff.) breaks this unit into five smaller units. But only in the central two oracles of salvation, 41:8-13 and 41:14-16, does Yahweh, who identifies himself again in 41:13, address the Servant, Israel-Jacob, directly. Many commentators treat these oracles separately, though Blenkinsopp (2002: 199) has drawn attention to the repetition of significant phrases that bind 41:8-16 as a single unit.

3.5.2. Isaiah 42:1-9

Since Duhm, it has been common to regard Isa 42:1-4 as the first Servant song, and its treatment has often been in isolation from its immediate context. However, in the text’s final form the discourse is extended beyond the song, and includes vv. 5-9. Although v. 5 begins with the messenger formula and is uttered by a voice other than that of Yahweh, indicating the beginning of a discrete unit, in vv. 6-9 Yahweh appears to address directly the Servant whom he has introduced in vv. 1-4. This section may be a comment on the song that was added later, since similar additions

34. 41:1-5; 6-7; 8-13; 14-16; 17-20.
37. For an example of the position of those who are not convinced by Duhm’s argument see Mettinger (1983).
38. See Muilenburg (1956b: 467), McKenzie (1968: 40), Westermann (1969: 98), Whybray (1983: 73-74), and Seitz (2001: 364), although the latter sees that the two units together describe the calling of the one Servant.
seem to be attached to the second and third songs as well.\textsuperscript{39} Who precisely is addressed in this unit is debated. For example, Westermann argues that there is not enough evidence to conclude that it is the Servant (1969: 98). However, the juxtaposition of this unit with the one preceding causes the two to dialogue, leaving open the possibility that we are meant to interpret the addressee as the Servant, as he is presented in 42:1-4.\textsuperscript{40} Childs also argues that the context causes us to read the two together (2001: 326). The view that 42:1-9 should be treated as a single unit is supported by Spykerboer (1976: 80), Motyer (1993: 318), Blenkinsopp (2002: 209)\textsuperscript{41} and Goldingay (2005: 149-154).

3.5.3. Isaiah 42:18-43:7

Most commentators treat the two units, 42:18-25 and 43:1-7, separately. The oracle of salvation that is introduced in 43:1 is certainly of a different form to the disputation that precedes it. However, commentators also note the close connection between the two units.\textsuperscript{42} The “but now” (אֲלֵהָה את) of 43:1 links with 42:18-25 by

\textsuperscript{39} See similar additions in 49:7-13; 50:10-11; and 54:1-55:13. The addition to the fourth Servant song does not have widespread support.

\textsuperscript{40} The identity of the Servant in both of these units is also open to conjecture. Seitz (2001: 364) is among those who understand the addressee in vv. 5-9 to be the same Servant that is introduced in vv. 1-4—and he identifies them both as Israel.

\textsuperscript{41} Blenkinsopp says the two statements of the Servant’s commissioning (vv. 1-4, 5-9) “belong together even if the second was added later, an opinion often expressed but impossible to prove” (2002: 209).

\textsuperscript{42} For example, Muilenburg (1956b: 480) reads 42:19-43:7 as a poem consisting of seven strophes, of which 43:1-3b is the fifth, and the beginning of the poem’s second part. The two parts are in counterpoint to each other. In the first part the theme is judgment, in the second it is redemption; the first deals with the past and the present, the second with the future; the first deals with Israel, the
contrasting the disputation with the salvation that Yahweh now proclaims, to the very same Servant that he addresses in 42:19. The two units are also linked by the theme of the Warrior God, which emerges from 42:13 and appears also in 42:25 and 43:3-4,\(^4\) by the “I-you” pronouns (e.g., in 42:19, 42:23a, 43:2, 3a and 43:5) (see McKenzie, 1968: 50), and by the imagery of “burning” in 42:25 and 43:2. While the generic voices of the units are radically different, it is Yahweh who speaks in both, and in both he speaks to the Servant. The polemic of the first is counterbalanced by the assurance of the second.

3.5.4. Isaiah 43:8-44:8

This section of Second Isaiah comprises some five or six smaller units, though there is disagreement on their precise delimitation, which normally hangs on whether the messenger formula in v. 14 is seen as introducing a new unit or culminating the previous one. Commentators commonly highlight a major break at 43:22.\(^4\) A number of discrete forms comprise this section.\(^5\) It can also be seen as belonging to a larger structure in which one fourfold sequence of poems (42:18-43:21) is

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second with God. See also Westermann (1969: 114) and Oswalt (1998: 136); see also Childs (2001: 334), who says “the redactional connection between 42:18-25 and 43:1-7 is so close that the integrity of the two discrete genres has been considerably blurred.”

43. On this theme see Spykerboer (1976: 102-103).

44. This verse introduces Watts’ Scene 5 of Act VII, which he titles “Remember These, Jacob!” (Watts, 1987: 136). The scene concludes at 44:23.

45. A trial speech (43:8-15), a proclamation of salvation (43:16-21) and an oracle of salvation (44:1-5).
paralleled with another (43:22-44:23 [45:8]).\textsuperscript{46} However, 43:8-44:8 is an extended discourse by Yahweh to the Servant. Following the prophet’s introduction in 43:8-9, Yahweh’s discourse begins, in v. 10, with the proclamation “You are my witnesses”, and concludes with the same words in 44:8.\textsuperscript{47} Despite changes in tone, and a number of formulaic prophetic utterances that break up this section (43:14, 16-17; 44:2, 6), it is consistently Yahweh who speaks, and the Servant who is addressed. The themes of “servant” (43:10; 44:1, 3), “witnesses” (43:9, 10, 12; 44:8), Israel as Yahweh’s “chosen” (43:10, 20; 44:2), and the recurring messenger formula “This is what Yahweh says” in 43:14, 43:16, 44:2 and 44:6, suggest taking the section as a single discourse.

3.5.5. Isaiah 44:21-22 (23)

With Westermann (1969: 139), Spykerboer (1976: 114), Childs (2001: 344), Blenkinsopp (2002: 235) and others, we note that this small oracle, which begins with “Remember these things”, appears to link back to the trial speech of 44:6-8. The prose section that separates the two units is generally considered an interpolation. The closing hymn, v. 23, which Westermann, following a critical tradition since Duhm, argues rounds off the preceding section (from 42:14), adds nothing to the constitution of the Servant, but does represent an appropriate hymnal response to the

\textsuperscript{46.} See Goldingay (2005: 215-218).

\textsuperscript{47.} Some commentators see 44:6-8 as the beginning of a new section, with specific links to 44:21-22.
actions of Yahweh outlined in vv. 21-22, that could have been sung by the Servant as much as anyone else. Only vv. 21-22 feature Yahweh’s direct discourse with the Servant. While there is no doubt this unit and 44:6-8 are linked, what is said to the Servant in each unit is different.

3.5.6. Isaiah 44:24-45:7

There is widespread consensus on the unity of this large section concerning Cyrus, the (unwitting) agent of Yahweh’s redemptive action on behalf of Israel. It is comprised of two discrete units featuring two Yahweh speeches: the first (44:24-28) addressed to Israel; the second (45:1-7) addressed to Cyrus. Both units are united by the motif of the Persian king, who is mentioned by name in 44:28, and 45:1. Debate concerning the form and function of the smaller units that comprise the larger section does not impact our approach to the discourse. Goldingay notes that this section both completes the cycle of poems that began in 43:22, and constitutes a new beginning (2005: 253). The unit is the central discourse of chapters 40-48. Worthy of note is that the second half of the discourse, 45:1-7, otherwise known as the Cyrus Oracle, is intended for the Servant in a refracted manner—that is, while ostensibly addressed to Cyrus, it is intended to be overheard by Israel.

49. For a summary of the issues see Childs (2001: 350ff.).
51. Melugin argues 45:1-7 exhibits the generic features of an oracle to a king (1976: 123). However,
3.5.7. Isaiah 48:20-21 (22)
Westermann identifies a hymn of jubilation (48:20-21) that rounds off chapters 46-48 (1969: 204-205), and an addition (v. 22).52 There is general agreement that the addition echoes 57:21, which is the original context of the saying, though how it functions in Isa 48 is debated—as a divisional marker, or as an important voice (of warning) in a different context. Childs (2001: 378), followed by Goldingay (2005: 359), treats vv. 20-22 as a single unit, reading the final bleak judgment of Yahweh as an element of the prophetic hymn that precedes it. Seitz (2001: 420) also sees it as an integral aspect of the message of vv. 20-21, but also recognises its function as both a divisional marker and a unifying motif.53 Our focus is on the discourse of the prophet in vv. 20-21, a short hymn54 that is addressed to the Servant, Jacob.

3.5.8. Isaiah 49:1-12 (13)
Isa 49 begins a major section in Second Isaiah, for theological, thematic and linguistic reasons that will be outlined in the study.55 In terms of how it contributes to

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52. The words of v. 22 were added “by a reader in whose eyes the division into the godly and the wicked was an axiom of theology, and who was anxious to prevent the wicked from claiming such words of salvation for themselves” (Westermann, 1969: 205).

53. According to Seitz the addition is by an editor mindful of a key theme of the message of Isaiah 40-66: “Within the context of recalling the first wilderness and God’s gracious provision, the death of an entire generation who failed to trust God is not forgotten” (2001: 420).

54. See Melugin (1976: 139).

55. For a discussion of some of the features distinguishing chapters 40-48 from 49-55 see particularly
the constitution of the Servant, Isa 49:1-6 differs from the discourses already outlined in that it represents the voice of the Servant himself. While there is widespread agreement that the focus of Second Isaiah changes at this point, there is disagreement on the genre of vv. 1-6, the so-called second Servant song. Like the first song, 42:1-4, it is often treated in isolation from its context. The case for reading the poem in its context in the final form of the collection will be outlined in chapter 5. As a response to Yahweh, it echoes many of the themes that are generated by the Servant discourses in chapters 40-48. Chapter 49 comprises three dramatic discourses: that of the Servant (49:1-6); that of Yahweh (49:7-12); and that of Zion (49:14-26) (see Watts, 1987: 185-186). Only the first two contribute to the constitution of the Servant, though some have argued that the voices of the Servant and Zion belong to one and the same character. There is no suggestion that 49:14-26 form an addition to the Servant song in the same way that 49:7-12 does. There is general agreement that 49:7-13 is related to the Servant song that precedes it the way 42:5-9 is related to the first Servant song (42:1-4). However, there is


56. V. 13 is a short hymn that functions like Isa 44:23.

57. Muilenburg also notes the dialogic style of this chapter as a key feature of the literary forms in this unit (1956b: 565).

58. See, for example, Wilshire (1975).

59. Muilenburg (1956b: 564-565) argues chapter 49 forms a unit of two divisions (vv. 1-13 and 14-26). V. 13 forms a “splendid finale” (564) to the first three strophes. We agree with Muilenburg’s division on the basis of the dialogic content of chapter 49. The three discourses are linked, but the first two particularly are closely connected.
disagreement on how closely the texts are related. For example, North (1964: 90) argues that while 42:5-9 reads like a Servant passage, the addition in 49:7-13 reads more like an Israel passage whose focus is the people’s journey back to Judea. North assumes that the Servant and Israel are separate entities. But Childs (2001: 386) points to the function of v. 7 as a redactional bridge to ensure the Servant is seen as the subject of both oracles. He argues the oracle of 49:8-12 has been editorially shaped to “enhance a coherent description of the servant’s role in the new exodus of the chosen people” (Childs, 2001: 386). Goldingay (2005: 374-376) shares North’s position that the one addressed in 49:7-12 is the community, not the Servant (who Goldingay identifies with the prophet at this point). However, he also recognises that the second discourse picks up and develops motifs from the first. Goldingay sees a relationship between the two units that is far more dialogical than Childs’s position, and less static than that of commentators who isolate the units from each other. Our study will demonstrate that the juxtaposition of the two discourses, with v. 7 acting as a bridge, causes them to engage dialogically, causing the Israel of the second discourse to be associated with the Servant of the first.

3.5.9. Isaiah 50:4-11 (51:7-8)

It has been common practice, since Duhm’s original thesis, to limit the so-called third Servant song to 50:4-9. However, vv. 10-11, despite being a separate oracle that may have been added much later, clearly belong to the song. The voice of the
one who speaks in vv. 4-9 does not identify himself (or herself) as the Servant. But a reference to the voice of the Servant in v. 10 causes us to re-read vv. 4-9 as the Servant’s own discourse. From v. 10 the identity of the one who speaks is obscure, and the Servant is the object, rather than the subject of the utterance. As Childs (2001: 395) points out, the Servant “is no longer the speaker, but one spoken about.” In v. 11 the people addressed are those who, in v. 10, do not obey the word of Yahweh’s Servant.60

There is no obvious need to follow Westermann and include 51:1ff. along with the addition. The speaker is Yahweh (hence “my righteousness”, “my salvation” and “my arm” in 51:5). Confusing matters, however, is the repetition of the Servant’s words from 50:9 in 51:7-8. These verses form such a close link with the end of the Servant discourse, and appear to draw parallels between the righteous of Israel and the Servant, that they are also considered in the study. Vv. 7-8 form the last of three exhortations (the first two are vv. 1-3, and 4-5) that clearly belong together, since they each begin with the command to “Listen!” and “Pay attention!”

3.5.10. Isaiah 52:13-53:12

The so-called fourth Servant song, 52:13-53:12, is the best known, and it stands out from the rest of the discourses we have outlined in that it is neither spoken to the

60. Goldingay’s observations on this unit represent the consensus view: “Verses 10-11 form a conclusion to the servant passage that compares with the conclusions to 42:1-4 and 49:1-6, taking up vv. 4-9 and driving home its implications” (2005: 412).
Servant, nor by him, but is spoken almost entirely about him. It is the Servant’s impact upon the speakers that characterises this discourse. The poem begins and ends with the words of Yahweh (52:13-15; 53:11-12), while the central section is spoken by a voice representing an unidentified group. This section is vital to the Servant’s constitution, since it provides a picture of how the Servant has impacted others. While it is the closest thing we have in Second Isaiah to an objectivised image of the Servant, its confessional nature draws attention to the discourse itself, rather than to the Servant’s identity or purpose. And while the discourse is not specifically addressed to the Servant, it may still be assumed that he is present as an eavesdropper, as he is with the Cyrus discourse in 45:1-7. That is, of course, unless the references to his death in vv. 8-9 are to be taken literally.

Isa 52:13-53:12 is treated as a complete unit by the vast majority of scholars, but not unanimously.\(^61\) Snaith (1977: 168) argues 52:13-15 is distinct from 53:1-10 because it is spoken by someone else.\(^62\) But this study will demonstrate that the presence of a variety of voices is no reason to break up this section. In fact, the

\(^{61}\) Orlinsky says the assumption that 52:13-53:12 is a unit is “gratuitous” (1977: 17), and that 52:13-15 is a separate unit that constitutes a suitable ending for chapter 52. His main argument is that the servant of 52:13-15 is Israel, while the figure spoken of in chapter 53 is an individual: “Unlike the people Israel, which did not keep silent in the face of destruction and exile, which was not cut off from the land of the living, and which deserved the divine punishment of destruction and exile because of transgression of the covenant, the servant in 53 is one who apparently did not complain, who ostensibly did not survive, and who experienced suffering through no guilt of his own” (1977: 21). Whybray commends the view taken by Orlinsky, Snaith and others, arguing 52:13-15, as an oracle spoken by Yahweh, “can hardly be regarded as a ‘preface’” to chapter 53 (Whybray, 1975: 169).

\(^{62}\) This is also Snaith’s logic behind separating 49:7-12 from 49:1-6, and 42:5-9 from 42:1-4 (1977: 168).
dialogic nature of the poem is reflective of the Servant’s constitution throughout Second Isaiah.

In Section II we apply our Bakhtinian reading strategy to the ten discourses we have outlined. Chapter 4 discusses the first seven discourses, in which the Servant is addressed but never speaks. Chapter 5 discusses the final three discourses, two of which—49:1-12 (13) and 50:4-11—feature the Servant as a speaker. The final discourse, Isa 52:13-53:12, features the Servant as an object of the discourse of others.
Section II  EXEGESIS
4. YAHWEH’S DISCOURSE TO THE SERVANT IN ISA 40-48

4.1. Introduction

In chapter 2 we reviewed the history of the Servant’s interpretation in order to ascertain how the ambiguity of the Servant’s characterisation had been explained, and discovered that the term “fluid” had been commonly used to describe the Servant’s polymorphous nature. This answered the first of the questions we raised in the Introduction, namely, how to understand the ambiguous, if not intentionally elusive, nature of the Servant’s characterisation. However, it became apparent that the Servant’s *dialogical* constitution, which we have argued is a prime contributor to his fluidity, has been largely neglected. This was the point at which we began our discussion of method in chapter 3, in which we sought to address the second question raised in the Introduction, namely, how to interpret a character who is constituted wholly by dialogue. We argued that the theories of Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly those concerning the polyphonic hero, dialogic truth and double-voicing, could provide fresh insight into the problem of the Servant’s dialogical constitution and the question of his function within the collection of Second Isaiah.

This brings us to the third question raised in the Introduction, regarding what advantages the Servant’s dialogical constitution has over more conventional styles of characterisation. We argued in the previous chapter that, in light of Bakhtin’s ideas  

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concerning the polyphonic hero, a dialogically-constituted character such as the Servant of Second Isaiah was a self-aware literary character who must be engaged with dialogically in order for his “truth” to be known. To that end we must stand beside the Servant in order to engage the discourse from the semantic space he occupies in the dialogue. Another way of saying this is that we must attempt to hear the Servant’s voice-idea from within the dialogue, in order to reimagine the Servant and his world from his unique perspective.

This chapter will apply this reading strategy to the first seven of the ten discourses we identified as constituting the Servant: Isa 41:8-16; 42:1-9; 42:18-43:7; 43:8-44:8; 44:21-22 (23); 44:24-45:7); 48:20-21 (22). These discourses, uttered predominantly by Yahweh, but also by the prophet, share the peculiarity that the Servant never responds to them. In the absence of the Servant’s actual response, we are forced to reimagine the internal discourse that is stimulated by what he hears; that is, we must reimagine how the Servant comprehends himself, his God and his world. These discourses also share the peculiar feature that they exclusively use the names “Israel”/“Jacob” of the Servant. He is not referred to in this way outside of Isa 40-48.2

2. Wilcox and Paton-Williams state the peculiarity differently, that “all the obstacles to identifying the servant consistently with Israel occur at or after Isa 49:4. Before then, in 42:1-4, and throughout Isa 40-48, a consistent identification of the two is possible” (1988: 81, emphases original). The Servant is named Israel in Isa 49:4, and this peculiarity is taken up in the next chapter.
4.2. Who am I?—The Servant in Isa 41:8-16

When we encounter the Servant for the first time in Second Isaiah, with the words “But you, Israel, my Servant” (יְהוָה יִשְׂרָאֵל יְמַטְסָנָה מִשְׁפָּט; יַמְטָסָנָה) (41:8a), we are immediately aware that the dialogue between Yahweh and the Servant is set in a broader context. The waw conjunction links the discourse of 41:8-16 with the previous speech of Yahweh in vv. 1-7. It also establishes a contrast between what is uttered to the coastlands (בָּשָׂם, v. 1a, 5a) and what is uttered to the Servant. Both the coastlands and the Servant are afraid, but while the coastlands are called to judgment (41:1d), the Servant is called to fear not (41:10a).

The discourse is comprised of two salvation oracles (41:8-13; 14-16) in which Yahweh seeks to comfort his Servant, Israel-Jacob, with words of reassurance. The discourse resonates with the command that begins the collection in 40:1: “Comfort, comfort my people”. The reason Yahweh’s people need to be comforted has been established in a series of disputations that are placed in the final form of the collection of Second Isaiah between the opening utterance of 40:1 and this first Servant discourse. The disputations establish not only the backdrop to Yahweh’s initial utterance to his Servant in 41:8-16, but to many of Yahweh’s speeches to the Servant in chapters 40-48. These links will be drawn more clearly as we discuss each discourse.

3. The coastlands are synonymous in Second Isaiah with the nations, representing the islands and coastlands to the west, the “peoples from afar” (גָּם יֹאכַל נָאָב, Isa 49:1a). In Isa 40:15 the coastlands are paralleled with the “nations” (בָּשָׂם).
The prophet’s disputational speech against Israel in Isa 40:27-31 summarises the issue between Yahweh and Israel that appears to fuel Yahweh’s polemic throughout the discourses that follow. It is the fourth in a series of textual units (40:12-17, 18-24, 25-26, and 27-31) in which the recipient of Yahweh’s “interrogative” discourse (Melugin, 1976: 91) remains unnamed until the concluding speech by the prophet. In v. 27 the prophet echoes a complaint by Israel in order to dispute its validity: “My way is hidden from Yahweh” (40:27c) and “my justice is passed over by my God” (v. 27d). The complaint cuts to the heart of Israel’s exilic crisis: where is Yahweh? And the prophet’s response—a rhetorical amalgam of disputation (vv. 27-28a), psalm of praise (vv. 28-29), and assurance of salvation (vv. 30-31)—cuts to the heart of the prophetic message: how can you doubt a God who is worthy of such praise?

In its context in the final form of Second Isaiah the first Servant discourse, 41:8-16, is heard as a response to Israel’s complaint in 40:27. Yahweh conveys a

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4. See Westermann (1969: 58) who emphasises that, at last, in 40:27-31, the audience which has been addressed from v. 12 onwards is named.

5. Seitz says: “The speech intends to drive home matters about God that Israel already knows but has forgotten, and its final purpose is to lift up, to increase strength, to bolster and rejuvenate” (Seitz, 2001: 342). Goldingay says something similar: “The prophet’s concern is to move Israel from lament to praise so that she may indeed make that affirmation and find new strength in Yhwh” (Goldingay, 2005: 64).

6. Reflecting the multivoiced nature of Isa 40:27-31, disputation and trial speeches are interspersed with hymns of praise and oracles of salvation throughout Second Isaiah, e.g. 42:18-25 with 43:1-7, and 43:18-28 with 44:1-5 (6-8). Melugin suggests a reason for this: “The doubt about Yahweh’s power occasioned by the exile provides the key. Traditionally the lament psalm and its answering assurance of salvation were not concerned with Yahweh’s ability to deliver . . . But the exile had raised doubts about Yahweh’s power, against which Deutero-Isaiah directed his disputation and trial speeches” (Melugin, 1976: 92).
message of comfort to his people that cuts through Israel's (apparently mistaken) belief that God has abandoned it. In other words, Yahweh’s discourse in this unit seeks to correct Israel’s self-awareness. It is an ideal text to study in light of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, because here we encounter the Servant figure for the first time via discourse whose explicit aim is to fundamentally destabilise his prior self-awareness, to which Beuken alludes:

This address does not contain a collection of titles and qualifications that are beautiful and true, but unrelated to the issue which is at stake; on the contrary, it has a real function in the comforting purpose of the salvation oracle (Beuken, 1972: 17).

Yahweh’s discourse causes the Servant to confront new knowledge about himself. We will reimagine that new knowledge as reflexive discourse summarised by the following utterances: 1) “I am Israel, Jacob” (v. 8ab); 2) “I am the Servant, chosen by Yahweh” (v. 8ab); 3) “I am the offspring of Abraham” (v. 8c); 4) “I am afraid, but I am encouraged not to be” (vv. 10ab, 13cd, 14a); 5) “I am a worm, but I am told I will prevail” (vv. 14a, 15-16).

We will explore each utterance in turn.

4.2.1. “I am Israel, Jacob” (v. 8ab)

The first time the Servant of Yahweh hears himself addressed as such, he is also named. Actually, he is given two names, Israel and Jacob. And he is described as the offspring of Abraham, the third name to be used in the first three lines of this poem.
Whatever ambiguity is introduced into the Servant’s characterisation in later discourses, in the opening utterance of this first discourse, at least, the identity of the recipient seems unequivocal. The use of the 2ms address throughout the discourse envisions Israel-Jacob as a corporate personality, a child, or “offspring” (םֵּאָרֶץ, v. 8c), of Abraham. While both Israel and Jacob can refer to the historical individual who bore that name, or to the nation as a whole, the reference to Abraham is clearly to the patriarch. For our purposes the question of the Servant’s identity is of secondary importance for the time being. The prime question is rather, what does the use of these names by Yahweh convey to the Servant who is thus addressed?

The use of the dual name, Israel-Jacob, is commonly enough used to designate the nation Israel throughout the OT for us to assume that the Servant had no great difficulty when it came to applying the names to himself. Commentators are almost unanimous in their belief that it is the nation, and not an individual, that is addressed by Yahweh here, with names that have been used to identify the nation from its earliest traditions. More specifically, it is the Babylonian exiles who are being addressed. That the exiles are being addressed in terms traditionally attached to the nation as a whole is worth noting, since by it the Servant undoubtedly hears that he is truly Israel, and not some reduced version of it. If there existed any

7. See, e.g., Ps 78:5; Isa 10:20; Jer 46:27.
9. On this point, Blenkinsopp observes that “addressing the dispersed communities of Jews as
ambiguity over this point previously, Yahweh’s designation of him as Israel-Jacob and the offspring of Abraham removes it.\textsuperscript{10} It is unlikely the names Israel-Jacob are used here merely to identify the recipients of the oracle. Second Isaiah uses the dual name more than any other OT writer (17 references, all between chaps. 40-49),\textsuperscript{11} which indicates that for him it has special significance. We can assume that when the Servant hears himself identified as Israel-Jacob by Yahweh in this oracle, it is also intended that he be made aware of the significance that Second Isaiah places on the term. What this significance is requires some thought.

Seitz is probably right when he observes that the names Israel and Jacob together, used so frequently as they are in this section of Isaiah, should “probably conjure up the larger context of ancestor narratives, concerning the wily patriarch” (Seitz, 2001: 355). Seitz’s argument is supported by the association in these opening lines of the names Israel and Jacob with the term “chosen” (v. 8b), which seems intended to evoke Israel’s knowledge of itself as God’s elect.\textsuperscript{12} The description

\textsuperscript{10} On the suggestion that the exiles are meant to believe that they are now the true Israel, in contradistinction from the people who have been left behind in Judea, Goldingay argues that Second Isaiah is not using the terms in such an ideological way. Rather, it reveals his concern for the nation as a whole—not just for those who are in exile (Goldingay, 2005: 99).

\textsuperscript{11} Isa 40:27; 41:8, 14; 42:24; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 21, 23; 45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 12; 49:5, 6.

\textsuperscript{12} Gitay, for different reasons, also sees the dual name as a link to the patriarchal narratives (Gitay, 1981: 107). Gitay points out that this initial use of the dual name is in reverse order to the rest of its occurrences in Second Isaiah. Here the Servant is addressed as Israel first and Jacob second, whereas in 40:27; 41:14; 42:24; 43:1, 22, 28; 44:1, 5, 21, 23;45:4; 46:3; 48:1, 12; 49:5, 6, the nation is addressed as Jacob-Israel. Gitay interprets this as a rhetorical strategy to shift the hearer’s focus from
“chosen” (נָאַבְרִיא, lit. “I have chosen you”) is paralleled with the description of Abraham as “my friend” (נָאַבְרִיא, lit. “my beloved”), and also with the designation of Israel as “my servant” (נָאַבְרִיא). These descriptions are intended to be received positively by the Servant. In the discourse of Yahweh election, love and service converge on the person of the Servant. This idea evokes Isa 14:1, where the people are told “For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob, and will choose Israel again, and will settle them in their own land, and travellers will join them and will attach themselves to the house of Jacob.” The names Jacob and Israel are used precisely because they have a history—and that history points to the freedom of Yahweh to choose someone like Jacob.¹³

According to Israel’s patriarchal narratives¹⁴ the moment the names Israel and Jacob became associated was during the patriarch’s encounter and wrestle with God (Gen 32:22-32). A taboo concerning the sinew of the hip is said to originate with the event of Jacob’s struggle (Gen 32:32), which indicates that the tale had

¹³. Commentators such as Muilenburg and Beuken have also argued that the use of the dual name establishes the exilic people’s solidarity with the covenant people of the past. Muilenburg says the use of the dual name gives the pronoun “you” in v. 8a its content, its “identity and historical reality” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 453). For Beuken also, the double title lends itself to the concept of election (Beuken, 1972: 16).

¹⁴. With Seitz (2001: 355) I am assuming, for heuristic purposes, that there is some form of public record of the patriarchal narratives that Second Isaiah is alluding to here. What form it was in cannot be known, but it is clear that such narratives were known to the Servant, since the patriarchs are mentioned without further elaboration. Our reimagining of the Servant’s self-awareness here is based on the assumption that such traditions were part of his consciousness.
entered the nation’s consciousness at least on the level of tradition. It is entirely possible that what is brought to mind by the Servant when he is addressed as Israel-Jacob is the memory that the one who received the blessing—ultimately the blessing of Yahweh’s choice—was the one who wrestled a “man” whom Jacob believed to be God himself (Gen 32:30). If the use of the dual name in Yahweh’s discourse with the Servant evokes anything like this self-awareness in the Servant, then we can postulate that such words must come as a relief to a people who believe that Yahweh has abandoned them. These names are not suggestive of a benign doctrine, but of a long-held belief that the nation has been chosen by Yahweh. The use of the dual name, Israel-Jacob, is a timely reminder that the election of the nation does not necessarily exclude the occurrence of an event such as the exile, which is not dissimilar to Jacob’s crippled state.

At the very least it can be said that for the Servant the “you” and the “my” that are used by Yahweh to address Israel-Jacob in 41:8a indicate a relationship.15 The names Israel-Jacob, and the introduction of Abraham, the loved one, set this relationship in an historical context. In that light, it is a relationship based on Yahweh’s free choice, his love, and the corresponding service of the Servant. This is a dialogical relationship, in that the Servant becomes conscious of it, or at least recalls it from memory, as Yahweh utters it. Yahweh intends for the Servant to know

15. The “you” pronoun “indicates that a personal relationship lies at the basis of the message brought by the prophet” (Goldingay, 2005: 98).
himself as the *chosen* and the *beloved*. In the discourse of Yahweh the names “Israel” and “Jacob” are no longer locked in the narratives of the past, but are brought refreshingly to life and given new significance in the circumstances in which the Servant finds himself. They are spoken afresh at a time when the Servant needs to know that he is bound to the people of the past, and to the God who called that people into being.

4.2.2. “I am the Servant, chosen by Yahweh” (v. 8ab)

We have noted above that when the term “Servant” is used in Second Isaiah for the first time, it is done so in parallel with “chosen” (יָאִיר, lit. “I have chosen you”). This indicates that the concept of servanthood that lies behind this discourse is not abstract, or open to a variety of interpretations. In the self-consciousness of the Servant the idea of servanthood is bound to the knowledge that he has been chosen by Yahweh. *Servanthood* and *election* are intertwined. As we have noted already, foundational to both terms is the idea of relationship. Goldingay points out that the term יָאִיר “draws attention to a relationship rather than an activity” (2005: 98). By this he means that it stresses the standing of the Servant before Yahweh, not his duties. The term gives the Servant the assurance of belonging to the one who designates him so.16 The designation “servant” is thus filled out in the self-awareness

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16. This is a relationship of protection and security—as Westermann says, it confers the idea of “standing under someone, being subordinate to him” (1969: 70).
of the Servant by his unique relationship with Yahweh. This is accentuated by the attachment to יְהַ֣נְעֵה of the 1p poss. pron. suffix—“my” (so, יְהַ֣נְעֵה). The Servant belongs to Yahweh.

This is not the first time that we encounter “my servant” in the book of Isaiah. In Isa 20:3 Isaiah of Jerusalem is referred to as “my servant”; in 22:20 Eliakim the king is given the honour of being “my servant”; and in 37:35 the title is given to David. This is, however, the first time the designation is used by Second Isaiah, and also the first time that Israel-Jacob is described as “my servant”.17

The special relationship between the Servant and Yahweh is emphasised by the parallel terms “chosen” and “my friend”. As the one chosen, the Servant understands that he is valued absolutely by the one who has chosen him. The term “chosen” points to the one who chooses, as “servant” points to the one who is master, and as “friend” points to the one who reciprocates friendship. The value of the one who chooses is bestowed on the one who is chosen.18 This is emphasised by Yahweh’s declaration that he has “not cast you off” (v. 9d). Israel-Jacob believes that Yahweh has rejected the nation. Empirical evidence supports the nation’s suspicions—Zion and her temple have been destroyed, while Yahweh’s people have

17. Other OT figures are referred to as “my servant” by Yahweh, e.g. Abraham (Gen 26:24), Moses (Num 12:7, 8; Josh 1:2, 7; 2 Kgs 21:8; Mal 4:4), Caleb (Num 14:24), David (2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kgs 11:13, 32, 34, 36, 38; 14:8; 2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6; Ps 89:4[9], 21[20], Ezek 34:24; 37:24), Job (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, 8), Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10), Zerubbabel (Hag 2:23).

18. See Goldingay (2005: 101): “The language of choice when applied to the people here, as in some other contexts (but not all), is used to emphasize the absolute value of the objects of choice to the chooser rather than their relative value in comparison with others.”
been taken from the land of promise. But here the Servant is reminded that he has never been cast off completely:

To enable her [Israel] to accept the assurance she is reminded of the experience which she has had, throughout a long history of the God who elected her and has never once cast her off (Westermann, 1969: 71).

The Servant hears in Yahweh’s utterance both consolation and reassurance—that he has not, nor is he about to, lose his standing to someone more worthy, since his election as a Servant and as a friend is grounded in the free choice of Yahweh, as was the case with Abraham.19 He is reminded that Yahweh’s choice is the foundation of their relationship, as it was the nation’s constitution (which is highlighted by the patriarchal narratives in which Yahweh freely chooses to form the nation from those he calls to serve him), and as it is the religion that in exile seems to be in tatters.20 The motif of Yahweh’s choice of the Servant is repeated throughout Second Isaiah, underscoring its importance to the prophet’s message.21

Perhaps more than anything, the Servant is reminded by these words that he continues to be defined not by the exilic situation in which he finds himself, but by the utterance of Yahweh, who calls him chosen. The Israelite generation that has

19. As North says, “Under the stress of exile the Jews might well conclude that Yahweh had cast them off, as he had every right to do, for their unfaithfulness to their part of the covenant” (1964: 97).

20. “Faith in the divine election marks the beginning of Israel’s religion . . . That Yahweh should take the initiative by choosing for himself a people, and that this people should be Israel, is the source of wonder” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 454).

21. In 43:10 the Servant is again addressed as “my servant whom I have chosen”; in 44:1 the one chosen is Israel; in 44:2 it is Jeshurun, a poetic reference to Israel that infers “the upright one” (ABD); in 49:7 Yahweh as the chooser is emphasised: “The Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you”.

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been born into exile and raised in the shadow of the Babylonian cult hears that they are Israel-Jacob, Yahweh’s Servant, not because they have maintained the structure of their forefathers’ religion—because, as is borne out in Second Isaiah, they have not—but because Yahweh has continued to honour his choice.  

4.2.3. “I am the offspring of Abraham” (v. 8c)

The Servant’s knowledge that he is the offspring of Abraham is enriched by Yahweh’s description of Abraham as “my friend”. We have already said that the reference to Abraham qualifies the terms “servant” and “chosen” by anchoring them in the patriarchal narratives—specifically in the friendship between Abraham and Yahweh. Abraham is also known as “my servant” in earlier traditions (see Gen 26:24). Even so, the reference to Abraham in the discourse to the Servant here is possibly unexpected. As McKenzie points out, it was not common for the prophets to anchor Israel’s election in the Abrahamic narratives, and Second Isaiah is perhaps the earliest to do so (McKenzie, 1968: 31). If this is the case the introduction of the name Abraham is likely to be a major disruption to the Servant’s self-consciousness. If the reference is introduced in order to jolt the Servant from his fear that he no longer matters to Yahweh, then this is achieved by shifting the Servant’s attention away from himself, and towards the ancestor with whom Yahweh has a long-

22. There is a possible echoing here of First Isaiah’s imagery of the holy seed (מְלָכָאָבַ יִשְׁרָאֵל) in the stump (לֵדֶהוֹ) (Isa 6:13) and the shoot from the stump (צָלַע) of Jesse (Isa 11:1). Both images point to a continuation of the Davidic line following devastating judgment—but the continuation will only come about because of Yahweh’s own actions, and not because the line is able to maintain itself.
established friendship, and a well-established covenant (Gen 12:2-3; 17:1-21). Particularly significant to the Servant who feels he has been abandoned are the commitments in the original covenantal promises to Abraham of offspring, land, and deity (Gen 17:8). All three have been shown to be vulnerable in the event of exile. But the reference to Abraham and his offspring evokes the covenantal promises in the self-consciousness of the Servant. It reaffirms that as an offspring of Abraham the Servant remains a beneficiary of the original promises. The goal of this renewed self-knowledge is the people’s comfort.

Like the term “chosen”, which directs the Servant’s gaze away from himself to the one who has chosen him, the reference to Abraham founds the Servant’s relationship with Yahweh in a historical situation that he cannot change. But it is a situation on which he can rely, since it has been based in friendship, even “intimacy” (Gitay, 1981: 101). And this is a friendship founded not on mutual commitment, but on the one who calls his partner “friend”.

The relevance of the reference to Abraham becomes more acute when the Servant is addressed as “you whom I seized from the ends of the earth, and called from its most remote parts” (v. 9ab). As Abraham once was (Gen 12:1), the Servant

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23. “By using the phrase ‘offspring of Abraham, my friend’ Deutero-Isaiah founds the election of the people upon the election of Abraham, thus comforting his people” (Spykerboer, 1976: 69).

24. Notes Muilenburg (1956a: 455), the term “my friend”, or “my beloved” (יִֽהְבֵּשֶׁ֫ה) does not contain the idea of reciprocity in the Hebrew.
is now being called from afar. If the Servant represents the people in exile then this has special significance. Surely the Servant is able to say to himself that just as Yahweh called Abraham from afar in order to bring the nation into being, so he can also call the exiles from afar in order to rebuild the nation that has been scattered. We are also prompted to draw the parallels between the nation that is sent into exile, and the patriarch who went from Canaan to Mesopotamia and spent twenty years in servitude (Sommer, 1998: 133).

“Ends of the earth” is a preferred phrase of Second Isaiah to describe the reach of Yahweh’s creative and redemptive power (_create_ the _ends_ of the _earth_) and the comparative phrase _create_ _ends_ of _earth_ appear nine times in Second Isaiah: 40:28; 41:5; 41:9; 42:10; 43:6; 45:22; 48:20; 49:6; 52:10). In Isa 40:28, the prophet responds to the people’s lament by reminding them that Yahweh is the “creator of the ends of the earth”. The utterance of the phrase in 41:9a interacts dialogically with the earlier use to suggest that the one who _creates_ the ends of the earth is able to _call_ his people _from_ the ends of earth, as he did with Abraham. How does the Servant hear this? Again, as reassurance. It is not possible for Yahweh to forget his Servant, since there is nowhere that lies beyond his reach.

25. Westermann argues the words “offspring of Abraham” are “proof positive that the historical traditions of his nation were the source of [Second Isaiah’s] inspiration” (1969: 70).

26. Blenkinsopp has also made this point: “It is noteworthy how often those addressed in chapters 40-48 are named after the ancestor who spent twenty years in exile in Mesopotamia, raised a family there, and returned to the ancestral land” (2002: 194).

27. Muilenburg, who does not read this unit as a salvation oracle but as a continuation of the trial scene that precedes it, describes this initial address to the Servant as Yahweh the judge turning
As if to confirm this, Yahweh (in v. 9cd) reminds the Servant of the purpose for which he was called—namely, to be the Servant, here addressed as the one chosen and not cast off (v. 9d). This is the second time in this discourse that “chosen” has qualified “servant”, and here this in turn is qualified by the phrase “and not cast you off” (אֲלֹהֵיכָּמָּשׁ תָּנְבֵּא), which echoes the people’s complaint in 40:27 by directly contradicting it. While Yahweh’s choice of the Servant draws its significance from his original choice of Abraham, his decision not to reject Israel-Jacob draws its significance from the friendship he has decided to maintain with the offspring of Abraham, his beloved.

4.2.4. “I am afraid, but I am encouraged not to be” (vv. 10, 11, 12, 13cd, 14a)

The purpose of Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant is not realised until v. 10a, with the command to “Fear not”. The utterances by which the Servant is addressed in vv. 8-9 are given added prominence by the way they have delayed this imperative, which is demonstrated to be the focus of the discourse by its repetition in v. 13c.28 The juxtaposition of the second salvation oracle in v.14-16 confirms this. Without the extended description of the Servant in vv. 8-9 Yahweh’s address to the Servant properly reads “But you, Israel . . . fear not!” Read this way it becomes evident that

28. “The important statements in vv. 8-9 are actually preliminary to this focal exhortation in v. 10 which justifies our calling these ‘fear not’ oracles” (Goldingay, & Payne, 2007a: 163).
the *waw* conjunction that begins this discourse in 41:8 draws a marked distinction with the preceding speech of Yahweh, in which he observes that “The coastlands have seen and they are afraid” (41:5a). In the final form of Second Isaiah Yahweh’s (abbreviated) message to the Servant is heard as “The coastlands have seen and are afraid, but you, Israel—fear not!”

This raises two questions: why are the coastlands afraid? and, why does the Servant have no need to fear? The answer to the first is suggested by Yahweh’s utterance in 41:2: “Who stirred up one from the east whom victory meets at every step? He gives up nations before him, so that he tramples kings under foot; he makes them like dust with his sword, like driven stubble with his bow.” The nations are afraid because Cyrus is on the march, conquering all before him. What is this to the Servant? Undoubtedly, he is also afraid of the implications of Cyrus’ campaign.29 Assuming that the Servant represents the exiles in Babylon, we can imagine his horror at having first been decimated by the conquering Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, only now to face extinction at the hands of another, more terrifying foe. The salvation oracles are spoken here not because the Servant is afraid of the

29. There are differing theories on why the Servant is afraid. Watts, for example, represents the view that the fear being addressed is that God has abandoned the people (1987: 104). The phrase with which Yahweh speaks to this fear, “I am with you”, originates deep in Israel’s traditions—for example in the Isaac narratives (e.g. Gen 26). With “I am your God” Yahweh announces to the Servant that “[his] breech of covenant that led to exile need not mean an absolute and permanent separation” (Watts, 1987: 105). The view taken here is that “I am with you” signifies that the very God who has stirred up the one from the east who threatens all before him, stands with those who are afraid of his agent, preventing them from harm.
Babylonians, but because he is afraid of the one Yahweh has stirred in the east.³⁰

How then does Yahweh’s discourse impact the Servant’s self-awareness? In answer to our second question—why does the Servant have no need to fear?—v. 10 provides two parallel claims: “I am with you”³¹ and “I am your God”³² (v. 10ab), followed, in 10cd, by the threefold promise of enacted commitment: “I will strengthen (יָשַׁלְךָ) you”; “I will help (רָצוּ) you”; “I will uphold (קָטֲבֵךְ) you with my righteous right hand.” In other words, the Servant hears that his predicament is entirely different from that of the nations—where they have reason to fear the might of Cyrus, the Servant has no such reason. Yahweh, the very one who has stirred Cyrus into action, is committed to the Servant—Yahweh is his God, and Yahweh will uphold him during the coming onslaught.

The Servant also hears in this discourse a message that is traditionally addressed to a person in need, such as the king in times of national crisis, in the

³⁰. It is worth noting Goldingay’s observation that the nature of the “fear not” oracle is “to address an enemy within, the people’s low self-esteem, as well as an enemy without” (2005: 112-113). Here again Goldingay has brought attention to the dialogic nature not only of the content of these oracles, but also their form — their specific intention is to remedy the self-awareness of the one to whom they are addressed, in this case the Servant, Israel.

³¹. The only other place where the phrase “for I am with you”, with God as the subject, is used in Isaiah is in 43:5, another salvation oracle. But see Gen 26:24 where, suggestively, God eases Jacob’s fears with the same phrase. The phrase is more common to Jeremiah. See 1:8, 19; 15:20; 30:11; 42:11, and particularly 46:28, where Jacob is addressed as “my servant”, suggesting a dialogic link with the discourse under discussion.

³². The phrase יָשַׁלְךָּו יָשַׁלְךָּו is used only twice in the OT, here and in Ezek 34:31. But similar sayings are found in Lev 11:45; 22:33; 25:38; 26:12; Num 15:41; Deut 29:13; Jer 7:23; 11:4; 30:22 and Ezek 36:28.
course of the liturgy. The salvation oracle, which traditionally is spoken to an individual, is here “democratised” and addressed to the nation, the Servant. The utterance is loaded with significance, since to have Yahweh speak a word of assurance that he might in the past have addressed to the king, elevates the role of the Servant and his standing before Yahweh, certainly in terms of his self-understanding. The promise of help to the helpless exiles is a key thrust of the prophet’s message throughout Second Isaiah, and a key component of the Servant’s self-awareness. The prophet perceives the wave of destructive force that propels Cyrus towards Babylon, and believes the only solution to the people not despairing is to hear and understand themselves according to the utterance of Yahweh, the one who has not abandoned them, but rather promises to help and uphold and strengthen.

In vv. 11-12 Yahweh’s discourse draws the Servant’s attention to the plight of his enemies, for it seems that the promise of aid alone is not enough to address his fears—he must also hear that his enemies will perish. Undoubtedly, the perishing of the Servant’s enemies will accentuate the miraculous nature of the Servant’s liberation. The Servant’s enemies are described as “all” (לֹּא) those who are

34. Williamson draws attention to the discussion of this point among scholars (Williamson, 1998: 128-129), and links this with the language of election, which, like the “fear not” oracles, is also traditionally associated with the figure of the king: “The regular designation of Israel as God’s servant in Deutero-Isaiah is also a deliberate transfer to the people of a title once ascribed especially (though of course not exclusively) to the person of the king” (Williamson, 1998: 129).
35. There are more instances of God as the subject of the verb הניב (”help”) in Isaiah than any OT book, and they are all confined to Second Isaiah: 41:13, 14; 44:2; 49:8; 50:7, 9.
“incensed” or “burn” (חרם) against him. The verb is often used with God as the subject, and Israel as the object of his anger. Isa 5:25 is typical: “Therefore the anger of Yahweh burned (חרם) against his people”. But in Isa 45:24 it is God’s enemies who are incensed at Yahweh—and they are the ones who ultimately will be shamed (זרב), echoing 41:11, where all who burn against the Servant will be ashamed (זרב). The theme of God’s enemies striving (בוחל, used in both its verbal and nounal forms) against both him and his Servant is echoed throughout Second Isaiah—45:9 includes words of woe to those who strive against their creator; 49:25 echoes the sentiment here, that those who contend with Israel Yahweh will contend with them; in Isa 50:8 the Servant himself, apparently having heard and taken on board Yahweh’s words of comfort, is able to declare “He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend (בוחל) with me?” Who then does the “all” refer to? The Babylonians, the Persians, or some other enemy? The utterance suggests to the Servant that anyone who stands against him—or anyone who causes him to fear—will be made as nothing, and in the Servant’s self-understanding this could apply to the Persians as appropriately as to the Babylonians.36

The first part of Yahweh’s discourse is bracketed off by v. 13, in which Yahweh reiterates the words and images that are used in 41:10, forming an inclusio. “I, the LORD your God” (v. 13a) echoes “I am your God” (v. 10b); “Hold your right

36. “The text itself speaks of ‘all who rage at you’ and invites any Israelite audience to assume that its enemies are embraced by it” (Goldingay, & Payne, 2007a: 165).
hand” (v. 13b) echoes “my righteous right hand” (v. 10d); the imperative to “Fear not” (v. 13c) is expressly an echo of the imperative in v. 10a; and Yahweh’s declaration that he is the one “who helps you” (v. 13d) echoes his promise of help in v. 10c. Though v. 13 completes the first oracle, v. 14 continues its themes, with the initial command to “Fear not” (v. 14a) followed by the declaration of help (v. 14c).

Yahweh’s imperative to “Fear not” addresses two of the Servant’s fears. The first is that Yahweh has abandoned him, a fear we have linked to the lament that is echoed in Isa 40:27. The fact that Yahweh is now discoursing with the Servant directly should remove this fear—that the Servant can hear the voice of Yahweh is enough to confirm that Yahweh has not deserted him. Yahweh’s command has a creative force to it—it is illocutionary, in that by his very command Yahweh achieves his purpose, which is to redress the Servant’s knowledge of God, his world, the future, and thereby himself. Says Westermann: “It is the cry which banishes the fear” (Westermann, 1969: 71). The content of Yahweh’s utterance—that his relationship with the Servant is established in his love for Abraham—supports this assurance. The second fear is that the Servant’s enemies are going to overwhelm him. Yahweh’s assurance that this will not happen remains to be demonstrated. But the promise of his presence with his people, so prominent in other exilic texts, suggests that the fear is not so much that they face a formidable enemy, but that they

37. See n. 31, p. 129.
will do so alone. That the imperative to fear not is stated three times, in v. 10a, v. 13c, and v. 14a, highlights that this is the central message of this discourse. It is the means by which Second Isaiah executes the commission Yahweh gave him in 40:1: “Comfort my people”.

The juxtaposition of the second “fear not” oracle, vv. 14-16, is “no accident” (Westermann, 1969: 75). The two oracles supplement one another, together reinforcing the prophet’s task of speaking comfort to the Servant. If we view the oracles as separate voices brought together by the prophet or a redactor, then we are permitted to hear them together as a chorus, whose purpose is to shake the Servant from his (apparently unfounded) despondency.

4.2.5. “I am a worm, but I am told I will prevail” (vv. 14a, 15-16b)

A variety of explanations for why Yahweh addresses the Servant as בֵּית (translated “worm”) are possible. It may be that the insignificance of Israel in relation to powers such as Babylon and Persian is being highlighted. It could be that the term refers to the remnant of Jacob as distinct from the nation as a whole, some of whom remain in the land of Judea, others of whom are scattered elsewhere. It may also be that the term is used to highlight the contrasting fortunes that will befall the nation that, ultimately, will become a “threshing sledge” (v. 15a). Our methodology causes us to ask not what the word means in the abstract, but how it is heard by the Servant—what does the word mean when it is put through the mill of the Servant’s
self-awareness?

Two aspects of the word’s usage in Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant here need to be highlighted. The term מַקְרָנָיו אֱלֹהִים (“worm Jacob”) is used in parallel with מַעֲרָבָיו, which can be translated “men of Israel”. In this sense “worm” qualifies “men”, suggesting that the men of Israel have been brought so low that they are as insignificant as the worm. This is not too far removed from the alternate reading of מַעֲרָבָיו—used together with מָהָר, as in Gen 34:30, Deut 4:27, and Ps 105:12, it signifies “few in number”, so here could be translated “few of Israel”. A number of translations allow מַעֲרָבָיו to qualify מַקְרָנָיו further by translating the latter “maggot” (REB) or “insect” (NRSV). Goldingay and Payne suggest “relics”, as in “relics Israel” (Goldingay, & Payne, 2007a: 170-171). Perhaps the imprecise nature of the imagery here is intentional, in order for the Servant to be impacted by multiple possibilities. There is no doubt that the term generates a negative self-image in the Servant, whether מַקְרָנָיו is translated “men”, “few” or “insect”. However, the Servant hardly needs to be reminded of his lowly state by Yahweh, since he is undoubtedly well aware of both his current circumstances and the way he is perceived by the nations round about. After all, Israel’s description of itself as a “worm” has become

38. So KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NJPS, and ESV.
39. So NIV (“O little Israel”); NJB (“You little handful of Israel”).
40. Blenkinsopp says that while the term “worm” by itself connotes “helplessness” and “insignificance”, the combination of the term with מַעֲרָבָיו suggests “death and decay” (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 201). This is in line with 1QIsa² (“the dead”).
an aspect of its lament (see Ps 22:7\[^{[6]}\]).\[^{41}\] It is entirely possible that Yahweh uses the term here only because the people have previously used it of themselves. In other words, questioning the Servant’s self-awareness as we are, here is a possible indication of how he currently perceives himself. Yahweh’s discourse, rather than seeking to convince the Servant of who he is, actually reflects back to the Servant how he is perceived already, not least by himself. This is a classic example of a character being revealed both to himself and to the reader via dialogue. It is also an example of double-voicing, since it echoes the Servant’s utterance in order to transform his self-knowledge. It does not extinguish the prior discourse, or diminish its meaning—rather, it signifies something new, which only the fresh intonation applied to an already existing utterance can generate.

The Servant will not see himself as a worm forever, since Yahweh’s reference to the very word Israel has used in its own lament seems only for the sake of magnifying the significance of the Servant’s turnaround. The Servant’s fortunes will change not because of his own strength, but because the one who helps him (echoing v. 13d) is Yahweh, who declares as much. The 2fs suffixes attached to the verb יָשָׁה (v. 14c) and the participle form of יָשָׁב (v. 14d) refer back to the feminine noun יָשָׁה, as does the 2fs suffix attached to the verb יָשָׁב in v. 15a. The address to

\[^{41}\] Whybray also argues that both יָשָׁה and יָשָׁב are “contemptuous, and are almost certainly used here because the exiles have so described themselves in a lamentation to which this oracle is the reply” (1975: 65).
the Servant in the feminine singular corresponds to the exclusive use of perfect verbs in vv. 14c-15a. From v. 15c the Servant is addressed in the masculine singular, and in the imperfect (“you will thresh”, יִדְשְׁתֶּר). The shift in syntax mirrors the transformation that will occur in the Servant’s self-knowledge. While the image of יָרֵד is in view, the Servant hears himself addressed not as one who is worm-like, but as the worm. The perfect verbs denoting Yahweh’s activity on behalf of the worm accentuate the imminence of his action—the transformation is occurring as Yahweh, who here (v. 14d) declares himself to be “your redeemer” (יִשְׂרָאֵל) for the first time in Second Isaiah, speaks. This should not surprise us, since the locus of the transformation is the Servant’s internal discourse. Conversely, the imperfect verbs from v. 15c, and the corresponding address to the Servant in the masculine singular, highlight the actions of the Servant post-transformation, when the Servant will know himself as threshing sledge.

The term “threshing sledge” (גֶּרֶסֶם) in v. 15a, is qualified by two images: it will be new, sharp and have teeth (v. 15b) and it will thresh the mountains and crush them (v. 15c). This last image of the mountains is qualified further by two parallel statements: it will make the hills like chaff and winnow them (vv. 15d, 16a), and the wind will carry them away; the tempest will scatter them (v. 16bc). More is said

42. Significantly, Yahweh declares himself to be Israel’s redeemer in conjunction with his oft-used Isaianic title “the Holy One of Israel” (יוֹדֵה). The title is used in twelve references in First Isaiah (Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11; 30:12, 15; 31:1; 37:23), often in the context of the people failing to recognise him. Significantly יָדֵה is used only once in First Isaiah (35:9). It seems to be one of Second Isaiah’s concerns to bring these two aspects of Yahweh together.
about the mountains and what will happen to them, than what is said about the threshing sledge. Whether the mountains are an allusion to enemy forces\textsuperscript{43} or to geographical elements that lie in the Servant’s path or even to obstructions to the coming of Yahweh that is referred to in 40:4,\textsuperscript{44} is perhaps not the point. It appears that what the Servant as the threshing sledge will achieve is of more significance than the fact of his being a threshing sledge, or what it is that he will winnow. Only in threshing the mountains will the Servant know himself as a threshing sledge, and only then will he know himself as other than a worm. The emphasis is on the transformation,\textsuperscript{45} which, as we have already noted, is due to Yahweh’s commitment to the Servant, and not to the Servant’s abilities. The Servant who previously has seen himself as a worm is being given a new self-awareness, one that is based not on what he has witnessed himself doing, but on what he hears Yahweh say. The key to the Servant’s transformation is precisely his dialogical constitution, since only in his self-consciousness does the Servant actually change. As yet he has achieved nothing, and for all intents and purposes remains the worm that we have linked to his own

\textsuperscript{43} For example, North (1964: 99) suggests the mountains and hills represent “worldly powers”, though he does highlight that it is the contrast between the insignificant worm and the threshing sledge capable of dealing with mountains that is Second Isaiah’s main emphasis; Spykerboer (1976: 70) says the best interpretation is to take the mountains and hills as representing Israel’s enemies, either in Babylon or in Palestine.

\textsuperscript{44} See Oswalt (1998: 93): “Nothing can stand in the way of the Lord’s promises to his people. There may be a reference to the return from exile here . . . , but there is no indication that the imagery should be limited to that.”

\textsuperscript{45} This is noted also by Melugin: “The major intention of this oracle is indeed related to the contrast between the present powerlessness of Israel with the mighty nation of the future” (Melugin, 1976: 95).
laments. However, since all that we know about the Servant thus far is what we have heard Yahweh say to him, we can suggest that in the Servant’s knowledge of himself he is no longer the worm, but a threshing sledge who will winnow the hills and crush the mountains.46

Finally, the lines of discourse that state “But you will rejoice in Yahweh; in the Holy One of Israel you will glory” (v. 16de) imply that an action (worship) will replace a state (depression). Yahweh’s discourse, his dialogic encounter with the Servant, is creative. His word causes the reassessment by the Servant of his own self-knowledge, and joyful worship is the (intended) result.

4.3. Who am I?—The Servant in Isa 42:1-9

This discourse comprises two discrete units (42:1-4 and 42:5-9) that are linked not only by their juxtaposition in the final form of the text, but also by the fact that Yahweh is the speaker in both, and the subject of his discourse is a figure who is being commissioned for a task.47 The units are also linked dialogically, whether this was originally intended by the prophet or not. Bakhtin argues that when “there is a coming together of two utterances equally and directly oriented toward a referential object” (1984: 188) (in this case the Servant and his task), then the monologic

46. Goldingay alludes to this dialogical transformation: “Israel has seen itself as a worm, a minor earthmover. God undertakes to turn the community into a more impressive one” (Goldingay, 2005: 116).

47. Seitz (2001: 362) describes the two units as episodes, “the first involving the presentation of the servant, the second the commissioning of him.”
context is weakened or even destroyed. In other words, two distinct voices come together and generate a dialogue that converges on the object of their discourse. The conviction among some scholars that 42:1-4 is a later interpolation only serves to heighten the dialogic nature of the two units, since

two discourses equally and directly oriented toward a referential object within the limits of a single context cannot exist side by side without intersecting dialogically, regardless of whether they confirm, mutually supplement, or (conversely) contradict one another (Bakhtin, 1984: 188-189).

However, it is not self-evident that the Servant is the object of the discourse in both units. Although Yahweh refers to the Servant in 42:1 (though only in the third person), he does not do so anywhere in the second unit. He does, however, say to the addressee in 42:6 “I have called you” (כִּי הַקָּבֵרָה), which echoes his address to Servant Israel-Jacob in 41:9b, and anticipates similar statements in 43:1e, and 7a, and is echoed by the Servant himself in 49:1c. It is true that Cyrus is also called by Yahweh (45:3d, 4c), and Blenkinsopp argues there is a strong case that Cyrus was originally identified as the Servant (2002: 210). However, the reference to the “former things” (יראתה) (42:9a) and the “new things” (יראתה) (42:9b), both of which are echoed by

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48. Isa 42:1-4 is the first of Duhm’s so-called Servant songs (see discussion in chapter 2, p. 35). The prevailing 20th century view that the songs represent a separate strand within Second Isaiah—either written by the prophet at a later date, or written by someone other than Second Isaiah and interpolated by an editor—has been challenged in recent years, mainly on literary grounds.

49. Even if the Servant is in view in both units we cannot automatically assume it is the same Servant as was addressed in 41:8-16, a point made by Whybray (1975: 71). He argues that Israel’s role as Servant is always passive, but here, in 42:1-4, the Servant’s role is active. This, he concludes, “is a decisive argument against this identification here”. This is an obvious monologic argument—an assumption is made that the Servant is always passive, and therefore any utterance which describes him as active must refer to a different Servant. From our point of view numerous depictions of the Servant are not only warranted, but essential to his dialogical make-up.
Yahweh in later discourse addressed unequivocally to Israel-Jacob (43:18-19), strongly suggest this discourse is also addressed to Israel.

In the final form of the text the most obvious reason the Servant is not addressed by name in 42:5-9 is that he has no need to be, since the Servant has already been named in the first. The absence of the term “servant” in 42:5-9 can be seen as evidence that the two units belong together—or, at least, that an editor believed them to be linked. A natural reading of the complete discourse pictures Yahweh first commissioning the Servant in the presence of witnesses, then turning to address the Servant directly. The scene evokes the designation before a witness or witnesses of Israel’s kings, such as Saul (see 1 Sam 9:17 and Yahweh’s declaration concerning Saul to Samuel, “Behold the man” (יַעֲקֹבִי אִישׁ) and David (particularly 1 Sam 16:12, and Yahweh’s declaration, “This is he!” (יהוה אִישׁ)). In the first Servant discourse (41:8-16) the Servant is only addressed, not presented. Here the Servant is constituted first by what he overhears Yahweh say to others, and secondly by what he hears Yahweh say to him.

The links between this Servant discourse and the first, Isa 41:8-16, provide a separate reason for considering Isa 42:1-4 in light of its immediate literary context,

50. See Westermann (1969: 94), who argues the wording of Isa 42:1-4 is so similar to 1 Sam 16 that it was probably intended to suggest a royal designation. Seitz (2001: 362) concedes: “Most scholars agree . . . [Yahweh’s utterance] is taken from a royal setting, where the king or the king’s successor is formally presented before an audience.” Blenkinsopp (2002: 212) similarly argues that Yahweh’s “discourse is addressed neither to celestial beings nor to foreigners but to the congregation, to whom the designated person is presented as if present to them.”
and not as an isolated text. The Servant is introduced here in terms that echo the first discourse: he is described as the one whom Yahweh upholds (גִּבּוּל), echoing 41:10d; and he is Yahweh’s “chosen” (נְצָר), echoing 41:8b. From this we take it that Israel-Jacob is still in view here. LXX certainly interprets this passage as a continuation of the Servant discourse that began with 41:8-16, since it qualifies the terms ὁ παῖς (“the servant”) and ὁ ἐκλεκτός (“the chosen”) with the names Ἰακώβ and Ἰσραήλ (Israel and Jacob) respectively. Reading this discourse on the back of the first has the effect of rendering this as the public declaration of what has already been made known to the Servant—his designation. We read it also as the broadening of the Servant’s awareness of both his relationship with Yahweh and the purpose behind the reassurances he was given in the previous discourse. This discourse indicates that those assurances were not ends in themselves, but were given in order to prepare the Servant for his task. Yahweh’s constituting the Servant

51. Goldingay (2005: 152) argues “one would need some explicit contrary indication if one were not to infer from the parallels of structure and language that 42:1-4 is intended to describe Jacob-Israel.”

52. Some scholars make an issue of the veiled language here—the fact that the Servant is not named. This is an issue mainly of their own making, since once the unit is isolated from the rest of Second Isaiah the identity of the Servant becomes a problem. This is verbalised by Westermann (1969: 93): “The cryptic, veiled language used is deliberate . . . The veiled manner of speaking is intentional, and to our knowledge much in them was meant to remain hidden even from their original hearers.” If the unit is read in its context, however, the Servant’s identity is not nearly so troublesome, since the dialogic links between this discourse and the earlier Servant discourse would have us believe he is still Israel-Jacob.

53. Says Ekblad: “Here the LXX translates in clear continuity with 41:8’s presentation of Israel as God’s servant” (1999: 58).

as a threshing sledge (41:15a) is complemented by the specifics of his newly-commissioned role that are outlined in 42:1d-4.\textsuperscript{55}

As in the first Servant discourse, our main concern here is not to solve the problem of the Servant’s identity, but to reimagine the internal discourse that is generated in the Servant by what he hears uttered about him and to him.\textsuperscript{56} We summarise that internal discourse with the following: 1) “I am chosen, delighted in, and upheld by Yahweh (vv. 1ab, 6b); 2) “Yahweh’s spirit is upon me, and prepares me for a task” (v. 1c); 3) “I am publicly commissioned for that task and given its purpose” (v. 1d, 4b, 6c-7c). We will discuss each statement in turn.

\textbf{4.3.1. “I am chosen, delighted in, and upheld by Yahweh” (vv. 1ab, 6b)}

Yahweh’s first words to the assembled witnesses, “Here is my Servant” (יְהֹוָה יְשַׁמֵּעָה), double-voice those that he has spoken to the Servant previously—with the effect that “my Servant” is now invested with new signification. Where previously it was used as a term of reassurance to the Servant (41:8a), it now becomes one intoned with

\textsuperscript{55} Gitay’s (1981: 125) understanding of the rhetorical purpose of the present unit is similar: “[Second Isaiah’s] main goal in the present address is to convince his audience that they have a significant function in the current development and that they will succeed in their mission.”

\textsuperscript{56} Westermann (1969: 93) makes the same point, but from a different perspective: “On principle, their [the Servant songs] exegesis must not be controlled by the question, ‘Who is the servant of God?’ . . . The questions which should control exegesis are: ‘What do the texts make known about what transpires, or is to transpire, between God, the servant, and those to whom his task pertains?’” We would add to these very appropriate questions one which reflects the dialogical constitution of the Servant texts: “What is the Servant made aware of concerning himself, his God, contemporary events, and the people?” More recently, Goldingay (2005: 153) has said that verses 1-4 “describe without referring”. That is, “their concern is to define a role and affirm that it will be fulfilled.”
honour and affection. Yahweh addresses the witnesses not with “Behold, the Servant.” The possessive “my” directed outwards signifies a public declaration of Yahweh’s commitment to the one he has promised to “uphold”.

“My servant” is paralleled here with “my chosen” (יֵ漯ה רַחַם, v. 1b). In 41:8 “my servant” is also paralleled with “chosen”, and the repetition of the parallel here heightens the links between the two discourses. Although the names Israel-Jacob are not used in this poem—which leads some commentators to posit that the servant here is an individual rather than the nation—the parallel terms clearly form a dialogic link. In 41:8b the phrase “whom I have chosen” qualified Yahweh’s use of the name “Jacob”. Here “my chosen” is itself qualified—by a term Yahweh did not use in the first discourse: “in whom my soul delights” (הַלְּבֹנִי מַלְאָלֶה, v. 1b). The addition of the verb הַלְּבֹנִי here confirms the shift in signification of “my Servant” in Yahweh’s discourse to the witnesses—and raises the question, why did Yahweh not use this term in his discourse to the Servant? What is the significance of Yahweh’s pronouncement of delight in the Servant in his presentation to the people? More precisely, how does the Servant hear this pronouncement?

The use of the verb הַלְּבֹנִי in this context can signify either that Yahweh is

57. Gitay (1981: 126) argues this is precisely the rhetorical strategy of this unit—it creates “an emotional and personal atmosphere which makes it easier for him [Second Isaiah] to reach the audience at this point.” We would argue the unit operates on more than the rhetorical level, and that the dialogic nature of the discourse actually effects intimacy where previously it was suspended or broken. This is reflected in how Yahweh is described, and by what Yahweh himself says to the Servant, as Gitay points out: “The description of God as the One who called, took Israel by the hand, protected her, and promoted her (v. 6b), expresses the intimate relationship” (126).
pleased with the Servant—as in, he is emotionally gratified by Israel’s service—or, that he accepts the Servant as he might accept a pleasing sacrifice. Our view is that the Servant is likely to have heard the pronouncement in light of its cultic connotations. Since the backdrop of this section of Second Isaiah is the overarching question concerning whether Yahweh has rejected Israel, the knowledge that Yahweh actually accepts the people is consistent with the reversal in the Servant’s self-consciousness that we have witnessed already. It is consistent with the overarching message of Second Isaiah that Yahweh confers acceptance upon the Servant while all empirical evidence points in another direction. This will be seen in our discussion of 43:8-44:8. This idea is also consistent with comparable prophetic literature from the same period. For example, in Ezek 20:40, Yahweh proclaims that he will “accept them” (נָעַמְם), referring to “all the house of Israel” (כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל). In the next verse Yahweh declares that “as a pleasing aroma I will accept you” (כִּי נָחָם אֵלֵי). 58 The pronouncement, to witnesses, that Yahweh now accepts the Servant is of the highest significance for the Servant’s knowledge of himself. No longer is he the one whose sacrifices Yahweh refuses to accept, as in Jer 14:12. Now, through no effort of his own, the Servant is declared, publicly, to be acceptable to Yahweh. Yahweh obligates himself to the Servant by this public declaration.

58. The pre-exilic warnings of Jeremiah are couched in the negative forms of this idea. See, for example, Jer 14:10.
The setting of this declaration (before witnesses) already suggests a royal designation of the Servant, as discussed above. The use of the roots דָּרָה and בַּשָּׁה also bring the royal traditions to bear dialogically upon this Servant discourse. Williamson, with others,⁵⁹ argues along these lines (1998: 132ff.). Williamson says that while some of the attributes given to the Servant here could describe other roles, such as a prophet, only a royal figure could hold them all together.⁶⁰ Certainly the words that Yahweh uses here do, as Williamson argues, suggest a royal application. 1 Chron 28:4 indicates that words such as “chosen” and “accepted” were used of David as late as exilic and post-exilic times:

Yet the LORD God of Israel chose מְגַזִּים me from all my father’s house to be king over Israel forever. For he chose Judah as leader, and in the house of Judah my father’s house, and among my father’s sons he took pleasure מְגַז in me to make me king over all Israel (ESV).

But since the Servant is not unequivocally addressed as a king we are required to consider how he would have heard this discourse.⁶¹ Westermann (1969: 97) arrives at

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⁵⁹. See, for example, Beuken (1972: 3). The prophecy evokes the designation by Yahweh of his king (e.g. 1 Sam 9:17, 16:12; Zech 3:8, 6:12) in three main ways: the designation (“Here is...”) itself, the giving of Yahweh’s spirit, and the role of bringing מְגַז, which is the characteristic task of the king (e.g. 1 Sam 8:5ff., 20; Isa 9:6; Jer 21:12; 22:3, 15; 23:5).

⁶⁰. Williamson argues this on the basis of five points: 1) That the first words of the discourse are a designation (as in 1 Sam 9:17, 12:13, 10:24, 16:12 and Zech 9:9); 2) That while “my Servant” is used widely, it is certainly used of the king, especially David (Ps 89); 3) The phrase “whom I uphold” is used of the king in Ps 63:9[⁶]; 4) That “my chosen” is never applied to a prophet, but is used of the king (for example, in 1 Sam 10:24, 16:1-13; 2 Sam 6:21; 1 Kings 8:16; 11:34; and Ps 89:4[⁶]); That the phrase “I have put my spirit upon him” in Isa 42:1 is reminiscent of the election of David as king in 1 Sam 16:13.

⁶¹. Beuken (1972: 4) makes the same point but in a different way. He argues the features of the Servant that are more like those of the prophet “interfere with the dominating king motifs to the extent that the Servant cannot simply be identified with the traditional Israelite king nor with the expected Messiah.”
a very different conclusion that seems more faithful to the dialogic nature of the text, in which various dimensions are brought together in the person of the Servant himself. Westermann argues the Servant is depicted as a mediator who discharges his office by way of both action (like the king) and speech (like the prophets). These two lines of mediation, which were combined in the one figure of Moses but had since diverged, were again combined in the office of the Servant.

Westermann’s reading of the discourse is helpful, even though he does not read 42:1-4 in light of its context, but as one of the added songs.62 But we have already made the case that 42:1-4 should be heard in dialogue with the prior Servant discourse, so that the Servant who is being presented in the presence of witnesses is the same Israel-Jacob of 41:8-16. If this is the case, then Westermann’s interpretation of the Servant’s dual role suggests that exilic Israel is being invited to imagine itself in the unique position of discharging the offices of king and prophet.63 This comes at a time when Israel is very much aware that the throne is vacant. The Servant’s fear of the coming onslaught from the east is exacerbated by his awareness that he is without leadership and without representation—indeed, the loss of the king no doubt has contributed in part to the belief that Yahweh has abandoned him, particularly if the royal imagery of First Isaiah, with its promise of a leader in the mould of David,

63. Goldingay (2005: 154) similarly sees “servant” as a position waiting to be filled: he argues that in 42:1-4 the “picture of the servant is on the way to becoming a role seeking someone to fulfill it.”
is already known to the people.\textsuperscript{64} In this context it may seem strange to Israel that it is being commissioned for a prophetic role to the nations.

In summary, the Servant surely is reminded, first of all, of his tragic circumstances—that there is no king. That Yahweh attributes to Israel-Jacob language used of the king is evidence of this discourse’s exilic context, when the reapplication of the imagery would have been appropriate. But secondly, Yahweh’s discourse is bound to stir in the Servant the idea that he is to replace the king in Yahweh’s purposes—that he is not to wait for a leader to rise up, but that he—the Servant, Israel-Jacob—is to take on the role the king was intended to fulfil. But that role has other dimensions, and these will be discussed below.

4.3.2. “Yahweh’s spirit is upon me” (v. 1c)

Yahweh’s declaration to the assembled witnesses, “I have put my spirit upon him” (יִנָּתַל עָלָיו רֹוחִי), describes an action that has already taken place. Its corresponding utterance in 42:1d, “He will cause justice to go out to the nations” (יִנָּתַל בִּרְשׁוֹת אֲנָמָנָה), describes an action that has yet to happen, but will happen as a consequence of Yahweh giving his spirit. The first statement has the Servant as object, the second as subject. Both statements are new to the Servant, in terms of his dialogical constitution, and again suggest a role that is more befitting a king than a despondent band of exiles.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{64} See, for example, Isa 9:6-7; 11:2-5; 16:5.

\textsuperscript{65} Westermann (1969: 95) points out that the designation of the Servant here is differentiated from
We have already discussed that the words “chosen” and “accepted” to describe the Servant, as well as the situation of being designated in the company of witnesses, raise in the Servant’s self-knowledge the idea that he is to take upon himself the office and function of the king. This awareness is heightened in the Servant by Yahweh’s declaration that he has given him his spirit, and that the Servant is to bring justice to the nations. The giving of the Spirit is traditionally an action that identifies the king. The giving of Yahweh’s spirit is also a mark of the prophet (see, e.g., Num 11; 1 Sam 10:6, 10; 11:6), which affirms Westermann’s view that the Servant is assigned a dual role. It is possibly known to the Servant that First Isaiah has envisaged the spirit of Yahweh resting on the descendant of Jesse: נְיוֹחָה וַעֲנַיִם יְהוָה רִחְיוֹנָה (“And the spirit of Yahweh will rest on him”) (Isa 11:2a). Isa 11:4a qualifies the role of this future king with the statement קִנַּת בִּנְיָמִין (“And he will judge the poor with righteousness”). More will be said about the קִנַּת that the Servant will bring to the nations with reference to 42:1d in the next section. It is mentioned here in order to draw a dialogic link between Isa 42:1-9 and Isa 11:1-9, 10 on the basis of the common root קִנָּה, and the shared use of רוּחַ (spirit). Also, the object of the Servant’s actions, and the actions of the root of Jesse (see Isa 11:10) will be the מַעֲרָכִים (“nations’). In both discourses the role of the central figure (in the

66. See, for example, the giving of Yahweh’s spirit to Saul (1 Sam 10:10); and the giving of the spirit to David (1 Sam 16:13).
first, the Davidic king; in the second, the Servant) will be played out on a large stage, and witnessed by the peoples of the world. Whether or not the dialogic link between the two was intentional, in the final form the Servant discourse echoes the first, and suggests that the Servant will fulfil the role of Jesse’s offspring. With regards the nations, which Isa 11:10 says will seek out the root of Jesse, the Servant’s designation suggests this will happen when the Servant makes himself known to the nations by taking נְשֵׂאָה to them.67

Yahweh’s discourse not only raises in the Servant’s self-knowledge the fact of his spirit’s presence and the purpose for which it is given, it also defines for the Servant the manner in which that purpose will be carried out. In other words, the giving of Yahweh’s spirit enables the hero to perform in a particular way,68 as it does in Isa 11:1-9. The giving of the spirit to the royal descendant of Jesse will ensure he has “wisdom and understanding” (חכמה וญาים) (11:2b), that he receives divine “advice and strength” ( libero נביה) (11:2c), and that he possesses the “knowledge

67. There is another reason for drawing links between the Servant discourses and the discourses that comprise Isa 11. We have already noted that in the first Servant discourse, Isa 41:8-16, the Servant comes to know himself as the one addressed as “you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its far corners” (v. 9ab). See the discussion on p. 125ff. We noted that this heightened the imagery of the Servant being called a descendant of Abraham, who was also called from afar. In Isa 11, “in that day” (בנה), in which the root of Jesse will stand as a sign for the peoples and the nations will ask about him (v. 10), the “lord” (אֱלֹהִים) will “assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (v. 12, JPS). The one who in the Servant discourses of Second Isaiah comes to know himself in the utterance of Yahweh as the one called from the earth’s farthest corners might also make the link with First Isaiah’s reference to “that day” in which these things are expected to occur.

68. On this point, Muilenburg (1956a: 464) says: “The gift of the Spirit is permanent, like that of the messianic king in 11:2 . . . it is charismatic and equips its possessor with unusual powers.”
and the reverence of Yahweh” (11:2d).

In Isa 42:1d-4 the Servant discovers that his purpose is to bring justice (דעון) to the nations. This is stated three times—in 42:1d, 42:3c, and in 42:4b. The three-fold repetition creates a framing device around a series of ironic statements that define, by affirming what is perhaps contrary to expectations, how the Servant will act. The first דעון statement (לניי וניי דעון) is in apposition to Yahweh’s declaration that he has given his spirit to the Servant in 42:1c, affirming that the giving of the spirit is precisely for this purpose. The second דעון statement, in 42:3c, repeats the first, but with the addition of the adverbial לניי (“faithfully” or “truthfully”). The third דעון statement, in 42:4b (שד sorter דעון), completes the frame. Since the descriptions of how the Servant will act are framed by these three דעון statements they specifically relate to this purpose. The concern is not to give the Servant a set of behaviours, but to qualify the Servant’s role by establishing its parameters. In other words, the Servant’s knowledge of himself in light of Yahweh’s discourse is given limitations—Yahweh’s spirit is a restraining force that will prevent the Servant from acting in certain ways. Or, stating it positively, Yahweh’s spirit is a liberating force that prevents the Servant from making certain errors. The act of uttering these limitations in the Servant’s hearing becomes an invitation for him to respond accordingly.

Specifically, the Servant hears that he “will not cry out” (לאweets) (42:2a). This utterance is complemented by the parallel statement
The act of crying out has negative connotations throughout Isaiah: it is a cry for help in the face of oppression (19:20); even heroes cry outside (33:7); others cry out to an idol that fails to respond (46:70); some cry out of pain (65:14). The Servant hears that his purpose will be achieved without such cries of anguish and frustration.

The Servant hears also that he will not break a reed that has already been broken (וּלָא אֲשַׁשֵׁי בְּחֶבֶר) (42:3a). Yahweh declares in a parallel statement that the Servant will not put out a wick that is burning dimly (וּלָא אֲשַׁשֵׁי) (42:3b). Both statements are taken to mean that in his dispensing of justice the Servant will not treat heavy-handedly those who are already weak or diminished. The roots that are used adjectivally to describe the reed and the wick of v.3ab (בָּהָה and בָּשַׁשְׁנָה) are used, in reverse order, and in their verbal forms, in 42:4a to speak of what the Servant will not become: he will not become weak or crushed. In other words, the spirit that prevents the Servant from crushing the oppressed will also protect the

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69. Muilenburg (1956a: 465) notes the connotation of distress or grief with the term generally, but suggests the parallel statement here leads to a more general meaning. However, that בָּשַׁשְׁנָה is associated with distress throughout Isaiah suggests that it should be the controlling image in the parallelism, and the second, seemingly general, statement should be interpreted negatively.

70. Westermann’s interpretation (1969: 96), that in oriental law a king, upon succession to the throne, has the laws re-enacted and publicly proclaimed, is somewhat forced in this context.

71. See Isa 36:6 and the description of Egypt as a broken reed (וּלָא אֲשַׁשֵׁי בְּחֶבֶר); in 1 Kgs 14:15 Israel is described as a reed shaken in the water. In both examples the reed connotes fragility, even when appearances suggest strength. See discussion in Kim (1999).
Servant, so that he will not be crushed in return. By this, the Servant better understands what Yahweh meant when he declared to both the Servant (in 41:10d) and to the assembled witnesses (in 42:1a) that he was upholding him. It also resonates with Yahweh’s utterance in 42:6b: I will take you by the hand and keep you. It is a possible allusion to the suffering that is associated with the Servant in later discourses.

Yahweh’s discourse stimulates the Servant’s internal discourse a number of ways. Firstly, the Servant is prompted to remember that he has not been abandoned. Secondly, the Servant discovers that Yahweh has stood by him for a purpose. Thirdly, the Servant is reminded that he is being upheld by Yahweh, who will continue to uphold him as he goes about his task. Fourthly, Yahweh has given his spirit to the Servant in order to prevent him from becoming weary or crushed—but also to prevent him from crushing others. This may come as a surprise to the Servant, who previously has been told that he will become a threshing sledge in order to thresh the mountains and crush them (41:15; see discussion above). This is a good example of two images coming into dialogic tension. Taken alone the image of

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72. This interpretation of קבר in this context is better than that proposed by Muilenburg (1956a: 464), of “grasp” or “lay hold of”. The picture of Yahweh grasping the Servant for his will and purpose is attractive, but the context better supports the traditional translation “uphold”.

73. Westermann (1969: 96) also makes this point: “This is the only place in the song which suggests that the Servant’s task is to involve him in grievous suffering.”

74. In Goldingay’s apt words, “Here the position of being Yhw’s servant is a matter of task not just privilege” (Goldingay, 2005: 155).
the threshing sledge could be used to justify aggression against Israel’s enemies. It may suggest to the Servant that his hope lies in becoming a mighty nation that can match its enemies on the battleground. But Yahweh’s designation of his Servant, before witnesses, as one who will not break a fragile reed radically questions that interpretation. Indeed, it may even have been crafted in response to exiles who were clinging too tightly to the idea that they would become mighty enough to exact revenge on their enemies. Can the two images be reconciled? For the moment they must be given space to quarrel. What is clear is that the multivoiced nature of the Servant’s constitution will not submit to easy harmonisation.

Finally, Yahweh’s discourse possibly evokes in the Servant’s self-consciousness First Isaiah’s oracles concerning a future king. The Servant, in the knowledge that Israel no longer has a king, is invited to see himself in that role. It remains to be seen whether the Servant responds positively to this invitation. Nevertheless, Yahweh announces that he has put his spirit upon the Servant, so that he will neither cry out in distress, nor crush those who are downtrodden. Such is the manner by which the Servant will carry out his task, the specific components of which are also communicated to the Servant by Yahweh. These are discussed next.

4.3.3. “I am publicly commissioned for a specific task” (v. 1d, 3c, 4b, 6c-7c)
Yahweh’s discourse makes two distinct claims upon the Servant concerning his, as yet future, task, both of which directly impact his knowledge of himself. The first is
stated to the assembled witnesses, and forms part of the Servant’s public commissioning, which we have understood to have taken place in the hearing of the Servant. The second is addressed directly to the Servant in the unit 42:5-9. The statements are dialogically related, in that while each communicates different aspects of the Servant’s task, one informs the other.

The first claim upon the Servant has been discussed briefly in the section above. It is comprised of three statements, made not to the Servant directly but to the witnesses. Each statement includes the word שׂדִּיעַם (“justice”, or “the true way” (JPS), see discussion below)—in 42:1d, 42:3c, and 42:4b. The Servant hears in these statements the claim that he will cause justice to be brought to the nations—and that he will do so “faithfully” or “truthfully” (יִשָּׂא, εἰς ἀλήθειαν, LXX).

The second claim is made upon the Servant directly in 42:6d. Yahweh tells the Servant that he will be given “as a covenant for the people” (לְךָֽו לְגוֹי), and, in an appositive phrase, “as a light for the nations” (לְנוֹ לְגוֹיָּם).

Each of these claims will be explored in turn, followed by a discussion of what they contribute to the Servant’s self-knowledge.

4.3.3.1. Justice to the nations
We have already made the case above that the Servant discourse in Isa 42:1-4 echoes the oracles concerning a future Davidic king in Isa 11, and therefore raises in the Servant’s self-knowledge the possibility that he is being commissioned for that task.
The Servant’s newfound knowledge—that his task will involve bringing וּלְעָלַם to the nations, a role that is traditionally associated with the king—makes it more likely that the Servant calls to mind the royal oracles. The dating, original setting and meaning of the royal oracles in Isa 11:1-9, 10 are highly debated; one argument is that their final redactional positioning did not happen until after the exile, which means the Servant might not have had access to them. However, there are enough dialogical links between the oracles and the Servant discourses to believe that one set of utterances influenced the other—even if we cannot be positive about the direction of that influence. In the final form of the text, however, and therefore according to the book’s final redactional layering, the Servant discourses have been influenced by the royal oracles of First Isaiah. The process behind this is obviously much more dynamic than an author merely echoing the words of an earlier text in order to draw semantic links. Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia suggests that all utterances are shot through with multiple voices—of various traditions, ideologies, texts, theologies, histories, and so on. According to the Bakhtinian reading we have been developing the final composition of the book reflects the Israelite community’s own self-interpretive journey through several hundred years of experiences. In one of the final stages of this journey the Servant’s application of the royal oracles to his own self-understanding, in light of new discourses that echo those oracles, is reflected in the

75. Childs (2001: 99) outlines the issues.
shape of the text’s final form. The oracles concerning the future king in Isa 11:1-9, 10 are prior to the Servant discourses in the book’s final form, and need to be. The Servant draws his identity from utterances that have already been made to the community he represents, utterances by which he now, in light of contemporary circumstances, understands himself in a new way. The hope of a future king is profoundly central to the message of First Isaiah, and it is fanciful to suggest that when the present discourse uses the same or similar terms to speak of the role of the Servant, an echoing of those terms does not take place—whether or not this was the intention of the author of either the original oracles, or the Servant discourses.

So, when Yahweh’s discourse concerning the Servant in 42:1-4 states three times that the bringing of נָפְלָיָה to the nations will be a key aspect of the Servant’s purpose, the Servant recalls the earlier oracles in which the duty to “judge” (צדק) belongs to the future king, as it did in the time of the Davidic kingdom. This is stated explicitly in Isa 11:3b (וְלָיָה L **And he will not judge according to what his eyes see”) and 11:4a (וְלָיָה לָיָה לָיָה לָיָה לָיָה L **And he will judge the poor with righteousness”).76 It should be noted that the links between this discourse and the royal oracles go beyond the semantic. Positioned as they are at the conclusion of a series of oracles concerning the devastation of the Northern Kingdom by the Assyrians (Isa 10:5-34), the royal oracles signal a message of rebirth and hope. The

76. See also Isa 16:5 and 32:1.
future Davidic king is seen as the physical manifestation of such hope, whether he is to be interpreted strictly historically (Hezekiah perhaps), or eschatologically. In Isa 42:1-9, also, language evoking the role of the king comes after the devastating consequences of Yahweh’s judgment, and signals hope out of despair. The difference is that here the Servant, Israel-Jacob, is both the one who is despairing, as well as the one who signifies hope. In Isa 40:27 Israel-Jacob laments that “My way is hidden from Yahweh, and my justice [מִשְׁפַּת] is disregarded by my God”. Hence, Israel despairs. But in the Servant discourse of 42:1-9 Yahweh echoes the term מִשְׁפַּת and invests it with wholly new meaning—justice is not something Israel-Jacob is owed, but something he will establish.77

As Goldingay (2005: 149) notes, Second Isaiah’s preaching has been moving to this point since Israel’s lament:

Jacob-Israel’s complaint about its mišpāt (40:27) remains part of the prophet’s agenda; 40:12-31 constituted one response, 41:1-20 made it more specific, and 42:1-4 takes it in an implicit new direction such as breaks the bounds of the parameters of Jacob-Israel’s complaint.

The equity and righteousness by which the king of Isa 11:1-9 (see vv. 3-4) was said to judge seems to have taken its meaning from and extended the application of the traditions concerning David’s role, seen in his dispensing of justice in 2 Sam

77. This point is not lost on Beuken (1972: 8), who argues: “For the reader of Second Isaiah’s prophecy [we would argue the Servant himself as the recipient of the discourse], there cannot but be a relation between Israel’s complaint and God’s word to Israel when he designates his Servant: ‘He will bring forth mišpāt to the nations.’” Beuken is also right to say: “Whether this relation is based on the message and the intention of the prophet himself or on the composition arranged by those who handed down the prophetic heritage, is a second issue” (1972: 8).
8:15: (“And David administered justice and equity to all his people”). David’s role resonates also with the actions of Yahweh, who, according to Ps 37:6, brings forth (צדק) righteousness (צדק) like the light (noonday)—four terms by which the Servant hears his role described in 42:1-9. The Servant, who in 42:6d is told he will be “as a light to the nations” (בַּיִת אֱלֹהִים), arguably hears Yahweh’s discourse as being shot through with these other voices. It is inconceivable to think he could hear himself addressed in these terms without recalling that is the primary responsibility of both Yahweh and his servant, the king.

Our view is that the Servant understands דִּבְרֵי חֶסֶד, or at least an element of it, to represent the same fairness for all and righteous decision-making on behalf of the poor and unfortunate that is foretold of the Davidic king in Isa 11:1-9. The internal discourse that is generated in the Servant by Yahweh’s commission is not unequivocal on this point, however. Complicating the Servant’s self-understanding are competing voices that suggest the nations will come to Zion for justice. Isa 2:2-4 (cf. Mic 4:2-3), for example, which is understood by some scholars to pre-date First Isaiah, speaks of דִּבְרֵי חֶסֶד going out from Zion and Yahweh judging (צדק) between the

78. Whybray interprets דִּבְרֵי חֶסֶד as “Yahweh’s sovereign universal rule or order” (Whybray, 1975: 72).
79. Hos 6:5 also speaks of Yahweh’s justice going forth as the light (צדק אֱלֹהִים).
80. Blenkinsopp (2002: 210) describes דִּבְרֵי חֶסֶד in similar terms in this context—as “a social order based on justice that originates in the will and character of the deity.”
nations who have gathered at the mount for just such a purpose.\textsuperscript{81} It is possible that the Servant, in light of this text,\textsuperscript{82} understands that he, with respect to the task he is being given, will replace Zion in Yahweh’s plan to bring עいただく to the nations, possibly because at the time the discourse is given, Zion no longer stands in its former glory. Such a reading would require a radical reinterpretation of the Servant’s self-understanding. How does he reconcile his laments at being abandoned by Yahweh with the knowledge that he will be the means by which עいただく will go out to the nations, and that he will judge righteously the nations of the world? Beuken (1972: 11) argues that in Isa 40:12-31 Israel understands its own neglected עceptar to mean the \textit{course of its history},\textsuperscript{83} which it believes is being determined by nations and their gods, and not by Yahweh. Our reading of the opening Servant discourse, Isa 41:8-16, was that it sought to address this misunderstanding. Now Yahweh, in 42:1-9, assigns the dispensing of עخطر to the Servant. In accepting the designation the Servant is called to imagine the re-establishment of the course of history “as

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{81} Both this text and its parallel in Mic 4 possibly reflect an ancient customary honorific regarding the universal appeal of a new temple. Many scholars certainly believe this unit pre-dates Isaiah. But Williamson’s (2006: 166ff.) cautious approach to its textual history, based not least on the parallel texts in Micah and 4QIsa\textsuperscript{a}, is well-founded.

\textsuperscript{82} There is debate on not only the age of this unit, but also on the date of its placement in the text. We cannot take it for granted that the Servant would have known it as it appears in the final form of the text, however its ancient parallels indicate that such a tradition would not have come as a surprise to the Servant.

\textsuperscript{83} Leene’s definition of “history” in the OT is helpful to clarify what we mean by the term here: he defines it as “the movement of peoples and kingdoms, seen in connection with its influence on the national and political existence of Israel, to which the decisive political and national events in Israel itself also belong” (Leene, 1997: 229).
\end{footnotesize}
determined by God’s will and by his insight” (Beuken, 1972: 10). There is much to commend this position in what we have already discussed.  

It has been suggested that the Servant’s role of “bringing forth” justice should be interpreted as meaning that he will be somewhat distanced from the actual task—that he will be the conduit, or the cause of justice going out. However, that the Servant’s role is described in the same way that Yahweh is said to bring forth justice in Ps 37:6 (both using the hif. form of the verb אָדֹנָי) suggests that the Servant should understand his role to be active, not passive. How this will come about precisely has not yet been demonstrated, but it will echo the administrative dispensing of justice undertaken by David. The adverbial הָעָדֹנָי that is attached to the Servant’s bringing forth of justice in Isa 42:3 may suggest to the Servant that his role will be undertaken in perfect accord with that of both David and Yahweh—and that Yahweh’s purpose will be realised. This surely comes as astonishing news to Israel-Jacob, who, as we have recalled several times, hears this discourse in response to the

84. Westermann’s (1969: 95) interpretation of אָדֹנָי is similar: it is “the judgment which says the Gentiles’ gods’ claim to divinity is nothing: Yahweh alone is God . . . This being so, the Servant’s task, according to 42:1-4, would be to bring this judgment to the Gentiles.” Goldingay also understands אָדֹנָי as Yahweh’s decision and his control of the world’s destiny (Goldingay, 2005: 153).

85. Goldingay (2005: 156-157) argues this point, on the basis that אָדֹנָי governs the Servant’s application of אָדֹנָי, and so should be interpreted as a declaring of it among the nations.

86. אָדֹנָי is used in its qal form in Hos 6:5, where Yahweh’s justice is said to go forth as the light.

87. Beuken argues that the mission of the Servant, as expressed by the words אָדֹנָי אָדֹנָי אָדֹנָי, imply: “He will establish justice, he will enforce righteousness” (Beuken, 1972: 6).

88. Beuken (1972: 26): “When the Servant has brought forth mispāṭ, Israel will recognise that God acts according to what he foretells.”
lament that the course of the nation’s history has been neglected by Yahweh. On the
back of reassurances that he is being upheld and chosen by Yahweh—words that
evoke Yahweh’s relationship with the king—the Servant now hears that he will
dispense justice in faithfulness to Yahweh’s purposes.

4.3.3.2. A covenant to the people
The phrase “as a covenant for the people” (נַעְנַעְנָא יִרְמָי) is used by Yahweh, of the Servant, in 42:6d. The recipient of Yahweh’s discourse here is clearly identified with
the Servant of 41:8-16. In 41:10d Yahweh tells the Servant—who is addressed as the
one “called” (אָרָק) from the farthest corners of the earth (41:9)—that “I will uphold
you with my righteous right hand” (נַיַּד הָרַךְ אֲבָנָא נַעְנָא יִרְמָי). Here, in 42:6a, Yahweh
echoes the earlier utterance, declaring to the Servant that he has “called” (אָרָק) him
“in righteousness” (נַעְנַעְנָא יִרְמָי). Not only that, but Yahweh will take the Servant by the
hand (here, נָנַנְ) (42:6b) and watch over him. All the suffixes are in 2ms, indicating
the discourse is addressed to an individual (as in a corporate personality), as is
41:8-16. This echoing has the effect of bringing the previous discourse into the
purview of this one. It takes the Servant backwards, before directing him forwards
with the new information of lines c and d. The verbs in this entire cola may be
governed by the waw consecutive, so read as having already occurred, since the
opening verb is in the perfect (reflected in JPS). The previously-held knowledge that
the Servant is both called and upheld by Yahweh provides a foundation upon which
the Servant can hear what he is to become, or has become.

This has the effect of reiterating the basis on which Yahweh calls Israel-Jacob his Servant. The Servant hears again that the initiative for the relationship was taken by Yahweh, whose calling of the Servant was “right” (ךְָּדָּמִּים, 42:6a). Yahweh continues to maintain the Servant, and thus maintain the relationship (“I will keep/ have kept you” (אָבְּרֵא הַּלִּית, 42:6c). This has fresh significance in the current context, since it follows the public commissioning of the Servant and the declaration of his task in 42:1-4. If the Servant doubts that he has the strength or capabilities to carry out the task of establishing יִשְׂרָאֵל, Yahweh reminds him that he does not do so in his own strength. This is stated not to the assembled witnesses, as in 42:1-4, but to the Servant directly. Yahweh’s discourse does not leave room for the Servant to object to his appointment on the grounds that he has nothing to contribute—instead, it calls the Servant to a role far beyond what he might have imagined for himself. We say this on the basis that in Isa 40:27 the prophet depicts Israel as being despondent and weak.

Having reinforced the basis of the ongoing relationship between them, Yahweh addresses the Servant with the statement under discussion: “I have given you as a covenant of [or “for’”] the people” (כְּבָּרִים לָאֲדֹנָי לָּעֲבָדֵי אַדַּנֵי) (42:6cd). This is followed by the appositive description, “as a light for the nations” (לָאֲדֹנָי לָּעֲבָדֵי אַדַּנֵי), in v. 6d. Both statements inform one other, and have to be taken together. They are followed by two infinitive clauses that qualify the nature of what it is to be a
“covenant” and a “light”: the Servant is given “to open the eyes of the blind” (כovenant) (v. 7a) and “to bring out from the dungeon the prisoner” (light: (v. 7b). The latter phrase is qualified with a parallel: “from the prison, those who live in darkness” (v. 7c).\footnote{Childs (2001: 326) points out that the “exclusively positive terms of action” in v. 7 contrast the litotes of vv. 1-4.}

Who is the beneficiary of the Servant’s mission here? Israel or the nations? The reference to the nations in 42:1d, the reference to the earth in 42:4b, the coastlands in 42:4c, and the nations in 42:6d, clearly suggest that those who are blind and in the dungeons are the nations, not Israel. To this point we have seen no evidence to counter our view that the Servant has been addressed as Israel-Jacob all along. And yet it cannot have escaped the Servant that in his depiction of the nations as blind and imprisoned Yahweh has echoed discourse in which Israel is depicted in the very same terms. For example, the imagery of “light to the nations” suggests an echo of Isa 9:1\footnote{2}: “the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light” (light: (v. 2). The messianic text of Isa 9 occupies a place in the final form of the text that suggests it comes as something of a vision of hope after the devastating instructions to the prophet in the call account of chapter 6, and the narrative accounts of the Assyrian crisis in chapters 7 and 8. The anguish (אפים) of 8:23\footnote{3} and the darkness that engulfs the people, is replaced with the great light that increases the nation’s joy (9:2\footnote{3}). In Isa 6 the prophet has a vision of Yahweh on the
throne of the heavenly court and hears the instruction to make the hearts of the people dull, their ears heavy, and their eyes blind. It is compelling to draw the dialogic links between the prophetic ministry of First Isaiah as described in his call narrative, the subsequent darkness in which the people ultimately wallow (which should perhaps be understood as the exile itself), and the discourse of Yahweh here in which the Servant is told he will open eyes that are blind (42:7a), and bring out “from prison” (גֶּהֶןָּו) those who “sit in darkness” (ךַּלְשַׁף) (v. 7c). In the dialogic constitution of the Servant, and the designation of his office before the assembled witnesses, a shift has taken place, whereby the nations now occupy the place of darkness that has been Israel’s, and Israel-Jacob, who was blinded by the prophetic ministry of First Isaiah, has been called to administer freedom and justice. In this we begin to see the transformative event that is the Servant’s voice-idea, his unique perspective on the world that calls other perspectives to be overhauled. Already he has been constituted in a way that revises the nation’s hope for a king, and its hope for justice. The Servant will, instead, occupy the place of the king, and will administer justice. Now his dialogical constitution revises the nation’s hope for light in the midst of darkness. The Servant will be a light for the nations. This embraces the “new things” (ףֶּשֶׁם) that are suggested in 42:9b.

And yet the reality is that exilic Israel is no more liberated than the nations themselves, and this is impressed upon the Servant in the following discourse,
42:18-43:7. So, 42:1-9 introduces a difficult ambiguity into the characterisation of the Servant. Using Bakhtin’s terminology we can describe it this way: that while the Servant knows himself to be Israel-Jacob, and while the Servant and Israel exist simultaneously, it is becoming apparent that they do not occupy the same semantic space. In 42:1-9 we see the first signs that a gap has opened up between Servant Israel-Jacob, and empirical Israel.90 We have already alluded to the idea that the Servant has been invited to see himself fulfilling a royal office. We can build on that idea by suggesting the Servant Israel-Jacob himself is a paradigm by which empirical Israel is invited to see itself. This does not mean, however, that there are two Servants; there is only one Servant, and that is the character that is being constituted by the speech of Yahweh and who knows himself as such. As Israel responds to the discourse of Yahweh, it will discover that it has always been the Servant, the offspring of Abraham.

As Israel responds to Yahweh’s call to be the Servant, it discovers that it has been made a “covenant for the people” (לְבַטְחַנְיָהוֹן), which we take to mean he embodies the assurance of Yahweh’s intention to bring light to the nations.91 There is

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90. The actual correspondent of the term “empirical Israel” is not easy to define. We intend the term to signify Israel as it is in a particular time and place, and in the case of Second Isaiah this suggests exilic Israel. But whether the exiles in Babylon, or the community left in Judea, or indeed the exiles scattered further abroad, are in view, is not so easy to define specifically, because the issue of overt audience and intended audience is complicated by the probable redactional history of the text of Second Isaiah, which suggests multiple overt and intended audiences are in view simultaneously. For a discussion of this problem, see Goldingay (1997: 241ff.).

91. Muilenburg (1956a: 469) interprets the term in a similar way: “It is the gift of divine grace but also the basis of Israel’s mission. God’s gracious purpose for the nations of the world is embodied in
perhaps a further dialogic link with the texts referring to the Abrahamic covenant, specifically Yahweh’s promise to Abraham that through him all the nations of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:3; cf. Gen 17:4-8). The term “covenant” in this regard includes the idea of obligation—God obligates himself to his promise.\textsuperscript{92} The link with Abraham is conceivable, particularly since the Servant discourses have explicitly mentioned Abraham and spoken of the Servant as his offspring (41:8c). In this light, a “covenant of the people” likely means that through the Servant the promise to bless the nations of the world will be realised. How will this happen?\textsuperscript{93}

While the discourse is not explicit we can suggest the following on the basis of our discussion so far: if the Servant is a paradigm by which Israel is invited to know and understand itself—and empirical Israel is still wallowing in darkness, as are the nations—then the response of Israel-Jacob to the voice of Yahweh is itself a sign of liberation, a “covenant” sign to the nations that Yahweh has pierced the darkness.\textsuperscript{94}

The key to this is the Servant’s response: if no-one responds to Yahweh’s speech

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{92} Covenant as “obligation” is a direction taken by Elliger, rendering “Verpflichtung für den מַדָּר” (Elliger, 1978: 234-235). Blenkinsopp (2002: 212) takes a similar direction.

\textsuperscript{93} The “Servant as covenant” idea is echoed along with the light to the nations imagery in the discourse of 49:1-13. That the practicalities of the role are not expanded on here, but are expanded on later in Second Isaiah, could be a case of literary anticipation, as suggested by Seitz (2001: 363): “That is, the author has so planned his work that he anticipates resolutions or clarifications and is free to forestall them at an earlier juncture.” But as Seitz acknowledges, the announcement of the Servant’s task, and his subsequent commissioning at this point in Second Isaiah, seems to be more than a mere literary device: “More than a literary technique is at work here in the declaration before the heavenly court of the servant’s final success. A promise has been made, and God will have to make good” (363).

\textsuperscript{94} See Hillers (1978: 176), who renders מְנַצֵּח “emancipation (clearing/brightness) of the people.”
\end{footnotesize}
then there is no Servant. However, if only one person comes to know himself as the Servant then he is the one who will act in the way Yahweh has designated. The hope of the discourse, however, is that all Israel will respond, since as we have stated already, there are not two Servants, just the one—Israel-Jacob.⁹⁵

To summarise, in Isa 42:1-4 the Servant is assigned an office that has royal overtones, in a ceremonial manner that evokes the appointment of the king in pre-exilic days. Westermann also suggested the Servant’s task embraced prophetic elements, particularly since it would involve speech (42:2), and he had been given Yahweh’s spirit (42:1c).⁹⁶ The Servant is presented before witnesses as Yahweh’s chosen, the one Yahweh accepts. His role is prescribed as bringing forth justice to the nations, and the spirit’s influence upon the Servant ensures that he will not despair, nor will he make others despair as he fulfils his task. Yahweh’s appointment of the Servant Israel-Jacob to such an honoured position causes a radical shift in the Servant’s knowledge of himself. Although the Servant is not named in 42:5-9, when the unit is allowed to dialogue with 42:1-4 it is heard as a direct commissioning of the Servant on the back of his presentation by Yahweh. In 42:5-9 Yahweh addresses the Servant directly, and elaborates his role of bringing justice to the nations. The

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⁹⁵. Laato argues on the basis of the close correspondence between the macro-structure of Isa 40-53, and the development of parallel arguments that are grouped in cycles, that there is a distinction between those Israelites who fail to trust Yahweh’s plan for the future realised through Cyrus, and those who return to the land on the basis of Yahweh’s promises (Laato, 1990).

⁹⁶. See discussion p. 145ff.
Servant hears that his task involves being a light to the nations, and a covenant for the people. And this task suggests that in the dialogical constitution of the Servant a radical transformation has taken place—since in First Isaiah it is the nation Israel that experiences blindness and dwells in the dark.

This is precisely what Yahweh says to the Servant in 42:18-43:7, which we discuss next.


This discourse comprises two discrete units, 42:18-25 and 43:1-7, that are more often than not taken together, not only on the basis of their juxtaposition, but also on the grounds of shared language and themes. The Servant is referred to explicitly in 42:19, although he is not addressed as such directly, but “Servant” is not mentioned at all in 43:1-7. Nevertheless, we hear the entire discourse as being uttered for the sake of the Servant, Israel-Jacob, for the following reasons: the oracle is addressed to Jacob-Israel in terms that echo previous Servant discourses; the Servant is referred to in 42:19, and both units are linked syntactically, thematically, and linguistically—indicating that even if 43:1-7 was not originally intended to be addressed to the

97. Muilenburg says the judgment of 42:18-25 “clearly anticipates the redemption of 43:1-7” (1956a: 475). It only does so in the final form, of course. Muilenburg more accurately says “The second part of the poem is a counterpart to the first” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 480). Wilson (1986: 110, n. 128) goes further, drawing attention to the contrasting fortunes of Israel in each unit, both of which are linked by the transitional phrase, הָדַע: Israel trapped in prisons, burned by fire, and with none to say “Restore”, contrasted with Israel walking unscathed through the fire, released from prisons, and Yahweh saying “Give back”. Childs’s comment that the redactional connection between 42:18-25 and 43:1-7 is so close that “the integrity of the two discrete genres has been considerably blurred” (2001: 334) echoes the approach of most commentators.
Servant, its placement in the text’s final form has made possible the dialogic association;\(^{98}\) 43:1-7 is a salvation oracle that echoes elements of the salvation oracle of 41:8-16, in which the Servant is addressed explicitly. Some scholars see the second unit as being composed of two parallel sections (vv. 1-4, 5-7),\(^ {99}\) though rarely question its unity. Recent literary approaches to Second Isaiah have recognised the chiastic pattern of this oracle. More is said on this below, since the structure of the oracle suggests how the discourse is intended to be heard.

At least two voices can be heard in the first unit—that of Yahweh (vv. 18-20) and that of the prophet (vv. 21-25). The subtle distinction between empirical Israel and the Servant that we saw developing in the previous discourse is heightened here, in that Yahweh directly addresses the “deaf” and the “blind” in the plural (42:18ab), and yet refers to his Servant/messenger, who is also blind and deaf, in the singular (42:19). We have already observed that while the Servant is Israel-Jacob, he does not share the same semantic space in the discourse as empirical Israel. Even so, there is an expectation that the blind and deaf people will associate with the Servant who is also blind and deaf. The prophet heightens this association by addressing the people

\(^{98}\) There is no doubt the two units are distinct in form, though there is broad speculation on the manner in which they were conjoined in the text’s final form. Most scholars see the juxtaposition of the units as intentional. For example, Melugin argues they were juxtaposed by a collector, since the salvation oracle was not customarily linked with a disputation (Melugin, 1976: 107). However, when the two units, which are quite contradictory in terms of theme and use of imagery, are placed side by side “we find a theology of the relationship between past and future” (Melugin, 1976: 108). In other words, the two “voices” begin a dialogue that reveals another level of meaning.

\(^{99}\) See, for example, Westermann (1969: 115). See also Schoors (1973: 76).
both in the plural (v. 23a) and in the singular (v. 23b). He also situates himself among those who have sinned (v. 24c) and who have provoked the giving up of Jacob-Israel to the looters/plunderers (v. 24ab). That the Servant has been addressed as Israel-Jacob in 41:8 strengthens the dialogic bonds between Servant-Israel/Jacob-people, while also allowing for the peculiarity that there is some semantic movement between them. This idea will be sharpened as we encounter more examples.

Two discrete genres comprise 42:18-43:7, the disputation (42:18-25) and the salvation oracle (43:1-7). It is helpful, and consistent with Bakhtin, to distinguish their generic features as heteroglossia, or competing voices, that give each discrete form its shape and character. The conventions and utterances that have influenced the discourse are double-voiced by Yahweh and the prophet as they address the people. Form critics speak of these original utterances as “oral forms of speech” (Melugin, 1976: 7) that have impacted the prophet’s style, and which can be identified as generic characteristics. While this is helpful it does not adequately speak to the phenomenon that all utterances are replete with heteroglossia from

100. There are subtle variations within these broad generic categories that are important in terms of identifying their form, but do not play a part in our discussion. For a more detailed and helpful discussion of the forms comprising Second Isaiah see Begrich (1963: 13-67) and Melugin (1976: 13-74).

101. For a discussion of how an awareness of genre distinction and the dialogic interaction of genres can aid exegesis, see Newsom (2003), particularly pp. 11-31. Newsom’s introductory thoughts on genre are helpful: “From the reader’s perspective, genre is part of the intertextuality that is an aspect of every reading experience. Texts are always read in relation to other texts that serve as points of reference. Patterns of similarity and dissimilarity, that is, recognition that the text at hand is like these and not those, establish the reader’s sense of genre” (Newsom, 2003: 11).
multiple strata of discourse.\textsuperscript{102} We also need to be aware that generic forms embrace not only the structures of other utterances, but the many competing voices that lie in the background of those utterances. It is important to bear this in mind in the present discussion, because the Servant is a character that is constituted by discourse in which these other voices are competing to be heard. For example, the disputational characteristics of 42:18-25\textsuperscript{103} indicate not only the genre of the unit, in a form critical sense, but also the generic voice by which the Servant is being constituted. This voice impacts the Servant’s internal discourse as much as the content of what it says, in that the realisation that he is being challenged presents the Servant with a choice—to respond by disputing the challenge, or accept what has been said, and make it an aspect of his self-consciousness. The latter causes the Servant to radically question his previous knowledge of himself, since this disputation directly confronts the reasons for the nation’s despondency.\textsuperscript{104}

These issues form the backdrop of our discussion of the Servant’s internal discourse at this point in Second Isaiah. We reimagine this internal discourse as follows: 1) “I am the Servant of Yahweh, yet I am blind and deaf” (42 vv. 18-20); 2)

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103. Such as the ‘χ (Who!)’ clauses, in vv. 19, 23 and 24.

104. Westermann argues the imagery of 42:22 has been adopted from community laments (Westermann, 1969: 112), and he compares this disputation with 43:22-28 (1969: 109). The imagery does appear to be generated by Israel’s miserable condition, which, as we have seen a number of times, did prompt the community lament that is echoed by the prophet in 40:27. Childs links this disputation with that lament (2001: 333).
“My exile is Yahweh’s judgment, not his failure” (42 vv. 22-25); 3) “Yet I belong to Yahweh, and am loved” (43 vv. 1, 4); 4) “Therefore I am redeemed” (43 vv. 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).

Each of these statements is expounded in turn.

4.4.1. “I am the Servant of Yahweh, yet I am blind and deaf” (42:18-20)

The dialogic nature of the discourse is evident from the first words—imperatives calling for a response, apparently from the very people who are unable to respond. The first is directed to the “deaf” ones (םילשורי) and is to “hear” (יומֵד). The second is to the “blind” ones (הנהוּ) and is to “look in order to see!” (אֹרַיֶּה). As discussed above, there is an association between the people who Yahweh addresses, and the Servant he makes reference to—but the two are not merged.

The immediate context suggests that Yahweh is being ironic, since the blind are not able to see and the deaf are not able to hear. However, v. 20 indicates that this is not strictly the case. The Servant can hear and see, but does not do so. Yahweh’s imperatives in 42:18 are illocutionary—the command itself enables the deaf to hear and the blind to see. Those who hear Yahweh and whose self-awareness is impacted by his utterance have already become the seeing ones and the hearing ones. Although these imperatives are followed by disputation, there is no threat attached to them. Westermann is helpful: “The dominant note in these imperatives is not . . . that of censure or accusation, but of a hidden promise” (1969: 109).
The imperatives not only demand a response, they provoke a question—to whom are they addressed? They are uttered so broadly they could be addressed to anyone who is blind and deaf. In the previous discourse the “blind” to whom the Servant is commissioned to provide light represents the nations, not Israel. Certainly, as Yahweh begins his discourse in 42:18 the Servant would not be expected to believe that he is among the blind and deaf. But the interrogative voice by which Yahweh speaks in v. 19 challenges this. The Servant is no different to the blind and deaf whom Yahweh commands to hear and see. He is, in fact, a deaf messenger, suggesting that despite his calling he is incapable of discharging his duties.

How the Servant interprets this requires some thought. We begin with the link between this passage and Isa 6:9-10, and Yahweh’s commissioning of Isaiah of Jerusalem to “make the heart of this people dull, and their ears heavy, and blind their eyes lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed” (v. 10, ESV). Isa 6 is a pivotal passage in First Isaiah, and it resonates loudly with 42:20, in which the Servant is referred to as the one who has seen many things, but does not observe them, and whose ears are open, but he does not hear. Both discourses speak of senses that are frustrated rather

105. Sommer’s caution about over-stressing the links between Isa 42:18-20 and Isa 6:9-10 is sobering, since he is otherwise sensitive to Second Isaiah’s allusions to First Isaiah (see Sommer, 1998: 255, n. 78). But he does concede that Second Isaiah’s use of the theme may have been influenced not only by Isa 6:9-10, but by Isaiah’s frequent use of the motif: see, e.g., 9:1, 29:9, 18f., 32:3-4.

than defective. If the Servant hears Yahweh’s discourse in the light of First Isaiah’s commission, then he understands his blindness and deafness to be a direct result of Isaiah’s prophetic mission—and not purely the result of his own disobedience. If sixth century Israel-Jacob is indeed blind and deaf, then the Servant is evidence that the prophet’s preaching to eighth century Israel-Jacob had its desired effect. This suggests to the Servant that the exile has not occurred because Yahweh has abandoned Israel. Rather, it is an episode in a history very much directed by Yahweh. In other words, Israel’s 输出 has not been neglected at all. 107 This is essentially the prophet’s message in 42:24.

Whether or not Isa 6:9-10 was in mind when this disputation was delivered and/or when it was included in Second Isaiah, in the final form 42:18-25 echoes the imagery of Isa 6. And it does so in a way that would have excited Bakhtin, because it subverts the message of the original utterance in a way that only double-voicing can—it leaves the integrity of the original utterance intact, but appropriates it for a new dialogic context. Yahweh’s imperatives in v. 18 double-voice his original commission to Isaiah of Jerusalem in order to reverse its outcome, as if Yahweh is now saying to Israel, “Your period of blindness and deafness, that I instigated, is over.” 108 In previous discourses the Servant has come to know himself as the exiled

107. We have rendered 输出 a number of ways, depending on the context. When we refer to Israel’s neglected 输出 we refer back to the word’s use in Isa 40:27d, where it means “the present course of history which Israel regards as misdirected by Yahweh” (see Dumbrell, 1985: 125, citing Beuken).

108. Sommer points out that Isa 42:18-25 makes no mention of Yahweh’s culpability in Israel’s
chosen people of Yahweh, Israel-Jacob, the descendants of the very people to whom Isaiah of Jerusalem was sent. Now he discovers that the spiritual darkness suffered by that generation continues, in him—the Servant is made to identify with the original recipients of Isaiah’s message, but also to hear the command of Yahweh to the people to see and to hear.

Despite his blind and deaf state, the Servant is left in no doubt that he remains the Servant. Indeed, the construction of v. 19 ensures that there is no separation between the terms “blind” and “my Servant” (יִהְיֶה). Here at least, the terms are synonymous. This signifies that the one who hears and knows himself to be Yahweh’s Servant must also acknowledge that he is blind and deaf. He cannot be one and not the other. “My Servant” is qualified by three parallel terms in v. 19, so this becomes an important utterance in terms of the Servant’s self-knowledge. The first is יִהְיֶה (“my messenger I will send”) (v. 19b). This description expands

blindness, which is a key point in Isa 6: “If Deutero-Isaiah’s use of the motif indeed depends on Isaiah’s, it is interesting that Deutero-Isaiah avoids mentioning the origin Isaiah posited for the people’s blindness in chapter 6—v. 13., YHWH’s covering their eyes.” But this is not strictly accurate—while Second Isaiah does not refer specifically to Yahweh blinding the people, he does attribute their dwelling in holes to Yahweh (42:22, 24). And in the framework of the passage, the blindness of the Servant is paralleled with his being trapped, which is depicted as judgment, as is blindness and deafness in Isa 6.


110. Seitz makes a similar point: “God’s servant, presented before the heavenly assembly and earth’s widest reaches, is no ideal figure whose past has been sanitized or obliterated or even forgotten. God’s dedicated servant bears fully the marks of that obdurate generation that preceded him, both in election and in merited judgment” (Seitz, 2001: 369).

111. We follow the MT in reading the singular “servant” in v. 19. But cf. LXX and Tg for plural “servants”.

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upon what the Servant has come to know of himself in the previous Servant discourse, 42:1-9, where he is commissioned to take justice to the nations. We referred to the prophetic overtones in the Servant’s characterisation (see p. 145ff.), noting that his role is one of action (attaching to his royal designation) and speech (his prophetic call). His designation as the “messenger” Yahweh will send underlines the prophetic elements of the Servant’s emerging self-consciousness.

The second parallel term is נֵכְסֵר.112 There is some conjecture about what this term means. Some scholars, Watts among them, believe Meshullam is the Servant’s name, and that he is the implied author of the entire work.113 The theory is not a recent one, and indeed was already discounted as “wholly improbable” by North (1964: 118). Muilenburg translates the word as “the covenanted one”, a derivation of the verb meaning “to be in covenant of peace” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 476). The major translations tackle it a number of different ways: “he that is perfect” (KJV); “he that is at peace with me” (ASV; NASB); “my dedicated one” (RSV; NRSV; ESV); “the one committed to me” (NIV); “the chosen one” (JPS); “the one who has my trust” (REB); “the friend I have taken to myself” (NJB); “my chosen people” (NLT-SE). LXX misses out the line completely. Our view is that the term needs to be understood in light of its parallel, נֵכְסֵר נָּאֶל with נֵכְסֵר (“peace” which shares the

112. The pual part. masc. sing. form of מָכַס (“to be complete/sound”, BDB).

same root as משל תרAlbert (is used to denote the envoy of peace after times of war, as in Isa 33:7. In light of this משל תרAlbert could be translated “the one of peace”. In other words, the messenger, the one Yahweh will send, embodies peace, not judgment, which is consistent with the overall message of Second Isaiah to Israel (see 40:2). It is also consistent with the preceding discourse, where the Servant discovers that his role will involve taking justice, or “the true way” (JPS), to the nations, and where he is described as a “covenant” (42:6d). The dialogic influence upon “covenant” of this interpretation of משל תרAlbert opens the way for the Servant to reinterpret תרAlbert as “covenant of peace” (as in Ezek 34:25; 37:26; and Isa 54:10 “my covenant of peace”).

The third parallel term is עב תרAlbert (“Servant of Yahweh”), a common phrase throughout the OT where it is used predominantly of Moses,114 but also of Joshua,115 the prophets,116 and of David.117 This is the first and only time it is used in Second Isaiah,118 and is a mark of some honour for the Servant who does not see or hear. The Servant is given no opportunity to dispute Yahweh here—he is Yahweh’s Servant, and yet he is blind and deaf.119 We have already discussed in the introduction to this

114. Deut 34:5; Josh 1:1, 13, 15; 8:31, 33; 11:12; 12:6; 13:8; 14:7; 18:7; 22:2, 4, 5; 2 Kgs 18:12; 2 Chr 1:3; 2 Chr 24:6
115. Josh 24:29; Judg 2:8
116. 2 Kgs 9:7
117. Ps 18 [title only]; 36 [title only]
118. The plural form is used once in Second Isaiah, in 54:17.
119. To understand the apparent contradiction the Servant need only ponder the salvation oracle that, in the text’s final form, immediately precedes, in 42:14-17. In v. 16 Yahweh reveals how one can be both Servant and blind—by allowing Yahweh to guide them.
discourse the peculiarity that while the Servant has been addressed as Israel-Jacob (in 41:8) he does not always occupy the same semantic space in the discourse as empirical Israel. Another ambiguity is introduced by the description of the Servant as blind and deaf (42:19-20), in conjunction with the direct address by Yahweh to “you” (plural) who are deaf and blind (42:18). The ambiguity is generated because in 42:7 the Servant is given a mission to open eyes that are blind, which we interpreted to refer to the nations to whom the Servant would be a light (42:6d). The description of both the Servant and the people (Israel) as blind echoes the earlier reference and causes both discourses to “quarrel”. By this we mean we can no longer hear one without also allowing the other to have its say. The impact of this upon our exegesis—and also upon the Servant’s knowledge of who he is—is that what was clearly a mission to the nations has become a mission to the blind of both the nations and Israel. We could also strain the point and argue that the mission is also to the Servant—except that for the Servant to accept his commission he must respond, that is, he must hear and see. In seeing and hearing, the Servant sets himself apart from the blind of Israel and the nations. In other words, only those exiles who hear and respond to the imperatives of 42:18 can know themselves as the Servant who is called to free those in darkness. And in the absence of a directive to ignore the blind and deaf of Israel, that commission will include the exiles who continue to dwell in darkness. This distinction is reflected in Tg, which interprets the addressees of Yahweh’s disputation as the “wicked”, who are required to repent before they can be
called the Servant. Spykerboer makes a similar distinction: “On the one hand, it is clear that the servant is blind and that the messenger whom Yahweh will send is deaf. On the other hand, the servant-messenger can only fulfil his function when his eyes and ears are opened. There is here a fluidity which must not be disturbed by neat distinctions” (Spykerboer, 1976: 99).

A question this distinction raises is whether we can speak of a Servant as being constituted dialogically if he or she refuses, or is incapable of choosing, to become a dialogical partner? Spykerboer is unequivocal: “Only those who will see and hear will be able to be the servant-messenger, who can accomplish the mission which Yahweh gives him” (1976: 100). But at the same time the Servant discourses have emphasised that the Servant is Israel-Jacob as it is, not Israel-Jacob as an ideal. As Goldingay correctly points out, Yahweh’s imperatives in 42:18 implicitly affirm that “it is after all possible for them [the exiles] to respond” (2005: 180). Spykerboer acknowledges that at this point in Second Isaiah the Servant cannot be distinguished from the blind and deaf, and this has been highlighted by our discussion above. The distinction will become sharper as the dialogue with Servant Israel continues: “Their response to Yahweh’s call will determine the distinction which lies dormant in vv. 18-19, but which is clearly present in the later chapters of the book” (1976: 100).

120. “You wicked who are as deaf, have you no ears? Hear! And you sinners who are as blind, have you no eyes? Consider and see! If the wicked repent, will they not be called my servant, even the sinners, against whom I sent my prophets? But the wicked are about to be repaid the retribution of their sins, except that if they repent they will be called the servants of the LORD” (Isa 42:18-21, Tg).
4.4.2. “My exile is Yahweh’s judgment, not his failure” (42:22-25)

In 42:21-25 a voice other than that of Yahweh speaks, and though its tone is still disputational, it takes as its subject the declaration that it was Yahweh who gave Israel-Jacob over to darkness and defeat. More than likely it is the prophet who now takes up Yahweh’s argument, and he begins by declaring Yahweh’s desire to glorify his הַרְוֹת,121 followed by an explanation of why Yahweh’s desire has been thwarted—the people through whom Yahweh’s desire was to be fulfilled have been “plundered and looted” (almart רֹצָה, v. 22a), and “trapped in holes, all of them” (almart תָּרָתִים נֹשֵׁב, v. 22b)—indeed, they are “hidden” (אמרה, v. 22c) in prisons. We explained in the introduction to this discourse our reasons for associating these plundered people with the Servant, Israel-Jacob, as well as our caution in merging the two. The juxtaposition of the prophet’s and Yahweh’s utterances draws a direct dialogic link between the people who are blind and deaf, and the Servant who does not hear and does not see. It follows that the Servant also associates with those who are trapped in holes.122 Empirically, Israel-Jacob knows full well that it is experiencing dark times,

121. Watts’ translation of הַרְוֹת here as “instruction” is helpful. By it, Second Isaiah refers to “the proper relationship between Israel and the nations . . . now being inaugurated by the Persian emperor Cyrus” (Watts, 2005b: 672). This helps explain how the Servant is standing in the way of God’s הַרְוֹת, and why he must respond to Yahweh’s call in order for הַרְוֹת to be fulfilled. Goldingay’s interpretation is more dialogical, since it can be understood only in relation to Jacob-Israel’s role: “Yhwh longs to command תּוּר (teaching, revelation or instruction) through giving it to Israel and having Israel embody it, and thereby to pursue a purpose for right order with Israel at its centre, recognized by other peoples” (Goldingay, 2005: 181). Seeking precision in our understanding of הַרְוֹת in this context is not helpful, since, as Goldingay alludes to, the point is that whatever Yahweh means by it, it depends on Jacob-Israel, and the Servant is belligerent.

122. The imagery is metaphorical rather than literal, and imagines Servant Israel as a waylaid
so on the surface the prophet’s discourse communicates nothing new to the Servant. But it does challenge the Servant’s belief that his situation has gone unnoticed by Yahweh. Indeed, the reverse is the case—Yahweh not only sees Israel-Jacob’s condition, he caused it to happen.

There is a real element of futility in Israel’s situation. The prophet argues that Yahweh gave Jacob to the looters because the nation would not walk in his ways, here paralleled with not obeying Yahweh’s law. But now Israel’s situation—its punishment—is standing in the way of Yahweh’s law being glorified through the Servant. This double-edged judgment is as binding as the divine hardening that resulted from Isaiah of Jerusalem’s commission. Israel-Jacob’s blindness, like its captivity, is both a consequence of the nation’s sin and the very reason the nation has been unable to respond to Yahweh’s call.

The nation has been blind and deaf to its own culpability in the situation it now finds itself. That is why the prophet must appeal to the people—here addressed in the plural (זַזִּים, “Who among you . . . !”)—to listen (v. 23). If we reimagine this appeal in terms of what it communicates to the Servant, we can suggest that the most startling knowledge the Servant gains of himself in this disputation is that the judgment that came upon Israel-Jacob in the events of 587 was intended to make him

sojourner, incapable of fulfilling his original mission because he has been robbed and holed up. Says Muilenburg: “The picture is, of course, exaggerated. The prophet seems to be describing Israel’s present condition under the figure of a caravan attacked by the bedouin in the desert, plundered and robbed, held prisoner in holes of the ground and forgotten by those who might have rescued them” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 478).

123. Not walking in God’s ways is “an image of disobedience” (Melugin, 1976: 107).
understand his culpability—and yet he still failed to see. It is interesting to note the dialogical position of the prophet relative to Israel-Jacob as his discourse unfolds. As he begins the prophet and the Servant are combatants in the disputation, highlighted by the use of the 2mp suffix, “you”. But note the common plural verb in v.24c: וַיֵּשַׁם ("We have sinned"), by which the prophet narrows the space between himself and the accused Servant. Seitz even argues that the unit is a corporate confession, like that of Jer 3:24-25 (Seitz, 2001: 370). However, the reflective first person voice is not nearly so distinctive here as there. Isa 53 echoes the confessional refrains more clearly. It is significant, however, that the prophet here stands with the Servant, and not over-against him. The language of v. 25a (ךִּסֹּף וַיֵּשָּׁם) echoes imagery in Lamentations (see, e.g., Lam 2:4, 4:11) suggesting that here, as in Isa 40:27, the prophet’s disputation has been triggered by the community’s laments. The laments are double-voiced so that it is Israel’s failure to recognise its own culpability that is highlighted, rather than any suggestion Yahweh has been either careless or malicious. The Servant hears in the prophet’s words to Israel that he neither understood that the might of battle (v. 25b) was Yahweh’s doing, nor did he take it to heart. In other words, he did not learn from the experience, and his inability to hear

124. Spykerboer demonstrates how the warrior God motif in this verse links back to its appearance in 42:13. As it coincides in this disputation with the blind and deaf motif, which appeared in v. 16, it is evident that the motif unifies the chapter. The warrior God motif then makes a return in 43:1-7: “The theme of the Warrior-God echoes through in the political activities of Yahweh stated in the passage; at the same time these aim at the salvation of Israel” (Spykerboer, 1976: 103). The interesting aspect of this for our purposes is in demonstrating how a motif that is attached to Yahweh impacts upon the Servant’s self-knowledge. In this section of Second Isaiah the Servant discovers that the warrior God is equally his judge and liberator, and nothing less than this knowledge is able to shake Jacob-Israel from his despondency.
and see have been perpetuated. The Servant, who has been called by Yahweh to bring ידוע to the nations and glorify Yahweh’s הושע, is still blind and deaf.

As the disputation ends the Servant’s dilemma is clear, but, in a sense, so is the solution. If Yahweh brought about the conditions that keep the Servant in darkness, then Yahweh can liberate him. As Goldingay says, “At the threshold of chapter 43 the logic of the charge is that Jacob-Israel has everything to fear” (Goldingay, 2005:177). But logic collapses and provides the Servant with a route of escape. A voice of assurance utters a word of salvation that yet again disrupts the Servant’s self-knowledge.125

4.4.3. “Yet I belong to Yahweh, and am loved” (43:1, 4)

Just as the Servant discovers the depth of his dilemma, and, if he understands at all the seriousness of the prophet’s charge, realises there is no way out of it, Yahweh re-enters the discourse with a declaration that is not only unwarranted but, in the context, mystifying. The only clue that the oracle does indeed belong here is the particle, ידוע, which, even so, some scholars rationalise away as a generic element of the salvation oracle, and not a signifier of the radical turn that Second Isaiah now takes.126

125. Says Childs, “the exile did not awaken Israel’s conscience or prepare the grounds for a return. Rather, a new word, solely from God’s side, wrought the change, opening the way to the future” (Childs, 2001: 334).

126. See, e.g., Schoors (1973: 68). But there is a dialogic effect created by the juxtaposition of these units that cannot be rationalised. The placement of the salvation oracle, and the introductory ידוע, indicates that all that has been said about and to the Servant in the previous discourse has been to bring him to this point: But from this point on things are different.
The disputation of 42:18-25 leads the Servant to a dead end, as far as his self-knowledge is concerned. But here he discovers the breadth of promise that comes with being called by Yahweh and being named his Servant. The oracle of 43:1-7 is widely recognised as a “classic promise of salvation (Heilsorakel)”\(^\text{127}\). But the identification of its formal characteristics should not flatten what is an extraordinary utterance, whose main purpose is to challenge the self-knowledge of the Servant towards whom Yahweh’s discourse is directed. By its nature it is discourse seeking response—in this case a change in perspective and behaviour. Having stripped the Servant of any sense of recourse or self-reliance in the preceding disputation, the prophet now, echoing Yahweh, reminds the Servant of his relationship with his God, which has been steadily expounded in previous discourses. The purpose, in light of the disputation that has preceded the oracle, seems to be to free the Servant of his blindness and deafness where the heat of battle could not. The difference in tone between the oracle and the disputation could not be more profound. The voice of assurance that speaks here resonates with an intimacy that was not heard in the harsh words of the prophet in 42:21-25\(^\text{128}\).

The Servant hears at the outset that he has been created by Yahweh, echoing

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128. Gitay says that this is done deliberately and stylistically: “One sees that DI stylistically develops his idea of God’s relationship with His people. At first it is indicated by the second person ending, based on the special relations between God and Israel derived from the fact that God is Israel’s creator (43:1). But later on, when this sort of relation is stressed time and again, the words ‘sons’ and ‘daughters’ appear. That is to say, the relationship is expressed first in a more abstract term, creator, and gradually it is developed into personal terms, sons and daughters” (Gitay, 1981: 149).
the second Servant discourse (see 42:5). There Yahweh was described as the one who created the heavens and the earth, and who gave breath to his people. Here the predicates are more specific: Yahweh created (םָכָה) Jacob (v. 1b) and formed (יִרְאֶשׁ) Israel (v. 1c). There is much conjecture concerning the precise moment that is being referred to here. The imagery of creation cannot be understood, at least not in the internal discourse of the Servant, apart from the words קָאָרֶא יִשָׂרָאֵל (‘I have called you by name’) (v. 1e) and יְאָרִי אֵל (“you are mine”) (v. 1f). The key terms

129. The different words used for creation here are prominent in the creation accounts of Gen 1-2: “created” is prominent in Gen 1, and “formed” is prominent in Gen 2. The word “made”, which complements these words in 43:7, is used in both creation accounts (see North, 1964: 119). In echoing the key terms in the creation account, the prophet here emphasises Yahweh’s creation of the Servant from chaos.

130. The use of imagery in v. 2 evoking the exodus event (e.g., passing through waters) suggests the “creation” referred to in v. 1 is the exodus itself. This was Westermann’s (qualified) position (Westermann, 1969: 117). This interpretation is still popular, as demonstrated as recently as Goldingay, who is even more specific than Westermann. He argues the Servant’s moment of creation was the deliverance at the Red Sea, “when Israel was created out of nothing (a group of slaves who were a nonentity in their world) by God’s word that created meaning and order out of desolation” (Goldingay, 2005: 189). This idea is attractive, since Second Isaiah is equating deliverance from exile as a second creation. The other reason Goldingay links creation with exodus, is that here creation and redemption are linked as the same event, which did not occur either at creation, or at the call of Abraham. On a very different tack, Snaith has argued that creation and formation here refer to recent or truly imminent events. Snaith sees the Servant as the exilic remnant group, and not the Israel of the past, so “creation” is an event synonymous with the naming of Israel-Jacob: “The LORD speaks to the newly created and newly formed Jacob-Israel, whom he has redeemed and to whom He has given this name. . . He does not mean that God created, formed, made this Jacob-Israel long, long ago” (Snaith, 1977: 181). Seitz’s position is closer to that taken by this thesis, that the Servant’s creation points to the election of Abraham’s offspring and the covenant with Jacob. This position is consistent with the emphasis throughout this section of Second Isaiah upon the patriarchs, particular Yahweh’s friendship with Abraham, and, of course, the naming of Jacob-Israel: “And just as Jacob was once given a new name, ‘Israel,’ which clarified his destiny with God (Gen 32:28), so also now that calling and that special relationship are here evoked” (Seitz, 2001: 375).

131. The term “called” is familiar to the Servant, who knows that he was called (and chosen) in order to be Yahweh’s Servant (Isa 41:9), and whose calling was righteous (42:6). Westermann argues that the words “I have called you by name” relate more appropriately to a transaction involving two people (1969: 116). Westermann is keen to emphasise the individual characteristics of the salvation oracle, and relate that to the reception of this word of salvation by individual exiles, as well as the remnant community as a whole. His argument is worth considering, and a Bakhtinian reading of this oracle is consistent with the idea of multiple addressees. Says Westermann: “The subject to which Deutero-Isaiah’s entire proclamation is addressed is the nation as a unit. In no case has he anything to say to an individual or to a section of the nation. In the exile, however, it was individuals whom the
that open the oracle (create, form, called by name) are repeated in v. 7, forming an inclusio, so that the assurance of salvation is framed by the imagery of creation and calling. This is important for the Servant to hear, since the promise of redemption issued by the oracle is shown to be anchored in a relationship over which the Servant had no influence, and which preceded his blindness. When the oracle is viewed in its chiastic structure, with v. 4 at the centre, it becomes apparent that the key terms of vv. 1 and 7 prepare the Servant to hear the most radical words at the heart of the oracle: “you are precious in my eyes” (יָנֹירָר בְּעֵינֵי), “you are honoured” (תָּבוּר), and “I, I love you” (יִהְיֶה בְּעֵינֵי). The root בָּנָא is used in the whole of Isaiah only

prophet was obliged to address, and individuals who had to be won to accept his message. As a result, his message to the chosen people takes on this new note of personal appeal” (1969: 116). Schoors points out that in the OT the expression is used only with reference to a special task (1973: 71). However, here any suggestion of a task is only implicit. “You are mine” (יִהְיֶה בְּעֵינֵי) reiterates the “you are my Servant” (יִהְיֶה בְּעֵינֵי) of 41:9c, echoing the earlier pronouncement in order to confirm that the Servant is still in view here. Westermann says that this, along with “I, Yahweh, am your God,” and “I am with you,” are “all time-hallowed formulae known to everyone in Israel” (1969: 117).

132. See Watts’ discussion of the chiastic structure of 43:1-7 (Watts, 2005b: 670): A: Yahweh, Israel’s creator and shaper (v. 1a-c); B: I called you by name (v. 1e); C: Fear not (v. 1d); D Nations given in exchange for you (v. 3cd); KEYSTONE: Because you are precious and I love you (v. 4ab); D’: People given in exchange for your life (v. 4cd); C’: Fear not (v. 5); B’: Everyone called by my name (v. 7a); A’: I created and shaped him (v. 7bc).

133. The root בָּנָא is not commonly used in Isaiahs, but its use by First Isaiah, in 13:12, could be significant. The oracle of judgment in 13:9ff. presents the “day of Yahweh” as a day of destruction and purging, in which Yahweh will make people precious (יָנֹיר hif. 1cs), like the gold of Ophir. It is possible the Servant makes the link, and therefore knows himself as the precious metal that has been produced from the refining process of the events of 587. This imagery invites the Servant to know himself as the remnant—not ideal Israel, but the people of Israel who have survived the destruction of Jerusalem and the events of exile. This position is similar to that taken by Snaith (1977).

134. The nif. 2ms form of the verb בָּנָא is used only twice in the OT, both in Isaiah. In Is 26:15 it is said to Yahweh by the prophet. Here Yahweh says it to the Servant. It is highly significant for the Servant’s self-knowledge that an utterance more suited to praise for God is here directed to the Servant, by God.

135. The use of the first pronoun here emphasises the personal force of Yahweh’s declaration of love for his Servant. The cumulative effect of these utterances is a powerful statement that belies the urgency of the prophet to cause Servant Israel a crisis of self-knowledge. Says Muilenburg: “The prophet exhausts every symbol at his disposal to express the depth and power of the divine love, and
four times, and only here is it used of the Servant. It echoes 41:8, where Abraham is described by Yahweh as his “beloved one”. The impact of this dialogic link is profound, since, again, it establishes continuity between Yahweh’s love for Abraham, and his love for the exilic community. The utterance could not be made more directly—I (Yahweh) love you (my Servant). Westermann sums up the striking nature of Yahweh’s declaration:

Here we also have one of the most beautiful and profound statements of what the Bible means by ‘election.’ A tiny, miserable and insignificant band of uprooted men and women are assured that they—precisely they—are the people to whom God has turned in love (Westermann, 1969: 118).

Westermann adds: “They, just as they are, are dear and precious in his sight.”

Each of these utterances could be treated independently of one another and some effort made to trace their referents, both historical and literary. But for the purposes of this thesis an observation of their cumulative impact upon the self-knowledge of the Servant suffices. The Servant is left in no doubt at all that he belongs to Yahweh, utterly. From the moment of his formation, through the period of darkness in which he convinced himself he was abandoned by Yahweh, to the here and now and his call to mission, the Servant has always belonged to Yahweh. And as Muilenburg says, “This belonging is the source of her [Israel’s] confidence and hope” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 481). In other words, it is on the basis of Yahweh’s spoken commitment to the Servant, Israel-Jacob, that he will be able to respond to

here it appears in a most spacious and universal context, drawn partly from contemporary history, partly from eschatological imagination, partly from the covenant tradition (cf., e.g., Exod 19:5)” (1956a: 488).
the call Yahweh has placed upon him.

Of course, the true measure of the force of this incredible declaration will be its reception by the Servant, and how it impacts his self-knowledge. This depends on him having heard and understood the prophet’s argument that it was Yahweh who brought the fire (42:25) against him in the first place. Profound as the declaration of devotion is, it loses something of its impact without the backdrop of 42:18-25. This is the dialogic impact of these two units heard together—they each intensify the message of the other. Without the profound declaration of love in 43:1-7, the disputation of the preceding unit is a bleak pronouncement of judgment. But together they generate an incredible dialogic truth that ultimately is embodied in the Servant’s unique voice-idea—not as a general theological principle, but as a lived-through experience that is unique to Servant Israel-Jacob—that out of the fire of judgment will come redemption. The cumulative effect of the utterances comprising this discourse is one of overwhelming affirmation and edification. The Servant can no longer labour under the misapprehension that he is cast off by Yahweh, as claimed in the citation of 40:27. The opposite is the case, for good and bad. When the Servant awakens to this, he discovers the incredible truth that Yahweh loves him, that he is precious, and that he is honoured.

4.4.4. “Therefore I am redeemed” (43:1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)
We have been unable to avoid mentioning the Servant’s redemption prior to this fuller discussion of it because in the structure of the oracle the idea of the Servant’s
calling, and that of his redemption, cannot be separated. The utterance “I have called you by name” is paralleled with “I have redeemed you” (טַמְּאֵל) in v. 1, and the oracle then develops this link, since the Servant’s redemption is the basis of Yahweh’s exhortation to “Fear not!” (כָּאָ apache) (v. 1d). The Servant’s calling, his belonging to Yahweh, and Yahweh’s love for the Servant, finds historical fulfilment in the act of redemption Yahweh is about to initiate. The Servant discovers that Yahweh’s words of assurance are no mere lip service—it is love in action, which in this context is the trading of “more valuable” nations for a band of exiles.

The root כַּלֶל was used in the first Servant discourse, where the Servant’s knowledge of Yahweh as the one who had abandoned him was challenged by the description of Yahweh as כַּלֶל (“your redeemer”) (41:14d). In this discourse the act of redemption refers specifically to the exchange Yahweh will conduct for the sake of his chosen: “I give Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in exchange for you” (v. 3, ESV). The Servant hears this in light of the pre-exilic understanding of כַּלֶל and the redemption of family members who have fallen into servitude. This is important, since, as Stuhlmueller points out, כַּלֶל “forcefully brings out the idea of a family- or blood-bond between the redeemer and the one redeemed” (Stuhlmueller, 1970: 100). In pronouncing himself Israel’s redeemer, Yahweh alludes to a bond that goes

136. The imagery is taken from socio-legal contexts, namely the ransom paid to liberate close relatives who have fallen into poverty from indentured service. Both property and people could be redeemed in this way (see Lev 25:47ff). For an extensive discussion of the contexts of redemption and its metaphorical and theological applications see Murray (1988) and Unterman (1992). See also Stuhlmueller (1970), particularly pp. 99-168.
beyond service. In v. 6cd that bond is clarified further, when he describes the exiles scattered abroad as “sons” and “daughters”. The Servant discovers himself to be the Redeemer’s kin!

There is a strong nationalistic flavour to this discourse, which no doubt appeals to the Servant, who has been stripped of his national identity. This resonates with the first Servant discourse (particularly 41:10-12), in which the Servant is told not to fear his enemies. Here the Servant hears that his liberation will be at a cost that will be paid by Egypt, Cush and Seba. Some commentators have difficulty with the theological implications of 43:3, 4. Childs, for example, argues the imagery is metaphorical, representing the high cost required for Israel’s deliverance and the value of Israel to God: “Duhm’s interpretation of the exchange as an abandonment of Africa to Cyrus because of disregard for the worth of other nations badly distorts the metaphor” (2001: 335). However, metaphors need a referent, and if the purchase of Israel’s freedom with the giving of Egypt as a ransom is unthinkable then the metaphor breaks down. Also, we need to hear this oracle as the Servant heard it, not as modern readers with modern sensibilities. There could be no greater expression of Yahweh’s commitment to the Servant, in face of the laments we have heard echoed in 40:27 and 42:25, than the surrender of other nations to Cyrus for the

137. See Watts (2005b: 675) for a further exposition of the historical/political backdrop to this imagery.

138. Seitz (2001: 376) relates the imagery to Isa 18-20, where the downfall of Egypt is foreshadowed. Yahweh’s promise to the Servant in 43:1-7 is consistent with Isa 19:4.
Servant’s sake. On the back of this the Servant is told to “Fear not!” (חָמָּ֔ר). We argued in our discussion of 41:14a that when the Servant was told not to fear the coming onslaught of Cyrus was in the background. Here the journey home could perhaps be the backdrop of the exhortation (43:2). This verse evokes 41:15-16, and its message that Yahweh will make the Servant a threshing sledge, before whom even mountains will be razed. Here, as there, the theme that no natural hurdle will impede the journey of Yahweh’s Servant follows the exhortation. While it is tempting to interpret the imagery of v. 2 as referring to the exiles’ journey home, this may be anachronistic. The images may operate metaphorically to represent any difficulties the Servant faces. The imagery of fire (שָׁם) in 43:2e is difficult to reconcile with waters (יָם) and rivers (יָם), if these represent the rivers the exiles will have to cross on their journey to Judea. It is more likely that both base elements represent the extremes that the Servant is likely to face.139 This imagery echoes that of 42:25, in which the imagery of fire represented the fall of Jerusalem and the heat of Yahweh’s wrath. The double-voicing subverts the original utterance, to signify that the fire of Cyrus’ campaign will not burn up the exilic remnant. That this

139. In Ps 66:12 the elements refer to suffering by the community of Israel in general, and more than likely the suffering of judgment specifically (“We went through fire and through water”, מֹּ֣בֶן נָּ֔שָּׂאְנִּים) cf. Pss 42:7-10; 46; 69:1-2, 14-15; 88:18[17]; 124:2-5; 144:7. The devouring fire of God’s judgment is a common image throughout First Isaiah. The fire consumes both the enemies of Yahweh and the nation Israel alike. Perhaps the striking imagery of Isa 9:18[19] is brought to the Servant’s mind when Yahweh says the flames will not burn him up: “Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts the land is scorched, and the people are like fuel for the fire (שָׁם); no one spares another” (ESV). See also 10:16-17, 30:27-33. The Servant has been struggling against the belief that such suffering has come about because of the neglect of Yahweh. These words of Yahweh then come as more reassurance, since they confirm that any such experience in the future will not be endured alone.
imagery is combined with images that also evoke the exodus traditions leaves them open to being interpreted a number of ways, which may be their intention. But in its immediate context the Servant hears this utterance, and quite loudly, as a reversal of his own judgment at the hands of the Babylonians.

There is a purpose to Yahweh’s exhortation and his words of reassurance—the Servant must make the journey home. It is significant that words of salvation are accompanied by images of the return, not just from Babylon, but from all points of the compass. In 43:5a the exhortation to fear not is repeated from 43:1c. As in 41:8-16, where the exhortation is uttered three times, the repetition of it here emphasises the illocutionary force of the discourse. The purpose of this discourse is to change the Servant’s knowledge of himself—from one who is afraid, to one whose knowledge of Yahweh’s presence dispels his fear—even in the face of the most overwhelming conditions, whether a journey through the desert or the onslaught of Cyrus.

A series of promises concerning the return of the exiles from afar expands upon Yahweh’s “I am with you” in 43:5a. The promises, which substantiate this

140. Tg directly reflects the idea that this verse evokes the exodus/wilderness traditions: “At the first when you passed through the reed sea, my Memra was your help; Pharaoh and the Egyptians, who were as numerous as the waters of the river, did not prevail against you; the second time also, when you will walk among the peoples who are as strong as fire, they shall not prevail against you, and kingdoms which are as powerful as flame shall not destroy you” (Tg. 43:2). Seitz also interprets the imagery as referring to the exodus event: “The relationship to the exodus narratives is not to be denied, but the association is secondary and allusive” (2001: 375).

141. North says the “assurance that flames will not now scorch is intended as a contrast with the flames that did scorch (42:25)” (North, 1964: 119, emphases original).
second exhortation to fear not, evoke 41:9, and Yahweh’s utterance to the Servant concerning his calling “from the ends of the earth” and “its farthest corners”. Yahweh’s discourse here echoes the theme of diaspora, shifting the emphasis from those who were called in order to bring the nation into being, to those descendants of the Servant who will be gathered from afar—indeed, from the east (םיה), west (םיה), north (םיה), and south (םיה). The word שָׁם is echoed here from the Servant discourse of 41:8-16, where it was used to denote not the descendants of the Servant, but the Servant himself—described there as the “seed” of Abraham. Hearing these discourses in light of one another highlights the prophetic strategy of this section of Second Isaiah. The prophet relativises the Servant’s self-knowledge against the larger history—past, present, and future—in which Yahweh is continually present and active. The overwhelming truth that is generated by the dialogue, and embodied by the Servant, is that in the here and now, when there appear to be so many reasons to fear, there are actually none.

4.5. Who am I?—The Servant in Isa 43:8-44:8

This discourse is dominated throughout by the direct speech of Yahweh to the

142. The geographical references in these verses appear to echo Isa 11:12, which speaks of the dispersed of Israel as being gathered from the four quarters of the earth (גַּם יָאָדוֹת יָהְמָה תַּרְחֵשׁ). The Servant is no doubt aware that the people of Israel are exiled not just in Babylon, but throughout the nations, including Ethiopia and Asia Minor. Yahweh’s words are a reminder that Servant Israel-Jacob is comprised not only of those exiles in Babylon, but elsewhere. Indeed, as Blenkinsopp points out, most of the references to exiles in Second Isaiah (41:9; 43:5-6; 45:3; 49:12; 51:10) are non-specific in terms of place (see Blenkinsopp, 2002: 222). This may well be because the prophet was situated in Babylon and had no need to reference his location continually. However, “none of the allusions to either topography or cultural matters points unmistakably to a Babylonian provenance” (2002: 222).
Servant, interrupted only by brief, formulaic prophetic utterances (43:14, 16-17; 44:2, 6). It is doubtful the discourse was uttered originally in its entirety—indeed, scholars have identified a number of discrete units distinguished by typical generic features. However, we note again that the distinctions are not so clear as some commentators would suggest. This is reflected by the lack of a broad consensus on both the forms and delimitations of some of these units, and by the acceptance that Second Isaiah’s creative individuality is more recognisable here than elsewhere.  

However, several generic voices are present in this discourse, as in preceding discourses, and they reflect either the different *Sitze im Leben* of the original utterances, or different literary styles adopted by the prophet for varying rhetorical purposes. Firstly, the disputational voice of 43:8-13 is widely accepted, and the unit’s generic characteristics, and the way the targets of the discourse are addressed, mark it as a trial speech—the nations and their gods feature as Yahweh’s opponents (v. 9), and blind Israel is called as Yahweh’s witness (v. 8). However, the purpose of the argumentative voice is to proclaim Yahweh as saviour (v. 11), not to judge. Muilenburg has argued for the division of this unit into an appeal (v. 8), followed by

143. Childs expresses this well: “It is inadequate to limit the present literary units to those genres that were originally shaped by oral communication . . . There has been a fusion of different genres and much freedom has been used in structuring a new composition” (Childs, 2001: 331).

144. Westermann makes a distinction between the trial speech and the disputation, on the basis that the trial attempts to resolve a claim (Westermann, 1969: 130). The claim at issue here is whether Yahweh is uniquely God. Westermann also acknowledges that it is not always possible to differentiate the trial speech from the disputation (Westermann, 1991: 201). While there are enough features in this unit to mark it as a trial, our focus is on the disputational “voice” of the unit, rather than its literary form.
three strophes, recognising that the trial focusses, in turn, on the nations (v. 9), Israel (v. 10), and Yahweh (vv. 11-13) (Muilenburg, 1956a: 485). While all are participants in the trial only Yahweh speaks, which in itself, in the world of the text at any rate, is enough to support Yahweh’s charge that he is uniquely God. This seems to be the purpose of the discourse.

The voice of promise and assurance that speaks in vv. 14-15 leads some to see the unit as a salvation oracle complete in itself, despite the absence of “Fear not”, while others see it as the conclusion of the preceding trial speech. Commending the latter view is the observation that the unit echoes the voice of assurance in vv. 11-13. However, the specific reference to Babylon in v. 14 introduces a new idea, distinguishing this unit from the trial speech.

Second Isaiah’s own creative hand is seen to be behind vv. 16-21, since while it has a structure similar to the salvation oracle it is atypical enough to prevent rigid categorisation. Its voice is certainly that of assurance and promise, since it calls the

145. As Melugin says, Yahweh’s challenge to the gods of the nations is to produce witnesses, as he has done with Israel, who can verify their ability to declare the former things. Of course, they cannot: “Thus Yahweh’s claim to be God, expressed in the typical self-praise style of Deutero-Isaiah’s disputations, stands (v. 11-13)” (Melugin, 1976: 110).

146. Spykerboer says of 43:8-13 that “while elements from a legal process are unmistakably present . . . , the main thrust in the passage is not the trial of the nations, but the self-revelation of Yahweh” (Spykerboer, 1976: 103-104).

147. Melugin, for example, says it is a salvation oracle that is complete form critically, but that it is different from the salvation-assurance oracle, as it does not include the exhortation, “Fear not” (Melugin, 1976: 110). He bases his argument on the similarities between 43:14-15 and 43:3b-4. However, as we have seen above, 43:3b-4 forms part of the larger chiasm of 43:1-7. Seitz argues vv. 14-15 is the culmination of the trial speech (Seitz, 2001: 376).

148. Hymnal features combine with a structure typical of the salvation oracle, but again without
Servant to leave his remembrance of exodus behind and look forward to a new, greater act of salvation. However, the past and future direction of Yahweh’s utterance should not detract from the immediate concern, which is to challenge the Servant’s attitude in the present. Stuhlmueller is right to say the genre draws attention to the present moment, since it is in the present that a word of salvation is required.149

The disputational voice returns in vv. 22-28, but now it is Israel who is on trial. The discourse between Yahweh and the Servant here is as direct as it gets in Second Isaiah. Yahweh’s charge against the Servant, outlined in vv. 22-27, seems intended to justify the action that is described in v. 28. The trial is held so that Yahweh can justify his destruction of the nation.150

In stark contrast, a voice of assurance is heard again in 44:1-5. Its abrupt introduction, marked with the conjunction πῶς, parallels the disputation-salvation assurance structure that we saw in 42:18-25/43:1-7.151 Melugin argues that because this oracle conforms to the general structure of the salvation-assurance oracle its

“Fear not.” But see Begrich (1963: 21), who argues “Remember not” is a modification of “Fear not.”

149. In the present Israel is given the reason it need not fear: “Yahweh is among his people now precisely as the Redeemer-God of the exodus” (Stuhlmueller, 1970: 69).

150. We read v. 28 in the perfect tense, with LXX, KJV, RSV, JPS REB, NRSV, NJB, and contra Tg, ASV, NASB, NIV, ESV.

151. Watts argues another generic voice is at play here, that of the judicial decision (Watts, 2005b: 686). This genre has parallels in Jer 28:15-16, 34:4-5, Ezek 21:3-5, Amos 7:16-17, and Zech 3:8-10. His argument reflects the dialogic impact upon this salvation speech of the preceding trial scene. Coming as it does at the end of a brief trial, Yahweh’s words of salvation reverberate with the words of a magistrate handing down a finding.
context is not integral to its meaning (Melugin, 1976: 115). However, the dialogic impact of the preceding trial speech is lost if this oracle is heard in isolation. The voice of disputation and self-justification of the preceding scene heightens the surprising richness of the declaration of salvation that immediately follows. In light of the juxtaposition the promises of 44:1-5 are heard as pure graciousness on Yahweh’s part. Melugin is right if he means that even without the preceding trial speech Yahweh’s words of assurance are powerful. However, as with 42:18-25/43:1-7, the impact of the “Nevertheless” is lost if the two speeches are prevented from dialoguing with each other.

The voice of disputation returns in vv. 6-8 to round out the discourse. We include this unit in the discussion because it carries on the direct speech of Yahweh to the Servant, and also because v. 8 echoes 43:10, and so brings the discourse full circle.

By highlighting the multiple generic voices that comprise this discourse we draw attention to the diversity of the prophet’s rhetorical strategy, the different ways he seeks a response from the Servant. Whether disputing with the exiles, or addressing them as if they are on trial, or speaking to them in words of reassurance and promises of salvation, the prophet is attempting to impact the Servant’s knowledge of who he is. The generic voices draw from discourses that have significance in the Servant’s time and place—the trial, the dispute, the promise of salvation to a ruler in distress—in order to disturb and liberate the Servant in his
errant self-consciousness. We reimagine the Servant’s internal discourse, as provoked by Yahweh’s speech in 43:8-44:8, as follows: 1) “Though I am blind and deaf, I am a witness” (43 vv. 8, 9, 10, 11-13, 15, 18; 44:8); 2) “I am guilty, but given a pardon” (43 vv. 22-28); 3) “I long for the past, but have been given a future” (43 vv. 18-19, 28; 44 vv. 2-5); 4) “I am and will become the Servant, kinsman of Yahweh” (43 vv. 14, 21; 44 vv. 1, 2). Each utterance is discussed in turn.

4.5.1. “Though I am blind and deaf, I am a witness” (43:8, 9, 10, 11-13, 15, 18; 44:7-8)

The description of the people in 43:8 as those who “are blind, yet have eyes” (שָׁעִיָּהּ שָׁעִיָּהּ שָׁעִיָּהּ שָׁעִיָּהּ), and who “are deaf, yet have ears” (לְשׁוֹנָהּ לְשׁוֹנָהּ לְשׁוֹנָהּ לְשׁוֹנָהּ) echoes Isa 42:18-20, again making an association between the people who are blind and deaf, and the Servant who is in the same predicament. In other words, although the Servant is not named in 43:8 he is certainly in view, and this is confirmed when Yahweh begins to speak in 43:10, where, in his direct address, he parallels the plural “witnesses” with the singular “my Servant.”

That the Servant is blind and deaf is already known to him then, and the way this discourse begins suggests Yahweh’s imperative to the Servant in 42:18 to look and see has not yet been heeded.152 That he is called as a witness in such a state,

152. Clements also makes this point: “The theme of blindness and deafness . . . makes its point in a way which assumes that this deafness and blindness is already known to be the case” (1985: 102). This is interesting from a dialogical perspective, since it indicates the Servant has already heard the previous discourse. Clements links the Servant’s knowledge of his state directly with Isaiah’s commission in Isa 6. He also links Isa 35:5, which is later than and dependent on the contents of chapters 40ff.
however, is perhaps a little surprising. Nevertheless, the prophet commands an unnamed individual, perhaps a bailiff, to “bring out” (אַיִּ֖שׁ) the blind and deaf. The imperative echoes the description of the Servant’s role in 42:7, where Yahweh commissions him to bring prisoners out of the dungeons. We have already noted the irony that the blind Servant is called to bring light to those in darkness (see links between 42:18-20 and 42:7-8). Here the same irony is generated by the echo; by it the Servant hears that before he can bring anyone out, he himself must be brought out—possibly from the dungeons, but certainly from his spiritual darkness.  

The Servant is brought into a judicial setting, where the nations gather together to answer Yahweh’s challenge (43:9). It is an imaginary setting, but no doubt mirrors typical judicial settings of the day. The prophet calls the nations to present “their witnesses” (זְפֵרָה) (v. 9e), so that it can be shown they were not able to predict the “former things” (יָדִישׁ) (v. 9d) as Yahweh did. This is the first time the word “witness” (דָּבָר) has been used in Second Isaiah, and though it is used initially with reference to the nations, in Yahweh’s discourse from v. 10 the term is attached to the Servant. A clear distinction is made between the “witnesses” of the nations, who do not even show up, and “my witnesses” (יָדִישׁ, v. 10a), who, as implied by the very discourse that is addressed to them, are present. “My witnesses” is paralleled with “my Servant” (v. 10b), who again is described as the “chosen” Servant.

153. North says the description of the Servant here is that of “captives whose sight has been impaired by long confinement in darkness” (1964: 122).
(echoing 41:8-9 and 42:1, signifying that the same Servant is still in view). The plural noun “witnesses” matches the 2mp pronoun זכר (“you”) at the beginning of Yahweh’s speech, in v. 10a. Watts (2005b: 676) identifies the “you” as the assembled nations, but it clearly refers to the witnesses/Servant, who has been addressed in both the singular and plural previously.  

The structure of Yahweh’s initial utterance to the Servant in v. 10 binds the voice-ideas of witness, servanthood and election together in the one dialogical partner, the Servant. The Servant hears that his service is his witness, and his witness is the purpose of his election. He was chosen in order (נָאָה וּנְאָה) to know (יֵדַע), believe (יְדַע) and understand (יִדְעָה) that “I [Yahweh] am he” (אֶלָה אֶלָה) (v. 10e). This is a key moment in the Servant’s developing self-knowledge, since here he discovers why it is that he is. This knowing, believing and understanding is the basis of his calling and purpose. This is why his blindness and deafness has been so tragic—the very purpose of his election has been thwarted.  

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154. To this point, the Servant has predominantly been addressed in the singular, apart from 42:9, where the 2mp pronoun is used, also in connection with Yahweh knowing the former things; in 42:18, where both the adjectives and verbs are plural; and in 42:23. When the Servant’s blindness and his role as a witness is being addressed he is spoken of in the plural. But in the parallel line b here the Servant is again addressed with the familiar singular term אֱלֹה, signalling that the same Servant is in view, and that the use of the plural should not preclude seeing the figure being addressed as the very Servant who is addressed in the singular in earlier discourses.

155. The utterance reverberates throughout Second Isaiah. See, for example, 41:4; 43:10-13; 46:4; 48:12.

156. Muilenburg says it this way: “Israel does not exist for herself. She is not first of all a great nation, a great military power, an economic force, a cultural center, or any other secular order. Her mission is to be God’s witness and elected servant” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 488).

157. Schoors says that by its election Israel is made capable of witnessing: “For it has been chosen precisely in order to know and believe that ‘he is he’” (Schoors, 1973: 226).
point: “Knowing and believing and understanding were what failed, leaving a previous generation blind to God’s ways” (Seitz, 2001: 377).

Throughout Isaiah the verbs יד🛍 and יד🛍 accompany one another to describe Israel’s spiritual darkness. They are used in parallel at the beginning of the book’s final form, in 1:3cd, in what might be viewed as the prologue to the entire work. In declaring of the people that: “Israel does not know, my people do not understand” (לארשי לָא ידrecoverre | לָא ידrecoverre | ידrecoverre | ידrecoverre) the book establishes from the outset a major theme that continues throughout the prophecies. In Isa 6:9, this lack of knowledge and understanding is seen as the basis of the prophet’s ministry, and also its goal.158

That the Servant is now being told that he is Yahweh’s witness, to know, to understand and to trust him, is a significant reversal in the Servant’s knowledge of himself. He knows, from the preceding discourse (42:19-20), that he is blind and deaf, despite being able to use his ears and eyes. Now he is being called to see again.159 And it is precisely in his role as “witness” that the Servant will discover his sight. Says Seitz: “No wonder the poet makes persistent reference to the calling of Abraham and the ancestral election; for all intents and purposes, this generation is meeting God as if for the first time” (Seitz, 2001: 377). This observation summarises well the transformative nature of Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant.

The actual content of what the Servant will know and believe and understand

158. See also 32:4; 40:14, 21; 44:18.

159. North says that Israel’s “very giving of evidence is to strengthen their faith and open their blind eyes to what is obvious” (North, 1964: 122).
about Yahweh underlines just how crucial his role is. What Yahweh reveals about himself to the Servant is a lived-through, embodied truth, the involvement of Yahweh in Israel’s history, its אֲצַל. What the Servant has discovered, and is yet to discover more, about Yahweh, is unique to the Servant. It is bound up with his voice-idea. The specific content of Israel’s witness will be: 1) That before Yahweh no god was formed (v. 10f); 160 2) That apart from Yahweh there is no saviour (v. 11b); 3) That only Yahweh, and not some foreign god, has declared and saved and proclaimed (v. 12a-d); 4) That no-one can take the Servant from his hand (v. 13b); 161 5) That he is Yahweh, Israel’s Holy One, Creator and king (v. 15). The Servant surely understands that these are realised only in him—that what Yahweh declares concerning himself also fundamentally concerns Israel. The Servant is not only the theatre of Yahweh’s revelation, but its key player.

Both the exodus event and the new act of salvation are in view when Yahweh speaks of salvation in this discourse, as highlighted by his declaration in v. 11. The double use of the first person pronoun in v. 11a emphasises his uniqueness, as the only God who knows himself as יְהֹוָה. The word for saviour in v. 11b, יְשׁוֹע, is

160. This is an allusion to the Babylonian gods, according to Whybray, since they stood in a genealogical succession (Whybray, 1975: 85).


162. Muilenburg points out that between v.11-13 there are twenty-nine words in the Hebrew, and twelve of them are in the first person singular: “It is monotheism at its most intense pitch” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 489). Westermann notes that before Second Isaiah’s time, “no one had ever spoken so unequivocally or radically on the subject of Israel’s God being the only God” (Westermann, 1969: 123).
used in Isa 19:20 in the oracle against Egypt. There is an echo of the exodus traditions in both that discourse and this. The word is used six times of Yahweh in Second Isaiah, and once in Third Isaiah. It never appears in this form in Exodus, though the verbal root is used twice, most significantly in Exod 14:30: יִשָּׁלֹם יְהֹウェָה בֵּית הָאָרֶץ אֲגָרֶם (“And Yahweh saved Israel that day.”) Second Isaiah’s use of the exodus imagery elsewhere suggests that here also the Servant is intended to remember the great salvation event of the nation’s history when he hears this term.

Our question again is, what does Yahweh’s declaration suggest to the Servant’s self-knowledge? We imagine that, initially, it simply reminds him of the reasons Yahweh can be trusted, which is no small thing to the exiles in Babylon and elsewhere. But also, the Servant is confronted with the idea that far from being neglected by Yahweh, he is absolutely essential to Yahweh’s plans. The trial is an ideal setting for such a dialogic realisation, since in the trial a charge is upheld or dismissed on the basis of a single, crucial testimony, given in a face to face encounter with the one making the charge. The dramatic intensity of this type of encounter is implicit in the present discourse. It is precisely in this setting that Israel discovers just how crucial its testimony is. In terms of how this impacts the

163. For Westermann it is a key purpose of the present discourse to strengthen Israel’s faith in its saviour God: “For them, God is now the one who is able to create a future out of the ruins of the past” (Westermann, 1969: 122-123).

164. Westermann makes a similar point regarding the declaration “You are my servant,” which, he says, represents “the endorsement of a testimony in court” (Westermann, 1969: 122).
Servant’s understanding of his identity and purpose, we can surmise that it is both empowering and sobering to the Servant to discover that his Creator’s purposes in the world cannot be realised without him. Yet again, this calls the Servant to reflect, and to re-evaluate, his self-knowledge. It also calls him to action, as Clifford correctly notes: “Knowing the divine words or promises . . . , Israel must now render those promises visible by its actions” (Clifford, 1984: 111). Those to whom Israel is a witness must see the Servant’s belief in action if Yahweh is to be truly vindicated to the nations and their gods.

A separate aspect to the Servant’s witness is bound up with the difficult term “former things” (תְּמוּנָת; v. 9d, 18a). In v. 9 the nations are challenged to produce anyone who is able to “announce the former things”. Its parallel statement is “Who among them can declare this?” with “this” (תָּמִן) paralleling “former things”. There is nothing in this discourse to indicate that the “former things” refers specifically to the prophecies of First Isaiah. However, for our purposes, the guiding question for any of these seemingly abstract terms in the Servant discourses has been, what do they mean to the Servant? There have been enough dialogic links with the prophecies of First Isaiah for us to begin with the assumption they are also in view here—or at least are brought to mind by the Servant when he hears “former things”. The clear connection between Yahweh’s word and its fulfilment is what demonstrates

165. What is that action? “To turn to Yahweh as its creator for that forgiveness of their rebellion that will enable them to be true servants and witnesses” (Clifford, 1984: 111).

166. As highlighted by Sommer (1998: 97)
Yahweh’s divinity here, so it makes sense that specific prophecies are being referred to. In the world of the Servant, at least as we have it in the discourses we have looked at so far, Yahweh’s unique ability to fulfil a prophetic word has been most clearly demonstrated in his involvement in the Servant’s history. It was Yahweh who made Israel blind, it was Yahweh who brought destruction upon the nation, now it is Yahweh who announces salvation. The Servant is in the unique position to know this, and has the crucial role of witnessing to it. Westermann’s oft-quoted statement on this goes to the heart of the issue for the Servant’s understanding of his role and identity:

What here decides a religion’s title and claim is neither its spiritual or ethical or religious value, nor its enlightenment or high cultural level; instead, it is continuity in history and this alone, the power of a faith to throw a bridge over a chasm torn open by the downfall of a nation (Westermann, 1969: 122).

Westermann adds: “This, however, requires witnesses to testify to it, that is, those who confess the divinity of the god in question” (1969: 122). This is how impacts the Servant. By highlighting the inability of the nations and their gods to know the former things, and by highlighting, in contrast, Yahweh’s ability to make the former things happen, the prophet evokes in the Servant a faith that throws a bridge over a chasm. Of prime importance is the Servant’s knowledge of himself in

167. Westermann: “The proof of divinity is, therefore, that a God conducts his people through history on a way which it can tread with confidence, because words which he uttered had shown both the direction to be taken and the end in view” (Westermann, 1969: 121-122).

168. Schoors also believes the former things refer to the salvation predicted beforehand. “The text is too close to 41:21-29 and 44:6-8 . . . to allow another interpretation” (1973: 225). Clifford describes the challenge to the foreign gods this way: “Other claimants to deity are challenged to make known their plans beforehand so that people may see whether deed matches prediction” (1984: 111).
continuity with Israel’s historical faith in Yahweh, since only then will the Servant trust in Yahweh’s involvement in his future. The signifiers by which the Servant hears and understands and is impacted by this argument are embedded in the discourses that constitute the narrative world of Isaiah. This is why the Servant is summoned as the “blind” and “deaf” in 43:8, because these terms are highly significant within this frame of reference.169

When the “former things” is repeated in 43:18 it means something entirely different, though the dialogic influence of the first utterance upon the second should not be missed. In v. 18 the Servant hears “former things” in light of the exodus imagery of vv. 16-17. More will be said on this below. The point to be made here is that while the exodus is in view in v. 18, as opposed to former prophecies, still signifies that Yahweh is able to bridge the gaping chasms of Israel’s history. Likewise, the second utterance informs the first. Read in isolation, there is no hint that the exodus is in view in v. 9. But in light of v. 18 there is an implication that the nation’s witnesses are incapable of testifying to anything like the exodus event. There are no “former things” to which the nations can point as evidence that their gods are “right” (v. 9e).170

169. Seitz makes this precise point: “Here we are within a specifically Isaian frame of reference. Blindness and deafness were hallmarks of the generation addressed by the prophet. The prophet’s former speech ricocheted off those he addressed like so much foreign gibberish (28:13); God’s work became alien and strange (28:21); ‘The vision of all this’ was sealed for those who could read, and it was open only in paradox for those who could not read in the first place (29:11-12)’ (Seitz, 2001: 377). On this, see also Isa 30:8: “so that it may be for the time to come”, and 8:16: “sealed among the prophet’s disciples”. There is an awareness in these texts that this message has to be fulfilled. The Servant discourses are self-consciously aware that that time has come.

170. The meaning here is “Prove them right,” from the root רָכוּ. It shares the same root as “righteous”, but considering the judicial backdrop here, Muilenburg translates as “innocent” (1956a:
The Servant’s role as witness to Yahweh’s unique ability to speak of things before they happen is emphasised in 44:8, in a disputation that concludes the discourse, forming an inclusio with 43:10 around the phrase “You are my witnesses” (יְהֹוָה בְּאִישֶׁךָ) and the theme of Yahweh’s foreknowledge. Polemic frames the entire discourse, since to this point the Servant has not yet responded to Yahweh’s call, and therefore his witness to Yahweh’s uniqueness remains unfulfilled.

4.5.2. “I am guilty, but given a pardon” (43:22-28)

The nations are not the only ones on trial in this discourse. Where the truth or falsehood of the nations’ gods was at issue in the trial scene of vv. 8-13, in vv. 22-28 the issue is guilt or innocence—not that of the nations, but of Israel. Yahweh indicts Israel-Jacob (v. 22), and by the conclusion of the trial Israel’s plight is adjudged to have been deserved (v. 28).172 Because the Servant was the addressee of Yahweh’s discourse in 43:10, and because he has been associated with the dual name Israel-Jacob, we include this trial scene in the discourses that constitute the Servant as a polyphonic hero. Yahweh addresses Jacob-Israel in this section with masc. sing. verbs and suffixes.

In v. 22, the force of Yahweh’s direct speech has Israel backpedalling on its

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487). However, the issue at stake in the trial is not the nations’ innocence or guilt, but a claim that their gods are divine. The decision is between truth and falsehood.

171. We take the plural “witnesses” to refer to the singular Servant because “Servant” parallels “witnesses” in 43:10ab, and 44:8 echoes 43:10.

double-voiced lament of 40:27, with “You have not called upon me, O Jacob, yet you have been wearied with me, O Israel.” The Hebrew emphasises the personal pronoun: יִרְדֵּךְ אָנֹתָא, it was not me! Israel had claimed that it was neglected by Yahweh, but Yahweh turns the tables by declaring Israel had not even called on him. The inference is that Israel called upon the gods of the nations instead. That is certainly what is suggested when we hear Yahweh’s declaration on the back of the opening trial scene in 43:8-13. Israel’s complaints never reached Yahweh.174

In vv. 23 and 24 Yahweh presents the evidence in support of his claim that the Servant has wearied of him: Israel-Jacob has not brought sheep for burnt offerings or honoured Yahweh with sacrifices. Not that Yahweh has asked for them—to the Servant Yahweh says I have not “made you serve” (προσέτικα) with offerings (v. 23c), nor wearied you (προσέφερον ἀνέμοι) with incense—meaning he has not requested these things. The repetition of ἡμισὺ here, in the hif. form, plays on Yahweh’s accusation in v. 22b. Although Israel has wearied Yahweh, Yahweh himself is not

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173. LXX takes the subject of the verbs as Yahweh: οὐ νῦν ἐκκλησάσα σε Ἰακωβ οὐδὲ κοπιάσαι σε ἐποίησα Ισραήλ: “Now, I have not called you O Jacob, neither have I made you weary, O Israel.” V.22 acts as an introduction to the indictments of vv. 23 and 24, and the sense of the second clause in the LXX certainly matches the final statements in each of those verses. Neither the LXX nor the MT perfectly fits the context, but there are more problems with the LXX. For example, Yahweh cannot say that he has not called Jacob, since a major theme in his discourses with the Servant is that the Servant has been called by Yahweh. In the MT v. 22 works antithetically, giving the indictment an ironic edge. It fits well the tone of Yahweh’s disputational discourse following the community lament of 40:27: “You did not call upon me, O Jacob—yet [unbelievably] you have been weary of me, O Israel!” The parallel statements in vv. 23d and 24d then invert this charge—Yahweh has not wearied Israel with any expectation, but has himself become weary with Israel’s sin.

174. Whybray describes the backdrop of this charge: “We must assume that the exiles had protested that the disaster of the exile had occurred in spite of Israel’s diligence in offering to Yahweh all the sacrifices which he had demanded” (1975: 91). For context see Isa 1:11, and Jer 6:20.
culpable. The use of רע here is not arbitrary. It echoes its disputational use by the
prophet in connection with the people’s lament in 40:27. There it was used
repeatedly to say that Yahweh does not grow weary (40:28e) as youths do (40:30a),
and that those who hope for Yahweh shall run and not be weary (40:31c). This
passage suggests that not only has the community not called upon Yahweh—who
could have prevented its becoming weary—it has become weary with him.

With the statement בַּעֲנֵיָּּךְּ ("You have wearied me with your iniquities," 43:24d) Yahweh echoes his charge against Israel in order to emphasise
its sin. Israel has no cause to be weary of Yahweh, since he has asked nothing of it.
However, Israel has made Yahweh weary with its sin. Tg’s interpretation of v. 22b,
that Israel has been weary with “the teaching of my law”,175 makes some sense in
light of Yahweh’s statement in v. 24d: While Israel has wearied with the law,
Yahweh has weared with the breaking of it. This statement has more force when
heard in light of 40:27-31, where the prophet maintains that Yahweh cannot become
weary. Here the Servant is told that his sin has, indeed, made its God weary.

The Hebrew for “burdened” in v. 24c is taken from the same root as
“servant”, so echoes the now familiar term by which the Servant is being constituted,
as if Yahweh is saying, “You have tried to make me serve you, when you have been
called to serve me.” As Westermann says, “If God is made into a [servant], if he is
made to serve, he has his divinity taken from him” (1969: 131).176 This is vitally

175. See Chilton (1987: 86)
176. “This reversal of the natural relationship between God and man, in which God is Lord and man
important for the Servant’s knowledge of himself. To find his way through the exile he must come to know himself as Servant, not master. Yahweh’s charge directly addresses the Servant’s errant self-image, in order to wrest him from his self-reliance.177

Yahweh’s accusations raise the question of who precisely is being indicted. Commentators are wont to make a distinction between a past generation that caused the exile, and the generation that is born into exile.178 The exegetical emphasis, again, should be on how the Servant hears these charges—are the sins his or those of the previous generations? The key is whether v. 28 is cast in the perfect or imperfect tense. Many of the major English translations cast these verbs in the imperfect, as if the judgment is still to take place (ASV, NASB, NIV, ESV). This makes no sense in the context—the judgments referred to (Jacob given over to destruction (בֵּית), and Israel to scorn, v. 28bc) have occurred in the past (see 42:25). It is better to read them in the waw consecutive as having already happened. This is how the LXX translates the verbs. This also fits with the focus on the past in v. 27, where the

God’s servant, flashes out for just a moment. It fades again immediately, for in v. 25 God again acts precisely and decidedly as a master who can as such simply blot out Israel’s guilt” (Westermann, 1969: 131).

177. Whybray hits the dialogic nature of this discourse on the head: “Its purpose is . . . to shake the exiles out of their complacency about their spiritual condition, which is preventing them from accepting the new promise of salvation which is being offered to them” (Whybray, 1975: 90).

178. For example, Snaith throughout this section of Second Isaiah maintains a distinction between the Servant and the old Jacob-Israel. So, here he reads the discourse as being addressed to the old Jacob-Israel, “who did not call upon God, nor did they weary themselves in their service to Him” (Snaith, 1977: 183). Snaith says this section tells of the utter and complete rejection of the old Jacob-Israel. While we agree that the previous generation is being accused, we have also noted on a number of occasions the emphasis Second Isaiah places on the current generation’s continuity with the people of old.
charge that “Your first father sinned” (v. 27a),\(^179\) suggests to the Servant that he has been corrupted from the beginning. His relationship with Yahweh, suggested by the term “mediators” (v. 27b),\(^180\) also has been corrupted. In other words, the Servant can trust neither his own traditions nor his religion.

However, to make a rigid distinction between the present and previous generations would be wrong, since continuity with the past has been emphasised throughout the Servant discourses, both positively and negatively. The sin of the Servant’s forefather, and the transgression of people who should have known better, does not absolve the Servant of his guilt, but affirms it, as demonstrated by the weight of the destruction that came upon him.

We agree with Blenkinsopp:

The entire drift of the accusation, especially the reference to the ancestors, points

\(^{179}\) The reference could be to Abraham, who has been referred to in previous Servant discourses. However, Abraham has been remembered favourably by Second Isaiah, with the apparent intention of re-establishing the positive grounds of Israel’s relationship with Yahweh. The more likely reference is to Jacob, whom the Servant is named after. This is all the more likely when the current trial scene, in which charges are being laid against Israel, is read in light of Hos 12:2-4. The phrase יָאַבְרָהַם יָאַבְרֹאֵל means “Your first [or earliest] ancestor/forefather.” Abraham does not need to be in view for the force of the clause to be conveyed—which is that there has never been a time that Israel has been without sin. Commentators differ in their interpretations of the reference. Muilenburg says it is to Israel’s eponymous ancestor, Jacob, and notes that it links original sin to Jacob and not Adam, as in later biblical development (Muilenburg, 1956a: 500). North also says the reference is to Jacob (1964: 130). However, Blenkinsopp argues the reference cannot be to Jacob, since there is no record of him sinning, nor to Abraham, since he was the “friend of God”; “The author may have had in mind the denunciation of Jacob-Jeshurun who, according to the Song of Moses, ‘abandoned the God who made him . . . ’” (Deut 32:15-18)” (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 232).

\(^{180}\) The origins of יָאָבְרַך are uncertain, and the major translations interpret the word a number of ways: teacher (KJV, ASV); mediator (RSV, ESV); spokesman (NASB, NIV, JPS, REB); interpreter (NRSV, NJB). BDB reads יָאָבְרַך as the participle form of the verb יָאָבָר (“to scorn”), translated “interpreter” or “ambassador”. Despite confusion over its meaning the sense of the clause is clear: even those who should have been trusted, figures who stood between God and his people, transgressed against him. So what hope did the Servant have? North’s interpretation: “The meaning may be somewhat wider than (false) prophets, and include the kings (and priests?), who were intermediaries between Yahweh and Israel” (North, 1964: 131).
to religious practice in the pre-destruction period along the lines of a well-established prophetic critique of the sacrificial system . . . , with special reference to the last decades of Judah’s independent existence” (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 231).

That the discourse is directed to “you”, however, indicates that the Servant is meant to know that he shares the judgment of these sins—as, indeed, he suffers from their consequences. However, the crucial point in the trial scene is not so much the Servant’s guilt, as his pardon. V. 25 stands at the heart of the trial, and shapes the Servant’s comprehension of the entire proceedings. And as with the previous discourse, a disputation that establishes the Servant’s culpability and Yahweh’s righteousness does not result in judgment but in words of salvation (44:1-8). Where the Servant might expect a judgment, he receives a pardon.181 Although the trial continues (vv. 26-28) after Yahweh declares the Servant’s sins blotted out (v. 25), the judgment that is described has already occurred. And even this judgment is overshadowed by the oracles of salvation that follow in 44:1-8. In v. 25a Yahweh declares that he himself is the basis on which the Servant is pardoned—אֲנִי אֲנִי חוֹז אֲנִי מִלֵּא חַסִּים לְךָ. The force of the repeated 1p pronoun, coupled with לְךָ (“for my sake”) emphasises that the wiping out of the Servant’s transgressions rests upon nothing the Servant is able to offer in either sacrificial worship or, indeed, service, but on Yahweh’s righteousness alone. North says: “Here Yahweh’s wiping out of Israel’s transgressions springs from pure grace; he forgives because it is in his

181. This is reflected in the unit’s form. Muilenburg points out that Second Isaiah’s language here is like the invective (Scheltrédé), and so a threat (Drohredé) is expected to follow (Muilenburg, 1956a: 497). The typical is disrupted for maximum impact.
nature to do so” (1964: 130).

Spykerboer says the motif of the trial is subservient to the motif of salvation here (1976: 110). We agree, since the trial establishes the guilt of Israel only in order to highlight the radical nature of the pardon. This is emphasised by the structure of the trial scene in 43:22-28, in which the pardon is placed at the centre. Everything that is said about the Servant confirms his culpability, but he does not receive judgment, but pardon. This is a startling moment of liberation for the despondent Servant. And it is a crucial point in his journey of self-discovery. The discourse constructs a matrix of judgment around the Servant only in order to dismantle it and erect one of forgiveness, so that the Servant knows himself not in direct relation to his historical circumstances and what they signify, but in relation to the promise of redemption and what that denotes. This is done purely dialogically, of course. In reality nothing has yet changed—the liberator has not yet come. But Yahweh’s discourse calls for a response in the Servant’s internal discourse first. Only later will the Servant be called to act.

182. The idea of blotting out (יהנָה) sin (אֵשׁ) or transgressions (יִשָּׁח) is common to Second Isaiah (43:25; 44:22), Jeremiah (18:23), Psalms (51:1, 9: 109:14) and Nehemiah (4:5). The participle form of יהנָה in this noun clause, predicating the personal pronoun, could indicate either past, present or future action, but in this case, and on the basis that the final verb of the sentence is in the imperfect, it likely signifies an imminent event. The parallel utterance “And I will not remember your sins” (אֶרְאֶה וְאֵינָם אֵאֵא אֶנְדָּחַם) (v. 25c) plays on the preceding indictments regarding the absence of Israel’s offerings (תרמים, which is placed in the primary position in the clause, is used to signify “sin offering” as well as “sin”).

183. The “acts” of the Servant will signify an even greater reversal, for the God who blots out Israel’s sins calls the Servant to then bear the sins of others. The dialogic link between this discourse and the final Servant poem did not escape Westermann: “What here is the momentary sounding of a note, is to be taken up again in the poems about the וְאֵשׁ, the servant of God: there is to be a servant who, at God’s behest, is to take the sins of the others upon himself” (Westermann, 1969: 132).
4.5.3. “I long for the past, but have been given a future” (43:18-19, 28; 44 vv. 2-5)

We have already alluded to how this discourse oscillates between the past and the future, and between judgment and salvation. Yahweh stands at the axis of both, bridging the chasm that is the exile—establishing continuity with the past for the sake of the Servant’s self-knowledge, while also highlighting the radical interruption of the exilic period as a precursor to something new. The simultaneity of the themes of continuity and discontinuity is a characteristic of the discourse between Yahweh and the Servant that is not easily rationalised. The Servant himself embodies it—hearing himself addressed as Israel-Jacob he is reminded of his historical rootedness.

But as the exilic community he stands at the threshold of a radically new era in which he will discover himself anew. Nowhere is this more clearly defined than in vv. 18-19, where Yahweh instructs the Servant to forget the former things and look to the new thing he (Yahweh) is about to do. Again, the dialogic nature of Yahweh’s exhortation is a key to unlocking the meaning of his use of נְאֻאָן here. The “former things” is not a universal term—it is heard as something specific to the Servant in a particular time and place. Here the reference double-voices the community’s laments in which the exiles rehearse Yahweh’s past actions on their behalf, and bemoan the apparent cessation of his salvific activity.184 This process is particularly transparent

184. The command to not remember cannot possibly mean forgetting completely what Yahweh has done in the past, since continuity with the past has been a major thrust of these discourses. Westermann recognised this: “In the legal process between God and the gods of the nations he gives them [the exiles] the lofty role of being God’s witnesses, which means testifying to a reliable continuity between God’s words and his action, between proclamations and their fulfillment”
in Isa 63:11-14, where the days of old (הַיּוֹם הַגּוֹיִם), namely the days of Moses and his people, are recalled (הָרִבד). While the text is probably much later than Second Isaiah, the recall of exodus traditions that it denotes gives us a picture of the type of remembrance that Yahweh challenges in 43:18. Yahweh instructs the Servant to not recall those days—in other words, to cease lamenting their passing. As long as the Servant is longing for past glories, and becoming despondent now that those days have ceased, he will fail to recognise Yahweh’s hand in the events that are about to unfold. The simultaneity of the former and the new things is also highlighted by the way the new thing is described. Although the new thing—which, in the context, encompasses the exiles’ liberation from Babylon and their long journey home—is said to contrast the former things, it is alluded to in language that double-voices the prophet’s own recollection of the former things in 43:16. The “way in the sea” (v. 16b) is echoed by the phrase “a way in the wilderness” (v. 19d), and “a path in mighty waters” (v. 16c) is echoed by “pathways in the desert” (v. 19e). Continuity and discontinuity occur simultaneously—the new thing is greater than the old thing, but can be understood only in light of the old thing. The benefit of a Bakhtinian reading suggests itself here. It allows for a “former thing” and a “new thing” to be


185. See also Pss 44:2-4, 74:2, 80:9-12.

186. The contrast is highlighted by the use of the phrase נֵבְשַׁע הָאָרֶץ, the verb נָבָשׁ signifying the bursting forth of new growth.

187. With Schoors we amend נָבָשׁ־אָרֶץ (“rivers”) to נַבְשָׁע הָאָרֶץ (“pathways”) in line with 1QIsa⁵. The word then parallels בחָרָם, and generates a “striking parallelism” between v. 16 and 19: A way in the sea/a path in mighty waters; a way in the wilderness/pathways in the desert. See Schoors (1973: 94-95).
heard in dialogue, while honouring the signification of each thing. Indeed, that each thing retains its signification is essential for the double-voicing to mean. This explains why the former things are referred to at all in a discourse that calls for the Servant to remember them no longer and to look to the future. The exodus remains paradigmatic for the Servant. It gives him his bearings—allows him to recognise himself in light of what he knows of the exodus community, and to believe that Yahweh is still a God who makes a way.

The water motif accompanies the description of this new thing in a way that also evokes in the Servant’s understanding the exodus traditions. The people’s grumbling in the desert (Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:1ff.) is recalled as Yahweh promises to provide water—rivers even!—in the wilderness (43:19de). Yahweh’s reference to “my chosen people” (יִּרְאוּ כְּצַדְּקֵי יְהוָה, v. 20e) is a timely reinforcement of this community’s continuity with the people of Moses. Their propensity to grumble finds an echo in the exilic community’s laments, and there is a subtle message in this that the Servant should not repeat the sins of his predecessors. But here, as there, the people’s grumblings are heard by Yahweh, who provides water. The imagery anticipates 44:3, where the image of streams of water poured out onto dry, thirsty ground, echoes 43:20. The earlier reference speaks of the provision of refreshment on the journey across the desert. In 44:3 the image of water represents the activity of

188. Fishbane notes that however much the prophet linked the two events, Exodus and Restoration, he was also aware of the discontinuities between them: “The new exodus will . . . not simply be a manifestation of an older prototype, but will have qualitative distinctions of its own” (Fishbane, 1985: 364). See also Fishbane’s general discussion concerning this issue (362-365).
God’s creative spirit among the Servant’s offspring. The imagery of Yahweh watering the thirsty land echoes the creation stories of God watering the dry ground in order to provide the first man with food (see, e.g., Gen 2:6, 10). Creation as a motif is again linked to Yahweh’s provision for his Servant here. The watering of the ground is highly significant to the Servant, since it represents the re-creation of what has been desolated. The Servant is stimulated here to see himself as the very dry and thirsty ground over which he will be marching in due course—barren ground in which nothing is able to grow, but with which Yahweh is able to produce offspring.189 As the Servant identifies with the wilderness, its stigma is reduced; its force as a barrier to the Servant’s returning home is minimised. The message to the Servant is clear—whether he is faced with a vast wilderness over which he must travel, or the barreness of the landscape of his own future, Yahweh is able to provide sustenance and hope.

189. Yahweh has already declared, in 42:1c, that he has given his spirit to the Servant. Here the Servant hears that the spirit will be given to his descendants. While the Servant hears this in light of the earlier declaration the sense is different. Again, there is both continuity and discontinuity. The giving of Yahweh’s spirit is associated with the anointing of the king (see Isa 11:2; see also our discussion on 42:1). Here clearly Yahweh is promising that the line of those blessed with his spirit will continue beyond the Servant, which is an important aspect of the new thing the Servant is discovering about himself. The promise will be echoed in Isa 59:21. The emphasis on the giving of the spirit here is on Yahweh’s creative activity, as reflected in both early and late OT texts: It is the spirit of God that gives life to the plants and animals (Isa 32:15; Ps 104:30) and mankind (Num 16:22; 27:16; Ecc 12:7). Says Schoors “It seems probable to me that this blessing of fertility is thought of in the line of that promised to the patriarchs (Gen 12:3; 22:17; 26:3-4; 28:14). In that sense . . . the formulas ‘maker’ and ‘former of Israel’ in the introduction also refer to the election of the patriarchs” (1973: 79). However, because of the dialogic link between this declaration and that of 42:1, we agree with Muilenburg that the imagery contains both the physical and spiritual connotations of the spirit’s activity (see Muilenburg, 1956a: 502). Most critical commentators take the strictly monologic position, as exemplified by North: “Volz is right when he says that there is no thought in the present text of spiritual energies, that ‘the [spirit] here is the divine energy which creates physical life, as in 32:15; Ps 104:30; or as in Ezek 37, where it wakens the dead bones’” (North, 1964: 133). Our position is that while the creative activity of the spirit is in the foreground of the imagery here, implicit is the perpetual presence of Yahweh that has already been promised to the Servant in 42:1.
The imagery also evokes the promise of land flowing with streams in Deut 8:7. The Servant hears that his offspring will be “like the grass” (44:4a) (רֶנֶן תָּבִ֖ר, “like the ben-tree”)\textsuperscript{190} and “like willows by flowing streams” (44:4b). In other words, he will repopulate the land. The purpose of this vision of the future is to provide the Servant with hope. This would suggest the Servant is currently without such hope—he is despairing about the future. The oracle of 44:1-5 addresses the exiles’ despondency by promising a lineage that will continue beyond the coming invasion of Cyrus. Again, the subject of the action is Yahweh. Nothing is required of the Servant. Indeed, as if to reiterate that Yahweh’s graciousness is anchored in the promises to the forefathers, in 44:3d the oracle echoes the patriarchal promises of descendants in Gen 12:2. The importance of the repeated allusions to the patriarchs throughout preceding discourses is solidified in light of the renewal of the Abrahamic promise in 44:3.\textsuperscript{191} The echoing of the word נָרָ֣עַ (“blessing”) makes explicit the dialogic link between Yahweh’s discourses to the Servant and to Abraham.\textsuperscript{192} This is of extreme

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\textsuperscript{190} We emend to “like the grass” (Heb. רֶנֶן תָּבִ֖ר, “like the ben-tree”), see North (1964: 131, 133). See also 1QIsa\textsuperscript{a}, LXX, and Tg, and a number of the major translations, RSV, NIV, JPS, REB, NRSV). This reading has more significance than “in the grass” (or similar; see KJV, ASV, NASB, NJB). It signifies to the Servant that he will be numerous, and will grow rapidly, be well-watered, and will not diminish.

\textsuperscript{191} Seitz also recognises the dialogical links with the patriarchal narratives here, but not necessarily to the Abrahamic promises. Seitz relates the use of the word “blessing” to Gen 25, and the blessing Jacob received from Isaac: “The unexpected choosing and blessing of Jacob, and not Esau, has its more dramatic counterpart here: a fresh start for a generation thought dead and cursed and their offspring after them” (Seitz, 2001: 386). Whether the reference is to Abraham or Jacob the effect upon the Servant is the same—established continuity between the exiles and the God of their fathers, and a future that is built upon promises given long ago.

\textsuperscript{192} A theme of Second Isaiah’s message so far has been continuity. The continuity between the Servant and Abraham was established in 41:8. In 43:5 Yahweh’s promise that he would bring the Servant’s offspring from out of exile alluded to the continuation of the people of God as a united people back in the land of their forefathers. Now Yahweh speaks of the Servant’s continuation in the
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importance to the Servant. The exile has made him doubt his identity as the people of Yahweh, since Yahweh would never abandon his own the way the exiles believe they have been abandoned. By linking the promise of descendants with the original promises to Abraham, Yahweh tells the Servant that he is a participant in the ongoing history of their covenant relationship, a history that the exile has disrupted, but not severed.

In 44:5 the Servant is given a vision of descendants who will respond to Yahweh in precisely the way Yahweh is hoping the Servant will respond—by coming to know themselves as Israel-Jacob. So far in Second Isaiah the Servant has not responded to Yahweh’s discourse, so we have no idea whether Israel-Jacob, or any member of the exilic community, will answer the invitation that is implicit in the Servant’s dialogical constitution. We have argued the Servant is being constituted as a paradigmatic figure by which the community is being called to reimagine itself. The community has not yet responded. But in 44:5 Yahweh provides the Servant with a picture of what it looks like when people do respond. And that those who respond are the Servant’s own descendants is a powerful image of continuity—that beyond the present age there will be those who hear Yahweh’s utterance and reimagine themselves in light of it. This is expressed as taking the name of Israel and writing on the hand “I am Yahweh’s” (יְהוָה).193

future—that he will have descendants suggests that the Servant is finite. He is not an “ideal” but an historical entity who will come to an end. But the blessing of Yahweh, the giving of his spirit, will ensure the continuation of the people. This sentiment is echoed in 45:19, 25; 53:10; 54:3. See also Mal 2:15, which may be an echo of this imagery.
The identity of the people referred to in 44:5 is ambiguous. The general scholarly consensus has been that they are proselytes from among the gentile nations.\(^{194}\) However, the point of this discourse is to encourage the Servant, Jacob-Israel, that he will have descendants. There has been no mention of those “descendants” being converts from other nations—though earlier discourses have clearly alluded to a mission to the nations (see 42:4, 6, 7). It could be argued that this is a fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise that we have argued has been an important constitutive element of the Servant’s self-knowledge, and the continuity that is so

193. The writing on the hand is the mark of a master on the hand of a slave (see Isa 49:16). North, believing the subjects of 44:5 are not Israelites, but proselytes, interprets “his hand” not in the dative position, but as the direct object, so “will write his hand to Yahweh”. In other words, he “will sign himself as the Lord’s” (North, 1964: 134). North’s argument is that since Israelite religion discouraged self-mutilation the prophet would not have encouraged the branding of human skin in proselytes. The point emphasised here is that the Servant’s descendants will voluntarily give themselves these names. Note how declaring “I am Yahweh’s” is tantamount in the descendants’ self-knowledge to naming themselves Israel-Jacob. This is because Israel was the name given by Yahweh. To accept this name is to accept Yahweh’s calling.

194. Stuhlmueller posits three reasons as to why the reference is to gentiles: a) Israelites are already Jacob-Israel; b) Yahweh never rejected his people; 3) It is more normal for a converted gentile to say he is “the LORD’s” (see Stuhlmueller, 1970: 130-131). However, the exiles are not unconditionally Jacob-Israel—they are so only if they respond to Yahweh’s call. The names do not reflect an objective reality, but the crucial self-knowledge of the exiles—it is imperative that they know themselves as Jacob-Israel. Westermann (1969: 137) also makes the mistake of interpreting this verse in light of an a priori (monologic) assumption of who it refers to. He says it refers to those who turn to Israel’s God and thus join Israel’s worship because there is no mention of circumcision—and Second Isaiah did not regard circumcision as a chief mark of membership of the people of God. But the more likely reason circumcision is not mentioned is because the descendants of the Servant have already been circumcised. Schoors’ interpretation is more in line with that of this thesis: “We may find here a new concept of God’s people as the community of those who adhere to [Yahweh]” (1973: 80). Likewise, Watts believes the verse refers Jews, not foreigners: “The result will be a new enthusiasm among Israelites in Babylon and elsewhere to ‘belong to YHWH’ and to use the name Jacob. The exilic process of assimilation had led many Jews to suppress their distinct identity, to hide behind Babylonian names, and to deny their religious identity” (2005b: 687). This renewal among the exiles is reflected in Goldingay’s understanding (2005: 232). Goldingay says flourishing will not be a matter of numbers alone, but also of “spirit and will.” This is important since the hope of these discourses is a renewed consciousness in the Servant. Goldingay, however, says the ambiguity in the identity of these people is intentional: “Ambiguity reflects the fact that the text’s concern lies elsewhere, not primarily in the offspring’s origin but in their encouraging significance for the community” (Goldingay, 2005: 233).
important for exilic Israel to grasp moves backwards and forwards. The prediction of offspring that will know themselves as Yahweh’s is a powerful incentive to the Servant who, as yet, seems to be holding out on realising himself as Yahweh’s dialogic partner/servant/chosen one/friend. We have argued that if the Servant does not respond to Yahweh’s discourse then he is not yet the Servant at all—he is merely blind and deaf Israel, trapped in holes and wallowing in darkness. The vision of offspring is a persuasive rhetorical device for urging the Servant out of his silence.

4.5.4. “I am and will become the Servant, kinsman of Yahweh” (43:14, 21; 44:1, 2)

The description of Yahweh as “your redeemer” (יְהַבָּרֵדֶר) in 43:14b reaffirms the special bond between Yahweh and the Servant that we highlighted in our discussion of 43:1-7. The Servant is more than a hired worker of Yahweh, he is a kinsman. We saw this in 43:4b, where Yahweh’s acts of redemption on Israel’s behalf were specifically linked to his love for the Servant.

This is the second time Yahweh has been predicated with “your redeemer” in Second Isaiah. Both instances have occurred within the Servant discourses. In the first instance, 41:14, the fem. sing. suffix attached to the masc. part. form of יְהַבָּרֵדֶר (as opposed to the masc. pl. suffix attached to the part. here) referred back to יְהַבָּרֵדֶר (“worm”), which we argued was a reference to the people in exile. These people are also in view in 43:14. That the redeemer is also called the Holy One of Israel יְהַבָּרֵדֶר יְהוֹאָשֶׁל (יְהוֹאָשֶׁל) suggests that Yahweh’s holiness is perceived by the prophet not as an
abstract quality, but is attached to his salvific acts.\textsuperscript{195} This is highlighted by Yahweh’s actions against Babylon.\textsuperscript{196} He will cause Israel’s captors, the Chaldeans, to become captives themselves.\textsuperscript{197}

The significance of this goes beyond the historical realisation of Yahweh’s promises. We have already discussed how by Yahweh’s self-designation “redeemer” the Servant understands himself to be Yahweh’s kin.\textsuperscript{198} This idea is re-emphasised in the present context. The roots of the use of יְהֹוָה to denote Yahweh’s activity on behalf of Israel are in the laws concerning the nearest blood relative of a person who has died and left a widow (Deut 25:5-6; Ruth 4:5, 10), and the vengeance for a victim of homicide (Num 35:12-28; Deut 19:4-6, 11-13). While it is stretching the metaphorical use of יְהֹוָה to make the links with the laws too direct, it is important to

\textsuperscript{195} On this, see Muilenburg: “His holiness is not merely a metaphysical attribute; its content is made known by his ethical activity” (1956a: 492). In other words, “Israel’s Holy One is Israel’s Redeemer, and her Redeemer is her Holy One”. But what does this title reveal to the Servant about himself? That he need not rely upon his own strength to escape his situation. Says Muilenburg: “The emphasis is on God’s relationship to Israel, not on Israel’s merit” (1956a: 493).

\textsuperscript{196} This is the first time Babylon (בבל) has been named in Second Isaiah. The name of Israel’s captors is used four times in Second Isaiah, all within chapters 40-48. Each time it is accompanied by a reference to the people who ruled over Babylon, the Chaldeans (כדָע). These references give us, for the first time, historical referents in this section of Second Isaiah. Assuming they refer to contemporaneous historical events, this discourse can be dated some time prior to the events of 539 and the fall of Babylon. The references also possibly clarify the reference to Abraham in the earlier Servant discourse (Isa 41:8-16) and the description of Israel-Jacob as “you whom I seized from the ends of the earth” (גֶּבְעֵי הָאָדָמָה). According to the patriarchal narratives, Abraham came from Ur, a region with which the Chaldeans were associated. As he was once called out from among them, so the remnant of Judah are now being called out from among them—in effect, from the ends of the earth.

\textsuperscript{197} In 43:14d the MT has בֵּית הַלֻּן (“fugitives”). RSV repoints as בֵּית הַלָּעָן (“bars”), to read “I will break down all her bars,” following the Vg (vectes). A number of translations take the latter view (JPS, NRSV, NJB).

\textsuperscript{198} See discussion p. 190, and n. 136.
note that the redeemer was always the closest adult male relative of the person
affected. The redeemer’s responsibilities to the kin of his relative lasted well after
the victim’s demise, and this appears to be the impact of Yahweh being called the
redeemer in these discourses. Stuhlmueller (1970) has demonstrated that Second
Isaiah consistently uses יד את when referring to redemption. While
stresses the connotation of paying the price of redemption, יד texts “spelled out the
consequences of the union of kinsmen with one another, with their ancestors and
descendants, and . . . even with the soil” (Stuhlmueller, 1970: 104, emphasis
original). By designating himself redeemer, Yahweh effectively binds himself by his
own law, and commits himself to the well-being of his kin, the Servant. The term
“my Servant”, according to Stuhlmueller, emphasises this bond: “By the repeated
occurrence of [ךנ[:], Dt-Is likened Israel to a person attached to Yahweh by a very
special, personal bond, not one merely of legal possession, but of mercy and love”

The discourse supports Stuhlmueller’s observations. The Servant hears that it
is “for your sake” (ךנ[:]) that Yahweh will make the Babylonians fugitives (v.
14cd). In v. 15 Yahweh declares himself to be “your Holy One” (ךנ[:]), and “your
king” (ךנ[:]), terms that emphasise the bonds between Yahweh and the exiles. He


200. This is only the second time Yahweh is described as the king by Second Isaiah, who uses the
designation only three times (41:21; 43:15; 44:6). It is interesting that Yahweh would use the self-
designation here. The effect upon the Servant is to remind him that not only is there no king, but that
Yahweh ultimately is the king in his absence. That the designation is not used consistently indicates
that its use in these early oracles is intentional, and intentionally temporary. Says Muilenburg: “Israel
declares himself to be Yahweh (v. 15a), Israel’s covenant God, and Israel’s creator (וצאתא, v. 15b). In 43:20d and 21a respectively, the close bonds between Israel and its God are stressed by terms the Servant is already familiar with: they are people “chosen” (הריו, see 42:1; cf., 41:8, 9; 43:10) by Yahweh, and a “people whom I formed for myself” (ייא יא, תאנ). The reciprocity expected by Yahweh’s commitment to the Servant is described in 43:21b: the people will declare his praise.

The oracle of 44:1-5 repeats these descriptions, and leaves no room for doubt that the two units are addressed to the same audience, or that the audience is the Servant. In 44:1ab Jacob-Israel is again described as “my Servant” (ידא), whom “I have chosen” (יהא יא). “My Servant” is repeated in 44:2c, which also refers to the Servant as the one formed (רו) from the womb (v. 2b), echoing 43:21. The Servant is also named Jeshurun (44:2d), a disputed term that possibly suggests honour.

The impact of these words upon the Servant has to be reimagined, since we are not given his response. But their effect is to build a matrix of signification around

201. Predication is piled upon predication, emphasises Westermann (1969: 125). The Servant is bombarded with predicates that indicate bonds forged not in words only, but in action—in history: “Each of these predicates indicates encounter and experience. This was what Yahweh had shown himself to be to his chosen people as they made their way through history” (Westermann, 1969: 126).

202. See also “chosen” in 41:9; 42:1; 43:10; 43:20; 45:4; 49:7.

203. For other uses in the OT see Deut 32:15; 33:5, 26. The name has possible Amorite origins (HALOT). BDB translates the name as “the upright one” (from the root וני), a poetic name that designates Israel under its “ideal” character. See discussion in Goldingay and Payne (2007a: 322-323).
the exiled people that removes all doubt concerning Yahweh’s commitment to them, or their own significance to him. They belong to him in a way that goes beyond obligation. To say the people are *bound* to Yahweh in love more accurately reflects the intensity of the discourse by which the Servant is invited to know himself in these discourses.

4.6. **Who am I?—The Servant in Isa 44:21-22 (23)**

The question of whether Isa 44:21-22 (23) forms a discrete unit/s or originally followed on from 44:8 has been well discussed in the commentaries.\(^{204}\) We need not get bogged down in the discussion here, albeit to say that the issue often hangs on whether “these things” (טָרִים) in v. 21a refers to the prose section of 44:9-20, or, in the case that the prose section is secondary, back to v. 8. Certainly the unit echoes the major themes of the previous Servant discourse, 43:8-44:8, although here the major theme, that of the Servant’s forgiveness, has undergone some development. However, as we will discuss, “these things” points forward rather than backward. On this basis we treat the unit as a discrete utterance.

Although numerous lexical and thematic links suggest the placement of the prose section was not arbitrary,\(^{205}\) we have not included vv. 9-20 in our discussion because it is not addressed directly to the Servant, nor does it refer to the Servant explicitly, and so falls outside the passages of discourse that constitute him. Our

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\(^{204}\) See, for example, Blenkinsopp (2002: 234-238).

main concern is with verses 21-22, since here Yahweh speaks directly to the Servant, who is addressed as “my Servant” in v. 21b and c. The Servant is also identified as Jacob-Israel in v. 21ab, terms which, as we have seen already, have become synonymous with the Servant in these discourses. We have already discussed these terms at length with regards their use in prior discourses, and we will not dwell on them further here. The discourse takes the form of an exhortation, so by its very nature expects a response. The type of response the discourse aims to generate should directly inform our understanding of the Servant’s self-consciousness at this point. We can assume that the exhortation appeals to an aspect of the Servant’s self-knowledge that has not yet been made known to him—hence the exhortatory nature of the discourse. This is discussed further below.

Verse 23 is usually treated along with vv. 21-22, even though its hymnal form is markedly different from the exhortation. However, the hymn is an appropriate complement to the exhortation, since it represents a dialogical response to the actions of Yahweh that would be appropriate from the Servant. It falls outside our Servant discourses, however, since it is addressed not to the Servant, but to the heavens and the earth. But it is significant because it affirms that the actions Yahweh has announced to the Servant have been accomplished. The text expects a positive response to these actions by the Servant.

The purpose of the exhortation is two-fold—to inform the Servant that his transgressions have been blotted out, and, on that basis, to urge his return to Yahweh.
The indicative of Yahweh’s forgiveness is followed by the imperative of the Servant’s reversal. Another way of saying this is that a renewed knowledge of himself is logically prior to any action the Servant might make in response. The Servant’s internal discourse must be challenged before the Servant can return. We reimagine that internal discourse at this point in Second Isaiah as follows: 1) “I cannot be forgotten by the one who formed me” (44 v. 21); 2) “I am forgiven by the one who formed me, who has made possible my return” (44 v. 22).

4.6.1. “I cannot be forgotten by the one who formed me” (44:21)

The exhortation begins with the words “Remember these things” (יִנְאָן), an imperative directed to the Servant, who is identified again as Jacob (v. 21a) and Israel (v. 21b). The imperative clearly expects an active response, to “remember”. This is an important clue to the Servant’s self-awareness at this point. We can assume that he is being told to remember because he has forgotten. Implicit in the imperative is the expectation that the Servant will retain some new knowledge of previously uttered or imminent discourse, referred to in v. 21a as “these things”. It is not immediately apparent that “these things” refers to knowledge that concerns the Servant himself. But in Bakhtin’s description of the polyphonic hero, any knowledge that the hero gains of his world is knowledge that becomes part of his internal discourse—the significance of this knowledge upon the hero’s internal discourse is what reveals something new to us about as well as to the character (see Bakhtin 227).
1984: 48). Here the Servant is explicitly commanded to make “these things” an ongoing aspect of his internal discourse, to “remember” them. Yahweh assumes the significance of “these things” to the Servant before uttering the command. Before we can reimagine how the Servant hears this command we must decide what “these things” refer to.

The adjective הָרִאשׁ could be taken to refer backwards, to either the prose section in 44:9-20 or the previous Servant discourse that ended with 44:6-8. If it refers to the prose section then “these things” signifies Yahweh’s discourse concerning the futility of bowing to idols. The significance of this to the Servant’s self-knowledge might be imagined as the realisation that he has always turned to idols and risks doing so again, unless he continually remembers his propensity for doing so. Alternatively, if “these things” refers to the previous Servant discourse—particularly 44:8, after which 44:21 may originally have followed—then “these things” might signify Yahweh’s sole claim to divinity and the calling of Israel-Jacob as witnesses to it (44:8c).206 The imperative to remember would then be linked to Israel-Jacob’s role as witness.

Alternatively “these things” could point forward and refer to the statements Yahweh makes in the present discourse: “I formed you” (v. 21c), “you are my

206. Westermann says that the words have a backward reference, and “must therefore be connected with 44:6-8—there is no god beside Yahweh, and Israel must testify that there is no rock beside him” (1969: 142). Whybray agrees: “The reference is probably to the reminder given by Yahweh in verse 8 that he had in the past showed himself to be the true God by predicting future events” (1975: 97).
Servant” (v. 21c), and “you will not be forgotten by me” (v. 21d). This is Seitz’s position.

This view has more to commend it because of the chiastic structure of v. 21: A: (21a) יִנְדֶ֣ק הַמַּעֲשֵׂ֣י הָאָדָם corresponds to A’: (21d) יִנְדֶ֣ק הַמַּעֲשֵׂ֣י הָאָדָם. And B: (21b) יִנְדֶ֣ק הַמַּעֲשֵׂ֣י הָאָדָם corresponds to B’: (21c) יִנְדֶ֣ק הַמַּעֲשֵׂ֣י הָאָדָם. The self-contained structure of the chiasm suggests the referents within it are best explained by each parallel term. For example, Jacob’s remembering is paralleled with Yahweh’s not forgetting. The imperative to Israel to remember is thus founded on Yahweh’s commitment to not forget Israel. “These things” does not point outside the chiasm but inside, to Yahweh’s repeated declaration that Israel-Jacob is the Servant, formed by Yahweh (v. 21bc). These utterances also double-voice key points of the Servant discourses to this point. No new information is introduced here—the Servant has heard previously that he is Israel-Jacob (41:8ab; 44:1ab, 2c), and that he has been formed by Yahweh (43:1c; 44:2b). The new element is the imperative to remember, suggesting that this is a watershed moment in Yahweh’s dialogue with his Servant.

To this point Israel has not been instructed to remember, only to “not remember” the former things (43:18), and this new imperative acts as a counterpoint to that. In letting go of his idealistic memories of former acts of salvation the Servant is encouraged to remember the new thing—that he has been formed to be the

207. Seitz says: “Israel is to remember that God formed it . . . and yet within the context of another sort of possible forming: that of deluded idol manufacture” (2001: 388).
The Servant. The significance of this to the Servant is that it directly challenges his attitude of despondency, which we have repeatedly argued is reflected in Isa 40:27. Israel-Jacob’s belief that the nation has been neglected by Yahweh is possible only because the people have “forgotten” the value Yahweh places on them. Here the Servant, Israel-Jacob, is commanded to not forget the place of honour he has before Yahweh.

4.6.2. “I am forgiven by the one who formed me, who has made possible my return” (44:22)

The imperative to remember is not the only new element introduced in this discourse. The Servant hears also that the blotting out (חָסַל) of his transgressions (אָוּר פ), which was anticipated in 43:25 with the participial form of the verb, has been accomplished. Both חָסַל and הָעַש are used again, but now the verb is in the perfect form—the blotting out has occurred. In the parallel lines of v. 22ab the Servant hears that his “transgressions” (אָוּר פ) and “sins” (חָסֵל) have been blotted out like a

208. The use of הָעַש in 44:21a also echoes 43:25c, in which Yahweh promises to not remember (רָשַׁע) the Servant’s sins (חָסֵל), and this is echoed in turn by 44:22.

209. Muilenburg disagrees that the perfect tense denotes a past action: “Forgiveness is so sure a reality that he portrays it as prior to repentance” (1956a: 509). Muilenburg, quoting Torrey (Second Isaiah, p. 354), says many of the perfects in Second Isaiah represent the perspective of faith: “The perfect tense . . . represents a triumphant flight of faith rather than an accomplished theological fact” (1956a: 509). This view is difficult to reconcile with Second Isaiah’s emphasis on the former things and the new things, and with the presentation of the Servant as one who has transgressed in the past, but has been forgiven in the present. The discourses are conscious of an historical chasm across which Yahweh’s speech and acts have formed a bridge. Shifts in historical perspectives represented by the text should be taken at face value.
“cloud” (ענן), and like a “mist” (ח *>), both of which denote the ephemeral.210

The news that the Servant’s sins are like clouds that can be wiped away so easily is profound.211 Throughout these discourses it has been impressed upon the Servant that certain things prevent him responding as the Servant—his blindness and deafness in particular. Yet here the way is cleared. The obstacles that seemed so indelible are claimed to be nothing more than vapour. Israel-Jacob’s despondency is without foundation, and the barriers to the Servant’s return have been wiped away. The upshot is the imperative of v. 22c: “Return to me for I have redeemed you” (שֶׁיָּדַע֣ אֲלֵךְ הָאָדָם). With no barrier to the Servant’s returning, his imminent response to Yahweh is a logical next step. Here the idea of redemption expands on the imagery of 43:3-4, in which the kinsman-redeemer paid a high price of ransom (Egypt, Cush and Seba) in order to liberate his Servant. Redemption is now attached to the idea of wiping out sins.

We see again in this discourse the idea of transformation that is embodied in the Servant’s dialogical constitution by Yahweh. We saw this for the first time in 41:14-16, in which Israel the worm became a threshing sledge, a minor earthmover became one that could thresh mountains. We also saw it in the two great discourses that contrasted the Servant’s culpability and judgment with Yahweh’s assurance of


211. Snaith dilutes the impact of Yahweh’s words somewhat by interpreting “sin” as the punishment rather than the wrongdoing (1977: 184).
salvation: 42:18-43:7 and 43:22-44:8. The rhetorical strategy that underscores these Servant discourses plays on the Servant’s self-knowledge in order to stress the transformation that Yahweh has wrought upon him. It highlights Israel’s lowliness (41:14a), its culpability and sin (42:24) and its decimation (43:28), in order to accentuate Yahweh’s provision to the Servant of might (41:15-16), his declaration to the Servant of love (43:4b), and his granting to the Servant of offspring (44:3). Another way of stating this is that the Servant stands at the threshold of a new beginning. This has been highlighted in the Servant discourses by the contrasting of the “former things” (יִשְׁתַּחַר (ר) (42:9a) with the “new things” (תִּשְׁחַר (ר) (42:9b). The Servant embodies a transformative process in which exilic Israel is invited to reimagine itself in light of Yahweh’s discourse, and to respond by returning to him (44:22c).

How the Servant responds to this command is not yet known, since the Servant does not speak. However, the hymn of praise that concludes this section in 44:23 hints at how the prophet, or at least the redactor, hoped that the Servant would respond. The exhortation to nature to rejoice (יִרְצָה, v. 23a, c) and to cheer (לֵיהַ, v. 23b) is given precisely on the basis that Yahweh has redeemed (יִשְׁתַּחַר) Jacob (v. 23e).

212. See also 43:18-19.
4.7. Who am I?—The Servant in Isa 44:24-45:7
This discourse—the central discourse of chapters 40-48 and the high water mark of the disputation that characterise Isa 40-48—is somewhat different to those we have examined so far, since ostensibly it is addressed not to the Servant, but to the Persian leader Cyrus, the one stirred up from the east (Isa 41:2). The discourse is comprised of two literary units (44:24-28 and 45:1-7), the latter of which is directed to Cyrus, who is named at the beginning of the second unit (45:1a), as well as at the end of the first (44:28a). The units are also marked as a single discourse by the inclusio of Yahweh’s creative activity, in 44:24 and 45:7, and by the overarching theme of Yahweh’s choice of Cyrus. The Cyrus discourse (45:1-7), otherwise referred to as the Cyrus oracle, is what Bakhtin terms a “refracted” discourse, in that the author’s intended message is refracted in a speech that is directed not to the

213. Muilenburg notes that all the major elements of Second Isaiah are combined in this discourse: redemption, creation, history, monotheism, prophecy, sovereignty and purpose (Muilenburg, 1956a:516).

214. Since the “one from the east” was introduced in Isa 41:2, the disputational discourses that we have included as those constituting the Servant have been preparing the Servant for the disclosure that comes in 44:24-45:7. Westermann sees this progression in the prophet’s thought clearer than most, when he argues the supreme importance of the oracle is that it “ties the prophet’s message of comfort to a contemporary event, and does so in a way that shocks Israel and makes a radical break with everything of which she had hitherto been persuaded” (Westermann, 1969: 154).

215. So close are the themes of these units that Westermann argues 44:24-45:1 is an introduction proper to the Cyrus oracle, and that it draws Israel into Yahweh’s discourse with the Persian king: “This is quite deliberate. In the oracle addressed to Cyrus, Yahweh desires to speak to Israel as well” (Westermann, 1991: 154). The designation of 44:24-45:1 as an introduction has not been widely accepted, though there is no doubt the two units are related dialogically, with one informing how the other is read. Childs acknowledges the probable redactional involvement in the placement of these units, but adds: “The final effect is that vv. 24-28 now prepare the reader for the royal oracle of 45:1-8 and the exertion of God’s creative power in the historical commissioning of Cyrus for Israel’s redemption” (Childs, 2001: 351).
intended audience, but to another character (see Bakhtin, 1981: 292, 299-300). This speech is addressed to Cyrus by Yahweh and takes the form of an oracle to a king, but it is an oracle never actually delivered to Cyrus. According to the oracle itself (Isa 45:4), Cyrus does not know Yahweh. The oracle was composed so that it could be overheard by Israel-Jacob in exile.216

At the beginning of the first unit (44:24) Yahweh is predicated in terms that have become synonymous with his unique relationship with the Servant Israel-Jacob throughout the Servant discourses: “your redeemer” (נְרֵדֶם, repeated from 41:14 and 43:14; see also 43:1; 44:6, 22; 48:20; 49:7) and “the one who formed you from the womb” (נְפָרִים, repeated from 44:2, and repeated in 49:1, 5; see also 43:1, 7, 21; 44:21). As well as this, in 44:26 Yahweh refers to “the word of his servant” (יְהוָה), and in 45:4 Yahweh explicitly makes reference to “my Servant Jacob, Israel my chosen one”. These echoes of previous discourses warrant our inclusion of these speeches among those that constitute the self-knowledge of the Servant.

As previously, our aim is to identify the significance of the discourse to the Servant. This task is a little easier in this discourse, since Yahweh’s intention in speaking to Cyrus is explicitly stated in 45:4. It is “for the sake of my servant Jacob, and Israel my chosen, I call you by name.” Even so, the benefit to the Servant of Cyrus’s campaign needs to be pointed out to him, since it is not self-evident. His

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216. This is Childs’s observation of this: “Although the royal oracle . . . is addressed directly to Cyrus, the literary composition assumes that Israel is also present and affected” (Childs, 2001: 353).
self-knowledge must undergo a radical revision in light of Yahweh’s commissioning of Cyrus. Specifically, he must concede something like the following: “I am the beneficiary of the actions of Yahweh’s ‘anointed’, his heathen ‘shepherd’” (44 v. 28; 45 v. 1, 4).

The discourse also reminds the Servant of his prophetic witness, and draws attention to two components of his message: the regeneration of Jerusalem, the towns of Judah, and the temple (44:26c-e, 28cd) and the appointment of Cyrus as Yahweh’s “shepherd” (44:28). We have referred a number of times to the emergence of the Servant’s awareness that his call has prophetic overtones.\(^{217}\) In 44:26ab it is made explicit. We reimagine this element of the Servant’s internal discourse with the following: “I have a prophetic role as a messenger of Yahweh” (44:26-28). We discuss these two reimagined statements in turn.

4.7.1. “I am the beneficiary of the actions of Yahweh’s ‘anointed’, his heathen ‘shepherd’” (44:28; 45:1, 4)

The elements that constitute the polyphonic hero are not features of objective reality—descriptions of the world around him, or even of himself—but the *significance* of those elements to the hero. Isa 44:24-28 is an ideal text upon which to apply Bakhtin’s thought, since while this disputation in hymnal style says much about Yahweh, and then introduces Cyrus by name for the first time in Second

\(^{217}\) See discussion on pp. 145ff., 176.
Isaiah, its meaning lies in the significance these statements have upon the Servant. Everything is said in order to prepare the Servant for the introduction of Cyrus. Another way of saying this is that the Servant’s internal discourse is impacted by the discourse of Yahweh in a way that readies him to not only trust that Cyrus is Yahweh’s choice of liberator but that, simultaneously, Yahweh himself can be trusted.

As with prior discourses, we are faced with the difficulty of not having a record of the Servant’s response before us—we must reimagine it. But in this case Yahweh’s discourse itself provides us with fairly meaningful clues as to how the Servant might respond. The generic voice of the first unit, 44:24-28, which we take as being directed to the Servant, is disputational which is noteworthy because the content of the speech is generally positive and familiar—Yahweh made all things (v. 24c), he makes fools of diviners (v. 25a), he confirms the word of his servant (v. 26a), and he announces the rebuilding of Jerusalem (v. 26c). Even though Jacob-Israel in exile has harboured doubts about Yahweh, these statements, in and of themselves, would not necessitate a disputational stance. However, the issue being disputed is the uniqueness and prior existence of Yahweh (44:24) over against false prophets who claim knowledge for themselves (v. 25), rather than seek the divine imprimatur (v. 26). The unit is unusual in that, while its form as a disputation is widely recognised, it is crafted in hymnal style—note the recurring use of participles
and the self-glorifying speech of Yahweh. The hymnal elements resonate with Israel’s worship, thereby drawing the Servant onto familiar, dialogic territory. Melugin sees that the hymnal elements, which are not disputed by the commentators, do not make the unit a genuine hymn, because it begins with a messenger formula. The disputation argues from a place the exilic community is already comfortable with, in order to quell their fears of the one stirred from the east: “In the situation of doubt occasioned by the exile the prophet has Yahweh argue from what Israel already knows about him in order to allay their uncertainty regarding the future” (Melugin, 1976: 38-39). This is a dialogic strategy, and the hymn is a perfect form for achieving its goal, since it “appeals to generally-accepted knowledge of his [Yahweh’s] activity” (1976: 39). Except that at this moment in its history Israel does not generally accept these things about Yahweh, which is why they are couched in disputational language. See, for example, echoes of the phrase “he stretched out the heavens” (גバランス נושנא 44:24) in Ps 104:2; cf. Jer 10:12, Zech 12:1. See also echoes of the phrase “he spread out the earth” (טכאלפ נושנא ,44:24) in Ps 136:6. These familiar elements are contrasted with the radically unfamiliar pronouncement concerning Cyrus in v. 28a, that Yahweh has called the heathen king to fulfil his purposes,

218. Most form critics treat 44:24-28 as a disputation, but Schoors, taking a lead from Westermann’s view that the unit acts as a hymnal introduction to the Cyrus oracle, describes it as a self-praise (Selbst-prädikation) of Yahweh (Schoors, 1973: 268). Contra Westermann, Schoors sees 44:24-28 as a discrete unit—essentially it is a disputation in hymnal style: “This fact is not surprising, when we take into account the fact that his arguments (God as creator and ruler of history) belong to the typical topics of the hymns” (Schoors, 1973: 271).
indeed to be his shepherd (44:28). This startling pronouncement comes at the end of the speech, by which time the Servant has been lulled into acquiescence by the more familiar hymnal utterances.

A clear rhetorical strategy is suggested by this combining of hymnal elements with a disputational voice, and the delaying of the true point of dispute, which is the announcement of Cyrus. Yahweh’s speech seeks to remind the Servant that Yahweh alone is the creator, to whom all things answer, and only then to drop the bombshell concerning Cyrus’s appointment. At the start of the discourse, in 44:24ab, the prophet introduces Yahweh as “your redeemer” (יְשׁעַךְ), which is a reminder of both Yahweh’s commitment to Israel, and even the event of the nation’s liberation from Egypt. Yahweh is then predicated as the one who has “formed [נָבֲנֵךְ] you [Israel] from the womb”. This is followed by Yahweh’s opening utterance in v. 24c, “I am Yahweh, who made all things”, drawing a parallel between the forming of Israel and the making of all things. In other words, an association is made between the Servant as a formed thing, and all other things that are made by Yahweh. He is one among many things that answer to Yahweh as creator—among them are false prophets (v.

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219. The shock to Israel, in Westermann’s words, is that “God makes Cyrus, a heathen king, his agent (anointed), through whom he intends to perform his work of setting Israel free” (Westermann, 1969: 154). Watts also links the disputational element of the discourse to the exiles’ hope for a Davidic king: “One could well envisage that Jacob-Israel, disappointed, indignant and perhaps even outraged that a pagan was to be their liberator, flatly rejected Cyrus” (Watts, 2005b: 42). This makes sense, particularly in light of the nation’s Davidic hope (Isa 7-11).

220. Fokkelman says that the opening colon “manages straight away to establish the close and intimate bond between God and people and to raise favourable expectations in the audience” (Fokkelman, 1997: 304).
25), cities (v. 26d), and dictators (v. 28). The participial statements running through the unit establish that Yahweh’s creative activity has not ceased. He is a God that builds rather than destroys—the heavens (v. 24d), the earth (v. 24e), indeed even Jerusalem (v. 26c) and the cities of Judah (v. 26d). The implication of this is that while Cyrus is seen as representing a force that sweeps everything away before it (45:1-2), in the case of Israel-Jacob his task will be to build up and restore to the Servant that which has been destroyed. Having established in the Servant’s self-knowledge that he continues to benefit from Yahweh’s restorative power, the discourse shifts to what is clearly expected to be a confronting proclamation, the anointing of the heathen king.221

We expect the statement that Cyrus is Yahweh’s “shepherd” (masc. sing. part. of הָבָשָׁן) who will fulfil all Yahweh’s desires (גָּאַל) to be greeted with maximum resistance by the Servant. The unexpected predication of Cyrus as Yahweh’s “anointed” (נְצָרִים) in 45:1a can only inflame the Servant’s response. We have already noted that the Servant has been assigned a king-like role in his taking of justice to the nations. But the predications “shepherd” and “anointed” here, which are loaded with royal signification, point away from the Servant, and away from the Davidic line. David is not only the shepherd boy of the historical narratives (1 Sam 17), he is

221. Seitz argues the movement of 44:24-28 is shaped to disturb the exilic audience—the unit builds, stalls at the mention of Jerusalem in v. 26, and only then introduces Cyrus: “The effect of this is to catch the audience off guard, as God’s plans announced from the divine council back in 40:1-11 here come to centre on the Persian ruler Cyrus” (Seitz, 2001: 393).
remembered as the shepherd of the people. Ps 78, which describes David as Yahweh’s servant (78:70), also describes his promotion from tending the sheep to shepherding (ניֵשָׁר) the people, Jacob-Israel (78:71). The term יֵשָׁר likewise evokes the ancient king (see the parallelism in 1 Sam 2:10de; see also 1 Sam 2:35; 2 Sam 22:51; Ps 2:2; 18:50; 20:6; 132:10; 132:17). In the Cyrus discourse this role is given to a foreign leader, and not, as the Servant may have come to believe, to one from among Israel. It is as Blenkinsopp puts it, “What this implies in concrete historical terms is that Cyrus has taken the place of the Davidic royal house, at least for the time being, an affirmation that we suspect not all of the prophet’s audience would have agreed with” (2002: 249).

Even if the allusions to David escape the Servant—unlikely as that may be—the announcement that Israel-Jacob will be shepherded by a heathen invader are likely to conflict with what the Servant has come to know of himself. The Servant has been told that he will be a threshing sledge (Isa 41:15a) that will crush the mountains (41:15c); that he will bring justice (צדק) to the nations (42:1d); and that he will bring prisoners from the dungeon (42:7b). Now the Servant is being likened to sheep. A monologic approach to this apparent paradox sees the Servant who is given an active role as someone other than passive Israel-Jacob—the prophet, or Cyrus himself, for example. At no moment, however, has there been reason for the exiles of Israel-Jacob to believe that Yahweh’s Servant discourse has been addressed to anyone other than themselves.
There are aspects of the unveiling of Cyrus that do not conflict with the Servant’s self-knowledge—indeed, his unveiling removes some of the mystery of Yahweh’s prior enigmatic utterances. For example, the Servant now has a context for the command to “fear not” (41:10a) that was uttered in the shadow of the coming of the one from the east (41:2a); he has a reason to believe that those who war against him will be like nothing (41:12cd); he now understands the content of the “new things” that have been declared in place of the old (42:9) and has reason to agree that the new thing rivals the exodus as a mighty act of Yahweh (43:18-19); the Servant’s redemption, stated in terms of the nations Yahweh gives in exchange for the Servant’s liberation (43:3cd, 4cd), can now be envisaged; and the bringing down of the Chaldeans as fugitives now emerges as a distinct probability (43:14c-e). So, the pronouncement of Cyrus as Yahweh’s agent of liberation is not solely a reason to complain. Indeed, if Cyrus does prove to be Yahweh’s “anointed” then all else that Yahweh has guaranteed concerning the Servant can be taken to heart as well, for the Servant has a future, and it is a future in the land of promise (44:26c-e, 28de). Clearly this is a pivotal moment in the narrative of Israel-Jacob’s demise and restoration—the Servant’s faith in Yahweh, which is tied also to the Servant’s knowledge of himself as the one formed from the womb to be his Servant, gains an historical foothold. The righteousness of the God to whom the Servant is dialogically, and thereby inextricably, tied will be measured not by words only, but also by the success or otherwise of his chosen liberator. The Servant’s very identity,
as well as his freedom from exile, is bound up with Cyrus’s campaign.

Having introduced Cyrus, Yahweh directs his discourse to the Persian leader himself. Ostensibly 45:1-7 is an oracle affirming Cyrus’s appointment, but in reality it is a refracted discourse intended to communicate to the Servant that Cyrus is coming not as the enemy, but as Yahweh’s anointed (45:1, ἀνίκητος). This again is a classic text upon which to apply Bakhtin’s theory of double-voicing and refracted discourse, since the Cyrus oracle signifies primarily because of its significance to the one who overhears it, the Servant, and not the one to whom it is addressed.222 As a speech to Cyrus it has the effect upon the Servant of placing Cyrus on the same footing, since Cyrus, as Israel’s liberator, is constituted in precisely the same dialogic manner as the Servant. That Cyrus is called to serve Yahweh is not an element of objective reality. It is only so because Yahweh says it. Even so, there is a difference between the Servant and Cyrus in their relation to Yahweh—the Servant has been formed from the womb (44:24), while Cyrus has been merely called. Nevertheless, Cyrus will have a role similar to that of the Servant—he will make people know that Yahweh is unique (45:6), which is a task also given the Servant as Yahweh’s witness (44:8).

The reference to “my servant Jacob” in 45:4 makes explicit the main purpose

222. The real audience, as Whybray argues, is not Cyrus but the exilic community (Whybray, 1975: 102). We also agree with Whybray that the oracle is a literary creation: “The supposed address to Cyrus is a literary fiction similar to speeches made by Yahweh to the heathen gods and their worshippers in the trial scenes” (1975: 102).
behind Cyrus’s call. The reference is set in the midst of language that establishes Cyrus in a position of service that is traditionally occupied by the king—he is anointed (45:1a), Yahweh has grasped his right hand (45:1b), Yahweh will go before him (45:2a), he has been called by name (45:3d, 4c). This serves as confirmation to the Servant that Cyrus will occupy the place once occupied by David.

Whether this is enough to dash hope of a return of the Davidic monarchy is not made explicit, but in our reimagining we would have to concede that any vestige of hope for a restored monarchy in the immediate future has taken a body blow.223 But while Cyrus will occupy a place of favour in Yahweh’s plans, the Servant’s status as “my chosen” (יִרְאוּי, 45:4b) is maintained. The predicate echoes Isa 41:8, 9; 42:1; 43:10; 43:20 and 44:1, 2, bringing to the fore the discourses that have previously constituted the Servant, suggesting that Cyrus has not replaced the Servant, but is rather acting on his behalf in order to bring about the plans that Yahweh has already revealed. Westermann’s comment on this is helpful: “While Deutero-Isaiah calls Cyrus Yahweh’s anointed, he never calls him his servant, and this simply because ‘servant’ implies a mutual relationship in which there is

223. Sommer expresses this well by drawing attention to the numerous allusions in Isa 44:24-45:7 to Ps 2, arguing that the career of the Davidide in the psalm “provides the prototype for Cyrus’s experience in the later text” (Sommer, 1998: 117). He argues that both the source and allusion are concerned with the widespread recognition of Yahweh and Israel’s welfare: “The promises of Psalm 2 are reapplied to Cyrus in order that the people achieve their royal state; Cyrus’s victory is for the sake of Israel (v. 4f)” (1998: 117). Sommer further argues that Second Isaiah did not envisage a restoration of the monarchy, but, as we have seen a number of times, believed the people now filled that role: “Deutero-Isaiah’s allusions to Davidic promises nullify the special status of the royal family, since the whole people now share in what had been the Davidides’ unique relationship with YHWH” (Sommer, 1998: 118).
It is imperative that the Servant accepts Cyrus as Yahweh’s anointed, which is why the Servant is invited to eavesdrop on the royal oracle. To reject Cyrus is to reject Yahweh (45:4cd). Clifford says that the prophet reckons Israelite refusal to accept Cyrus as “culpable misunderstanding of the nature of Yahweh as the one God who controls all kings and all history” (Clifford, 1984: 117). While this is true the situation is even more compelling. The Servant has no future, particularly as Yahweh’s witness, without the intervention of Cyrus in the history of Israel-Jacob.

4.7.2. “I have a prophetic role as a messenger of Yahweh” (44:26-28)
We have said already that in 44:24 Yahweh is predicated in terms that have become synonymous with his unique relationship with the Servant— he is “your redeemer” (אֶתְמוּרָא) and the one “who formed you from the womb” (אֶתְמוּרָא). The latter phrase has been uttered with the Servant in view in 44:2, and will be repeated in 49:1, 5. The former is repeated from 41:14 and 43:14. It is never uttered with anyone other than the Servant in view in Second Isaiah.

The reference to Yahweh’s servant in 44:26a might be expected to supplement the Servant’s self-knowledge. However, its signification is not immediately transparent, particularly since in the MT the singular “his servant” (אֶתְמוּרָא) is paralleled with the plural “his messengers” (אֶתְמוּרָא) (44:26b), leading some

224. Goldingay describes Cyrus as “the servant of the servant of Yhwh” (Goldingay, 2005: 266).
commentators to speculate that a figure other than the Servant, Jacob-Israel, is in view. \(^{225}\) Complicating the interpretation are the variant readings—Tg has the plural “servants”, for example, which is reflected by NIV and REB. The MT, however, is supported by 1QIsa\(^a\) and 1QIsa\(^b\). \(^{226}\) De Waard argues for the retention of the singular “servant”, but against reading “servant” as a collective noun, since, he says, this would be without a parallel in Isaiah (1997: 174). This is not the case, however, since in 43:10ab the singular “my servant” (יִשְׂרַיאֵל), representing the exiles of Israel-Jacob, is paralleled with the plural “my witnesses” (יִרְאָה). It would not be inconsistent with Second Isaiah’s Servant imagery for the plural “messengers” to refer also to the singular Servant in 44:26.

Again, the key question on difficult points of exegesis such as this is not, who is the Servant? but, what is the significance of these utterances to the Servant? In light of this it is important to note that 44:26ab echoes an utterance of Yahweh from a previous Servant discourse, 42:18-43:7. The Servant has heard himself referred to as “messenger” previously. In 42:19 “my servant” (יִשְׂרַיאֵל), who is blind, is paralleled with “my messenger” (יִרְאָה), who is deaf. Both images refer to the same figure, the Servant of Yahweh (יִשְׂרַיאֵל, 42:19d). The reference to “the word of his servant” in 44:26a, and its parallel “the plan [proclaimed by] (יִרְאָה) his messengers” in 44:26b,

\(^{225}\) Childs, for example, argues that the parallel “his messengers” makes it clear that “neither the prophet himself nor the ‘suffering servant’ is intended” (2001: 353). De Waard raises the opposite view: the prophet is either talking about himself or the project of Cyrus (de Waard, 1997: 175).

\(^{226}\) See discussion in de Waard (1997: 174).
coming as they do in a discourse that, as we have demonstrated, is addressed to the same Servant, Israel-Jacob, is arguably heard by the Servant as another reference to himself, and in particular to the role of witnessing to Yahweh’s salvific activity that has been assigned to him in previous discourses. The Servant’s prophetic office has risen to prominence in several discourses, but here, in 44:26ab, undergoes some revision. In 42:19 the Servant/messenger heard that he was blind and deaf—by implication unable to perform his role of witnessing. In 44:26 the Servant hears that his word is confirmed by Yahweh, and that his proclamation of Yahweh’s plan is fulfilled. The Servant hears that he is no longer blind and deaf, but has a prophetic calling that is effective. In other words, liberation to fulfil his calling has already occurred. This was the theme of 43:8-13—that the blind and deaf would be brought from their holes and serve as witnesses in Yahweh’s trial with the idols of the nations. According to 44:26 this is occurring. What may be of some surprise to the Servant is to hear that his witness has a specific content, which up until now has only been alluded to—that the agent of Yahweh’s redemption will be Cyrus, whose restoration of Jerusalem is integral to Yahweh’s plans (44:26cd, 28cd).

The use of the plural “messengers” (44:26b) in place of the singular “messenger” (42:19b) requires further explanation. Whereas the previous utterance had an element of exclusivity to it, the term “his messengers” (וֹדְךָדִיקָם) appears to broaden the role. Some interpreters see in this a reference to the prophets, rather than to Israel-Jacob. Blenkinsopp, for example, interprets the servant in 44:26 as the
prophet, Second Isaiah, and the “word of his servant” to mean prophetic speech: “The utterance is that of an individual prophet set alongside a plurality of messengers and envoys” (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 247). However, the reference to “his servant” in 44:26a, and its parallel “his messengers” in line b, merely reflects the ambiguity in the Servant’s characterisation that we have witnessed throughout our study. We have said before that the Servant, Israel-Jacob, and empirical Israel, do not occupy the same semantic space. We have suggested the Servant is a calling waiting to be answered—a discourse waiting for a response. The Servant office has an active role in Yahweh’s salvific plans, but it is not fixed to an historical entity—it is no more, but certainly no less, than an open invitation, addressed primarily to Israel-Jacob. In 44:24-28 the Servant who has responded to Yahweh’s call and is proclaiming his plan is not the exilic group en masse. This does not mean that the Servant ceases to be Israel-Jacob. Muilenburg comes close to the position we are advocating when he says that the Servant in 44:26 is “prophetic Israel”: “To him Yahweh has revealed his word, and he confirms what he reveals” (1956a: 518). In the dialogic approach taken in this thesis it would be more appropriate to say that the Servant’s calling is a prophetic one, whether Israel-Jacob as a whole, or whether one or more from among Israel-Jacob, understand themselves as constituted by Yahweh’s discourse. Hermisson, who believes the prophetic servant of the so-called Servant songs is Second Isaiah himself—a position which is not held by this thesis—is nevertheless helpful when he describes the characterisation of the Servant in 44:26
as “not simply ‘individual’ or even ‘autobiographical’. It seeks to do justice to the collective and supra-individual traits in the Servant Songs and to the correspondence between the two Servants” (Hermisson, 2004: 46). We agree that the Servant figure as addressed by the discourse of Yahweh is both supra-individual and collective. However, we have argued that there are not two Servants—there is one Servant whose internal discourse can resonate with multiple consciousnesses. In other words, many people can quite validly say, “I am the Servant”. But as 45:4 highlights, this does not mean that Israel-Jacob ceases to be the Servant. Essentially, the Servant denotes anyone who says “I am the Servant, Israel-Jacob”, whose internal discourse resonates truly with the discourse of Yahweh that is addressed to the Servant in Second Isaiah.

4.8. Who am I?—The Servant in Isa 48:20-21 (22)

This short hymn is a fitting way to bring to a close the series of discourses that have constituted the Servant, Israel-Jacob, in the opening chapters of Second Isaiah. Its call to praise Yahweh (v. 20f) is also a call upon the exiles of Israel-Jacob to be willing to be known among the nations as the Servant who has been redeemed. The six imperatives around which the first half of the hymn is composed call the Servant

227. Goldingay’s argument that the word “servant” in 44:26 has no referent is too nebulous. The reference does not, as he suggests, apply to “any servant—any prophet or leader, but anyone else too—through whom [Yahweh] speaks and/or acts” (Goldingay, 2005: 257). Yahweh’s discourse is intended for a specific Servant, Israel-Jacob. The Servant of Yahweh is the one who hears this discourse and understands him- or herself as Israel-Jacob in light of it.
to concrete action in response to both Yahweh’s discourse and his act of redemption, which has been clarified as the intervention of Cyrus in Mesopotamian geo-politics. But it is not Yahweh who speaks to the Servant here. The prophet addresses the exiles on Yahweh’s behalf. Indeed, he is emerging as another consciousness on the same plain as Yahweh and the Servant. Apart from his speech, we know no more about this speaker than we do about Yahweh or the Servant—all we know is what we hear him say. The prophet exists within the text of Second Isaiah in order to address discourse to others, in this case the Servant. He does not exist on a plain other than that of the Servant, neither does he exist beyond the Servant’s knowledge. Indeed, he seems to exist in order to stir the Servant’s own discourse. In 48:20 he does this explicitly by commanding the Servant to act. Notably he does not stand over against the Servant as an all-knowing author who treats the Servant as a tool for his own discourse. He respects the Servant as another consciousness alongside his own, in counterpoint with him. In all respects he resonates with Bakhtin’s idea of the full-fledged consciousness that is essential to a polyphonic “atmosphere” in which a multiplicity of voices are able to dialogue on the same plain:

Not a single element in this atmosphere can be neutral: everything must touch the character [the Servant, in our study] to the quick, provoke him, interrogate him, even polemicize with him and taunt him; everything must be directed toward the hero himself, turned toward him, everything must make itself felt as discourse about someone actually present, as the word of a ‘second’ and not of a ‘third’ person (Bakhtin, 1984: 64).

That the discourse calls for the exiles to proclaim “Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob” (בOqSoÅy wø;dVbAo hÎwh ◊ ylAaÎ…g) (v. 20fg) signifies that the growing prominence

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of this other prophetic voice does not result in the loss to Israel of its Servant status. Far from it, in fact, since the exiles are urged to accept their identity as Yahweh’s Servant and act accordingly, proclaiming their redemption as they depart Babylon. The Servant’s call to action, at a critical juncture in the history of Israel-Jacob, calls to mind all that constitutes “Servant” in chapters 40-48. It anticipates a moment of crisis in the Servant’s self-knowledge, since unless the exiles heed the prophet’s imperatives then Servant Jacob, as he has been constituted by the discourse of Yahweh at least, will likely cease to exist.228 It is no surprise that the hymn ends with a reimagining of the exodus/wilderness tradition (v. 21),229 since the call to leave Babylon echoes the profundity of that paradigmatic salvific event. Both events have been viewed by Second Isaiah as acts of creation, or, more accurately, acts of creative redemption.230 The call upon the Servant is no less than a call to reimagine his future as a nation reborn. We reimagine the Servant’s internal discourse in this respect as follows: “To be the Servant I must now act as the Servant”.

228. The earlier portion of Isa 48, vv. 1-19, falls outside the passages we have designated as “Servant” passages, but the themes—former things (v. 3), new things (v. 6); deafness (v. 8); Israel-Jacob as the one called by Yahweh (v. 1, 12)—clearly reflect the themes we have encountered throughout the Servant discourses. A study of Yahweh’s discourse to Israel with broader parameters would include Isa 48 in its entirety, since the prophet’s call to servanthood in vv. 20-21 is the culmination of the larger section.

229. The reference to the exodus/wilderness tradition also returns to the opening imagery of Second Isaiah, and the highway in the desert (40:3). The inclusio, combined with the Servant’s culminating call to action, indicates the completion of this section of Second Isaiah.

4.8.1. “To be the Servant I must now act as the Servant.”

If the emphasis in previous discourses was on Yahweh’s redemptive actions and his supremacy among the gods of the nations, the emphasis in this final Servant discourse of chapters 40-48 is on the actions of the Servant. Six imperatives dominate v. 20, sharply contrasting with the indicative descriptions of Yahweh’s involvement in the exodus/wilderness story in v. 21. The gulf between the two events is monumental. Although the Servant sits on the cusp of the new exodus, redemption is yet to be realised. The imperatives, juxtaposed with the indicatives of v. 21, highlight the unfulfilled nature of Yahweh’s salvation. In Cyrus’s defeat of the Babylonian empire redemption is very much an “already”, which is why the imperatives to leave Babylon can be spoken so confidently by the prophet. But in terms of the Servant’s response, redemption is a very definite “not yet”. The exiles must leave Babylon for their salvation to reach fulfilment.231

The final imperative of v. 20 justifies the inclusion of this discourse among those that constitute the Servant in Second Isaiah. It compels those fleeing Babylon to say “Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob.” In saying this the exiles will be proclaiming three statements of faith that have their origins in the Servant discourses

231. We cannot be too dogmatic about the historical context of the prophet’s imperative to leave Babylon in 48:20. The imperative is echoed in 52:11, and the most likely context is post- the fall of Babylon, and pre- the exiles’ return to Judea. But it could just as easily anticipate the coming of Cyrus. However, the position occupied by Spykerboer is the more likely one, that if 48:20 is related to 52:11 then “it seems that this call would have been uttered after the fall of Babylon and after Cyrus’ decision to allow the Jews to return with the temple vessels (cf. Ezra 1)” (Spykerboer, 1976: 159).
already discussed: 1) Yahweh is uniquely involved in Israel’s salvation history; 2) Yahweh has redeemed Israel; 3) Israel is Yahweh’s Servant, Jacob. The Servant’s proclamation to the world on Yahweh’s behalf is the goal of Israel-Jacob’s departure from Babylon, if we take seriously the value placed on the act of proclamation by the poetic structure of v. 20. Two imperatives to the Servant to leave his exilic context, “Go out from Babylon” (כָּפָר יַבֹּנֶא) (v. 20a) and “Flee from Chaldea” (כָּפָר בּהֲדָא) (v. 20b) are set against four imperatives to witness to it—“declare” (גוּלִי) (v. 20c), “proclaim” (גְּלֶדָא) (v. 20d), “send out” (גָּלֶא) (v. 20e), and “say” (גָּלֶא) (v. 20f). These imperatives underscore the Servant’s ongoing role as witness to redemption. The act of leaving Babylon\(^{232}\) is integral to the Servant’s redemption, but the emphasis here is in what the Servant does subsequent to his departure. As Clifford says, “The people are called not only to believe but to act” (Clifford, 1984: 145). Their departure is an action that demonstrates their belief, but it is their proclamation that acknowledges Yahweh’s involvement in their liberation, as Childs notes: “Redeemed Israel is not merely to relish its deliverance. It must also bear witness to all the world in proclaiming what God has done on its behalf on the way home through the desert” (2001: 378). The imperative to Israel goes beyond this, however. Israel is also called to respond dialogically, to confess its self-identification with the

\[232\text{ Babylon/Chaldea has become synonymous with exile in the Servant discourses (see 43:14), even though the broader discourse has been concerned with the exiles scattered throughout the nations (see Isa 43:6). Although the prophet is aware that exiles are scattered across the nations, the Servant that has been addressed is in Babylon, and his leaving will pre-empt the return of exiles from the nations.}\]
Servant office assigned it by Yahweh, and to accept its calling. In doing so the exiles will be the forerunners of those of their descendants who will say “I am Yahweh’s” (44:5). This responsary is the key to the Servant’s polyphonic constitution.\(^{233}\) Without the echo of the prophet’s proclamation in the exilic community’s response, the Servant remains merely a monologic concept imposed upon a community that does not want it.

The people are commanded to proclaim the news of their redemption “to the ends of the earth” (גֵּרֵד הָאָדָמָה, 48:20e). In the Servant discourses the phrase alludes to the diaspora. In Isa 41:9, the Servant was taken from the ends of the earth (גַּם יָדְיוֹ לְכָל אֲנָדָם). In Isa 43:6 Yahweh says he will bring his daughters from the end of the earth (גֵּרֵד הָאָדָם). The phrase is also used by Second Isaiah to refer to the nations in a more general sense.\(^{234}\) But in 48:20 there is a sense that the exiles scattered beyond Babylon also need to confess the redemption of Servant Jacob, hence the imperative to proclaim Yahweh’s salvation to the “end of the earth”.

The exodus from Egypt is a paradigm of the exilic community’s imminent departure from Babylon, which is why elements of the tradition are recited in conjunction with the imperatives to leave. The Servant, not for the first time, hears that he is constituted not only by the discourse of Yahweh in the present, but by

\(^{233}\) Gitay recognises the element of fulfilment in the prophet’s imperatives: “The whole political development, dominated by God, is oriented towards Israel’s redemption. It is impressive, therefore, that the discourse and, as a matter of fact, the whole argument, closes with a direct call to Israel to be active, and to go out from Babylon, being protected by God” (Gitay, 1981: 217).

\(^{234}\) See, for example, 40:28, 41:5, 42:10, 45:22, 49:6 and 52:10.
Yahweh’s involvement in Israel’s history. The episode that is narrated in v. 21 brings to mind Yahweh’s provision for the original wilderness community “in the deserts” (יהוהנָרִים),\(^{235}\) and probably the community’s propensity to doubt and complain. North says that “events future and past are part of the one redemptive process” (1964: 184). We would add that the Servant is constituted by discourses both ancient and contemporaneous, as demonstrated by the continual references to the past in the Servant discourses. It is difficult to determine the source of the imagery in v. 21.\(^{236}\) But it is safe to say the Servant has knowledge of the traditions, since the variety of allusions to them in the OT testify to their prominence in the exodus/wilderness traditions that filtered down to post-exilic times. So, evoking the tradition on the eve of the Servant’s departure from Babylon speaks to his prior knowledge—of both Yahweh’s provision, and the community’s faithlessness. No doubt, in appealing to the Servant’s faith, it also resurrects his fear, and by this we are brought full circle to the first Servant discourse, and the command to “Fear not” (41:10). It also reinforces echoes of the exodus/wilderness traditions throughout the discourses (e.g., 43:2; 43:16-17), and reminds the Servant that doubt and downheartedness have always

\(^{235}\) "רִים is not typically used of the desert in Second Isaiah. "רִים is used more often (40:3, 41:19, 42:11, 43:19, 43:20, 50:2, 51:3). "רִים is used more often of the ruins of the city of Jerusalem and the surrounding land (44:26e, 49:19a, 51:3b, 52:9b), which makes its use here in the context of exodus/wilderness imagery interesting. It suggests, possibly, that the desert in view in the second exodus is not so much that stretch of land between Babylon and Jerusalem, but the devastation that the exiles will confront on their return.

\(^{236}\) It may allude to an oral tradition concerning the provision of water in the desert or to a written account of the event. There are similar allusions throughout the OT that both pre-date and post-date Second Isaiah (e.g., Ex 17:6; Num 20:8-11; Deut 8:15; Ps 78:20, 105:41, 114:8; Neh 9:15).
been elements of Israel’s self-knowledge. However, the discourses have armed the Servant with a new self-knowledge, based not in his past failures, but in Yahweh’s renewed calling and commitment. The question is, How will the Servant respond to this: will he, in faith, trust that Yahweh will provide, as he did before, and flee Babylon—or will his fear overwhelm him and prevent his response?

4.9. Conclusions

The discourse of Isa 48:20-21 brings to a close the first major section of Second Isaiah. The saying “There is no peace, says Yahweh, for the wicked,” (אַלּ הָיְתָה קְרִידָה לָעֲדֵי הַשְּׁאָר) in 48:22 is a literary marker. Its repetition in 57:21 divides Isa 40-66 into three roughly equal parts. Its placement at the end of Isa 48 is fitting, since the imperatives to the Servant to leave Babylon conclude the series of discourses by which the Servant has been constituted by the speech of Yahweh in chapters 40-48. We conclude with three observations about the Servant’s polyphonic constitution.

1) From beginning to end the constitution of the Servant has been thoroughly consistent with what Bakhtin calls “polyphonic design”, the creation of a literary character who exists beyond the objectifying, finalising control of the author. Second Isaiah has achieved this by withholding from us any objective characterisations of the Servant. All that we know about the Servant has come via the speech of Yahweh and the prophet, and, predominantly, not about the Servant in a finalising manner,
but to the Servant in a way that leaves the way open for the Servant to respond. Bakhtin makes the point that in Dostoevsky’s novels “the author’s discourse about a character is organised as discourse about someone actually present, someone who hears him (the author) and is capable of answering him” (Bakhtin, 1984: 63, emphases original). In Second Isaiah the voice of Yahweh assumes this role, and although we have not yet heard the Servant, Yahweh’s discourse has respected the Servant as a “thou”—his words have expected an answer from the Servant. The Servant has been constituted so far by discourse directed to discourse. By the end of chapter 48 we are left unable to really describe the Servant as one might a character in a monologic text, because we have not yet seen him. We—along with Yahweh and the prophet—are still waiting for a response.

2) This open expectation of a dialogic response is also consistent with polyphonic design. By the end of Isa 48 the question of how the Servant will respond remains open. Although the saying in v. 22 leaves no room for disobedience,237 there are no guarantees the Servant will respond in a particular way. We are actually denied the opportunity in Isa 40-48 to form an objective impression of the Servant that would allow us to predict his behaviour. Such finalising and controlling objectification is typical of most literary works, but this monologism is outside

237. In this regard the saying is more than a literary marker, and actually strikes a sombre tone at the conclusion of the first part of Second Isaiah. This is precisely Seitz’s interpretation: “Within the context of recalling the first wilderness and God’s gracious provision, the death of an entire generation who failed to trust God is not forgotten” (Seitz, 2001: 420).
Bakhtin’s polyphonic design. The polyphonic hero must always have the final word on who they are, since polyphony imitates life itself, and as Bakhtin points out “In a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal, in a free act of consciousness and discourse, something that does not submit to an externalising secondhand definition” (Bakhtin, 1984: 58). To this end, Bakhtin observes, Dostoevsky’s novels are full of heroes that do not die, since polyphony is represented more by the “crises and turning points in their lives” (1984: 73), rather than death. Bakhtin would have appreciated the way that Isa 40-48 ends—with the Servant on the “threshold” of a decision; commanded to leave Babylon, but with the imperative hanging, unfulfilled, as though the Servant is caught in mid-crisis. Situated here, the Servant is beyond the objectifying tendencies of a monologic reading strategy—indeed, he remains beyond the finalising control of the prophet, the readers, and even Yahweh. At the end of chapter 48 the Servant may be in exile, but in terms of his self-consciousness, he is very much free.\(^{238}\)

3) The imperatives of Isa 48:20 raise the question of when these were actually delivered. We raised this briefly in n. 231 (p. 252) above. While we cannot say with any certainty whether the prophet delivered these imperatives to the exiles

\[\text{\footnotesize 238. We cannot say, as Bakhtin does of Dostoevsky, that the author intended to create this freedom as part of his literary design. However, we can claim that the effect of the Servant’s dialogical constitution resonates with how Bakhtin describes Dostoevsky’s design: “A character’s discourse is created by the author, but created in such a way that it can develop to the full its inner logic and independence as someone else’s discourse, the word of the character himself. As a result it does not fall out of the author’s design, but only out of a monologic authorial field of vision. And the destruction of this field of vision is precisely a part of Dostoevsky’s design” (Bakhtin, 1984: 65).}\]
before or after Cyrus’s edict, or even before or after the fall of Babylon, it does not really matter. What matters is that they have been spoken at all, as one discourse among many, in a work that is comprised almost wholly by discourse. Bakhtin observes that in the novels of Dostoevsky dialogue is never recorded as though it was already finalised when it was written down, as in a conventional novel. It is no “stenographer’s report of a finished dialogue, from which the author has already withdrawn and over which he is now located” (Bakhtin, 1984: 63, emphases original). It is not the “image of a dialogue”, a fabricated dialogue that only appears to be open to fresh discourse. It is truly open dialogue, discourse that is as present to the author as it is to the characters. Says Bakhtin, “it takes place not in the past, but right now, that is, in the real present of the creative process” (Bakhtin, 1984: 63). We mention this here because in the discourses that constitute the Servant in Second Isaiah we have a sense that we are overhearing a dialogue that is unfolding in the present—not in a subjective or mystical sense, as in the actual present of the reader, but in the present of the Servant’s unfolding self-consciousness. We sense that we are discovering who the Servant is at the same time that he is discovering himself—and at the same time that the prophet, and Yahweh, are discovering the Servant. The open-ended discourse makes this possible, since Second Isaiah never takes a position over against the discourse as if it were already finalised. He participates in the discourse as much as Yahweh or the Servant, and indeed, as we saw in 48:20, he contributes to the discourse as a speaking “I” addressing a hearing “thou”, the
Servant, Israel-Jacob.

The dramatic backdrop lends authenticity to this sense of narrative development and unveiling self-consciousness. In our close reading of the Servant discourses we have observed a possible correlation between the dialogic position of the speaker, mainly Yahweh, and contemporaneous historical events. For example, the first Servant discourse, 41:8-16, refers back to 41:2 and the reference to the one “stirred up from the east”. If this is a reference to Cyrus, as we have assumed, then the first discourse has been spoken with Cyrus’s invading force still on the horizon. In the discourse of 43:8-44:8 we get the impression that Cyrus is somewhat closer, since Yahweh refers to the bringing down of the Babylonians (43:14) and also to the springing forth of the new thing (43:19), as though it is beginning to happen. However, Cyrus is not revealed by name until the discourse of 44:24-45:7, by which time it appears that his coming is in no doubt, and in all likelihood is imminent. So, when the prophet in 48:20 commands the exiles to leave Babylon it reflects the next stage in the narrative—Babylon has fallen and the exiles, who have survived the sacking of the city, are implored to leave. At each stage the discourse reads true to its time. Whether it is or not is not of prime importance, since in a polyphonic text what matters chiefly is the preservation of the hero’s self-consciousness, his freedom to remain beyond our finalising control. The sense of a narrative progression that underscores the discourse is one feature of the polyphonic design, since dialogue must have a narrative shape in order to develop, in order to remain “present” to the
speaker. In the next chapter we will follow this unfolding drama into its next stage—
the response of the Servant, Israel-Jacob, and the unfolding significance of the
Servant to the nations and their kings.
5. **THE SERVANT'S RESPONSE AND A CONFESSION, IN ISA 49-53**

5.1. **Introduction**

In the previous chapter our methodology involved reimagining the Servant’s internal discourse based on discourse that was directed to him, and that directly concerned him. In this chapter our approach will be somewhat different. In Isa 49:1-6 the Servant finally speaks, so we have no need to reimagine his internal discourse, since we get to hear it. In place of reimagining the Servant’s internal discourse we will examine each individual utterance in light of what we have already come to know of how the Servant views himself and his world.

Immediately following the Servant’s speech in 49:1-6, Yahweh responds to the Servant (49:7, 8-12). The discourse is similar in nature to those we have looked at already, and our approach to it will be the same as in the previous chapter. It signifies, in the final form of the text, as a response to the Servant’s speech, and as such contributes to his self-knowledge.

In 50:4-9 the Servant speaks again, and in vv. 10-11 someone, possibly Yahweh, responds. Our approach to these discourses will be the same as that taken to 49:1-6 and 7, 8-12, since, again, the Servant himself gives us access to his internal discourse, and Yahweh’s response contributes to the Servant’s self-knowledge.

In 52:13-53:12 we encounter an entirely different type of discourse. The introduction and conclusion to the poem, 52:13-15 and 53:11-12, are voiced by
Yahweh to an unnamed third party in a manner reminiscent of 42:1-4. But the heart of the poem, 53:1-10b is spoken by a group whose identity is somewhat veiled. Their discourse is not directed to the Servant. The content of their discourse is a confession regarding the Servant’s significance upon their own self-knowledge. What this confession signifies to the Servant will be the focus of our discussion.

5.2. The response of the Servant in Second Isaiah—The first discourse, Isa 49:1-12 (13)

The discourse in which the Servant first responds to Yahweh is structured, in the final form of the text, as a dialogue in which the Servant speaks first, followed by Yahweh’s response. The dialogue is comprised, in form critical terms, of three genre units: vv. 1-6, v. 7, and vv. 8-12. It is closed off with a hymn of thanksgiving in v. 13. The three units are linked not only on a dialogic level, but on a purely linguistic level also. For example, “servant” (v. 3a, 5b, 6b, 7e) and “nations/nation” (6e, 7d) links vv. 1-6 with v. 7, while “salvation” (6f, 8c) links vv. 1-6 with vv. 8-12. All three units echo elements of Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant from chapters 40-48.1 As Melugin points out (1976: 145), each unit has a different focus: vv. 1-6 focus on the Servant’s obedient response to Yahweh, his past failings and his future mission to the nations; in v. 7 Yahweh’s response is introduced with the oracular formula חנָנָנוּךְ יְהוָה, and his own utterance from v. 7f on focusses on the

1. These will be outlined in detail below.
submission of the nations; vv. 8-12 also begin with the oracular formula, and continue the utterance of Yahweh, who focusses on the exiles’ return to Judea and his own provision. The different perspectives befit the dialogic nature of the discourse as a whole.²

5.2.1. The Servant speaks—The Servant in Isa 49:1-6

Although on the face of it Isa 49:1-6 is a speech by the Servant who has been addressed as such in chapters 40-48, critical approaches to the poem have been unable to reach a consensus on either the nature of the text, or the identity of its speaker. Some of these differences were discussed in the history of interpretation (chapter 2). At issue is the nature of the speech itself, and the judgment of scholars on this point is usually shaped by *a priori* assumptions regarding the Servant’s identity. If he is taken to represent Israel the poem is usually understood to be an imitation of a call narrative—specifically it imitates the call of Jeremiah in Jer 1:5.³ If the poem is understood as the second Servant song, in line with Duhm’s thesis, then the Servant is taken as an individual and the discourse is understood as a song of thanksgiving (*Danklied*)⁴ or a commissioning report.⁵ We will not get bogged

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² In this regard it is worth noting that while Yahweh responds to the Servant in vv. 7-12, the Servant has not directed his discourse of vv. 1-6 to Yahweh, but to the nations.

³ See Muilenburg (1956a: 565).

⁴ Begrich (1963: 55).

⁵ Westermann (1969: 207); see discussion in Melugin (1976: 69-71).
down in the form critical arguments, since the diversity of opinions testifies to the difficulties associated with identifying the unit’s genre too rigidly. Our view of the poem’s form is in line with that of Melugin, who argues that while the poem reflects features of the commissioning report, it is not an example of a genre in customary use in Israel: “Although the language of commissioning and elements of other genres appear in the poem, its structure is ultimately the creation of Deutero-Isaiah” (Melugin, 1976: 143). For reasons outlined below, our view is that the poem is a piece of literary imagination that intentionally functions as the Servant’s faithful response to Yahweh’s discourse. As such it echoes the “voice” of the call narrative, particularly that of Jeremiah. In v. 3 it also echoes elements of the king’s designation, or “investiture”, reflecting the dual offices, royal and prophetic, that we have argued have been attached to the Servant throughout the discourses we have examined so far.

The speech essentially demonstrates that the Servant is awake to Yahweh’s call, and that he has answered faithfully. The many affinities between this discourse

6. Blenkinsopp’s view of the difficulties identifying the form is well taken: “By the time these discourses came to be written down, the literary genres identified by standard form-critical procedures in prophetic books had to a considerable extent disintegrated” (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 299).

7. Wilson says that the form of Isa 49:1-6 is dependent upon Jer 1:4-10, but he also relates it to the prophetic call narratives generally, as well as the calls of Moses and Gideon (Exod 3-4; Judg 6:11-17; Isa 6:1-13; Jer 1:4-10; Ezek 1-3) (Wilson, 1986: 271ff.). He also notes, however, that the inclusio of the references to the nations, v. 1 and v. 6, suggests that the call narrative is being reinterpreted in a larger context (275).

and those of Yahweh in 40-48, which we will identify, highlight its nature as a response. Some have argued this does not mean that the Servant who speaks is the Israel-Jacob of chapters 40-48. Whybray, for example, argues that the allusions merely demonstrate that the language is Deutero-Isaianic, “and comparison with these other passages cannot therefore be used in arguments concerning the identity of the servant” (Whybray, 1975: 137). This much is not denied, since such an argument would impose a monologic interpretive strategy on a dialogic text. As we have argued, our reading strategy must be consistently dialogic, engaging with the discourse while at the same time suspending monologic a priori assumptions. For this reason we are cautious about Seitz’s approach to the question of the discourse’s nature and the identity of the speaker here. Having decided that the speaker is the same figure who is commissioned in chapter 40, Seitz describes the function of the discourse as a “recommissioning” of the Servant, “in the light of developing circumstances at this particular juncture in the discourse, involving the role of Israel, the servant-author, and the nations” (Seitz, 2001: 429). We agree that the discourse takes place at a critical juncture in the collection, but we disagree that it is a recommissioning of the Servant. Since the discourse imitates the call and response of Jeremiah it seeks to be understood as the first dialogic response of a prophetic figure.  

9. Muilenburg also notes the affinities (1956a: 564ff.).
10. See also Muilenburg, who argues the dialogue style of the poem explains its literary forms: “Vss.
5.2.1.1. The Servant speaks to the nations, vv. 1-2

The discourse begins with an imperative, to listen, שָׁמַע. The emphasis is on the one to whom they must listen, "to me", v. 1a. The question is, who does this speaker know himself to be? What is interesting from a dialogic perspective is that the discourse begins with the speaker demanding that his speech be heard. This is no introspective discourse—it is, again, discourse addressed to discourse. The speaker wants a dialogue, or at least wants his own discourse to impact that of someone else. The command to the Servant in 48:20 was to proclaim ("make it heard") his redemption. Here the Servant fulfills this imperative by commanding the coastlands to "hear". This is slightly ironic, since according to the discourse of Yahweh "hearing" has not been one of the Servant’s strong points. In Isa 42:18 he is commanded to "hear" as the one who is deaf. He is the one whose ears are open, but does not hear (Isa 42:20). Again in Isa 44:1 he is commanded to hear. In terms of his own speech, in Isa 42:2 the Servant is the one who will not make his voice heard in the street. And yet in Isa 49:1 he not only hears, but demands that he himself be heard.

The Servant’s discourse is not directed to Yahweh, as we might expect, but to

1-6 are confession in the manner of Jeremiah (so too vs. 14)” (1956a: 565).

11. The imperative to “listen” is emphasized by its parallel, to pay attention (hif. of נָשְׂמֵה). It draws attention to the discourse of the speaker, sparking the question: What does he have to say that demands such attention?
the coastlands, גַּםְיוֹ. In Second Isaiah the coastlands are synonymous with the
nations, representing the islands and coastlands to the west, the “peoples from afar”
(גַּםְיוֹ, 49:1b). In Isa 40:15 the coastlands are paralleled with the “nations”
(גַּםְיוֹ). In Isa 41:1 the coastlands, again representing the nations, are commanded to
listen, as they are here (though the verb there is שָׁמְרוּ, to be silent), and the context is
the announcement that Yahweh is the one who has stirred up Cyrus. The coastlands
represent those nations that are afraid of Cyrus’s campaign. Their fear is referred to
explicitly in Isa 41:5, where the coastlands are paralleled with “the ends of the earth”
(גַּםְיוֹ, fem.). In Isa 48:20 the Servant is commanded to proclaim his
redemption to “the ends of the earth” (גַּםְיוֹ, masc.), which is precisely what the
Servant begins to do in Isa 49:1.12

The Servant’s discourse to the nations begins with his credentials, “Yahweh
called me from the womb” (v. 1d). While the phrase evokes the call of Jeremiah—a
point that is over-emphasised by commentators who advance the individual
interpretation of the Servant in this poem—“from the womb” (גַּםְיוֹ) has become
synonymous with the Servant in Second Isaiah.13 For example, in Isa 44:2, 24, Israel-

12. North notes that the Servant’s audience is as wide as Yahweh’s in 41:1 (1964: 186).

13. We do not deny the affinities between the Servant and Jeremiah. Indeed, there are a number of
affinities between the Servant Israel of the discourses and Jeremiah. Jeremiah is known in the womb
(Jer 1:10; 25:15); his ministry results in persecution (Jer 11:18ff.; 12:1ff.; 15:10ff.; 20:7ff.); he faces
trial (Jer 26:1-24; cf. Isa 50:4ff.); both are led as a lamb to the slaughter (Jer 11:19; cf. Isa 53:7) and
are taken from the land of the living (Jer 11:1-23; cf. Isa 53:8). Tull, who advances a collective
interpretation of the Servant in Isa 49, argues that the allusions are from the poem back to Jeremiah,
rather than the other way round. That is, the poem uses imagery from the call of the individual
prophet, rather than Jeremiah being fashioned “in the likeness of collective Israel” (Tull Willey, 1997:
197).
Jacob is described as being “formed” (תִּנוֹא) from the womb, meaning “before birth” (see also Isa 46:3). The phrase “formed from the womb” is spoken by the Servant in Isa 49:5, echoing its use in the earlier Servant discourses. The Servant’s use of “called” rather than “formed” in 49:1c is also consistent with how he is addressed in Yahweh’s discourses, e.g. Isa 41:9; 42:6; 43:1, 7. Cyrus is also one called by Yahweh (Isa 45:3, 4), but Cyrus is never referred to as the one formed from the womb. Our interpretation of the imagery in 49:1 is that the Servant has heard Yahweh’s address, and knows himself as the one called “from the womb”. The phrase has always signified Yahweh’s commitment to his Servant, Israel-Jacob, that began before his “birth”. It has also signified the Servant’s kinship bond with Yahweh. The significance here is that it is the Servant who is confessing this bond to the nations.

The phrase “he named my name” (נֹאַב וּנָאוֹת, literally “he caused my name to be made known”) in v. 1d highlights that the Servant knows himself as one whose

14. Muilenburg suggests the prophet is actually referring to the call of Abraham (see Isa 51:1-3) (Muilenburg, 1956a: 566). It is worth bearing in mind that there may be more than one allusion in play here. The Abrahamic link is certainly constitutive of the Servant in the early discourses of Yahweh.

15. We agree with Westermann, who says the call upon the Servant affects his entire life: “He is called in every part of his existence” (Westermann, 1969: 207). Our view is that the Servant has no existence apart from his call. No objective, observable life of the Servant outside the call of Yahweh exists in Second Isaiah. All we know about the Servant is his call, and, from Isa 49:1-6, his obedience to it.

16. Seitz argues of these references that language once applied to Israel “is now applied to the servant” (Seitz, 2001: 429), as if there are two discrete entities, the Servant and Israel. But the association between “Israel” and “Servant” is never explicitly severed in Second Isaiah.
name has been given him by Yahweh. Its use echoes Isa 43:1e, where the phrase signifies belonging, stated explicitly in 43:1f as “you are mine” (יָדוֹתָד).\footnote{17} In Isa 43:7 the people of Yahweh are those called by his name, and again the emphasis is on belonging: “the ones I created for my glory” (אֲנָשֵׁים). In Isa 49:1 the Servant acknowledges that he belongs to Yahweh by proclaiming to the coastlands that Yahweh named him from the womb. The Servant’s utterance is a proleptic fulfilment of Isa 44:5: “This one will say ‘I am Yahweh’s’” and “will name himself by the name of Israel.”

The content of the Servant’s discourse to the nations is his own speech. This should not surprise us, since in Isa 48:20 he was commanded to proclaim, four times in four different ways. In 49:2 he likens his speech to a weapon sharpened by Yahweh—in other words, enabled by Yahweh.\footnote{18} The acknowledgment that his own discourse has been impacted by that of Yahweh is self-consciously dialogic. Bakhtin says this knowledge of the significance of others’ discourse is a vital aspect of the polyphonic hero:

> Everything must touch the character to the quick, provoke him, interrogate him, even polemicize with him and taunt him; everything must be directed toward the hero himself, turned toward him, everything must make itself felt as discourse about someone actually present, as the word of a ‘second’ and not of a ‘third’ person (Bakhtin, 1984: 64).

\footnote{17. We also note the parallel with Cyrus, in that Cyrus is also called by name, and named by Yahweh, in Isa 45:3-4.}

\footnote{18. The image is without precedent in Isaiah, but it does echo the military metaphors of the first Servant discourse, particularly Isa 41:15. North sees an allusion to Isa 11:4, and the imagery of the king who will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth (North, 1964: 187). Westermann suggests the sword indicates the “penetration” of the Servant’s word, and the arrow (v. 2c) its “range” (Westermann, 1969: 208). He links the image with the reference to Jeremiah’s word in Jer 23:29.}
We have said before that all that we know about the Servant in chapters 40-48 we do so via discourse directed to or directly concerning the Servant, predominantly that of Yahweh. In Isa 49 the Servant responds, not with abstract words, but with words and images provoked by that discourse. Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky that “the entire artistic construction of a Dostoevskian novel is directed toward discovering and clarifying the hero’s discourse, and performs provoking and directing functions in relation to that discourse” (Bakhtin, 1984: 54). When the Servant responds by making reference to how Yahweh has impacted his speech, he highlights that Yahweh’s discourse has had precisely this effect.

The phrase “In the shadow of his hand he hid me,” (v. 2b) highlights the Servant’s coming to consciousness of his call. The phrase connotes the sudden revelation of the Servant to the nations, possibly from the shadows of exile. It certainly refers to the Servant’s awareness that he is only now responding to the command of Yahweh to speak to the nations. The root אֶבִּיה has been used of the Servant already in the discourses. In Isa 42:22 the Servant was described as a people plundered and looted, trapped in holes and hidden (אֶבִּיה) in prisons. Here it is claimed the Servant was hidden not in holes, but in Yahweh’s hand, directly contradicting Israel’s original claim that Yahweh had abandoned his people (Isa 40:27).
5.2.1.2. The Servant recounts a dialogue with Yahweh, vv. 3-4

After presenting his credentials for addressing the nations, the Servant double-voices Yahweh. This is announced with the phrase, יְהֹוָה יִתְנָא, “And he said to me . . .” in v. 3a. By saying this the Servant highlights the dialogic nature of his relationship with Yahweh, and at the same time eliminates any “surplus” objectivised information we might believe we retain about the Servant. When a polyphonic hero double-voices the discourse of someone who has expressed a point of view on them, as Yahweh has done with the Servant in chapters 40-48, it brings that discourse within their dialogic field of vision (Bakhtin, 1984: 73) and eliminates any finalising influence their discourse has. The knowledge we have of the Servant is no longer knowledge we have obtained solely from Yahweh’s potentially objectifying discourse, but knowledge we obtain from the Servant himself, who makes Yahweh’s discourse concerning him his own. It is no surprise that the utterance the Servant double-voices first is “You are my Servant,” יְהֹוָה יִתְנָא (v. 3a). This utterance is vital to the Servant’s constitution, but, ironically, also has the most potential to finalise him. That is, unless the Servant makes the designation an aspect of his own self-knowledge it remains a mere image that has been thrust upon him, and that seeks to define him. But by double-voicing it the Servant owns it as an element of his own self-consciousness. He grasps it, and makes it his own, thereby accepting what it signifies. This process is actually enacted, because the Servant then proclaims this very knowledge to the coastlands.
As if to press this point, the Servant specifies that his designation is not just as a Servant, but as the Servant, Israel (v. 3b). It is unclear whether to read this clause as a vocative address (“You are my Servant, [O] Israel”), which tends to suggest the Servant here is the nation, or as a predicative (“You are my Servant—you are Israel”),\(^{19}\) which might suggest an individual has replaced the nation. A way around the problem is to see it as a gloss.\(^{20}\) There is no problem with the line, however, until we try and make the Servant someone other than Israel. A dialogic reading accepts that the name Israel is utterly synonymous with the title Servant, and has been since the Servant discourses began. The name is dialogic—spoken by Yahweh, heard by the Servant, and repeated by the Servant to the nations to whom he has been commanded to speak. The Servant is Israel, Israel is the Servant, and here the Servant Israel responds to Yahweh’s discourse obediently. This echoes Isa 44:5: “This one will . . . name himself by the name of Israel.” In uttering the name Israel the Servant double-voices Yahweh’s earlier utterance, and testifies that he belongs to Yahweh and is indeed the Servant.\(^{21}\) It matters not who actually speaks

\(^{19}\) See Wilcox and Paton-Williams (1988: 93), who read the designation as predicative, and interpret the addressee as the prophet.

\(^{20}\) See, for example, Orlinsky (1977: 88). Muilenburg’s argument alone suffices to demonstrate why the name “Israel” should remain: “Poetic parallelism, the witness of the versions, similar passages elsewhere (41:8; 43:10; 44:2, 21), and meter all argue for its retention” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 567). Westermann argues precisely the opposite, on the grounds of grammar and metre alone (Westermann, 1969: 209). But he also argues that the verse makes good sense without it. This is precisely the type of monologic approach that threatens the polyphonic environment of the Servant discourses, rendering them nonsensical unless we push and pull them until they bend to an a priori interpretation. So, Westermann argues that “Israel” is a gloss, the first instance of a collective interpretation of the Servant: “It has justification in the fact that elsewhere and in a different context (44:23), Deutero-Isaiah can say that God is glorified in Israel” (1969: 209).

\(^{21}\) Adams (2004: 227) suggests that in the dropping of the name Jacob from the designation in v. 3, a distinction is made between the nation, Jacob-Israel, and those who embrace the Servant Israel. We
this—what matters is that Yahweh’s discourse has found a respondent, a faithful
dialogic partner—Yahweh’s word has been fulfilled.

The Servant is never told by Yahweh in the previous discourses that he
(Yahweh) will be glorified in him, as the Servant suggests in v. 3b.22 The closest
correspondence to what the Servant says here is in Isa 44:23, the only other
occurrence of נָאשָׁנָה in Second Isaiah (apart from Isa 55:5). The short hymn of Isa
44:23 follows the Servant discourse of Isa 44:21-22, in which Yahweh proclaims the
Servant’s sins forgiven. The problem is, the hymn was not spoken to the Servant by
Yahweh. By echoing the hymn here the Servant perhaps is indicating that he has
heard it as a reference to his own redemption.

Having double-voiced Yahweh’s speech to him, the Servant, in v. 4, recounts
his response to Yahweh.Significantly, the Servant recalls how he resisted Yahweh’s
call. This is important since it highlights the independence of the Servant’s self-
knowledge from the potentially finalising discourse of Yahweh. The polyphonic hero
does not merely accept the objectivising discourse of others—he or she argues with
it, responds to it, voices an opinion on it. So it is with the Servant here: “But I said, ‘I
have laboured in vain’” (v. 4a). This utterance, with its use of the root יָנוּ for labour,
appears to echo the disputation of Isa 40:27-31, in which the inability of Yahweh to
grow weary (יָנוּ) is compared to the propensity of even youths to grow “weary”

have also argued that such a distinction exists, albeit subtly, in the Servant discourses.

22. The idea has certainly been alluded to—in Isa 43:7 Yahweh speaks of his people having been
created for his glory, but the word there is כָּפָר.
The disputation challenges Israel’s complaint against Yahweh that he has neglected the exiles’ דַּעַלְמָן. In Isa 40:31 Israel is told that those who wait on Yahweh will run and not be weary (וֹאֵר). The Servant in 49:4a confesses that his own labour has been in vain (רָאֵי הָאָדָם). This may refer to the failure of the mission of the prophet commissioned in 40:2. But the prominence of the root in Isa 40:27-31, which, as we discussed in chapter 4, is a foundational speech for Yahweh’s polemic against Israel and the nations in Isa 40-48, suggests the Servant is specifically making reference to Israel’s complaint.23 His double-voiced discourse here represents an acknowledgment that Israel has previously failed Yahweh. The confession also echoes the key accusations of Isa 43:22-24, in which the root רָעָל and what it connotes are integral to Yahweh’s argument with Israel. We note again the seriousness of the accusation against Israel: It had wearied (רָעָל) of Yahweh (Isa 43:22b), though Yahweh did not weary (רָעָל) Israel with requests (Isa 43:23d); however, Israel wearied (רָעָל) Yahweh with its iniquities (Isa 43:24d). Although in English “labour” and “to become weary” have different connotations, in the Hebrew the word רָעָל encompasses both labour and its effects simultaneously.

The case for linking the Servant’s confession in v. 4a with Isa 40:27-31 is strengthened by the parallel utterance in v. 4b, “I have spent my strength (רָעָל) for

23. Melugin also makes this observation. He argues 49:1-6 is deliberately placed at the end of what he describes as the Jacob-Israel section of the collection to recapitulate the language of 40:27-31 (Melugin, 1976: 146).
nothing and vanity.” יָבָשָׁה is also prominent in Isa 40:27-31: Yahweh gives יָבָשָׁה to the weary (40:29a), while in 40:31a those who wait on Yahweh will renew their strength (יָבָשָׁה), like an eagle renewing its plumage. Perhaps the Servant in Isa 49:4 is referring to the realisation that he is the one without strength, and is ready for Yahweh’s renewal.24

But the recounting of past failures is not the purpose of the Servant’s confession. It merely emphasises the Servant’s proclamation of Yahweh’s faithfulness: “Surely my justice (יָשָׁה) is with Yahweh” (v. 4c). No one word is adequate to translate יָשָׁה here. As discussed in chapter 4, יָשָׁה connotes the way of Israel in history, reflected in the different translations: e.g. “my case” (JPS); “my cause” (REB). Here the use of יָשָׁה seems to imply “the justice that is due to me.”25 It echoes Isa 40:27-31 yet again, particularly Israel’s complaint that Yahweh has missed Israel’s יָשָׁה, or has neglected its way in the world.26 In its complaint that Yahweh had neglected its יָשָׁה Israel had become self-centred and despondent. In assigning Israel the role of its dispensing in 42:1-9, Yahweh turned the Servant’s

24. Westermann rightly points out that, for the speaker, v. 4 is in the past, and he questions whether it refers to the work of Deutero-Isaiah, since it seems to refer more to the pre-exilic prophets. Westermann comes close to our view when he says that it is inadequate to say the prophet is a single person, at a specific moment in time. He is an individual, but the Servant is “their office, their ministry, their being servants” (Westermann, 1969: 211).

25. Note its parallel in v. 4d, “recompense” (יָשָׁה).

26. See our lengthy discussion in chapter 4, p. 154ff. where we made the point that in the second of our Servant discourses, Isa 42:1-9, Yahweh turns the complaint on its head by assigning to the Servant the role of bringing יָשָׁה to the nations. We linked this role to that of the king, whose duty it was to dispense יָשָׁה fairly and justly.
field of vision outwards. This is what is fulfilled in the discourse of the Servant in Isa 49. Here the Servant, addressing the very nations to whom he has been sent, confesses that he was wrong, and that Israel’s ḫeḇēḵ is with Yahweh. In other words, Yahweh has not neglected it after all.27 This is accentuated by the parallel utterance, “My recompense is with my God,” (v. 4d). Recompense is ḥĕlēḇ, and echoes its use in Isa 40:10: “Behold Lord Yahweh comes with might . . . behold, his reward is with him and his recompense (ḥĕlēḇ) before him.” ḥĕlēḇ denotes both the work a person performs and the reward or wage that is given as a result.28 It also connotes achievement. The recompense of Lord Yahweh in Isa 40:10 is the restoration of Jerusalem and Judea, and the emphasis is on it being Yahweh’s recompense, rather than one Israel has been able to earn for itself. The sense is the same as “those who wait on Yahweh” in Isa 40:31—those who wait on Yahweh will receive Yahweh’s recompense. Here the Servant proclaims that he is prepared to wait for the recompense that comes from Yahweh, rather than the wage for which he has laboured in vain.

5.2.1.3. The Servant double-voices Yahweh’s new command, vv. 5-6

The double-voicing of Yahweh’s discourse is a major characteristic of the Servant’s response, and it continues in vv. 5-6. Again, we do not have access to the dialogue

27. Muilenburg also notes that here the Servant gives his answer to Isa 40:27 (Muilenburg, 1956a: 568).
28. See HALOT.
that occurred between the Servant and Yahweh, other than the Servant’s double-voicing of it here. This is an important element to bear in mind when we attempt to interpret the content of the Servant’s discourse—the original dialogue, or rather its image, is less important than its double-voiced form. The point to emphasise is that the Servant’s response demonstrates he has embraced the discourse by which Yahweh has sought to constitute him. In double-voicing it to the nations the Servant makes it his own. His response to it witnesses to its integrity. But in the mouth of the Servant Yahweh’s discourse also has the function of authorisation. It adds weight and purpose to the Servant’s discourse to the coastlands.

The תָּנָּא (“And now”) that announces the new utterance in v. 5a signals that the Servant is on the threshold of a new statement of purpose, a new realisation. But the new pronouncement is delayed by a series of utterances that restate the Servant’s standing before Yahweh. Notably, each utterance directly double-voices Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant in chapters 40-48. This indicates that the pronouncement of the Servant’s new task is bound to his servanthood, to his dialogic constitution by Yahweh, and to Yahweh’s love commitment to him.

The Servant begins by acknowledging his kinship bond with Yahweh, with the utterance “He who formed me from the womb to be his servant” (v. 5b). Yahweh has told the Servant repeatedly that he (Yahweh) formed him (see 43:1, 7, 21; 44:2, 21, 24). However, it was never stated explicitly that Israel-Jacob was formed to be the Servant, as it is here in the Servant’s own speech (although it was alluded to in 41:9cd). That the Servant expands upon what Yahweh has said to him is consistent
with the function of double-voicing in a polyphonic work. The Servant continues to exhibit individuality and the freedom to advance another’s discourse for his own purposes. In claiming that he was formed as the Servant from the womb the Servant effectively commits himself to the role—more than this, he sees “Servant” as his very nature, formed as such before birth. There is no clearer indication of the Servant’s acceptance of Yahweh’s discourse to him than this.

The purpose of the Servant’s call—to bring Jacob back to Yahweh, and to gather Israel to him—typically causes monologic reading strategies to overheat at this point, since they are unable to fathom how it is that the Servant Israel has a mission to Israel. The typical solutions—that “Israel” in v. 3 is a gloss; that the Servant is the prophet and not the nation;29 or that the subject of the infinitive in v. 5c is Yahweh30—are unsatisfactory. The difficulty arises because this verse is generally interpreted in isolation from the previous discourses, in which we have already observed a fluidity between those of Israel who know themselves to be the Servant, and those who do not. If we approach this issue monologically then it is unsustainable to have two Servants, so one of the above solutions must apply. But the problem—and the solution—is particular to the Servant’s dialogical constitution: the one who is called to restore Israel-Jacob back to Yahweh is the one who has heard Yahweh’s call and knows himself to be the Servant. This might be the prophet,

or a section of the exilic community—but when this Servant responds he does so as the Servant Israel-Jacob.

In the discourses of Isa 42:1-9 and 42:18-43:7 we discovered the Servant is called to not only witness but to free those in the darkness—even though the Servant himself is described as blind and deaf. The most common solution to this apparent paradox is provided by Duhm’s approach to the so-called Servant songs, in that it posits an individual, the prophet, who is called to prophecy to blind Israel. But we have demonstrated in our discussion of these discourses that it is blind Israel who is Yahweh’s witness—the Servant simultaneously represents those who are in darkness, as well as those who respond to Yahweh’s call. We have also seen that when the Servant is commanded to proclaim his redemption to the ends of the earth, he probably understands this to include the exiles scattered abroad (see discussion on Isa 48:20). Yahweh has emphasised that his aim is to restore the whole nation of Israel, not just that part of it that resides in Babylon (see Isa 43:5-6). The sons and daughters who will be brought from afar, from the ends of the earth (43:6cd), are also described as those created for Yahweh’s glory, whom he formed and made (Isa 43:7), which are terms by which the Servant Israel-Jacob is consistently addressed. In other words, the Servant Israel-Jacob has always understood his ministry to be to Israel-Jacob.

The task of the Servant, as echoed by the Servant in 49:5c, is specifically “to bring back” (pol. infin. const. form of ובו) Jacob. The use of ובו here echoes its use in Isa 44:22, and Yahweh’s command to the Servant to return to him now that the
redemption of Israel-Jacob has been achieved. Yahweh’s redeeming of Israel, and Israel’s return to Yahweh, are seen as two separate acts. The Servant’s role has been to facilitate the return of those of Israel-Jacob who have not yet heeded Yahweh’s call. They are those in Isa 42:22 described as “spoil” who have no-one to proclaim “Return!” (יְשֵׁבוֹת). The Servant’s choice of words here also possibly echoes the mission of First Isaiah in Isa 6:10—Isaiah was commissioned to preach so that the people would not turn (יַעֲרָה). If this is in view, then the Servant’s mission to Israel-Jacob is again cast in a prophetic mould, and, in effect, reverses the ministry of First Isaiah, fulfilling the hope expressed in passages like Isa 10:21: “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God” (ESV).

In v. 5ef the Servant applies Yahweh’s discourse to himself in a way that underscores his acceptance of his call. Again, since the Servant’s discourse concerning himself is couched in language that has already been directed to him by Yahweh, it suggests that the one speaking here does not replace the community of Israel-Jacob. The Servant is at pains to stress the continuity between the constituting discourse of Yahweh and his own self-knowledge. He wants to emphasise that he knows himself to be the Servant, Israel-Jacob. The utterance “For I am honoured (יַעֲרָה) in the eyes of Yahweh,” echoes the incredible statement of Yahweh in Isa 43:4: “You are precious in my eyes, you are honoured (יַעֲרָה) and I love you.” The Servant who speaks here demonstrates again that he has not only heard Yahweh’s discourse, he has embraced it. It has been brought within his own dialogic purview.
In proclaiming this to the coastlands he affirms the significance of Yahweh’s declaration to his own self-knowledge, as well as his freedom to respond to it dialogically. This “free” response to Yahweh’s word is an essential aspect of the Servant’s purpose in Second Isaiah. More will be said concerning this in chapter 6.

The parallel statement “My God has become my refuge” (v. 5f) fulfils Yahweh’s saying in 45:24 concerning others those will say that only in Yahweh are found righteousness and strength. Again, we see how the Servant’s faithful response to Yahweh’s discourse embodies the integrity of Yahweh’s word. “My God” signifies the faithful dialogic correspondence to “my Servant”. It is also worth noting that in 45:22-25 the “ends of the earth” are in view, as they are in 49:6.

The discourse in v. 6 places the Servant on the threshold of his new mission. He continues to quote Yahweh, though again we have no record of a dialogue between them that contains words such as the opening utterance, “It is too negligible for you to be the Servant . . .”31 This of course is not the point. The Servant casts his own speech as a response to Yahweh in order to demonstrate his faithfulness to him, and also to authorise his address to the nations.

The thing that is too negligible is the Servant’s prior mission to Israel-Jacob, which here is described as a raising up of the tribes of Jacob (v. 6c), and a bringing back of the preserved/protected of Israel (v. 6d). This is the

31. This is the only use of ניב in Second Isaiah. The nif. 3ms form of the verb is used here, with the Servant’s purpose as the subject. The nuance of the verb is variously translated “light” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV, ESV), “small” (NASB, NIV), “little” (JPS), “slight” (REB), “not enough” (NJB). The suggestion is that the Servant is capable of so much more than the task assigned him.
only use of the phrase "tribes of Jacob" in the OT. It highlights the conglomeratic nature of Jacob, more in evidence during the exile now that the tribes have been scattered. "Raise up" (hif. inf. of מֹשֵׁךְ) highlights the fallen nature of Jacob, the Jacob that has been imprisoned in holes (Isa 42:22-25). We have discussed with reference to 49:5 the source of the Servant’s belief that he was called to bring Israel-Jacob back to Yahweh. Nothing new is introduced in v. 6, other than the remarkable pronouncement that this task is being expanded. There is no suggestion that the mission to Israel is over, only that the Servant is capable of expanding the mission of salvation to include “the ends of the earth”. To “bring back” reverses the scattering of Israel in the events leading to the exile. Clearly the Servant has a role in proclaiming the forgiveness of Yahweh to those of Israel-Jacob who are in exile beyond the borders of Babylon. Among the first of the exiles to respond to the call to servanthood have been those in Babylon, who were then called to take that word of salvation to the tribes scattered abroad. This was referred to explicitly in Isa 48:20-22, where the Servant was commanded to flee Babylon proclaiming the redemption of Yahweh.

The role of bringing back is an active one, of leadership, on behalf of passive Israel. The “preserved (רָשָׁא) of Israel” signifies those who have been watched over. This is an interesting acknowledgment by the Servant in light of Isa 40:27-31, where

32. North says that “raise up” is a fair translation of מֹשֵׁךְ here because “Israel in the exile was ‘down’” (North, 1964: 189).

33. See North, who interprets as an “allowing to return” (1964: 189).
the accusation was that Yahweh had disregarded Israel. Here the Servant admits that Israel has been watched over the whole time. The saying also evokes the Servant discourse of Isa 42:1-9, in which Yahweh promised to “keep” (משמר) the Servant (v. 6c). Notably, the Servant also heard that Yahweh would make him a light to the nations (§ָּעַל מָנָּה), a phrase the Servant double-voices in 49:6e. It appears almost certain that the double-voicing is intentional—again, it demonstrates the Servant’s faithful dialogic response to Yahweh’s call. It confirms that the Servant has heard it, and, more importantly, that he has defined himself by it. As discussed before, this brings Yahweh’s discourse within the Servant’s own and gives him a final, self-conscious word on what Yahweh has said. The Servant demonstrates that he is a fully-formed consciousness on the same plain as Yahweh. In other words, he is constituted as much by his own discourse as by that of others. This has implications when we come to discussing what the Servant signifies in the final form of the text. Essentially the Servant has a purpose and a perspective in the text that no-one else has. A Bakhtinian way of saying this is that the polyphonic hero, in this case the Servant, occupies a unique semantic space in the discourse. The implications of this are discussed in chapter 6.

The purpose behind the Servant being a light for the nations is so that Yahweh’s “salvation” (/embed) will reach to the “end of the earth” (v. 6f). This is the first use of the noun “salvation” in Second Isaiah, and its significance will be
clarified by its parallel use in 49:8c. The phrase “end of the earth” is different in use within the Servant discourses to signify Israel scattered among the nations (Isa 41:9, 43:6). In 48:20 it signified the nations, but with the diaspora in view. Here it most certainly refers to the nations, since the “end of the earth” is set over against the tribes of Jacob and the preserved of Israel, though, as already discussed, the mission of the Servant to the nations is an extension of his calling, and not a substitute for it. The real point at issue here is that the Servant’s knowledge of the extension of his mission has been unveiled by Yahweh. The Servant, in turn, reveals this to the very nations to whom he is being sent. In a profoundly dialogic way, the Servant pivots between Yahweh’s discourse addressed to him, and his own discourse addressed to the nations. We stand with him, at the point at which he double-voices a dialogue with Yahweh in order to re-direct it outward. This is a vital point in the discourse that reveals to the Servant, and to us, his purpose. We discover him on the threshold of a new mission, and at the point at which he accepts it. In other words, when we hear the Servant speak, he has already decided to act upon Yahweh’s prior word to him—indeed, we discover him in the process of acting upon it. His self-consciousness is revealed to us as he thinks. There exists no image of this dialogue outside of what we hear its participants say, which means this: the Servant exists beyond the normal finalising practices by which we assess a character’s “meaning” and function in a text. The Servant does not represent a theology or an ideology—

34. See discussion on Isa 49:8.
rather, he *is*. Nevertheless, his discourse in Isa 49:1-6 does demonstrate that he fully knows himself to be Israel. We can say that much, since, as we have demonstrated, everything he has said here double-voices discourse that we have encountered already in chapters 40-48, or discourse that we otherwise have no access to. It is not adequate to say that he *is* the prophet here, or he *is* the nation—we do not have the objective data with which to make such a judgment. All we know is what he knows himself to be—and that is the Servant, Israel-Jacob, in faithful dialogic response to the God who has called him into being and to action.

5.2.2. **Yahweh responds—the Servant in Isa 49:7-12**

Yahweh’s response to the Servant in 49:7-12 is comprised of two discrete units that not only differ in perspective but function in the discourse in specific ways. V. 7 and v. 8 are distinguished by the oracular formula that begins each one, leading most scholars to see v. 7 as a complete unit. Westermann’s view, that vv. 7-12 is a re-shaped salvation oracle that was originally structured thus: 7a-8a-8c-12, 7b, with 8b added later, is no longer taken seriously. V. 7 is now taken as a complete salvation oracle (Melugin, 1976: 143) that makes explicit why the Servant will be a light to the nations,35 and casts the speeches of 49:1-6 and 8-12 as “Servant” discourse.36 V. 7

35. Clifford argues that Israel’s “return to the land means that its subjection to Babylon is ended (‘servant of rulers,’ [v. 7e]); kings of the world have to recognise a power superior to Babylon’s” (1984: 153).

36. Childs’s view is important: v. 7 “performs a special function in assuring that the servant is seen as the addressee in both oracles” (Childs, 2001: 386).
has a chiastic shape—A: Israel redeemed by Yahweh the Holy One; B: Israel despised by rulers of nations; B’: Kings rise up and see; A’: Israel chosen by Yahweh the Holy One—that strongly suggests its independence from the units on either side.

The discourse in vv. 8-12 is addressed to the same figure who speaks in vv. 1-6. Its content substantiates the second half of v. 7. Melugin argues that while the oracle has features of the “announcement of salvation” and the “assurance of salvation,” its form is of Second Isaiah’s making (1976: 144). This is an important point to make since, as we observed with vv. 1-6, Second Isaiah is adept at re-crafting literary forms to communicate his message. Our view is that the Servant discourse is crafted from the prophet’s literary imagination in a similar manner to the “polyphonic design” observed by Bakhtin in the works of Dostoevsky. As vv. 1-6 imitated the form of a call narrative, so Yahweh’s discourse in v. 7 and vv. 8-12 imitates an announcement of salvation, which is an appropriate corollary of the faithful response of the Servant in vv. 1-6.

As with the discourses in chapters 40-48 we are in the position of having to reimagine the significance of Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant in 49:7, 8-12. The Servant does not respond to Yahweh in a way that reveals his internal discourse

37. Blenkinsopp argues the addressee is the figure who speaks in vv. 1-6, but that he is an individual (2002: 305). Blenkinsopp’s view that the Servant in 42:6 is Cyrus predisposes him to interpret the speaker in vv. 1-6 as the prophet, who is taking over the mission that Cyrus has failed (2002: 301). Seitz similarly argues the oracle is to the individual who speaks in vv. 1-6 (2001: 430). Seitz’s view is that the prophet has taken over the mission of the community. Seitz’s interpretive error is to differentiate between the Servant and Israel where the text does not.
explicitly. However, since Yahweh’s speech is a direct response to the Servant’s discourse, we can assume that the Servant not only hears it, but accepts it. In v. 7 the Servant hears that though he is despised by the nations, he will nevertheless provoke a stunning reversal in them. We reimagine his internal discourse along the lines of the utterance, “I am despised, but I will provoke the nations’ honour.” In vv. 8-12 he hears that Yahweh continues to uphold him, with the specific intention of restoring Israel to the land of Judea. We reimagine his internal discourse on this point as, “I have been kept by Yahweh as a covenant promise of the nations’ redemption.” These two reimagined utterances are discussed in turn.

5.2.2.1. “I am despised, but I will provoke the nations’ honour” v. 7

The Servant hears a new truth concerning himself when Yahweh speaks in v. 7, but again, it is not abstract knowledge concerning an objective image of him, but the anticipation of a new situation that will come about in connection with this knowledge, and how the Servant will respond to it. The new knowledge—new, at least, in the discourses that have constituted the Servant to this point—is that he is “deeply despised” (v. 7c) and “abhorred by the nation” (v. 7d). The Servant hears this uttered, however, in the context of knowledge he is more familiar with—that he has been redeemed and chosen by Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel.

It should not surprise us to hear new discourse about the Servant introduced by Yahweh at this point. Such is the nature of a dialogic text—the dialogue
continues to advance. If the discourse followed a predictable path it would not be polyphonic. While the Hebrew is problematic, the sense is clear: the Servant is deeply (signified by the presence of בְּרֵפֶן) despised. The Servant has not heard the description before in Second Isaiah, though it will be echoed in Isa 53:3. Qualifying this utterance is בְּרֵפֶן (“to one abhorred”), clarifying the question of who it is that deeply despises the Servant—it is the nation (ְנָא, sing.). There is a question mark over whether “nation” refers to Israel, or is a collective noun representing the “nations” to whom the Servant is being sent as a light. The key is how the Servant understands the reference, and the phrase “Servant of those who rule” (בְּרֵפֶן בְּרֵפֶן) in v.7e clarifies the matter. The Servant has not been referred to like this before—indeed, he knows himself only as the Servant of Yahweh. The imagery contrasts how the Servant is seen by the nations, with how he is viewed by Yahweh. Tg’s translation is informative: “to those despised among the Gentiles, to those cast out among the kingdoms, to those who are servants to rulers.” The phrase “servant of rulers” depicts Israel-Jacob in its exilic state, scattered among the nations and serving foreign kings.

The lowly state of the Servant of rulers is contrasted with the stunning

38. The MT’s בְּרֵפֶן (qal infin. const. of בְּרֵפֶן) should be read as בְּרֵפֶן בְּרֵפֶן (nif. part.—see HALOT). 1QIsaא has בְּרֵפֶן.
39. בְּרֵפֶן בְּרֵפֶן (piel part. masc. sing. const.) should possibly read בָּרְפֵּן בָּרְפֵּן (pual part. masc. sing. const.), in line with the conjectural reading of “despised”.
40. On this difficulty, North appropriately raises the possibility of a parallel with Isa 55:5, where a collective sense is intended (1964: 192).
reversal that is depicted as kings “seeing” the Servant and falling prostrate because of him. The “kings” (בְּנוֹי הָצְיָרָה) parallel the “rulers” (נְדֵמְתֵי מַלְכוּת), but here they respond to what they see, first by rising, then by falling. Tg is more specific about what the kings will see—they will see “them”, the servants, the exiles. The nations’ seeing is an important motif in this context, in light of the prominence of the blindness motif in the Servant discourses.

The chiastic framework bookends these promises with the description of Yahweh as faithful and holy (v. 7b, i). In form and content, the utterance testifies that Yahweh’s character is foundational to his assurances to the Servant. The predicates “the Redeemer of Israel” (אַלְמָנֵא הַיָּדִים נְדֵמְתֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל) and the “Holy One” (נְדֵמְתֵי נְדֵמְתֵי) (v. 7b) are familiar to the Servant. In Isa 41:14, our first Servant discourse, Yahweh described himself with both predicates, in the phrase “your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel” (אַלְמָנֵא הַיָּדִים נְדֵמְתֵי נְדֵמְתֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). Both predicates were used of Yahweh again in Isa 43:14. In 43:3 Yahweh is the Holy One of Israel who exchanges nations for the Servant (an act of redemption not described with נְדֵמְתֵי). The root נְדֵמְתֵי has been used a number of times of Yahweh in the Servant discourses (see Isa 43:1; 44:6, 22, 24; 48:20; cf. 44:23, 49:26, 51:10, 52:9, 52:3, 54:8). The adjective נְדֵמְתֵי is used of Yahweh many times, and is a well-attested Second-Isaianic predicate of Yahweh

41. See Judg 3:20 and Job 29:8 for parallel imagery.

42. As Melugin points out: “Just as elsewhere in Isaiah 40-55 Yahweh’s saving deed is performed so that all will see that he is God, so also in 49:1-13 the collection relates the nations’ ‘seeing’ with their salvation” (1976: 145).

43. See also Isa 47:4 and Isa 48:17, Isa 54:5.
The corresponding description of Yahweh as “faithful” in v. 7h (נְשָׁה, nif. part. masc. sing. of נְשָׁה) is a reminder to the Servant that the nations’ reversal will not depend upon his performance, but upon Yahweh himself. Westermann makes precisely this point: “But what compels their awestruck attention is not this nation’s vitality and toughness. It is the faithfulness of its God who, when disaster overtook it, stood by it from first to last” (Westermann, 1969: 216). As if to press this, Yahweh reminds the Servant of his status as “chosen” (v. 7i). The Servant knows himself as one who was chosen by Yahweh from the previous discourses—this is another reason we take this discourse to be directed to the Servant, Israel-Jacob. Yahweh says this to no-one else in Second Isaiah. The Servant knows himself exclusively as the one Yahweh has chosen, so we can assume that the parallel נְשָׁה also is best taken in reference to the Servant, and is not merely an abstract quality of Yahweh.

5.2.2.2. “I have been kept by Yahweh as a covenant promise of the nations’ redemption” vv. 8-12

As Yahweh’s response to the Servant begins in earnest in v. 8 we are struck by the

44. Muilenburg suggests the “holy one” reflects Yahweh’s judgment upon Israel, the “redeemer” Yahweh’s redemption (Muilenburg, 1956a: 570). This is a nice observation, since the twin aspects of the Servant’s knowledge of himself as Yahweh’s Servant are his judgment and his redemption.


46. The term “chosen” also continues the Davidic idea into this section of Second Isaiah, and maintains the Servant’s self-knowledge as a figure that occupies the vacant position of the monarch before Yahweh. As Tull points out, “servant” and “chosen” is a combination that occurs only of David and his descendants (1997: 210-211). See Ps 89:4, 20-21; 78:70.
dominant dialogic style, couched in “I-Thou” language: “I have answered you”; “I have helped you”; “I have kept you”; “I have given you”. The MT has the singular “you”, reflecting the singular Servant, while Tg is consistently transparent in its identification of the Servant with the nation, by having the plural “you” here. The opening declarations reaffirm what we said in the previous section regarding the character of Yahweh being foundational to the Servant’s knowledge of himself, and his knowledge of his purpose.

This is the only occurrence of the phrase “In a time of favour I have answered you” (טבש ידניא) (v. 8b) in Second Isaiah, though it may echo Yahweh’s promise in Isa 41:17: “When the poor and needy seek water . . . I, Yahweh, will answer them.” The self-consciously dialogic nature of the utterance is striking. Yahweh’s “favour” is demonstrated as his responsiveness to Israel’s cries for help. This is perhaps another allusion to Israel’s complaint in Isa 40:27. If so, then Yahweh counters the complaint by asserting that he has indeed heard and answered, at a time that suits him. It highlights also that underscoring the collection of Second Isaiah is dialogue—the complaint of Israel, answered by the disputations of Yahweh, followed by the double-voicing of Yahweh by the Servant, followed by

47. The word “favour” (טבש) has not been used previously in Isaiah, though it is used a number of times in Third Isaiah. Its root, השב, is used in Isa 42:1: “in whom my soul delights” or “who I favour deeply”.

48. 1Qlsa has the verbs in the imperfect. Muilenburg argues the prophet merely pictures the day of salvation as having been realised (Muilenburg, 1956a: 571). However, Yahweh has answered the Servant—he answered him in the discourses of chapters 40-48, and explicitly answers the Servant’s discourse now in 49:8-12.
Yahweh’s response.  

The direct correspondent of the previous clause is “In a day of salvation I have helped you” (v. 8c). “Salvation” ($) parallels “favour”, and picks up on the last utterance of the Servant in Isa 49:6. Prior to that this form of the word was not used, though its root, וַיִּשָּׁמַר, is used throughout Second Isaiah, and Yahweh has often proclaimed himself “saviour” (43:3, 11; 45:15, 21). The “day of salvation” no doubt refers to the time of liberation from exile. “I have helped you” ($) is significant, in that a number of times Yahweh has assured the Servant that he will help him. This utterance will be repeated by the Servant in Isa 50:7, 9. Here Yahweh is claiming that the promise has been fulfilled—the Servant has been helped. We relate this to the moment of liberation from exile—we have said already that we believe, from the progression of the discourse, and particularly the imperatives of Isa 48:20-22, that Cyrus has already come. The reason the discourses of Yahweh and the Servant have the tone of fulfilment is because the Servant has now spoken, and has actualised Yahweh’s promises by coming to know himself in light of the discourse. Until the Servant responded, all that Yahweh said in order to constitute him remained unfulfilled—a monologic impression of what the prophet, refracted in Yahweh’s discourse, hoped the Servant would be, but nothing more.

49. This is expanded in chapters 49-55 to include the contribution of the voice of the city, Zion.
50. See, for example, Isa 43:3, 11, 12; 45:8, 15, 17, 20, 21, 22; 46:7; 47:13, 15; 49:25, 26; 51:5.
51. See, for example, Isa 41:10, 13, 14; 44:2.
The same tone is struck with the utterance “I have kept you and have given you” (אָדַתָּנִי אֶלְבִּיתָנִי) (v. 8d), which a number of the major translations cast in the imperfect. But we read them in the perfect (waw consecutive) with RSV, JPS, REB, NRSV, and NJB. This keeps them consistent with lines b and c. A question mark hangs over whether אָדַתָּנִי is derived from the root אָצַל (“to keep”) or אֲצִיל (“to form”). The first is the most likely—apart from text critical arguments—since Yahweh’s discourse here seems to reinforce Isa 42:6, where Yahweh first tells the Servant that he will give him as a covenant for the people (אָדַתָּנִי, echoed in Isa 49:8e). In 42:6b the Servant hears that Yahweh will take him by the hand and “keep” (אָדַתָּנִי) him. Nevertheless, use of the root אֲצִיל has been far more prominent in the Servant discourses, not least in the Servant’s double-voiced discourse in Isa 49:5, where his forming is linked to his mission to Israel, which is suggested by the term אָדַתָּנִי here. Our preference though is for the first interpretation, primarily because of the echoing of Isa 42:6, and because “I have given you” also echoes Isa 42:6.

The phrase “a covenant to the people” most certainly double-voices Isa 42:6d, and Yahweh’s utterance also draws within it Isa 49:6, in which the Servant

52. See KJV, ASV, NASB, NIV, ESV.
53. LXX reads the second, with Tg. Vg supports reading אָדַתָּנִי.
54. This clause could also be translated in the imperfect, or in the waw consecutive.
55. Whybray argues against the authenticity of these words in 49:8. But he also argues that in 42:6, where they are authentic, they refer to Cyrus, and were placed here because they were mistakenly taken to refer to the Servant (Whybray, 1975: 140). But we have demonstrated that the words do refer to the Servant in 42:6, and their repetition here makes the link between Israel and the Servant explicit.
also echoes Isa 42:6. The covenant to the people clearly represents “promise”—the Servant is a promise of redemption to the nations. His witness, namely his faithful response to Yahweh, is a sign of redemption to those who remain in the darkness (see Isa 49:9ab, and its links with Isa 42:7 and Isa 42:22). Three infinitive clauses qualify the nature of the Servant’s covenantal role: 1) To establish the land; 2) To apportion the desolate inheritances; 3) To say to the prisoners, “Come out,” (v. 9a).

The roles clearly belong to the first group of exiles to leave Babylon—and they are representative of the Servant who has responded obediently to the call of Yahweh. The “people” here could be understood either to refer to Israel in exile, or to the nations—or, indeed, to both. But in Isa 42:6 the reference is to the nations, and the reference to the nations in 49:6d suggests that we should maintain that interpretation. If this is so then we suggest that in 49:8 the Servant’s re-establishing of the land is intended to be a sign of promise to the nations.

The Servant’s role is elucidated in the infinitive clauses that qualify his calling as a “covenant to the people.” First, he will “establish the land” (וְיָדַעְתָּם) (v.8e). The reference to land is ambiguous, and needs qualification. It seems to refer

56. The phrase “a covenant to the people” is taken by some to be an addition in order to make the recipient the Servant. See, for example, Westermann (1969: 213). However, it makes little sense to isolate only this phrase, since, as we have demonstrated, a number of utterances in this discourse echo the Servant discourses.

57. The scope of the Servant’s mission in 49:8-12 is debated: some see it as limited to the exiles, the “survivors of Israel” (Clifford, 1984: 153, see also 154), while others see it as being universal (Wilson, 1986: 278ff.). Even so, Clifford identifies the Servant as Israel whose ultimate witness is to the nations (Clifford, 1984: 153).

58. On this see Goldingay: “The idea is not that Yhwh makes Jacob-Israel into a covenant for people in order to raise Israel’s land, but that raising Israel’s land is a means of making such a covenant for people” (2005: 377).
to the land of Judea, and its closest parallel is in Isa 49:19, where Judea, apparently, is described to Jerusalem as “your devastated land” (יהורעשת). The second infinitive clause, v. 8f, clarifies the reference. To “apportion the desolate inheritances” (ESV) (ותומעוי י(embed שמש), in light of earlier allusions to the patriarchal traditions, refers to the land of promise that was made desolate during the events leading to the exile. In Isaiah the heritages sometimes refer to the people themselves (Isa 19:25; Isa 47:6), but here the reference is to the land.\footnote{For “inheritance” see Jer 12:14 and Ezek 47:13-48:29.} The land is pictured as a birthright, and the apportioning refers to the sharing of it among those who are rightful heirs. Clifford is probably right to say the references, indeed the entire theme of vv. 8-12, evoke the role of Moses in leading the people to the promised land (1984: 153-154). Seitz follows this line also, but to push his argument that the Servant is an individual. He argues the task of apportioning heritages was an individual one: either Moses (Num 26:52-56; 34:1-15) or his delegates, Joshua and Eleazar (Num 32:28-32; 34:16-29) (Seitz, 2001: 430). We have no problem with this, but the use of imagery traditionally associated with individuals does not render the Servant an individual over against a collective. It can be argued that the act of apportioning the inheritances is symbolic rather than literal.

The Servant will also call the “prisoners” (אִזְרָאֵלי) to “Come out!” (v. 9a); and say to those who are “in darkness” (אֲנֵךְ) to “Let yourself be seen” (v. 9b). This, too, will be a covenantal sign to the people. The clause clearly double-
voices Isa 42:7, and also echoes Isa 42:22. But the identity of the prisoners is questionable. We agree with Barstad that it is wrong to take it as a literal reference to the exiles in Babylon (see Barstad, 1989: p. 57ff.). The term is a figure of speech, like *prison, darkness* and *blindness* in 42:7, to describe anyone who does not know Yahweh. ⁶⁰ But its use in the context of the imagery of the returning exiles in 49:8-12 suggests that here it is being applied to the exiles scattered abroad. Both “prisoners” (אֵצֶרֶד) here and “prisoner” (אֶזֶר) in Isa 42:7 share the same root, אֶזֶר (to bind). Both sets of prisoners are brought out: in Isa 42:7 they are led out (אֶזֶר) and here they are commanded to come out (אֶזָא). Here, as in 42:7, the prisoners dwell in the darkness (רַע). Whether this liberation of the prisoners has actually taken place is left open. All we can say is that Yahweh has already given the Servant as a covenant to these people, a promise that they are being liberated from the darkness. ⁶¹

The returning exiles are then pictured as a flock of sheep, with Yahweh as the shepherd. ⁶² Tull notes the affinities between the imagery in vv. 9-13 with descriptions in Jeremiah 31: 1) The image of Israel as a flock of sheep (v. 9; Jer 31:10); 2) The springs of water imagery (v. 10; Jer 31:9); 3) The key image of the

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⁶⁰. On this we diverge from Barstad, who identifies Second Isaiah’s audience as the people of Jerusalem and Judah, and thus sees these metaphors as referring to their “miserable situation” (Barstad, 1989: 58). Our view is that this interpretation of the purpose of the prophet’s message is too narrow. However, Barstad is correct to note that in Isa 49:8-12 there are no allusions to leaving Babylon (59). But we question his assessment that there are no allusions to the return of the exiles through the desert.

⁶¹. Tg specifies the identity of the prisoners here: they are the “prisoners among the Gentiles” who are “jailed among the kingdoms as in the darkness.” This interpretation reflects our reading, that the prisoners are the exiles scattered among the nations.

road (v. 11; Jer 31:9); 4) The image of the exiles returning from the north and elsewhere (v. 12; Jer 13:20); 5) The instruction to the returnees to cry out (v. 13; Jer 31:7, 12); 6) The address to the coastlands (v. 1; Jer 31:10). Says Tull: “What is clear is that the visions of return expressed here are not Second Isaiah’s own creation, but are pictures of hope already formed in the community’s mental landscape” (Tull Willey, 1997: 205-206).

That the vision of redemption extends beyond the exiles in Babylon is confirmed by the imagery in v. 12. It also indicates that the Servant does not yet know himself to be all Israel. The Servant is a “you” in this discourse, while the remaining exiles are a “they”. We have outlined the distinction between the two already. Those who will come “from afar” is an echo of Isa 43:6. Key terms in both discourses are “afar” (𐤉𐤄𐤅𐤃) and “north” (𐤌𐤈𐤁𐤄). It highlights that Yahweh’s commitment to the exiles beyond Babylon is unaltering. It is not surprising that this discourse echoes the salvation oracle of Isa 43:1-7, since Yahweh has already alluded to the themes of bondage and darkness prevalent in the disputation that precedes that oracle, 42:18-25. We combined the disputation with the oracle in the Servant discourse of 42:18-43:7, and here Yahweh’s double-voiced discourse does the same by forging dialogic links with both. The effect is to impress upon the Servant that despite his words in the discourse of 49:1-6, particularly in v. 6, and its

63. Tull’s words are helpful in explaining why the Servant discourses are crafted with such double-voiced discourse—they bring into Israel’s dialogic purview images and words the nation is familiar with in order to re-work them. For example, here the repetition makes the claim that “the things formerly declared have now come to pass” (Tull Willey, 1997: 206).
focus upon the nations, this still very much includes the exiles at the “ends of the earth.” What is suggested is that this is the reason the kings and princes of the nations will rise and bow down in worship—they cannot fail to see the redemptive work of Yahweh on behalf of the exiles, because they have been scattered throughout their lands.

5.3. **The response of the Servant in Second Isaiah—The second discourse, Isa 50:4-11**

The second discourse in which we hear the Servant speak is comprised of two units: vv. 4-9, in which an anonymous voice is heard, and vv. 10-11, in which the voice of the first unit is identified as the Servant’s, by a separate though equally anonymous voice that is usually taken to be that of Yahweh. Isa 50:4-9 is the third of the so-called Servant songs. It is not immediately apparent that this is the Servant Israel-Jacob speaking, which is one reason why the Servant of the songs is presumed to be someone other than the exiles. We have demonstrated, however, that even those discourses that are often depicted as individualistic have been consistent with the self-knowledge of the Servant as Israel-Jacob, when interpreted dialogically. This is

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64. The exiles will come from the west/sea, and from the land of Syene. וּלְבָנָה signifies the western sea, the Mediterranean, and so “west”. For Syene, MT has אִישֵׁי מַן וּלְבָנָה while 1QIsa has the spelling אִישֵׁי מַן, and this is accepted as the correct spelling (de Waard, 1997: 183). It signifies the Egyptian town Syene, or modern Aswan. It is possibly a metaphor for the whole of Egypt. De Waard notes that for the prophet it could represent the southern limits of the civilized world, so an image of “the ends of the earth.” In any case, the references indicate the widespread nature of the diaspora at the time. See also Betz (1992: 250).
not a new discovery with reference to 50:4-9. Muilenburg, who says 50:4-9 depicts the Servant as a “lonely figure in all his humility and spiritual grandeur in precisely the same way as throughout his other poems, i.e., with sympathy, imagination, and insight” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 579), argues that the language is no more individualistic than in Lamentations: “Semitic conceptions of ‘the individual’ and community were not ours” (1956a: 580), he warns. We have argued that there is no distinction between this or that Servant—individual or collective—only between the Servant Israel-Jacob that has responded to Yahweh’s discourse, and the Servant that is yet to respond.

Critical approaches to the question of the genre of vv. 4-9 have been varied, though there is general agreement that the unit echoes the laments, with their dual “voices” of despondency and hope.65 From our perspective this becomes important when it is recognised that it specifically echoes the laments of Jeremiah.66 That the speaker also double-voices Lamentations 3:30 suggests that the discourse serves a revisionary function with respect of Israel’s suffering, complaints and hope.

65. See, for example, Begrich (1963: 54-55), who argues it highlights the contrast between the divine purpose and the speaker’s experience: “50:4-6 umfassen die Klage, die den schmerzlichen Gegensatz von göttlichem Auftrag und der Erfahrung des Sprechers zum Ausdruck bringt.” Alternatively, Melugin argues vv. 4-9 is an imitation of a psalm of confidence that is intended to highlight the word of judgment upon the faithless in vv. 10-11: “Deutero-Isaiah combined the psalm of confidence and the divine word of judgment because he wanted to distinguish between the faithful servant and those who were unfaithful” (Melugin, 1976: 152).

66. See, for example, Westermann, who see affinities between the Servant’s and Jeremiah’s “certainty of being answered” and his protestations of innocence with the confidence that he will be answered (Westermann, 1969: 227).
Vv. 10-11 are seen as a response by Yahweh to the lament of the Servant, paralleling the similar structure in the Jeremiah laments (e.g., 11:18-20, followed by Yahweh’s response in vv. 21-23; 15:15-18, followed by Yahweh’s response in vv. 19-21). The response also parallels the comment in 42:5-9 on the Servant discourse of 42:1-4, as well as Yahweh’s response to the Servant in 49:7-12. The content of vv. 10-11 will not be dealt with in detail in our discussion, since they have no direct bearing upon the Servant’s self-knowledge other than confirming that it is the Servant who speaks in vv. 4-9. Whoever it is that speaks in vv. 10-11, the important thing to note is the distinction that is made between the one who knows himself to be the Servant in vv. 4-9, and those who are exhorted to fear Yahweh in v. 10. When Yahweh speaks to the Servant in chapters 40-48 he leaves the discourse open in order for the Servant to respond. But in 50:10-11 the Servant’s constitution is closed. There is no invitation to be the Servant, only to obey his voice (v. 10b).

5.3.1. The Servant speaks—The Servant in Isa 50:4-9

When the Servant speaks in 50:4-9 he does so in contrast to the nation that is


68. Few commentators believe the Servant continues to speak in vv. 10-11. Blenkinsopp, for example, says it is unlikely in this instance that the prophet speaks in the third person about himself. But he suggests that it could represent the voice of the prophet’s disciple (2002: 323).

69. Childs also notes the distinction between the Servant and the community: Vv. 10-11 “pick up the growing theme from chapters 48ff. of a disobedient community that resists the offer of deliverance” (2001: 396).
addressed by Yahweh in 50:1-3, but which remains silent (v. 2b). The tone of accusation against the nation in vv. 1-3 is reflected in the response of Yahweh to the Servant’s discourse in vv. 10-11. Those who are silent in v. 2b parallel those who light their own fires in v. 11. The image of a nation that continues to walk in darkness and does not speak is in stark contrast to the figure who self-consciously acknowledges the dialogic nature of his relationship with Yahweh (v. 4). However, this does not necessarily indicate that the Servant is an individual who stands over against the nation.

It is not a given that the Servant who is mentioned in 50:10b is the speaker of vv. 4-9. In fact, on first reading the discourse does not even appear to be a Servant passage like those we have seen.\textsuperscript{70} But the first person discourse is consistent with what we have described as the polyphonic design of Second Isaiah. All that we know about this voice is what it says, subverting the normal monologic design which allows the reader to have an image of the character that is surplus to what the character knows. Identifying the speaker here is difficult because we do not have access to information other than what the character knows concerning him-/her-self. Essentially we must engage with the dialogue in order to discover who the speaker is, as we have done with previous discourses. But for the reasons already established

\textsuperscript{70} While we concur with Orlinsky to a point, we do not go all the way with his rejection of this discourse as a Servant text: “It is doubtful that anyone would have designated this an {ebed} section were it not for for the fact that v. 6ff. deal with the suffering of the speaker” (Orlinsky, 1977: 90). The body of our discussion outlines why we believe it to be a Servant text, and the suffering in v. 6 is only one aspect.
we will begin with an assumption that the speaker is the Servant.

5.3.1.1. The Servant’s openness to Yahweh’s discourse, vv. 4-5

While the bulk of the Servant’s discourse concerns his suffering and his confidence in Yahweh’s vindication, he begins by acknowledging his dialogic constitution by Lord Yahweh (יהוה). The Servant has been given the “tongue” (לسان), that is speech, of “those who are taught” (masc. pl. adj. from the root לומד). The latter phrase might double-voice Isa 48:17d, where Yahweh professes himself to be the one who teaches (לומד) “you” (Israel) to profit, which is paralleled with “the one who leads” (v. 17e). It might also take its significance from Isa 40:14, and the absoluteness of Yahweh’s knowledge, expressed in the claim that no-one has “taught” (לומד) him. The important point is that the speaker is conscious that he has received his teaching direct from Yahweh. The Servant expresses new knowledge about himself with this phrase. As Whybray points out, he here refers to himself as Yahweh’s pupil rather than his Servant (Whybray, 1975: 151). The self-knowledge of the Servant as one of the לומדים leads Clifford to link this poem with Isa 8:16-18 and Isa 30:8-14, arguing that the knowledge of the speaker as a “disciple” is the key to understanding the

71. This term is not used in any of the other Servant discourses. But it is used in Isa 40:10, and, interestingly, in Isa 48:16, where another speaking “I” makes an appearance. This could be an indication that the speaker in Isa 48:16, and the speaker in Isa 50:4-9, is one and the same person, the prophet, as opposed to Servant Israel.

Considering the parallel vocabulary between 50:4-9 and 30:8-14 this is a fair point to make. If the Servant understands himself in light of the disciples who First Isaiah posited as custodians of the witness to Yahweh, then this suggests a self-consciousness that goes beyond the Servant discourses of chapters 40-48. The Servant knows himself not only as the one constituted by Yahweh in those speeches, but also according to major motifs from First Isaiah. He also sees himself on the threshold of a new event, a new moment of self-discovery in which he will become the repentant correlate of the former people of “rebellion” (י”ר, 30:9a, from the root יִרְמָה cf. 50:5b).

The target of the Servant’s informed tongue is the “weary” (יֵרֵע) (v. 4b), a term that revives the Servant’s connection with those who complain to the prophet in 40:27. The Servant’s task is to sustain (יַשְׁמַע) them with speech. But who are they? The term “weary” has only referred to Israel in Second Isaiah, particularly in the all-important disputation in Isa 40:27-31. This suggests again that the Servant knows himself as someone other than empirical Israel, which would seem to support the idea that the Servant is an individual here. However, it is not the first time that we

73. Seitz argues the term יִרְמָה in 50:4 is a “conscious evocation” of Isa 8:16 (2001: 437).

74. It is in this sense that Childs argues that what the Servant learned was not abstract information, “but to accept the experience of suffering and shame” (2001: 394).

75. Tg interprets the “weary” as “the righteous who faint for the words of his law.”

76. This is the only occurrence of the verb יַשְׁמַע (“sustain”, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, ESV) in Isaiah. It is variously translated “in season” (KJV), “speak timely” (JPS), “console” (REB), and “comfort” (NJB). “Sustain” is appropriate considering its direct object, יֵרֵע (“weary”). How does the speaker sustain? With a word, יַשְׁמַע, with speech. Again, the discourse is self-consciously dialogic. The יַשְׁמַע of the speaker corresponds to the יִרְמָה that is given him by Yahweh.
have suggested the Servant Israel-Jacob does not occupy the same semantic space as empirical Israel. We have also suggested there is a distinction between the Servant who has responded to Yahweh’s call, and the nation that remains in blindness. The Servant’s declaration that he sustains the weary is consistent with this, but it does not necessarily mean the Servant is the prophet. Even though the prophet has crafted this discourse, it is spoken as the Servant who responds faithfully to Yahweh. Even now, in the discourse as we have it, there are not two clearly-defined Servants. There is still only one Servant, Israel-Jacob. Melugin’s view of the prophet’s identity is helpful:

Without doubt Deutero-Isaiah’s own experience as a prophet has coloured his portrayal of the servant. The trial and disputation speeches indicate how reluctant his hearers were to accept his message. Still, we should not go so far as to conclude that the servant is simply the prophet. The collection understands the servant as Israel. Yet the collection creates an ambiguous relationship between Israel and prophet . . . A similar ambiguity is apparent in 50:4-11. In this text the servant seems to have a prophetic mission with an accompanying rejection by those who hear his word; at the same time, in the context of the collection, he is Israel who moves from doubt (50:1-3) to confidence (50:4ff.) (Melugin, 1976: 154).

The Servant, like his audience who are exhausted, must be aroused to hear Yahweh’s word—though the Servant hears not a word of sustenance, but a word of instruction. When the Servant says that Yahweh “rouses my ear” (עָנָי רָעֲשָת) (v. 4d) we hear an echo of the Servant’s description as the one who has ears but cannot hear (see Isa 42:20, 23; 43:8; see also 48:8). We have suggested the motif of deafness in Second Isaiah may draw some signification from the mission of Isaiah of Jerusalem,

77. See discussion on p. 165ff.
78. See discussion on p. 178ff.
whose task it was to preach until the ears of Israel were closed (Isa 6:10). Here the speaker revives the motif by highlighting his own responsiveness to Yahweh. This is not in contradistinction to the Servant, since we have already heard in Isa 49:1-6 the Servant’s obedient response to Yahweh.

This is emphasised by the Servant’s reference to his own hearing (הָבָה) as being “like those who are taught” (קָרְאָיִם) (v. 4e). With the use of the root הָבָה the reference to the Servant’s lack of hearing becomes more transparent. Israel’s inability to hear has been a major theme of Second Isaiah, even outside the Servant discourses (see Isa 40:21, 28; in the discourses see Isa 42:18, 20, 23, 24). Despite this the Servant is commanded to hear (Isa 44:1), and then to proclaim (the converse of hearing) (Isa 48:20). The Servant’s statement here that Yahweh awakens him to hear is a reinforcement of this major theme—his hearing and his proclaiming are bound together. With the repetition of לִשְׂמַע in v. 4e the Servant emphasises that he knows himself as one of those who are taught by Yahweh, in other words those who can hear Yahweh’s voice.81

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79. This contrasts the silence of Zion’s children in 50:1-3. Goldingay argues that here “the prophet claims to have experienced Yhwh getting through, and claims implicitly to be modelling what it means to be a child of Ms Zion and to be realising by anticipation the intent that 54:13 will announce” (2005: 404). We stress again, however, that the one who speaks is the “Servant”. There is no objective image of the prophet that stands over against Servant Israel here, only the discourse of the “Servant.” We refer again to the distinction we have made between the Servant who has responded to Yahweh, and the Servant who corresponds with the children of Zion and still walks in darkness.

80. Tg understands the speaker here as one of the prophets, or as a collective of the prophets: “Morning by morning he rises early to send his prophets so perhaps the sinners’ ears might be opened and they might listen to teaching” (1987: 99).

The opening of the Servant’s ear has enabled him to act in a way that defines him as obedient Israel, the faithful dialogic partner of Yahweh. The Servant knows himself as one who did not rebel (יהלך) (v. 5b) and did not give way (לכ, with adv. אַחֲרֵיהֶם) (v. 5c). The rebellious ones in Isaiah are Israel, but the root מָשָׁר is never used elsewhere in Second Isaiah, and only three times in First Isaiah (Isa 1:20; 3:8; 30:9). The speaker here makes a distinction not between himself and Israel, but between a response that is obedient, and one that is rebellious. He emphasises that he has not responded in a way that was analogous with the response of Israel in the past. The Servant’s response is not rebellious but obedient. Again, there is a high degree of self-consciousness on display here, which is to be expected of a polyphonic hero. In double-voicing some of the key descriptors by which rebellious Israel has come to be known, the speaker establishes his own consciousness as someone who is other, who has the freedom to be obedient. The use of the personal pronoun, כָּלָּנִי (v. 5b) also emphasises the speaker’s self-consciousness. He has no need to use it, but it sets the speaker apart from those who have been rebellious.82

The speaker remains consistent with the polyphonic design of Second Isaiah here. In echoing the themes that have reverberated through Second Isaiah the Servant yet again maintains for himself the final word about himself. In responding to

82. The imagery here may echo those who are turned back (נָשִׁיעוּ כָּלָּנִי) in Isa 42:17, since they are among those who trust in carved idols. The image is an appropriate backdrop to its use here, considering its parallel “rebellious”. It may be that what is alluded to is the idolatry of Israel, and the underlying theme throughout the previous discourses that Israel would rather rely on idols than on a living God who brings a liberator to Babylon.
discourse, he demonstrates that he is constituted not by arbitrary words, but by a specific word, and by his own specific dialogic response. In other words, he can hear discourse and respond to it as a fully shaped consciousness. The double-voicing is not as clear in this discourse as in Isa 49:1-6. But this also is consistent with the text’s polyphonic design, since it shows that the speaker is not locked into discourse addressed to him, but is free to go beyond it, and to expand upon it—indeed, to stay ahead of it. In staying ahead of Yahweh’s discourse here the Servant has affirmed that he is a thinking consciousness. This is consistent with Bakhtin’s idea of the polyphonic hero’s formation:

The author does indeed leave the final word to his hero. And precisely that final word—or, more accurately, the tendency toward it—is necessary to the author’s design. The author constructs the hero not out of words foreign to the hero, not out of neutral definitions; he constructs not a character, nor a type, nor a temperament, in fact he constructs no objectified image of the hero at all, but rather the hero’s discourse about himself and his world (Bakhtin, 1984: 53).

This is precisely what we have here—not an objective image of the hero, as if we could say this is the prophet, or this is the nation. We are not afforded that privilege, since this is not a typically monologic text. We have the hero’s discourse, and through that discourse we have an impression of who it is that speaks. But at the end of the utterances in vv. 4-5 all we can say is that the hero is conscious of being obedient to the awakening word of Yahweh, an utterance that summons all previous accusations against Servant Israel and dispels them—someone has responded to the discourse, demonstrating both its efficacy and the trustworthiness of Yahweh in speaking it.
5.3.1.2. The Servant’s suffering, vv. 6-7

The Servant’s description of his suffering introduces a new element to his self-knowledge, and its source is not immediately apparent. There are no precedents for the imagery used here in Second Isaiah, and to this point in the Servant discourses any “suffering” has been alluded to in a general way, such as in 42:25 and 43:28, both of which are spoken by Yahweh to the Servant, and allude to the destruction of Jerusalem. Nowhere has the Servant been told or said that his ministry to the nations will involve suffering. However, it has been hinted at—in 42:4 it was said of the Servant that he would not grow faint or be discouraged—perhaps in the face of persecution. Those who are incensed at the Servant in 41:11 are perhaps those who will persecute him. And in 49:7 the Servant hears that he is deeply despised and abhorred by the nations. So, while the imagery of persecution used by the Servant in 50:6-7 has no direct precedent, it comes as no complete surprise either.

In terms of the Servant’s polyphonic design the Servant’s self-knowledge is again demonstrated to be broader than the discourse that has been addressed to him. He began with knowledge obtained via someone else’s discourse, but now his own discourse introduces something entirely new: “I gave my back to those who strike (נָשָׁה),” (v. 6a). The verb נָשָׁה is well-used in First Isaiah, and can denote both the punishment of Yahweh (as in Isa 5:25), and/or the hardship inflicted on the people.
by their captors (as in Isa 10:24).\footnote{In the warnings against disobedience in Lev 26 Yahweh promised that he would strike (הָקַנ) his people for their sins (v. 24) (see Van Dam, 1997: 103).} The two significations are often conflated. The verb is used significantly in Isa 53:4, which will be discussed below. The sense in 50:6 is that the hero has been beaten (perfect tense), and has endured it willingly. We question why the speaker introduces this information into the discourse here, since it raises the idea that obedience to Yahweh is linked to suffering.\footnote{See Ps 129:3 for similar poetic imagery concerning Israel.}

The corresponding image of suffering, to give “my cheeks to those who pull out the beard,” (v. 6b), highlights a dialogic association between the images of suffering in v. 6ab, and those in Lam 3:30. Several linguistic echoes press the association, as well as the form of both passages as laments in first person address. Where here the speaker “gave” (נָתַן) his back “to those who strike” (לְקַפְּרֵנִים) (v. 6a), as well as his “cheek” (יֵלֶד) (v. 6b), in Lam 3:30 the speaker urges those who wait on Yahweh to “give” (נָתַן) his “cheek” (יֵלֶד) to the one who strikes him” (לְקַפְּרֵנִים). When in 50:6ab the Servant claims to have willingly taken the suffering that the speaker in Lam 3:30 urges upon those who wait upon Yahweh, the implication that the Servant sees himself as fulfilling the original exhortation is hard to avoid. Noting the shared motifs between the two utterances, Tull says: “The concentration [in the Servant discourse] is on the spiritual struggle of the speaker, his coming to grips with suffering in a constructive way, and his attempts to convey a model of persevering trust to listeners who are encouraged to follow his example” (Tull Willey, 1997: 83-84).
In other words, the Servant responds in a way that appears to double-voice the past experiences of the community, thereby transforming those experiences in a new attitude towards Yahweh that the Servant actually embodies. The following observations by Tull are important:

First, by taking most of its material from the middle portion of the lament, Isaiah places more emphasis on the speaker’s hopeful words than on his laments and complaints, which were originally far more numerous. Second, the speaker in Second Isaiah describes himself as displaying the qualities that the Lamentations figure does not claim, but merely envisions and prescribes. Third, all complaint language is removed from the sufferer’s mouth and attributed to another speaker… (Tull Willey, 1997: 219).

The figure who complains to Yahweh in Isa 49-55, as distinct from the Servant who utters his devotion to Yahweh, is Daughter Zion (Isa 49:14).85 As Tull points out, Second Isaiah appears to have “reemployed” the figure of Daughter Zion from Lam 1-2 in order to voice the community’s ongoing complaint to Yahweh, while reimagining the figure of Lam 3, who “exemplifies those who contend with confusion and opposition” (Tull Willey, 1997: 219), as the faithful, yet suffering, Servant.86 Concludes Tull: “While Lamentations 3 had displayed human grappling with God’s faithfulness, the emphasis in Isaiah 50 has been subtly transformed into a study, by means of a single paradigmatic figure, of human faithfulness” (Tull Willey, 1997: 219). This does not confirm either that the Servant is an individual who

85. Wilshire (1975) conflates the two identities, so that the Servant is the city. For the contrasting Servant and Zion imagery in Second Isaiah see Sawyer (1989). For an overview of Zion’s decline and glorification, see Kleinig (1994: 52-55). For a fuller treatment of the parallel careers of the Servant and Zion see Steck (1992: 173-207).

86. The imagery of the Daughter of Zion is as open to multiple interpretations as that of the Servant when approached monologically. Like the Servant motif, it functions in the text predominantly as a paradigm by which the exiles are invited to reimagine themselves (see Sawyer, 1989: 101).
interprets his own suffering in light of the figure of Lam 3, or that the Servant is a poetic construction that envisages how Israel should respond to its own suffering. It does demonstrate, however, that the Servant’s self-knowledge is composed of more than the discourse that has been directed to him by Yahweh. His self-consciousness has embraced other voices, heteroglossia, from the exilic community’s experiences and laments. He knows himself as one who has suffered what the community has suffered, and knows that he has suffered it in a way that fulfils the prescribed act of faithfulness to Yahweh envisioned by the righteous speaker of Lam 3.\textsuperscript{87} The Servant’s acceptance of the harsh realities of exile flies in the face of the prevailing view among the exilic community that Yahweh’s punishment went too far (reflected in the community’s complaint to the prophet, 40:27, and echoed in the voice of Zion, 49:14).

The Servant also appears to embody a reversal of the prophet Jeremiah’s experiences as a Servant of Yahweh. We noted in our discussion of 49:1-6 that the Servant’s discourse imitates aspects of Jeremiah’s call, re-emphasising his awareness that he has been called to a prophetic office. In the present discourse the association between the Servant and Jeremiah undergoes some development, so that we are left in no doubt that the Servant in 50:4-9 is not Jeremiah.\textsuperscript{88} With Sommer (1998: 64-65)

\textsuperscript{87} Krašovec’s description of how the people of Lamentations come to a realisation of God’s righteousness, reflects the righteousness of the Servant in Second Isaiah: “The suffering people come gradually to terms with the fact that they are being punished, terribly but rightly. Accepting God’s justice by recognising their guilt is seen by the poet as essential to the change of heart needed by Israel for her deliverance” (Krašovec, 1992: 225).

\textsuperscript{88} Muilenburg makes a similar observation when comparing the Servant in this discourse to Jeremiah: “It can scarcely be doubted that Jeremiah exerted a profound influence on the prophet’s
we observe that the Servant double-voices Jeremiah’s oracles in order to force them into a dialogic revision, much as he has done with Israel’s exilic laments. The Servant brings Jeremiah’s experiences within his own field of vision in order to baptise them in his self-consciousness. For example, we see Jeremiah deeply resenting the ridicule put on him (Jer 20:7-9), but the Servant accepting it (50:5); Jeremiah wanting to avoid his abuse (Jer 20:10), but the Servant giving his back (50:6); Jeremiah’s statement of trust regarding the shame and humiliation his persecutors will suffer (Jer 20:11), but the Servant not hiding from humiliation, and therefore suffering neither it nor shame (50:6-7). It appears that while Jeremiah provides a paradigm by which the Servant’s faithfulness can be understood, the Servant is also a foil, another “voice”, that casts a critical light over the career of the famed prophet. 89

The Servant’s acceptance of his suffering is linked to his hearing of Yahweh’s stirring word morning by morning. What this suggests is that to turn away from suffering would be rebellion against Yahweh. But how is this to be understood? Is there a general theological principle in play here that suffering equates to obedience? Our view is that this is not the case—that the truth of this imagery is dialogical, that is, it is fixed to who the Servant is, and makes sense only if the suffering that is referred to is the situation of exile. To turn away from it means to

89. Says Sommer: “The servant’s career is modeled on that of Jeremiah,” but “the servant accepts his fate more readily than Jeremiah” (1998: 66).
not accept that the suffering was brought about by Yahweh—believing instead that
the forces of history hold sway, or that the gods of Babylon are the cause of Israel’s
exilic misery. In this light we can say that suffering is not an aspect of the Servant’s
call—rather, the Servant accepts what he has heard Yahweh say about Israel’s exilic
suffering, namely, that it was Yahweh who “gave up Jacob to the looter . . . Was it
not Yahweh, against whom we have sinned?” (Isa 42:24). It was Yahweh who gave
Jacob to utter destruction and Israel to reviling (Isa 43:28). This knowledge has
become an integral aspect of the Servant’s understanding of who he is. He cannot be
the Servant Israel-Jacob unless he acknowledges that he is the Israel-Jacob upon
whom Yahweh brought his judgment. This is why he does not hide his face from
disgrace and spitting (v. 6cd).90

The Servant acknowledges not only the suffering and shame that have been
directed at him, but that the intervention of Yahweh counteracts the effects of his
abuse. The Lord Yahweh “helps” (זב, qal imp. 3ms) the Servant (v. 7a). The verb
זב is used throughout the Servant discourses (see Isa 41:10, 13, 14; 44:2; 49:8).
Indeed, of eight usages of the verb in Second Isaiah, seven of them fall within the
discourses. It is a specific element of the Servant’s constitution, and its double-

90. Westermann makes a worthwhile point regarding the Servant’s suffering—that what the Servant
here expresses, in terms of accepting the suffering, would have been revolutionary for the time,
“because in terms of that world’s thought what the Servant here says of himself, that he allowed
himself to be smitten, means that he regards the attacks, blows and insults as justified, and so
concedes that God is on the side of his opponents” (Westermann, 1969: 230). We have argued that the
Servant needed to come to this knowledge in order to believe that it was happening in accordance
with Yahweh’s control of the course of Israel’s history.
voicing here indicates that the one who speaks is the Servant, Israel-Jacob. The prophet’s assertion is repeated in 50:9, emphasising its centrality in the prophet’s discourse. Why is this so? Again, by echoing Yahweh’s declaration of help, the Servant here gives utterance to the fact that it has become part of his self-knowledge. This goes beyond merely repeating what Yahweh has promised, since the knowledge that he is helped by Yahweh has seen him through an actual event. It does not matter if the Servant’s suffering is literal or figurative—what matters is that the Servant has extended the discourse of Yahweh and applied it to a situation external to him. In other words, while we do not have an objective image of the event of suffering itself—which is why it is very difficult to say whether it happened or not—we do have the Servant’s discourse concerning it. And, notably, that discourse double-voices Yahweh’s promises. In other words, what we have of the event is the significance of Yahweh’s discourse concerning that event upon the Servant who has experienced it. We emphasise that we are not granted access to the event itself, only to the Servant’s discourse about it, which, significantly, relativises the event/s in terms of Yahweh’s assurance of help.

Because Yahweh helps, the Servant has not been disgraced (יהל) (v. 7b). The verb shares the root יִהל with the noun in the last line of v. 6. Yahweh’s help cancels out the impact of the insults upon the Servant.91 Yahweh’s help not only counteracts

91. Westermann is helpful on the link: “What is emphasised is that God is to bring the past and present acts of hostility and abuse into constructive connection with the Servant’s justification” (Westermann, 1969: 231).

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the insults, it enables the Servant to withstand the physical assault on his face—he can make it like flint, and not feel the effects of having his beard pulled out. Is this literal? Again, we have no objective account of the suffering. The point, again, is what the promise of help has enabled the Servant to achieve. In the face of suffering he is able to stand, which is prophetic imagery that draws its significance from Jer 1:18 and Ezek 3:8-9.

5.3.1.3. The Servant’s vindication, vv. 8-9

The discourse of Yahweh to the Servant continues to resonate in the Servant’s own in the claim “My justifier (יִקְיָד) is near (בָּזְרִים)” (v. 8a). The nearness of Yahweh, the righteous one, is a prominent theme in the opening Servant discourses.92 This verse not only echoes the content of the discourses, but the voice of confidence that challenges its audience echoes the form of disputation that was prominent in chapters 40-48. Tg highlights the Servant’s belief in his own vindication: “My innocence is near. Who will go to judgment with me? Let us stand up together”. This is the voice of someone absolutely sure of their justification—and the response is an entirely appropriate one considering Yahweh’s discourse has sought to impress upon the Servant his forgiveness.93

92. See Isa 41:10 where the God who says “I am with you” (יִהְיֶה אֶלֶיךָ) also promises to uphold the Servant with “my righteous right hand” (יִקְיָד יְדִי הָיֶשֶׁף), and in Isa 42:6 Yahweh, who has called the Servant in righteousness (יהוה אֵל הָיֶשֶׁף), is so close he can take the Servant by the hand.

With the phrase “Who will contend (יִרְדּ) with me?” (v. 8b), the Servant echoes Yahweh from Isa 41:11, where not only will those who contend (יִרְדּ) with the Servant be as nothing, but they will be disgraced (אֵדֶר). Significantly, in Isa 50:7b the Servant says that he has not been disgraced (אֵדֶר) because Yahweh helps him, which is precisely the intent of Yahweh’s discourse in Isa 41:11. So, who is it that contends with the Servant? Precise identification, again, is not the point. The point is that the Servant is ready to stand against anyone who will contend with him because Yahweh has vindicated him, and not because he is strong in himself. Nevertheless, the Servant’s challenge, “Let us stand together,” (v. 8c) suggests the nations and the rulers of Isa 49:7 are in view, since these have emerged as the Servant’s only adversary in Second Isaiah.94 But that the Servant himself asks, “Who is my adversary?” (v. 8d) suggests that the answer should not occupy us too much. The point is that there is no adversary (יִרְדּ אֵדֶר, lit. master of my justice)95 who can challenge the Servant. Yahweh has vindicated his Servant. Again, what is important here is that it is the Servant Israel-Jacob that says this. Having bemoaned Yahweh’s neglect of its יִרְדּ (Isa 40:27) Israel-Jacob, as the Servant, now challenges anyone to dispute it. The Servant embodies a complete reversal of Israel’s

94. Interpretation depends upon the interpreter’s identification of the Servant, however, as demonstrated by Seitz (2001: 437). While acknowledging the echo with Yahweh’s disputations, he sees the Servant’s adversaries as Israel, because the Servant has become more individualised since Isa 49.

95. “My adversary” (יִרְדּ אֵדֶר) is also translated “my accuser” (NIV), “my opponent” (JPS), the “disputer of my cause” (REB).
prior attitude towards Yahweh, and his confidence is that of a people that has fully turned from its doubt.

With the utterance, “Behold, Lord Yahweh helps me,” (v. 9a), the Servant repeats his assertion of v. 7a. The rhetorical question that follows, in v. 9b, “Who is he who condemns (השׁם) me?” resonates with the knowledge that the Servant has been declared forgiven by Yahweh (see Isa 43:25; 44:22). The hif. form of the verb הָשַׁם means “to declare guilty”. The accusations of guilt that are levelled at the Servant are inconsequential, since he accepts the guarantee Yahweh has given him. This is the emphasis of the discourse, to demonstrate that the Servant knows himself as one who has been utterly forgiven, and therefore cannot be accused. It is interesting that the Servant does not merely accept that Yahweh has forgiven him—he directs new discourse on the subject to potential challengers; he acts on the basis of the knowledge he has gained of himself.

The final utterance of the Servant’s discourse (v. 9cd) is particularly informative for demonstrating who the Servant knows himself to be. A number of phrases from the Servant’s discourse are echoed in the discourse of Yahweh to his people in Isa 51:4-8, including this one: “Behold, all of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.” The imagery relates to those who insult those who have Yahweh’s law in their heart and do not fear the reproach of others. The Servant evidently knows himself as one who is dedicated to Yahweh, and who has

96. See HALOT.
suffered the revulsion of others because of it. Here the Servant’s confidence that those who condemn him will be eaten up like a moth eats a garment anticipates Yahweh’s promise, which is delivered more generally to Zion. This, too, is evidence that the Servant identifies with those people. The Servant who speaks is the Servant, Israel-Jacob. We reiterate that by this we mean that the Servant is an open invitation to the people to be identified as the faithful Servant of Yahweh. He embodies what it is to respond faithfully to Yahweh, and to accept the suffering of exile as Yahweh’s righteous judgment. What is in view here is not the suffering of an individual, despite the dominant view of recent commentators on Second Isaiah. The suffering is that of exilic Israel, and the Servant speaks in association with them.

5.4. The significance of the Servant in Second Isaiah—The final discourse, Isa 52:13-53:12

The final Servant discourse, in which an anonymous group confesses how their view of the Servant has been radically altered, plays a special role in the Servant’s polyphonic design. The “we” who speak in 53:1-10 occupy a unique semantic space with reference to the Servant. Their “voice” contributes to the Servant’s knowledge of himself like no-one else’s has. Where Yahweh has called the Servant into being,

97. Childs, for example, argues that by the end of the discourse the nation’s mission has been transferred to the individual: “When seen in the larger context of the narrative movement within chapters 40-55, there is a clear transfer from Israel, the servant nation, to Israel, the suffering individual who now embodies the nation’s true mission” (2001: 395). Goldingay also focuses heavily on the individual: “The running links in vv. 4-9 with 41:1-16 suggest that promises to Jacob-Israel are here applied to the prophet individually as part of the process whereby the prophet models what Yhwh undertakes for the whole people” (Goldingay, 2005: 411). Our view is similar, but also fundamentally different. Our view is that it is the Servant, resonating here with the voice of the prophet, who is responding faithfully to Yahweh, and thereby calling the people to do the same.
so to speak, and the Servant has responded by demonstrating his willingness to \textit{be} the Servant, the “we” testify to the significance of that response upon them. Their discourse gives the Servant a picture of how his faithfulness will impact others. It takes the constitution of the Servant’s character well beyond the I-Thou relationship with Yahweh—in other words, it opens the dialogue by which the Servant knows himself and ensures that it does not become closed, since the discourse of the “we” who speak in 53:1-10 becomes an open invitation for anyone to voice a similar confession.

The identity of the speaking “we” will be clarified in our discussion below. From an objective point of view they are anonymous, but we do get an idea of who they know themselves to be. The clue is in v. 3d, where they say of the Servant “he was despised (נָּפָשׂ), and we did not esteem (בָּשַׁם) him.” In Isa 49:7 the Servant is despised (נָּפָשׂ) and abhorred by the nations. These are the very nations the Servant addresses in Isa 49:1. They are also the kings who will “see and arise” (Isa 49:7). These same kings will shut their mouth (52:15b) because of him. The Servant’s discourse in Isa 49:1-6 had challenged these nations to perceive him as the Servant—it invited a response, and our view is that the speech of the anonymous “we” in 53:1-10 represents that response. However, we suggest this without wanting to finalise who the “we” are. That the poem is ambiguous concerning their identity

\footnote{98. The mention of the kings and the nations in the frame of the poem (see chiastic shape of 52:13-53:12 below) gives “specificity” to the “we” (Wilson, 1986: 300-301).}
suggests that their openness to reinterpretation is as much a part of their constitution as it is with the Servant himself.\footnote{We agree with Clines on this point, that it is an aspect of the poem’s “essence” that “unequivocal identifications are not made and that the poem in this respect also is open-ended and allows for multiple interpretations” (Clines, 1976: 33).} Why this might be is discussed below.

The critical consensus regarding the discourse’s form is that while psalmic conventions have influenced its shape and style, it is a product of the prophet’s literary imagination.\footnote{Who actually wrote the poem is debated, since some scholars see the suffering Servant as Second Isaiah and read Isa 53 as the record of his death. In that case the poem has been crafted by his followers, for example.} The introduction by Yahweh, 52:13-15, resembles the presentation of the Servant in 42:1-4. Both it and the conclusion (53:11-12), also spoken by Yahweh, echo the salvation speeches from earlier in Second Isaiah (43:1-7; 44:1-5). They are identified as the discourse of Yahweh by the familiar term “my servant” (52:13a; 53:11c).\footnote{Defining where Yahweh’s conclusion begins is not easy. Bergey (1997) presents a compelling argument that v. 11ab should be included with v. 10 as the speech of the nations. He argues this on the basis that יָּשָׁר (v. 11a) echoes יָּשָׁר in 10b, and יָּשָׁר (v. 11a) echoes יָּשָׁר in 10c, both of which follow clauses that contain יָּשָׁר and יָּשָׁר (10a, d). Our view, however, is that 10a, d are inclusions that contain the final thought of the nations, and that the introduction of יָּשָׁר in v. 11b represents a new thought. The repetition of יָּשָׁר and יָּשָׁר in v. 11a highlights continuity of thought from the nations to Yahweh, just as there is continuity from Yahweh’s introduction to the speech of the nations from 52:15 to 53:1 (see discussion below).} This voice of assurance brackets the core of the discourse both structurally and dialogically. The voice of repentance, indeed of regret, that we hear in 53:1-10, is profoundly coloured by Yahweh’s promise of the Servant’s exaltation. The juxtaposition of the two distinct utterances brings them into direct dialogic engagement.

The confession of the nations in 53:1-10, it has been argued, has been
influenced by the conventions of the psalms of thanksgiving, particularly evident in the narration of need throughout the confession. However, its final form and content originate in the imagination and prophetic craft of Second Isaiah—so argues Melugin, who describes Isa 53 as “a confession by the nations in a manner unprecedented in Hebrew literature” (Melugin, 1976: 74).

Goldingay has drawn attention to the chiastic shape of the entire poem (2005: 470). His suggested outline is helpful:

vv. 13-15 My servant will triumph despite his suffering
v. 1 Who could have recognised Yahweh’s arm?
vv. 2-3 He was treated with contempt
vv. 4-6 The reason was his suffering for us
vv. 7-9 He did not deserve his treatment
vv. 10-11a By his hand Yahweh’s purpose will succeed
vv. 11b-12 My servant will triumph because of his suffering

Our discussion of the poem will take a similar course. Our approach to the Servant discourses has been to summarise the key points of the Servant’s reimagined

102. See Begrich (1963: 62-65), who points out that the only difference is that the person who is suffering does not speak, but that others narrate the need (63): “Hier findet sich engste Verwandtschaft mit den Aussagen des Klagegedecks und der Erzählung der Not im Danklied, nur mit dem Unterschied, daß nicht der Leidende spricht, sondern daß andere von ihm reden.”

103. See also Clifford (1984: 175). Childs also highlights the creativity of Second Isaiah: “Although traditional psalmic conventions lie in the background of the text, the structure is basically a new literary creation, differing in both form and content from the common oral patterns” (2001: 411).

internal discourse, and the main themes highlighted by Goldingay provide an appropriate framework by which to do that here. The following discussion will be divided into three sections: Yahweh speaks concerning the Servant; The nations speak concerning the Servant; Yahweh concludes the Servant discourse. In the first section we will discuss the implications of Yahweh’s introduction on the constitution of the Servant, under the heading: The Servant’s triumph, 52:13-15. In the second section we will discuss the implications of the nations’ discourse on the constitution of the Servant, under the headings: Yahweh’s purpose embodied in the Servant, 53:1, 10; Contempt for the Servant and his unjust treatment, 53:2-3, 7-9; and, The significance of the Servant’s suffering, 53:4-6. In the third section we will conclude our discussion under the heading, The Servant’s exaltation, 53:11-12.

5.4.1. Yahweh speaks concerning the Servant

Yahweh’s discourse frames the poem structurally, thematically and dialogically. His voice of assurance and exaltation sets the tone, even over the nations’ confession. It presents the Servant as one whose depth of lowliness is dramatically reversed by his lofty exaltation. This drama is played out in full view of the kings of the nations, whose reversal concerning their perception of the Servant and his suffering is equally dramatic.

5.4.1.1. The Servant’s triumph, 52:13-15

The discourse begins in a way that echoes the start of Isa 42:1-9, with the declaration
“Behold, my Servant . . . ” (יהוה . . . שׁהֶם). The Servant has never been addressed by Yahweh as anything other than Israel-Jacob in Second Isaiah, and there is no reason to believe anyone else is in view here.105

As in 42:1-4, where Yahweh presents his Servant to anonymous witnesses, as might occur in a royal investiture, so here he presents the Servant in the third person. This has the effect of bringing to mind the Servant’s royal office, which we discussed at length with reference to Isa 42:1-9. It also has the effect of signifying to the Servant in a refracted manner, as was the case in 42:1-4 and 45:1-7, where the Servant heard himself constituted via discourse addressed to third parties. As Yahweh begins with “Behold . . .” the sense is that the Servant is a witness to the exchange that takes place between Yahweh and the nations. The discourse signifies to him in a refracted manner, by allowing him to see how his servanthood has impacted others—much like how Scrooge witnesses the impact of his actions upon others in Dickens’ A Christmas Carol.106

The Servant hears Yahweh declare that he (the Servant) will act wisely (שׁהָם).

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105. Tg famously adds “the Messiah” after “my servant,” and Isa 53 then develops as a poem to the Messiah and those who depend upon him. But as Chilton points out, it is not the Messiah who suffers in the poem: “Indeed, the point of the interpretation is to emphasize the triumph of the Messiah . . . at the expense of ‘all the kingdoms’ (v. 3a; cf. vv. 7, 11, 12)” (Chilton, 1987: 103, 105). This perspective, says Chilton, was contextualised after 70 CE.

106. Muilenburg rightly observes that while the discourse is addressed to the nations, the entire poem is for the sake of Israel: “Here at last is the answer to Israel’s despair and blindness… Such major motifs as the mission of Israel, the relation of Israel to the nations, the meaning of her suffering, and her eventual exaltation are present here” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 615).
The verb לָשָׁה can be translated “to act prudently”, as in “to succeed”. Another connotation may be in view. In the prose section on idolatry in 44:8-20, those who follow idols are said to have had their hearts closed so that they cannot understand (לָשֶׁה). Here the opposite case is made on the Servant’s behalf by Yahweh—the Servant’s “triumph” is that he has responded faithfully to Yahweh’s call and stands in fellowship with him. This was highlighted in our discussion of 50:6, in which we argued that the Servant’s willingness to accept suffering was a reversal of Jeremiah’s laments, and a fulfilment of the righteous hope outlined in Lam 3:30.

The Servant will also be high (לָשֶׁה), lifted up (נָשָׁה), and exalted (נָבְה). In other words, he will be seen. The Servant will no longer be lowly. There is no precedent in the Servant discourses for this imagery, but it is consistent with polyphonic design that Yahweh takes the discourse further. This is new imagery—that is, it is not double-voiced discourse—so we can say that it is provocative. Its purpose is to draw a response from those to whom it is intended to be heard.

Yahweh contrasts the Servant’s exaltation with the more down-to-earth and

107. North notes, rather monologically, that: “It is a matter of observation that the man who acts prudently becomes prosperous” (1964: 234).

108. Another contrast may be in view also. Dorsey compares how the Servant is depicted in Isa 53 with how the king of Babylon is depicted in Isa 14, concluding that their contrasting fortunes and primary characteristics reflect an intentional link between the two (Dorsey, 1999: 231).

109. Muilenburg’s interpretation approximates our description of the Servant coming to a knowledge and acceptance of his dialogical constitution: “The Servant’s ultimate triumph is related to his wisdom… He lives in such close fellowship with his God that he discerns his ways and purposes, knows something of the mysteries of his revelation, and sees the deeper meaning involved in his suffering” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 616).
imminent reality of the Servant’s lowly state (v. 14). Many (חָפֵל) were astonished at him (MT, חָפֵל, “at you”). The word “astonished” has negative connotations here. מַשָּׂכִית means “appalled” (see 1 Kgs 9:8; Jer 18:16; Ezek 27:35), and in Isa 49:8 (cf. 49:19) it is used to describe the land of Judea as “desolate”. Yahweh’s description of the Servant is as close to an objective description of the Servant as we come—however, the inclusion of the apparently misplaced second person prepositional address in v. 14a maintains the polyphonic design, perhaps by accident. As it stands, Yahweh appears to turn to address the Servant, before turning back to the kings of the nations to press his point. Whether this was the intention of the author is unknown, but it is certainly its effect.¹¹⁰

The many are appalled at the Servant because his appearance (חֱסָרָה) is marred (קָשָׂר) to the extent that his deformities render him inhuman (חָסַר) (v. 14b); and his form beyond the children of humankind (רַחֲמוֹת חָסַר) (v. 14c). The Servant’s appearance is emphasised because this is what the kings see. The Servant’s exaltation will force them to see him in a different light, but here Yahweh confirms that the one they will see high and lifted up is the same one whose appearance was disfigured. While the words have not been used in the Servant discourses to this point, they do resonate with what the Servant knows himself to be. He has heard himself described as “deeply despised” and “abhorred” (Isa 49:7); and in Isa 43:28 Yahweh described Jacob-Israel as the one delivered to utter destruction and reviling.

¹¹⁰ The preposition is emended to read “at him”. See, for example, Westermann (1969: 259).
So Yahweh’s description of him here is nothing new to the Servant. He has come to
know himself as this disfigured victim of judgment and destruction. Those of exiled
Israel who have heard Yahweh’s discourse and who know themselves by it
understand this to be the case—as a nation they have been pummelled by the nations,
two in particular, to the point of unrecognisability—and their suffering has isolated
them among the nations. Westermann says concerning the suffering: “Grievous
suffering and, in particular, suffering that disfigures, can cut a man off from his
fellows” (1969: 259). This is the paradigm by which the suffering of Israel is best
understood. The point, however, is not the disfigurement, but what Yahweh promises
to his Servant as a consequence of his servanthood.

The language used to depict the Servant’s exaltation is obscure in
comparison. Notoriously difficult to interpret is Yahweh’s opening utterance: “So
shall he sprinkle (חָזְזָה) many nations,” (v. 15a).\footnote{The variant translation “startle” is sourced to LXX, while the vast majority of texts support the MT. Says de Waard: “Translators should therefore try to render M in spite of its notorious difficulty” (de Waard, 1997: 194).} The root חָזְזָה (to spatter or
sprinkle)\footnote{See HALOT.} has ritual connotations, with regards cleansing or consecration (see Lev
14:7, 51; 16:19; Num 19:4), but commentators are divided on how much prominence
to give this meaning.\footnote{North links the imagery to the ritual sprinkling of blood by which contagions and infections are neutralised (North, 1964: 235), while Whybray argues the connotations are forced (Whybray, 1975: 170). Likewise, Childs argues the efforts to heighten the cultic context of the passage is not actually supported by the rest of the poem (2001: 413).} However, it appears the paradigm of cultic imagery has
shaped the prophet’s thought to some extent at least, since in 53:10b the Servant’s

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112. See HALOT.

113. North links the imagery to the ritual sprinkling of blood by which contagions and infections are neutralised (North, 1964: 235), while Whybray argues the connotations are forced (Whybray, 1975: 170). Likewise, Childs argues the efforts to heighten the cultic context of the passage is not actually supported by the rest of the poem (2001: 413).
life is described as an נָסִיָּה (sin offering), which also has rich cultic connotations. More is said on this term below. While the precise meaning of the verb נָשָׂא here is obscure what is suggested by it is that the Servant will impact the nations like a spray. The “many” יָשָׂר nations is the counterpart of the many who were appalled at the Servant in v. 14a. The recognition of this is important, since these are the very nations to whom the Servant has been sent as a witness in previous discourses (see Isa 43:10, 12; 44:8; cf. 49:6e). This utterance describes how that witness is received—the nations have been appalled at the Servant, but they will marvel. The reaction of the nations to what they witness is described as the kings shutting their mouths כָּלַח עַל הָעַד (v. 15b)—another reference to speech, this time to the loss of it. The mouth represents discourse throughout Second Isaiah (Isa 45:23; 48:3; 49:2; 51:16). Their discourse is disrupted because they “see” (יָשָׂר) (v. 15c) and “understand” (בְּרֵי) (v. 15d) that which they have not been told/heard. In other words, the kings have witnessed with their own eyes, and have not relied upon the discourse of others. Here Yahweh double-voices his own discourse in Isa 49:7, in which he gave the deeply despised and abhorred Servant a vision of a future in which kings would “see” (יָשָׂר) and arise. This emphasis on seeing and understanding in the absence of being told anything is highly significant in a work in which the discourse of Yahweh to the blind and deaf Servant who refuses to see and hear and understand was so prominent (42:20; 43:8). The kings clearly grasp what

114. For the collocation of kings and nations see Isa 41:2; 45:1; 49:7, 22-23; 60:3.
the Servant struggled to comprehend, and what the exiles who remain in darkness have not yet comprehended. “Understanding” here is יָשָׁר, and its use resonates with Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant in Isa 43:10, in which the Servant heard that he had been chosen in order to know, believe and understand (יָשָׁר) that Yahweh is God. The implication is that the kings of the nations will understand this by what they see. They have not had the benefit of Yahweh’s direct word, yet they will understand nevertheless.115 In other words, there is direct continuity between the kings who see and understand and are impacted by the Servant in 52:13-15, and the “we” who confess as much in 53:1-10.116

5.4.2. The nations speak concerning the Servant

When the nations speak in 53:1-10 it is significant that what we discover about them is not their identity, or their role in society, or their belief in Yahweh, or what they

115. North makes an interesting point regarding the understanding of the nations here—that the word “understanding” may be crediting the heathen nations with too much (1964: 235), which is why he posits “become attentive to.” However, the nations demonstrate in 53:1-10 that “understanding” is precisely what the nations have come to.

116. Generally, the difficulties some scholars have with this continuity have been introduced by themselves because of rigid preconceptions concerning the identities of the Servant and the speaking “we”. For example, Childs, citing Beuken (II/B, 203ff.), says it is not the kings of the nations who are in view in v. 15c, but a new subject (Childs, 2001: 413). He suggests this because, while he recognises the continuity between 53:1 and 52:15, he does not accept that it is the nations who speak in 53:1-10. Seitz, on the other hand, argues the nations are in view in 52:15, but, since he believes the speaking “we” in the main poem are the disciples of the prophetic Servant, he is forced to establish some distance between the subjects of Yahweh’s utterance and the confessors of Isa 53. He attempts to do this by suggesting the “temporal horizons” of the two framing discourses are “flexible, yet coordinated” (2001: 463). Argues Seitz: “The first piece speaks of an ultimate recognition by the nations, and it is a recognition that nowhere takes place within the main body of the poem” (2001: 463). In other words, the “seeing” of the nations lies in the future, and is reflected in the main poem only as a potential “voice.” In 52:15 it is only eschatological or “promissory.”
look like—we discover their thoughts on the *significance* of the Servant. This is significantly dialogic, in that the speaking “we” enter the text of Second Isaiah in order to tell us something about the Servant. But all that we see of him in their discourse is what he “means” to them. The account of the Servant in Isa 53 has already been filtered through the internal discourse of the nations, which is why interpreters find it so difficult to identify him on the basis of this text. There is no image of anything the Servant has actually done. What we have access to is the dialogised form of him in the nations’ confession—a highly subjectivised account of how the nations have come to understand the Servant’s significance.

### 5.4.2.1. Yahweh’s purpose embodied in the Servant, 53:1, 10

In both 53:1 and 10 the nations claim that what they have witnessed has been according to the purpose of Yahweh, stated in v. 1b as רָ֣מַזְתֹּתָ֖י (“the arm of Yahweh”), in v. 10a with the 3ms perf. form of the root גִּנָּ֗ה (“to desire”), and in v. 10d as Yahweh’s גִּנָּ֗ה (“desire” or “will”), echoing 10a. The claim makes explicit that the Servant did not suffer arbitrarily, but according to the power and desire of God. This speaks directly to the exiles’ original complaint to the prophet that Yahweh had disregarded Israel’s way in the world, its פָּרֹוק (40:27). The nations’ realisation that the suffering of the Servant was in the plan of Yahweh seems to be the cause of the astonishment with which v. 1 begins. This note of incredulity sets the tone for the entire poem—the nations can barely believe what they are
confessing. This much is indicated by the opening rhetorical question: “Who has believed what they heard from us?” (ESV).\textsuperscript{117} As Muilenburg has pointed out, the question anticipates the answer “No-one!” (1956a: 618).\textsuperscript{118} What the nations have witnessed, and the significance they have come to attribute to it, was something they never thought possible. Yahweh alluded to this when he said that kings would shut their mouths because of him (52:15b).\textsuperscript{119}

Despite the close dialogic link between 52:15b and 53:1 commentators persist in trying to establish distance between the kings of Yahweh’s discourse and the speakers of 53:1-10.\textsuperscript{120} Generally they do so because of assumptions they have made concerning who the Servant is. Whybray, for example, for whom the Servant is the prophet, represents a common view—that the speakers are a group of the prophet’s fellow-exiles, “possibly an intimate group of his disciples, though they speak for the whole exilic community” (Whybray, 1975: 171). Clifford recognises that the nations play an important role in Second Isaiah, but as “chorus”, not as protagonist—hence the speaker in 53:1-10 is Israel: “More precisely, ‘the many’

\begin{footnotes}
\item[$\textsuperscript{117}$] וַיְנַתַּן is variously translated with “we” as the messenger, so “our report/message” (KJV/ NIV) or with “we” as the recipient of the message, “what we have heard” (RSV; cf. JPS). Since the speaker is in the act of speaking about the Servant our preference is to recognise him/them as the messenger in 53:1a.

\item[$\textsuperscript{118}$] Cf. GKC§151a.

\item[$\textsuperscript{119}$] Westermann is spot on when he points out that the transition from Yahweh’s utterance to the confession of the nations is “scarcely noticeable” (1969: 260).

\item[$\textsuperscript{120}$] Blenkinsopp represents a recent approach to the identity of the speaker: it is a disciple of the prophet, recording the prophet’s origin and appearance, the sufferings he experienced, and his heroic and silent death (2002: 349). Blenkinsopp also sees the last three Servant poems as presenting different phases in the career of a single individual.
\end{footnotes}
who, in the thanksgiving psalms, would have listened to the vindicated just person
tell his story ... By an extraordinary shift in perspective, ‘the many’ tell the story
whereas the servant is silent” (Clifford, 1984: 178). However, by Clifford’s own
argument all Israel is called to be the Servant. This poem represents a confession, a
“coming around” to the Servant’s perspective, and a moment of repentance. If Israel
was the speaker here, it would speak as the Servant, since only this would represent
true repentance for Israel. Yet here, those who speak do so in contradistinction from
the Servant—they specifically do not come to know themselves as the Servant in the
same way, for example, as the speaker of Isa 49:1-6.

There is also the view that the kings of the nations could never say what the
speaking “we” say in the poem.121 Another view is that Yahweh never speaks to the
nations, so Isa 53 could not represent the nations’ revelation.122 However, if the poem
is a work of literary imagination, crafted in the voice of the nations, but with the
intention of communicating a message to Israel, we have no problem with the poem
representing a confession of the nations. North has addressed this concern:

If it is argued that the heathen could not possibly give expression to thoughts so

121. Seitz goes further than many recent commentators in trying to accord the nations a place in the
drama of what is going on in Isa 53—but because of his interpretation of who the Servant is, does not
go far enough. He claims that the speaking “we” are the individual Servant’s disciples, but that they
are essentially anticipating the response of the nations to how Israel has impacted them: “Through
Israel the nations find a ‘voice,’ as Israel makes confession and acknowledges the sacrifice of the
servant” (Seitz, 2001: 460). Seitz’s approach suffers from trying to accommodate his own
identification of the Servant with the prophet, and ultimately the speaking “we” are forced to be the
prophet’s disciples, the exilic nation, and the gentile nations.

122. This is Beauchamp’s argument: “Et, logiquement, si une nouvelle doit être transmise, elle doit
l’être par les sujets de l’expérience que le récit formule avec des tels accents, plutôt que par les Rois et
Nations qui, rappelons-le, ne sont pas donnés comme destinataires directs des paroles de YHWH”
(Beauchamp, 1989: 336).
deep that they have no parallel in the OT, the same is equally said of the Jews. The interpretation of the Servant’s sufferings must be the Prophet’s, moved by the Holy Spirit. As such it is, in the universal setting of the passage, as appropriately voiced by the Gentiles as by Jews (North, 1964: 236).

The astonishment expressed by the nations in 53:1 concerns the reversal in the Servant’s fortunes,123 which the nations attribute to the “arm of Yahweh”. The imagery signifies the power of Yahweh, particularly his demonstrated power at times when intervention is required (see Isa 52:10; cf. Ps 98:1). In their question “To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?” (v. 1b) the kings indicate that they have seen what they have because Yahweh has revealed it to them.124 In contrast to the discourses in which the Servant is told to see and hear the new thing Yahweh is about to do, here the kings have seen even though they were not looking and were not told to do so.

The counterpart of v. 1 in the chiastic framework of the poem is the notoriously difficult v. 10.125 It concludes the discourse of the nations and brings their confession full circle with the acknowledgment that Yahweh has been involved in the Servant’s plight. This answers the nations’ “to whom has Yahweh’s arm been revealed?” question. In their claim that it was Yahweh who made the Servant sick (v. 10a) the nations effectively answer: Yahweh’s arm has been revealed to us! The will

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123. North says it is the exclamation of those who have heard the πως and say, “What we have heard is something we should have thought impossible, and yet it is true!” (North, 1964: 236).

124. The nif. form of the root הָלַג draws attention to its subject—Yahweh—and the freedom he has to reveal his arm at will.

125. For a recent and thorough treatment of the problems associated with the verse see Goldingay and Payne (2007b: 318-322).
of Yahweh in the suffering and exaltation of the Servant is emphasised by the parallel terms בֵּן (verbal root, “to desire”) and בָּא (noun, “will”) in v. 10a and d respectively. We translate <ט>מְבַשֵּׁר וְיִרְדֶּהְוּ in v. 10a with “Yet Yahweh was pleased with his crushed one whom he made sick.” This reading, which takes a
different view to modern translations which preserve the “sadistic nuance” suggested by the MT, is in line with de Waard: “The LORD approved of his oppressed servant whom he had put to grief” (de Waard, 1997: 196). The saying takes up the use of the verb “to crush” (בָּא) from v. 5. The use of בָּא provides a vivid picture of the nation’s oppression. It is possibly onomatopoeic, capturing the sound of a stone or wooden pestle crushing grain in a stone mortar (Domeris, 1997: 943). It conveys the “smashing” of body and spirit (944), and God is often, but not always, the subject of the verb. The focus in v. 5 is on the significance of the Servant’s suffering to the nations—here the focus is on the nation’s knowledge of Yahweh’s involvement in the events that have seen the Servant suffer, and the purposes behind them. It is vital that the nations acknowledge Yahweh’s involvement in the Servant’s history. Yahweh’s desire that the nations “know” him is expressed repeatedly in the oracle to

126. The syntax of the Hebrew בֵּן leads to difficulties here. GKC§74k sees בֵּן as standing for כָּל, hif. per.f 3ms of בָּא with the quiescent כ omitted after the manner of כָּל verbs. Some emend to יִרְדֶּהוּ and treat the noun adverbially, “with sickness” (as in Vg et Dominus voluit conterere eum in infirmitate, “and the Lord willed to crush him with sickness”).

127. 1QIsa reads כָּלִי, substituting the verb בָּא of the MT with כָּל, “to wound,” (piel 3ms of בָּא, with 3ms suffix). This reading links 53:10 with 53:5, where the Servant is כָּלִי “pierced for our rebellion”. So, some commentators emend to “and healed him who had made (himself a sacrifice to sin).” NEB, REB, etc, follow this.

128. He crushes the oppressor (Ps 72:4) and the wicked (Job 34:25). But he does not crush the prisoner (Lam 3:34). See discussion in Fuhs (1978), and Wolf (1980).
Cyrus (Isa 45:3, 6), and also lies behind the role of the Servant as a light to nations. Here the nations effectively testify that they recognise the links between the Servant and Yahweh.

The use of נְבֵית in v. 10a (hif. perf. 3ms, “he made [him] sick”) picks up on the use of the noun נביה, from the same root, in vv. 3 and 4, which we will look at below. It leaves us in no doubt that the Servant’s “sickness” that is depicted graphically in the main body of the poem is not a random occurrence, but is caused by Yahweh—but the purpose is not to make a propositional statement on theodicy, but to demonstrate the nations’ knowledge of Yahweh’s involvement in the Servant’s plight.

The idea that Israel’s exile represented the payment of a debt for sin is introduced in Isa 40:2. This is echoed in the clause “because if his soul makes a guilt offering” (v. 10b). We risk overloading the term מְזַחְתָּה by reading it purely in light of its Levitical use (see Lev 5:6-25, 6:10, 7:1f., 14:12-28, 19:21; cf. Num 6:12, 18:9), but the introduction of the lamb to the slaughter imagery in 53:7 leaves the connection wide open, since it is the lamb that is offered as the מְזַחְתָּה to Yahweh as compensation for sin. It is interesting that it is left to the nations to introduce this link, who recognise the Servant as their sin offering.129 This will be seen more clearly in our discussion of the main body of the nations’ confession.

129. This does not surprise Muilenburg, who points out that the idea of substitutionary sacrifice is of great antiquity and is dispersed among many nations: “What is extraordinary here is the transformation of ancient categories into the loftiest values of religion, especially the unique character of the sufferer” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 628-629).
In all his discourses to the Servant Yahweh never suggests that he is a guilt offering, and neither does the Servant when he responds. What the nations suggest here is that the Servant has compensated Yahweh not only for his own sin, but for the nations’ sin as well.\textsuperscript{130} Again, we stress that this imagery signifies dialogically—that is, the nations describe the Servant this way for the Servant’s sake, that by this discourse he would see himself in light of the significance his suffering has had on the nations of the world. Whybray argues against the idea of a man’s life being given as a guilt offering, since it has no precedent in the OT (Whybray, 1975: 179). But Whybray’s identification of the Servant as an individual prevents him from seeing that the point is the significance of the metaphor for both the nations and Israel.\textsuperscript{131}

Israel’s experience of exile takes on an entirely new perspective if the Servant sees his suffering as compensation to Yahweh for the sake of the nations. And according to the nations this was Yahweh’s will all along. We agree with Childs that the imagery does not signify an obliteration of sin, but a bearing of it (2001: 418).\textsuperscript{132}

The nations see that the Servant not only suffers as part of Yahweh’s plan, but that, as a result of his offering, his life will be extended. This is expressed with

\textsuperscript{130} North points out that the guilt offering in Lev 6:1-6 was to cover deliberate offenses such as breach of faith and robbery with extortion: “These are such crimes as the heathen may have committed and this is probably the reason for the choice of [םָּשֵׁת] here” (North, 1964: 243). This application seems to narrow the scope of the word unduly, however.

\textsuperscript{131} Goldingay’s discussion of the use of metaphor in Isa 53 is helpful (2005: 477-481). Goldingay points out that several fields of metaphors provide imagery in order to understand the language of sacrifice and suffering in Isa 53. These are sourced from: 1) Material in Isaiah itself; 2) Experiences of the prophet in Isaiah; 3) The king of Israel; 4) Spattering etc and purification rituals.

\textsuperscript{132} However, we disagree with Childs that there is no parallel between the Servant and the scapegoat, however, since the scapegoat also bears (ןָּשֵׁת) sin in Lev 16:22.
the three-part utterance: he will see offspring (גְּדָה), prolong his days (v. 10c), and the will of Yahweh will prosper in his hand (v.10d). It is difficult to see how the Servant will have prolonged life if he is an historical individual (particularly since 53:9a indicates that he dies). But if the Servant is a paradigmatic figure by which Israel is invited to recognise itself then it is possible to see how such a figure cannot be finalised. Unfinalisability is a key feature of a character that is constituted dialogically, so life after death is consistent with the Servant’s dialogic constitution. The Servant paradigm will live on even after the prophet, or the exilic generation, has died. This is consistent with the promise of offspring that has been a vital element of the Servant’s self-knowledge (see Isa 44:3). From the unique perspective of the nations in Isa 53:10 the possibility of offspring is linked to the giving of the Servant’s life as a guilt offering. This reflects Israel’s situation historically—in exile there is a very real possibility of national extinction. If the Servant had not responded to Yahweh’s discourse—that is, if at least someone of Israel had not responded to the prophet’s message—Israel-Jacob would have faced the prospect of languishing in Babylon until his national identity had been wiped from the geo-political map. Only the Servant’s acknowledgment of Yahweh’s righteous judgment, the flip-side of which was redemption at the hands of his chosen agent Cyrus, opened the way for the possibility of offspring. The prolonging of the Servant’s days echoes Isa 44:5—we have already argued with reference to that text that descendants of the Servant would continue to know themselves in light of the discourse addressed to the Servant
by Yahweh. In this way the Servant survives beyond “death”. The resurrection of
an individual does not have to be in view here to warrant the astonishment of the
nations. We agree with Muilenburg: “The great surprise of the nations reflected in
vs. 1 and 52:13 need not imply that an individual is meant; surely the elevation and
‘success’ of Israel, conceived with great elasticity and fluidity, would occasion a
similar reaction (cf. Ezek 37:1-14)” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 629).

5.4.2.2. Contempt for the Servant and his unjust treatment, 53:2-3, 7-9

The Servant’s “life story of suffering” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 619) is told in vv. 2-3,
7-9 of the nations’ confessional poem. The imagery used to describe the Servant’s
lowliness and suffering in vv. 2-9 has a narrative arc, beginning with his youth in v.
2, to his death in vv. 8-9. The heart of the poem, vv. 4-6, which is the hub of the
nations’ confession, interrupts the story briefly. We can conclude from this that the
poem’s purpose is not to document a particular period of persecution in the life of an
individual. Rather, the poem utilises the literary genre of biography to depict an
entire life of humility and suffering. It is unlikely that the biography of an actual
individual is in view—the language is too stylistic. We suggest, rather, the

133. Whybray offers a somewhat confused assessment of the resurrection imagery: “As a metaphor
of the restoration of Israel after exile this might be conceivable (cf. Ezek 37:1-14), but with reference
to an individual it is totally foreign to the Judaism of the sixth century BC” (Whybray, 1975: 171).
Whybray does not allow this to inform his identification of the Servant, however, since he maintains
the Servant is an individual.

134. Von Rad recognises this when he says that the author of Isa 53 does not “spare words in
describing the depth of [the Servant’s] suffering” (Von Rad, 1965: 257). The images do not depict a
literal event, and as metaphors they are characteristically imprecise, full of force and emotion, and
allow for a certain “vagueness” (258).
individual Servant is a metaphor for a nation that has been formed in open view of the mighty nations of the world, who have witnessed not only its formative years, in which it stumbled like a toddler into nationhood, but also its troubled mid-life and then, more recently, its death at the hands of the Assyrians and the Babylonians.\footnote{135}{The opposite view to that outlined here is also argued by some. Childs, who argues the figure portrayed appears to be “in every way” an historical figure, says: “The language cannot be rendered metaphorically as the nation without straining the plain sense of the text in a tortuous fashion” (Childs, 2001: 414). To claim that the text has a “plain sense” is to deny decades, if not centuries, of scholarship that has failed to reach a consensus on its meaning. It has a plain sense only in a monologic reading strategy. Childs even admits in the same paragraph: “Increasingly the language takes on a flavour that transcends a simple historical description, and begins to resonate with the typical idiom of the innocent suffering one of the Psalter.”} We have in Isa 53 an account of Israel from Exodus to Exile and beyond—or, to reflect the language of Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant, from formation to redemption. The images of intense suffering describe the nation’s exilic years with language that evokes the nation’s bondage in Egypt.\footnote{136}{“Like other prophets before him . . . , Second Isaiah thought of the afflictions of his people as a renewed Egyptian bondage and wilderness wandering” (Bright, 2000: 356).} Says Muilenburg: “If the servant is understood collectively as corporate personality, as the Israelite indeed who is the true Israel from beginning to end, then the description can be taken in part, at least, as her historical existence as the nations observed it, and indeed as Israel herself experienced it” (Muilenburg, 1956a: 620).

The key to unlocking the meaning of this section of the poem is to bear in mind how it fits within the overall constitution of the Servant in Second Isaiah. As a discourse that outlines how one group of people has come to see someone else in a different light, it contributes a particular type of knowledge to the Servant’s
understanding of himself. In life, the realisation that we have impacted others shapes what we say to ourselves about ourselves, as well as what we say to ourselves about them. This is what occurs in this section of the poem—the Servant, in the discourse of the nations, discovers how he has impacted them. And their take on how the Servant has impacted them is unique, since they occupy a unique semantic place in the discourse. In other words, the nations’ confession provides the Servant with a knowledge of himself that he could obtain no other way—since no-one can know how they have impacted others unless they tell them.

Our reading of this section of the poem is shaped by this awareness. For one thing, it reminds us that we are not reading a list of theological propositions, but the uniquely dialogic perspective of a group of people that have been touched by the Servant in a particular way. For example, the description of the Servant as a “young plant” (לֵיהָ, lit. “sucking one”) “root in dry ground” (רָעַג בַּגָּד הִתָּר) (v. 2ab) says as much about the nations as it does about the Servant—the imagery signifies the Servant’s insignificance to those observing him.137 To the kings of the nations he began as a tender shrub struggling for nutrition.138 In the corresponding imagery in v. 2cd the roots ḥaṣá (to see) and ḥebra (to take pleasure) are used to emphasise this: the Servant had no majesty to look at, and no beauty to desire. The first image echoes the utterance of Yahweh concerning the seeing of the kings (Isa 49:7; 52:15c). The

137. The imagery of the plant might be an allusion to the “shoot” and “branch” (שָׁפְלוֹ) of 11:1, and the “root” (שָׁפְלוֹ) of 11:10.

138. See Ezek 16:4-7 for parallel imagery depicting the lowliness of Israel’s beginnings.
nations’ statement that there was nothing to look at highlights the before-and-after aspect of Yahweh’s original claim: it is the one who is despised who will make the kings see (cf. 49:7). The words echo Yahweh in a more obvious sense as well: Yahweh also spoke of the Servant’s הָאֹרֶץ (“form”) and his יִרְאוֹת, (“beauty”/“appearance”), in 52:14; cf. 53:2c, d. In echoing Yahweh so explicitly the speakers associate themselves with the “many” (םַלְדֹּת) who were appalled at the Servant. The significance of this to the Servant is that he does not merely hear Yahweh’s utterance of how others have perceived him; he hears it from the “many” themselves.

The explanation, or justification, for why the nations did not esteem the Servant, continues into v. 3. The Servant was “despised and rejected by men” (v. 3a). We encountered the word “despised” (הָעֵד) in Yahweh’s brief discourse in Isa 49:7. In echoing it here the nations make an association between the Servant who is in view in 49:7, and the Servant who is in view in Isa 53. They also give a dialogic dimension to a description of the Servant that, in 49:7, was yet monologic. The Servant had not heard himself described as such previously, though it resonated with elements of Yahweh’s discourse to the Servant in chapters 40-48. In 49:7cd the Servant was said to be both despised, and abhorred (רָעַע) by the nation. Here he is despised and “abandoned” (לֹא יָדֹע, see HALOT) by men (people). The root יָדֹע describes cessation, or the giving up of something. It evokes transience. Here the adjective as applied to the Servant denotes him as having been given up on.139 Again,

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139. The same sense of abandonment is reflected by the character Job, in Job 19:14: “My relatives
the description emphasises the Servant’s lowly state, but not in an objective sense. These are relative terms, and here they serve a dialogic purpose. Their emphasis is on how the Servant is perceived, and here the point is that the Servant was perceived to be unworthy of retaining.

The translation “man of sorrows” for אָבֶל נַפֶּשׁ (KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, JPS (“man of suffering”), NJB, ESV), in v. 3b, skews the reading of this section of the discourse: it results in an individualistic interpretation of the Servant figure, and pictures his suffering as more psychological than physical. נַפֶּשׁ is from the root נָפֶל, “to be in pain” (qal) or “to cause pain” or “to ruin” (hif.).140 The plural noun here and in 53:4b is perhaps better translated “pains”, while אָבֶל is more accurately translated “full of pain”, with the plural intensifying the imagery.141 The Servant also knows “sickness” (יִלְּוָד, v. 3b). יִלְּוָד is variously translated “grief” (KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, ESV), “suffering” (NIV, NJB), “disease” (JPS, REB) and “infirmity” (NRSV). Like נַפֶּשׁ it is repeated in v. 4. יִלְּוָד derives from the root לָו, meaning “to be sick or weak” (qal) or “to make sick” (hif.). “Sickness” or even “disease” (JPS, REB), more accurately translates יִלְּוָד, which, like its English equivalent, connotes the physical, emotional and psychological weakness that comes with sickness.

140. See Fretheim (1997: 575)
141. For abstract plurals see GKC§124a; see also HALOT (579).
Some external links may shed light on how the Servant is being perceived by this imagery. In Isa 1, which some commentators see as having been crafted to read as introduction to the final form of Isaiah,142 Yahweh tells Israel “your whole head is sick” (ים כף לְפָנָיָם) (v. 5c).143 In Isa 17:11 the day of judgment upon Jacob is described as a “day of disease and incurable pain” (יָמָוָה מֵשֶׁכֶּה לְפָנָיָם), combining both terms that occur in 53:3b. In Isa 33:24 a day of restoration and forgiveness is described as a time when no inhabitant of Zion will say “I am sick” (יִהְיֶהָוֹן). And Hezekiah, too, suffers a sickness (Isa 38:9) that parallels the sickness of the city. In this paradigmatic tale, both Hezekiah and the city only find relief from “sickness” when they turn back to Yahweh.144 The point is that “sickness” and “pain” appropriately describe the suffering of the nation as much as that of any individual within it.145 Overwhelmingly, the imagery relates to the judgment of Israel throughout the book of Isaiah. Outside of Isaiah these key terms are consonant also

142. See, e.g., Dumbrell (1985); see also Clements (1982: 117-118).

143. The translators of the LXX apparently recognised the links between the Servant and the nation as it is depicted in Isa 1. They matched πάθημα (“pains”) in Isa 53:3 with ἐν πάθημα ὄν (“being in a blow/plague”). πάθημα is used three times in Isa 53, and is also used to match ἔρπος (“wound”) in Isa 1:6. Although ἐρπός is from a different root (ἐρπω) to ἔρπος (ἐρπω), it has the same beginning letters, as noted by Ekblad (1999: 217). This might seem a tenuous link, but in light of the other linguistic echoes Ekblad is right to draw attention to it, especially since the LXX does match ἔρπος (“stricken”, which is from the root ἐρπω) with πάθημα in Isa 53:4. It is also interesting that the LXX matches ἔρπος (“stricken”) in 53:4 with εἶναι ἐν πόνῳ (“to be in pain”). It uses πόνον (“pained”) to match ἔρπος (“sick” or “injured”) in Isa 1:6. Ekblad concludes that in its interpretation of Isa 1 the LXX identifies the suffering Servant with “the sin and pain of God’s people” (217).

144. Hoffer says that in Isaiah the motifs of sickness and injury are “an impelling theme”, and she interprets them as metaphors for judgment and redemption (Hoffer, 1992: 75).

145. That Israel knows of the association between judgment and sickness is demonstrated by the number of references to יִהְיֶהָוֹן in Deuteronomy. For example, Deut 28:59 and 61 refer to the יִהְיֶהָוֹן that Yahweh will bring upon the people should they fail to follow his law.
with the nation’s suffering under Egyptian rule. The description of the Servant as “sick” or “full of pain” is consistent with what the Servant has come to know of himself and his former state, which he has come to accept as a result of Yahweh’s actions (Isa 43:28). It should not be taken for granted that these descriptions of the Servant’s lowly state refer to an individual, since within Isaiah these words are rarely ascribed to an individual. Again, the key is to reimagine how the Servant understands these terms. We imagine that the Servant is intended to overhear this discourse in much the same way as he was intended to overhear the Cyrus oracle. If this is the case, these descriptions resonate more with his understanding of the nation’s judgment than any personal, individual suffering, which has not featured as an element of the Servant’s discourse, and is unlikely to have been introduced arbitrarily here. With regards the imagery of suffering in 50:6 we argued that the nation’s suffering was in view, not that of an individual prophet.

The phrase יִבְּשָׁמָה בְּנֵחַ מִפְּנֵי יָם in v. 3c (“And as one hiding his face from us,” JPS) is obscure. The major translations view the subject of the clause as those

146. The word בְּנֵחַ is consonant with Israel’s suffering under Egypt, which is paradigmatic of the Servant’s suffering in Babylon. In Exod 3:7 Yahweh says to Moses that he knows his people’s בְּנֵחַ.  

147. An aspect of Hebrew theology challenged the prevailing view that sickness was demonic in origin. Harrison says, “They adhered to the Mosaic teachings, which ascribed sickness and health alike to the activities of the one true God” (Harrison, 1997: 141). Yahweh can be the one who hears the sufferer’s lament (as in Isa 38:3), or the one who inflicts the curse, as he appears to be in Isa 53 (see Seybold, 1980: 404; Stolz, 1997: 427).  

148. Westermann links the language here with the Psalms, particularly Ps 22:7, 25 and 119, and makes the following valid point: “This close affinity with the language of the psalms has one important consequence. We cannot look for the various statements made in v. 3 to furnish us with an exact and literal description of the Servant’s suffering. What we have is the same stereotyped way of speaking about suffering in general terms as is used in the psalms by those who bring their suffering to God in lament” (Westermann, 1969: 262).
hiding their faces (from the Servant). However, JPS is the more natural, since the masc. sing. noun נפשו suggests that the Servant and not “others” are the subject of the clause. The complication is the Servant discourse in Isa 50:6, where the Servant proclaims that he did not hide (הנה) his face from disgrace and spitting. On this basis, Duhm argued the MT of 53:3c required further emendations: “Aber das würde einen falschen und unwahrscheinlichen Zug in das Bild bringen, auch wohl ונו und Streichung von ו erfordern” (Duhm, 1892: 368). The proposal that נפשו should be read as the hif. part., with IQIsa, results in ונפשו ונהו ונפי, “like one before whom the face should be veiled.” This fits with Duhm’s view that the imagery refers to being horrified at the sight rather than the proximity of the abhorred one. However, it is possible to interpret this clause with the Servant as subject, and also hold it in dialogic tension with 50:6. Indeed, this is preferred. We concede that 53:3c, with the Servant as subject, seems to contradict what the Servant himself says in 50:6. But this is precisely the point. The nations, before their revelation, have misunderstood the Servant. While he proclaims that he did not hide his face from his persecutors, they claim that he did. The astonishing reversal that the nations experience is emphasised by this contradiction of what the Servant himself has testified. Another element comes into play here as well—by contradicting the Servant, the nations actively associate with those who have beaten the Servant in Isa 50:6, since in 53:3c they claim he turned his face from “us”. If this clause is harmonised with 50:6 both

149. KJV, ASV, RSV, NASB, NIV, REB, NRSV, NJB, ESV.
the reversal of the nations, and their association with those who have stood against
the Servant, are flattened out. This is a prime example of where a dialogic reading of
apparently contradictory utterances resists the harmonising tendencies of a
monologic reading, and aids interpretation.

The repetition of הָעֲבִזֹּת ("despised") in v. 3d creates an inclusio with v. 3a.
More importantly it introduces the confession that the ones who rejected and
despised the Servant in v. 3a are actually the “we” of the confession: “we held him in
no regard” (v. 3d). The confessional aspect of the discourse gathers force from this
point, as the speaker brings his fellow confessors into view. This is the real purpose
of the discourse, to confess how their regard for the Servant was reversed—from
being of no significance at all, the Servant became highly significant. The inclusio
also emphasises the dialogic links of this discourse with Yahweh’s discourse in Isa
49:7. The voice of those speaking becomes synonymous with those of the “nation”
who Yahweh says despise the Servant, and yet who will see.

The imagery of the Servant’s suffering is intensified in the second half of the
poem,150 where the biographical device narrows in on the Servant’s latter years,
including those of his apparent death. In v. 7 the discourse returns to a more
objective description of the Servant’s suffering, following the very subjective nature

150. Westermann makes a good point on the differing nature of suffering. V. 3 referred to suffering
such as sickness. V. 7f. refers to suffering that is inflicted by others (Westermann, 1969: 264). It
represents both illness and persecution: “This shows that Isa 53, too, portrays the Suffering Servant as
the typical sufferer in terms of the two basic modes of suffering as given by tradition. There is
therefore no reason for taking either the one (illness, e.g. leprosy) or the other (violence or conviction)
as a literal, true to life description” (1969: 265).
of the central passage, vv. 4-6, which we look at in more detail below.

The opening images of v. 7a—the Servant was oppressed (כְנֵה) and afflicted (הֹנֵא)—suggest the oppression of captivity, though the verb כְנֵה can refer to any form of oppression.\(^{151}\) Certainly the people’s time in exile is seen as a time of oppression (Isa 14:2, 4), and the Servant knows himself as one who has suffered captivity (Isa 42:7, 22; 49:9). The use of הֹנֵא emphasises the unusual phenomenon that the Servant was able to remain silent in the face of such oppression. The lexical group associated with the root reflects “fear and a sense of impending death” and “arises from the darkness of human experience, the shadow side of life” (Gerstenberger, 2001: 235).\(^{152}\) The Servant’s silence in the face of this has clearly impressed itself upon the speakers, since the parallel images of the Servant not opening (כָכַפ) “his mouth” (כָפ), i.e remaining silent, in v. 7b, e, frame the description of his suffering. The Servant’s silent acceptance of his persecution is consistent with the sense of the Servant’s discourse in Isa 50:4-9, particularly the idea that Yahweh’s vindication has enabled the Servant to face persecution. It also loosely alludes to the discourse of 42:1-9, in particular Yahweh’s utterance that the Servant would not cry aloud (כֶּנֶה)

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151. Alone, the root כְנֵה connotes “the exertion of cruel and dehumanising pressure on another person by forced labour, tribute, or repayment of debt” (Swart, & Nel, 1997: 27). See also Coppes (1980a: 553), who says the root connotes “the exertion of demanding oppressive pressure for payment or labour.”

152. Gerstenburger (2001) notes that the root הֹנֵא is often used in liturgical texts and suggests its use in Second Isaiah (Isa 41:17; 49:13; 51:21; 53:4, 7; 54:11) indicates these texts are liturgical in origin. While we do not necessarily agree with this, his point supports the argument of this thesis, which is that the language of the Servant discourses is chosen specifically because it is embedded in the nation’s story, and by its use the nation is called to associate with the Servant. See also Martin-Achard (1997).
or lift up his voice. In our discussion of that discourse we drew attention to the nature of קֶשׁ as a cry for help, the absence of which is alluded to here. Indeed, the Servant is silent like a lamb (גוֹלַע)/like a ewe (גָּעַד) (v. 7cd).153 That the Servant’s silence has been alluded to in three separate discourses suggests itself as an important aspect of his self-knowledge. If the Servant is a paradigm by which Israel is called to understand itself, then the Servant’s silence becomes a blueprint for how the nation should respond. Or perhaps this is how Israel did respond to the exile—in silent acceptance—and the nations’ testimony concerning the Servant draws for Israel a picture of how its response has/will impact the nations.

The language of persecution is more explicit in v. 8, particularly in 8a: By oppression (דָּרַשׁ) and by judgment (שְׁפֵ החַן) he was taken away (וָכַף).155 The use of the nouns שָׁלָל and שָׁפְעַה is consistent with what the Servant knows about himself from Yahweh’s discourse, so there is no need to dwell on the complexities and textual problems of this section of the poem.156 To be taken (וַחֲלָל, qal pass. perf. 3ms)

153. The choice of words other than בָּשׁ to depict the sheep going to slaughter avoids an association with how the nations depict themselves as sheep going astray in v. 6, drawing a firm distinction between the Servant and the nations.

154. While the precise meaning of the phrase נַעַר מָשָׁא אַלּוֹ פָּאָה is obscure, the noun פָּאָה is relatively straightforward. The basic meaning of the root פָּאָה is “to hold back” (Wright, & Milgrom, 2001: 310), and in Isa 53:8 could mean imprisonment. The paralleling of פָּאָה with שְׁפֵ החַן suggests either distress/opposition, or captivity/imprisonment. See also Konkel (1997).

155. North’s three options for translating this phrase are still debated in the commentaries, and they are worth noting here for background: i) “From imprisonment (custody, arrest) and from judgment” (judicial sentence); 2) “By reason of an oppressive sentence” (lit. “oppression and sentence”—hendiadys); iii) “Without hindrance and without sentence”, i.e. no one attempted to secure a fair trial for him (North, 1964: 241).

156. Commentators offer various solutions to the problem of interpretation here, but Westermann’s comment is apt: “In whatever way they are taken, the words speak of violent action by others against
(by oppression) appropriately describes the Servant’s forcible removal from the land and his exile into Babylon.\(^{157}\) That the Servant was oppressed ( Isa 42:22-25; 43:28; 50:6) is nowhere disputed. The use of הֶבֶל here is an interesting choice. The word is a loaded one in Second Isaiah. The prophet echoed Israel’s complaint regarding Yahweh’s neglect of its הֶבֶל in Isa 40:27, and this provided the basis for Yahweh’s disputational discourses to the Servant in chapters 40-48.\(^ {158}\) In the Servant discourse of Isa 42:1-9 the Servant discovered that not only had Yahweh not neglected his הֶבֶל, but he was preparing the Servant to bring his הֶבֶל to the nations. We know the Servant took this to heart, because in the first discourse in which the Servant speaks he acknowledges that his הֶבֶל is with Yahweh (49:4c), signifying a different attitude to that of Israel in 40:27. That the Servant was taken away to exile “by judgment” (מְפַגּוֹת) is something the Servant, before hearing and accepting the discourse of Yahweh, likely would have refuted. But he is now ready to acknowledge this—that his being taken forcibly away from the land of Judah was not a sign that Israel was being neglected, but was indeed at the heart of Yahweh’s intended הֶבֶל for Israel, and for the nations.

The Hebrew of v. 8bc is obscure. But the general sense—“And as for his

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the Servant within the context of a court of law” (Westermann, 1969: 265).

157. The passive qal of הָנִּיטְנָה is used also of the people being taken into exile in Isa 52:5.

158. See discussion p. 115f.
generation (רָזָא), \(^{159}\) who paid attention when it was cut off (רָזְג) \(^{160}\) from the land of the living?”—is consistent, again, with what the Servant has accepted as his story and his identity. We have argued that the Servant discourses have challenged a perceived belief among the exiles that the people of Yahweh had come to an end—the discourses established an unbroken line from Abraham into the present by which the Servant was meant to know himself as an heir to the patriarchal promises. This came to the fore in the great salvation discourses, Isa 42:18-43:7 and 43:8-44:8, in which the destruction of Israel-Jacob at the hands of Yahweh’s instruments of wrath was set in the larger context of Yahweh’s assurances of salvation. These assurances were couched in creation imagery that emphasised Yahweh’s creative redemption.

We cite Westermann again on the nature of these discourses:

> What here decides a religion’s title and claim is neither its spiritual or ethical or religious value, nor its enlightenment or high cultural level; instead, it is continuity in history and this alone, the power of a faith to throw a bridge over a chasm torn open by the downfall of a nation (Westermann, 1969: 122).

It is this chasm in Israel’s history that the nations have witnessed and report in 53:8. Adds Westermann, again a quote that we have already used: “This, however, requires witnesses to testify to it, that is, those who confess the divinity of the god in question” (1969: 122). We read the verb רָזְג, “cut off” (3ms nif.), to predicate “his

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159. There is much variety on the interpretation of רָזָא among commentators. Westermann cites Köhler, Elliger and others who translate “and as for the men of his time”, although he says this “does not run very easily” (1969: 265). But we believe this is an appropriate translation.

160. “Cut off” translates the nif. perf. form of the root רָזְג. The application of רָזְג is fairly broad, but it always connotes separation. Smith says that like its synonym בָּשֵׂךְ the root has the basic meaning “to sever”: “When followed by the preposition [נַע] it connotes a violent severance from a former way of life” (Smith, 1980: 158). See also Görg (1975) and Carpenter and Nicole (1997).
generation” in 8b.\textsuperscript{161} It describes the generation that went into exile, and which was effectively cut off from the living.

The purpose of Isa 53 is not to describe objectively the Servant’s suffering, but to confess its significance to those who speak, the nations. This is emphasised in v. 8d, where the nations confess that it was for the “transgression” (אָרֵץ) of “my people” (אָדָם) that he/it was given a “blow” (אֲבָדָק).\textsuperscript{162} There is a strong case to be made that the recipient of the blow is the “generation” rather than the Servant. There is no need to force this interpretation however, since the Servant is associated with the exilic group, in our view. Here the emphasis is on the nations’ admission that the “blow” was endured by the Servant for the “transgression” of “my people”. The idea that the Servant’s suffering was somehow “vicarious” will be dealt with in our discussion of v. 5 below. “My people” (אָדָם) is problematic, since to this point the discourse has been voiced in the plural “we”.\textsuperscript{163} Several variants are proposed by commentators—emending to נַעֲשֶׂה, “our transgressions”, or even removing the

\textsuperscript{161} Worth considering is the phrase in Lev 16:22, יִשָּׂאָה נֵן, the “land of isolation,” to which the goat bearing the iniquities (נֵן) of the people on the Day of Atonement is sent. יִשָּׂאָה is from the root יָשָׂא and נֵן is literally “cut-off land” (Blenkinsopp, 2002: 351). The prophet perhaps intends for the ceremony to have a dialogic bearing on the imagery of the Servant’s suffering, again, radically reworking the theology of the exiles’ state. As the goat is sent into isolation so that the sins of the people can have no influence on the community, so the Servant is sent to Babylon in isolation from the nations.

\textsuperscript{162} The MT’s נֵן לִפְנֵי is problematic, and very few translations follow it, despite textual support. The corrected text of 1QIsa\textsuperscript{a} reads נֵן לִפְנֵי (“afflicted for them/him”). The reading of the LXX εἰς θέαντον, “he was led to death,” presupposes a Hebrew Vorlage, גָּנִית נָשִּׁים, “stricken to death.”

\textsuperscript{163} 1QIsa\textsuperscript{a} corrected text reads נַעֲשֶׂה (“his people”) for נֵן. This affects interpretation significantly.
The sudden introduction of the first person address is consistent with a number of oddities that we have seen in the Servant discourses, e.g., Yahweh’s sudden address to the second person singular “you” in 52:14, and the reference to the singular “nation” in 49:7. In our view the utterance highlights the emergence of a singular voice at this point in the discourse that heightens the tone of personal repentance that dominates the second half of the poem. It also reflects the emergence of a singular voice in the Servant discourses of Isa 49 and 50. In our view it represents the defining of the speakers’ self-knowledge, a moment when the generalised “we” is willing to be seen as a specific “I”.

Despite widespread debate concerning whether or not the Servant died, the opening imagery of v. 9 is fairly explicit: They set his grave (יָדוּ) among the wicked (יָדוּ). In our view it is consistent with what we have come to know of the Servant to say that he died and was buried—after all, the Servant as a self-conscious “I” has emerged from among the generation that was cut off by Yahweh and sent into exile. As North notes, since a person would normally be buried with

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164. Melugin tentatively proposes that the voice of Yahweh enters the discourse at this point, since יָדוּ usually refers to Yahweh’s people in Isaiah (Melugin, 1976: 168). If Melugin is right this would reflect the Servant’s actions on behalf of both the nations and the rest of Israel.

165. Westermann argues that since the Servant is said to have been buried with malefactors and miscreants this verse indicates an individual is in view (1969: 266). Westermann is happy to discuss the metaphorical nature of the language in other sections of the poem, but apparently not here. But the language is creative imagery, and it is not beyond the style of the poem for the death of Israel to be personified in this way, particularly considering the rich personification of the Servant Israel-Jacob in the discourses.
their fathers, “to be denied such a burial was a calamity” (North, 1964: 241). The Servant was meant to dwell in the land of his fathers, the land of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Instead, he was buried in a foreign land, with not only the wicked, but also with the rich (םותב) “in his death” (םותב, lit. “in his deaths”, MT) v. 9b. has both positive and negative connotations in the OT, but as it parallels the “wicked” of v. 9a it has negative connotations here. This is confirmed by the imagery of the next two lines, the first of which, “he had done no violence” (לא רעה) is the counterpart of “the wicked” (v. 9a) it has negative connotations here. This is confirmed by the imagery of the next two lines, the first of which, “he had done no violence” (לא רעה) is the counterpart of “the wicked” (see Ps 11:5; Prov 10:6, 11; cf. Ps 17:9; Prov 21:7), and the second, “there was no deceit in his mouth” (לא רעה), the counterpart of “rich” (see Mic 6:12, Jer 5:27).167

The problem that causes consternation among commentators is that here it reads as if the Servant has done no wrong, while elsewhere Second Isaiah says that the people have fully deserved their judgment (e.g. 42:24; 43:27-28). This is one of the principal reasons for identifying the Servant of Isa 53 as someone other than Israel. When we approach this poem monologically it is difficult to see how the Servant could be both the guilty nation and an innocent victim of oppression.168

166. 1QIsa reads תומת, “his tumulus.” The vast majority of modern translations follow the Qumran text: “They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich” (NRSV). This reading is to be preferred, and the parallelism is appropriate.

167. The Mic 6:12 reference is particularly helpful in identifying the source of this imagery. Because of the rich who are full of violence (תומתה) and the inhabitants (of Jerusalem) who speak lies (רהט, which shares the same root as ראת “deceit”) Yahweh declares, in Mic 6:13, he will make the city, representing the people, “sick” (תומת, see Isa 53:3, 5, 10) and he will “strike” it (כהב, see Isa 50:6, 53:6), making it “desolate” (תומת, see Isa 49:8 and 52:14) because of its “sins” (תעות, see Isa 43:24, 25; 44:22).

168. Orlinsky’s view is typical of this approach: “But there is no way of getting around the
However, this issue is one that benefits from a dialogic reading strategy, which, unlike a monologic approach that seeks to harmonise competing voices, is able to hear those voices in dialogue or, as in this case, as a quarrel. Because a polyphonic hero is constituted by several lines of intersecting discourse, he is able to embody a number of apparently contradictory points of view simultaneously. We pointed out in our introduction to Bakhtin’s thought that dialogic truth is embodied truth, truth that is fixed to the person who utters it. Dialogic truth is not comprised of universal “truths”, but of unrepeatable utterances that contribute to a dialogic whole. We have demonstrated how the Servant has been constituted dialogically, that is, by the utterances of several speakers—Yahweh, the prophet, the Servant himself, and, in Isa 53, the nations. Each speaker views the Servant differently, from their own perspective and for their own purposes. The Servant’s knowledge of who he is comprises all of them, even those that dispute another. For example, the Servant knows that he is blind and deaf, but is also a witness. He is a threshing sledge that will raze mountains, but will not extinguish a faintly burning wick. He has wearied Yahweh, but is loved and honoured by him. In other words, the presence of competing voices is not the problem it is often perceived to be. Each voice contributes to the grand ensemble by which we come to know the Servant, Israel-Jacob. On the issue of the nation’s guilt or innocence the Servant embodies no less straightforward statement (v. 9), . . . ‘Although he had done nothing lawless/And there was no deceit in his mouth,’ in contrast to which the servant had previously been considered punished for his own sins rather than in consequence of the sins of others . . . The writer of Isa 40-66 was under no such delusions about his people” (Orlinsky, 1977: 21).
than three competing points of view simultaneously: he is culpable for his punishment (42:24; 43:27-28); his sins have been blotted out like a cloud (44:22); he suffered even though he had done no violence and had not lied (53:9). We could also include the point of view that the people’s strife is payment for their sin and, having paid it, they are now pardoned (Isa 40:2). The question that needs to be asked in each case is not, Who is the Servant? but, How does the Servant hear this utterance? In the case of Isa 53:9, our suggestion is that the Servant who knows himself to be both culpable and forgiven, is afforded the opportunity to see his judgment a third way—through the eyes of the nations, for whom the Servant was punished for their sin, not his own. This is not a generalised “truth”. The Servant is not innocent—he knows that. But in the eyes of the nations he was innocent, because through some astonishing reversal in their appreciation of their own culpability, he was punished for their wrongdoing. In their astonishing confession, they have eyes only for their own culpability, and in view of their own guilt see the Servant as having suffered unjustly (v. 9cd) and, even more astonishingly, for their sake (v. 8d). The Servant who hears this is called to see himself in light of it—not as an innocent who must appeal wrongful conviction—but as an equally guilty party whose punishment, nevertheless, has been received by the nations as a light upon their own culpability. In the confession of the nations the Servant is afforded a glimpse of how Yahweh has used the Servant’s suffering in a creatively redemptive way to reach the nations and convict them of their own sin. By this Israel-Jacob is invited to see its exilic sufferings in a redemptive way—the exile was not merely the punishment for the
sins of a previous generation, but the means of taking Yahweh’s salvation to the ends of the earth (49:6f).

5.4.2.3. The significance of the Servant’s suffering, 53:4-6

The heart of the poem also features its most staggeringly confessional language. The central section, vv. 4-6, forms the core of the poem structurally, emotionally, and dialogically, the latter because this is where the purpose of the discourse, as a confession of the nations concerning the Servant’s significance to them, is expounded.

The opening line of v. 4, “Surely he has borne our sicknesses (יִלּוּדָי) and carried our pains (יִפְלֹקָה)…” is striking. In the echoing of יִלּוּדָי and יִפְלֹקָה from v. 3 something highly significant takes place in the discourse. In v. 3 the יִלּוּדָי and the יִפְלֹקָה of the Servant were objective elements of his suffering—monologic descriptions of a suffering figure who, as is made explicit, was of no account to those who saw his suffering. Here those elements take on new significance as the speakers bring them wholly within their own dialogic purview. The יִלּוּדָי and the יִפְלֹקָה of the Servant become יִלּוּדָי (“our sickness”) and יִפְלֹקָה (“our pains”).169 This is the great reversal, or the inversion, of the poem.170 All the themes of the poem pivot on this

169. Muilenburg points out how radical this utterance is in light of Israelite and ancient Near Eastern theology, which says suffering is due to sin (see Deuteronomic theology and the wisdom theology of Job’s friends) (1956a: 622). The reversal here is that while the suffering is deserved, it is deserved by those making the confession.

170. North highlights the repetitions and “poetic inversions” that highlight the repentance (1964:
section. We see the Servant’s suffering through someone else’s eyes. It is refracted in the significance it has upon the nations who speak. The nations do not objectivise the Servant or his experiences—they engage with them, reflect upon what the Servant and his suffering means to them; they interpret the Servant’s suffering in light of their own internal discourse, a discourse that leads them to the threshold of a new discovery—that the Servant did not suffer for his own sake, but for theirs.\footnote{171} How they got to this point we are not told.\footnote{172} But they have begun a dialogue with the Servant himself, and what we “see” and “hear” is not a system of thought or a set of theological principles, but the internal discourse of the nations. We are not given “Isaianic theology” or a new doctrine on salvation. We overhear a confession.

The content of this confession is that “we regarded him struck, smitten by God and afflicted” (v. 4cd). “Struck” is from the root ògn.\footnote{173} In v. 8 the Servant’s “blow” (òqng) is reinterpreted, as having taken place “for the transgression of my people” (מַחְשָׁפְתֵּנִי רָעָם). “Smitten” is from the root nêh.\footnote{174} It is used in 50:6 in the

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\footnote{171}{The poem’s great reversal is not the Servant’s exaltation but the realisation of the speaking “we” of the significance of the Servant’s suffering. Says Goldingay: “Over against the first and last, however, here the positive lies not in a reversal of the servant’s own experience, from humiliation to triumph, but in a reversal of the speakers’ understanding. Yet perhaps these are one and the same” (Goldingay, 2005: 471).}

\footnote{172}{We agree with Reventlow: “This was a liberating event without a model . . . The ‘we’ had to use metaphors to paint its likeness in the picture of sickness” (Reventlow, 1998: 28).}

\footnote{173}{òqng literally means “touched”, or, more figuratively, “touched violently, struck, or afflicted” (HALOT). See also Schwienhorst (1996: 205-207). Used figuratively, as it is in Isa 53:4, òqng can denote an affliction or disease sent by Yahweh. See also Coppes (1980b), Delcor (1997), and Grisanti (1997).}

\footnote{174}{Conrad notes that “only rarely are individuals ‘struck’ by God” (Conrad, 1996: 421). The possibility that Yahweh could strike Israel the same way that he struck Egypt is reflected in the curses}
Servant’s discourse on his suffering: “Those who strike” (מַעֲשֶׂה). “Afflicted” is from the root נָשָׁה. A different participle form is used in v. 7. Elsewhere the root is used to describe the humiliation of Egyptian oppression (Exod 1:11, 12; Deut 26:6).

In v. 4 the nations suggest that the Servant’s affliction was punishment by God—though it is not stated, the inference is that he was punished for his own sake. The great reversal comes in v. 5, when the nations confess that it was not for his own sake that he suffered, but for theirs. Their astonishing realisation is conveyed in four clauses, two parallel couplets, each emphasising two separate but related dimensions of the Servant’s significance to the nations. The first couplet emphasises that the Servant suffered for “our” sins; the second that his punishment was for “our” peace.

The Servant was wounded (מַעֲשֶׂה) for our transgressions (אוֹשֶׁחַ) (53:5a). The pol. part. form of the verb מַעֲשֶׂה echoes its use in Isa 43:28a, where Yahweh declared his role in the destruction of Jacob-Israel: “I profaned (מַעֲשֶׂה) the princes of the

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175. The verb is used throughout First Isaiah to denote the judgment of Yahweh upon his people (see, e.g., Isa 1:5a; 5:25b; 9:13a; 10:20). Yahweh’s striking is not reserved for Israel (see, e.g., Isa 10:26; 11:15; 27:7), but its use here is certainly consistent with how Israel views its divine punishment. The root is prominent in Deut 28 (22, 27, 28, 35, 59, 61) to denote Yahweh’s punishment for disobedience, and this is the likely source of the imagery.

176. We have already broached the difficulties of the apparent contradictions between the point of view of the nations and the general thrust of Second Isaiah in the previous section.

177. The root מַעֲשֶׂה is translated “pierce” or “wound” by the major translations. The root appears throughout the entire range of Semitic languages, always with the meaning “hollow out” or “pierce” (Dommershausen, 1980: 417). Its use in Isa 51:9 refers to the fatal wounding of the מַעֲשֵׂה, the mythical sea dragon. See also Long (1997) and Wiseman (1980).
sanctuary.” The noun אַרְבּוֹן is rarely used of anyone other than Israel in Isaiah, which would suggest it cannot be anyone other than Israel speaking here. However, in Isa 24:20 the rebellions (ארבון) of the earth cause it to swagger like a drunkard—so the word is not exclusive to Israel. But the inference is that in using a word of themselves that is generally linked to Israel, the nations are associating with the exilic people in their time of judgment. The same point can be made of the word iniquities or sins (אַרְבּוֹן), in v. 5b, for which the Servant has been “crushed” (אֱאֶבֶן). It is usually applied to Israel (Isa 1:4, 5:18; 33:24).

It is appropriate to speak of the discipline (אֱאֶבֶן) that brings peace (אֱאֶבֶן) being upon the Servant in v. 5c. Isa 26:16 also speaks of Yahweh’s discipline being upon his people—indeed, a number of key words from Isa 53 are found in Isa 26. One perhaps borrows from the other—certainly they relate to one another dialogically. The “peace” that discipline here brings is recognised by the speakers of Isa 26 to have been established by Yahweh (Isa 26:12).

The stripes/sores (אֱאֶבֶן) that the Servant has suffered (v. 5d) and by which the nations are healed (אֱאֶבֶן) evoke imagery associated with Israel under judgment in Isa 1, where the nation suffers a number of complaints that are also suffered by the Servant in Isa 53 (see Isa 1:6c). The echoes suggest a strong association between the nation, and the Servant who suffers the judgment of Yahweh. At the same time a

178. Harrison and Patterson note that the noun אַרְבּוֹן is used of the nation only in Isaiah (Harrison, & Patterson, 1997: 4). Elsewhere it is used of individual, physical wounds.
distinction is drawn between the Servant who suffers, and the nations that do not. The Servant suffers, but the nations experience healing. In Isa 19:22, in an oracle against Egypt, Yahweh’s judgment will result in the Egyptians turning (חזר) to Yahweh, who will heal (נשתם) them—so the confession of the nations in 53:5d is consistent with the Isaianic hope.

The discourse of the nations in v. 5 raises a number of questions, such as how best to understand the transference of guilt and the apparent vicarious suffering of the Servant, and how the healing of the nations is effected. The imagery of vicarious sin-taking is possibly taken from Lam 5:7 and Ezek 18:2, and the belief among the exilic generation that they were paying for the sins of their fathers (see Clifford, 1984: 179). But in the mouths of the nations this imagery undergoes a radical revision. In Isa 53 the nations turn on its head the belief that the exilic generation has borne the sins of a previous generation, by confessing that the Servant has actually borne the nations’ sins. This also calls into question a prevailing sentiment that is reflected in the Psalms, that Yahweh turn his wrath towards the nations that have ridiculed Israel in its time of suffering—e.g., in Ps 79:7-8, where the psalmist pleads for retribution against the nations, and for the sins of the fathers to not be held against them (cf. Lam 3:58-66). Isa 53 speaks to both these concerns in a compelling way. The effect is something like the story of Jonah, which presents the heathen in repentance in order to compel the people of God to see him in a different light. The language of sacrifice for the sake of another acts as a counter-balance to the theology
of vindication that is evident during the exilic period.

We saw in earlier discourses that the Servant was called to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles (Isa 42:6; see also 49:6, 8; 50:10). He was also called to be a witness (43:10, 12; 44:8). In the confession of the nations he hears that his witness has not been in vain, because the nations now see. For their part, the nations expand the dialogue by which the Servant is constituted. They cause him to reflect upon himself and his experiences in an entirely new way. In reinterpreting his experiences the nations broaden the Servant’s self-awareness—they make the Servant reflect upon the possibility that Yahweh’s work of redemption, embodied in the Servant and enacted in his liberation from exile, continues on, unfinalised, in the coming to knowledge of the nations. In the testimony of the nations the Servant’s sufferings have brought peace and healing. The precise meaning of these terms is difficult to ascertain, which is demonstrated by the myriad ways scholars try to explain them.\(^{179}\) In our view, the significance of the terms is not what they literally depict, but that it is the nations who claim that peace and healing have come via the Servant Israel-Jacob’s suffering.\(^ {180}\) This is an astonishing paradigm with which Israel is being confronted. It invites Israel to believe that because it has suffered, the

\(^{179}\) For example, Vriezen suggests that the images of suffering and healing weld together ideas that are familiar to Israel, such as penitence and conversion, and expiation of guilt by the bearing of punishment, as well as Wisdom ideas such as the necessity of sorrow for education, as in Ecclesiastes and parts of Job (Vriezen, 1970: 272). Hanson cautions against seeing the Servant as effecting “personal” redemption, but rather “as part of a larger proposal seeking to redefine the basis upon which the Jewish people were to re-establish themselves as a nation” (Hanson, 1998: 16).

\(^{180}\) This may seem like an avoidance of difficult exegetical issues that are too difficult. However, the very ambiguity of the terms suggests that their presence in the text serves a purpose other than literal representation of external referents.
nations will be blessed. So the nations’ discourse becomes a doorway to new possibilities beyond the age of suffering. It calls Israel to a wholly different future. The Servant is invited by the nations to consider the purpose which his exile now serves—the redemption of the nations who perceive his suffering to be for their sake.

In v. 6a the speakers claim to speak for “all of us” (אשאכ), without revealing explicitly who this represents. There is a sense in which “all of us” is open to anyone who is able to know themselves in light of the discourse of Isa 53. The importance of this phrase is reflected in its repetition in v. 6d. It acts as a framing device around the verse, suggesting that this is the closest we come to the heart of the nations’ self-reflective discourse. In v. 7 the attention shifts back to the Servant. But v. 6 is the heart of the confession, its high point and its centre. The full significance of the Servant’s suffering is brought to bear on “us” at this point, with three deeply confessional statements:

1) Like sheep we have all strayed (גויאב). There is no external referent for this imagery within Isaiah, though the act of going astray is a common way of describing the darkness of humanity without the guidance of Yahweh. This applies to both Israel (Isa 3:12; 9:16; 29:24) and the nations (30:28; 47:15). The staggering aspect of this confession is that the nations concede they have been conducting their histories in their own way, and that this was wrong. There is a strong echo in this sentiment of the vision in Isa 2:2-4, when the nations gather around Zion asking for

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181. North makes the valuable point that what is being depicted here is a change of mind that the speakers would not have achieved by themselves (North, 1964: 238).
Yahweh to teach and guide them (see Mic 4:1-4).

2) We have turned, as a man, to his own way (אֲנֵהַ לְשׁוֹן אֶחָד). The 3mp suffix attached to לְשׁוֹן refers back to אֲנֵה, but the 1cp verb controls the clause. The sense is that no-one can avoid the indictment generated by the nations’ confession. In light of the Servant, “we” have realised that each one has followed his own path. The word לְשׁוֹן is significant in the Servant discourses. The confession of the nations here seems to echo the prophet in Isa 42:24: “Was it not the LORD, against whom we have sinned, in whose ways they would not walk, and whose law they would not obey?” (ESV). The “way” of Yahweh in the discourses refers both to following his law (דְּרָכָה) and to the way home from exile (43:16, 19; 49:9, 11). In the mouth of the exiles this confession could refer to either, but if it is the nations who speak then it refers to Yahweh’s law. Again, this is not inconsistent with the overriding themes of either Second Isaiah, or the final form of the entire book. In Isa 42:16 the blind who will be led in a “way” that they do not know can refer to both the exiles in darkness, or to the nations who need a light sent to them—in Second Isaiah the darkness envelopes both equally.

3) Yahweh has allowed the iniquity of all of us to hurt (אָכְרָה) him. This clause is the key to the discourse, since three of the “heroes” whose discourse has constituted the Servant are mentioned in the same utterance for the first time. The nations grasp the full significance of what has occurred in and to the Servant: it was Yahweh’s work, but it was the Servant who suffered, and it was “we” who benefited.
There is no sense here of a vicarious suffering. And there is no sense that the Servant has suffered unjustly. All that is stated is that the consequences of sin (נָא can denote both the sin and its guilt/consequences) that “we” deserved as much as the Servant, have been witnessed in him alone. Again, we stress that what we are faced with here is not a systematic theological proposition. The key here is that it is the nations interpreting the significance of the Servant’s suffering for themselves.

5.4.3. Yahweh concludes the Servant discourse

It is unclear where the conclusion begins. In 53:11c there is a reference to “my Servant” (יהוֹנָדָא), signalling that at least here it is Yahweh who speaks. The abrupt introduction of “his knowledge” in v. 11b signifies a new thought, and does not echo anything said by the nations. The “knowledge” of the Servant echoes the purpose for which Yahweh chose the Servant to be a witness (43:10c), suggesting that this is also part of Yahweh’s closing speech. V. 11a repeats the words נָא and שִׁפְרוּ from v. 10bc, possibly suggesting that this is part of the nations’ discourse. However, it could also suggest that Yahweh is double-voicing the nations in order to establish continuity between the speeches.182

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182. See discussion in n. 101, this chapter. See also n. 116 on the issue of continuity.
5.4.3.1. The Servant’s exaltation, 53:11-12

The conclusion to the poem, 53:11-12, is more obscure than Yahweh’s introduction, and the major translations rarely agree on how it should be interpreted. While the opening utterances are fairly opaque, their echoing of major tropes from the previous Servant discourses is unmistakable. For example, from his utter anguish (כְּפַלְפַל, lit. “from the anguish of his soul”) he (the Servant) will see (יָשָׂר) (v. 11a); in his knowledge (יָדַע) he will be satisfied (v. 11b). The noun כַּפַלְפַל embraces all that is said in Isa 53 concerning the Servant’s suffering. Various translated as “suffering” (NIV), “anguish” (NASB, JPS, NRSV, ESV), “travail” (KJV, ASV, RSV), “humiliation” (REB), “ordeal” (NJB), the noun is not easily expressed by single English words, since in Hebrew thought the word can embrace all its nuances, including hardship, its efficacy, and its rewards.\(^\text{183}\) This is reflected in NLT-SE: “When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish.” The Servant’s anguish is pictured as labour that has a reward.\(^\text{184}\) This is made explicit in v. 12ab.

It is worth highlighting that in this final Servant discourse Yahweh returns to one of the major motifs of the discourses that have constituted the Servant—his blindness. The Servant was made aware of his deficient sight early in the discourses (e.g. Isa 42:18, 20), and we have linked the motif to the prophet Isaiah’s mission as

\(^{183}\) On this see Otzen (2001: 196).

\(^{184}\) Schwertner argues that the Hebrew notion that work equates with trouble is shared by many old languages (1997: 925). Allen, similarly, claims the root relates to the “dark side of labour, the grievous and unfulfilling aspect of work” (1980: 675). However, in Ecclesiastes כַּפַלְפַל is usually equated with joy (see Ecc 2:10; 8:15).
set out in Isa 6. As the Servant came to consciousness of his calling and his mission to the nations, the success of his witness was described in ways that double-voiced his own deficiency—kings would see (יִשָּׁרָה) (Isa 49:7; 52:14-15). Indeed, the confession of the nations in 53:1-10 seems to fulfil this—they have seen the Servant in a new light. Now Yahweh lends his voice to this chorus of fulfilment, saying that from the Servant’s anguish, which we understand as a term summarising the suffering that has been witnessed by the nations, the Servant would see. Many translations follow the key Qumran texts and slot a direct object in here, but in the MT there is none, and significantly so.\(^\text{185}\) The reward for the Servant is not that he will see \textit{something}, it’s that he will see at all. This is a reversal of Israel’s judgment in Isa 6:10, where the prophet’s mission was to close the eyes of the disobedient nation. \textit{Knowing} is linked with \textit{seeing} in the self-consciousness of the Servant, who knows himself to have been lacking in understanding (Isa 42:25c; cf. Isa 6:10), but also that his calling was to \textit{know} Yahweh and his ways (Isa 43:10). We interpret both sight and understanding in the Servant discourses as the Servant coming to self-awareness, that is, awakening to Yahweh’s discourse and knowing himself by it. It is by this knowledge, of himself as Yahweh’s Servant, that he will justify many.\(^\text{186}\)

\(^{185}\) 1QIsa\(^a\), 1QIsa\(^b\) and 4QIsa\(^d\) have יָשָׁרָה, “light”, after the verb—“he will see light.” LXX has δέιξηται σὺν τῷ φῶς. Qumran texts are taken to be reliable (see de Waard, 1997: 197). We take issue with de Waard’s argument though: “A rendering of the verb ‘to see’ without object is, of course quite impossible . . .” This is not the case, however, for the reasons already discussed. But as de Waard notes, the vast majority of translations follow Qumran.

\(^{186}\) Day argues against interpreting יָשָׁרָה as “knowledge” in v. 11b on the basis that the introduction of a reference to knowledge is “abrupt”, and because “it is not immediately obvious what knowledge is intended” (Day, 1980: 97). Day argues instead for “humiliation”.

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The righteousness of the Servant (v. 11b) is bound up with his sight and his knowledge—in other words, it signifies his obedience to the discourse of Yahweh. It refers to the internal discourse of the Servant as uttered in Isa 49:1-6 and 50:4-11—it is the willingness of the Servant to say “I am Yahweh’s” (44:5). The Servant was called in righteousness (Isa 42:6), meaning his very constitution by Yahweh’s discourse is “righteous”. It is through the Servant’s righteous acceptance of his calling that many others are made righteous—that is, they will come to a realisation of the significance of the Servant, and come to know themselves in light of it. We have seen this embodied in the confession of 53:1-10—the nations being made righteous through their knowledge of the Servant. Yahweh’s discourse in 53:11-12 is a divine imprimatur on what the nations have confessed, binding together dialogically the themes of the introduction, the body of the poem, and the conclusion. This is emphasised in the reference to the “many” (דֵדְרִים) here (v. 11c), which echoes the “many” (דֵדְרִים) who were appalled at the Servant in Isa 52:14, as well as the “many” (דֵדְרִים) nations who would be affected by him in 52:15.

We translate דֵדְרִים (v. 11d) with “and he is the one who bears their punishment,” to reflect the emphasis suggested by the pronoun. The emphasis is not on the bearing of punishment, but on the one who bears it. The Servant’s role is

187. Muilenburg says the verb “to be accounted righteous” has a “forensic connotation” here, and that the primary meaning is of acquittal (1956a: 630). We prefer to interpret the verb dialogically—that is, in light of how the root is used through the Servant discourses.

188. Whybray has a similar interpretation: “Yet he suffered punishment which only they deserved” (Whybray, 1975: 181, emphases original).

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accentuated because it is imperative that the “many” come to know themselves relative to the Servant’s suffering. The Servant’s coming to knowledge opens the way for the nations to come to knowledge. His sight facilitates their sight, in that in his story of destruction, exile and redemption, the nations come to recognise Yahweh’s unique redemptive intervention. The statement that the Servant bears the punishment of the “many” is only what the nations themselves confess (53:4-5). 189 Yahweh double-voices the nations’ confession, in which the prominent theme is the bearing of the consequences of sin—suffering, sickness, beatings—and not the sin itself. The word נפש does not make a distinction between the two aspects of sin, but here the focus is on the consequences.

Yahweh’s echoing of key utterances continues into the final section of the conclusion. The Hebrew of v. 12ab is again obscure, and we will not get bogged down attempting a definitive translation where others have continually fallen short. We emphasise, however, that the fruit of the Servant’s mission will be shared among the nations (the “many” again) and the Servant. Here Yahweh is active on behalf of both the Servant and the nations, and the Servant himself will share his spoil with the nations.

Yahweh echoes the nations from 53:8-9 when he says of the Servant that he exposed himself to death (₪שֶׁמֶרֶת מִלְחָמִים מִצָּעַר, v. 12c) and was counted with the

189. We translate the plural form of נפש as “punishment” here rather than “sin”, with JPS. The major translations read “iniquities” or “grief”.

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transgressors (אַחֲרֵי-שָׁמַיִם נִפְרָדָה, v. 12d). It is interesting to note how Yahweh draws within his own dialogic field of vision information he has drawn from the discourse of others. Again, this gives the discourse of the nations the divine stamp of approval. To the Servant who overhears this discourse it underscores what the nations have said. Indeed, much of the conclusion serves to bring Yahweh’s voice in line with that of the nations, as if to demonstrate that the nations are not alone in their appreciation of the Servant’s mission. He also underscores what is said in v. 11, when he says the Servant has carried the guilt of the many (אַחֲרֵי-שָׁמַיִם) (v. 12e). It returns to the theme of the introduction, and how the “many” once viewed the Servant. The parallel statement, (“and intercedes for the transgressors”, v. 12f) echoes 53:6d, and the acknowledgment of the nations that Yahweh allowed the punishment of everyone to hurt (מַעְלֵה) the Servant. In a way that is not easily translated, the Servant continues to be the embodiment of this representational activity. The imp. hif. form of the verb מַעְלֵה indicates continuity, and speaks to the unfinalisability of the Servant. His role as someone who intercedes for the nations and those languishing in darkness continues. We understand this to mean that the witness of the Servant who suffered at the hands of the Babylonian invaders, died in exile, but was re-born in the call of Yahweh to be the Servant, continues to signify to the “many” in a way that invites their confession.

190. 1QIsa reads וְלְפִיכָלְכְךָית עַל-שָׁם, “and for their transgressions,” as in, “and he interceded for their transgressions.” But as de Waard notes the vast majority of translations simply render MT (de Waard, 1997: 198).
5.5. Conclusions

In the Introduction to the thesis we raised the question of what advantages the Servant’s dialogic constitution might have over more conventional types of characterisation. We have seen from the discussion on Isa 53 alone that one clear advantage is the ability of the dialogically-constituted polyphonic hero to represent several competing points of view simultaneously, without requiring them to be harmonised. The advantage of this is that one figure can appeal to an entire people group, among whom there are bound to be deeply-held and diverse ideologies and theologies. The polyphonic hero can embody several fundamental, but apparently contradictory, “truths” concurrently, while a monologic reading seeks to harmonise these disparate perspectives and risks missing what a character like the Servant signifies. More will be said on this in the next chapter.

Another advantage is that the Servant’s dialogic constitution allows him to embody a process of critical reevaluation of those deeply-held and diverse theologies and ideas, when otherwise their revision might be resisted. It is one thing to state monologically that an idea is questionable—it is quite another to have a character embody the idea and transform it in their dialogic interaction with others. We saw this happen in Isa 53 with reference to the idea of Israel’s suffering. We also saw it in Isa 50:4-9 with reference to the role of the prophets, particularly Jeremiah.

The advantage of a dialogic reading strategy such as we have developed is that it allows us to recognise these aspects of the Servant’s role within the text of
Second Isaiah. It also allows us to exegete the Servant discourses from the perspective of how the Servant might have heard the speeches that constitute him, in order to interpret those discourses in a fresh way. For example, we have been able to re-visit what it means to the Servant that he is called (41:9; 42:6; 43:1, 7; 49:1), that he is an offspring of Abraham (41:8), that he is a worm and a threshing sledge (41:14-15), that he is blind and deaf (42:18-19; 43:8), that he is a witness (43:10, 12; 44:8), that he is called to bring justice to the nations (42:1, 3, 4), that he is despised (49:7; 53:3), that he is a light to the world and a covenant to the nations (42:6; 49:6). We have argued that when we hear the discourses from the Servant’s perspective then we realise that there are not two Servants—Israel-Jacob in chapters 40-48 and the prophet from chapter 49. When we hear the discourse as an “I” to whom that discoursed in addressed and who it concerns, there is only one Servant, Israel-Jacob, who comes to know himself by that discourse, and responds to it in a way that demonstrates that Yahweh has found an obedient dialogic partner. But we have also recognised that the Servant, Israel-Jacob, does not necessarily occupy the same semantic space as empirical Israel. There is some distance—a certain amount of fluidity—between the Servant Israel-Jacob as he is constituted by the discourse, and the nation that is invited to know itself as the Servant. Because of this we have described the Servant as a paradigm, by which Israel is invited to know itself. Empirical Israel is urged to situate itself in the dialogue, as we have, and hear itself be called by Yahweh; hear itself respond faithfully to Yahweh as the Servant does in 49:1-6 and 50:4-9, and hear itself described as the suffering one whose story convicts
the nations of its sin in Isa 53.

On the basis of our dialogic reimagining of the Servant discourses we are in a position to examine more closely what it is that the Servant contributes to the message of Second Isaiah. We call this the Servant’s “voice-idea”, a term coined by Bakhtin, and we will unpack it in the next chapter.
6. THE VOICE-IDEA OF THE SERVANT IN SECOND ISAIAH

6.1. Introduction

The polyphonic hero who is constituted dialogically occupies a unique space in the world of the text, which he or she views from a unique perspective. Because the hero is constituted at the point where several lines of discourse intersect, and not from an objective distance by an author who knows more about them than they know about themselves, no one else can see the world as they see it. Not only that, no one can have the same significance that they have upon their environment and other “consciousnesses”. Their point of view of the world—their ideology—cannot be shared by any other consciousness, since each one is constituted differently, by discourses that converge at different places and in different ways. It follows, then, that what the polyphonic hero utters concerning their world represents a unique point of view. Someone else may repeat what the hero says, but it can never signify in the same way, because that “consciousness” does not see the world as the hero sees it. But more than this, who the hero is, is as significant as what they say. Because they are constituted dialogically what they say is who they are, and who they are is what they say. The two cannot be extricated without damage being done to their constitution, since there exists not two distinct, objectivised images—the character and their discourse—but one consciousness, one discourse, one idea. As the representation of a unique discourse upon the world, the polyphonic hero is also a
full-fledged, unmerged, signifying “voice-idea”.\(^1\) Until we have explored the voice-idea of the polyphonic hero we have not yet engaged with him or her dialogically.

In this chapter we focus upon the voice-idea of the Servant of Second Isaiah. To do so we draw together the main strands of discourse that we have argued, in the previous two chapters, constitute the figure of the Servant in the discourses we have explored so far. Our hope is that we will see something of the Servant’s unique point of view on the world, the ideology that he not only utters—since, after all, we have only two such utterances, Isa 49:1-6, and 50:4-9—but that he embodies. The Servant is constituted at the point of convergence of ten discourses that are uttered by four distinct voices—Yahweh’s, the prophet’s, the Servant’s own, and that of the nations—which means that his response to the discourse of others contributes as much to the Servant’s voice-idea as what the Servant himself says. In other words, the Servant’s discourse on the world, his “ideology”, is bound up with his constitution. This is what Bakhtin means when he argues that the polyphonic hero’s discourse about the world “merges with confessional discourse about oneself” (Bakhtin, 1984: 78). We have seen this with reference to the Servant. When he speaks, in Isa 49:1-6 and 50:4-9, he not only discourses about himself, but about his environment, his God, his persecutors, his understanding of prophecy and about his

\(^1\) The term “voice-idea” is Bakhtin’s. Bakhtin uses a number of terms—idea, idea-image and voice-idea—which all refer to the idea in a dialogic work, but they are not interchangeable. “Voice-idea” (Bakhtin, 1984: 91) specifically refers to the idea that cannot be separated from the one who utters it.
own calling. His discourse on the world cannot be isolated from his discourse about himself. The polyphonic hero engages his world dialogically—he responds to its discourse with discourse, and it is at this point of intersection that we discover the hero’s voice-idea.

This means that the Servant’s “truth” is not easily stated in propositional form. The Servant has not been made to utter “truths”. If he had our task would be simple—we would merely have to extract those truths from the Servant’s mouth. And this would allow us to speculate on whether the Servant’s “truths” are affirmed or repudiated by Second Isaiah’s overarching “theology”. This cannot be done with integrity where the Servant is concerned, because the author’s “theology” in relation to the Servant is not transparent. Since the Servant is constituted entirely by the discourse of characters who exist on the same plain as him there is no overarching frame of reference, no fixed matrix of “truth”, by which we are able to assess the Servant’s “meaning”. There are, instead, consciousnesses who engage dialogically with each other, and with the ideas of their past and present contexts. As with the exegetical process that we outlined in the previous two chapters, here also we must attempt to hear the Servant’s voice-idea by situating ourselves beside him, in the hope that we will see his world as he sees it.

The literary theories that inform this chapter are extracted from Bakhtin’s essay, “The Idea in Dostoevsky” (Bakhtin, 1984: 78-100). Again, we stress that Bakhtin’s theories were developed from his observations of Dostoevsky’s
polyphonic design. While we have consistently referred to the Servant as a polyphonic hero, and to the collection of Second Isaiah as a dialogic text, we by no means compare it to the fictional works of Dostoevsky. In Dostoevsky’s novels there are many polyphonic heroes, and therefore many voice-ideas. In the novel these ideas are brought into contact, they play off one another, they quarrel, and new thresholds are manifested as the great dialogue expands and moves in new directions—the polyphony of unmerged voice-ideas that results is the means by which these ideas are explored, often to great depth. We have said already that Second Isaiah is not this type of work. Clearly there is not the space in fifteen chapters of a collection like Second Isaiah to create the type of grand dialogue that constitutes Dostoevsky’s works. Nevertheless, the theories that Bakhtin draws from Dostoevsky are able to illuminate our reading of the Servant discourses, as we have seen in the previous chapters—not least because the Servant as a character is constituted in precisely the same way as Bakhtin describes the heroes in one of Dostoevsky’s fictional works. Since the Servant is also constituted at the point of several intersecting discourses, he should, according to Bakhtin’s theories, represent a unique view of the world—and it is this perspective we seek to explore here.
6.2. Defining the “idea”

6.2.1. The “idea” in a monologic world

It is easier to grasp Bakhtin’s concept of the voice-idea in a polyphonic work once we have been reminded of the more familiar idea in the monologic world. The major difference between them is that while the voice-idea in a polyphonic work is inextricably bound to the hero’s dialogic constitution, the monologic idea is not bound to a character at all. For the monologic idea to retain its ability to signify it must remain distinct from the characteristics of any one character. Otherwise, it becomes one characteristic among many, and loses its ability to mean. For example, a character might be overweight, might like to wear hats, and might engage in the propagation of nationalistic material. In this example, the idea of nationalism does not mean directly—it is a characteristic. The idea of nationalism that signifies directly is a propositional statement that can be uttered by one character or another. Then its “truth” is not compromised, since it belongs not to the constitution of the character uttering it, but to the monologic system of meaning that is constructed by the author. Who utters it, or in what context, is, for the author, a matter of composition, or “convenience”, or stylistic consideration. Says Bakhtin:

Such an idea, in itself, belongs to no one. The hero is merely the carrier of an independently valid idea; as a true signifying idea it gravitates toward some impersonal, systemically monologic context; in other words, it gravitates toward the systemically monologic worldview of the author himself (Bakhtin, 1984: 79).

An example from OT scholarship should help clarify this: The books of Samuel and Kings raise certain ideas concerning the monarchy and its function and purpose in
ancient Israel, and even its culpability in events that occurred to Israel, namely the
destruction of the northern and southern kingdoms, and the exile. Scholars claim
they are able to discern what the author/redactor dubbed “the Deuteronomist”
believes concerning the role of the monarchy in relation to its demise and the
disintegration of the separated kingdoms. These ideas exist apart from the
constitution of the characters who populate these books—they belong to the author’s
worldview. A character such as the prophet Samuel may utter certain things that
echo the “idea” of the author, but the idea itself is not inextricably bound to his
character. If it was then it would cease to signify directly, because the character exits
the narrative (in 1 Sam 25, though his ghost makes an appearance in chapter 28), and
therefore the “idea” would exit with him. As it is, even though the character of
Samuel dies, the “idea” of monarchy continues to mean, because it exists apart from
the character in the “systemically monological worldview” of the author/redactor.

So, in the monologic world, ideas are not “represented” or embodied, they
are “expressed directly” (Bakhtin, 1984: 84). Ideas foreign to the idea of the author
cannot be represented either—foreign ideas can only be affirmed as true, or denied
as false. As Bakhtin puts it, alien ideas are either polemically repudiated, or
assimilated (1984: 85):

2. Martin Noth formulated the classic theory of the Deuteronomistic History, which he attributed to
an exilic author, “the Deuteronomist”, whose intention to explain the downfall of the northern and
southern kingdoms can be seen in the re-shaped history comprising Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings
In essence idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil, which, it follows, can only be a pedagogical dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984: 81).

In summary, the idea in the monologic work is propositional in nature. It signifies directly and apart from any one character. The idea is neither represented, nor embodied, and therefore it does not require a dialogic context in order to mean. Instead, it gravitates to the systemically monologic worldview of the author. Others’ ideas are not represented or embodied either, whether they are the ideas of the present, the past or the future. They are not engaged with dialogically—they are either affirmed or repudiated.

6.2.2. The “idea” in a dialogic work

Three main aspects of the idea in a dialogic work set it apart from that in a monologic work. Firstly, in contrast to the directly-signifying idea in a monologic work, the idea in a dialogic work signifies as a voice-idea, meaning that it is bound to the character who not only utters (voices) the idea, but who also embodies it, lives it out, and knows him- or herself according to it. Secondly, the voice-idea must enter a dialogue with other voice-ideas in order to be extended; in order to be open-ended and anticipatory. This does not occur in a monologic work since other ideas are not represented, only assimilated or repudiated. In a monologic work it is the author’s idea that dominates: “Other truths do not have the right to demand an answer from the reader; that right is allotted only to the author’s truth” (Morson, & Emerson,
1990: 238). Thirdly, this dialogue of voice-ideas is not “made up” from scratch, but encompasses ideas heard in the work’s epoch, even in epochs of the past. It also anticipates ideas of the future, since the “quarrel” generates new “linkages of ideas”, and “changes in the arrangement of all the voice-ideas in the worldwide dialogue” (Bakhtin, 1984: 91). In this way the dialogue remains open to the future and to new possibilities of fresh discourse.

These three aspects provide the framework by which we will discuss the voice-idea of the Servant in Second Isaiah.

6.3. The Servant’s “voice-idea”

6.3.1. The inseparability of the idea and the Servant

Bakhtin calls ideas in a monologic work “no-man’s thoughts” (Bakhtin, 1984: 93), because they are bound to no one. In a monologic work it is the author, the “ultimate semantic authority”, who “retains the power to express a truth directly” (Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 238). This can be expressed in their own voice or in the voices of their characters, but regardless, the power to mean is reserved for the author alone. In a dialogic work it is the hero who signifies since, as a fully-formed consciousness, he or she occupies a semantic space that no one, not even the author, can occupy. They

3. Bakhtin noted that in Dostoevsky ideas were placed “on the borderline of dialogically intersecting consciousnesses. He [Dostoevsky] brought together ideas and worldviews, which in real life were absolutely estranged and deaf to one another, and forced them to quarrel” (Bakhtin, 1984: 91).
are constituted at a unique point on the dialogic grid that gives the work its substance and form. It follows then that their voice-idea, the point of view of the world that their position affords them, cannot be extricated from them without its “truth”, its signification, being compromised. It is a contradiction of the very nature of the polyphonic hero to express their “truth” propositionally. As soon as this is attempted their voice-idea is compromised. Indeed, Morson and Emerson describe what occurs when “monologic thinkers” overhear a dialogue between voice-ideas: “They usually try to extract just such a finalising proposition, but in doing so they are false to the dialogic process itself” (Morson, & Emerson, 1990: 237).

The method of exegesis outlined in the previous two chapters has sought to engage with the Servant dialogically, while resisting the temptation to reduce his “truth” to finalised propositions. Here also we must attempt to dialogue with the Servant’s voice-idea, while resisting the assumption that the prophet has constructed him according to pre-determined ideas or theologies. We have argued, and effectively demonstrated over the course of the previous chapters, that the Servant has been constituted dialogically, in a manner similar to how Dostoevsky constitutes his polyphonic heroes. This means that his “truth”, what the Servant signifies, cannot be grasped apart from an engagement with the Servant himself. For example, the “idea” of vicarious atonement that is often transferred from systematic theological categories to the Servant poem of Isaiah 53 is alien to the dialogic constitution of the
Servant figure. It is a directly signifying idea that does not emerge from our dialogue with the Servant, but is rather imposed upon him as if he were a non-signifying image of a character in a monologic work. When we approach a dialogically-constituted figure like the Servant of Yahweh we need to resist the temptation to summarise their identity and purpose propositionally, since this was not the intention of the text. We cannot even say that the character is this or that idea—because the polyphonic hero is “born of that idea” (Bakhtin, 1984: 85, emphasis original), he is not the idea itself. Second Isaiah’s Servant is a call to dialogue, he is not a pedagogic exercise in abstract theologies.

The constitution of the polyphonic hero, and the emergence of his voice-idea, occur simultaneously. Hence, the hero’s voice-idea can be heard only as the hero is spoken to and as he or she responds. Indeed, this is why, according to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky said an idea must not only be understood but “felt” (cited in Bakhtin, 1984: 85). The reader experiences the idea as he or she dialogically engages with the hero, who is a full-fledged consciousness. Bakhtin says it this way: “The image of the hero is inseparably linked with the image of an idea and cannot be detached from it. We see the hero in the idea and through the idea, and we see the idea in him and through him” (Bakhtin, 1984: 87, emphases original).

We have seen in the previous chapters how this has occurred in the

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4. For a review of the different “models” of atonement often applied to Isa 53, see Lindsey (1983).
constitution of the Servant. Nowhere in Second Isaiah does the prophet seek to outline what the Servant represents apart from the discourse that constitutes him. There is presented no monologic idea of what “servanthood” signifies other than in the discourse directed to the Servant, or that directly concerns him, or that is uttered by him, or in the confessional discourse of the nations. We come to know the Servant as we come to know what he embodies. We actually participate in the event of his unfolding voice-idea, since as he responds to Yahweh’s discourse in Isa 49:1-6 and makes himself known to the nations, we also discover how he has made Yahweh’s discourse an aspect of his own internal discourse. What the Servant says, particularly his double-voicing of Yahweh’s discourse and other “ideas” we discuss below, is new to us, as it is new to Yahweh and the nations. The prophet has given us no prior warning of how the Servant will bring these heteroglossia within his purview. In other words, the prophet allows the Servant to signify directly—the prophet is present in the text as a speaking “I”, but he does not interfere in how the Servant means. The “idea”, or the theology, that the Servant represents, is unique to the dialogue that converges upon him and which enters the dialogic “field of battle” (Bakhtin, 1984: 88) with him.

A review of how the Servant responds to Yahweh’s discourse in Isa 49:1-6 should demonstrate how the Servant retains the power to signify directly, and how he resists the finalising control of other voices. Before we hear the Servant speak in Isa 49 our knowledge of him comes predominantly from the discourse that is directed to
him by Yahweh. If Yahweh’s discourse was the sole basis of the Servant’s constitution we would, with some justification, suggest that what Yahweh utters concerning Israel-Jacob represents the ideology of the prophet—that the prophet is using the voice of Yahweh to voice his own idea, which is what Bakhtin calls refracted discourse. What that idea is would be reflected in the things Yahweh says to the Servant. For example, in chapter 4 we drew attention to the imagery in Yahweh’s discourse that is drawn from the nation’s Davidic hope, and how the discourse seems to transfer this hope to the people themselves. If this were a monologic text we would suggest that the prophet’s idea embraced the reassertion of Israel’s national identity in the face of the destruction of the monarchy. However, when the Servant speaks in 49:1-6 he double-voices Yahweh, thereby bringing Yahweh’s discourse within his own “dialogic field of vision” (Bakhtin, 1984: 73). The Servant’s discourse then goes beyond that of Yahweh, and demonstrates that as a consciousness he is not confined by Yahweh’s definition, or by the idea that has been suggested by his discourse. The author, Second Isaiah, achieves this by having the Servant speak not to Yahweh in his response, but to the coastlands—the nations. This is vitally important, because the first time we hear the Servant speak he is responding to Yahweh’s discourse by acting upon it. In acting upon it the Servant demonstrates that he has been impacted by it. The allusions to Yahweh’s discourse

5. See discussion on p. 164ff.
are double-voiced for the sake of the nations, not to demonstrate that the Servant is parroting Yahweh’s utterances. This is essential to the constitution of the Servant as a polyphonic hero, since it gives the hero the final word on discourse that has been addressed to him. The Servant demonstrates that Yahweh’s discourse has not closed him off and finalised him “like a plastic statue”—rather, it has provoked discourse and self-consciousness. The Servant demonstrates that he knows himself to be the one to whom Yahweh has spoken. Bakhtin outlines this aspect of the polyphonic hero in his discussion of Dostoevsky’s “Notes from Underground”, particularly with reference to the Underground Man who eavesdrops on those above ground and anticipates their discourse about him in order to retain the final word concerning himself:

The hero from the underground eavesdrops on every word someone else says about him, he looks at himself, as it were, in all the mirrors of other people’s consciousnesses, he knows all the possible refractions of his image in those mirrors. And he also knows his own objective definition, neutral both to the other’s consciousness and to his own self-consciousness, and he takes into account the point of view of a ‘third person.’ But he also knows that all these definitions, prejudiced as well as objective, rest in his hands and he cannot finalize them precisely because he himself perceives them; he can go beyond their limits and thus make them inadequate. He knows that he has the final word, and he seeks at whatever cost to retain for himself this final word about himself, the word of his self-consciousness, in order to become in it that which he is not. His consciousness of self lives by its unfinalisability, by its unclosedness and its indeterminacy (Bakhtin, 1984: 53).

By speaking, and by double-voicing Yahweh’s discourse, the Servant also goes beyond its limits, and demonstrates that Yahweh’s discourse is inadequate to finalise him, to make him a finished image.\(^6\) In other words, he knows himself as more than

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\(^6\) We are not suggesting that Yahweh’s discourse sought to finalise him—on the contrary, the
the idea suggested by Yahweh’s discourse. This is why interpreters have such difficulty identifying the Servant—because in the construction of the text, he is a speaking “I” who resists finalising definitions.

This is emphasised by the Servant’s double-voicing of Yahweh’s designation of him as the Servant, in Isa 49:3. By echoing this most important of Yahweh’s utterances the Servant embraces it as an element of his own self-consciousness. In proclaiming it to the nations, as he does here, he announces that he accepts the designation. He brings it within his own dialogic field of vision. Double-voicing in this way is vital to the polyphonic hero’s constitution, since it brings within the hero’s discourse the discourse of another that concerns himself, so eliminating any surplus information the other has. By this we mean that the knowledge we have of the Servant regarding his purpose is no longer limited to knowledge we have obtained from Yahweh’s potentially-objectifying discourse, but knowledge we obtain from the Servant himself. In Isa 49:3 the Servant makes that aspect of Yahweh’s discourse his own.

It is emphasised also in Isa 49:4 when the Servant recounts a dialogue with Yahweh we have no other record of. He situates himself outside the discourse by which we have come to know him in chapters 40-48. It is even more suggestive that in this double-voiced dialogue the Servant resists Yahweh’s call by claiming to have
discourse intended to provoke a response by the Servant.
laboured in vain—indeed, he begins the account by emphasising the personal
pronoun, יִנָּא (But I!), thereby enforcing his individuality over against the speaking
“I” of Yahweh’s discourse.7

When the Servant alludes to his physical sufferings in Isa 50:6 he further
reinforces his independence as a thinking “I”, by discoursing on imagery that
originates outside Second Isaiah. If the imagery of striking the back and pulling out
the beard refers to a literal historical event, it is an event we have no access to apart
from the Servant’s discourse. This in itself would be significant. It is clear that the
discourse does not invite historical reconstruction. The point is the discourse itself,
which draws these external, and hidden, events into its field of vision. The discourse
uses these referents to reveal something new concerning the Servant. The
significance of these events to the Servant is all we are permitted to know of them.
We would like to know more, of course—such as who is inflicting the beatings, and
why are they doing it—because we are wired by literary convention to expect a
monologic image of the event, by which we would stand over against the Servant
and view him objectively. But the polyphonic text does not permit us this—we see,
or rather we hear, the Servant’s discourse, his interpretation of these events. That is
all that matters, and the design evokes what Bakhtin says of Dostoevsky’s design:
“The entire artistic construction . . . is directed toward discovering and clarifying the

7. So note Muilenburg (1956a: 568) and North (1964: 188).
hero’s discourse, and performs provoking and directing functions in relation to that discourse” (Bakhtin, 1984: 54).

We pointed out in the previous chapter that the imagery in Isa 50:6 alludes to Lam 3:30. Our understanding is that although the imagery does refer to historical events—namely the suffering of the exiles—the Servant intentionally double-voices Lam 3:30 in order to make his voice-idea louder. However, in terms of the Servant’s constitution the effect is the same—the Servant double-voices the discourse of others in order to affirm his independence as a thinking “I”, a full-fledged consciousness.

This independence means that the Servant’s voice-idea cannot be defined on the basis of motifs and tropes imposed upon him by others. Yahweh’s discourse does not define the Servant, so we cannot look only there for clues as to the Servant’s voice-idea. Yahweh’s discourse provokes a response from the Servant in which he establishes his own semantic position relative to Yahweh’s discourse. So, at the very least we must consider how the Servant responds, and why he says what he does. But, as we will discuss in the next section, another voice is introduced in Isa 53 that extends the Servant’s voice-idea even further. This interplay between multiple consciousnesses is what Bakhtin describes as the dialogic field of battle.

6.3.2. The Servant’s dialogic field of battle

Bakhtin observed that the voice-idea of an individual character could not remain the sole possession of that character without, ultimately, ceasing to signify. The idea, if
it is to live and expand, must enter into dialogue with other voice-ideas—in other words the consciousness of the hero must encounter other consciousnesses who occupy equally valid semantic positions. A particular viewpoint on the world discovers more about itself when it encounters other points of view and quarrels with them. Says Bakhtin:

The idea lives not in one person’s isolated individual consciousness—if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. The idea begins to live, that is, to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, to give birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of others (Bakhtin, 1984: 87-88, emphases original).

It is no surprise that of all the Servant poems the one that creates most intrigue is Isa 52:13-53:12. This is partly due to its importance to the Christian interpretation of the death of Jesus Christ. But it is also due to the artillery the discourse brings to the Servant’s dialogic field of battle. The poem’s value to the doctrines of the Church may have been aided by the type of discourse that it is—for, of all the Servant discourses, it is this final one that gives the dialogue that converges on the Servant its unfinalisable, anticipatory dimension. Its nature as a confession by an unnamed group of the significance of the Servant’s idea breaks open the closed circle of dialogue between Yahweh and the Servant. It invites participation by others. The semantic position occupied by the Servant in the dialogic field of battle primarily invites participation from Israel-Jacob. But this has the potential of isolating anyone who is not of Israel. The advent of another voice provides a way into the dialogue from outside Israel. It invites anyone who has overheard the Servant’s dialogue with
Yahweh into direct dialogic engagement (or quarrel) with the Servant himself, since the confession of the nations, though brief, is such a profound voice-idea concerning the significance of the Servant that it is not easily dismissed. Centuries of scholarship on the identity and purpose of the Servant is testimony to this, as is the ongoing debate surrounding what it is that the Servant has achieved. The Ethiopian’s question to the evangelist Philip in Acts 8:34 is precisely the response the discourse of the nations anticipates. The Ethiopian, by asking who it is that is being spoken about in Isa 53:7-8, takes a dialogic position in relation to the Servant that approximates that of the nations. The question is notoriously difficult to answer, since the discourse of the nations does not represent an objectifying monologic description of the Servant, but a point of view, a voice-idea, and a signifying position in the Servant discourse as a whole. It is a confession of signification that seeks an echo.

Prior to the confession of the nations in Isa 53 the dialogue between voice-ideas has been well-established, but it is limited mainly to two consciousnesses, that of Yahweh and the Servant. The dialogue proper does not occur until Isa 49:1-6 when the Servant finally responds to Yahweh’s discourse that has been directed to him, or which directly concerns him (as in 42:1-4 and 45:1-7). Before he does so the idea of the Servant that is suggested by Yahweh’s discourse remains potentially monologic, in that if the Servant does not respond Yahweh’s discourse will cease to

8. The voice of the prophet is also heard but in a less prominent way. We have highlighted where the prophet contributes to the Servant’s constitution in our exegesis (chapters 4 and 5).
signify as anticipatory dialogue. Since it is discourse that seeks a response, in word
and deed, from a named dialogic partner—Israel-Jacob—a non-response would
finalise the discourse. We have demonstrated, however, that when the Servant
responds in a way that affirms his self-consciousness, in Isa 49:1-6, Yahweh’s
discourse is given new significance. When Yahweh then responds to the Servant in
49:7-12, echoing aspects of his own and the Servant’s discourse, while also
introducing a new idea—that of the nations’ despising of the Servant—the Servant’s
voice-idea is broadened, given new scope; new opportunities for fresh discourse are
opened up. This type of event is what Bakhtin refers to when he says:

Human thought becomes genuine thought, that is, an idea, only under conditions of
living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone
else’s voice, that is, in someone else’s consciousness expressed in discourse
(Bakhtin, 1984: 88).

But it is the confession of the nations in Isa 53 that gives the Servant idea its
unfinalisable quality. The Servant’s “idea” finds new fertile ground in the discourse
of the nations, and the confession demonstrates the germination of new thought that
would not be possible without either Yahweh’s discourse, or the Servant’s response.

Before we explore how this dialogic interaction generates a voice-idea in
Second Isaiah it will be helpful to hear Bakhtin’s description of a similar dialogic
event that unfolds around the character of Raskolnikov in Dostoevsky’s Crime and
Punishment. It is a description that is easily applied to how the dialogic meeting of
the consciousnesses of Yahweh, the Servant and the nations give birth to the idea of
the Servant in Second Isaiah:

In the course of this dialogue Raskolnikov’s idea reveals its various facets, nuances, possibilities, it enters into various relationships with other life-positions. As it loses its monologic, abstractly theoretical finalized quality, a quality sufficient to a single consciousness, it acquires the contradictory complexity and living multi-facedness of an idea-force, being born, living and acting in the great dialogue of the epoch and calling back and forth to kindred ideas of other epochs. Before us rises up an image of the idea (Bakhtin, 1984: 89, emphasis original).

A brief review of one aspect of the Servant’s voice-idea—that of suffering—should adequately demonstrate how the dialogic field of battle extends an idea’s complexity and opens it up to the “great dialogue” of its immediate epoch, and those of past and future generations. The association of the idea of suffering and the figure of the Servant is first made by Yahweh, in Isa 42:22, 24-25 and 43:27-28. In 42:22 the suffering is described as a situation of being plundered and looted, trapped in holes, and “hidden” (אָיזַר) in prisons. In 43:28 the suffering is described in more dynamic terms. It is a profaning (אִלְלָה), and a giving over to “utter destruction” (כָּנַע) and abuse (תָּפִל). In both instances Yahweh says the Servant’s suffering is a just reward for his sin: the Servant, Israel-Jacob, would not walk in Yahweh’s paths or obey his law (42:24de); his first father sinned and his “mediators” transgressed (43:27). As an utterance of Yahweh the idea of suffering that is bound to the Servant is a simple one. But even so the idea is enlarged by the redactional juxtaposing of salvation oracles immediately following each discourse on suffering, in 43:1-7 and 44:1-5. The oracles, like the disputations, are uttered by Yahweh, but the generic voice of assurance in both casts a new dialogic hue over the words of judgment. In
the discourse of Yahweh in Second Isaiah, the idea of suffering that is bound to the Servant always stands at the threshold of forgiveness, so it is not enough to say of the Servant that he embodies the idea of righteous judgment. The Servant’s suffering is anticipatory. In the discourse that constitutes the Servant from Yahweh’s own point of view, judgment and mercy are two consecutive episodes in the course of the Servant’s history.

We stress that this is not an abstract, monologic theology. One cannot say that judgment is always followed by mercy on the basis of the Servant discourse, since the “truth” of Yahweh’s utterance is dialogic, that is, it is bound to the Servant and his experiences. However, we also stress that for as long as the idea exists purely as an utterance of Yahweh its monologic character remains intact. It is discourse seeking a dialogic response, so the idea carries within it the potential for dialogic extension. But if such a response is not forthcoming then it takes on the character of finalising definition. In that case the idea can only signify directly as an echo of the author’s “truth”, or, alternatively, as a contradiction of it.

But the Servant does respond to Yahweh, in both Isa 49:1-6 and 50:4-9. His response to the “idea” of his suffering comes in 50:6, and when the Servant speaks to it he does so not in the language of Yahweh’s discourse, but in language that evokes Lam 3:30. We have highlighted the links in the previous chapter. Here we note that when the Servant speaks of his suffering by double-voicing discourse that is not Yahweh’s, he goes beyond the words that have constituted him thus far. But in
echoing Lam 3:30, a text that describes one who waits for Yahweh as volunteering his cheek and willingly accepting insults, the Servant brings the imagery to bear upon his own suffering, and claims for himself the role of the willing sufferer of the laments. In doing so he authenticates what Yahweh has said of his suffering in the discourses just quoted—he accepts that his suffering is the result of righteous judgment, since the contemplative sufferer in Lam 3 has accepted his situation and is now waiting for Yahweh’s compassion. Another way of looking at this is that the Servant has brought within his voice-idea the historical experiences of ravaged Judah, and in his response to Yahweh has submitted those experiences to the voice-idea of suffering established in Yahweh’s discourse. In the process those experiences have undergone a transformation—as embodied by the Servant they are no longer a cause of lament and complaint (as they are in Lamentations, as well as in Isa 40:27-31), but an opportunity to acknowledge guilt and to return to Yahweh. The voice-idea of the Servant’s suffering has embraced a new dimension that was not possible without his response. When we consider that the exilic community is being invited to identify with the faithful Servant, the power of the voice-idea to signify where the propositional statement could not takes on extra significance. The Servant’s discourse compels the community to “feel” and experience the truth of the idea of the suffering Servant, rather than just hear it. The Servant offers the community a point of view on its suffering that does not come naturally to it, one that has been made possible only by the dialogic constitution of the Servant, and by
the expression of his unique perspective.9

There is another aspect to this that is raised briefly by Newsom in her article *Response to Norman K. Gottwald* (1992). She argues that Lamentations represents the voice of the Judahite community that was left behind after the events of 587 BCE, while Second Isaiah speaks to the exilic community in Babylon. The former views elements of the latter (the princes, Lam 1:6; the king and princes, Lam 2:9; the prophets, priests, and elders, Lam 4:13-16) as being to blame for the destruction of Jerusalem. In Newsom’s words, their critique is “sustained and thorough” (1992: 77). She notes the significance of the absence of terms such as king, prince, priest, prophet and elders in Second Isaiah to refer to the exilic community. Instead, they are designated as children, sons and daughters. What Newsom does not refer to explicitly, but is no doubt aware of, is the constitution of the exilic community by Second Isaiah as the Servant, Israel-Jacob—which we have argued embraces the Judahite community as well. This is evident in the double-voiced discourse of Isa 50:6 which, by picking up the speech of Lam 3:30, assumes for the Servant a role that brings him in line with the expectations of the Judahites, while also bringing within his constitution as Servant Israel-Jacob, the one Yahweh loves, both the exilic and the Judahite communities. He embodies the reunification of the communities under one designation—not prince (because, according to Isa 43:28, the princes were

9. We agree with Auld’s assessment of the poetry of Isaiah, that it “shares the ability of all good poetry to suggest rather than to state, to evoke rather than to define. That is part of the opportunity it offers and also part of the problem it poses for all succeeding tradition” (Auld, 1980: 580).
profaned), not king (which, in Second Isaiah, is a term reserved for the nations), but Servant, a designation which draws its full signification from its relation to Yahweh as Master.

The monologic quality of the idea of suffering introduced by Yahweh’s discourse breaks down even further as a third voice is introduced. This voice is brought into direct dialogic engagement with both the Servant and, albeit in a more indirect way, Yahweh.\textsuperscript{10} The “they” of Yahweh’s introductory discourse in 52:13-15 merges with the “we” who speak in 53:1-10,\textsuperscript{11} meaning the voice represents the point of view of the nations in response to what Yahweh has just said. We noted in the previous chapter how the “we” double-voice aspects of Yahweh’s and the Servant’s discourse, particularly with regards the Servant’s suffering. Indeed, the discourse of the nations here is taken up completely with the Servant’s suffering, which in itself gives the “idea” an added dimension, since in the discourse of Yahweh and the Servant suffering played a relatively small part. The nations make a unique contribution to the Servant’s voice-idea—for them his suffering takes on a significance it did not have for either Yahweh or the Servant. For Yahweh, the suffering of the Servant was a symbol and a consequence of Israel-Jacob’s sin, but it also anticipated Yahweh’s compassion. For the Servant, his suffering became an opportunity to endure in the belief that Yahweh’s compassion (or his vindication)

\textsuperscript{10} Clines demonstrates how the poem of Isa 52:13-53:12 focuses on the relationships in which “he”, the Servant, figures (Clines, 1976: 39).

\textsuperscript{11} See Clines (1976: 40).
was assured. It became a living symbol of the Servant’s faithfulness, an embodiment of the community’s hope in the face of its laments as expressed in Lam 3:30. But in Isa 53, in the voice of the nations, the Servant’s suffering takes on the character of witness. It becomes a symbol to the nations of its own guilt before Yahweh. Here again the suffering is seen as anticipatory—the nations recognise that the Servant’s suffering is a prelude to new life and offspring (53:10). In other words, the Servant embodies a narrative of redemption that testifies not only to the Servant’s faithfulness in the face of suffering and shame, but also to Yahweh’s restorative power. The nations do not just proclaim this idea monologically—they testify to its impact upon them. The content of their discourse is the significance of the Servant’s voice-idea to them. Their discourse is not pedagogic, since they are not theologians or academics—it is the recounting of an experience that has transformed them. The nations, like the Servant, embody the truth of what they are saying. Their discourse cannot be abstracted from who they are without its character being lost. For example, to extract a systematic theological statement of vicarious atonement from the poem is to deny the uniqueness and the lived reality of the nations’ voice-idea on the Servant’s suffering. The nations do not claim that the Servant’s suffering is objectively and perpetually vicarious. But they do claim to have been transformed by what they have witnessed in a way that makes his suffering vicarious for them. For the nations, the Servant’s suffering is covenantal, in that by it they see the promise of redemption, where previously they were not even aware they needed it.
The dialogic emergence of this multi-faced\textsuperscript{12} “idea” of suffering, that encompasses judgment and forgiveness, confession and repentance, witness and redemption, voiced by multiple consciousnesses each illuminating one another in their world of “yoked-together semantic human orientations” (Bakhtin, 1984: 97), has a clear advantage over a monologic statement. By it the prophet’s target audience, the exiles themselves, are drawn into a dialogue that compels them to respond. It is one thing for the prophet to tell the exiles that one day the nations will repent when they witness how Yahweh has enabled them to return to Judea. It is quite another thing for them to “experience” this truth dialgocially, to be caught up in an unfolding idea that is being “played out at the point of dialogic meeting” (1984: 88) between consciousnesses. It is a dialogue in which they are compelled to participate, to discover themselves in light of the blind, but redeemed, Servant. In the dialogic field of battle that rages through the poems of Second Isaiah, the exiles hear themselves being called as Yahweh’s Servant; they hear themselves responding faithfully and hopefully, even willingly; and ultimately see themselves reflected in the consciousness of the nations, as they (the nations) repent because of what Yahweh has achieved in and on behalf of the Servant, Israel-Jacob. This is the future orientation of the Servant’s voice-idea. It anticipates that the exiles will leave Babylon and return home, and in doing so worship Yahweh as redeemer (see 44:26;

\textsuperscript{12} The term is Bakhtin’s (1984: 89).
48:20-21). It also anticipates a chain reaction in which exiles scattered further abroad will return home (43:6). The existence of Third Isaiah, chapters 56-66, suggests to us that there were at least some among the returning exiles who recognised the future orientation of the Servant voice-idea, particularly as the “heroes” of this third collection of oracles are the “servants”, who are understood by some to be the offspring of the Servant. In other words, some did experience the truth of the prophet’s message as event—and by it they not only understood the idea of redemptive suffering, they felt it. In the embodied voice-idea of the Servant the community’s voice, for so long couched in the form of lament, found a form more characteristic of the enduring prophet who faithfully hopes for deliverance.

6.3.3. The voices of the Servant’s epoch

Bakhtin traces the voice-ideas that populate Dostoevsky’s novels not only to the writer’s creative imagination, but to the heteroglossia of his age. Dostoevsky was able to discern voice-ideas, or “idea-images”, in the voices of his epoch—not just the “loud, recognised, reigning voices of the epoch, that is, the reigning dominant ideas (official and unofficial)” but also those voices “still weak, ideas not yet fully emerged, latent ideas heard as yet by no one but himself, and ideas that were just beginning” (Bakhtin, 1984: 90). Dostoevsky could also discern voice-ideas of the

13. See, for example, Beuken (1990).
past in the heteroglossia of the present. By bringing these voice-ideas together and causing them to quarrel, Bakhtin anticipated future “dialogic encounters” between ideas. So, on the plane of the present, “there came together and quarreled past, present, and future” (1984: 90).

The discourse that converges on the Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah is replete with voice-ideas of the past—both recent and remote—and voice-ideas of the present and the future. At the point of convergence—the polyphonic Servant himself—these ideas are given room to quarrel, and new voice-ideas are anticipated and imagined, such as that represented by the speaking “we” of Isa 53, whose extraordinary perspective on the Servant was still to be actualised in history. Bakhtin calls these sources “idea-prototypes”, and argues that they enter Dostoevsky’s work without losing any of their essential semantic validity. They remain unmerged voice-ideas, but in the new work are brought into a new realm of existence in which “they become thoroughly dialogised images of ideas not finalised monologically” (Bakhtin, 1984: 91). We have seen such idea-prototypes scattered through Second Isaiah, and they have made vital contributions to the dialogical constitution of the Servant. Indeed, they have guided us in our hearing of the Servant’s voice-idea. A brief review should demonstrate how the Servant has become a playground for voice-ideas of the past, present and the future.

Of the voice-ideas of the past that dialogue with the Servant’s own, those of Abraham and the covenantal promises, David and the messianic hope, and Moses
and the deliverance of the exodus, are the most prominent in the earlier Servant discourses.\textsuperscript{14}

Abraham is introduced by name in the first Servant discourse, 41:8-16, albeit briefly (in v. 8c). We argued in chapter 4 that the prophet emphasises the Servant’s lineage in order to qualify the terms “servant” and “chosen”. It is better to say that Abraham is a voice-idea from the remote past that is brought to bear upon the Servant dialogue, and that the unique contribution this idea makes to the Servant’s constitution is that of friendship with Yahweh, based in Yahweh’s free act of compassion. Yahweh makes this explicit when he describes Abraham as \textit{יִבְשׁוֹא} or “my friend/my loved one” in 41:8c.\textsuperscript{15} “Abraham” as a voice-idea does not define and enclose the Servant—it merely contributes a point of view that is unique, which is that the Servant’s heritage is anchored in the love of Yahweh for Israel-Jacob’s forefather. Although the name Abraham is mentioned only once, this voice-idea makes its presence felt throughout the Servant discourses. In 41:9 Yahweh’s utterance to the Servant, “you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners” should be heard in light of it. In 42:6d the utterance “a covenant for the people, a light for the nations” resonates with Yahweh’s promise that all the nations of the earth would be blessed through Abraham (Gen 12:3; cf.

\textsuperscript{14} These themes are discussed in chapter 4.

\textsuperscript{15} We have already noted, with Muilenburg (1956a: 455), that the term “my friend”, or “my beloved” (יִבְשׁוֹא) does not contain the idea of reciprocity in the Hebrew.
17:4). The extraordinary declaration by Yahweh to the Servant in 43:4, "I love you," (‘I love you’), is heard as a reaffirmation of a long-established axiom. In 43:5 Yahweh’s promise to bring the Servant’s offspring (‘î) from the east and the west is heard as a commitment to the far-flung of Israel that has a rich historical basis—particularly as it also echoes its use in 41:8, where ‘î refers explicitly to the seed of Abraham. In 44:3 Yahweh’s promise to pour his blessing on the Servant’s descendants is heard as a renewal of the Abrahamic promise in Gen 12:2-3. It is here that the voice-idea of Abraham quarrels, rather than dialogues, with the voice-idea of the Servant, since the surety of the promises to Abraham are by no means self-evident to the exilic people, who have come to know themselves as the blind and deaf of Yahweh (42:18-19; 43:8), rather than his beloved. The resistance of one idea to the other is reflected by the disputational form of much of Yahweh’s discourse. Yet out of the quarrel is generated a new idea—that the promises to Yahweh’s beloved Abraham are more enduring than the blindness Israel-Jacob has brought upon itself.

Another voice-idea that strives with that of the Servant, as opposed to just agreeing with it, is that of the people’s Davidic hope, particularly as First Isaiah presents it (9:1-7; 11:1-16). It is significant that the idea of a renewal of the Davidic monarchy is not directly represented as such in Second Isaiah. There may be a number of reasons for this. For example, the Davidic idea had become repugnant to sections of the nation that blamed the monarchy and the elite for the destruction of
the city.\textsuperscript{16} It might also be because the role of \textit{shepherd} and \textit{anointed one} has, out of necessity, been transferred to Cyrus (see Isa 44:24-45:8). Gottwald argues along these lines, and also notes that the “specifically ‘moral’ and ‘religious’ functions” of the Davidic king, such as witness, leader, and command-giver to the nations, will be given to the returning exiles (Gottwald, 1992: 53-54). The Davidic idea has not been eradicated by Second Isaiah—but it is present in a more muted way than, say, that of Abraham. David is never mentioned by name in the Servant discourses, and only once in Second Isaiah (55:3). Its use there is significant, since it is not aligned with the idea of monarchy, but with Yahweh’s promise of an everlasting love commitment to the Davidic line (cf. 2 Sam 7). The renewed commitment is to the people, not to a specific ruler. This reflects the nature of the Davidic idea’s presence in the Servant discourses, where it seems the people, Israel-Jacob, have been assigned David’s vacated position. This is indicated by the presence of conventional language that echoes the Davidic idea, for example: the title “servant” is ascribed to David in Isa 37:35 (cf. Ps 89); “my chosen” (יִרְמָא, 42:1; 45:4; cf. 41:8, 9; 43:10, 20; 44:1, 2; 45:4; 49:7) is often used of the king outside Second Isaiah (1 Sam 10:24, 16:1-13; 2 Sam 6:21; 1 Kings 8:16; 11:34; and Ps 89:4\textsuperscript{[i])}; the role of administering justice (as is ascribed to the Servant in 42:1, 4) traditionally belongs to the king (2

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\footnotesize 16. On this point see Gottwald (1992: 53): “In Lamentations . . . we have a glimpse of the indigenous Judahite community that remained in the land and carried on its worship at the site of the destroyed temple. We read there of their disillusion with the Davidic dynasty and with the corrupt leadership of officials, priests and prophets.”
\end{flushleft}
the description of Cyrus as Yahweh’s “shepherd” (masc. sing. part. of הָגַשֵּׁה) in 44:28, and as his “anointed” (מָשָׁא) in 45:1—both associated traditionally with the Davidic king—are reminders that there is no-one from Israel who currently bears such titles. That the vacant throne of Israel is never referred to specifically in Second Isaiah is probably because the people do not need to be reminded of it. The downfall of the monarchy is one of the tragedies associated with the people’s exile (see Lam 2:1-3). Nevertheless, the muted presence of the Davidic voice-idea is a disruptive and constant element in the Servant dialogue, like the veiled memory of a serious illness diagnosed but not yet treated. Again, the Davidic voice-idea does not define and finalise the Servant monologically, like it does in some approaches.17 We cannot say absolutely that the Servant, Israel-Jacob, replaces the king. That Cyrus is also presented in Davidic language demonstrates that the presence of the voice-idea in Second Isaiah is more complex than that. But it does affect the pitch of the Servant’s voice-idea. It means that the voice-idea of the Servant contains within it the idea of unmediated representation before Yahweh, because the monarchy is gone. This enables the Servant to hear Yahweh’s call to service more clearly, since the monarchy no longer represents the people to Yahweh. In the absence of a monarch, the Servant, Israel-Jacob, is being called to a hitherto unheard of level of service on behalf of the nations. In other words, in the grand dialogue that constitutes

17. See, for example, Williamson (1998).
the Servant, the voice-idea of the Davidic king stands not between Yahweh and the
Servant, but to one side of them. And it does so as a voice-idea seeking a quarrel,
particularly where Cyrus is concerned. We have already quoted Blenkinsopp on this:
“What this implies in concrete historical terms is that Cyrus has taken the place of
the Davidic royal house, at least for the time being, an affirmation that we suspect
not all of the prophet’s audience would have agreed with” (2002: 249). In other
words, the presence of the Davidic voice-idea is not a welcome one—indeed, it
causes the people to question whether Yahweh is really acting in their best interests
(this much is evident from the Cyrus oracle, 45:1-7). But this serves to magnify the

The Mosaic voice-idea is brought into dialogic tension with the Servant idea
with the explicit intention of causing the Servant’s flight from Babylon to be
understood in relation to Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. This much is made clear in
passages like 43:2, where the Servant’s journey back to Judea is couched in language
that evokes the exodus event,¹⁸ and 43:16-17, where the dialogic link is more
explicit. Although Moses is never mentioned in Second Isaiah, we describe the
exodus references as the Mosaic voice-idea, rather than just “exodus motifs”, for two
reasons. Firstly, the Servant is given a leadership role in the deliverance of the
people from exile akin to that of Moses—indeed, he will open eyes that are blind and

¹⁸. Although, as Seitz says, the “association is secondary and allusive” (Seitz, 2001: 375).
free prisoners from darkness (42:7). The very designation “Servant” is taken by many commentators to be an indirect reference to Moses. Secondly, the exodus imagery is more than a motif—it functions in the discourse much more like a quarrelling voice-idea. For example, the exodus idea contributes to the Servant’s voice-idea in two ways: it doubles as a paradigm for the miraculous deliverance of the exiles from an apparently hopeless situation of bondage and as a blueprint for leadership; and, paradoxically, it calls the Servant, Israel-Jacob, to stop harking to the past glories associated with the exodus, and look instead to the new thing Yahweh is about to do. The Mosaic voice-idea assumes the role of contradiction in the dialogic field of battle, urging the Servant to look back at the exodus, while also compelling him to turn away from it. We argued in our discussion of Isa 43:18-19 that with reference to the “former things” motif the themes of continuity and discontinuity were held simultaneously. The reference double-voices the community’s laments in which the exiles rehearse Yahweh’s past actions on their behalf, and bemoan the apparent cessation of his salvific activity. We argued this process was particularly transparent in Isa 63:11-14, where the days of old

19. This observation is made by Coats: “In contrast to the New David, the messiah, at the centre of First Isaiah, the Second Isaiah describes God’s leader as a servant, a New Moses who will lead the people from their exile in Babylon” (Coats, 1993: 186). Our view is that the Mosaic voice-idea does not replace the Davidic voice-idea—rather, they are both held simultaneously.

20. This is the central argument of O’Kane’s article (1996). See also Miller (1987: 251), who highlights common elements in the roles of the Servant and Moses, such as “intercessor” and “suffering servant of God”.

21. We dealt with this theme in some depth in chapter 4.
(קֹדֶשׁ בְּשַׁדַּי), namely the days of Moses and his people, are recalled (רֵאָם). In 43:18 the Servant is commanded to not remember the former things, while Yahweh immediately announces that his “new thing” includes making a way in the wilderness (43:19), an image that signifies because of the exodus motif. So the new thing, which is greater than the former thing, can only be fully grasped in light of the old thing. The Mosaic voice-idea is a prime example of how an idea is brought into the dialogic field of battle without losing anything of its original semantic validity. Indeed, in the case of the former thing its original semantic validity is essential for the new thing to be comprehended. The Mosaic voice-idea thus signifies in two discourses, in two different ways, simultaneously—it functions in the discourse associated with the exodus traditions in order to compare the new thing with the former thing, and also contributes to the Servant’s voice-idea by disrupting how the community has been using the former thing.

The Servant’s constitution by these, and other, pivoting points of view

22. See also Pss 44:2-4, 74:2, 80:9-12.

23. Clements argues the influence of the Moses idea (he does not use this term) on the text of Second Isaiah is indirect, a view we concur with. Arguing that the exilic age led to a “profound magnification” of the importance of Moses in the formation of the nation, Clements suggests that there was no direct intention on the part of the author(s) of Isa 53 to use the Moses traditions as a prototype for the Servant, but rather that “the same theological concerns which helped shape the Deuteronomic portrayal of Moses have shaped those of the Suffering Servant” (Clements, 1998: 47-48).

24. Leene describes the simultaneity of the former things and the new things differently: “One must ensure that the new does not cancel history or make it irrelevant, because it is this history that the new wishes to endorse as proof of Yhwh being the only God. What is essential in the new is this endorsement. But although history reveals God’s righteousness, in itself it does not appear to be able to make Israel reflect this in his own justice . . . Yhwh achieves this through the new” (Leene, 1997: 230).
renders him more than a literary character—the Servant is, using Bakhtin’s words, a “concrete event made up of organised human orientations and voices” (1984: 93). The voice-ideas that contribute to his constitution, such as those we have just discussed, are not merely drawn from the past. The traditions associated with Abraham, Moses and David have not been locked away in vaults—they have continued to signify to Israel down through the generations, and in exile they have taken on new significance. If this were not the case they would contribute nothing to the Servant dialogue. While it is impossible to discern precisely how these traditions signified in the prophet’s day we can at least see how they are represented in the Servant discourse in a way that will draw the people to his voice-idea. The Servant’s polyphonic design enables voice-ideas that have been transmitted from the ancient past into the present to find new life in the dialogic arena in which the hero now finds himself.

6.4. The voice-idea of the Servant

The polyphonic Servant dialogues not only with voice-ideas that have been generated in Israel’s remote past, but with ideas that are of more recent origin. In some ways these ideas are more precious to the exilic people than those associated with Abraham, David and Moses, since they have enabled the people to find an identity in the face of the destruction of monarchy, temple, city and nation. We refer to ideas like “the suffering of the righteous”. In dialogic encounter with the Servant’s
voice-idea the axiom that the people are suffering unjustly for the sins of previous
generations undergoes a radical transformation. The suffering of the present
generation becomes the catalyst for the redemption of the nations, a “truth” which is
not a generalised theological abstraction, but an embodied point of view expressed
exclusively by the nations themselves in Isa 53. If the Servant’s voice-idea is a live
event, to use Bakhtin’s words (1984: 88), then it is a critically transformative one, a
process in which some of the ideas the people hold as truth are exposed to the
abrasive dynamic of the Servant’s dialogic encounter with Yahweh, and are radically
subverted.

One axiom that is transformed by the voice-idea of the Servant is that of
Yahweh’s wrath against the nations, which Israel expects as just recompense for the
destruction of its temple, city and identity. Nowhere is this idea more clearly
expressed than in the lament of Ps 79, which powerfully voices a nationalistic
ideology that was sure to have engendered popular support during the exilic period.
Yahweh is invoked against the nations who have “entered your inheritance”
(םַמָּאֲרָא שֵּׁמַע לְחַשְׁנָם), “defiled your holy temple” (קְרֵי לְחַשְׁנָם), and “laid
Jerusalem to ruins” (כַּשְׁנָם לְרָעִים לְשֵׁנִים) (Ps 79:1). The poem echoes language we
have encountered in the Servant discourses: the inhabitants of Jerusalem are called
“your servants” (ךָשְׁנִים, vv. 2a, 10c); there is a plea for God to not remember (רֵאש) the
nation’s former iniquities (דַּע, v. 8a; cf. Isa 43:22-28); there is an appeal for the
“prisoners” (רַעִים, v. 11a; cf. Isa 42:7); the exilic people are described as “sheep”
(יִשָּׁרָאֵל, v. 13b; cf. Isa 53:6). But the lament’s call for judgment against the nations is radically at odds with the vision of Yahweh’s concern for the nations in Second Isaiah. Yahweh is invoked to pour his anger on the nations who do not know him (v. 6a); his judgment upon them will be seen as vengeance for the outpoured blood of the “servants” (v. 10c); and the taunts of the nations against Yahweh will be returned sevenfold (v. 12). The people justify their appeal on the basis that the devastation was brought upon them not because of their sins but those of former generations (v. 8a, the precise phrase is יָאָשִׁים, the “former sins”).

All aspects of the idea voiced in the lament are transformed by the Servant’s voice-idea. The idea that the exilic people are suffering unjustly meets the Servant who has burdened Yahweh with his sins (43:24); who has been given up by Yahweh (42:24-25); who is blind and deaf (42:7, 18, 19; 43:8), but nevertheless has had his sins blotted out like a mist (44:22; cf. 43:25). The Servant, Israel-Jacob, who responds to Yahweh, does not complain about unjust suffering, but acknowledges that he has laboured in vain (49:4a); and he has not turned away from those who strike his back and rip the beard from his cheeks (50:6), imagery whose source in Lam 3:30 casts the Servant as the one who accepts his judgment. Additionally, the idea that the nations will be struck with the wrath of Yahweh for their taunts against Israel meets the Servant who will bring justice to the nations (42:1d, 4b); who will be a light to the nations (42:6d); whose liberator will come from the nations (Isa 45:1-7); and who ultimately will send a proclamation of Yahweh’s redemption out to
the nations (48:20). When the Servant responds he has no thought for vengeance. He acknowledges his role to the nations (49:6). Indeed, the nations themselves acknowledge that the Servant has suffered for their sake, that they might have peace and healing (53:5).

However, because the Servant is a voice-idea that can retain the semantic validity of the voices that constitute him, the ideas of Ps 79 retain their signifying, unmerged quality: those who strive against the Servant will perish (41:11cd, 12cd); Egypt will be traded for the Servant’s redemption (43:3-4); the Babylonians will be brought down as fugitives (43:14); Cyrus is given licence to subdue the nations before him (45:1). And in Isa 53 the testimony of the nations echoes the lament concerning the servants’ unjust suffering—the Servant has indeed suffered unjustly, not for his own sins, but for those of the nations. In other words, while the Servant voice-idea critically engages with the ideas of his epoch, by no means can he be reduced to simple propositional definitions.

6.5. Conclusions

Second Isaiah discerns the mood and thoughts of his epoch—he hears the voices of the exiles and crafts a polyphonic hero, the Servant, who speaks to those ideas, dialogues with them, quarrels with them. There are no simple resolutions to the dialogue. Rather, it causes the people to “feel” its diverse points of view. The prophet does not dismiss the ideas of Israel monologically, but draws the people into
a dialogic tussle in which they are invited to see themselves in a new light—as the Servant. Whoever is willing to understand himself or herself as the Servant will discover a new orientation. They have not been convinced to hold to a new idea, because Second Isaiah does not present these ideas as finalised, as if they merely replace old ideas that are no longer relevant. Ps 79 remains scripture, as does the Davidic hope, the Abrahamic promises, the Mosaic paradigm. The exiles are invited to consider the dialogue from a new perspective—that of Yahweh, the Servant himself, and the nations, to hear each voice and see their world differently. Bakhtin says that Dostoevsky thought not in thoughts, but “in points of view, consciousnesses, voices” (1984: 93). We propose that Second Isaiah is comprised not of monologic or propositional ideas, but of voices that each occupy a unique place in relation to their world. To hear their voice-ideas we must locate ourselves near them in the dialogue, as we have argued. We believe Second Isaiah addresses the ideas of his age and his people not by rejecting or replacing them with other ideas, but by inviting the people to enter the dialogue at a different point. Says Bakhtin of Dostoevsky: “His path leads not from idea to idea, but from orientation to orientation. To think, for him, means to question and to listen, to try out orientations, to combine some and expose others” (Bakhtin, 1984: 95). It is significant that in Second Isaiah we are given not a collection of ideas, but a chorus of voices.
7. CONCLUSION

7.1. A summary of the issues

We began our study at the point where interpreters of Second Isaiah have struggled to find a decisive approach to the difficult issue of the suffering Servant’s ambiguous characterisation, and the related issue of his function within the collection. The issue, as we summarised it, was that within Isa 40-55 the Servant’s characterisation was so ambiguous that we could never be sure who it was that was being spoken about. We noted that interpreters from the earliest times had been unable to identify the Servant definitively, or even come to a consensus explanation for the ambiguity of his characterisation. Some had suggested the ambiguity was a result of there being more than one Servant, others that the title Servant was transferred, from a group representing either the nation Israel or a section of it, to an individual, such as the prophet Second Isaiah himself.

Before even addressing the issue of who the Servant might be, we suggested that the difficulties concerning his ambiguous characterisation had arisen not because there were multiple Servants, but because the Servant had been constituted differently to how literary characters were conventionally constituted. By this we meant that the Servant was never described and his actions were not depicted. Our way of expressing this was that the author of Second Isaiah provided no image of the Servant that the reader could objectively assess. The reader’s only access to the
Servant as a character was via discourse addressed to him, or spoken by him, or uttered about him. The other way that we expressed this, and which was suggestive of the methodology we would eventually follow through the course of the study, was that the Servant was constituted wholly by a dialogue that converged upon him, rendering attempts to interpret him objectively not only difficult, but highly suspect.

A number of questions emerged from our brief overview of the main issues:
1) How were we to understand the ambiguous, if not intentionally elusive, nature of the Servant’s characterisation? 2) How were we to interpret a character who was constituted wholly by dialogue? 3) What advantages did the Servant’s dialogic constitution have over more conventional styles of characterisation? 4) What was the function of the Servant within Second Isaiah’s broader message? 5) Did a fresh approach that paid heed to the Servant’s dialogic constitution enable us to better identify the Servant?

In order to conclude this thesis we will address how those questions were answered through the course of the study.

7.2. The ambiguous nature of the Servant’s characterisation

Our history of the Servant’s interpretation engaged with the first question by looking specifically at how interpreters had dealt with the issue of the Servant’s ambiguous characterisation. The review showed that, historically, the Servant had been understood in accordance with three broad categories: he was an individual (and
interpreters differed markedly on who that individual was); he was a corporate figure (again, interpreters differed on whether he represented the whole community of Israel or sections within it); or he was both an individual and a corporate personality. Over the past five or so decades scholars often referred to this last category as the Servant’s “fluid” characterisation, a term that was understood in a variety of ways. Some argued for a linear or synchronic development associated with the Servant’s calling (so the community Israel was replaced by a figure that represented them, most likely the prophet himself), while others saw a dialectic or oscillating relationship, since the “Servant” was an office that could be fulfilled only by the prophet and the nation together.

We began our research at this point, remarking that the Servant’s fluid nature had resurfaced as a prominent theme in recent studies of Second Isaiah. But we posited a fresh observation—that the Servant’s fluidity was intensified by the peculiar nature of his constitution as a literary character. We noted that our only access to the Servant in the collection of Second Isaiah was via ten primary discourses that converged upon him. These discourses were uttered by a multiplicity of voices. Apart from the troublesome phenomenon that the Servant was addressed as “Israel-Jacob” in the early discourses, yet seemed to speak as an individual in the latter discourses, it was the issue of his constitution by multiple voices that we suggested was the major obstacle to a definitive identification of the figure. We suggested that since this was a literary problem we needed to look to the field of
literary criticism for a theoretical framework within which we could approach the issue in a fresh way.

7.3. **The dialogical constitution of the Servant**

The second question, that of how to interpret a character constituted wholly by dialogue, led us to Soviet literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin, whose theories of dialogism, we argued, spoke directly to this issue. Bakhtin’s ideas concerning dialogic truth, multivoicedness, heteroglossia and double-voicing, were seen to be as applicable to life generally as they were to the narrative world of Dostoevsky specifically. They provided the backdrop for our approach to the multivoiced constitution of the Servant and the dialogic nature of the collection from which he emerged. We specifically identified Bakhtin’s theory of the polyphonic hero as a means of gaining new understanding of not only how the Servant was constituted, but also the impact of his constitution on the collection of Second Isaiah.

Our thesis was that the Servant shared the peculiar characteristics of the polyphonic heroes Bakthin observed in Dostoevsky’s novels: he was constituted by dialogue; there existed no fixed image of him anywhere in the collection of Second Isaiah; and he remained unfinalised and open to fresh dialogic encounter. This latter point was demonstrated in the history of interpretation, in which we noted that from pre-Christian times interpretive communities saw themselves and others in light of the Servant’s voice-idea. The term voice-idea was taken from Bakhtin, and by its
application to the Servant we intended to demonstrate that the Servant was not a fixed image, but an ideological doorway. He occupied a unique semantic position in Second Isaiah, and embodied a very particular view of Israel’s exilic experience. The polyphonic hero’s voice-idea was a key aspect of the the Servant’s dialogic constitution, because voice-ideas invited dialogic interaction, not objective, monologic description. In other words, a reader could comprehend the polyphonic hero only by engaging with his internal discourse—the way the hero responds to the discourse of the world around him. We argued a reading strategy that paid heed to Bakhtin’s theories would invite the Servant to reveal what he knew about himself and his world. It would attempt to hear the discourse as the Servant would have heard it. This reflected the title of the thesis, A Dialogic Reimagining of a Servant’s Suffering: Understanding Second Isaiah’s Servant of Yahweh as a Polyphonic Hero.

We argued that only by engaging with the dialogue that constituted the Servant could we hope to view the world from his perspective, and in doing so comprehend his unique voice-idea. This required us to exegete the discourse as discourse seeking a response—in other words, the content of each discourse was studied for what it suggested to the Servant, Israel-Jacob, accepting as a base assumption that discourse seeking a response was shot through with signifiers that would stir such a response. To this end we particularly looked for examples of double-voicing, in which discourse re-voices the utterances of others in order to convey meaning in a refracted way. Our exegesis formed the content of chapters 4 and 5.
7.4. The advantages of the Servant’s constitution

The third question, that of the advantages of a dialogic constitution over a conventional monologic constitution, was tackled over the course of the exegesis in chapters 4 and 5, and was consolidated in our discussion of the Servant’s voice-idea in chapter 6.

We discovered that in Isa 40-48 almost everything we came to know about the Servant was via the speech of Yahweh and the prophet, either addressed to the Servant, or directly concerning him. By the end of chapter 48, however, there had been no response from the Servant, even though a response was expected. We argued that this reflected what Bakhtin called the polyphonic design, discourse seeking a response. With respect to the Servant, the discourse addressed to him by Yahweh rendered the “Servant” an invitation rather than a fixed image. We observed that although the Servant was Israel-Jacob, he did not share the same semantic space as empirical Israel. We argued that in chapters 40-48 we were actually denied the opportunity to form an objective impression of the Servant that would have enabled us to predict his response to Yahweh. We observed that Bakhtin would have appreciated the way that Isa 40-48 ended—with the Servant on the threshold of a decision; commanded to leave Babylon, but with the imperative hanging, unfulfilled, as though the Servant was caught mid-crisis. This openness to the future, and the invitational nature of the Servant’s constitution to this point, was part of the
rhetorical strategy of the collection, and one of the key advantages of the Servant’s
dialogic nature over a more conventional design. The discourse of Yahweh called the
Servant into being. It invited an active response from exilic Israel, the willingness to
be the Servant, and everything that “Servant” encompassed in Yahweh’s discourse.
This included the idea that the Servant was called (41:9; 42:6; 43:1, 7; 49:1), that he
was an offspring of Abraham (41:8), that he was a worm and a threshing sledge
(41:14-15), that he was blind and deaf (42:18-19; 43:8), that he was a witness (43:10,
12; 44:8), that he was called to bring justice to the nations (42:1, 3, 4), that he had
been judged by Yahweh (42:22-25) but that he was also loved by him and belonged
to him (43:1, 4). It also included the disruptive news that Cyrus had been called as
Yahweh’s anointed one and as his shepherd in order to liberate the captive exiles
(44:28, 45:1, 4).

We also argued that in the discourses that constituted the Servant in chapters
40-48 we had a sense that we were overhearing a dialogue that was unfolding in the
present—not in a subjective or mystical sense, as in the actual present of the reader,
but in the present of the Servant’s unfolding self-awareness. The dialogic nature of
the Servant’s constitution made this possible, since we were never given the
opportunity to finalise and objectify him. We argued that not even the writer of the
discourses stood over against the dialogue as though it were already finalised. The
effect of this was to draw us, the readers, into the dialogic process, to experience
rather than observe the hortatory impact of Yahweh’s call upon his exilic people.
In chapter 49 we heard the Servant speak for the first time, and the content of his discourse echoed many aspects of Yahweh’s prior discourses. It was here that the rhetorical impact of the Servant’s specifically dialogical constitution was fully felt, since, by double-voicing Yahweh’s discourse the Servant revealed that he understood himself as having been constituted by it, that the Servant was awake to Yahweh’s call, and had responded faithfully. The figure who spoke in chapter 49 did so as the Servant Israel-Jacob. The effect of this response upon the discourse’s original audience would have been profound. The dialogical constitution of the Servant meant that he functioned as a paradigmatic figure with whom the community was being called to engage. Had the Servant been constructed monologically he would have been set apart from the community, distant from it. But the community was not granted the opportunity of interpreting the Servant’s actions as distinct from its own. In the faithful response of the Servant to Yahweh’s call the community was called to realise its own faithful response, in spite of its many doubts and concerns.

This was seen more clearly in our exegesis of Isa 50:4-9, in which we demonstrated that the Servant’s acceptance of suffering (50:6) was a reimagining of the community’s laments, particularly those voiced in Lam 3. By echoing the laments the Servant demonstrated that his knowledge of himself was as one who had suffered what the community had suffered, and also that he had suffered in a way that fulfilled the prescribed act of faithfulness to Yahweh envisioned by the righteous speaker of Lam 3:28-30. Again, the Servant spoke as the community, and in his
utterance of faithfulness in the face of extreme hardship the community was called to reimagine itself, and to reinterpret its suffering in line with the Servant’s internal discourse.

In our exegesis of Isa 53 we encountered a different type of discourse—the paradigmatic discourse of a group that had been impacted by the Servant. Of paramount importance in Isa 53 was not who the speaking “we” were, but the significance the Servant had had upon them. Again, we argued that the characterisation of the speakers in Isa 53 was intentionally dialogic. Their discourse represented the response of the nations to the Servant’s suffering. We identified the speakers as the nations and their kings, not because there was a fixed image of them in the text, but because the text suggested this was how the speakers knew themselves. The Servant’s discourse in Isa 49 had challenged the nations to recognise him as the Servant. Isa 53 represented the response of the nations to that challenge. We argued that the rhetorical intention of this discourse was to give Israel hope, to demonstrate that its faithful response to Yahweh’s call to servanthood and witness would bear fruit, and would see an appropriate response to its exilic experience in the nations and their kings.

7.5. The function of the Servant in Second Isaiah

In chapter 6 we engaged with the fourth question, concerning the function of the Servant within Second Isaiah’s broader message. Specifically, our concern was with
the Servant’s rhetorical—that is hortatory—function.

Essentially, we argued that the Servant was both a paradigmatic figure who called exilic Israel to respond to Yahweh in a particular way, but also that he was a voice-idea, the focal point of a quarrel between old, and not-so-old, ideological positions, and the new theological position opened up by the prophet’s ministry. In other words, the Servant embodied a critical reimagining of some of Israel’s accepted ideological and theological viewpoints. We argued that the Servant had become a “playground” for voice-ideas of the past, present and the future. These included those of Abraham and the covenantal promise, David and the messianic hope, and Moses and the deliverance of the Exodus. Perhaps more importantly, the Servant was a battle-ground on which the prophet was challenging ideas from Israel’s recent past, particularly the idea that the people had suffered unjustly for the sins of previous generations. Brought within the voice-idea of the Servant, this position experienced a radical overhaul. The suffering of the present generation was viewed not as a cause for lament and complaint, but as the catalyst for the redemption of the nations. The voice-idea of the Servant was a critically transformative live event, a process in which the tightly-held ideologies of the people were brought into critical dialogic engagement with the Servant and radically subverted.

This was the Servant’s rhetorical function in the text of Second Isaiah. Second Isaiah, as a collection of hymns, poems, oracles, disputations and laments,
spoke to a community of exiled people in a difficult transitional time. It responded specifically to the complaints of the people in Isa 40:27, by reimagining those people as the Servant of Yahweh, loved and called and formed by him for the purpose of bringing justice and redemption to the nations, despite the suffering they had endured in exile. As a text seeking to persuade a people to respond with action and belief, Second Isaiah did not erect a fixed image of a Servant the people were meant to marvel at, but constructed a creative and highly imaginative dialogue between Yahweh, the prophet, the nations, and the Servant Israel-Jacob himself, in which the exilic people were called to participate, and in participating to reimagine themselves as the Servant who had responded faithfully to Yahweh, and who would facilitate a similar turning to Yahweh among the nations and their kings. This was how the exiles would experience the redemption of their story and their recent past.

7.6. The identity of the Servant in Second Isaiah

It became evident during the course of the thesis that the Servant was Israel-Jacob throughout Second Isaiah. But it was also evident that at certain times Israel-Jacob bore the characteristics of an individual. We saw that the Servant functioned in the text as Israel in order to call Israel to action and belief, but that his dialogical constitution prevented a direct association with empirical Israel, or the prophet, or anyone else. Our view was that the Servant was a literary construction who was crafted polyphonically in order to function as a paradigmatic figure and as a
critically transformative event. Some could see this as representative of the “ideal” position, in which the Servant represents Israel as it should be. But our view is that the Servant represents Israel as it is. Within the world of Second Isaiah, the Servant represents the truth of who Israel is in dialogic engagement with Yahweh—Israel is loved, is called, is formed to bring justice and peace and redemption to the nations. Empirical Israel is called to respond in a way that is appropriate to this dialogic reality. The interpretive difficulties arise because while the Servant and empirical Israel exist simultaneously, they do not occupy the same space. They are one and the same, and yet there exists a call and response. In the Servant there is an “I” and a “we” and a “you”, but there is also a “they”, those of empirical Israel who have not yet responded as the Servant, who do not yet know themselves as he knows himself. This is clearly a dialectical relationship, but there are not two Servants. There is not a Servant Israel and a Servant who is the prophet. And there is not an ideal Servant and a Servant who is unfaithful. There is only one Servant, Israel-Jacob, by whose internal discourse all Israelites are called to reimagine themselves. The question of whether it was the prophet himself who stepped forward from chapter 49 onwards was, as we demonstrated in the study, inconsequential, since the discourse of Isa 49:1-6 was intended to be read as the response to Yahweh’s discourse by the Servant who had been called. The discourses were part of a larger literary design in which the Servant was consistently, and intentionally, Israel-Jacob.
7.7. Further research directions

A dialogic reimagining takes seriously the unconventional way that the Servant is constituted as a literary figure in the collection of Second Isaiah. We have argued that if the Servant has been constituted according to a particular design, then our interpretation should not only honour that design, but seek to understand how the design contributes to the Servant’s rhetorical impact on the original and subsequent audiences of Second Isaiah.

Our study has not exhausted the work that could be done in this area of Isaianic studies. We have focussed on those discourses that refer to the Servant specifically, but we have also argued that other discourses contribute to the Servant’s self-understanding (Isa 40:27-31 is a prime example). If the Servant is Israel-Jacob consistently throughout the collection then it could be argued all discourses addressed to Israel constitute the Servant. The dialogic method we have expounded could be applied to those discourses also. More work could also be done on the relationship between the Servant and Zion, particularly in chapters 49-55. The parallel stories of the masculine Servant and the feminine Zion are related structurally, but the question of whether they are related dialogically cries out for a Bakhtinian reimagining that would analyse the juxtaposition of the two sets of discourses. Of particular interest would be the effect of hearing one set of discourses in light of the other, and vice versa.

This line of research might also extend into Third Isaiah, since it has been
long recognised that the “servants” (56:6; 63:17; 65:8, 9, 13, 14, 15; 66:14) bear a family resemblance to the Servant of Second Isaiah. It is worth reexamining the identity and purpose of the servants in Third Isaiah in light of Bakhtin’s theories of double-voicing, to ascertain whether there is any intentional dialogic link between the function of the servants and that of the Servant. The dialogical impact upon the Servant of the presence of the servants in the final form of the text is an issue that has not been broached in this study.

There is also much scope for an extension of the research and discussion of the voice-idea of the Servant. This study has worked predominantly on the level of the discourse in Second Isaiah. A much broader study that examines the role of not only the Servant, but also of the feminine Zion, in the ideological dialogue between the Judahite and exilic communities, and which embraces research beyond the discourse of Second Isaiah has the potential to bear rich fruit.

Finally, there is scope for reexamining the impact of a dialogic reimagining of the Servant upon New Testament studies, particularly how the NT communities interpreted the death of Jesus in light of the suffering Servant. Our study has shown that the peculiarly polyphonic nature of the Servant’s constitution invites reinterpretation. This means that even though the Servant is Israel-Jacob, he is also open to being reinterpreted as Jesus, who, incidentally, the NT writers claim to have acted vicariously on behalf of Israel, while also calling for the nations to reimagine their own realities in light of his. Our dialogic reimagining of the Servant’s role in
Second Isaiah leaves the way open for parallels to be drawn between him and Jesus, and in fact invites those parallels. As Bakhtin says, the polyphonic hero exists on the threshold of new dialogic encounter, which suggests the dialogue concerning his identity and function will continue.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AncB</td>
<td>Anchor Bible, New York, Doubleday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANETS</td>
<td>Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>American Standard Version, 1901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BETL</td>
<td>Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum Lovaniensium, Paris</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BKAT</td>
<td>Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament. Neukirchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BZAW</td>
<td>Beihefte zur <em>ZAW</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>BSac</td>
<td><em>Bibliotheca Sacra</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>CBOTS</td>
<td>Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series, Lund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBQ</td>
<td><em>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FZAT</td>
<td>Forschungen zum Alten Testament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HKAT</td>
<td>Handkommentar zum AT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>The Interpreter’s Bible, 12 vols., Nashville, Abingdon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Critical Commentary, London, T&amp;T Clark</td>
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<tr>
<td>JBL</td>
<td><em>Journal of Biblical Literature</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JETS</td>
<td><em>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSNT</td>
<td><em>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSOT</td>
<td><em>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JSS</td>
<td><em>Journal of Semitic Studies</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KJV</td>
<td>King James (Authorised) Version</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASB</td>
<td>New American Standard Bible, 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIB</td>
<td>The New Interpreter’s Bible, 12 vols., Nashville, Abingdon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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NICOT  The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, 18 vols., Grand Rapids, Eerdmans
NJB  *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday, 1990
REB  Revised English Bible, Oxford University/Cambridge University, 1989
RSV  Revised Standard Version, 1971
SBL  Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSP  Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers
SBTS  Sources for Biblical and Theological Study
SJOT  *Scottish Journal of Theology*
TBü  Theologische Bücherei
Tg  Targum
TynB  *Tyndale Bulletin*
Vg  Vulgate
VT  *Vetus Testamentum*
WBC  Word Biblical Commentary, 58 vols., Waco, Word
ZAW  *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
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