

EPIPHANIC IMAGERY IN SECOND ISAIAH'S PORTRAYAL OF A NEW EXODUS

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The coming liberation of Israel from Babylonian exile is depicted by Second Isaiah as a recapitulation of the exodus from Egypt.¹ In one passage, Isa 43:16–21, the coming event is specifically contrasted to the past deliverance at the Sea of Reeds, demonstrating that the author consciously modelled his promise of deliverance on the memory of the exodus. There are several other allusions to the historical exodus as well.² Second Isaiah's theme of the new exodus is a powerful, poetic example of typological interpretation within Hebrew Scripture (Anderson, 1962, pp. 177–195).³

Many of the new exodus passages contain descriptions of awesome transformations of nature. The mountains and valleys along the way of return will be levelled into a roadway or changed in other amazing ways (40:3f, 42:14, 43:19, 49:11, 55:12), bodies of water will appear or disappear wonderfully (41:19f, 42:15, 48:21), vegetation will spring up or wither (41:19f, 42:15, 43:19f, 49:9c–10, 55:12f), and wild beasts will break forth into praise of Yahweh (43:20). This imagery is very striking and evocative, bearing much of the weight of transforming the prospective return into an event of eschatological dimensions.

It is my aim in this study to trace the origin of this imagery. The imagery is virtually without analogy in the narrative accounts of the

1. According to Anderson (1962, pp. 181–182), Isa 40:3–5, 41:17–20, 42:14–16, (43:1–3), 43:14–21, 48:20–21, 49:8–12, 51:9–10, 52:11–12, and 55:12–13 contain the new exodus theme.

2. Namely, the water from the rock (48:20–21), leaving in haste, taking vessels and being guarded front and rear by God (52:11–12), and the making of a way in the sea (51:9–11): cp. Anderson (1962, p. 183).

3. Fishbane (1979, pp. 132–138) covers much the same ground as Anderson, but differentiates his position from Anderson's in the following way (p. 151, n. 8): "Some of his suggestions are dubious; and he has overlooked other features treated (here)." I see nothing in what he says, however, that would contradict the present study.

exodus from Egypt, so we will have to look for antecedents in the poetic-psalmic literature of Scripture. Once we have located the stream of tradition from which this imagery is drawn and located the place of Second Isaiah's examples in it, we can study the purposes served by epiphany and the role it plays in Second Isaiah's message.

I

I believe that the imagery of miraculous transformations in nature along the way of return from exile recalls the depictions of massive, disruptive natural occurrences of the epiphanic traditions of Hebrew Scripture and of the ancient Near East. In particular, I will argue that Second Isaiah drew upon traditions already in existence, which (1) depicted the exodus as an epiphany of Yahweh and (2) portrayed Yahweh's future intervention in history as epiphanic, and combined them to render the prospective return from exile as a new—"eschatological"—exodus.

The first step in the argument is to describe the literary genre which I have called "epiphany." There are a number of scholarly treatments of the genre which depicts God's presence as causing or precipitating dramatic disruptions in nature.⁴ Most scholars treat all passages with this type of depiction as belonging to one genre, but Claus Westermann has argued that a distinction must be made between *theophany* and *epiphany*, two separate genres which share the imagery of intervention (Westermann, 1965, pp. 93-101). In a theophany, according to Westermann's nomenclature, God appears in order to reveal His will by means of speech, while in an epiphany God comes to intervene for (or against) His people in a time of crisis. In a theophany, God comes down from an exalted height to a sacred place on earth, while in epiphany He comes from a distant place on earth, e.g., the desert south of Palestine, to the scene of the people's distress. Even the convulsions in nature, a feature shared by the two genres, are portrayed differently. In a theophany, the eruptions are localized at the place of appearance, while in an epiphany they occur along the route of God's journey to the scene of distress.

Unfortunately, the evidence is not this tidy. The only theophany to fit Westermann's description is the revelation at Sinai (in particular, Exod 19:10-19, recalled in various passages, e.g., Exod 20:18-21, Deut 4:11-12, cp. 1 Kgs 19:11-13), hardly enough to establish the existence of a distinct genre.⁵ On the other hand, a number of passages

4. For example, Weiser (1950); Jeremias (1965); Westermann (1965); and Kuntz (1967).

5. Many passages which are termed "theophany" in scholarly literature do not contain depictions of disruptions in nature, e.g., the revelations to the patriarchs and to "judges"; cp.

which Westermann (1965, p. 93) identifies as epiphanies issue in verbal revelation (viz., Deut 33:2–3, 26; Ps 50:2–6; Mic 1:3–4). The better part of wisdom is to set Exod 19:10–19 aside as a special case, and classify the rest as a single genre. Nevertheless, we can accept Westermann's description of the genre of epiphany in its essentials.⁶

Judg 5:4–5, in the Song of Deborah, can serve as an example of the oldest type of epiphany in Scripture:

Leaving and Coming of God	Yahweh, when You came forth from Seir, when You marched from the field of Edom,
Cosmic Convulsions	the earth trembled, and the heavens poured; yea, the clouds poured water. The mountains quaked before Yahweh, yon Sinai before Yahweh, God of Israel;
God's Intervention	. . . the triumphs of Yahweh, the triumphs of (for?) His peasantry (?) in Israel. (v. 11) ⁷

This epiphanic passage is a part of a larger unit which can be identified as a song of victory, but it can be easily distinguished from the rest. Here alone is Yahweh's action depicted; otherwise only the human participants and various natural phenomena act. Since the song as a whole identifies Israel's victory as the work of Yahweh, the epiphany is central to the entire piece.⁸

The characteristics of epiphany are all clearly present in Judg 5:4–5, 11. Yahweh comes from another place on earth to the scene of Israel's

Kuntz, 1967, pp. 104–133. We probably should consider theophanies without disruptions in nature to constitute a genre distinct from that depicted in the Sinaitic narrative, though the latter does have some features in common with the former.

6. It should be noted that Weiser (1962, p. 38, n. 2) replied to Westermann's critique of his thesis. He reiterates his contention that the imagery of disruptions in nature derives from the Sinaitic theophany as mediated through the cult, even when the imagery occurs in poetic accounts of Yahweh's actions. The fallacy in Weiser's position is to rely upon the hypothetical *Sitz im Leben* of a genre for an explanation of its literary features. A *Sitz im Leben* is an hypothesis based upon formal analysis, and it is a circular argument to explain the genre by means of the hypothesis. For this reason, I am leaving the determination of *Sitz im Leben* out of my account of the literary genre.

7. Adapted from the chart provided by Westermann (1965, pp. 94–95).

8. There are some challenges to the unity of the Song, e.g., Soggin (1981, pp. 94–97), following Richter (1963, pp. 91–104). This is not the place to defend its unity, but I will proceed on the assumption that such a defense can be executed successfully.

battle against the Canaanite coalition of forces led by Sisera. The convulsions in nature occur along the way of His journey. The action of God is an intervention to deliver Israel from its foes; this is not said in the section with epiphanic imagery, but it is expressed elsewhere in the poem (vv. 11, 31).⁹

The epiphany genre did not originate with Israel, but goes back to the myth, hymnody, and iconography of ancient Near Eastern polytheism. The portrayal of Baal as a storm god with lightning in his hand is an important instance from Israel's immediate cultural milieu. In all probability the imagery associated with Baal and other storm gods is the antecedent of the epiphanies of Hebrew Scripture. At the same time, we can observe a striking difference between the biblical material and its antecedents: In Israel's polytheistic milieu, the epiphany of deity is a cosmological-mythological event, whereas it is an historical event in Israel's literature.¹⁰

II

Now that we have the genre laid out before us, we can forge the links to the new exodus passages of Second Isaiah. I will argue that the imagery of natural transformations in the new exodus passages fit the description of the epiphany of God. First, I will show that the exodus was depicted in epiphanic imagery before Second Isaiah. Then I will attempt to trace the development of imagery in the exodus epiphanies in the direction of Second Isaiah's passages.

The depiction of the exodus as epiphany antedates Second Isaiah. Ps 77:16–20 and all of Psalm 114 describe the exodus in tell-tale epiphanic imagery, and Exod 15:7–10 at least echoes such language. Although one might raise questions about the dating of these passages, I see no reason to date them after the exile.¹¹ This is sufficient to confirm the

9. Interpreters have frequently surmised that a thunderstorm occurred in the course of the battle of Megiddo and turned the tide of war in Israel's favor; so, e.g., Bright (1959, p. 158). V. 21 supports this hypothesis. Even if this is so, it would not mean that the epiphanic depiction is simply a description of the event untouched by the conventions of the genre; at most it would suggest what prompted the author to draw upon the genre.

10. Westermann (1965, p. 97) is the source of these observations. It should be noted that there are a few examples of the cosmic-mythological type of epiphany preserved in Hebrew Scripture, e.g., Ps 29, 104:32.

11. Weiser (1962, pp. 91–95) argues for a pre-exilic dating of most of the Psalms. His position may be somewhat conservative, but it is not unreasonable in the case of Psalms 77 and 114. He (p. 709) dates Psalm 114 before the fall of the northern kingdom on the basis of the mention of Judah and Israel in parallel in v. 2.

proposition that the portrayal of the exodus as an epiphany of Yahweh was well established in the tradition prior to Second Isaiah.

The epiphanic character of Second Isaiah's new exodus passages was not recognized either by Anderson or by Westermann.¹² Perhaps this oversight can be traced to the differences between Second Isaiah's portrayals and those which fit the description I have given. To establish the roots of Second Isaiah's imagery in epiphanic language, I need to show that his belong at the end of a development that can be observed in the more easily recognized epiphanies. For lack of a better term, I call this development a trend toward "rationalism." By this I mean the depiction of the disruptions in nature as contributing to the action of deliverance.¹³

To exhibit the development of the genre toward depictions of the disruptions in nature as serving a rational purpose, the following examples manifest stages along this line of development. For simplicity's sake, we can limit our examples to epiphanic depictions of the exodus.

Ps. 77:16–20 can serve as a starting point:

When the waters saw You, O God,
 when the waters saw You, they were afraid,
 yes indeed, the deep trembled.
 The clouds poured down water;
 the heavens pealed thunder;
 the arrows flashed on every side.
 The crash of Your thunder was in the stormwind;
 Your lightnings lit up the world;
 the earth trembled and shook.
 Your way was through the sea,
 Your path through the great waters;
 yet Your footprints were unseen.
 You led Your people like a flock
 by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Yahweh's intervention to deliver His people from Egypt is accompanied by dramatic convulsions in nature. The disruptions occur in response to

12. Cp. Westermann (1969, pp. 21–22, 36–40, 79–81, 105–107, 126–129, etc.). In the course of private correspondence between us he stated his concurrence with my thesis.

13. I am not contending that the earlier stage, with its somewhat animistic imagery, i.e., natural phenomena responding like animate beings to the presence of God, passes out of the poetic vocabulary of Israelite authors when the rationalistic development occurs. Hab 3:2–15 may be rather late in date of composition, but it exhibits the qualities of the earlier stage. I do contend that the rationalistic stage is later than and a development from the earliest examples of semi-animistic imagery.

God's presence as He literally travels through the sea.¹⁴ Except for the "path" through the sea, the disruptions themselves do not further the action, but simply reveal the awesome power of God.

Psalm 114 modifies the epiphanic imagery in a rational direction:

When Israel went forth from Egypt . . .
 The sea looked and fled,
 the Jordan turned back.
 The mountains skipped like rams,
 the hills like lambs . . .
 Tremble, O earth, at the presence of Yahweh,
 at the presence of the God of Jacob . . .

In this Psalm, the epiphanic disruptions in nature, with the exception of the quaking of the mountains, contribute to the action. Like the older epiphanies, the imagery is still semi-animistic—the sea, Jordan and the mountains respond like animate beings—but their response furthers the action of God. There is another rationalistic feature to the imagery: the epiphanic disruptions occur as Israel, not God, passes by. While it is still Yahweh's presence which precipitates the disruptions, it is never explicitly stated that He is travelling along the desert way.¹⁵

The same rationalistic modifications of the epiphany can be discerned in the new exodus passages of Second Isaiah. In them, both Yahweh and Israel journey through the desert, but Yahweh is never the subject of a verb of movement.¹⁶ Moreover, the disruptions of nature contribute directly to the action: the excavation of a roadway, the miraculous appearance of water and vegetation, and so on. Second Isaiah rationalizes the imagery one step further: the natural phenomena are not portrayed as animate beings reacting to God's presence, as they are in Ps 77:16ff and 114; rather the desert environment is changed by the action of God upon it.¹⁷ All of these characteristics can be observed in Isa 41:18:

14. The portrayal of the exodus as epiphany introduces another rationalistic element simply by having the scene of deliverance itself be the route of travel. Thus, Yahweh does not come from some place to Israel, but travels with Israel in its exodus.

15. Westermann (1965, p. 96, n. 47) hypothesizes that the Psalm originally had Yahweh the subject of travelling, as Ps 77:16–20 does.

16. Isa 40:3–5 comes closest to doing so, for it is Yahweh who will travel along the roadbed made in the wilderness. Of course, outside the epiphanic passages Yahweh is made the subject of verbs of movement; in the vicinity of 40:3–5 we have 40:10–11.

17. There are two exceptions, Isa 43:20 and 55:12, in which beasts and mountains with their vegetation will rejoice and praise God. One suspects the influence of the call to praise here; cp., e.g., Psalm 148 and Isa 44:23, etc.

I will open rivers on the bare heights,
 and fountains in the midst of valleys;
 I will make the wilderness a pool of water,
 and the dry land springs of water.

Yahweh acts directly and miraculously to transform the natural environment to aid His people in their journey from Babylon to Judah.

To summarize, Second Isaiah drew upon an existing tradition for his depictions of the new exodus as epiphany. He extended a rationalistic trend in that tradition when he depicted the epiphanic eruptions as beneficial acts for God's people on their journey through the desert.

III

Second Isaiah also had precedent in the tradition of epiphanic depictions for the announcement of a *future* epiphany. Isa 30:27–33 and Mic 1:3–4 employ the epiphany genre in prophecy, the former in a prophecy of judgment against the enemies, the latter in a judgment against Israel. Both passages draw upon imagery suggestive of God's wrath and destruction fury, for in each He comes to judge.¹⁸ Thus, these passages differ markedly from Second Isaiah's in imagery and God's mood, but nevertheless they establish a precedent for depicting God's intervention in the future in epiphanic terms.

IV

We may be able to identify another stream of tradition behind Second Isaiah's depiction of Yahweh's miraculous transformations of the desert. In the descriptive psalms of praise, God is frequently depicted as turning the human world upside down, as overthrowing the mighty, and as raising up the lowly (e.g., I Sam 2:4–8; Ps 147:6, Job 5:11–14). The concluding sections of Psalm 107, a liturgy celebrating Yahweh's deliverance of persons in distress, states this theme in two ways. In vv. 39–41, God's reversals are stated in rather standard language:

(God) pours contempt upon princes,
 and makes them wander in trackless wastes;
 but he raises up the needy out of affliction,
 and makes their families like flocks.

A parallel section, occurring just prior to this one, depicts God's action in the imagery of transforming nature:

18. The same use of epiphanic imagery is found in some early apocalyptic passages, e.g., Zech 9:14f, Isa 59:15b–20.

He turns rivers into a desert,
 springs of water into thirsty ground . . .
 because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.
 He turns a desert into pools of water,
 a parched land into springs of water.
 And there He lets the hungry dwell,
 and they establish a city to live in (vv. 34–36).

Here we have language quite reminiscent of Second Isaiah's, especially in the theme of beneficial transformation of nature.¹⁹ Second Isaiah, it would seem, combined the "reversal" motif of descriptive praise with the epiphanic genre.²⁰

The reversal motif of the descriptive praise psalms, however, is hardly of equal importance to the epiphany in the formation of Second Isaiah's depictions of the new exodus.²¹ Above all, the reversal motif does not evoke Yahweh's "glory," which is so prominent in Second Isaiah's message. Ps 107:42–43 calls upon the worshipper to discern Yahweh's justice and steadfast love, whereas Second Isaiah is effusive over His wonderworking power and incomparable being. Moreover, the reversal motif locates the beneficial changes in the land to be occupied and civilized, whereas the transformations of the new exodus occur along the route of travel. In the new exodus, the exiles benefit from the transformations only temporarily—like the manna and quail of the original exodus—whereas the hungry of Psalm 107 will benefit permanently from them.²² These differences between the reversal motif and Second Isaiah's new exodus can be best accounted for if we view the epiphany as the genre at the foundation of his imagery of desert transformation.

V

Having identified the antecedents of Second Isaiah's portrayal of the new exodus, it should be worthwhile to survey the passage briefly to

19. The first part—the negative action of God—parallels Isa 42:15–16, though the reasoning is different.

20. Westermann suggested this thesis to me in private correspondence.

21. In addition to the points made in the text, I would like to note that the imagery of natural changes is not common as an example of reversal in the descriptive praise psalms; this fact makes the motif unlikely as a major source of influence.

22. Second Isaiah does not speak of the miraculous transformation of the land of Judah. In chapter 54, where he depicts the new state of salvation, he promises an increase in population and protection from enemies, along with a permanent state of grace, but no change in the physical environment. Isaiah 35, which is reminiscent of Second Isaiah in many respects, preserves some features of the new exodus, particularly in vv. 8–10, but the change in nature seems to be located in the land which the redeemed will occupy.

determine the purposes to be served by Yahweh's epiphany. We can proceed through the new exodus passages *seriatum*.²³

The initial announcement of Yahweh's intervention, Isa 40:3-5, is depicted as an epiphany. Yahweh will reveal His "glory" to all flesh (v. 5). The rugged wilderness will be changed into a roadbed in preparation for, and perhaps as a manifestation of, the divine appearance. The return of the Israelite exiles is not mentioned; here only Yahweh travels the way of return. This initial passage conditions all subsequent announcements of epiphany as a divine appearance before the whole world. The specific epiphanic occurrences will aid Israel in their return, but their return will reveal God not only to the recipients, but to all flesh.

Isa 41:18-19, 42:15-16, 43:19-20 and 49:9c-11 depict the journey of the exiles back to their homeland as epiphany. Isa 41:18-19, 43:19-20 and 49:9c-11 announce a radical transformation in the wilderness to facilitate the survival of the people:

I will give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert,
to *give drink* to my chosen people . . . (43:20b)
They shall *feed* along the ways,
on all bare heights *shall be their pasture*;
they shall *neither hunger nor thirst*;
neither scorching wind nor sun shall smite them, . . . (49:9c-10)

The italicized phrases specifically identify the transformations in nature as benefitting the returning exiles. Some of the imagery, it might be noted, portrays the people as herd animals, picking up the metaphor of God as shepherd presented in Isa 40:11.

The miraculous change in the wilderness will not only aid the exiles but also reveal the presence of Yahweh in the events:

I will open rivers . . . set in the desert the cypress . . .
that humans may see and know,
may consider and understand together,
that the hand of Yahweh has done this,
the Holy One of Israel has created it (41:18-20).

The acts of God for Israel will demonstrate to the whole world that He has delivered Israel, and in that deliverance "all flesh will see the glory of Yahweh" (Isa 40:5).

Isa 42:15-16 stands out from these passages in that the epiphanic transformation is destructive:

23. I concur with Mulenburg (1956), Westermann (1969), and Melugin (1976), that Isaiah 40-55 exhibit a unity, pattern and sequentiality that suggest that the work was deliberately arranged to be read as a continuous poem.

For a long time I have held my peace,
 I have kept still and restrained myself;
 now I will cry out like a woman in travail,
 I will gasp and pant.
 I will lay waste mountains and hills,
 and dry up all their herbage,
 I will turn the rivers into islands,
 and dry up the pools.

This imagery recalls passages which speak of God's coming to judge peoples in His wrath (e.g., Isa 30:27–28; Mic 1:3–4). However, it is really not anger that moves Yahweh here, but the pent-up desire to save His people. In a bold simile, Yahweh compares Himself to a woman in labor. On the one hand, this suggests His inner agony and turmoil, and on the other, the creative outcome. The disasters in nature are simply the manifestation in the created order of what God is going through; we might call them the "objective correlative" of God's state-of-mind. The same pericope reverses itself in v. 16, bringing the whole epiphany into line with the others:

And I will lead the blind in a way they do not know . . .
 I will turn the darkness before them into light,
 the rough places into level ground.

Three of the new exodus passages, Isa 48:20–21, 51:9–11 and 52:11–12, make no reference to epiphany in the new exodus. All do recall events of the original exodus that could be said to reveal God's wonderful power: Isa 48:20–21 recalls the miracle of water coming from a rock,²⁴ 51:9–11, the "drying up" of the sea,²⁵ and 52:11–12, the military protection provided by the pillar of cloud/fire.²⁶ We might say that epiphany-like events of the original exodus have replaced the future epiphany. In fact, none of the three focusses on the future event as God's deed. Isa 48:20–21 and 52:11–12 are commands to Israel to move out, 51:9–11 a petition to God to act.

The last new exodus pericope in Second Isaiah, Isa 55:12–13, adds another variation on epiphany. Here nature is transformed into a "praising community":

For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace;
 mountains and hills before you shall break forth into singing,

24. Water from the rock is depicted as an epiphanic phenomenon in Psalm 114.

25. This image is used in Ps 77:17, 20 and Exod 15:8.

26. The role of God as front and rear guard may allude to the angel (E) or pillar of cloud/fire (J) in Exod 13:21–22, 14:19–20, 24.

and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
 Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress . . .
 and it shall be a memorial to Yahweh,
 an everlasting sign which shall not be cut off.

Off and on through the new exodus passages we meet the praise of the redeemed (e.g., 43:21b, 48:20bc), and even of the beasts (43:20), but only here do we see epiphany itself as praise.²⁷ The joyous mood of the people will find an objective correlative in the echoing hills. Just as praise is the natural follow-up of God's deliverance, so the epiphany of God in deliverance is itself an event of praise. The figure of a monument to God indicates that the event of praise is established in perpetuity.²⁸

VI

Our study of the origins of Second Isaiah's depiction of the return from exile and his use of that depiction should yield insight into various aspects of his message and its place in biblical literature. Three subjects have occurred to me: (1) Second Isaiah adopts and adapts earlier traditions in an artistically and theologically significant way in his presentation of his message. (2) Second Isaiah uses epiphany to represent a theocentric vision of the future. (3) Second Isaiah relied upon epiphanic imagery to heighten the portrayal of coming events to the level of eschatology. Finally, we need (4) to assess how literally his epiphanic language was intended and received.

(1) Second Isaiah declares that the event that he is announcing was proclaimed "from the beginning/beforetime" (Isa 41:26-27, and so on). From this statement one would expect the appropriation of earlier traditions and application of them to the present time in his work. This is certainly true of the new exodus theme with its epiphanic imagery; it is also true of practically every theme of his work. He had precedent for Cyrus's role in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, but he struck off

27. Outside of new exodus passages, we find psalms interspersed through Isaiah 40-55: 42:10-13, 44:23, 45:8, 48:20f, 49:13, 51:3, 52:9f, 54:1f. The final new exodus passage probably picks up on these praises for the idea of beasts, mountains, and so forth; uttering praise certainly comes from the praise psalm tradition, not epiphany.

28. More could probably be made of the progression of the new exodus/epiphanic passages, but that would require an extensive exposition of the larger units. It is sufficient for our purposes to observe that the revelation of God is the first, and the purpose of the second; God's passion dominates the third, while the newness of this "exodus" is emphasized in the fourth. The command to leave Babylon concludes a major section (either chapters 46-48 or 40-48) and praise rounds off the book.

on a new path when he designated this foreign ruler as deliverer and “messiah” (Isa 45:1–6). He offered a bold new interpretation of royal traditions when he democratized the Davidic promises (Isa 55:3–5). Another striking re-interpretation, in my opinion, was his use of war oracles depicting Israel as a weapon in Yahweh’s hand (Isa 41:11–13, 14–16), for it is quite obvious that the exiles have no military action to perform in the unfolding events. Yahweh now acts through other armies for Israel to accomplish what He had hitherto accomplished through their army.

In epiphany, Second Isaiah found an older tradition amenable to the proclamation of a “new thing.” The original imagery and rendering of God would have struck him as naive; it bespoke an imagination that saw an animate nature responding to deity in violent thunderstorms and volcanic eruptions and earthquakes. Israelite authors had adapted the genre to accounts of Yahweh’s interventions for His people, but at first they made no connection between the disruptions in nature and God’s intervention; moreover, they assumed God to have come from some dwelling-place.²⁹ As time passed, there was a trend toward rationalizing these “naive” features. Second Isaiah represents something of a culmination of this trend. He took up this old way of speaking, purged it of its “animistic,” mythological flavor, and employed it to depict the return from the exile as “more than historical.” By adopting this old genre, he maintains continuity of faith; by purging it of its naive qualities, he instructs his generation in the way to read received tradition; and by making it bear the weight of eschatology, he identifies his present and future as the culmination and fulfillment of the whole course of Israel’s history.

(2) Epiphany is intrinsically a way of speaking of God. The name itself says as much, and the genre was always used through the history of tradition to render God. The genre Israel received from the ancient Near East was a naive but vivid depiction of deity; Israel adapted this genre to the presentation of Yahweh’s acts in history in order to portray the efficacy of His action. In the Song of Deborah, treated above, epiphany bears the full weight of rendering Yahweh’s participation in the battle between His people and their enemies. The introduction of epiphanic imagery into praises of Yahweh for His exodus deliverance

29. This is not to say that the Israelite authors were actually animistic in their thinking. Poetic imagery may last in a tradition long after people have ceased believing in the cosmology and theology which it assumes. John Milton’s use of pre-Copernican cosmology in *Paradise Lost* is a good example of how older ideas about the universe persist in poetry.

evoked His palpable presence in the course of that event by means of "poetic exaggeration." We might say that epiphany was one of the weapons in the arsenal of Israelite authors for convincing their community of Yahweh's active presence in human events (Patrick, 1981, pp. 78-85).

Second Isaiah had a theocentric vision of the future, and his use of epiphany at significant points in his proclamation served this vision powerfully. Yahweh is about to reveal His glory to all flesh (Isa 40:3-5). All the specific events that Second Isaiah announces in the cycles of poetic prophecy—the victory of Cyrus, defeat of Babylon, return of the exiles to their homeland, and the restoration of national life—have this revelation as their purpose. The return home, especially, will be so spectacular that no human can miss the hand of Yahweh in it (Isa 41:20). All those who survive the catastrophic events of the time will recognize that here is the true God (Isa 45:20-25).³⁰

Second Isaiah uses epiphany not only to evoke Yahweh's effective presence in events, but also to depict His inner life. In Isa 42:14-15, in particular, epiphany is the manifestation in nature of Yahweh's agony, His overwhelming urge to act in behalf of His people. The physical world convulses with the labor-pains of God. On the principle that the epiphanic passages are to be read cumulatively, all the depictions of Yahweh's epiphany in the new exodus manifest His passion.

The epiphany not only manifests Yahweh's inner mood, it also characterizes Israel's. Joy is to be the mood of the exiles when they leave for home, and nature itself joins in this mood by proclaiming Yahweh's praise (Isa 55:12-13). Epiphany, thus, is the objective correlative of the state-of-mind of both giver and receivers.

(3) The very idea of a "new" exodus is eschatological.³¹ One would not speak of a new one unless the "old" needed to be completed or

30. Some justification must be given for the assertion that the peoples of the world will convert to Yahweh according to Second Isaiah. There are statements in Isaiah 40-55 which speak of the defeat (e.g., 41:11-12, 15-16, 25) and subordination of the nations (e.g., 45:14-17, 49:23, perhaps 55:3-5). These stand in some tension with universalistic passages (e.g., 40:3-5, 45:6, 20-25). Klein (1979, p. 119) summarizes Second Isaiah's teaching on the subject as follows: "(a) Babylon and the other nations will be defeated; (b) the nations will serve Israel by bringing home the exiles and by responding as servants to her beck and call; (c) the nations will witness Israel's future history and will be led to acknowledge the sole power of Yahweh; (d) one passage seems to speak of proselytes explicitly (44:5, cf. 55:5); (e) Israel is not sent on a mission to the nations (they actually come to her), though her fate and posture under God's governance may lead nations to acknowledge and confess Yahweh. . . ."

31. There is, of course, an on-going, lively debate over what constitutes eschatology and when it appears in Israel. I follow von Rad (1965, pp. 112-114) and Hanson (1975, pp. 10ff)

surpassed. The new one is designed to bring the result toward which all of God's activity is directed; it is eschatological in the sense that it is to change the conditions of human existence decisively. Second Isaiah exclaims at one point that the new event so far exceeds everything that has ever happened, including the exodus from Egypt, that the past can be forgotten:

Remember not the former things,
nor consider the things of old.

Behold, I am doing a new thing . . . (43:18–19a)

Although this is undoubtedly a bit of rhetorical exaggeration, inasmuch as the prophet himself recalls the old exodus continually, it surely demonstrates that the return from exile is a new, eschatological exodus.

The prophet drew upon the epiphanic portrayal of the original exodus to evoke the eschatological significance of the coming event (e.g., Isa 43:19b–21). There was a "latent" eschatology in the epiphanic representations of the original exodus, for the poets rendered Yahweh's presence much more palpable through such imagery than actual history affords. Second Isaiah actualized this latent eschatology in the exodus tradition when he took up the genre of epiphany in his depiction of the coming event.

The radical changes in nature cause the coming event to burst the bounds of what humans can expect from history. Liberation from exile due to startling changes in the political order of the world may arouse great expectations, but by itself such an event does not reach beyond the scope of the ups and downs of history. It is the epiphany, the miraculous transformation of nature, that bears the weight of eschatology in the new exodus passages. God will make Himself so overwhelming manifest in the return from exile that Israel will enter into a wholly new era with their God (Isa 54:1–17), and the world at large will recognize Him to be the true God and only savior (Isa 40:3–5, 41:20, 45:20–25).

We also noted that Second Isaiah's epiphanic imagery has roots in the language of descriptive praise. Yahweh raises the poor and weak to power and transforms their natural habitat from desert to fruitful land (Ps 107:39–41, 35–38). These beneficial changes in nature are analogous to the beneficial changes occurring along the way back home. However,

in applying the term to classical prophecy and early apocalyptic. By eschatology I mean literature (or oral utterances) that announces an intervention of God which will resolve the conflict between God and His human creatures once and for all. Cp. Patrick (1981, pp. 107–112).

there is no suggestion in the praise psalms of an eschatological reversal; Second Isaiah again brings out the eschatology "latent" in this praise motif.³²

Although we can speak of Second Isaiah's message as eschatological, it is not yet apocalyptic. It does not exhibit the sorts of dualism that mark off apocalypticism from prophetic eschatology.³³ In agreement with his prophetic predecessors, Second Isaiah depicts God's world-transforming intervention as the unfolding of historical movements discernible in the present. He differs in the content of his message: God's judgment was center stage in the pre-exilic prophetic message, with salvation hidden behind it; Second Isaiah looks back on judgment (Isa 40:2, 42:21, 24–25, 43:22–24, 25–28), forward to salvation.

Messages of unconditional salvation are, unfortunately, much more precarious than those of unrelenting doom (cp. Jer 28:7–9). The irony and pathos of Second Isaiah's message is that the concrete occurrences announced by him materialized more or less as he foretold, but the eschatological "overplus" did not. His disciples were forced to live in that ambiguity that inheres in eschatological theologies, viz., between the present and the yet to be.

VII

(4) When we begin to contemplate the fate of Second Isaiah's prophetic message, we are compelled to wonder just how literally he intended it and his disciples construed it. Were the disciples (or Second Isaiah himself if he lived to see the day of return) disappointed when the desert did not bloom and gush with water? Did they discern Yahweh's hand as vividly as their master had said they would? Did the fact that many exiles did not desire to return discourage them? Did they sense any incongruity when the nations did not convert?

Our texts yield no answers to these questions; at most we can circumscribe parameters within which the answer must fall. Obviously Second Isaiah was a poet in spirit, and he invented his figures of speech with a great deal of freedom. The fact that he can invert epiphanic imagery in one place and then reverse himself (Isa 42:14–16) indicates that he was

32. What he does not do is depict the new era in paradisiacal terms, save for the precious stones in the new structures of the city (Isa 54:11–12). One would have expected a coming paradise from what he says about the transformation of nature along the way, but for some unknown reason he holds back. The apocalypticists that come in the centuries that follow will not be so reticent.

33. See Hanson's (1975, pp. 160 *et passim*) characterization of (early) apocalypticism.

not advancing "predictions" when he portrayed the return as epiphany. He employed his imagery to create a certain mood and evoke the transcendent significance of what was about to take place. Undoubtedly his disciples understood this.

However, we cannot simply write off Second Isaiah's message as "poetry"; he was a prophet. If his depictions were so indefinite that they could not be disconfirmed by the much more prosaic reality of the actual return, then one must ask whether we are in fact dealing with prophecy. Surely a necessary ingredient of serious prophecy is risking being disconfirmed by the course of human events. So, though he was confirmed in concrete details of his message, his portrayal of the return as a new exodus, as an epiphany of God recognized by the whole world, was by any reasonable assessment disconfirmed. Neither nature nor the human heart underwent the sort of change one would call eschatological.

We can only guess at how Second Isaiah's disciples experienced the journey and restoration. Since his writing is preserved, at least some of his disciples (probably most) did not become disillusioned. They continued to see in his words "the word of our God (which) will stand for ever" (Isa 40:8). On the other hand, the very existence of the collection of prophecies and visions known as Third Isaiah (Isaiah 56-66) shows that they felt the need to "update" his eschatological message. They abstracted the eschatological element, including imagery, from his time-bound message and applied it to their post-exilic situation. Somewhere in the process they gave up on human agents and historical processes as the means of God's intervention and looked forward to a direct divine intervention.³⁴

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34. For the interpretation of "Third Isaiah" proffered here, see Hanson (1975, pp. 32-208).

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