CHAPTER FOUR

A JUDAHITE PERSPECTIVE IN ISAIAH 40–55

INTRODUCTION

We concluded in the preceding chapter that the arguments that are commonly marshalled in favour of a Babylonian provenance of Isa 40–55 fail to convince. This chapter turns the issue around: are there aspects of Isa 40–55 that actually suggest a Judahite setting? It has been noted from time to time that several passages in Isa 40–55 betray a Judahite perspective, or that they would make the most sense if they addressed a Judahite audience. I shall revisit these passages in order to determine whether or not they contain a geographical perspective. If they do, can we, on that basis, infer that these passages originated in Judah? I shall first examine nine passages in Isa 40–55 (Isa 41:8–10; 41:25; 43:1–7; 43:14; 45:13; 46:11; 49:12; 49:17; 52:11) that contain spatial connotations. I shall then look at three passages that refer to sacrifices and/or to the temple (Isa 40:16; 43:23–24, 28) and discuss whether these references tell us anything about their geographical setting. It should, however, be conceded that the evidence in these passages is at best circumstantial and/or implicit. Had there existed stronger indications of the Judahite location of Isa 40–55, it is doubtful that the present monograph would have been needed.

Isa 40–55 contains passages that mention types of flora and fauna that are more commonly found in Judah rather than in Babylon (Isa 40:20; 41:15, 17–20; 44:1–5, 14; 55:12–13). However, I discuss these passages elsewhere. I have already dealt with Isa 40:18–20 and 44:14 in chapter 3 since they form part of the so-called idol fabrication sections. Likewise, I will discuss Isa 41:15; 44:1–5, 23 in chapter 7 because they from part of the oracles to Jacob-Israel. Finally, I will examine Isa 41:17–20 and 55:12–13 in chapter 5 since they are often understood to contain imagery related to the Exodus.

In my translations of the different passages, I translated all perfect forms as past tense unless otherwise stated. I am aware, however, that in many of these cases, these perfect forms may be examples of the
so-called “prophetic perfect”. As such, they denote events which are yet to take place but which, from God’s perspective, are already accomplished.

1. Passages that Betray a Judahite Point of Reference

It has been argued sporadically by scholars that the following nine passages (Isa 41:8–10; 41:25; 43:1–7; 43:14; 45:13; 46:11; 49:12; 49:17; 52:11) betray a Jerusalem-oriented perspective. Some of them refer to Babylon as a distant land, while others describe the ingathering of the Diaspora as a movement towards Jerusalem rather than away from another location. Yet others presuppose Jerusalem as their centre point. I shall explore these verses in order to establish their geographical perspective. I shall also ask whether this Jerusalem perspective supports a Judahite origin for these passages.

1.1. Isaiah 41:8–10

Isa 41:8–10, part of the longer oracle of Isa 41:8–16, addresses Jacob-Israel directly in second person singular (cf. chapter 7). The key issue in the present context is the phrase מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר (“from the end of the earth”) in verse 9. First, what perspective does this phrase imply, and secondly, what does this perspective tell us about the author’s view of the Diaspora?

Isa 41:8–10 8But you, oh Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend, 9whom I have extracted מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר from the ends of the earth מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר, and from its far corners I have called you, and I have said to you ‘you are my servant, I have chosen you, and I have not rejected you’. 10Do not be afraid, because I am with you, do not be dismayed for I am your God. I have strengthened you אֶת הַמַּקְהֵּל מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר, indeed I have helped you אֶת הַמַּקְהֵּל מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר, indeed I have supported you בְּמַטַּר מַדְּקֵל. There are arguments in favour of both a Babylonian and a Judahite perspective with regard to this passage. To begin with the former, one matter of syntax favours an exilic perspective of Isa 41:8–10. As indicated by the 2m.sg. verbal suffix on the verbs מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר, מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר, and מַלְאָךְ אָבֹאֵר in verse 9, it is Israel that is being chosen, taken from the ends of the

1 I have discussed this matter in greater detail elsewhere (Tiemeyer, “Abraham”, pp. 49–66). What is presented here is an abbreviated version of the relevant sections.