CHAPTER NINE

GOD, THE PROPHET AND THE SERVANT—COMPETING JUDAHITE PERSPECTIVES

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding two chapters we established that the two main non-divine literary characters in Isa 40–55, Zion-Jerusalem and Jacob-Israel, both represent the community in templeless Judah. In this chapter, we shall look at the three remaining literary personae: the Servant, the authorial voice, and God. We shall begin with the Servant, seeking to determine whether or not this figure represents a Judahite or an exilic person/community outside of the text of Isa 40–55.1 We shall then explore the first person sayings in Isa 40–55 that probably reflect the opinions of the prophetic authors of Isa 40–55 in order to investigate what these sayings tell about their location. Finally, we shall look at God in his position as the chief dramatic persona in Isa 40–55 in order to determine the geographical flavour of the theology found in the divine speeches. More exactly, do the oracles in Isa 40–55 show affinity with the theology of the various speakers in Lamentations or with the theology of the divine oracles in Ezekiel?2

1. The Servant

Bernard Duhm was the first historical-critical scholar to single out the four so-called Servant Songs (Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9(11); 52:13–53:12) from their immediate context in Isa 40–55.3 This view, although dominant for nearly a century, has now mostly been abandoned. In contemporary historical-critical scholarship, those scholars who maintain

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1 The age-old question concerning the identity of the Servant lies beyond the boundaries of this study and will therefore not be addressed.
2 An earlier form of this discussion appears in Tiemeyer, “Drama of Judahite Voices”.
3 Duhm, Jesaia, pp. xvii–xviii.
that the current literary corpus in Isa 40–55 constitutes the end result of a longer period of growth tend to argue that the Servant Songs were added gradually and alongside other material. In contrast, those historical-critical scholars who regard Isa 40–55 as the work of one author, together with many of those scholars who focus on the final form of the text, stress the interchanging fates of the Servant and Daughter Zion. They see the Servant Songs as integral to Isa 40–55 and argue that they are best understood as integral to the surrounding material.

As in the previous chapters, my own approach falls somewhere in between these two ways of thinking about the Servant material. I shall look at the presentations of the Servant within the various texts of Isa 40–55 in order to determine the location of the person/community (or persons/communities) outside the text that this literary persona represents. First, I shall discuss the literary relationship between the Servant Songs and the material which relates to Zion-Jerusalem to determine whether or not this literary relationship can tell us anything about the geographical origin of the material. Secondly, I shall explore whether or not the Servant Songs in themselves contain any hints to their geographical setting. Thirdly, I shall examine the theology expressed by the Servant in Isa 40–55 to explore to what extent it agrees with that of the Zion-Jerusalem and Jacob-Israel personae. In all three cases, I am interested in the author’s intent: who were the target audiences of the authors of Isa 40–55 and where were they?

1.1. The Servant and Zion-Jerusalem

The final form of Isa 40–55 attests to an interchanging pattern between the oracles to Zion-Jerusalem and the oracles to the Servant, and there is a certain amount of agreement between the fates of these two literary figures. This raises questions concerning the relationship between the Servant and Zion-Jerusalem outside of the text of Isa 40–55. Do they represent the same or distinct communities? I determined in the preceding chapter that Zion-Jerusalem serves as the representative of the Judahite community. Is this true also for the Servant or does he symbolize a different community?

In order to determine this, we need to examine the agreement between the Servant and Zion-Jerusalem on a literary level. Scholars have understood this literary agreement differently. To begin, a number of exegetes argue, to a certain extent, that the literary figures of the Servant and Zion-Jerusalem either merge or were the same (literary) figure all along.