CHAPTER FOUR

THE IDENTITY OF THE “SERVANT” IN SECOND ISAIAH

We have seen that nothing especially significant was attached in biblical times to the so-called ‘ebed sections in Second Isaiah; were it not for the theological needs of early Christianity that brought emphasis for the first time to the concept “servant” in Isaiah 52-53, it is altogether doubtful that scholars would subsequently have paid special attention and granted special status to Second Isaiah’s servant passages. We shall deal here with the four generally recognized major servant sections, though not in very great detail, in the hope of clarifying the identity of the servant in them. For bibliography or more detailed analysis, see, e.g., NORTH, 117 ff.; SNAITH; LINDHAGEN, 197-228; LINDBLOM, 14 ff.; ROWLEY, passim; DE BOER; ZIMMERLI-JEREMIAS, 23-34.

A. 42.1 ff.

Scholars differ on the length of the first ‘ebed section, the vast majority undecided between vv. 1-4 and vv. 1-7 or 8; some regard vv. 5-9 as a separate unit, but disagree on how to associate it with vv. 1-4. Regardless of these sundry differences, (1) it can be only an
individual person that vv. 1-4 and 7-9 allude to, and (2) it is Israel in exile that is the object of his efforts.

(1) *The servant an individual person rather than the people Israel*

(a) When God is said to have summoned the servant in order (v. 7)

To open eyes that are blind,
To rescue prisoners from the dungeon,
From the prison those who sit in darkness,

the terms “blind” (sometimes with its parallel “deaf”), “prisoners,” and “those who sit in darkness,” as elsewhere in Second Isaiah (cf., e.g., vv. 18 ff. in our very chapter) can refer only to Israel in exile.\(^1\)

Thus the servant can only be an individual person.

(b) It will be seen from the Appendix below, “A Light of Nations,” etc., that neither of the two expressions in v. 6, לארו מים לבריה טים, points to Israel in relation to the nations, but rather to an individual in relation to Israel (לבריה טים) and in relation to the world at large (לארו מים).

(c) It is not easy to identify the people Israel with anything in vv. 1-4 (on additional “Jacob. . .Israel” in the Septuagint of v. 1a, see § B 3 below). Thus God does not “put His spirit upon” ( дух וה(cancel) an entire people, not even His own people Israel; so that “I have put My spirit upon him” (v. 1bα) would naturally indicate an individual person. (It need hardly be noted that rušab in v. 5—“Who gives. . .spirit/life to those who walk in it”—parallel to nešbamāh, is something else again. R.V.S., e.g., spells it “Spirit” in v. 1, but “spirit” in v. 5.)

(d) It makes no sense to assert about Israel in exile (vv. 2-3) that “He will not cry out or raise his voice and cause it to be heard in the open. A bruised reed he will not break, a dimly burning wick he will not quench. . .” Rather, this is the sort of statement that is made about God’s individual spokesmen, who submit to His will in their unpopular mission.

(e) Regardless of how one renders the three clauses with mishpat in vv. 1, 3, and 4, “(he shall) bring forth/execute/establish/promulgate judgment/justice (to the nations/in the earth),” it is hardly captive

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\(^1\) Cf. chap. III, § B above; Lindhagen, p. 210; Lindblom, p. 78 and n. 25. Thus in vv. 18 ff. in this same chapter, Israel in exile is referred to as “deaf” and “blind.” Of course even those who identify the servant here with Cyrus (against this identification see immediately below) must identify the “blind” here with Israel in exile; Babylonia was hardly to be freed by Cyrus.