TWO ADDITIONAL NOTES TO „THE SUFFERING SERVANT—A NEW SOLUTION” 1)

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I

THE RELIGIOUS SETTING OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT DRAMA

In the above-cited study we have shown, or at least have attempted to show, that those portions of the Book of Isaiah which deal with the figure of the Suffering Servant, when properly integrated, constitute a drama, patterned directly after Greek drama and composed at about 450 B.C. 2), at just the time when, during the so-called Age of Pericles, Greek drama was at its very height. Moreover, since this drama reaches its climax in the death of the Servant, it is definitely a tragedy. We have suggested that this tragedy must have been composed by some gifted Hebrew writer who lived in close proximity to Dor, the town upon the upper Mediterranean coast of Palestine in which, so we now know, an Athenian garrison was stationed from about 460 B.C. on for an indefinite, though probably not an overlong, period. This Athenian garrison may well, during the period of its occupation of Dor, have exerted a strong cultural influence upon its immediate Jewish neighbors, and among them quite probably upon certain strata, or, perhaps better, certain individual members, of the

2) This date, rather early in its relation to Greek drama, finds some corroboration in the fact, to which my attention was directed by my good friends, Professor Eric Werner and Professor T. H. Gaster, each independently of the other, that inasmuch as in our drama, as we have reconstructed it, there are, besides the Chorus, only two speakers, God and the Servant, the influence of Aeschylus, the earliest of the three great Greek tragedians, who employed this particular dramatic technique regularly in his work, is especially noticeable. Moreover, to both scholars this apparent affinity of our drama with Greek drama, and particularly with the dramas of Aeschylus, suggested the possibility that the production of our drama was stimulated directly by Aeschylus’ „Prometheus”, for both scholars see a decided similarity between the role of Prometheus in this Greek drama and that of the Servant in our drama.
population of not too distant Galilee. One of the earliest and most outstanding fruits of this Greek cultural influence was this drama.

Now we may be reasonably certain that this drama was not composed for merely literary purposes, to satisfy the inner urge of some gifted writer to produce a work of literary character and value and for the entertainment of a body of readers, whoever these may have been. In that age and locale such literary activity was practically unknown. Every literary project in those days must have been one of importance, motivated by some actual and cogent purpose. And since the Suffering Servant drama is plainly primarily religious in character, deals with an essentially religious theme, it must have been composed to serve some specific religious purpose. Accordingly we may well ask, what might this purpose have been?

The drama records the tragic fate of an “anointed one”, a member therefore of the royal, Davidic line, who was executed by being suspended on high, either by hanging, impaling or crucifixion, and while in this position, suspended “twixt heaven and earth” 1), was pierced, presumably by a sword or spear, and so came to his actual death. We have shown in the above-cited study that this dramatic motif has close affinities with the Biblical narratives of Pharaoh’s butler and baker in the Joseph story 2), and of Haman and Mordecai in the Book of Esther 3), and also with various incidents of the rebellion and death of Absalom 4), and also of the release of Jehoiachin, captive king of Judah, after thirty-seven years of exile and, impliedly, of imprisonment, and his exaltation to a position of honor at the court of Amel-Marduk, the son and successor of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia 5).

Moreover, each of these incidents is represented as happening in connection with the celebration of an important festival. The taking from prison of Pharaoh’s chief butler and chief baker, the execution of the latter by hanging and the restoration of the former to his previous, high position were linked with the celebration of the impliedly important, annual festival of the king’s birthday. The execution of Haman by hanging, and that too upon a gallows fifty cubits high, certainly far higher than the normal gallows would have

1) 2 Sam. xviii 9.
3) Esth. vii 9ff.; viii 15.
4) 2 Sam. xv 19.
5) 2 Ki. xxv 27-30.