Bonds of Love: Methodic Studies of Prophetic Texts with Marriage Imagery (Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, Hosea 1-3, Jeremiah 2-3)

Abma, R.

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CHAPTER 4

Marriage Imagery in Deutero-Isaiah

'The detail is everything'

1 Deutero-Isaiah in contemporary research

1.1 Introduction

Two passages in Deutero-Isaiah contain marriage imagery. These texts are Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10. In connection to the examination of these texts, it is necessary to discuss an issue that has been at the centre of a passionate ongoing debate in Deutero-Isaiah studies, namely the significance of the arrangement of the final text. The point of debate is the contribution of the context to the interpretation of the individual units. As this matter also affects the interpretation of Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10, it is appropriate to discuss it here.

Publications in the field show a wide divergence of opinion on this topic. At one extreme, it is held to be desirable to explain a passage in isolation of its immediate context (the position of form critics); at the other extreme, the immediate context is taken to be decisive for the meaning of a passage so that every text must be carefully explained in relation to what follows and precedes it. The controversy between scholars concerning this issue runs deeper than mere dissent concerning the most appropriate method of interpretation. Ultimately it involves an assessment concerning the question whether it can be assumed that the individual texts have a meaningful context. Broadly speaking there are two alternative views: the book can be seen as a loose collection of originally separate units in which the final text order is irrelevant, or the book can be viewed as an integrated whole with a sensible arrangement of the individual units. The choice between these options precedes the level of text interpretation and relates to ones paradigm of interpretation. Such paradigms, however, are not beyond discussion. It rather should be a remaining concern of scholarship to sort out which paradigm is most adequate and appropriate, most helpful and fruitful in explaining the text of Deutero-Isaiah, even if a complete consensus may be unattainable.

1. This motto has been formulated by V. Nabokov and is found in R. Alter, The Art of Biblical Poetry, New York: Basic Books (Harper), 1985, p. 3.
2. Chapters 40-55 of the book of Isaiah are generally known as Deutero-Isaiah.
3. According to R.F. Melugin, the nature of the final text arrangement is the most pressing issue in Deutero-Isaiah scholarship. His monography is entirely devoted to this topic: R.F. Melugin, The Formation of Isaiah 40-55 (BZAW 141), Berlin: De Gruyter, 1976, pp. 1-7.
4. I am not suggesting that there is one objectively true method for Deutero-Isaiah. Truth in interpretation is a matter of functional rather than ontological truth. However, it is important to
In sum, the extent of connectedness between the individual units is a major topic in the scholarly debate on Deutero-Isaiah. I will now elucidate the positions that have been formulated in this respect in somewhat more detail. That simultaneously creates the opportunity of giving some insight into previous scholarship on Deutero-Isaiah. The survey of preceding interpretative work will necessarily be brief. I hope nonetheless that it will bring to the fore some crucial insights of preceding scholars on Deutero-Isaiah.

1.2 The significance of the final text in the perspective of form criticism

The influence of form critical studies on Deutero-Isaiah scholarship can hardly be overestimated. In this tradition, which originated in the beginning of the twentieth century and was inspired by the work of Gunkel, the study of small units has priority. Yet, form criticism entails more than giving priority to the small units of speech and the assumption that these units have an oral background. The claim was made that these units, or ‘short utterances’, originally could and did stand by themselves! As oracles they were individually complete. As a result, many form critics paid little attention to the final text arrangement and even came to see the assumption of a logical relationship between the separate units as a fallacy. The final text of Deutero-Isaiah was understood as a disordered collection of ‘original prophecies’. The following statement of Mowinckel illustrates this radical judgement:


Mowinckel continues with the remarkable claim that the final text arrangement is irrelevant for the interpretation of individual texts:

Für die Exegese ist es prinzipiell völlig belanglos, wo im Buche dieses oder jenes Stück steht; jeder Einzelspruch muß für sich erklärt werden, ohne andere Rücksicht auf die anderen zu nehmen als die, welche sich daraus ergibt, daß sie ungefähr gleichzeitige Erzeugnisse desselben Mannes sind.

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6. Cf. S. Mowinckel, ‘Die Komposition des deuterojesajanischen Buches’, ZAW 49 (1931), pp. 87-111 and 242-259. Mowinckel saw Deutero-Isaiah as a collection of ‘völlig selbständiger Einheiten’ (p. 87). According to Gunkel the original units could be of considerably small size, ranging from two or three to six verses.
These remarks of Mowinckel are representative of the classical form-critical viewpoint. The opinion is that no reasonable composition is discernible in the book and on that account the context of every passage is regarded as insignificant for the interpretation. In the evaluation of Muilenburg, much form-critical work thus had the impact of 'attacking' the idea of unity in Isaiah 40-55.

Form critics usually dismember Isaiah 40-55 into a great number of independent units, ranging from forty-nine (Gressmann) to seventy (Begrich). Subsequently they attempt to define the different genres present in these units and discuss the meaning of the unit with the help of the genre characteristics. At the same time they use their findings to further refine their genre models. The study of Schoors may serve to illustrate this. Schoors comes to the conclusion that the main genres in Deutero-Isaiah are (1) the words of salvation, which can be further divided into oracles of salvation and proclamations of salvation dependent on the second or third person style, and (2) the polemic genres, which can be separated into trial speeches and disputations. Besides these four types, one finds other genres or elements from other genres integrated into the text of Deutero-Isaiah (songs of taunt or praise). The four servant songs are excluded from this treatment because they do not correspond to any particular genre and fall outside of the scope of the form-critical study of Schoors.

On the basis of an analysis of the present genres, Schoors comes to an assessment of the content of Deutero-Isaiah: in his view ‘the great quantity of salvation words makes it clear that the central point of the prophet’s message is salvation’. The imminent overthrow of Babylon, the forthcoming deliverance from exile and the homecoming of the exiles to Jerusalem are the most prominent themes in Deutero-Isaiah. On the other hand, the polemical genres indicate that Yhwh is also enmeshed in several disputes with his people about his power and purposes. In his final section Schoors also comments upon themes traditionally associated with Deutero-Isaiah, such as monotheism, universalism and the theology of creation.

Characteristic for the approach of Schoors is his primary focus on small units. He regroups the texts according to the genre that they display, with the result that he deals with Isaiah 54:1-3, 4-6 and 7-10 in three distinct places within his book. Hardly any attention is paid to the connections between these ten verses or between this text and what follows and precedes it. That is the consequence of his methodology. At the same time, the treatment of the genres in the text is complemented by the demonstration of characteristic themes of Deutero-Isaiah in the specific text passage that he deals with, themes such as universalism, polemic with the idols and the emphasis on creation. Schoors builds his interpretation of

9. Cf. Schoors, Saviour, p. 5, 297. Schoors argues in his conclusion (p. 297, footnote 2) that the ‘collection of the pericopes in Dt.-Is. is secondary, and does not show any structure. The units have been collected according to purely external standards’.
13. Schoors, Saviour, pp. 299-305.
Deutero-Isaiah thus upon two pillars: the genre of the specific unit and the central ‘theological thoughts’ of Deutero-Isaiah.

In commentaries from this period, whether or not they are of a form-critical persuasion, one roughly finds the same combination of elements. There is a detailed form-critical or philological analysis of the text and to complement this analysis, an introduction concerning the ‘theology’ or ‘central ideas’ of Deutero-Isaiah is supplied. In the discussion of individual passages, the commentator every now and then refers back to this introduction in order to make some additional remarks or point out some peculiarities of the present passage. In this way the author provides his comments with some depth and offers the reader a sense of cohesion within the book of Deutero-Isaiah. This assessment does not intend to disqualify these works, but only to point to their general pattern of interpretation, and to draw attention to the role that the context plays in such interpretations of Deutero-Isaiah, that is: virtually none.

1.3 Beyond form critism: Muilenburg

The commentary of Muilenburg, published in 1956, marks a turning point in the study of Deutero-Isaiah. The sparkling and programmatic introduction of his commentary is still worth reading for the unconventional and sensitive way in which Muilenburg discusses the poetic and thematic features of Deutero-Isaiah. In this introduction, Muilenburg expresses, on the one hand, his esteem for the precision with which form critics approach the individual units and, on the other hand, he argues for a more literary approach in which attention is paid to the coherence of the text as a whole.

Muilenburg qualifies the literary units within Deutero-Isaiah primarily as poems. In his view, these poems are ‘developed literary compositions’. Most of these are longer than prophetic oracles and on that account he finds the focus on short units within form criticism inadequate for Deutero-Isaiah. Muilenburg motivates this assessment by the assumption that in Deutero-Isaiah the results of a ‘literary revolution’ are discernible. This revolution becomes visible in the books of Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Deuteronomy and Deutero-Isaiah where one finds a free fusion and combination of literary types, as well as units of considerably greater length than what is assumed within form criticism.

Muilenburg then develops a literary approach to Deutero-Isaiah, which is marked by attention for the poetic style and structure of the text. He divides Isaiah 40-55 into twenty-one poems or compositions and discerns a high amount of ‘literary craftsmanship’ within them. He observes a great variety of rhetorical and stylistic devices that create structure and coherence in the text. Among these features of style and composition is the literary genre employed in a unit.
Genre is, thus, no longer the sole aspect relevant to the form of an individual unit, but is one among others.

Muilenburg also takes the cohesion of the different units within the book into consideration. In his view, the book is a deliberate composition. This conclusion is inevitable once one becomes aware of the high quality of the poetry and of the patterns of coherence over longer units. The cohesion of the composition is reflected in a continuity of thought. Muilenburg discerns such a continuity in the presence of two features: a set of major motifs which recur throughout the book and the logical relations between one poem and the next. In their present order the poems move towards a climax, starting with the great announcement of God’s coming to Jerusalem and ending with the actual presence of God in Jerusalem. Such elements of correspondence, of which there are many, both between the beginning and the end of the book and between subsequent passages, ‘bear witness to the fundamental unity’ of the book.\(^{19}\)

It is clear that within Muilenburg’s approach the order of the final text regains significance. The context is again regarded as relevant for the interpretation of individual units. In his commentary substantial attention is paid to the relation between a text and the passages that precede and follow it.\(^{20}\) Nonetheless, Muilenburg’s treatment of the links between subsequent texts seems somehow incomplete. One receives the impression that Muilenburg assumes a logical connection between, e.g., Isaiah 53 and 54 and observes a number of connections and correspondences between these texts, but is not able to provide an explanation for these features.

Leene’s critique is that the concept ‘continuity of thought’ is insufficiently specific.\(^{21}\) In his view, there is not only continuity but also real progression in the text. This is a dramatic progression, in the sense that in the course of the text parallel to the words that are spoken certain events ‘happen’. These events move the text forward and place text and hearer in a new position. This notion points to a deeper sense of connection between the distinct units than Muilenburg assumes. Nevertheless, Muilenburg was the first to put the literary composition of Isaiah 40-55 on the agenda again. His sensitive and respectful treatment of the text as a whole and his keen eye for the many rhetorical features within the text make his commentary a landmark in Deutero-Isaiah studies.

1.4 The drama approaches of Beuken, Leene and Watts

Beuken

Muilenburg’s ‘continuity of thought’ model could not wholly satisfy all scholars with an interest in a synchronic approach to Deutero-Isaiah. For some, there was still too much focus on the individual units. The connections that were found between the units remained incidental. This approach did not provide a sense of the ongoing dynamic within the book, spanning the work as a whole.

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19. Muilenburg, ‘Isaiah’, p. 385. These observations bring Muilenburg to the conclusion that the poems within Deutero-Isaiah must have been written rather than spoken (see p. 386).

20. Cf., e.g., Muilenburg’s treatment of Isaiah 54:1-10 on pp. 632-638. See further below.

21. See H. Leene, Vroegere Dingen, p. 182. Leene comments upon the views of Muilenburg on pp. 36, 182, 291.
In this climate Beuken published his commentary on Deutero-Isaiah.\(^{22}\) In the introduction Beuken develops the notion of ‘dramatic progression’. In his view, Deutero-Isaiah unfolds a drama. It portrays a course of events which serves to ‘bring’ Israel via several intermediate stages from Babylon to Zion. A great number of themes, such as the rise of Cyrus, the restoration of Jerusalem, the mission of the servant, the correction of Israel’s trust in the gods of the nations, all have their place in this drama and contribute to its progression. One could say that the effort to portray the redemption of Israel from Babylon and to engage Israel in the project of return to Zion binds the book together and constitutes its unity.

For Beuken the word ‘drama’ seems to imply two things. In the first place the word expresses that there is a coherent sequence of episodes or ‘scenes’ in the text. This coherence is not only formal, but also material: a real progression is perceptible between the individual units. Every passage marks a further moment in the drama. Text and reader are in a different position after Isaiah 50:4-11 – to mention an example – than they were before this passage. At the end of this text, the reader has received additional information and is confronted with new emphases and changes in mood and tone. As Beuken formulates it:

The composition creates in the series of prophecies a progression of dramatic nature, with the result that text units shaped according to the same literary type nevertheless have a different meaning, dependent on the context, that is, dependent on the point that has been reached in the history which Yhwh brings to pass for his people in this book.\(^{23}\)

In the second place, the word ‘drama’ also indicates that the interaction between text and audience is a central feature of Deutero-Isaiah. Readers (or hearers) are invited to participate in this drama.\(^{24}\) The text situates its readers towards the end of the exile, after the rise of Cyrus and before the redemption from Babylon and the journey to Zion. At the same time the readers are invited not to remain motionless and static in their current position but to ‘move ahead’ along with the events depicted in the book. When the fall of Babylon is described and ‘takes place’ in Isaiah 47, the reader is expected to take it as reality that the role of Babylon has been played out. Thus readers are expected to concentrate their thoughts on Zion, as if no Babylon or situation of bondage could longer threaten them.

Beuken approaches the question of unity in Deutero-Isaiah thus in an innovative way. In his view, the unity of the work is not constituted only by aspects of form, content or literary shape, but primarily by the drama which the book portrays. The most fundamental force binding the individual passages and the book as a whole together is the dramatic progression. In Beuken’s perception, certain dynamics are characteristic of Deutero-Isaiah. Every individual passage must be explained in light of its contribution to the whole and as part of a

\(^{22}\) The Dutch commentary of Beuken appeared in two volumes; the first deals with Isaiah 40-48 and the second with 49-55. See W.A.M. Beuken, Jesaja (POT 2a/2b), Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1979 and 1983.


\(^{24}\) Beuken, Jesaja, vol. 2a, pp. 10-13.
It should, however, be noted that this is but a partial representation of the views of Beuken: his commentary also provides classical and detailed textual studies employing the methods of form criticism and literary criticism, and these are combined with a study of the dramatic perspective of the book.

Leene

Leene has further elucidated the views of Beuken by an in depth investigation of what the word ‘drama’ precisely should entail when it is employed with respect to Deutero-Isaiah.²⁵ I shall not repeat his work here in detail but highlight a few pertinent elements. Leene specifies the notion of ‘dramatic progression’ by distinguishing it (a) from progression in thought, in the spirit of Muilenburg, and (b) from rhetorical progression. Both distinctions relate to important elements in his definition of the drama character of Deutero-Isaiah.

In the first place, Deutero-Isaiah can according to Leene justifiably be called a drama if it is possible to arrange the subsequent units in the text and the events that they present within one progressive time perspective. Isaiah 53 and 54 may serve as example again. Is it right to assume that the events presented in unit A and the different events presented in unit B presuppose one another and build upon one another, in the sense that every passage constitutes a vital link within a chain of events? May one suppose that the individual texts of Deutero-Isaiah fit within such an ongoing time perspective? And that this time perspective constitutes the fundamental tie that binds the units together?

The underlying issue is whether Deutero-Isaiah can be viewed as presenting a story. Story is a technical term here, that is defined as a series of logically and chronologically related events.²⁶ In the view of Leene this is indeed the case: Deutero-Isaiah may be regarded as a dramatic text with a story. In light of this, it important to explore the role of the story in a dramatic text further, in order to clarify the sort of connections that Leene envisions between the individual units.

The presentation of the story in dramatic texts is of a special kind. Drama namely lacks a central figure who is separate from the events and characters in the story and communicates the story to the recipient, the so-called narrator.²⁷ This has manifold consequences. It means that the story within a drama is limited in terms of time and space. It must be presented from beginning to end by the actors within a relatively brief time. As a result, the story in drama, or more precisely in dramatic texts, develops for a large part via speech. It develops within the speeches of the main characters uttered in the here and now, rather than in a series of actions of the main characters in various places and at diverse intervals of time.

Two further aspects of drama are relevant. In the first place, drama presents the series of events essentially in a chronological order. Unlike narrative texts, there is no narrator who can go beyond the flow of the story and insert flashbacks.

²⁵. See Leene, Vroegere Dingen, pp. 30-37, 181-183. An English summary is included on pp. 323-331.
²⁷. For an introduction into drama theory see Luxemburg, Literatuurwetenschap, pp. 205-221, and the instructive scheme on pp. 155-156.
and anticipations in the drama. Thus a strong internal chronology is present in drama. In the second place, as I just mentioned, drama deals with action in a special way. Understood as that what makes a contribution to the development of the story, action for a large part, though not entirely, takes the form of speech. Speeches in drama often mark a change, occasion another speech and so the story is developed. Speeches thus contribute to the progression of the story and in that sense may be regarded as events. They not only deal with events but they are themselves events. Thus, narrative texts ‘present’ the story, drama texts ‘are’ the story.\[28\]

This clarifies what Leene means by ‘dramatic progression’. His concept of drama implies that every text in Deutero-Isaiah is regarded as constituting a new moment in the drama. Every passage carries the story further and creates a new situation. In order to understand the text one must move ahead with the drama and take account of the dynamics which encompass Isaiah 40-55 and which make the situation in chapter 45 totally different from that in chapter 48. For this reason the notion of ‘continuity in thought’ is too static, since it fails to justice to the progressive time perspective.

In the second place, Leene takes issue with the idea of ‘rhetorical progression’. His debate here is with Gitay, who conceives of Isaiah 40-48 as a rhetorical composition with the purpose to ‘persuade’.\[30\] Leene agrees that a persuasive dimension is present in the text but maintains that this is balanced by a performative dimension. The text not only has the purpose of effecting changes in the mind of its audience but also presents changes that ‘happen’ within the world of the text itself. The composition presents particular themes, or better, dramatic programmes, which are in a process of change and which are gradually unfolded and brought to completion. The performative character of the text for Leene is related to its dramatic character. The term ‘performative’ expresses not only that every text within the drama represents a new situation, but also conveys in a broader sense that the events which are told in the text become reality. The words perform what they say. The reader is invited to consider the events related in the text as though occurring at the moment in which they are spoken. In that sense the language and structure of Deutero-Isaiah go beyond the persuasive. Audience and hearers can only be persuaded of a process of change that is already performed and presented in the text.

Concluding with a word about the way such a drama may have functioned, Leene suggests that due to its coherent structure the drama of Isaiah 40-55 must have been a written composition. It may have been read aloud in front of an audience on particular occasions. In view of the internal cohesion, the reading must have consisted of the integral piece, although the performance may also have been split into two parts, consisting of Isaiah 40-48 and 49-55 respect-

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29. Leene, Vroegere Dingen, pp. 30, 36, 182.
At the same time, this view does not exclude the possibility that the units may have been originally composed after form-critical patterns.

**Watts**

In an entirely different fashion, Watts has also dealt with Deutero-Isaiah as a drama. He conceives of the entire book of Isaiah as a drama or ‘vision’ in twelve acts. Watts characterizes Isaiah 1-66 as a ‘sweeping presentation of history through twelve generations’. It is about ‘the purposes of God and the assigned roles for Israel and Jerusalem’ in world history during a period ranging approximately from 750 to 450 BCE. One could say that according to Watts the book is a sort of theo-political treatise that points out the most recommendable attitude of Israel in confrontation with the world powers Assyria, Babylon and Persia. The work presents the words of Yhwh who among his heavenly court comments upon the ‘mundane events’. The character of the book, however, is that of a multi-voiced drama rather than of a treatise. In elaborating this view Watts takes the chronological order that he perceives in the book so seriously that he connects every act in the drama to a particular interval of time and to the reign of particular foreign and national rulers. For Deutero-Isaiah the rule of the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius I constitutes the general background. These rulers, however, also play a major role in the drama. Deutero-Isaiah contains numerous fragments spoken by them or dealing with them. King Darius, for instance, may be identified as the speaker in Isaiah 50:10-11 and 51:4-8. Isaiah 54:1-6, on the other hand, is a song in which the heavens and the earth speak verses alternatively. It is clear that such an attribution of speaker roles lacks any textual basis. The same holds for Watts’ attempt to identify every unnamed character in the text with a specific historical person. His commentary in this regard is highly speculative and eccentric. I have mentioned it here because of the notion of drama which Watts, in spite of all distinctions, does share with Beuken and Leene.

**Conclusion**

For my explanation of Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10 I will take the notion of ‘dramatic progression’ as specified by Beuken and Leene as point of departure. An advantage of this dramatic approach is that it offers the opportunity to study the text with great precision. One must take into account the particular moment that has been reached within the drama, and be alert to the particular innovations and the contribution made by an individual passage. This distinguishes this approach from other synchronic and diachronic approaches. At the same time, this will not prevent me from occasionally arriving at different conclusions concerning specific texts than the scholars just mentioned.

34. For a summary see Watts, *Isaiah I-33*, p. L.
35. An excursus on drama in ancient Israel is found in Watts, *Isaiah I-33*, pp. XLV-L.
1.5 Purpose and background of Deutero-Isaiah

There is uncertainty about the date and place of origin of Deutero-Isaiah. Until recently, the most generally held view was that the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah date from the period of the Babylonian exile and more specifically from the last decades of this period (550-539 BCE). The latter is suggested by the references to Cyrus, the Persian king whose first successes date from approximately 550 BCE. The conquests of Cyrus would have stirred hope in the prophet and inspired him to a glorious message of comfort and redemption for the exiles in Babylon among whom he lived. The actual realisation of this comfort and redemption was still in the future.

In the last decades, this view has been challenged and the origins of Deutero-Isaiah have been sought in the Persian period. In the first place, the references to the overthrow of Babylon (47-48) and to the homecoming of the exiles (48:20-22, 49:14-21) strongly suggest that the work postdates the fall of Babylon and the Cyrus edict of 539. It is implausible that the prophet could have foreseen these events. In the second place, one should not overestimate the historical effects of the Cyrus edict. It did not immediately lead to a massive emigration from Babylon to Zion. One must rather reckon with a gradual and slow process of ‘return’ of groups of ‘exiles’ to Zion. This process seems to have continued far into the fifth century. At the same time, some groups presumably did not even consider giving up the security of Babylon in order to embark on a journey to Zion which lay in ruins. Thus, historians and biblical scholars now think that in a number of respects the situation of the Babylonian period continued to exist during the Persian period, with as major hallmarks the continued presence of a group of Israelite people in Babylon and the troublesome and protracted process of the restoration of Zion. The characteristic themes of the comfort to Zion and the encouragement of the Babylonian exiles to return to Zion would fit well with this period.

A third argument for dating Deutero-Isaiah in the early Persian period (roughly between 515 and 430) is that chapters 49-55 seem to reflect a situation of conflict and strife in Zion. The future of Zion is by no means only bright and brilliant. References to attacks on Zion are found even in the grand finale of the book, Isaiah 54:14-17. With Watts and Davies I think this suggests a date after the arrival of some immigrants and after the emergence of the first conflicts related to the rebuilding of the city and the community. As a consequence, one

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37. The terms ‘exile’ and ‘return’ are put between brackets, since it has been argued that these are theological constructs within the biblical texts which do not, or only partially, correspond to the historical events. See P.R. Davies, *In Search of ‘Ancient Israel’* (JSOTS 148), Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, pp. 40-42.


39. In the view of P.R. Davies, and this is rather sensational, the end of the exile thus marked the beginning rather than the end of major problems concerning identity and theology for Israel. The Persian rather than the Babylonian period would form the cradle for the biblical literature (see his *Ancient Israel*, chap. 6, pp. 90-107).

must conclude that the book has its origins in Palestine rather than in Babylon, although elements in chapters 44-47 demonstrate knowledge of the situation in Babylon as well.\footnote{Deurloo concludes from Isa. 52:9, 11-12 that the temple must already have been re-established.}

Deutero-Isaiah is a literary, multilayered text, whose purpose cannot be expressed in one sentence. Surely, the comfort of the exiles in Babylon and of the group of remnant and pioneers in Zion is a central theme: that is the purpose of God which will ‘succeed’. Characteristic for the book is further the double focus on both Babylon and Zion, and the double address to both Zion and Babylon. In the end, however, neither the situation in Jerusalem nor that in Babylon is the main topic of the book. The book has a dynamic theme and circles around the journey from Babylon to Zion. This travel involves Yhwh, Israel and the audience. This purport of Isaiah 40-55 is well captured in the statement of Gottwald that ‘the aim of the author was to enlist the audience in a program of return to Judah’.\footnote{Cf. N.K. Gottwald, ‘Social class and ideology in Isaiah 40-55: an Eagletonian reading’, Semeia 59 (1992), pp. 43-57 (esp. p. 44).}

2 Isaiah 50: 1-3

2.1 Introduction

Isaiah 50:1-3 and 54:1-10 belong to the second half of Deutero-Isaiah (chapters 49-55), in which a focus on the fate of Zion is one of the prominent features. Zion is here conceived of as a female person and the desolation of the city is primarily represented by female imagery. Zion is depicted as a mother without sons who will welcome a great number of returning children, reflecting the theme of the repopulation of the city, or as a widow for whom a new bridal time is announced, alluding to the theme of the arrival of Yhwh in Zion.

Isaiah 50:1-3 is marked in the Masoretic text by two 
\textit{setumot} and is thus characterised as a separate unit. The section is situated between the so-called third servant song (Isa. 50:4-11) and a long address to Zion (49:14-26).

Two points mark the connections between Isaiah 50:1-3 and the preceding and succeeding text. The first is the messenger formula with which Isaiah 50:1 opens, \textit{Hox en en}. This formula is also found in Isaiah 49:8; 49:22 and 49:25 and functions each time to delineate a new text section.\footnote{There is a slight variation in Isaiah 49:22 (כ ה תב אמ המ and in 49:25 (כ ה תב אמ המ).} The second point of connection are the speakers and addressees in the text. In this respect a significant change occurs in the first verse of Isaiah 50. The preceding text, Isaiah 49:14-26, consists of a long speech of Yhwh to Zion, following a brief introduction (49:14). Zion is here addressed in the second person singular. In Isaiah 50:1-3 again a speech is found in which Yhwh is the speaker, but here the...
address is in the second person plural. The new addressees are spoken to with respect to their 'mother'. In light of the circumstance that Zion in 49:14-26 is continuously addressed in her role as mother and in view of her absent sons, it is likely that in 50:1-3 the sons of this mother are being addressed. Thus while in Isaiah 49:14-26 Zion is addressed concerning her sons, in Isaiah 50:1-3 the sons of Zion are addressed concerning their mother.

The connections between Isaiah 50:1-3 and Isaiah 50:4-11 are less evident. In Isaiah 50:4 a striking transition takes place: Zion and her sons disappear from the scene and a new speaker appears. It is the voice of a single person speaking in the first person. Not only the speaker but also the mood and themes of this poem are totally different from the preceding passage. A detailed study of both texts will nonetheless reveal certain points of connection between Isaiah 50:1-3 and 50:4-11, but that is of later concern. We turn first to the text of Isaiah 50:1-3.

2.2 Translation and notes to Isaiah 50:1-3

1. Thus says Yhwh:
   Where is then the letter of divorce of your mother
   with which I sent her away?
   Or which of my creditors is it
   to whom I sold you?
   Look, because of your iniquities you were sold
   and because of your transgressions your mother was sent away.

2. What is the reason that no one was there when I came?
   that no one answered when I called?
   Is my hand truly too short to redeem?
   Is there no power in me to rescue?
   Look, by my rebuke I dry up the sea
   I make rivers into a desert
   their fish shall stink for lack of water
   and will die of thirst.

3. I clothe the heavens with blackness
   and make a mourning cloth for their covering.

Text-critical, grammatical and syntactical notes

Isaiah 50: 1

- The particle ה in vs. 1b reinforces the interrogative pronoun. According to BDB (p. 216) it has the function 'to impart directness and force, bringing the question or statement made into close relation with the speaker'. This is reflected here in the translation 'where... then'.

- The appositional clause 'as to which I sent her away' is appositional to the word 'mother' rather than to the word 'letter of divorce'. A literal translation would be '...your mother, whom I have sent away'. For sake of smoothness many translations add the preposition 'with' resulting in the translation 'with which I sent her away' (so NRSV, RSV).
• The particle `lam in vv. 1f and 2d has a contrastive nuance. One is tempted to translate ‘no, look...’ rather than only ‘look’ or ‘behold’. North (Second Isaiah, p. 58) expresses this contrastive element with the renderings ‘nay’ and ‘surely not’ in vv. 1-2.

• The word ישן in vs. 1f is the most common word for ‘sin’ in the Hebrew Bible. It is related to a verb that means ‘to bend, twist’ (so Knierim, שת, THAT 2, cols. 243-44). The noun refers to a course of action that ‘bends away from what is right’ and points to behaviour that perverts what is right and normative. One finds the noun rendered as ‘iniquities’ (RSV), ‘sins’ (NRSV), ‘Verfehlung’ (Buber) or ‘Verkehrtheit’ (Knierim). The corresponding term מלח in vs. 1g has the nuance ‘to break away from an existing relationship’. This has a juridical connotation and points to the violation of boundaries in the sphere of private (Ex. 22:8) or public law (1 Sam. 24:12) but it can also point to acts that violate the covenant between Yhwh and his people. RSV and NRSV have ‘transgressions’ and Watts (Isaiah 34-66, p. 191) has ‘rebellions’. I chose for ‘transgressions’.

• The preposition ב in vs. 1g f can have a local, instrumental or causal meaning (HAL 1, pp. 100-101). Rignell’s proposal to interpret the preposition here as indicating the price paid for something is creative but does not fit the context (L.G. Rignell, A Study of Isaiah Chapters 40-55, Lunds Universitets Arsskrift 52-5, Lund, 1956, p. 67). His suggestion is that the fact that the people are sold compensates for their iniquities and thus creates a positive effect: in exchange for being sold the children are set free from their iniquities. The sale of the children has, however, no positive connotations in this context but is a purely negative matter. The purpose of the text is not to indicate that the sins have been compensated for but rather is to identify the cause of the sale of the children.

Isaiah 50:2

• The emendation of חכם (noun) to חכם (inf. construct, punctuated with a cholem rather than a sureq) is suggested by LXX, Targum and Vulgate; however, as there is little difference in meaning between the infinitive and the noun and because the noun is not unknown in the Hebrew Bible (Ex. 8:19; Ps. 11:9; 130:7), there seems no reason to emend the MT. Furthermore, words with the ending -ut are not uncommon in this passage. Translations make different choices in rendering the word: ‘redeem’ (RSV, NRSV) or ‘ransom’ (Watts, Isaiah 34-66, p. 191).

• There seems to be a logical inconsistency in vs. 2g-h, namely, in the suggestion that the fish stink before they die. Solutions to this problem have been sought in the addition of another subject in vs. 2h (‘and their beasts die of thirst’, thus the critical apparatus of the BHS) or in the change of the verb רעב (to stink) to רעב (to dry up), following the LXX. There is little textual support for these emendations and, according to Beuken (Jesaja, p. 75), such reversions of the logical order are not uncommon in poetry.
2.3 Isaiah 50:1-3 in discussion

Isaiah 50:1-3 has been the topic of substantial research. I will discuss here some fruits of the history of interpretation, focussing first on the form and genre of the text section. Thereafter I will pay attention to views of the content and meaning of the passage. For the sake of clarity, I will make a distinction between diachronic and synchronic approaches to the text, beginning with the former.

Diachronic views on the form and genre of Isaiah 50:1-3

In general form critics count Isaiah 50:1-3 among the genre of the trial speech.Characteristic for this genre is that the vocabulary and course of events in the text bear similarity to juridical proceedings. The most prominent elements in this genre are the summons to court, the accusation of the opponent and the pronouncement of a sentence. Technical terms such as זָרָא מָשֶׂסֶת, רִיב and are characteristic for this genre.

According to form critics, Isaiah 50:1-3 portrays the following situation: Yhwh stands in court as the accused; as counteraccusation and in refutation of his guilt he points to the iniquities of the people. In the course of the lawsuit, the original accusers appear to have disappeared (vs. 2) so that Yhwh’s refutation of the accusation must be perceived as being convincing and successful. Some form critics cherish the opinion that from verse 2c onwards (‘is my hand too short’) the text passes into a different genre, a so-called ‘disputation’. Characteristic of this genre is that it revolves around a dispute between two parties. The point of the dispute within Isaiah 50:1-3 would be the saving power of Yhwh and the antagonists would be Yhwh and the children of Israel. These genres, however, are relatively akin: the trial speech and the disputation speech are both rated among the polemical genres. Common to the view of all critics just mentioned is that Isaiah 50:1-3 involves a polemic dialogue between Yhwh and Israel aimed at bringing Israel around to a different perception of things.

A close examination of the arguments for placing Isaiah 50:1-3 within the genre of trial speeches reveals that these are not consistent. If we take the form-critical discussion of Schoors as our point of reference, it appears that the following elements in the text give rise to this genre definition: (a) the questions in vs. 1 are interpreted as a response of Yhwh to an accusation of the people; (b) the terms זָרָא מָשֶׂסֶת and are interpreted as technical juridical...

44. A substantial overview of form-critical views concerning this passage is to be found in Schoors, I am God your Saviour, p. 177. Schoors offers a survey of the major form critical works of this century.

45. The typical elements within this genre have been elaborated by C. Westermann, Sprache und Struktur der Prophétie Deuterojesajas, pp. 41-51. In the summary of Schoors, Saviour, p. 185, these elements are: the summons, the trial including speeches of the parties, the interrogation of the witnesses and the judgement. Schoors rates the following texts among the genre of the trial speech: Isaiah 41:1-5; 21-29; 42:18-25; 43:8-13, 22-28; 44:6-8; 45:18-25; 50:1-3.

46. See Schoors, Saviour, p. 199. On the other hand, Melugin, Formation, p. 152, characterizes the whole text as a disputation speech with the comment that the first part of the text imitates the language of a trial.

47. See Schoors, Saviour, pp. 176-188.
terms; (c) the reproving counterquestions of Yhwh in vs. 2 suggest a correspondence with the order of events during a court session.  

With respect to the first argument, one may agree to the thought that in vs. 1 Yhwh refutes an accusation or complaint of the people. This need not imply, however, that this refutation constitutes a counteraccusation or that the whole takes place within the context of a court procedure. One should at least consider the possibility that the challenge to show the letter of divorce implies the non-existence of such a letter and hence functions as a word of reassurance to the people. The problem with the label ‘trial speech’ is that it is too monolithic and leaves no room for the possibility that the questions in vs. 1 may constitute a word of salvation as well.

The argument of the technical terms can be rebutted by a study of the distributional patterns of these terms in Deutero-Isaiah. The verbs קנה, קדם and גיש cannot automatically be considered as juridical terminology. The verb קנה occurs only three out of twenty-six times in the context of a lawsuit (45:20; 48:15-16; 50:2). The verb קדם functions as a legal term at most three out of thirty-two times (44:7; 48:13; 50:20). In order to express the summons to come to court, there is a preference for other terms such as הקבץ and קוס. The verb גיש, finally, occurs four times in Deutero-Isaiah and only in this case it would qualify as lawsuit terminology.

Concerning the third argument, it may be remarked that the presence of questions is not decisive for the genre. Other genres, such as disputations and proclamations of salvation, likewise contain questions (cf. 40:12-31; 44:22-28; 51:9-16; 55:1-2) and, on the other hand, not every trial speech includes questions (43:22-28). In conclusion it is appropriate to call attention to one further point. In form-critical approaches no allowance is made for the drastic shift in the text in verse 2e ('look, by my rebuke...'). Yet, the fact that the verbal tense in the text changes here from qatal forms to yiqtol is an aspect that should not be overlooked. The implication is that the text turns to a concrete description of Yhwh's actions, which demonstrate 'his dominion over nature', certainly, but which also have a broader impact than being mere illustrations within a lawsuit. These actions are portrayed as actually happening and so underline that a dramatic depth point has been reached between Yhwh and Israel. It thus seems that the text goes here beyond the genre of a trial speech or disputation. The text rather displays a free use of genre elements without fitting strictly into one genre definition or another.

48. These arguments are found in Schoors, Saviour, pp. 198. See also Melugin, Formation, pp. 50-53.

49. In the view of Merendino, for instance, these questions have a reassuring rather than an accusing function. See R.P. Merendino, ‘Jes 50,1-3 (9b. 11). Jahwes immerwährende Huld zum erprobten Volk’, Biblische Zeitschrift 29 (1985), pp. 221-244. In this respect it is interesting that Isaiah 49:14-16, a text that also starts with a question, is regarded as a ‘proclamation of salvation’ (Schoors, Saviour, p. 106).

50. Cf. Melugin, Formation, p. 52: ‘But the fact that v. 2b-3 cannot successfully be included within the strict confines of a trial speech makes it doubtful that we can make such fine distinctions. Indeed, we should not expect poetry to be so precise'.
The content of Isaiah 50:1-3

Definitions of genre usually influence the evaluation of the content of a text as well. If the genre has been defined as a trial speech or disputation, the interpretation tends to be considerably affected by the image of two parties engaged in a conflict in which they are diametrically opposed to each other. Melugin, for instance, has characterized the content of Isaiah 50:1-3 as follows. In his view the text reflects a dispute about two accusations brought forward by the people against which Yhwh has to defend himself. Yhwh asserts his innocence in the form of a counteraccusation and ultimately leaves little doubt among his ‘opponents’ about who is right.\(^{51}\) Quite similarly, Schoors sees the refutation of the people’s misplaced accusations as the essence of the text. In response to these accusations Yhwh reprimands the people by pointing to his majesty over nature.\(^{52}\) Interpretations of this kind result in the image of a superior God who is easily offended and in an almost childish way rehabilitates himself. The central point in these interpretations is that the complaints of the people cannot be justified – one does not quarrel with Yhwh – and that the claims and responses of Yhwh are understandable and completely justified.

An interesting contribution in this respect has been made by Merendino.\(^{53}\) Merendino promotes rather extravagant views with respect to the original composition of the text, but his fresh look at the meaning of the words leads him to a different assessment of the content of the passage than the scholars just mentioned. He points out that vs. 1, if it is examined as a separate unit, displays no signs of a lawsuit setting. The reference to the guilt of the people need not be seen as a new condemnation that reinforces the guilt of the people, but also may be seen as an affirmation of the reality that the children have been sold.\(^{54}\) The questions in this verse are precisely intended to contradict the idea that Yhwh has given up the covenant with Israel and to reassure the people of the lasting commitment of Yhwh. In that sense Isaiah 50:1 can be seen as a ‘Hoffnungswort’ and ‘Heilswort’.

Synchronic views on Isaiah 50:1-3

Two synchronic studies of the structure of Isaiah 50:1-3 have been presented. Leene has observed a completely symmetrical structure in Isaiah 50:1-3. Verse 1 is composed of two questions which are followed by a response introduced by the

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53. See Merendino, ‘Huld’, pp. 221-244.
 particle πή. The same pattern of questions and response is found in vv. 2-3, giving the passage a precisely parallel structure.56

Beuken agrees with Leene concerning the double pattern of questions and response; however, he isolates vs. 2ab from this structure and regards these questions ('What is the reason that when I came no one was there, that when I called no one answered?') as the heart of the passage.57 These questions stand between the first and second set of questions and responses and remain open. An answer is not given until the next passage, Isaiah 50:4-9.

In terms of content both Leene and Beuken disagree with a purely juridical interpretation of the passage. An important component in their explanation is the literary setting of Isaiah 50:1-3. When Isaiah 50:1-3 and 50:4-11 are interpreted together, it appears that the servant gives the response to Yhwh that the children of Zion fail to give.58 It is further characteristic for the interpretations of these scholars that they overcome the form-critical dilemma between word of comfort and word of judgement and accept that the text contains a mixture of positive and negative elements. In the view of Leene, Isaiah 50:1-3 expresses Yhwh’s intention of starting anew with Israel and the result when Israel fails to respond, namely: dead fish and mourning in heaven. According to Leene, the pericope thus leaves the reader with ‘an internal tension, the tension between indictment and, albeit shrouded, word of promise’.59 Beuken emphasizes the element of disappointment about the lack of response from the people. The intention of Yhwh is to set the people free but ‘if they do not want to be set free, the exodus breaks off and ends with plagues’.60

2.4 The literary structure of Isaiah 50:1-3

The literary structure of Isaiah 50:1-3 is marked by some significant features. The composition as a whole displays a pattern of repetition. The structure of vs. 1, consisting of two questions and a response introduced by the particle πή, is formally repeated in vv. 2-3. In the latter verses the pattern has a more extensive form – the questions are now four in number rather than two and the response consists of six lines rather than two – but the pattern is essentially the same. This becomes even clearer when one discerns that the questions in vs. 2 can be grouped in two clusters. Those in vs. 2a-b fall under the same interrogative phrase and those in vs. 2c-d are joined through a sequence of connected interrogative particles. The structure of the text is thus as follows:

[56. See H. Leene, De stem van de knecht als metafoor. Beschouwingen over de compositie van Jesaja 50, Kampen: Kok, 1980, p. 9.]
[57. See W.A.M. Beuken, Jesaja (2b), pp. 70-71. I employ slightly different line numbers than Beuken.]
[58. Leene, Stem, p. 24; Beuken, Jesaja, p. 77.]
[59. Leene, Stem, p. 15 (my translation).]
[60. Beuken, Jesaja, pp. 76-77 (idem).]
Within vs. 1 a chiastic order is present between questions and response. The response in the second part of this verse resumes terms from the first part but does so in reverse order. The terms 'to send away' and 'to sell' reappear in the order 'to sell' and 'to send away'.

In this light the question arises as to how the two sets of questions in vs. 2a-d relate to the response in vs. 2e-3b. Do all questions find an answer in this response, or does the response relate only to the second set of questions, leaving the questions in vs. 2a-b without an answer, as Beuken has suggested? I incline to support the latter view since there is a slight shift of theme discernible in vs. 2. The first questions in this verse deal with the issue of the lack of response to the call of Yhwh (vs. 2a-b). The second set of questions (vs. 2c-d) turns to the theme of the effectivity of Yhwh’s purposes. The response part (vs. 2e-3b) especially elaborates the latter issue. The former questions are not substantially addressed in this response and remain open. In other words, in terms of form a double question-and-response structure is visible in Isaiah 50:1-3. In terms of content, within this pattern of repetition also a ‘heart’ is visible in the unaddressed and still open questions in vs. 2a-b.

2.5 Explanation of Isaiah 50:1-3

A challenge to the people’s perspective (verse 1)
The text opens with a question about the letter of divorce that Yhwh supposedly handed to Zion, asking ‘where then’ this letter is. A second question follows which challenges the addressees to point out ‘which creditors’ were involved in the sale of the children. Usually the assumption is made that these questions take up elements of thought that circulated among the people. The people must have been wrestling with the thought that Yhwh issued a letter of divorce to Zion and that Yhwh was forced to sell the children. Such thoughts are addressed by the counterquestions formulated in this verse. The addressee of these counter-questions are the ‘children of Zion’ and for the moment it must be left open

61. So Beuken, Jesaja, pp. 76-77.
whether this designation implies that these children are actually ‘in’ Zion or not.\(^{63}\) Zion in any case is the mother that is referred to.

The topic of the first question is the נַוְר אֶבֶן חָרֵם or ‘letter of divorce’. This combination of words literally means ‘letter, piece of evidence of cutting’. The verb תָּרָכָה means ‘to cut’ but in biblical Hebrew the verb occurs frequently in an idiomatic combination with the word בֵּית הַרְבוֹעָה and then it assumes the connotation ‘to ratify’.\(^{64}\) A covenant is ratified by a deed of ‘cutting’, referring to the sacrifice ceremony in which an animal is ‘cut’ in order to seal the covenant.\(^{65}\) In a similar way ‘the letter of cutting’ functions to ratify the divorce and make it official.\(^{66}\)

The expression ‘letter of divorce’ occurs four times in the Hebrew Bible (Deut. 24:1-3; Isa. 50:1 and Jer. 3:8), each time in the context of a divorce procedure. The verb חָרֵם (Pi’el), which occurs in all of these cases as well, has a broad meaning and can mean ‘to let go, to set free’ or ‘to send away’. When the verb occurs in the context of male-female relations, it does not have a positive connotation but signifies that a man dismisses a woman, resigns his responsibility for her and ends the relationship with its inherent protection.\(^{67}\) The term then has the underlying meaning ‘to divorce’.\(^{68}\)

With respect to the content, function and background of the letter of divorce, not much is known. The Bible speaks about this document only in passing and never in practice but only within legislation and in a metaphorical sense. The biblical texts rather presuppose familiarity with the custom and do not specify the procedure. Examples of letters of divorce have been found in extra-biblical texts from Assyria (1500 BCE) and Elephantine (500-400 BCE).\(^{69}\) Divorce is thus as such an ancient phenomenon. The time at which the custom of issuing a letter of divorce became practice in Israel cannot be established. Scholars have made the assumption that originally a divorce was effectuated by an oral declaration, while only later and in special cases an official writ of divorce became customary. The oral formula may have remained the most common practice.\(^{70}\) The function of the letter of divorce is to mark the termination of a marriage, but a further function is to evidence the legally unmarried status of the woman. That is important, for proof of this status permits the woman to remarry and enables a man to escape the risk of unknowingly having sex with an unofficially divorced woman (Deut. 22:22) which would earn him a death

\(^{63}\) Mostly it is assumed that the children of Zion must be located in Zion (Beuken, Jesaja, p. 76; Watts, Isaiah, p. 192, North, pp. 198-199). In my view, however, Isaiah 50:1-3 makes more sense if situated in Babylon. See for a further discussion the section ‘Audience’ below.

\(^{64}\) See HAL 2, p. 476. In post-biblical Hebrew the verb חָרֵם actually assumes the meaning ‘to divorce’.


\(^{66}\) In addition the suggestion has been made that there may be an ancient custom behind the expression, putting the obligation upon the husband to cut the corner of his wife’s garment to symbolize the severance of the marriage bond (D.L. Lieber, ‘Divorce’, Encyclopedia Judaica, vol 6, Jerusalem 1972, pp. 122-137 (esp. p. 123), with reference to an ancient Sumerian ceremony).

\(^{67}\) Cf. Gen. 21:14; Deut. 22:19, 29; 24:1-3; 2 Sam. 13:16.

\(^{68}\) Cf. Gen. 21:10; Lev. 21:7, 14; 22:13; Num. 30:10.


penalty. It is hard to judge the actual practice from the biblical texts, but the texts give the impression that a letter of divorce was not a standard element in every divorce case, but a rather sophisticated element in the few cases that actually needed a juridical ratification. Four explicit references are relatively few in view of the many passages speaking about divorce without clear mention of a document of divorce (Ex. 18:2; 2 Sam. 3:14-16; Ezra 10). While according to the biblical texts only men were in the position to initiate a divorce, the documents in Elephantine show that in that society women could also take the initiative in a divorce.

The issue in the text is whether or not Israel can produce such a letter of divorce. It is most likely that the question is rhetorical and requires a negative answer ('nowhere'). The point of the question is then to emphasize that such a letter of divorce does not exist. Arguments in support of this position are the parallelism with the second question in vs. 1de, which points to another nonexisting reality ('creditors'), and the internal logic of vv. 1-2 in which Yhwh seems to seek rapprochement to Israel rather than to underline the definiteness of the present alienation. At the same time the fact of divorce is not denied ('your mother was sent away'). Yet, the text shifts away from the notion of a definitely settled and formally ratified divorce. It turns to focus on the responsibility for the divorce and in this way creates an opening for the restoration of the relationship between Yhwh and Zion.

Meanwhile, the notion of divorce implies that the relationship between Yhwh and Zion is imagined as a marriage. This marriage has been broken by the fact that Yhwh has sent Zion away. This should not be interpreted too literally but be understood in the sense that the fates of Yhwh and Zion have become separate rather than being intimately bound. This reflects the reality of the exile that is so prominently and painfully present in Deutero-Isaiah.

The second question in vs. 1 also requires a negative answer. The suggestion is made that the cause of the children's plight lies in the circumstance that Yhwh was indebted to creditors and had to sell his children in order to offset the debt. This suggestion, however, is an entire misrepresentation, if we take notice of the negative force of the rhetorical question.

The verbs that occur here, the verb הָעָל (to be a creditor) and the verb קָרֵּא (to sell), relate to the sphere of trade and commerce. The notion of 'sale' occurs

71. Contra van der Merwe (Deuterojesaja, p. 150). His interpretation that a divorce according to Deut. 24:1-3 is illegal when there is no letter of divorce, is a generalisation and rests on a misunderstanding of this text.


73. JM §161a defines a rhetorical question as one that does not expect an answer. Beuken, Jesaja, p. 71, has noted that the word הָעָל often introduces the response to a rhetorical question, cf. Isa. 40:15, 50:9.

74. This view is shared by Beuken, Jesaja, pp. 71-72, Leene, Stem, p. 11; North, Isaiah, p. 198. Another view is found in Van der Merwe, Deuterojesaja, pp. 148-150, who thinks that Israel must have received a letter of divorce in order to make the divorce – that is indeed presupposed – legal.

75. This idea of the divorce between Yhwh and Zion is widely echoed in Deutero-Isaiah. It surfaces in the notion of geographical separation between Yhwh and Zion: Yhwh is not in Zion but will come to Zion (40:10; 52:8) and also finds reflection in other images, such as the idea that Zion is captive (52:2), lies in ruins (51:19) and is bereaved of children (49:21).

76. The verb הָעָל – also spelled as עָלֶה – has the meaning 'to lend' and is also used to mean 'to become a creditor'. The participle that is found here denotes a (professional) lender or creditor.
elsewhere occasionally with relation to Yhwh and Israel and entails that Israel is being ‘sold, handed over’ into the hands of enemies. The connotations of such a sale are that the people must suffer under the domination of foreign nations and be treated as slaves. They are ‘crushed and oppressed’.  

The suggestion made here is that Yhwh is forced by circumstances to give up his children and to sell them as slaves. The terminology of ‘creditors’ and ‘children’s sale’ portrays Yhwh altogether as an impotent factor in a situation where other forces are in control. Yet, the verse continues on to show that this image of Yhwh cannot be maintained and is altogether a misrepresentation of Yhwh and of his relation to the people.

It is interesting that this depiction of Yhwh as debtor is precisely opposite to that in the prologue of the book. Isa. 40:1-11 depicts Yhwh as a creditor rather than as a debtor, and as a merciful creditor who acquits the people of all further guilt and announces that ‘her penalty has been paid’ (40:2). Deutero-Isaiah is indeed full of economic language in order to describe the relation between God and people. Contrary to the present usage, however, such images customarily have a highly positive overtone.

‘Because of your iniquities and your transgressions’

The response in the second half of the verse (lfg) gives a certain twist to the questions. The letter of divorce and the creditors are no longer mentioned but all emphasis is put on the cause of the divorce and of the children’s sale. The reason lies in ‘your iniquities and your transgressions’. Furthermore, the verbs ‘to send away’ and ‘to sell’ reoccur in the passive mode. That means that there is a recognition that the children were sold and that their mother was sent away without the judgement that Yhwh functioned as subject of this action. The accent in the response shifts thus in two respects from that in the questions: it switches from the idea that a divine initiative lies behind the present situation to the recognition of this situation as a matter of fact, and it shifts from a focus on the responsibility of Yhwh to the responsibility of the children.

A close look reveals that there is in this respect a remarkable distinction between Zion and the children of Zion. The children of Zion are held responsible for their present misfortune and for the desolation of Zion. Zion herself, however, is not declared guilty. This distinction has to do with the different functions of Zion and of the children of Zion in Isaiah 49-55: the text offers comfort to the former and wants to engage the latter to take part in this program of comfort.

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77. Cf. Deut. 28:68; 32:30; Judg. 2:14; 3:8; 10:7; 1 Sam. 12:9; Isa 52:3; Ps 44:13.
79. For the causal force of the preposition a see HAL 1, p. 101 (no. 19) and BDB, p. 90 (nos. 3-5). The word-pair ‘transgressions and iniquities’ in Deutero-Isaiah see further Isa. 43:24-25; 53:5; and cf. Isa. 40:2; 53:5,12.
80. The distinction between the portrayal of Zion and the children of Zion is pervasive in Isa. 49-55. Zion is depicted as a lamentable and sorry figure (49:14-21; 51:17-20; 54:1-4). The
Strictly speaking, the question whether Yhwh is responsible or not for the children’s and their mother’s plight is not answered. The shift in focus from the initiative of Yhwh to the guilt of the children indicates that the main concern of the text is to point out the human cause rather than the divine initiative behind the situation of divorce and servanthood. At the same time, this shift of attention towards the human responsibility serves as an indirect answer to the question whether Yhwh has sold the children and divorced the mother or not. The implicit answer is that this question is wrongly put and does not get at the heart of the matter. The crucial point, in the text’s perspective, is that the facts of servanthood and divorce are undeniable and in order to ‘explain’ this situation the people should look to themselves rather than assigning some obscure role to Yhwh in bringing about this situation. The text, in other words, proposes a different perception of the present state of the mother and children than is present in the questions and suggests that the issues lie elsewhere than is expressed in these two questions.

On the whole, both parts of Isaiah 50:1, the rhetorical questions and the responses, give the impression that the split between Yhwh and people does not have to be definite. There is no evidence of a letter of divorce nor of the existence of creditors pressing Yhwh with iron force to sell the children of Zion. Further the references to the ‘iniquities and transgressions’ of the children of Zion imply that on their side there is a possibility to change. Something has gone wrong, but things can be done differently in future. A state of servanthood need not to be their destination forever. Briefly put, the text points out that Yhwh is not bound by creditors nor are the children bound forever by their misbehaviour. In a concealed way the possibility of change is present in the verse.

**Yhwh disillusioned by the lack of response (verse 2a-d)**

In contrast to the set of questions in vs. 1 which aimed at reverting the complaints of the people, the opening questions in vs. 2 bring up concerns of Yhwh: ‘What is the reason that no one was there when I came, that no one answered when I called?’.

The interrogative phrase imo is a more elaborate question marker than the simple ‘why’ and can be paraphrased as ‘for what reason’ or ‘what can explain that?’.

The issue that needs explanation is that no one was there when Yhwh ‘came’. The lack of further specification with respect to this coming leaves the interpretation open to different options. Is the verb קוה here an abbreviation for the expression ‘to come to court’? Is it a reference to the coming of prophets who meet with no response? Is the implied meaning that Yhwh comes to Zion and finds no response there?

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81. See JMI § 102a and i. The word is a contraction of the words יַהַוָּא and יַהַו (pass.part. Qal of the verb י֫הוּ) and literally means ‘what that is known...?’.

82. For these three views see, respectively, Schoors, Savour, p. 198; North, Second Isaiah, p. 99 (following the Targum); and Beuk, Jesaja, p. 73. The interpretation of the verb ‘to come’ as juridical vocabulary is not convincing, as I have shown. The other interpretations suffer from a lack of specificity. For what response would Yhwh or the prophets expect when coming to Zion except belief in a very general sense? I suggest that it is possible to determine the meaning of the verb here more precisely.

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In order to determine the meaning of this 'coming' more precisely, it is important to take note of the clues offered by the immediate context. The verb 'to come' is parallel to the verb 'to call' in the second line. The verb קָרָה can vary in meaning from 'to call, to proclaim' to 'to call and commission', i.e., 'to call into service'. In principle the verb denotes not merely a loudly voiced utterance but points to a calling that means to achieve something: to assign somebody a function, to set someone in motion, to invite a response. In the biblical idiom, the verb has the meaning 'to call (someone) effectively', in such a fashion that the person called is stirred and brought into motion.

The precise purpose of the 'coming' and 'calling' of Yhwh is not exposed in vs. 2a-b but the second set of questions in vs. 2c-d provides significant clarification. These questions concentrate on the disbelief in Yhwh's saving power. It is most logical to assume then that doubts concerning this power account for the failure of the mission of Yhwh described in vs. 2a-b. Also the purpose of Yhwh's mission is clarified. The call that went out to the people aimed apparently at the 'ransom' and the 'rescue' of the people from their state of servanthood and from their oppressors. If we take into consideration that the verb וַיָּצָא and synonymous verbs such as נִתיָן have their main point of reference in Deutero-Isaiah in the redemption from Babylon, it seems that the mission of Yhwh in the present text also involves the redemption from Babylon. In other words, the 'coming' and 'calling' of Yhwh will bear a link to his purpose to set the people free. The call would aim specifically at setting the people in motion in order to embark with Yhwh on the journey from Babylon to Zion.

When that call finds no response, the supposed ineffectiveness of Yhwh's power becomes an issue. This happens by two parallel questions: 'Is my hand truly too short to redeem? Is there no power in me to rescue?'. Both of these questions circle around Yhwh's capacity to save. The phrasing shows a subtle variation. The words 'hand' and 'redeem' in vs. 2c find their counterparts in the terms 'power' and 'save' in vs. 2d. The 'hand' is a well-known biblical metonym for power and might, and failing power is expressed often by the image of a 'shortened hand' in contrast to the 'outstretched arm' that reveals great power.

The noun נִשָּׁבָת ('redemption') that is related to the verb נִשָּׁבַט occurs only four times in the Hebrew Bible. The verb נִשָּׁבַט is close in meaning to the verb וַיָּצָא ('to ransom, act as kinsman') but carries different nuances. The former term ('to ransom, to redeem') occurs specifically in connection to the legislation concerning the first-born and refers to the act of buying something or someone free from
existing obligations by offering something else in exchange. It has a more ‘financial’ connotation than the latter which has more a ‘family’ connotation. The common assumption is that when the verb מָכַד occurs in relation to God and Israel the notion of *quid pro quo* recedes in the background: Yhwh ‘buys the people free’ for nothing and as an act of grace. This assumption is actually hard to maintain, since at least in Isaiah 43:3-4, reference is made to a ‘price’ and ‘ransom’. In the context of Isaiah 50:1-3 the verb ‘to redeem’ corresponds to the verb ‘to sell’ in vs. 1.

**Excursus on the meaning of the verb מָכַד**

Characteristic for this verb in its literal sense is the idea that something is under a legal or cultic obligation from which it cannot free itself. Freedom can only be achieved by an act of substitution. The context in which the need for ‘redemption’ arises can be the legislation concerning the first-born (Ex. 13:11-15; Lev. 27:27; Num. 18:15-16), situations of slavery (Ex. 21:8; Lev. 19:20) or situations of guilt and sin (1 Sam. 14:45). The primary context is that of the law concerning the first-born. Every first-born human or animal, so it is stipulated, belongs to Yhwh and must be devoted and sacrificed to Yhwh. The first-born humans and unclean animals may be redeemed from this obligation by the payment of a ransom or by replacing it by a substitute animal (Ex. 13:11-15). The clean animals must always be offered (Lev. 27:27, Num. 18:16). In the second place, acts of ‘redemption’ can also take place in connection with slavery. Redemption then results in freedom from slavery (Ex. 21:8; Lev. 19:20).

In about 70% of the cases, Yhwh is the subject of acts of redemption. The context can be that he redeems the people from slavery so that they can live in freedom (Deut. 7:8; 9:26; 13:6; 24:18; Ps. 78:42), or it can be that Yhwh ‘redeems’ the soul from death and from its enemies in order to bring it back to life (Ps. 34:23; 44:27; 49:16; 69:19; 71:23). In these cases the setting is wider than that of legal obligations and consists more generally in a situation of imprisonment and affliction. According to Stamm, the ‘specifically juridical aspect’ then recedes to the background while the ‘liberating-saving’ aspect moves to the foreground. However, not in all of these cases is the notion absent that Yhwh pays a ransom in order to redeem Israel (Isa. 43:4).

The distinction between the terms מָכַד and מַכִּיר lies, according to Stamm, in the fact that the former term in comparison to the latter is ‘more general’ and not limited to a specific legal setting. Differently put, the term מַכִּיר has its roots in family law while the term מָכַד belongs to the sphere of trade and commerce. In the former case, the kinship between the subject and the object or the owner of the object plays a role, while in the latter case the accent lies on the payment of the ransom by no specific person. In the metaphorical sense the words come fairly close in meaning (‘to redeem, to liberate’), although the accent in the former case remains on the ‘close ties’.
between Yhwh and people while in the second case – at least with God as subject and
the people as object – the accent purely lies on Yhwh’s capacity to save.

It is interesting to see how the LXX has translated the words רְאוֹן, וַאֲלֵךְ, and רֵעַ. In
this respect LXX Isa. 40-55 offers a picture that deviates from LXX Isa. 1-39 and other
books. In Isa. 40-55 the verb רֵעַ (to rescue) is rendered consistently by the Greek εἴσκε­ρω (Isa. 42:22; 43:13; 44:17, 20; 47:14; 50:2), although the general translation
practice is to render this verb with the Greek verb προσέβηκα (cf. Isa. 5:29; 36:14-20;
37:11-12; 38:6; Judg. 6:9; 8:34; 9:17; 1 Kgs. 4:7-8; Ps. 50:22). The verb προσέβηκα,
however, is in Isa. 40-55 together with the usual rendering λύσπου reserved for the
translation of the verb רְאוֹן and the verb וַאֲלֵךְ (the Greek verb προσέβηκα occurs further
twice in Isa. 49:25-26 for the Hebrew וַאֲלֵךְ). The LXX Isa. 40-55 translates the verbs
רְאוֹן and וַאֲלֵךְ both by forms from the verb προσέβηκα or the verb λύσπου. The verb רְאוֹן
is translated in Isa. 51:11 by the verb λύσπου while the noun from the same verb in
Isa. 50:2 is rendered by a form of the verb προσέβηκα. The verb וַאֲלֵךְ is rendered by a
form of προσέβηκα in Isa. 44:6; 47:4; 48:17, 20; 49:7, 26; 51:10; 52:9; 54:5, 8 and by a
form of λύσπου in Isa. 41:14; 43:1, 14; 44:22-24; 52:3.

The point is that the Greek προσέβηκα is not employed for the Hebrew verb רְאוֹן, as
is common practice, but especially in the setting of Isa. 40-55 is employed for the
Hebrew verb רְאוֹן. A possible explanation for this could be that the translators of LXX
Isa. 40-55 wished to ‘reserve’ this Greek verb for the Hebrew verb רְאוֹן, taking into
consideration that the latter term is exceptionally frequent in Isa. 40-55 and one of the
crucial terms of salvation. Another possibility, which does not exclude the former, is
that the LXX-text of Isa. 1-39 and that of Isa. 40-55 (or 40-66) were composed by
different groups of translators. However that may be, it is clear that behind the LXX
Isa. 40-55 a careful study of the text is detectable and a deliberate, though not
concordant, choice of translation.

In the parallel question in vs. 2d the verb רְאוֹן (‘to snatch away, to deliver’) oc­
curs. Seeligmann has made the assumption that the term stems from the shep­
herd’s world and has associations with the rescue of an animal from the jaws of a
beast.94 That provides the word with a connotation of urgency.

In a broader sense, the capacity to save is a prominent issue in Isaiah 40-55.
On the one hand, the power of Yhwh is emphasized, both his power in creation
(40:26; 41:20; 48:13) and his power to save Israel (45:22-24; 51:9-11). On the
other hand, the power of the idols is contended in polemical passages, such as
Isaiah 44:6-20 and 46:1-7. In these texts the idols are identified as feeble and
impotent wooden images who cannot save. In this context, the questions in Isaiah
50:2 are rather crucial. When Yhwh’s capacity to save is questioned, precisely
the difference between Yhwh and the idols is at stake. This distinction, and the
lack of belief in this distinction, is thus a crucial point and puts the text under
voltage: is Yhwh powerful or not?

An overwhelming manifestation of power (verse 2e-h)
The power of Yhwh is subsequently illustrated with three motifs: the drying up of
the sea and of rivers, the extinction of fish and the darkening of the heavens (vv.
2e-3b). Everything is presented in the present tense and graphically depicted
before the eyes of the reader.

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94. See HAL 3, p. 677, with special evidence in Am. 3:12 and Ezek 34:10-12. In Isa. 40-55 the verb
There is debate about the framework which binds these motifs together and from which the whole image may be interpreted. Some scholars have discerned in the text reminiscences of creation and the mythological struggle against the powers of chaos (cf. the 'rebuke' of the sea). Others have understood the text as containing strong allusions to the exodus story, especially to the crossing of the Red Sea and the preceding plagues (fish stinking and complete darkness). Recently the tendency has been to assume a blend of creation and exodus motifs. A third and largely overlooked possibility is that the text borrows motifs from the theophany genre. The hymnic rather than descriptive language in these verses, the majesty of Yhwh in nature, the undertone of judgement, the element of blazing wrath, and the rather bizarre scene resulting from it all seem to comply with the idea that Yhwh reveals himself and his power in the style of a theophany. Yhwh makes a forceful appearance in order to express his judgement concerning a situation of 'crisis' on earth.

Isaiah 50:2-3 certainly does not depict a theophany in the strict sense. The text rather offers 'a free collage of images' (Leene). But recognition of the theophany genre provides the insight that the images offered here do not convey a message of reassurance. The power that is demonstrated has forceful and destructive aspects. Yhwh's power to redeem is thus strangely enough demonstrated by a power of the opposite kind.

The first event consists in Yhwh drying up the sea by rebuking it. The verb נבש, from which the noun here translated as 'rebuke' is derived, varies in meaning from 'to scold, fulminate' to 'to threaten'. When Yhwh is the subject the waters or the sea frequently constitute the object. The rebuke of Yhwh, apparently an overwhelming and majestical act with sound effects, results in these cosmic elements shrinking and disappearing. The term thus carries the connotations of extraordinary force and possibly fury. The sea that is dried up by the rebuke of Yhwh (vs. 2e) is presumably no sea in particular but 'the' sea as a cosmic element. It is subject to the power of Yhwh and serves here to demonstrate his extraordinary might.

95. Van der Merwe, Deuterorjesaja, pp. 151-156 offers a discussion of the different views (with references). A mixture of creation and exodus motifs is assumed by North, Isaiah, p. 199; Leene, Stem, pp. 13-14; Beuken, Jesaja, p. 74. Van der Merwe concludes that there is no hard evidence of ties between Isa. 50:2-3 and the exodus tradition in the Pentateuch.

96. Cautious suggestions in this direction have been made by Beuken, p. 75; Van der Merwe, p. 152. Comparable texts are Ps. 18:8-16; 104:7; Nah. 1:2-6 (cf. the notion 'rebuke') and Isa. 42:13-17. The connection between theophany and 'crisis' is found in B. Becking, 'Passion, Power and Protection: Interpreting the God of Nahum', in: B. Becking & M. Dijkstra (ed.), On Reading Prophetic Texts, Leiden: Brill, 1996, pp. 1-20 (esp. p. 7).

97. The noun מַשָּׂא and concomitant verb occur in Isa. 50:2; 51:20; 54:9. With Yhwh as subject and the waters as object, see, e.g., Ps. 18:16; 104:7; 106:9; Nah. 1:4. Especially Ps. 18:16 and Nah. 1:4 are good parallels: both texts depict a divine theophany and refer to the anger of Yhwh.

98. Together with Van der Merwe (Deuterorjesaja, p. 152), I disagree here with a majority of scholars (North, Leene, Schoors) who assume that the 'sea' may be identified as the Reed Sea. Arguments for this position: the images in the immediate context in Isa. 50:2-3 do not suggest an allusion to a new exodus but are unequivocally negative; on account of this context Isa. 50:2 is closer to Ps. 18:16 and Nah. 1:4 than to Ps. 106:9 where the term 'rebuke' occurs in the context of an exodus; there rather may be a distant reminiscence in Isa. 50:2 to the sea as 'gottesfeindliche Macht' in association with the Ugaritic deity Jam (HAL 3, p. 396).
The parallel line in vs. 2f speaks about turning rivers into a desert. This is again a negative act. The desert in Deutero-Isaiah is, on the one hand, the place that Israel must pass through en route to the land of promise (40:3) and, on the other hand, a place of desolation without the possibility of life (41:18-19; 43:20). The word functions here in the latter sense. The water that is made to disappear is precisely the symbol of life (41:18-19; 43:19-20; 55:1).

The effect of these measures is described in vs. 2gh. These lines show an abrupt shift of focus away from Yhwh as subject to the fish as subject and represent a second element within the demonstration of the power of Yhwh: all fish ‘shall stink for lack of water’ and ‘die of thirst’. The order of events is neither logical nor chronological but presumably expresses two simultaneous effects of the ‘lack of water’. The term ‘to stink’ has the connotation of decay and death and the term ‘to die’ confirms this element of death and points to the end of all that lives in the waters.

This motif of the death of fish appears somewhat unexpectedly amidst the demonstration of power in the sphere of the great cosmic elements, the sea (vs. 2ef) and the heavens (vs. 3ab). One explanation that has been given for its appearance is that the motif alludes to the first plague preceding the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 7:17-24). The words ‘to stink’, ‘fish’, ‘die’ and ‘thirst’ reoccur in Isaiah 50:2. The meaning of the allusion would be that Yhwh’s plan to redeem Israel comes to a premature stop in this text and does not reach further than the first plague. According to another explanation, references to ‘fish in the waters’ often occur in association with Egypt and particularly in relation to words of judgement upon Egypt. The text would indirectly portray the victory of Yhwh over Egypt and in this way give proof of Yhwh’s sovereignty.

Contrary to these explanations, I would suggest that two elements are decisive for the meaning of the references to fish in Isaiah 50:2. In the first place, there is an element of irony in the idea that the fish, the animal species preeminently associated with water, dies for lack of water and dies of thirst. The word ‘thirst’ usually occurs with reference to humans, although it is occasionally found with reference to animals and to the soil as well. Even so, the idea that fish ‘die of thirst’ is almost humorous and grotesque, since it takes the image of dryness to an extreme. In the second place, the death of the fish may allude to the extermination of all living beings. There may be a pars-pro-toto effect in the image. If the fish in the sea cannot survive for lack of water, one may conclude that the fate of all other beings equally dependent on water will be no different. By means of these two images of terror – the drying up of the sea and the death of the fish – Yhwh thus displays his power when Israel does not respond to his call.

99. See among others Schoors, Saviour, p. 200; Leene, Stem, p. 14. Van der Merwe, Deuterojesaja, pp. 151-55, however emphasizes that the correspondence with Ex. 7:17-24 is limited to the death of the fish: the other key words occur in a different sense in both texts. In his view, Isa. 50:2e-3 is composed of hymnic motifs which express the sovereign power of Yhwh in nature and it is not always clear ‘to which extent these hymnic descriptions allude to specific acts in history’ (p. 152).
100. See Van der Merwe, Deuterojesaja, pp. 153-54, with reference to Isa. 19:5-11; Ezek. 29:2-5; 30:12.
101. See Ex. 17:3; Ps. 104:11 (animals) and Isa. 44:3 (soil).
Mourning in heaven (verse 3)
The conclusive acts of Yhwh are that he ‘clothes the heavens in blackness and makes a mourning cloth for their covering’. These lines are parallel both in form and in content. Yhwh is the subject of the two verbs and the heavens are the object. The dimension of ‘clothing’ or ‘covering’ is present in both lines, as well as the dimension of ‘blackness’ and ‘mourning’.

The verb יָנַע expresses more than a superficial change of clothes. It points to the assumption of a new quality and identity. Clothing of the heavens in blackness thus indicates that the heavens become all blackness. It is a point of debate precisely how this darkening of the heavens should be explained. Is it explainable in terms of an exceptional natural phenomenon, such as a solar eclipse, a sandstorm or some other atmospheric situation that causes a blackened sky?

Or is another explanation possible that focuses on the meaning of this image within its context rather than on the phenomena behind it? Could it be that the image of ‘dark heavens’ expresses that the heavens are shrouded in mourning? Is it an image of the grief of Yhwh?

The notion of mourning in this verse has often been overlooked, perhaps because of the unfamiliarity of the idea that there could be grief in heaven, but it is rather likely that the noun כָּנָּנִים in vs. 3a has the connotation of mourning.

This interpretation is confirmed by the second statement in the verse, which entails that Yhwh will make the heavens ‘a mourning cloth for their covering’.

The word כָּנָּן refers to a rough piece of fabric that is made from goat’s wool and ‘therefore mostly black’. This piece of cloth frequently functions as a mourning garment worn during periods of repentance or grief. It may be assumed that this function is present here as well, albeit that it in this case the heavens wear such a sack cloth. One may deduce that the ‘heavens’ denote here not merely the ‘air’ or ‘sky’ but primarily point to the sphere of Yhwh and his abode. When the heavens are clothed in blackness, that expresses that there is grief in the sphere of Yhwh. It is Yhwh who is mourning and it is Yhwh who covers his abode in darkness. It is as if the heavens are his ‘visible exterior’ and his ‘garment’ through which his emotions of grief can be expressed. The depiction is indeed remarkable and concrete in its anthropomorphism.
On the whole, verse 3 pictures a dramatic climax in the manifestation of Yhwh's power. The heavens are clothed in black and provide no glimmer of light. This sombre attire indicates Yhwh's sorrow. This intense reaction of Yhwh is most adequately explained in relation to the people's lack of response that became apparent in verse 2. This lack of response forms an absolute nadir in the relationship between God and his people and in the progressive unfolding of the themes of comfort and the restoration of Zion. The continuous doubt concerning Yhwh's capacity to reverse the people's fortunes (49:14, 24-26) and the lack of response to Yhwh's representative, the servant (49:4-6), culminate in Isaiah 50:2 in the unanswered calling of Yhwh. The resulting grief indicates the intensity of Yhwh's disillusionment.

At the same time, the focus on the response of the people leaves an opening in the text: the invitation to listen to Yhwh remains open. When the single servant in 50:4-9 accepts the invitation and 'gives ear' to Yhwh and acts in compliance with his call, the mourning and grief of Yhwh vanish. In the subsequent chapter the mood is again one of hope and of promise (Isaiah 51).

2.6 Audience

What is the position of the audience suggested by Isaiah 50:1-3?\(^{108}\) The text offers a number of clues. In the first place, it can be deduced from the text that there is alienation between Yhwh and Zion ('divorce') and that the people have become enslaved under a foreign authority ('sold'). This must relate to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, as a result of which Israel has been exiled to Babylon (42:21-22) and Zion lies devastated (44:28; 51:17-20).

In the second place, if we examine the flow of the argument in Isaiah 50:1-3, it appears that the text first takes into account the lamentable position of the people and the city (vs. 1). Subsequently, the sons are reproached for the fact that they do not give ear to the voice of Yhwh who intends to redeem them (vs. 2). Finally, the assumption that Yhwh has no capacity to save is refuted (vv. 2e-3). A twofold conclusion can be drawn from this: the sons of Zion are apparently disheartened and have doubts concerning the power of Yhwh, and Yhwh's intention to 'redeem' and 'rescue' must specifically be related to the situation in Babylon (vs. 1). The redemption that Yhwh has in mind is the redemption from the bondage in Babylon.\(^{109}\)

In this perspective the coming of Yhwh, his call and the people's lack of confidence all receive a sharper profile. The arrival of Yhwh is apparently to motivate the people to depart from Babylon. His 'call' is quite concretely an appeal to depart from Babylon (cf. Isa. 48:20; 49:9; 52:11). The attitude of the people may specifically be explained as a lack of confidence in the redemption from Babylon and in the project of the return to Zion. The lack of response to the call of Yhwh is a sign that the audience is not only disheartened but also reluctant towards the venture of leaving Babylon. The audience is evidently not eager to heed the call.

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of Yhwh and embark on the journey to Zion, but has become ‘attached’ to Babylon.\textsuperscript{110}

This interpretation starts from the premise that the audience of Isaiah 50:1-3 is located in Babylon. Otherwise the divine appeal to depart from Babylon would make little sense. I differ here from the view of Beuken that Yhwh comes to Zion in this text. In his view, from Isaiah 49 onwards the central location in the text is Zion and the role of Babylon is played out. In my view, however, there remains a double focus and a ‘switching of the camera’ between Babylon and Zion in Isaiah 49-55, although these chapters concentrate on the fate of Zion.\textsuperscript{111}

A key argument for the hypothesis that Zion is the location of the audience in Isaiah 50:1-3 is the word ‘to come’. With Yhwh as subject, this verb in the context of Deutero-Isaiah usually expresses a movement towards Zion.\textsuperscript{112} It would, therefore, be odd to find Yhwh in this passage coming to Babylon. At the same time, this argument is not persuasive and may be outweighed by counter-arguments.

Let me summarize the arguments in favour of the position that the audience of Isaiah 50:1-3 is located in Babylon. First, the terms ‘to redeem’ and to ‘rescue’ are far more appropriate in relation to an audience of exiles in Babylon than in relation to an audience located in Zion. Second, the exodus from Babylon must start in Babylon. It is thus not impossible that Yhwh comes to Babylon in order to fetch the people and to launch the voyage to Zion. Third, the preceding text, Isaiah 49:14-26, deals with three complaints about the situation in Zion, about the travel from Babylon to Zion and about the possibility of escaping from Babylon. In this sequence a gradual shift of focus from Zion to Babylon is visible, although the female Zion is addressed throughout. In Isaiah 50:1-3 there is a switch of address from Lady Zion to the sons of Zion. It would be logical to infer that this switch of address corresponds to a switch in location as well. The shift in address from Lady Zion to the children of Zion is too obvious to be missed, and the situation of Zion and her children is also clearly distinct. This compositional argument seems to support the assumption that the children of Zion must be situated in Babylon rather than in Zion.

If the view is accepted that Isaiah 50:1-3 applies to the situation in Babylon and addresses an audience located in Babylon, the text assumes a new significance. The passage would have to be interpreted as a confrontation between Yhwh, who comes with the intention to redeem the exiles, and the exiles themselves, who are not prepared to depart from Babylon and embark on the journey to Zion. This clash of interests, then, is marked as a lowest point in the enterprise of the return from exile and in the relationship between Yhwh and his people.

\textsuperscript{110} Other traces of this reluctance are found in Isa. 48:3-5, 8-9; 49:4; 51:12-13; 53:6.

\textsuperscript{111} Both Beuken (\textit{Jesaja}, p. 73) and Watts (\textit{Isaiah 34-66}, pp. 192-193) assume that in Isa. 50:1-3 Yhwh addresses the people in Zion rather than in Babylon. It is interesting that the matter of location has only in the last two or three decades been identified as a clue for the composition and content of Isa. 40-55. Previous to the work of Beuken and Watts, locations were simply silently assumed or not mentioned at all.

\textsuperscript{112} See Beuken, \textit{Jesaja}, p. 73, and cf. Isa. 40:10; 42:16; 52:8. Another argument can be refuted as well: the sons of Zion (Isa. 50:1) need not necessarily be ‘in’ Zion (cf. Isa. 49:22 ‘they shall bring your sons in their bosom’).
2.7 Composition and context

Following Isaiah 50:1-3 the text continues with the so-called third song of the servant, Isaiah 50:4-9. The latter is followed by a commenting voice (vv. 10-11) that emphasizes the obedience of the servant. There is not much literal correspondence between Isaiah 50:1-3 and 50:4-9, but there are semantic connections, predominantly in the form of contrasts.

The speaker in the song in Isaiah 50:4-9 identifies himself as an obedient listener and respondent to Yhwh: he emphasizes his open ears (vv. 4-5), his capacity to speak (vs. 4) and his readiness to comply with Yhwh’s plans (vs. 5). He thus characterizes himself as a pupil of Yhwh. The words ‘hear’ and ‘speak’ and the explicit mention of the organs of hearing and speaking (‘ear’ and ‘tongue’) contrast sharply with the silence and the lack of response to Yhwh in the previous passage. The attentive attitude of the servant fills, so to say, the lacuna left by the people. Whereas the people do not listen or respond to the appeal of Yhwh, the servant does. Whereas they do not reciprocate, the servant shows his trust and commitment to Yhwh.\(^{113}\)

There is thus a contrast between the many that do not react in Isaiah 50:1-3 and the single servant in 50:4-9 who hears the call of Yhwh and obediently follows it. This contrast between the servant and the people, between the single servant and the many, between commitment and unresponsiveness, is visible in yet another point of contrast between Isaiah 50:1-3 and 50:4-9, namely, the accent on the divorce and separation of Yhwh and Zion and the children of Zion in the former passage and the accent on the intimate relationship between Yhwh and servant in the latter passage. The intimacy between Yhwh and the servant appears from that Yhwh wakens the servant, opens his ear and helps him over against his adversaries. The vocabulary found here reflects close contact rather than separation, in contrast to the miscommunication between Yhwh and the children of Zion.

The positive response of the servant to the plans of Yhwh can be described even more precisely. Therefore it should be taken into account that Isaiah 49-55 circles around the theme of the exodus from Babylon and the return to Zion and has the call to move out in Isaiah 48:20-22 as its heading. In this light it is likely that the obedient servant is the figure who has performed the exodus. The servant is the exemplary pioneer who has travelled to Zion, unlike the unresponsive people who in majority are still in Babylon. If this interpretation is valid, the contrast between Isaiah 50:1-3 and 50:4-9 can also be explained in terms of a distinction in location. The people who were disinterested when Yhwh came to redeem them are to be located in Babylon. The servant, who speaks about his obedience to Yhwh and the violence that befell him, presumably speaks from Zion. The violence that the pioneering servant experiences (50:5-6) speaks in favour of this interpretation, when it is interpreted as violence that the servant encounters in the restoration of the city, coming from hostile factions within Zion which resist the returnees and undermine their plans to restore the city.\(^ {114}\)

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114. A much overlooked fact of Isa. 49-55 is that it testifies quite extensively to the conflicts and misfortunes that attend the rebuilding of the city Zion (51:12-14; 54:14-17). Violence from opposing forces is part and parcel of the project to return to Zion (50:6; 53:5-7). Isa. 49-55 thus
In the present interpretation the passages in Isaiah 49-55 can be explained from the idea of a switching camera which exposes alternately the situations in Babylon and Zion. Every passage may be understood against the background of either Zion or Babylon. Location is thus a key element in the interpretation of the passages. Such a 'geographical' reading contributes to the understanding of the dynamics of the book, insofar that the adversaries in Zion are not simply the same as those in Babylon and insofar that the reader becomes more aware of the fact that redemption in Deutero-Isaiah is not an abstract theme but takes the practical form of redemption from Babylon with a view to the rebuilding of Zion.

2.8 Conclusion about the divorce imagery in Isaiah 50:1-3

The imagery of the 'letter of divorce' is an indication that the relationship between Yhwh and Zion is conceived of as a marriage and as an indissoluble bond. Zion is personified as a female (see the concluding section on Isaiah 54 below) and Yhwh is personified as her husband. The point made here is that although the situation seems equivalent to divorce, on account of the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile of part of the people, the ties between God and Zion are not annulled. Yhwh continues to care for Zion and for her children and plans to buy them free. It is interesting that such a concrete element as the 'letter of divorce' is transposed to the level of the relationship between Yhwh and Zion. The denial of the existence of such a document is a forceful and clear symbol for the idea that the relationship between Yhwh and Zion cannot be equalled to a definite divorce, although it may seem so.

3 Isaiah 54:1-10

3.1 Introduction

Isaiah chapter 54 consists of two poems addressed to Zion, the first contained in verses 1-10 and the second in verses 11-17. Like the first, the second poem begins with an explicit address to the female Zion, in participle style.

Chapters 54 and 55 together can be considered as the grand finale of Deutero-Isaiah. No longer are references found to the hardship of the people or to the afflictions of the servant. The key word in these chapters is נבש, 'to succeed' (53:10; 54:17; 55:11): at this point in the book, the word of God is about to succeed. Decisive moments in the dynamics of the book have taken place, such as Yhwh's arrival in Zion (52:8-10) and the people's recognition that the pioneering work of the servant was for their good (53:4-6). These crucial moments form the necessary background for the two final chapters, for the glorious song about Zion's future (chap. 54) and for the colourful invitation to come to Zion and enjoy there the good things of life (chap. 55).

seems to presuppose the same sort of confrontations between restoration workers and the resident population, as are known from Trito-Isaiah and the book of Nehemiah. Cf. Abma, 'Travelling', pp. 23-25.
The tone in both chapters is optimistic, although it should not be overlooked that the promise of a bright future in Isaiah 54:1-10 contrasts with the bleak present of Zion. The future that is announced to the city is still in the future and is at odds with the present. The text circles around a reversal of Zion’s fortunes. For the interpretation it is important not only to observe that the text portrays such an unexpected and splendid reversal of fortunes, but especially how and with which motifs and vocabulary this reversal is portrayed.

Isaiah 54:1-10 resumes a number of themes from the preceding texts, particularly from the Zion poems in Isaiah 49:14-26, 51:17-23 and 52:1-10. The announcement of the obtaining of sons (vv. 1-3), for instance, corresponds to the previous absence of sons (Isa. 49:14-21; 51:17-23). The notion of marriage (vv. 5-6) is reminiscent of the notion of divorce that was spelled out in Isaiah 50:1-3. With these Zion poems, Isaiah 54:1-10 shares the formal characteristic of a sustained address to a female addressee. This strong personification of Zion in Isaiah 54 and the preceding chapters is a striking phenomenon that will be discussed more fully below (see section 3.8).

3.2 Translation and notes to Isaiah 54:1-10

1. Shout with joy, o barren one, who did not bear
   burst into shouts of joy and exult, you who have not been in labour!
   For the children of the desolate one will be more
   than the children of the married one
   says Yhwh.

2. Broaden the place of your tent
   and let them stretch out the curtains of your dwellings
   do not hold back!
   Lengthen your cords
   and strengthen your stakes!

3. For you will spread out to the right and to the left
   your offspring will take possession of the nations
   and they will inhabit the desolate cities.

4. Do not fear
   for you will not be put to shame
   Do not be embarrassed
   for you will not be ashamed
   For you will forget the shame of your girlhood
   and remember no more the disgrace of your widowhood.

5. For the One marrying you is your Maker
   Yhwh of hosts is his name
   and the One redeeming you is the Holy One of Israel
   God of the whole earth he will be called.

6. For like a woman abandoned and grieved in spirit
   Yhwh has called you.
   A wife of youth, would she be rejected?
   says your God.
7. For a brief moment I abandoned you
   but with great compassion I will gather you.
8. In an overflow of anger I hid my face from you for a moment
   but with everlasting loving-kindness I will have compassion on you
   says the One redeeming you, Yhwh.
9. For the waters of Noah mean this for me:
   As I have sworn
   that the waters of Noah will not go over the earth again
   So I swear
   that I will not be angry with you or rebuke you.
10. For the mountains may move and the hills may shake
    yet my loving-kindness will not move away from you
    and my covenant of peace will not shake
    says the One having compassion on you, Yhwh.

Text-critical, grammatical and syntactical notes

Isaiah 54:1
- The verb אָבָא is a stative verb and originally points to a state rather than an action (JM § 41b). It means 'to be desolate' or 'to be appalled, awe-struck'. The verb can occur with both humans and things as subject, as vs. 1 (human subject) and vs. 3 (cities as subject) in this chapter illustrate. On account of this double dimension, it fits in the present context, in which Zion functions both as a city and as a female person. As a person she is 'desolate' in the sense of being lonely and miserable, and as a city she is 'desolate' in the sense of lying in ruins and being depopulated. In the present verse the word stands in contrast to the 'married state' of a woman and has an association of loneliness and tragedy (cf. 2 Sam. 13:20).
- The verb לֵךְ, here a female participle, means to dance, to whirl and also 'to writhe in travail' (cf. Isa. 45:10; 51:2; 66:7-8).

Isaiah 54:2
- The plural imperative רִאֲשָׁנָה in vs. 2b in the MT (from the verb הָעַל) represents a text-critical problem. In the apparatus of the BHS two alternative readings are recorded. One is that a singular female imperative form is assumed rather than a male plural form, in accordance with the other forms in the verse. This reading is found in the LXX and Vulgate. The other is that a different punctuation is assumed, changing the verbal form into a Pual (רִאֲשָׁנָה, rather than רִאֲשָׁנִים, meaning 'and they will be spread out') in agreement with Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion. Since a similar change of subject within a verse occurs in the next verse (3b-c) and since one may understand the plural as an impersonal collective form ('they'), the present text can be retained (cf. Beuken, Jesaja, p. 247).
Isaiah 54:3

- The verb רָצַע in vs. 3a means ‘to break through, to spread out’ and has a rather forceful connotation. It is translated as ‘to spread out’ (NRSV) or ‘to break out’ (McKenzie, Isaiah, p. 137).
- There is no unanimity about the translation of the verb שָׁרִי in vs. 3b. It has been rendered as ‘possess the nations’ (NRSV); ‘dispossess the nations’ (so Whybray, Isaiah, p. 185 and Korpel, ‘Female Servant’, p. 156), ‘succeed to the nations’ (North, Isaiah, p. 66) or ‘inherit’ (Bonnard, Le Second Isdie, p. 285). BDB (p. 439) establishes the primary meaning of the verb as ‘to take possession of’ and indicates that the verb often has the nuance of taking possession of something ‘in place of others’ or ‘in succession to others’. With Israel as a nation as subject, the object quite often consists of land but may also consist of foreign nations (Num. 21:32; Deut. 2:12, 21-22; 9:1). In the latter case there is a meaning nuance of ‘expelling the nations and taking possession of their territory’. That meaning is appropriate here, and one may supplement in thoughts the ‘territory of the nations including all its property’ as object of the verb.
- In the present context of ‘desolate cities’, the verb יָשֵׁב in vs. 3c assumes the meaning of ‘to inhabit, to settle’ or even ‘to people’ (so RSV and NRSV).

Isaiah 54:4

- The words ילדות (girlhood) and אֲלַמּות (widowhood) are both abstract plural forms (IM § 136g-h). The former has been translated in this setting as ‘girlhood’ rather than ‘youth’, distinguishing it from the more usual and synonymous term נוֹרָא (vs. 6). The word ילדות does not exclusively relate to females, as the other occurrences in Ps. 89:46; Job 20:11; 33:25 indicate. In this verse, however, it points to the premarital state of a woman complementary to the postmarital state of widowhood. Both forms show a strong similarity in Hebrew (alliteration).

Isaiah 54:5

- The form בֶּן־לִיצָר constitutes an interesting text-critical problem. As it stands, the form is a participle plural of the verb בָּלַע (Qal) and means ‘to marry’. The plural aspect is problematic. In the apparatus of the BHS two variant readings are indicated. The first is that of 1 QIsa, which offers the reading בֶּן־לִיצָר (a sg.ptc. with 2.fem.sg. suffix or possibly a noun). The second variant is reconstructed on the basis of the LXX and the Targum; both these texts offer a noun rather than a participle and this may go back to a variant in punctuation of the Hebrew (בֶּן־לִיצָר rather than בֶּנִי לָיצָר). Other ancient versions such as Symmachus (κυριοτερα ο ουσειι) and the Vulgate (dominantur tui) show verbs here. The LXX actually shows an additional element of difference, as it renders the form בֶּן־לִיצָר as κυριος. Isaiah 54:5 in the LXX reads στα κυριος ο ποιουσ σε, κυριος σαβαωθ συμμοι κυριος. This implies that the LXX reads (1) a noun rather than a participle, (2) a singular rather than a plural form and (3) a different meaning of the root בָּלַע (lord rather than husband; the Hebrew can signify both). A significant consequence of the reading of the LXX is that the notion of marriage disappears from the text.
Could this be motivated by the desire to avoid strong anthropomorphism? It may be true that the Greek word κυρισζ can also mean ‘husband’ but it would be difficult and unlikely for any reader to be aware of this in view of the phrase κυρισζ σαβαοθ in the subsequent clause. This leaves us with the problem of the plural form. Is it possible to find an acceptable explanation for the present text and to interpret it as a singular form as the context requires? Three partially overlapping explanations have been suggested: (1) the plural form is a pluralis majestatis reserved for God (cf. JM § 136d); (2) the plural form is an unintentional writing error under the influence of the subsequent word רעש, in which case the י would not be an indication of the plural but would belong to the root; (3) the plural spelling is artificial and is employed to avoid associations between Yhwh and the deity Baal (see North, Isaiah, p. 246 and Schoors, Saviour, p. 83). Whatever the precise explanation may be, the two verbs in vs. 5a presently demonstrate a perfect assonance which may explain the present forms. There is little doubt among commentators that the plural form of the verb may be considered to be a pluralis majestatis and be translated as a singular form.

Isaiah 54:6

- The appositional clause כ ל נב נב in vs. 6c can be interpreted as concessive ('although she was rejected', so Sawyer, ‘Daughter of Zion’, p. 94) or temporal ('after/when she was rejected') or as a rhetorical question ('could she be rejected?!'). NRSV and RSV favour the temporal interpretation and smuggle in an element of comparison in vs. 6c, which is not present in the Hebrew, in order to interpret vs. 6c as a strict parallel to vs. 6ab. In these translations vs. 6 reads: 'For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man’s youth when she is cast off (similarly the Dutch NBG). In this interpretation the assumption is made that the wife of one’s youth has been rejected and is now taken back. However, the interpretation of the clause as a rhetorical question suggests precisely the opposite, namely that the woman of one’s youth cannot possibly be rejected. With Beuken (Jesaja, p. 252) and North (Isaiah, p. 250), I view the particle י here as introductory to a question claiming an impossible or unreal state of events ('a woman of youth, can she be rejected?!'). Such questions can only be followed by a negation (cf. BDB, p. 472-d). This interpretation fits with the general function of י as attention marker and with the message of reassurance within this verse.

- The expression נב נב literally means ‘woman of youth’. According to HAL (3, p. 665) this expression denotes a woman who entered into marriage as a virgin (‘die als ledige Geheiratete’). HAL thus interprets the element of youth with reference to the woman. However, the masculine suffix attached to this phrase in Mal. 2:14-15 and Prov. 5:18 (‘the wife of your youth’) suggests otherwise and indicates that the meaning of the expression is the ‘first female marriage partner’ to whom a male becomes married in his youth. Since there is no sign of a particular accent on the virginal state of the woman, it seems that HAL places a wrong accent in describing the meaning of the word.
DEUTERO-ISAIAH

Isaiah 54:8

• The word קס in vs. 8a is a hapax legomenon that rhymes with the noun קס (~'wrath, anger') with which it occurs in the construct state. The LXX has ευθμος μακρος. BDDB (pp. 1052; 1009) suggests interpreting קס as an equivalent of the noun קס which means 'flood, overflow' and which occurs in Prov. 27:4 in a comparable sense. The change of כ to ק is then to be explained as a form of consonant assimilation in light of the immediately following word קס. HAL (4, p. 1511) follows the same explanation. The suggestion in the apparatus of the BHS to assume metathesis and to read a form of the root קס ('force, might') is less plausible since no further evidence for this root is found in biblical Hebrew (for further discussion see Watts, Isaiah, p. 235 and North, Isaiah, p. 247).

• The word לא is translated in a great variety of ways. NRSV and RSV translate 'love' (54:8) or 'steadfast love' (54:10); Darr (Family of God, p. 180) and Sawyer ('Daughter', p. 94) translate 'love'; Watts (Isaiah, p. 234) has 'devotion'. According to M. Buber, לא is a relational concept and denotes goodwill between humans or between humans and God, expressed in deeds of solidarity and kindness (see M. Buber, Zu einer neuen Verdeutschung der Schrift (suppl. vol. 1), Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1954, p. 32). Within a covenant context the word often has the connotation of loyalty and points to acts that are in accordance with and affirm the existing relationship.

Isaiah 54:9

• The text of the beginning of this verse is disputed. Besides the reading of the MT, לא ('for the waters of Noah'), two alternative readings exist. The LXX reads απο του υδατος του επι Νοα παντοτε μοι εσται, which reflects the particle of comparison כ in Hebrew (so BHS) or the preposition כ (so Beuken, Jesaja, p. 256) rather than כ. Another alternative is that the four consonants לא are interpreted as כ and לא so that the nominal form means 'days' rather than 'waters'. The latter reading is found in 1 QIsa, Symmachus, Theodotion, Targum and Vulgate (according to Beuken, p. 256), but is not found in the apparatus of the BHS, which suggests that there is little evidence for this reading in the manuscripts of the MT. Support for the reading of the MT is found in the codex Leningradensis and in the LXX. Most recent translations and commentaries follow the reading 'days' rather than 'waters' (see NRSV, RSV, North, Isaiah, p. 247; Schoors, Saviour, p. 131; Westermann, Jesaja, p. 218; Korpel, 'Servant', p. 158). Beuken, Jesaja, p. 256 and Watts, Isaiah, p. 234-235, however, are exceptions; they adhere to the reading 'waters', although Beuken follows the vocalisation of the MT and reads the particle כ while Watts prefers to read the particle of comparison כ. The NRSV thus offers the translation 'This is like the days of Noah to me'. Watts offers 'This is for me like the waters of Noah' and Beuken proposes 'Verily, as the waters of Noah is this for me'. Beuken inserts the particle of comparison 'as' in his translation on the grounds that its absence may be explained as a case of ellipse. Beuken's argument to read כ rather than כ is that the former is almost required in vs. 9 due to the sudden change in subject matter; it further constitutes a parallel with the beginning of vs. 10 (p. 246). According to Beuken the water motif connects vv. 8 and 9 and dominates the
whole of vs. 9. Summarizing the arguments, it seems that the interpretation 'KT'a is preferable to the interpretation 'D'-D. Besides the weight of textual evidence, it may be pointed out that (1) יך is a frequent particle in Isaiah 54:1-10 (cf. vv. 1, 5, 6) and fits well in vs. 9 to mark the switch to a different subject matter; (2) the same phrase 'waters of Noah' occurs in vs. 9b and could, therefore, also be read in vs. 9a; (3) the particle of comparison may be regarded as implicitly present, though in my view such an element of comparison is not required in vs. 9a. One could also interpret the clause as pointing ahead to the comparison following in vs. 9bc (reading נית kataphorically rather than anaphorically) and translate it as: 'For the waters of Noah are this for me...'. That the verse as a whole intends to present a comparison is clear. Vs. 9a functions as introduction and superscription. Though the syntax in what follows is somewhat awkward, the particle נית in vs. 9b may be read as נית (so HAL 1, p. 95, cf. Isa. 55:9). It is followed by the word יך in the apodosis in vs. 9d ('as I swore...so I swear now'). Vs. 9b-c and vs. 9d-e thus form the two members of the comparison.

3.3 Isaiah 54:1-10 in discussion

Form critics generally divide the passage into three units. The first unit is constituted by vv. 1-3 and is classified as a short hymn. The second unit consists of vv. 4-6 and has the pattern of an oracle of salvation. The third unit consists of vv. 7-10 and in terms of genre corresponds to a proclamation of salvation. Common to these three units is the message of salvation.\(^{115}\)

| Isaiah 54:1-3 | hymnic style |
| Isaiah 54:4-6 | oracle of salvation |
| Isaiah 54:7-10 | proclamation of salvation |

Some variations in this scheme have been suggested. Melugin observes that Isaiah 54:1-3 is not a proper hymn but a combination of hymn style and prophetic promise, while vv. 7-10 is also a fusion of genres best described as a disputatiouslike promise.\(^{116}\) Westermann is known for his view that in Deutero-Isaiah the independent genre units have been combined in longer poems or compositions.\(^{117}\) He treats vv. 1-6 as a poetic unit, in which the pattern of a double imperative followed by a substantiation is found twice, so that vv. 1-3 and vv. 4-6 are perfectly parallel.\(^ {118}\) The poetic structure of Isaiah 54 has been described in


\(^{117}\) See Westermann, \textit{Sprache}, p. 84. He writes: 'genauso ist die Botschaft Dtjes.', wie sie uns in Jes 40-55 vorliegt, \textit{nicht} eine Sammlung von Einzelstücken, die je verschiedenen Redegattungen angehören, sondern ein aus diesen Redeformen erwachsenes sinnvolles Ganzes'.

\(^{118}\) See Westermann, \textit{Jesaja}, p. 218.
detail by Korpel. She focuses on the microlevel of the text and arrives at the same subdivision of Isaiah 54:1-10 as most scholars from a form-critical persuasion.\textsuperscript{119}

With respect to the content of Isaiah 54:1-10, commentaries foreground different aspects of the text. Quite often there is an emphasis on the notion of covenant and on the enduring quality of the relationship between Yhwh and Zion. Muilenburg identifies the theme of these verses as ‘the inauguration of the new covenant’ and McKenzie points to ‘Yhwh’s enduring love’ in the heading of his explanation of Isaiah 54. Beuken also employs the notion of the peace covenant in the heading of his exposition of the chapter.\textsuperscript{120} There seems to be an implicit orientation in these expositions to the latter half of the passage (54:7-10) and to the promise of everlasting loving-kindness found there (54:8).

Westermann shows some sensitivity for the dynamic aspect of Isaiah 54:1-10. According to him, the passage focuses upon the ‘Wende’ from suffering and upon the ‘Wende’ from God’s wrath to his compassion and new commitment. In the view of Westermann the text reaches a climax in vv. 7-8:

Here comes the essence, here lies the heart of the proclamation of Deutero-Isaiah: in God himself a change has taken place: on that account everything must become different. God’s anger has turned away. He turns to Israel again with compassion. That makes everything well.\textsuperscript{121}

It is striking that in these interpretations the heart of the text is found outside of the verses with explicit female imagery (vv. 1-6) and that central motifs in the text are circumscribed with such general terms as ‘love’ or ‘renewal of the covenant’. The specific female imagery and the metaphorical language in the passage tend to be played down.

In this respect the approaches of Beuken (1974), Sawyer (1989) and Darr (1994) represent another line of research.\textsuperscript{122} These scholars have focused upon the female imagery in Isaiah 54 and have examined the meaning and effects of this imagery with refreshing results. Both Sawyer and Darr state at the beginning of their work that they resist the tendency of commentaries to ignore the imagery and look ‘through or past the metaphor to discern the poem’s cognitive content and theological core’.\textsuperscript{123} One should not rush to ‘decode the imagery’ but appreciate it as an integral part of the text.

Darr has studied the Zion texts in Isaiah 40-55 from the viewpoint of the relationship between Yhwh, Israel and Jerusalem, which she provocatively perceives as a family relationship. In her view the female personification of Jerusalem and the depiction of this city as daughter, wife and mother of the


\textsuperscript{120} See Muilenburg, Isaiah, p. 632; McKenzie, Second Isaiah, p. 137; Beuken, Jesaja, p. 242.

\textsuperscript{121} Westermann, Jesaja, p. 221 (my translation).


children of Israel introduces into the book of Isaiah the notion of the family of God. Using this family notion as a starting point, Darr explains the Zion texts in Isaiah 49-55 as examples of how images from family life are employed in order to shed light on ‘the powerful bonds between Israel and God’. In her explanation of Isaiah 54 the emphasis lies on the ‘commitment’ of Yhwh to Zion and on the reliability of his love. The relationship between Yhwh and Zion as presented here is not at odds with other aspects of Deutero-Isaiah, but is in line with the central idea underlying the book, namely that the relationship between God and Jerusalem is as indissoluble and as unforgettable as family ties. Darr thus employs the figurative language with respect to children and females as a new entrance into the themes and concerns of the book of Isaiah. Her work is intriguing, especially when it comes to new definitions of old themes. Darr rede­

fines, for instance, the concern about the fate of Jerusalem in the prologue of Deutero-Isaiah (40:1-11) in relational terms such as ‘care and commitment’ rather than in abstract and technical terms such as exile and restoration.

In addition to these approaches to the text as a whole, two specific issues in Isaiah 54:1-10 call for attention. First, there is the intriguing question who the female addressee is in Isaiah 54. The opinion of most scholars is that Zion is intended (Beuken, Darr, Watts and North). But should Zion then be understood as a symbol both for the city and for the people of Israel? May some fluidity be supposed between Zion and Israel, as many older commentators consciously or unconsciously do (Westermann and Mui­lenburg)? Is Zion here, as Beuken has proposed, a corporate personality representing the people in three successive stages of its history, namely, as ancestress, as wife of Yhwh and as a city in ruins? Or should one, yet a fourth view, initially refrain from identifying the female addressee in order to appreciate the imagery? I prefer the first reading and assume that the female addressee may be equated to Zion. There is, however, still the question as to what can explain the absence of a clear identification of the addressee, if Zion is intended but not mentioned. To this question I will return when dealing with Isaiah 54 in context (section 3.7 below).

A secondary issue is the tendency among interpreters to explain elements in the text typologically. The references to ‘shame of your girlhood’ and ‘disgrace of your widowhood’ in vs. 4 have been interpreted as references to periods in Israelite history, representing e.g., the bondage in Egypt and the Babylonian exile. Although it is clear that a text full of metaphor and personification invites explorations into other conceptual spheres of meaning, it seems to me that these inferences go beyond the scope of the poem and strain the poetic images in the text. The images in vs. 4 do not present a historical survey of events, but present with rhetorical force a complete reversal between the past and the present plight of Zion.

124. See Darr, *Family*, p. 35. Her thesis is: ‘Central among the vast array of issues addressed in Isaiah are the nature and status of ongoing relationships among Yahweh, Israel […] and Judah’s capital city, Jerusalem. Isaiah’s authors did not, of course, analyze these relationships […] systematically. Rather, they frequently employed tropes derived from everyday familial roles (husband/wife, parent/child) and experiences (e.g., marriage, labor and delivery) to shed light on the powerful bonds they believed existed between Israel and its God’.


126. See Beuken, ‘Identity’, pp. 63-70 and for the fourth opinion see Sawyer, ‘Daughter’, p. 94.

127. See Schoors, *Saviour*, pp. 81-82 for a survey of such views.
We will now leave the issues relating to Isaiah 54 in previous discussions and turn to the text itself.

3.4 The literary structure of Isaiah 54:1-10

The passage can be subdivided in two sections, the first consisting of vv. 1-6 and the second of vv. 7-10.\(^{128}\) The main argument for this subdivision is the change in speech perspective. In vv. 1-6 a prophetic voice is speaking and in vv. 7-10 Yhwh is speaking in the first person.

Isa. 54:1-6 prophetic voice section 1
Isa. 54:7-10 Yhwh section 2

This subdivision is supported by the fact that the syntactical patterns in vv. 1-6 are different from those in vv. 7-10. In the first section a repetitive pattern is found of imperatives followed by one or more motivating *ki*-clauses:\(^{129}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vs. 1a-b</td>
<td>shout of joy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 1c</td>
<td>for the children of the desolate one will be more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 2</td>
<td>broaden the space of your tent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 3</td>
<td>for you will spread out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 4</td>
<td>do not fear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vv. 5-6</td>
<td>for the One marrying you is your Maker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The pattern occurs three times and the clauses supplying the motivation ('for') gradually increase in length. In the first case it consists of one line (vs. 1c), in the second case of one verse (vs. 3) and in the third case of two verses (vv. 5-6).

At the same time, one may regard vv. 1-3 and vv. 4-6 as subunits within the first section. Both vs. 1 and vs. 4 start with two parallel lines with reassuring imperative forms. This subdivision is also thematic. In vv. 1-3 the obtaining of children is the main theme, while in vv. 4-6 Yhwh’s consolation of the woman is central. The first section as a whole is marked by the repetition of the verbs ‘to be desolate’ and ‘to marry’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verses</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vs. 1</td>
<td>for the children of the desolate one will be more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>they will inhabit the desolate cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vs. 1</td>
<td>than the children of the married one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>the One marrying you is your Maker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second section we find two pairs of verses, vv. 7-8 and 9-10. Vv. 7-8 are bound together by the fourfold repetition of a circumstantial adjunct introduced by the preposition *ל*.

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\(^{128}\) Another subdivision is suggested by the Masoretes, who place a *setumah* after vs. 8 and thus suggest that vv. 1-8 and 9-10 are the major subunits in Isaiah 54:1-10.

\(^{129}\) The particle *ל* can have several syntactic functions but primarily it is a particle with intensive and emphatic force. At the beginning of a clause it may function as emphatic introduction to what follows. See BDB, p. 472 and Schneider § 53.3.1.
Further both vv. 7 and 8 are characterised by an antithetical parallelism within the verse:

vs. 7 in a brief moment but with great compassion
vs. 8 in an overflow of anger but with everlasting loving-kindness

A similar pattern of verses with a twofold structure is found in vv. 9-10. Here again the verses consist of two members with parallel and contrastive elements. Characteristic for these final verses is the word repetition or, more precisely, the verbal repetition that they display.

vs. 9b-c I have sworn
vs. 9d-e so I swear
vs. 10a For the mountains may move and... may shake
vs. 10b-c yet my loving-kindness will not move and... will not shake

In vv. 7-10 there is an emphasis on the present commitment of Yhwh to Zion in contrast to his dealings in the past or to elements in nature. These verses are further bound together by the repetition of the word 'anger' in vv. 8 and 9 (verb and noun), the word 'loving-kindness' in vv. 8 and 10 and the word 'to have compassion' in vv. 7, 8 and 10 (noun and verb).

Two elements bind Isaiah 54:1-10 together in its entirety. The first element is the female personification of the addressee. Even though there is no specific vocabulary revealing that the addressee is female in vv. 7-10, this element continues to be present. A second element of repetition throughout Isaiah 54:1-10 is the messenger's formula. This formula ('says Yhwh') is found in vv. 1, 6, 8 and 10. It is extended in vv. 6, 8, 10 by the closer description of Yhwh with a participle and a personal suffix. These recurrent elements identify Yhwh as a deeply and personally involved God.

vs. 1 says Yhwh
vs. 6 says your God
vs. 8 says the One redeeming you, Yhwh
vs. 10 says the One having compassion on you, Yhwh

3.5 Explanation of Isaiah 54:1-10

There is a remarkable relation between the beginning and end of the poem in Isaiah 54:1-10. The text starts with an appeal to rejoice in anticipation of the reversal of Zion's fortunes as spelled out later in the poem. One may have expected such a call to praise after the promised reversal of fortunes rather than before it. Still, the text opens with what it logically would end with.
The order of events within the poem is thus the reverse of the logical order. Further, the text deals with two themes in almost entire separation. At the beginning of the poem (vv. 1-4) there is an exclusive focus on Zion and on the bustling activity of Zion in the future. In the last part of the poem (vv. 7-10) there is an almost exclusive attention to Yhwh. In a sort of introspective speech moving backwards and forwards between the past and the present, Yhwh meditates on his change of attitude towards Zion (‘I did... but now I will...’). The comparative element provides these verses with a nuance of reflection rather than of action, so that it remains more or less open how the change of Zion’s plight (vv. 1-4) and the change in attitude of Yhwh (vv. 7-10) precisely relate to each other.

It seems that in the midst of the poem (vv. 5-6) we are closest to how Zion’s plight and Yhwh’s attitude are related. Here Yhwh and Zion both appear. Yhwh is described as Zion’s ‘marrier’ and ‘kinsman’ and Zion is presented as ‘abandoned’ but yet the first and foremost partner of Yhwh. Yhwh ‘calls’ Zion and that calling may be understood as a call to companionship and to putting their lives and fates together as if they were one.

Is this the element of action that one expects in the poem? Is this the central moment bringing about a real change in Zion’s affairs? Otherwise the reader is left with the question whether anything at all happens in the text, whether indeed a change does take place that can reasonably cause Zion to rejoice. In response to this, three statements can be made.

First, it seems that the search for a central action in the text is misplaced. The emphasis in this passage is not on action but on the portrayal of a new situation as a contrast to the miserable past of Zion’s depopulation and the unsurpassable distance between Zion and Yhwh. At this point in the drama of Deutero-Isaiah the moment has apparently come to do so. Second, these new circumstances are brought to the fore with a choice of images which gain meaning from the fact that they stand in contrast to previous images. Third, the moment of change in Isaiah 54:1-10, or of action, if one wishes, lies in the words. It lies in the way Zion is addressed, and in the fact that she is addressed here in the way she is addressed. The comfort realises itself in words. These words portray events and express the powerful commitment of Yhwh to revive Zion.

Rejoice! (verses 1-3)
The opening verse of this chapter contains a rich variety of vocabulary for joy and rejoicing. Three verbs invite Zion to rejoice and to let this be heard: sing, shout and rejoice! Such hymnic praise is evoked elsewhere with respect to Yhwh’s comforting of Zion (52:9) or with respect to the exodus of the people from Babylon to Zion (55:12), but here it is called forth with respect to the situation of Zion.130 Zion is presently a barren female but in the future she will have children. The three appositives ‘barren one’, ‘who did not bear’ and ‘who have not been in labour’ contrast curiously to the threefold call to rejoice. Barrenness and the lack of sons generally imply a dishonourable status and a low social position for women in the biblical texts. With respect to Zion the absence

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130. See for similar calls to rejoice, e.g., Isa. 44:23; 49:13; 52:9; 54:1; 55:12 (with the same expression הַזָּרֶה מַלְאָכָה).
of children has an even more wry tone: she has borne children but has been bereft of them by the Babylonian oppressor (51:20) and in that sense she may be compared to a barren woman. The arrival of children is a prominent theme in Isaiah 49-55 since they represent the repopulation of the city and thus inaugurate the restoration of Zion (49:17-21).

Indirectly the theme of marriage is also anticipated. The ‘married one’ (vs. 1d), who will be surpassed by the ‘desolate one’ in number of children, serves as an external element of comparison. At this point in the text Zion is understood as the desolate one but later in the text she will come to be understood as the ‘married one’ as well (vs. 5).

Verse 2 turns to images and terms from a different semantic field than the feminine and praise terminology in verse 1. The words in verse 2 have a common emphasis on habitation. The series of imperatives graphically evokes the process of pitching a tent, from choosing a site and stretching the canvas to fastening the pins. The five lines are arranged around the central line ‘do not hold back’. The words ‘cords’ and ‘stakes’ (vs. 2d-e) are rather specific terminology and occur particularly with reference to the tent of meeting. In the present context these elements simply provide a detailed description of how a tent is put up. The verbs בָּרָק (broaden) and רָקַע (lengthen) provide through their complementarity a sense of totality to the expansion of Zion. Zion is thus invited to enlarge her housing capacity in every possible sense. One may infer from the connection with the preceding verse that this expansion serves to anticipate the arrival of her future children in order to make room for them to live.

Verse 3 announces to Zion an expansion on an even larger scale. Not only will Zion spread out to the right and to the left – a merism – but also her offspring will take possession of the territory of the nations and populate the desolate cities. The plural of the word ‘cities’ and the general thrust of the statement concerning the dispossession of the nations indicate the grand scope of the promises made here.

The vocabulary in Isaiah 54:1-3 has often been related to texts concerning the matriarchs and patriarchs in Genesis. The word combination of ‘seed’ and ‘to take possession of’ (vs. 3b) is an almost stereotypical phrase found in formulas of blessing in Genesis 22:17, 24:60 and 28:4. These blessings concern Abraham, Rebekah and Jacob:

Genesis 22:17 And your offspring shall take possession of the gate of their enemies
Genesis 24:60 May your offspring take possession of the gates of those who hate them
Genesis 28:14 May he give to you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your offspring...
so that you may take possession of the land...

131. Cf. Ex. 35:18; 39:40; Num. 3:37. The plural מֵאֲשָׁרָת בְּנֵי in 2b is a poetic plural (see BDB, p. 1015).
132. Two texts with comparable tent imagery are Isa. 33:20 (with respect to Zion) and Jer. 10:20.
133. In Hebrew it is possible to refer to the ‘seed’ of a woman in order to denote her offspring, cf. Gen. 3:15; 16:10; 24:60; Isa. 17:11.
The phrase ‘you will spread out to the right and to the left’ in vs. 3a bears associations with Jacob. In Genesis 28:14 Jacob is told in the context of a comprehensive blessing: ‘and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south’. Since the verb רเล่า is rarely employed as here, namely, with a person as subject and in the context of a promise, the resemblance between the address to Zion in Isaiah 54 and to the patriarch Jacob is striking. At the same time, the wording in vs. 1 with the reference to the ‘barren’ woman can be interpreted as an element of correspondence with the stories of the matriarchs in Genesis, Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel who are all barren (Gen. 11:30; 25:21; 29:31). One could thus argue that Zion in Isaiah 54:1-3 is addressed as a patriarch or as a matriarch in disguise. More generally stated, it seems that Zion is addressed here with images that are connected to the formation of Israel as a nation and to Israel as a whole. The phrasing of the promises to Zion is thus not just ‘at random’ but alludes to images employed elsewhere within a blessing context.

The end of shame and disgrace (verse 4)

Verse 4 abounds with terms from the semantic field of shame and disgrace. Three verbs (עיהוד, עבד and שיבת) and two nouns indicate Zion’s shameful and embarrassing position. Contrary to contemporary usage, these terms do not point to private and individual feelings of shame and inferiority but to a particular social position. The terms must be interpreted within the honour-and-shame system within the Hebrew society. As Westermann puts it:

In order to appreciate the plethora of verbs (vs. 4a) and nouns (vs. 4b) expressing the shame, ignominy and humiliation, we must remember that for Israel and the nations around suffering and shame went together as the outside and the inside of the same phenomenon. Thus in the case of the childless woman’s suffering, it is not anything she does, such as behaving immorally, that causes her shame but childlessness as such. It is exactly the same with a vanquished nation: its defeat costs it its honour in the eyes of other nations. Shame is thus a matter of social relations rather than of individual feelings and points to a damage to someone’s normal entitlement to honour and full participation in society. Shame is in this frame of thinking not necessarily caused by actions but may be occasioned by unfortunate circumstances such as widowhood or barrenness. These circumstances automatically involve shame and loss of honour and cause social inferiority. Shame and disgrace are thus not so much motivated by the opinions of others but rather the inevitable side effect of specific circumstances.

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134. HAL, p. 914, lists six cases of the verb ר with an human subject and without an object (Gen. 28:14; Ex. 1:12; Isa. 54:3; Hos. 4:10; I Chr. 4:38; 2 Chr. 11:23).  

135. Beuken (‘Identity’, pp. 37-42) concludes from the tent imagery and the motif of barrenness that Israel is pictured in Isa. 54:1-3 as the barren matriarch Sarah. He suggests that there is an historical periodisation behind the subsequent images of Zion in Isa. 54: vv. 1-3 address Zion in terms that are reminiscent of the patriarchal time, vv. 4-10 move to address Zion as wife of Yhwh (pre-exilic era in the land) and vv. 11-17 finally address Zion as city (exilic present).  

The disgraceful situation of Zion is specified by the expressions ‘shame of your girlhood’ and ‘disgrace of your widowhood’ (vs. 4e-f). The simultaneous reference to ‘girlhood’ and ‘widowhood’ is paradoxical from a logical point of view. The interpreter is thus stimulated ‘to inquire after their proper meaning’. Many commentators interpret these expressions as references to periods in the national past of Israel. The period of youth has been identified as representing the slavery in Egypt or all of the pre-exilic sufferings. The period of widowhood has been equated with the period of the Babylonian exile. If one pursues this line of explanation, however, one needs to face such questions as: (1) can the intermediate period of marriage be historically fixed as well? (2) If Zion is a widow, does this mean that her husband – Yhwh – is temporarily dead and rises from the dead when remarrying her? Basically, one may wonder whether it is necessary to assume that the stages of girlhood and widowhood represent a chronological sequence. The text focuses on the present misery of Zion and the present reversal of this situation. In this light the images of ‘girlhood’ and ‘widowhood’ may constitute a parallel pair and provide two descriptions of one central point, the miserable situation of Zion. In this light the chronological interpretation is not particularly convincing and it seems that the text can be explained in a more obvious way by treating the images of ‘girlhood’ and ‘widowhood’ as two amplifying poetic images rather than as sequential descriptions of Zion’s situation.

It seems thus wise to understand the expressions ‘shame of your girlhood’ and ‘disgrace of your widowhood’ as parallel images and in view of the common aspect of both. Widowhood refers to the post-marital status of a woman, and in view of this it seems likely that the former expression refers to the premarital status, i.e., to a woman’s being of marriageable age previous to marriage. This fits with the general meaning of the word המאה. The text thus brings Zion’s present plight to the fore with the help of two complementary poetic images. These images have the absence of a spouse as a common element and by circling around this ‘vacant place’ they anticipate the appearance of a husband in the next verse. He is the one that will bring Zion into an honourable status.

Zion married and redeemed (verse 5)
A problem in this verse is that it is not entirely clear what statements are being made. What is the subject and what the predicate in vs. 5a and 5c? Is the Maker marrying you or is the Marrier making you? The word order is not conclusive, as both subject and predicate can be placed in initial position in nominal clauses.

140. There is no inherent relation between the act of redemption (cf. Lev. 25:23-55) and the state of widowhood, so that there is no ground to assume that the two situations of the female described in vs. 4 correspond to the two actions in vs. 5 (to marry – to redeem). Only in the book Ruth one finds a combination of the thoughts of widowhood and redemption (2:20; 3:9-13; 4:14), but in a notoriously complex way.
141. See Schneider § 44.3.1.
Some translations indicate through a changed word order that they favour the first interpretation (‘For your Maker is marrying you’). This is indeed the most probable in view of the accent on the unmarried status of Zion in the context.\textsuperscript{142} At the same time this should not lead us to pay less attention to the divine titles describing the subject, for part of the point lies precisely in the combination of the titles mentioned.

The verse is thus replete with descriptions of the divine and contains six verbs or nouns referring to Yhwh. Twice a description of Yhwh’s special involvement with Zion (vs. 5a and 5c) is followed by a doxology and a characterisation of his holiness and power in a more comprehensive sense (vs. 5b and 5d).

the One marrying you is your Maker
the One redeeming you is the Holy One of Israel

Yhwh of hosts is his name
God of the whole earth
he will be called

The contrast between the close affinity to Zion implied in the former lines, and the sovereignty over heaven and earth in the latter, catches the eye and heightens the effect of the major statements that Yhwh will act as ‘marriage partner’ and as ‘redeemer’ for Zion (vs. 5a and 5c). Images from the most intimate sphere of family life are combined with images from the sphere of divine supremacy.

The verb ‘to marry’ calls for special attention.\textsuperscript{143} It is not a common idea that Yhwh will marry Zion. What should one precisely understand by this? It seems that the verb ‘to marry’ primarily rebuts the idea that God has abandoned Zion to herself and has taken distance from her fate and fortunes. A fresh pledge to Zion and a new and close alliance with her should remove these thoughts. The alliance of marriage should express God’s commitment to the fate of Zion and his compassionate and close involvement with the city. God binds his fate to hers, as in a marriage, suggesting that this commitment will somehow turn her state from devastation and destruction to reconstruction and revival. The idea of marriage implies a rehabilitation for Zion and is part of the programme of comfort for Zion. The central aspect of the idea of marriage is that God resumes and reaffirms his indissoluble bond with Zion. This notion of marriage, mentioned almost in passing, contains thus not only a message of reassurance for the present, but also provides a promise for the future, in the sense that Yhwh binds his presence to Zion in order to let Zion share in his glory and his future.

The second statement presents Yhwh as redeemer and kinsman of Zion. This image is a favourite within Deutero-Isaiah.\textsuperscript{144} The depiction of Yhwh as redeemer suggests that Zion has been reduced to poverty and has become enslaved under the domination of foreign powers. She has no reliable means of existence. Yhwh is portrayed as the brother or next of kin who stands in for her and buys her free. In this image Yhwh is a close relative of Zion, who takes up the responsibility to restore the fate of Zion. In the metaphorical usage of the term,

\textsuperscript{142} So RSV and NRSV. Beuken, ‘Identity’, pp. 43-46, comes to the same conclusion.
\textsuperscript{143} The verb יָתָ֣ו occurs sixteen times in the Hebrew Bible, either with the meaning ‘to marry’ or ‘to own’. Cf. Deut. 21:13; 24:1; Hos. 2:18; Mal. 2:2; 1 Chr. 4:32.
\textsuperscript{144} The masc. participle of the verb يָתָ֣ו occurs ten times in Isa. 40-55, predominantly with Israel or Zion as object (41:14; 43:14; 44:6; 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8). The verb itself occurs another seven times (cf. Lev. 25:23-35).
some aspects, such as the financial and the familial, may have receded into the background while the element of liberation from bondage prevails. Yet, the notion that the verb יָגוֹר presumes an existing relationship between redeemer and redeemed, in the form that Yhwh reclaims Zion as his possession, continues to be present. That means that the emphasis lies again on God’s intimate relationship with Zion.

The first love (verse 6)
The same course of action is expressed once again. All that has been said before implies, in the words of the present verse, that God calls Zion back, aggrieved and abandoned as she is. In order to underscore the credibility of this gesture, a comparison is made between the predicament of Zion and the status of a first wife who cannot be rejected. The style figure is that of a litotes, the affirmation of something by an emphatic negation, which is found here in the form of a rhetorical question. As a wife of one’s youth, Zion cannot be rejected.

The description of Zion as an ‘abandoned and aggrieved’ woman recalls the desolation indicated earlier (vs. 1). Yhwh breaks this desolation by ‘calling’ Zion. The phrasing is brief and raises wonder about the precise meaning of the word ‘to call’ here. Is it a calling back, a calling into a new function and position, or simply a form of restoring the communication? A clue as to the meaning of the word seems to lie in the texts where the word ‘call’ is employed with Yhwh as subject and the Servant or Abraham as object (Isa. 41:9; 42:6; 49:1; 51:2). In these texts, there is a connotation of election and a special relationship – almost companionship – between the caller and the called. This aids in understanding the verb ‘to call’ in the present verse. Zion is called into a new companionship with Yhwh. The perfect tense of the verb has been subject to discussion, but can be taken as indicating ‘background information’ for the point that will be made in vs. 6c. The speaker presumably looks back upon an action that has just (vs. 5) been accomplished.

At last the implications of the expression ‘wife of youth’ must be discussed. Does it suggest that Yhwh had previously been married to Zion and is remarrying her after a period of divorce? The implication would be that he actually has broken the rule that he now calls upon. Again one should not overcharge the image. No attention whatsoever is paid to the past of Zion or Yhwh: the marriage images are all employed with a focus on the present. The only point made by the expression ‘wife of youth’ seems to be that, by force of comparison, Zion is the


146. Both BDB and HAL assign a special meaning to the verb ‘to call’ in Isa. 54:6. BDB, p. 896, suggests the meaning ‘to call and endow (with a privilege)’ (cf. Isa. 51:2; 55:5). HAL 3, p. 1054, gives a meaning ‘berufen’ with an appeal to Isa. 41:9; 42:6; 49:1; 51:2. An instructive parallel is Isa. 43:1. It is also significant that the verb ‘to reject’ in vs. 6c is the precise opposite of the term ‘to elect’ (cf. Isa 40:20; 41:8, 9, 24; 43:10). This underlines that the notion of ‘election’ and special ‘predilection’ plays a role here.

first and remaining love of Yhwh. The emphasis is on the enduring quality of the relationship: Zion is God’s wife of ‘youth’ and, therefore, also his partner for the future.

The rehabilitation of Zion (verses 7-8)
Concerning Isaiah 54:7-10, Sawyer wrote:

The last four verses of the poem are apologetic in tone: ‘It was just for a moment – I lost my temper... I won’t do it again... I promise... I love you’. [...] Yhwh] sets aside all hardness and pomposity, the frightening manifestations of his power and his status as ‘God of all the earth’, and comes to her, on bended knee as it were, to plead with her to let bygones be bygones and start again.148

The mood of overcoming the past and making a new start prevails in these verses. Yhwh depicts in a monologue and with a sort of qal-wa-chomer reasoning how his attitude towards Zion in the future will surpass and annul his attitude in the past.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Past</th>
<th>Future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>brief</td>
<td>great</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>abandon</td>
<td>gather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flow of anger</td>
<td>loving-kindness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for a moment</td>
<td>everlasting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hide my face</td>
<td>have compassion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yhwh admits having abandoned Zion in the past (vs. 7a). This abandonment involves more than a temporary distance between Yhwh and Zion: it implies God’s retreat from the ‘Schutz und Solidarverhältnis’ with Zion.149 However, this period of abandonment, pleonastically described as a ‘short moment’, will be surpassed by the ‘gathering of Zion’ which will happen ‘with great compassion’ (vs. 7b). The verb ‘to gather’ is peculiar here for two reasons: it usually occurs with a plural object and is frequently employed with respect to people living outside Palestine, who are to be gathered in order to be brought, or to come, home.150 However, Zion is home. Most commentators, therefore, assume a momentary shift of attention from Zion to the people in exile, inferring that the meaning of the words must be that the children of Israel, rather than Zion herself, will be gathered in Zion.151 This seems justified, but at the same time it is important to notice that Zion is addressed here as Israel in a sort of constructio ad sensum. Zion and Israel merge and the distinction between Israel as a people and Zion as a city momentarily disappears. This may be an indication to the readers that Israel should be on the path towards Zion, for only in this city will Yhwh make the gathering and revival of Israel as a people come true.

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149. See Gerstenberger, סוד, TWAT 6, pp. 1200-1208 (p. 1206).
150. For the verb יָבֵא with singular object, cf. Deut. 30:3-4; Isa. 43:5; Ezek. 28:25. In the meaning ‘to gather in order to travel home’ cf. Isa. 49:18; Jer. 31:8; Ezek. 34:13; 37:21.
151. See e.g., North, Isaiah, p. 250.
Verse 8 presents another retrospective look at the past and a promise for the future. Some expressions are almost synonymous with elements in the previous verse. The ‘hiding of the countenance’ parallels the verb ‘to abandon’, the ‘everlasting loving-kindness’ corresponds to ‘great compassion’ and the verb ‘to have compassion on’ has the same positive connotation as the verb ‘to gather’ in verse 7. There is again a contrast within the verse through the opposition between the ‘momentary’ hiding of the face and the loving-kindness ‘forever’.  

The element of wrath is new. It may be explained as a response to the people’s laments about the disastrous devastation of Jerusalem (see below) and should not be taken as a new element of judgement. On the whole, these verses (vv. 7-8) do not shun holding God responsible for the fate of Jerusalem, although at the same time they minimize the impact of the wrath of Yhwh, suggesting that it was only ‘for a moment’.  

Pages have been written about the words רדס (loving-kindness) and רדם (compassion). The latter term in the biblical texts predominantly has God as subject and occurs in Deutero-Isaiah within the programme of comfort (Isa. 49:13). The term signifies the outgoing care of God and his commitment to Israel or to individuals in a dead-end situation. It is a term with the undertone of warmth. It is expressive of the intention of Yhwh to make things good for the other party beyond mutuality.  

The former word, רדס, denotes good will between humans or between humans and God, expressed in loyal deeds of solidarity and kindness. Three elements are constitutive for this term: it points to an action rather than to an attitude, it has a relational character and it points to a reliable and firm commitment. There is a classical debate about whether רדס should be interpreted primarily in relation to the concept of covenant and as a logic ingredient of covenant relations, or in analogy to the term רדם and be understood as unexpected kindness. Whatever the answer may be, רדס is one of the key terms in the relationship between God and Israel and in mutual relations between humans.  

It is interesting that with the notions of ‘wrath’ (noun in vs. 8 and verb in vs. 9) and ‘rejection’, these verses take up the question with which the book of Lamentations closes: ‘Or would you utterly reject us (תָּנֵס)? Would you be angry with us beyond measure (רֵעָבָנִי)?’ (Lam. 5:22). In view of the strong correspondences between the books of Deutero-Isaiah and Lamentations it can hardly be a coincidence that the last text in Isaiah 40-55 which deals explicitly with Zion, takes up motifs from the last verse in the Book of Lamentations. Isaiah 54:7-8 thus addresses the open question with which Lamentations ends and answers it negatively: ‘No, he is not rejecting you or being angry with you forever’. This
implicit response to the idea that it is all over with Zion (Lam. 5:22) in the context of a prophetic poem about the bright future of Zion (Isa. 54), underlines that Deutero-Isaiah reflects the concerns of the laments about Zion and attempts to respond to them. In this way it opens new perspectives for Zion.

The new commitment is firm (vv. 9-10)
The strength of the new commitment to Zion is accentuated by two comparisons, one between the actions of God in the present and in the past (vs. 9) and one between the contemporary action of Yhwh and the firmness of certain elements in nature (vs. 10). The key element within these comparisons is the firm and enduring quality of the new relationship between God and Zion. At the same time, the scope of the text widens. The illustrations from national history and from nature serve to express the idea that God's covenant with Zion is comparably broad in scope and unshakeable in quality.

The verb נאשׁ (‘to swear’) is a first indication of the firm reliability of the new commitment of Yhwh to Zion. This verb (vs. 9) denotes the incontrovertible affirmation of an intention which one purposes to keep and fulfill. It is a warranty that the expressed commitment is binding and unchangeable. Such pledging of an oath frequently occurs in the context of a covenant ceremony in order to confirm a relationship. It is characteristic for both oaths referred to here that they are phrased in the negative and express what Yhwh will do ‘no longer’ or ‘not again’. He will not again let the ‘waters go over the earth’ nor ‘be angry’ with Zion. Both negations have the positive effect of marking the end of a period of devastation and destruction. The age of the flood and the age of Zion have in common that there was a period of severe destruction which, against all odds, was succeeded by a new beginning. In the face of such destruction, the oath is pledged that the ‘anger’ and ‘rebuke’, synonymous expressions for the punishment of Zion, will come to an end. As the thrust of the comparison with the time of Noah is essentially clear, the relations between the flood account in Genesis and the present Isaiah text will not further be dealt with here.

In the concluding verse, the enduring quality of God’s care for Zion is emphasized again, this time by a reference to nature. While there is a paradoxical element in the first line, suggesting that ‘mountains may move and hills may shake’, there is an element of superiority in the second line, suggesting that God’s ‘loving-kindness’ and ‘covenant of peace’ will surpass the mountains and hills and will definitely ‘not’ move or shake. Mountains and hills generally provide the association of eternal stability. The accompanying verbs, however, express movement and instability. The second verb means ‘to totter, shake’ and denotes a movement that is particularly unfirm and wavering. The improbability of wavering mountains and shaking hills serves here to demonstrate a fortiori the...

impossibility that God’s commitment to Zion would be unreliable. Thus the
firmness of Yhwh’s solidarity with Zion is brought to the fore.

The expression ‘covenant of peace’ should be understood in the sense that
peace – widely shared prosperity and well-being – forms the quality and content
of the covenant that Yhwh guarantees to Zion.159 The word rv"n has here the
meaning of a one-sided ‘pledge’ and ‘obligation’. It denotes that Yhwh takes the
obligation upon himself to fulfill the pledge. The term has been paraphrased as
‘Zusicherung’ or ‘Zusage’ and carries the nuances of a strong and lasting
commitment.160 Peace is a key word in the final chapters of Isaiah 40-55. It seems
to be within reach after the arrival of Yhwh and the acknowledgment of the
work of the servant (Isa. 52:7; 53:5; 54:10, 13; 55:12). The solemn promise that
Yhwh will be committed to the ‘peace’ of Zion summarizes much of what has
been said. It indicates that the well-being and revitalization of Zion are the
concern and purpose of Yhwh.

3.6 Audience

The primary audience in the poem in Isaiah 54:1-10 is Zion. There is some
fluidity in this figure: Zion is addressed as a currently barren and desolate woman
and future mother of sons (vv. 1-3). She is addressed as Yhwh’s first and
remaining love (vv. 5-6) and as his new partner (vv. 7-10). In this figure one
recognizes the community in Jerusalem, which suffers from destruction and de­
population but subsequently receives the message of repopulation and the re­
newed presence of Yhwh.

At this point the community in Zion can be more specifically qualified. It is
not just a passive category but is comprised of those people in the city who are
dedicated to the restoration of Zion and who are oriented to Yhwh’s presence.
These people are also called the servants of Yhwh and are the pioneers within the
kingdom (cf. 54:17). The message to this community is not just one of comfort
but has a dimension of finality. The future glory of Zion is revealed here in its
fullest sense. Comfort and restoration are realized and can only be received with
cheer. This corresponds to the position of this text as conclusion to all Zion texts
in Isaiah 40-55.

Within the drama of Isaiah 49-55, Zion also is a figure on stage. That is to
say, the words spoken to Zion are intended not only to Zion but also to the people
in Babylon. The plural figure addressed in Isaiah 52:11-12, that has raised its
voice in 53:1-7 and is again addressed in 55:1-3, may be identified as the implied
audience in Isaiah 49-55. This plural group of people coincides with the exiles in
Babylon. They represent the exiles who are hesitant to emigrate to Zion. Viewed
in this light, the message of reassurance to Zion in Isaiah 54:1-10 also serves to
accentuate the appeal to undertake the travel to Zion. The text highlights the

159. Cf. IM § 129f (genitive of quality). The same expression is found in Num. 25:12; Ezek. 34:25;

160. The term rv"n has a special sense in Isaiah 40-55. It occurs only in the construct state with an
appositional term (Isa. 42:6; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3) and does not bear a nuance of mutuality but
rather of a one-sided commitment or ‘Selbstverplichtung’ of Yhwh (cf. E. Kutsch, THAT
alliance of Yhwh and Zion and so leaves no doubt as to the location where the loyalty of God lies. In that sense, the Zion text in Isaiah 54 also serves as a final motivation to embark on the travel to Zion. That is the place where one can live in Yhwh's presence and participate as co-workers in his purposes.

Other scholars have also inferred that Zion has at least a double function in Isaiah 49-55. Zion is viewed both as the object of God's rehabilitation and as the final destination for the travelling exiles. Zion is thus present under two perspectives, as a people and community before God and as a place and destination for the exiles. The female representation of Zion expresses both these perspectives, as Zion can be depicted both as a mother in need of sons (place perspective) and as a female suffering from all sorts of distress (people perspective).

The present reader may recognise relevant elements both in the primary and in the implied audience. The perspective of the struggling community in Zion and of the unwilling group in Babylon to join the seemingly unpromising purposes of God are both such that they may invite reflection and identification.

3.7 Composition and context

There are few immediate connections between the two poems in Isaiah 54, but in general the continuation of earlier themes is recognisable in vv. 11-17. The repopulation and reconstruction of the city are here the most prominent themes. Especially the great number of children (vs. 13) and the presence of a plurality of servants of Yhwh in the city (vs. 17) are important elements in the second poem. Further the term 'peace' (vs. 13) reoccurs and the reconstruction of the city in splendour (vv. 11-12) recalls the expansion motif in vs. 2.

The connections between Isaiah 54 and Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the so-called fourth servant song, have been discussed extensively. In the view of Muilenburg 'the sharp contrasts and the motif of the great reversal bind the poems into a fairly well-knit unity'. He rightly points out that both the servant of Yhwh (Isa. 53) and the female Zion (Isa. 54) are exalted from a low to a high position. These characters share a negative past and the promise of a positive future. The most significant word repetitions between the two texts are:

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161. Cf. Beuken, Jesaja, p. 275. Beuken alludes to the city both as community and as eschatological destination.


The correspondences in the descriptions of the servant and of Zion are too numerous to be overlooked. Within a dramatic reading of Isaiah 49-55, the dynamic relation between the chapters and the way in which chapter 54 develops and builds on themes from chapter 53 are of particular interest. In this light, the motif that the single servant in chapter 53 develops into many servants in chapter 54 is significant. This expansion of the one servant into many presumably has to do with the recognition of the work of the servant by the ‘we’ figure in 53:4-6. At any rate, the changing perspective on the servant in chapter 53 and on Zion in chapter 54 are not just parallel events. There is also a causal-logical relation between the elevation of the servant and the reconstitution of Zion, in the sense that the acknowledgement of the servant’s work by the ‘we’ figure marks a climax in the drama and is suggestive of a more positive attitude than before on the part of the people in Babylon (the ‘we’ figure) regarding the project of the return to Zion. This switch in perception makes the mission of the servant ‘to bring Israel back’ ultimately successful. It is only on account of this success that in chapter 54 Zion can be assured of the arrival of children with final certainty.

The remarkable connections between the male servant and the female city have been explained in terms of a near or complete identification. According to Wilshire, ‘the servant is the city’ and according to Korpel, Zion and the servant ‘are to some extent interchangeable concepts’. In my perception these statements do not do full justice to the relationship of the servant to the city. The solution to the relation between the servant and the city lies, I suggest, in the idea that the work of the servant must be located in Zion, both in Isaiah 50:4-9 and 52:13-53:12. I have argued elsewhere that either Zion or Babylon forms the implicit background of the individual texts in Isaiah 49-55, and that the texts may be better understood in light of the location in which the events described take place. The servant’s work, insofar as it is related to violence, should be located in Zion, a location which is associated with adversaries throughout the final chapters of Deutero-Isaiah (Isa. 54:14-16; 51:12-13; 53:4-7). The function of the servant would then not be to compensate for the wrongs of the people in a general sense, but to be a pioneer worker in the rebuilding of Zion. His participation in the return and the reconstruction of Zion mark him as the obedient servant of Yhwh, and his close connection with Zion may explain the correspondences between the fate of the servant and that of Zion, found in chapters 53-54.

In this connection perhaps also an answer may be found to the question why Zion is not named in Isaiah 54. It appears that within Isaiah 53-55 a general anonymity is found. In distinction to Isaiah 51:17-23 and 52:1-3, neither Zion nor Israel or Jacob is mentioned by name. This may have to do with the con-cussive scope of these chapters. After the fourth servant song, the strict distinctions between city and people, which were previously almost antagonistic, begin to fall away. The people have indicated their willingness to move to Zion, and in Isaiah 54 they are in anticipation already ‘included’ in the city. At this point in the text, anonymity and inclusivity prevail over the clear and exclusive naming of the characters involved.

3.8 Evaluation of the marriage imagery in Isaiah 54:1-10

In order to situate the marriage imagery of Isaiah 54:1-10 within Deutero-Isaiah, first the prominent role of Zion and the female personification of this city in Isaiah 49-55 will be discussed. Then some observations about the setting and thrust of the marriage imagery in Isaiah 54 will follow.

The female personification of Zion in Isaiah 40-55

The emphasis on Zion is a remarkable feature of Isaiah 49-55. This holds particularly for the four large compositions which are addressed to Zion and in which Zion is personified as a female figure (Isa. 49:14-26; 51:17-23; 52:1-2; 54:1-17). Additional indications of female personification may be found in the prologue (Isa. 40:1-11) and in a few other texts (Isa. 50:1; 51:16).

The name ‘Zion’ is a designation for Jerusalem that occurs especially in prophetic and poetic texts. Frequently the term has additional overtones that go beyond the matter-of-fact designation ‘Jerusalem’. There may be an accent on the special role of Zion as the chosen city of God. Or an emotional undertone may be present, especially when Zion is personified as ‘daughter Zion’ or as mother in view of her absent children (Isa. 49:14; 51:18-20; 54:1-3).

How can the strong female personification of Zion in Isaiah 40-55 be explained? Three factors may account for this phenomenon. The first is the convention in the cultural environment of Israel to depict cities as females. In the Ancient Near East and the Greek-Hellenistic milieu, it was common to conceive of cities as a female and to image them as mothers, daughters and spouses to the patron god of the city. Biddle traces this phenomenon back to ancient city laments. Such texts often use the images of a bereft mother and widow in order to depict the deplorable fate of the city. The theory of Biddle and Steck is that the phenomenon of female personification in the Hebrew Bible likewise primarily emerges in the context of disaster and distress. The female personification of Jerusalem in the book of Lamentations would thus reflect the ancient practice to lament the fate of a destroyed city by using female images, and would represent

166. Cf. E. Otto, ΠΡΗΜ, TWAT 6, pp. 994-1028 (esp. p. 107). The name ‘Zion’ occurs 93 times in Isa.-Mal.; 53 times in Ps.-Chr. and six times in Jos.-Kgs. The name ‘Zion’ is found 47 times in Isaiah and eleven times in Isa. 40-55 (eight times in Isa. 49-55).
the first recognisable stage of the female personification of Jerusalem in the biblical texts.\(^\text{167}\)

A second factor contributing to the female personification in Isaiah 40-55 is that Deutero-Isaiah has strong literary connections with the book of Lamentations. It has been argued that Deutero-Isaiah forms an 'almost antiphonal answering of the lament' expressed in the book of Lamentations.\(^\text{168}\) This holds especially for the Zion texts in Isaiah 49-55, in which the female images of widowhood, loss of children and humiliation reoccur. The most essential correspondence lies in the theme of comfort in Isaiah 40-55, which may be heard as a direct response to the book of Lamentations (Lam. 1:2, 9, 16, 21; Isa. 40:1; 49:13 et passim). In the liturgy of the synagogue, this relationship is reflected in the reading of Isaiah 40 ('comfort ye') on the Sabbath following the ninth of Av, when the text of Lamentations is recited ('there is no comforter').\(^\text{169}\)

A third factor contributing to the prominent role of Zion in Isaiah 40-55 is the special design of these chapters and the central role of the city of Jerusalem in the book of Isaiah as a whole. Within Isaiah 40-55 a twofold structure is visible, in the first part of which the major concern is Israel in Babylon and in the second part of which the main concern is the comfort of Zion. In Isaiah 49-55 the accent lies on the revitalisation and the restoration of the city. This is not strange in a book which as a whole shows a focus on the city of Jerusalem, as the place of special covenantal expectations and obligations. At the same time, the city in these chapters is not simply a location but it almost takes over the role of the people. The special title 'my people', reminiscent of the covenant formula, is reserved here for Zion and employed with respect to Zion.\(^\text{170}\) The special care for Israel, expressed in words of comfort, ultimately takes the form of special care for Zion. It is Zion to which Yhwh binds his presence, and while Zion is, on the one hand, a figure distinct from Israel, a place to which Israel must travel, she is, on the other hand a figure who replaces Israel and takes over its role as covenant partner. Zion thus embodies Israel in a most concentrated sense and functions here as Yhwh's covenant partner.

The marriage imagery in Isaiah 54

At first sight, the marital imagery in Isaiah 50:1 and Isaiah 54:4-6 seems relatively marginal. It can easily escape notice that in these texts the statement is found that Yhwh will remarry Zion and reaffirm his relationship with Zion. At second sight, however, the intimacy suggested in the marriage imagery seems to touch upon a central feature of the whole of Deutero-Isaiah. A renewed concern and care for Zion seem in fact to permeate the whole of Isaiah 40-55, so that the

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167. Cf. M.E. Biddle, 'Lady Jerusalem', pp. 173-194 and O.H. Steck, 'Zion', p. 279. Biddle emphasizes that in the lament texts concerning Ur the city goddess is personified while in the biblical texts it is simply the city that is personified as female.


169. This sabbath is known as Sabbath Nachamu and its Haftara is taken from Isaiah 40 (cf. S.Ph de Vries Mzn, *Joodse Riten en Symbolen*, Amsterdam: Arbeiderspers, 1968, pp. 149-50).

170. Cf. for the covenant background of this formula Ex. 6:6; 19:5; Lev. 26:12, Deut. 7:6. The phrases ‘my people’ and ‘his people’ occur frequently in Isa. 40-55 (e.g., 40:1; 49:13; 51:4, 16, 22; 52:4-6, 9).
marriage imagery is not insignificant but part of a larger comfort programme. For this reason some further reflections about the marriage imagery may be made.

There is a great amount of tender and affectionate language in Deutero-Isaiah. Different words and passages denote the intimate involvement of God with Israel and Zion. In the opening passage the promising title 'my people' appears as an indication of the renewed commitment of Yhwh to Zion. The remarkable passage in Isaiah 43:1-4 identifies Israel as highly treasured and loved by Yhwh. The key words 'to have compassion' and 'to comfort' in the Zion poems emphasize the special care and concern of Yhwh for Zion. This care is compared to that of a mother for her child (Isa. 49:15). The central verb 'to redeem' indicates that Yhwh intends to turn the fate of Zion and to change her misery and solitude into a happy new existence.

The marriage imagery in Isaiah 54 is part of this larger programme of love and comfort. But it has specific dimensions as well. When Yhwh is depicted as the husband of Zion and Zion as his first love (54:5-6), that points out that the bond between Yhwh and Zion is strong and indissoluble. When Yhwh is said to 'marry' Zion, that means that his commitment to Zion is as intimate and lasting as in a marriage. Especially the element of intimacy is strong in this marriage imagery. Yhwh binds his fate to Zion, and connects her future to his. The suggestion in the texts is that the love of Yhwh for Zion, a notion that is present although the word as such is not mentioned, is more than an inward emotion. It actually makes a difference. It implies a reversal of fortunes. The close presence of Yhwh and his commitment to the city create a new future and apparently have the capacity to bring Zion to restoration and revival (54:1-6). The love of Yhwh is thus a love that revitalizes. It generates new life. The marriage imagery also contains a message for the future, in so far it alludes to the lasting companionship between God and the city in times to come.

To sum up the results of the investigation thus far:

- The marital images in Isaiah 50 and 54 function within a context of comfort and reassurance. The accent lies on the affection of Yhwh for Zion and on the revitalizing power of this love for Zion.
- The marriage imagery is part of the larger programme of comfort in Deutero-Isaiah and fits within other family imagery in connection to Yhwh and Israel (so Darr).
- The female personification of Zion is part of the general outlook of Isaiah 49-55 and is not limited to texts with marriage imagery, or intrinsically connected to the marriage imagery. It is a broader phenomenon in relation to the miserable and lamentable fate of the city, which forms one of the points of departure for the whole of Isaiah 40-55.
- The setting of the marriage imagery in Isaiah is different from that in Hoshea and Jeremiah. In Deutero-Isaiah the emphasis lies on the one-sided commitment of Yhwh to Zion, while in the latter texts the notion of mutuality is the central point. The relationship between Yhwh and Israel comes then to be seen as an obligation of the covenant partner as well.