

## The Theme of the Babylonian Exile as Imprisonment in Isaiah 42:22 and Other Texts in Isaiah 40-55

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Although some scholars argue that Isaiah 42:22 has the people remaining in Judah rather than the exiles in mind, this paper asserts that the description of the exile as imprisonment is an exaggeration. Some Judean exiles were in all likelihood forced to work on royal building projects. Their imprisonment would at most be temporary. By depicting the exile as imprisonment 42:22 accentuates Yahweh's announcement in 42:14-44:23 that he would restore his relationship with Israel. The end of the punishment was in sight despite the fact that Israel's precarious situation could be interpreted as an indication that Yahweh's relationship with them has ended. In the present form of the text of Isaiah 40-55, 42:22 reveals that the one who would deliver the prisoners (42:7), himself needed deliverance. 42:22 thus sets the stage for the re-commissioning of the servant in 49:1-6. Although 49:24-26 does not give the servant a role in the return of Zion's sons, the statement in verse 25 that Yahweh himself would take up the prisoners' cause forms a strong contrast to the reproach reflected in 42:22.*

### **A INTRODUCTION**

Isaiah 40:2 announces the end of the Babylonian exile. Jerusalem's time of service (abx) has ended. The term abx evidently calls the compulsory service required from the Judeans to mind, since it should be construed as a reference to the Neo-Babylonian *šābu*, the compulsory work required from prisoners of war (cf. Korpel 1999:92).<sup>1</sup> In 42:22 Israel is characterized as a people that was robbed and plundered. They became loot and were all bound in holes, hidden in prisons.<sup>2</sup> Since it is generally assumed that the Judeans, who were deported to

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<sup>1</sup> The image of the yoke, occurring in 47:6, does not necessarily have compulsory labour in mind. It frequently refers to oppressing rule by foreign nations. Cf. Deut 28:48; Jer 28:2, 4, 11, 14.

<sup>2</sup> The emendation suggested in BHS requires no change in the consonantal text. The use of the preposition בְּ with יָתֹבֵן in the parallel phrase implies that מִיַּרְוֵיב' should not

Babylonia, were treated leniently, the likelihood that the depiction of the Babylonian exile as imprisonment describes the actual conditions endured by the exiles has been questioned. This paper reconsiders the available evidence. Subsequently the attention moves to the theme of the Babylonian exile as imprisonment in 42:22 and other texts in Isaiah 40-55, particularly 42:7; 49:9, 24, 25.<sup>3</sup> 42:22 is examined in relation to its immediate literary context as well as its macro-context. Several scholars have reflected on the relationship between 42:7 and 42:22.<sup>4</sup> An attempt is made to determine whether the location of 42:22 inbetween 42:7 and 49:9, is of any significance.<sup>5</sup> Various other themes that play an important role in Isaiah 40-55, are attested in 42:18-25. Only those that have a direct bearing on 42:22, are brought into consideration. The language in 42:22 has parallels in Isaiah 1-39. For instance, according to 10:6, 13 the Assyrians would treat people as 'spoil' and 'plunder'.<sup>6</sup> Isaiah 1-39 is, however, beyond the scope of this paper.

## **B THE CONDITIONS ENDURED BY THE BABYLONIAN EXILES**

In the beginning of the sixth-century BCE inhabitants of Jerusalem and its vicinity were on three occasions deported to Babylonia, in Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year (597 BCE), in his eighteenth year (586 BCE) and in his twenty-third year (582 BCE). Since many exiles chose to stay in Babylonia, the end of the Babylonian exile is taken as the time when the exiles were allowed to return to Palestine.

The exilic period represents a huge lacuna in the historical narrative of the Old Testament (cf. Albertz 2003:3). The books of Ezekiel and Jeremiah do, however, offer indirect information for the early years of the exile (cf. Ackroyd 1968:31-32). The exiles had villages where they 'dwelt' (Ezek 3:15), mainly in the region of the 'river Chebar' (Ezek 1:1, 3 and elsewhere), the *nar kabari*, one of the canals which traversed the deep alluvial land of the lower Euphrates and Tigris. The prominence of place-names with 'tel', for instance Tel Abib (Ezek 3:15),<sup>7</sup> meaning the site of an abandoned ancient settlement, suggests a deliberate policy of settling the exiles in areas earmarked for redevelopment (cf. Blenkinsopp 2002:427).

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be taken as 'young men', but rather as the plural of  $\text{רַבִּי}$  preceded by the preposition  $\text{בְּ}$  (cf. North 1977:117).

<sup>3</sup>  $\text{יְבִיבִי}$  in Isa 52:2 is frequently read as  $\text{חַבְבִּיבִי}$ , 'captive'.

<sup>4</sup> For example Leene (1987:139-140); Hanson (1995:54); Carroll (1997:88).

<sup>5</sup> Melugin (1976:145) draws attention to the fact that in Isa 49:2, the servant was hidden, as is the case in 42:22. The hiddenness of the servant in 49:2 does, however, not refer to the consequences of the events of 597 and 586 BCE. Beuken (1983:16) rightly relates the servant's hiddenness in 49:2 to his proclamation.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Goldingay (1995:59) for more examples.

<sup>7</sup> Several other names of settlements of exiles in Babylonia are mentioned in Ezra 2:59 = Neh 7:61.

No official Babylonian archives comparable to the Assyrian archives have been found. The Babylonian Chronicles<sup>8</sup> are fragmentary, with gaps for the years 594-558; 556; 552-550 and 544-540 BCE (cf. Albertz 2003:45-47). Some indication of the conditions of the Babylonian exiles may be gleaned from the Jehoiachin tablets, texts published by Joannés and Lemaire in 1999 and the other texts, apparently from the same collection, being prepared for publication by L. E. Pearce.

The Jehoiachin tablets show that king Jehoiachin was at least for some time held in fairly comfortable house arrest, receiving generous rations from the royal storehouse (cf. Oded 1977:481). In one of the texts published by Joannés and Lemaire, reference is made to *āl-Yāhūdu*, ‘the city of Judah’, a previously unattested place-name (cf. Pearce 2006:400).<sup>9</sup> Of the nearly 100 texts from *āl-Yāhūdu* and *Našar* being prepared for publication by Pearce, approximately one-third was composed in *āl-Yāhūdu*. In these texts the integration of Judeans into Babylonian economic life is evidenced by their participation in very ordinary economic transactions. The earliest text in this corpus dates to 572 BCE (Pearce 2006:400-402). Pearce (2006:407-408) notes that these texts do not provide evidence for the professional status of the deportees or descendants. She does, however, observe that these texts, to the extent that they record promissory notes and other forms of indebtedness, demonstrate that at least a portion of the Judean deportees and their descendants provided a ready supply of labour for the official administration.

A significant number of the non-Babylonian names in the *Murašû* documents from Nippur are Israelite-Judean names, many of them with the theophoric element *Yahweh*. These documents testify to a significant Judean presence in the area occupying a variety of roles (Blenkinsopp 2002:428). The *Murašû* documents date from the reigns of Artaxerxes I (464-424 BCE) and Darius II (424-404 BCE). It is therefore debatable whether one can assume that these texts present an accurate reflection of the Neo-Babylonian period (cf. Smith-Christopher 1997:26).

Younger (1998:219) recounts that the Israelites deported by the Assyrians between 734 and 716 BCE, were apparently of two filtered types, often determined by the individual deportee’s prior status and skills: those who received preferred or at least reasonable treatment and those who received hardship and bare subsistence. Sargon II claimed that *Dur-Sharruken*, his new capital, was built by enemy captives (Younger 1998:221). The Babylonian kings were extremely active in the area of building activity. Nebuchadnezzar

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<sup>8</sup> The Babylonian Chronicle for 598-597 BCE does not mention the deportation of part of the population of Judah. Cf. Albertz 2003:54.

<sup>9</sup> Settlements near Nippur during the Neo-Babylonian period were often named after the ethnicon or place of origin of the deportees who populated them (cf. Vanderhooft 2003:246).

set out to rebuild Babylon. Numerous other cities in Babylonia were similarly restored and their temples embellished (Van de Mieroop 2005:259-260).<sup>10</sup> In an inscription of Nebuchadnezzar II, discussed by Weissbach in 1938,<sup>11</sup> the king boasts that he had forced the people from far places, whom Marduk had delivered to him, to work on the building of Etemenanki. He had imposed on them the brick-basket. According to Smith-Christopher the terms used in this inscription ('I forced them to work...') clearly refer to corvée labour, and *e-mi-id-su-nu-ti tu-up-si-ik-ku* ('I imposed on them the brick basket') further implies strong terms of subservience. Nabonidus dedicated 2 850 captives from Que to building projects in honour of Bel, Nabû and Nergal (Eph'al 2003:178). While some Judean exiles were settled in desolated areas like Tel Abib, the possibility that others were forced to work on royal building projects cannot be ruled out. According to 2 Kings 24:16 Nebuchadnezzar carried a thousand craftsmen off to Babylon in 597 BCE. Since there is no evidence that following employment on royal building enterprises the men were used in labour gangs *in perpetuo*, nor were such captives normally made slaves (Wiseman 1983:80), it is likely that they would later have been allowed to join the other exiles. Their 'imprisonment' would at most be temporarily.

It seems beyond dispute that Jerusalem was treated severely as a result of Zedekiah's rebellion. After his sons were killed before his eyes, his eyes were put out. Then, according to 2 Kings 25:7, he was taken 'in fetters' to Babylon (cf. Smith-Christopher 1997:16). It is highly likely that the Judeans, who were deported to Babylon after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE, were treated more severely than those deported eleven years earlier. They would, nonetheless, not have been prisoners of war kept in prison camps in the modern sense (cf. Klein 1979:3).<sup>12</sup>

According to Jeremiah 29 some of the leaders of the exiles suffered reprisals as a result of the disturbances in 595/4 BCE. At some later date, probably after 592 BCE, Jehoiachin was thrown in jail where he remained until 561/560 BCE when, according to 2 Kings 25:27 and Jeremiah 52:31-34, he was freed from prison by Amel-Marduk (cf. Oded 1977:481).

The fact that many of the Judeans did not take the option of returning to Palestine does not necessarily imply that they were all treated leniently. Smith-Christopher (1997:29-30) has noted that various forms of the Hebrew terms rendered 'imprisonment' turn up as metaphors for exile, along with the various use of terms of binding and fetters. Did the metaphor of imprisonment and re-

<sup>10</sup> Cf. also Kuhrt 1997:593.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Smith-Christopher 1997:24.

<sup>12</sup> During the second half of the third millennium BCE prisoners of war in Mesopotamia were sometimes bound and put in neck stocks or wooden blocks upon their capture. Immediately after they were captured, prisoners of war were regarded as slave property of the crown / state (cf. Gelb 1973:86-87).

ferences to imprisonment grow more plentiful during the exilic period by pure chance? It is possible that there was at least some precedent. The memory of the harsh treatment of some exiles by the Babylonians probably led to the depiction of the exile as imprisonment.

### C ISAIAH 42:22 AS A REFLECTION OF THE CONDITIONS OF THE BABYLONIAN EXILES

Some scholars argue that Isaiah 42:22 has the people remaining in Judah rather than the exiles in mind.<sup>13</sup> Excavations in Jerusalem confirm the destruction of the city (cf. Carter 2003:306). Barstad's (2003:14) view that life after the conquest of Jerusalem went on pretty much in the same way that it did before the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar's armies, can therefore not be accepted. However, a number of towns and villages in the area of Benjamin clearly escaped destruction. Although Lamentations 1:3 refers to hostile troops that roamed unconfined throughout Judah, hunting down refugees and taking them prisoner in order to put them to work as slaves (cf. Rekema 1999:108-109), those circumstances were clearly not prevalent in the whole of the former kingdom of Judah. Lamentations 4:20 laments that the king was held captive in their pits (מַטְ/תַּיַּי מַבֵּי). This is clearly a reference to Jehoiachin (cf. Korpel 1999:99), held in Babylonian captivity. Although Isaiah 42:22 does not use the term תַּיַּי מַבֵּי, it has exiles in mind. The verb בָּוַו, which refers to the return to Palestine in 49:6a, presumably presupposes the exile in 42:22b (cf. Beuken 1986:156).<sup>14</sup>

Westermann (1981:92) has proposed that the metaphor of the exile as imprisonment originated from the psalms of lamentation. He believes that all the clauses in Isaiah 42:22 were adapted from a lament. The statements in 42:22 are long-established technical terms and metaphors used by Israel to describe her plight as she made lamentation in the presence of God.<sup>15</sup> Although Westermann's proposal was taken up by scholars such as Schoors (1973:206), Melugin (1976:42), Beuken (1986:156-157) and Kraus (1990:48), it was challenged by Elliger (1978:288). He has made the point that this language as well as terminology, are absent in the Psalms from the pre-exilic as well as post-exilic times. Both the verbs זָבַב and חָסַו occur only once in the Psalms, respectively in Psalm 109:11 and 44:11. Unlike Psalm 44, a communal lament from the exilic era (cf. Mettinger 1997:147), neither Isaiah 42:22, nor its immediate literary context (42:18-25), contain a declaration of the people's innocence. Psalm 109 is an individual lament. Images and formulations from laments are frequently utilized in Isaiah 40-55. This is, nonetheless, not the case in 42:22.

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<sup>13</sup> For instance, McKenzie (1968:47).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. also Isa 51:11.

<sup>15</sup> Isa 40-55 are characterised by a peculiar mixture of psalmic and prophetic language. Albertz (2003:380-381) thinks that this is due to the fact that the group which was responsible for Isa 40-55, probably consisted of descendants of non-priestly cultic personnel, primarily the temple singers.

Isaiah 42:22 asserts that all were snared in holes and that they were hidden in prison houses. In light of what is known about the conditions of the Babylonian exiles, this is clearly an exaggeration. As was noted earlier, it is possible that there was at least some precedent. Carroll (1978:126) has claimed that much of the language of Isaiah 40-55 consists of exaggerations. Israel has received double punishment for her sins (40:2) and the coastlands tremble at the approach of Cyrus (41:5). The depiction of the exile as imprisonment is probably another example. It is noteworthy that Isaiah 49:24-25 describes those subject to Babylonian imperial rule as prisoners (cf. Blenkinsopp 2000:315).<sup>16</sup>

#### **D ISAIAH 42:22 IN RELATION TO ITS IMMEDIATE CONTEXT**

Isaiah 42:18-25 is a distinct literary unit although it is thematically connected to 42:14-17 and 43:1-7. 42:14-17 and 42:18-25 have the themes of blindness and not knowing in common. Melugin (1976:106) has, however, noted that while 42:14-17 only mentions the blind, 42:18-25 speaks of both the blind and the deaf. The theme of trust in molten images, attested in 42:17, is absent from 42:18-25. The summons to hear in 42:18 therefore clearly introduces a new pericope (cf. Baldauf 1991:19).

The most prominent linkage between Isaiah 42:18-25 and 43:1-7 is the image of fire and burning (42:25; 43:2). While burning is the result of Yahweh's wrath in 42:25, fire is mentioned in 43:1-7 with no indication that it is punishment for Israel's disobedience (cf. Melugin 1976:107). Several important themes occurring in 42:18-25 are absent from 43:1-7: blindness, deafness, the servant, and sin (cf. Leene 1987:141). The introductory *hT:[]* in 43:1 was probably affixed when 42:18-25 and 43:1-7 were juxtaposed (cf. Melugin 1976:108).

Isaiah 42:18-25 definitely does not belong to those texts that make things easy for exegetes (cf. Baldauf 1991:13; Begrich 1963:13; Westermann 1981:90; Leene 1996:816). It opens with a summons to the deaf and the blind to hear and to see. Israel had seemingly blamed Yahweh for their distressed circumstances. The charge against Yahweh would be similar to the one quoted in 40:27: Yahweh was blind and deaf to Israel's burden of suffering (cf. Schoors 1973:202; Hanson 1995:53). Subsequently Yahweh answers Israel's accusation in verses 19 and 20. The servant, that is the people, was blind and deaf. The people's blindness and deafness do not point to the people's captivity in exile as is suggested by Lee (1995:66). It rather alludes to an incapability of comprehending Yahweh's plan for their return through the rise of Cyrus.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Becking (2006:3) notes that in Ps 126 the return from exile is seen as a collective event in which Israel in its entirety is involved.

<sup>17</sup> *μLvmKi* should be taken as a pu'al of *μlv*, literally 'the one who was a repayment', the one who had to pay for Israel's sins. Cf. Korpel & De Moor (1998:122).

Verses 18-20 are thematically connected. All three verses speak of blindness and deafness (cf. Korpel & De Moor 1998:155). Although the reference to Yahweh in a speech by God in verse 19b is surprising (cf. McKenzie 1968:46; Baldauf 1991:22; Van Oorschot 1993:208; Labahn 1999B:210), *hwhy db,* ('servant of Yahweh') may have been expanded from *yDb*[' ('my servant') (cf. North 1977:118).

The prophet is speaking in verses 21-23. He begins his discourse by stating in verse 21 that Yahweh longs (*Åpj*) to make his *hrwT* great and glorious. In view of the fact that *Åpj* alludes to Yahweh's intention to free Israel through the exploits of Cyrus in 44:28 and 46:10 (cf. Van Oorschot 1993:211), the prophet seemingly hints at Yahweh's intention to bring salvation. In 42:22, which is linked to the preceding verse by a *waw* adversative, the prophet describes the situation of the exiles. In spite of Yahweh's intention to deliver them, Israel was imprisoned, believing that they had no one who would deliver them. Finally an appeal is made in verse 23 by a series of rhetorical questions to the people to perceive what Yahweh was doing. Verses 21-23 are closely linked to the preceding speech by Yahweh. *allh* in verse 22 alludes to Yahweh's servant in verses 19-20, while verse 23 picks up the cry in verse 18.

The discrepancy between Yahweh's intention to bring salvation (verse 21) and the people's situation (verse 22) is explained by the confession of sin in verse 24bA (cf. Seitz 1998:184; Labahn 1999B:211). The people's precarious situation was due to their sins. This line of thought is further developed in verses 24bBC-25. It is, however, questionable whether this explanation formed part of the original unit. In verse 42:24bBC, which is related to 30:9 and 28:12 (cf. Williamson 1994:89-90), Israel's unwillingness to listen relates to a resistance to follow Yahweh's instruction. In contrast, in 42:20 Israel's unwillingness to listen bears on their inability of comprehending Yahweh's plan of salvation. The verbs *rw* and *vrj* in 42:19a correspond respectively to *rw* and *vrj* in the following verse (Merendino 1981:278). Furthermore, the first person plural formulated verse 24bA stands out amid speeches by Yahweh and the prophet. It also introduces the association of Israel as a people that was robbed and plundered with Yahweh's judgments. In addition, verses 24-25 seemingly speaks from a temporal distance (cf. Baldauf 1991:34). Although a change in theology in the text could be an indication that the author's opinions have changed over an extended period of time (cf. Tiemeyer 2007:369), it is noteworthy that Labahn (1999B:222) attributes verses 24bBC-25 to a guilt-orientated revision of Deutero-Isaiah by later adherents of the prophet who used some aspects of the Deuteronomic theology of Israel's history. If verses 24-25 are taken as secondary additions, verses 18-23 nevertheless form a coherent unit.

The description of the exile as imprisonment in Isaiah 42:22 evidently gives an ironic commentary on verse 21aA (cf. Baldauf 1991:32). Verse 22b declares that there was no one delivering them (*lyXim' -yaw*). It is possible that

verse 22 presupposes the sentiment of some exiles after the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus.<sup>18</sup> Babylon was not destroyed by Cyrus as had been suggested in Isaiah 47\*. Babylon became one of the four Persian capitals, while Jerusalem was in ruins. Cyrus was welcomed by the priests of Marduk as the ‘the chosen agent’ of the god Marduk. There was no large return of Judean exiles to Judah before 520 BCE (Albertz 2003:402-403). Disillusionment spread among the exiles. The people questioned whether salvation was really on its way (Labahn 1999A:73).

Although the prison paradigm is not unique to Isaiah 42:22, much of the vocabulary is foreign to chapters 40-55. The verbs *zlb* and *hsv* occur elsewhere in this corpus only in 42:24a, a text that is in all likelihood dependent on 42:22. *jjp* is a hapax legomenon. The rare word *rj* is only found elsewhere in 11:8. Although *rj* is found in 1 Samuel 14:11,12; Job 30:6; Canticles 5:4; Ezekiel 8:7; 2 Kings 12:10; Nahum 2:13, its sole occurrence in Isaiah 40-55 is in 42:22. The verb *jph* *hiph‘il*/*hoph‘al*<sup>19</sup> occurs elsewhere in Isaiah 40-55 only once, namely in 49:2. Although the Judeans are addressed as the blind in 42:18, 42:22 does not relate the idea of imprisonment to blindness.<sup>20</sup> The fact that the vocabulary used in 42:22 is foreign to chapters 40-55 supports the view that it is a quotation (cf. Elliger 1979:289).

## E ISAIAH 42:22 IN RELATION TO ITS MACRO-CONTEXT

If the hypothesis that the hymns in Isaiah 42:10-13; 44:23; 45:8; 48:20-21 and 49:13 function as major structural markers in chapters 40-55 (cf. Matheus 1990:152-153; Mettinger 1997:153) is accepted, it is clear that 42:14-44:23 forms the macro-context of 42:22. 42:14-44:23 are an announcement of Yahweh’s contention that he is the Redeemer of Israel (Sweeney 1988:92). It incorporates several distinct literary units. Leene (1987:162) identifies two parallel series: 42:18-25 is parallel to 43:22-28; 43:1-7 is parallel to 44:1-5; 43:8-13 / 14-15 is parallel to 44:6-8 / 9-20 and 43:16-21 is parallel to 44:21-22 / 23. This structure evidently is the result of a deliberate literary composition.

Melugin (1976:107-108) has noted that there is a progressive chain of verbal repetition and similarity in images and theme in the three units, Isaiah 42:14-17, 42:18-25 and 43:1-7. This stair-step progression expresses a particular understanding of the relationship between past and future. 42:14-17 asserts that although Yahweh was silent in the past, he will in future lead the blind through the desert in a way they did not know. 42:18-25 attempts to persuade Israel that their sin rather than Yahweh’s blindness is the cause of their plight

<sup>18</sup> Elliger (1978:289) attributes the depiction of the exile as imprisonment in Isa 42:22 to mockers who questioned Yahweh’s interest in the exiles.

<sup>19</sup> *jph* is sometimes taken as a *hoph‘al* perfect (cf. BHS).

<sup>20</sup> The release from prison is related to the ‘opening of eyes’ or ‘the sight of the blind’ in texts like Isa 42:7; 49:9 and Ps 146:7-8.



and that they must hear this for the sake of the future. While the summons to listen and see in 42:18 already hinted at a note of hope (cf. Goldingay 1995:52), 43:1-7 explicitly announces Yahweh's coming redemption (Sweeney 1988:73). The juxtaposition of 42:18-25 and 43:1-7 demonstrates that, although burning came as punishment (42:25), Yahweh's redeeming presence can be in the midst of fire and water (43:2). The description of Israel as a people that was robbed and plundered, which themselves became loot and were all bound in holes, hidden in prisons, prepares the way for the announcement of redemption in 43:1-7. Here, however, the exiles are metaphorically depicted as debt-slaves (cf. Dille 2004:79).

Isaiah 42:18-25 and 43:22-28 are in many respects parallel to each other (cf. Leene 1987:153). In both (42:24-25 and 43:27-28) Israel is told that it was because of their sins that Yahweh has poured his anger upon them. Like 42:18-25 43:22-28 falls into the category of a trial speech between Yahweh and Israel. Here the charge is that Yahweh did nothing while Israel rendered true service (cf. Westermann 1981:90). There are, however, important differences between these passages. While there is no mention of forgiveness in 42:18-25, Yahweh assures the people of his forgiveness and mercy in 43:22-28 (cf. Laato 1990:216). The themes of blindness and deafness and the servant of Yahweh are absent from 43:22-28. 42:18-25 makes no reference to Israel's observance of the cult. In the light of this state of affairs as well as the fact that the introductory הַיְיָ in 44:1 obviously connects 43:22-28 and 44:1-5, more emphasis should rather be placed on the relationship between these two units.

Isaiah 42:22, with its depiction of the Babylonian exile as imprisonment, accentuates Yahweh's announcement in 42:14-44:23 that he will restore his relationship with Israel. The end of the punishment was in sight despite the fact that Israel's precarious situation might be interpreted as an indication that his relationship with them has ended.

#### **F THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISAIAH 42:22 AND OTHER TEXTS IN ISAIAH 40-55 IN WHICH THE THEME OF THE EXILE AS IMPRISONMENT IS ATTESTED**

Isaiah 42:7 and 42:22 have the description of the places of imprisonment as  $\mu\text{yail } k\text{]} \text{ y}\text{Tb}^{\text{21}}$  in common. The relationship between 42:7 and 42:18-25 is, nonetheless, complex. While the verb  $j \text{ q}\text{p}$  (to open) has the eyes as object in 42:7, it has the ears as object in 42:20. In 42:7 'to open the eyes of the blind' signifies the release of prisoners<sup>22</sup> (Elliger 1978:236). In contrast, in 42:18 blindness refers to the inability to comprehend Yahweh's plan of salvation. 42:7 has a closer relationship with 49:9. Both verses take  $J\text{v}h\text{o}$  (darkness) as a

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<sup>21</sup> Isa 42:7 has the singular. The use of  $r\text{ }l\text{ }s\text{h}^{\text{21}}$  is unique to 42:7.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. also Ps 107:10.

metaphor for imprisonment. In addition, both use  $\mu\gamma\tau\omega\sigma\alpha$  ( $\tau\gamma\sigma\alpha$ ) with the verb  $\alpha\chi\eta$  for the return of the exiles from Babylonian captivity.

Isaiah 42:5-9 are generally taken as an expansion and continuation of 42:1-4 (cf. Westermann 1981:84; Werlitz 1997:34). The catchword  $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$  from verses 1-4 is absent in verses 5-9. While the servant is referred to in the third person in verses 1-4, he is addressed in the second person in verses 5-9 (cf. Snaith 1977:167). Although the portrait of the servant in verses 5-9 agrees with that in verses 1-4 (Beuken 1986:131), the portrayal of the servant's mission is different. In verses 1-4 the servant's basic task is to bring justice to the nations. Verse 7 elucidates the task given to the servant in the previous verse. He will set the captives free. Elliger (1978:236) rightly disputes the view that the opening of the eyes, referred to in verse 7a, should be taken spiritually.

Isaiah 49:9 forms part of the second of two speeches by Yahweh that follow on 49:1-6. The first, verse 7, is introduced by an expanded messenger formula. It announces the servant's coming recognition by the leaders of the nations. The second speech, verses 8-12, elaborates on the first in that it provides some details on how the servant will participate in Yahweh's restoration of the covenant to the people. The servant will help gather Yahweh's people from all the lands in which they are held captive and return them to Yahweh, presumably in their own land. A number of connecting features between the various pericopes can be observed. Most obvious is the relationship between  $\mu\gamma\tau\omega\sigma\alpha$  ( $\tau\gamma\sigma\alpha$ ) ( $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$ ) ( $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$ ) ('I will give you as a light to the nations') in verse 6 and  $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\tau\epsilon\tau\epsilon\tau\epsilon$  ( $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$ ) ( $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$ ) ('I have given you as a covenant to the people') in verse 8. Also, in verse 1-6 the purpose of Yahweh's servant is  $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$  ( $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$ ) ( $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$ ) ('to raise up the tribes of Jacob'). In verses 8-12 the one to whom Yahweh addressed the oracle is given a mission:  $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$  ( $\epsilon\pi\upsilon\lambda\eta$ ) ('to establish the land'). The servant in verses 1-6 and the one addressed in verses 8-12 are both understood as agents of Yahweh's 'salvation'. The captives will not only be set free, but will have the prospect of a new life free of hunger and thirst (cf. Matheus 1990:117-118). Holladay (1997:203) agrees with Westermann (1981:172) that 49:7-12 are appended to the second song in the same way as 42:5-9 are attached to the first (42:1-4). It could therefore be expected that 42:5-9 and 49:7-12 are interrelated.

In recent redaction-historical studies of Isaiah 40-55 there seems to be a gathering consensus about the broad lines of the genesis of the corpus (cf. Albertz 2003:375; Conroy 2004:91-92). A clear consensus as far as the relationship between 42:18-25 and 42:7 and 49:9 is concerned, is nonetheless not reached yet. While Hermisson (1989:310-311) regards 42:5-9\* as belonging to a collection that came into existence before 539 BCE, he assigns 42:18-25 and 49:7-12 to a layer originating in the early post-exilic period. Kratz (1991:216-217) attributes 42:18-25 and 49:7-13 to his so-called Servant-Israel layer, a re-interpretation of the Servant Songs dating from the first half or around the middle of the fifth century. He ascribes 42:5-7 to his *Kyros-Ergänzungsschicht*

from between 520-515 BCE. Van Oorschot (1993:197) regards 42:5-9, 42:18-23\* and 49:8-12 as belonging to the same layer, his *Naherwartungsschicht*, which he dates around the transition from the sixth to the fifth century (Van Oorschot 1993:239-242). Werlitz (1997:41) relates the additions to 42:1-4 and 49:1-6 to the compilation of Isaiah 40-55\* as a book. Albertz (2003:410), who takes up this suggestion, views 42:18-25\* as belonging to an earlier collection that originated in the period of the prophetic disciples' Babylonian ministry. Albertz (2003:376) thinks the first two Servant Songs probably emerged during the years after the disappointing experience of 539 BCE and that 42:5-9 and 49:8-12 were formulated after the return to Jerusalem (522-521 BCE). According to this view 42:18-25, with the exception of certain additions, antedate the redactional additions to the first and second Servant Songs. One has to agree with Joachimsen (2007:219) that such a lack of consensus leads to scepticism of the plausibility of literary and redactional criticism as a basis for constructing the history of the formation of the relevant texts.<sup>23</sup>

Isaiah 49:24-26, which together with 49:14-23, serve as an introduction to chapters 49-55, answer the doubt provoked by the promise that the nations will carry Zion's sons home (Melugin 1976:151). The two rhetorical questions in 49:24 give expression to Zion's doubt (cf. Van der Woude 2005:142-143). Yahweh reacts by saying that captives will be taken from warriors (verse 25a). Steck (1992:56) attributes 49:14-26 to a redaction that inserted it into an existing text. Hermisson (1989:310-311) assigns it to the same layer as 42:18-25. Van Oorschot (1993:346), however, traces it to a stratum that was introduced after the stratum which incorporated 42:5-9; 42:18-23\* and 49:8-13.

Beuken (1972:2) cautioned against making the tension between the Servant Songs and their context into an alibi which distracts from paying attention to the message of the final composition. Isaiah 40-55 are not a collection of unrelated oracles, but a well-considered composition (Beuken 1978:33). Although it is misleading to speak of the 'final form' of the text in the singular (cf. Carr 2003:64), the relationship in the present form of the text between Isaiah 42:22 and the other texts that use the motif of the exile as imprisonment, should be considered.

The substantive *db*<sub>l</sub> occurs twenty-one times in Isaiah 40-55. With the exception of 49:7 and 54:17, all occurrences of *db*<sub>l</sub> in chapters 49-55 refer to an individual (Blenkinsopp 1988:99). In 41:8, 9 *db*<sub>l</sub> denotes Israel. It refers to Jacob in 44:2; 45:4; 48:20 and to Israel and Jacob in 44:21 (twice). Since 43:8 depicts Israel as blind, it is clear that in 42:19 *db*<sub>l</sub> denotes the people (*μ*<sub>l</sub>) and

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<sup>23</sup> Leene (1996:812-813, 816) attributes Isaiah 40-55 to the work of a single person or group, that took a long time to complete, and as a result went through several versions. He argues that Isa 42:18-25 were written in order to align 42:18-44:23\* to 42:1ff.

not the prophet (cf. Meredino 1981:277; Elliger 1978:287).<sup>24</sup> As was already noted, *allh* in 42:22 alludes to Yahweh's servant in 42:19-20. The theme of the exile as imprisonment links 42:22 with 42:5-9 and 49:8-12 and the Servant Songs that precede them. The reference in 42:7 to the servant as being appointed 'to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness', aggravates the depiction of the servant in 42:18-25 as blind and imprisoned. It was not only a case of the blind leading the blind (Carroll 1997:88), but also of the deliverer who himself needed deliverance. Someone who believed that there was no one to deliver him, could not lead the prisoners from the prisons.<sup>25</sup> If 42:7 refers to the freeing of all nations in exile (cf. Koole 1985:163), the portrayal of the servant in 42:18-25 as blind and imprisoned is the more so unexpected. 42:22 thus sets the stage for the re-commissioning of the servant in 49:1-6. In contrast to 42:22, where the servant<sup>26</sup> himself is still imprisoned, he would in future restore the tribes of Jacob (49:6).

In Isaiah 49:24-26 the captives are not confined to the Judean exiles (cf. Blenkinsopp 2000:315). However, in contrast to 42:5-9, the servant has no role in the return of Zion's sons. Yahweh himself would summon the captors to let the captives go. Van der Woude (2005:155) notes that while 40:1-11 announce that Zion would be comforted, Yahweh himself comforts Zion in 49:14-26. 49:24 manifests the same idea that is at the root of the statements in 40:27 (cf. Westermann 1981:177) and 42:18: The belief that Yahweh had forsaken the exiles. The statement in 49:25 that Yahweh himself would take up the prisoners' cause therefore forms a strong contrast to the reproach reflected in 42:22. While 49:24 does not use *zb'*, the use of the synonym *j'ql n'* calls 42:22 to mind.

## G CONCLUSION

In light of that what is known about the conditions of the Babylonian exiles, the description of the exile as imprisonment in Isaiah 42:22 is an exaggeration. The memory of the harsh treatment of some exiles by the Babylonians probably led to the depiction of the exile as imprisonment.

The description of the exile as imprisonment in Isaiah 42:22 gives an ironic commentary on the assertion in the previous verse that it was Yahweh's intention to bring salvation to the exiles. 42:14-44:23, which form the macro-context of 42:22, are an announcement of Yahweh's contention that he is the

<sup>24</sup> McKenzie (1968:46) regards Isa 24:19b as a gloss that identifies Israel with the servant of Yahweh of the Servant Songs.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Leene (1987:139-141) for a discussion of the paradox that Isa 42:18-25 forms in relation to 41:1-42:17.

<sup>26</sup> In Isa 49:1-6 the servant is an individual who is given the task formerly given to Israel. It is likely that the referent of the 'servant' figure in the Servant Songs changed in the course of the history of redaction. Cf. Conroy (2004:92) for a discussion.

Redeemer of Israel. 42:22, with its depiction of the Babylonian exile as imprisonment, accentuates Yahweh's announcement that he would restore his relationship with Israel. The end of the punishment was in sight despite the fact that Israel's precarious situation might be interpreted as an indication that his relationship with them has ended.

A clear consensus as far as the diachronic relationship between Isaiah 42:18-25 and 42:7 and 49:9 is concerned, is not possible yet, despite a gathering consensus about the broad lines of the genesis of Isaiah 40-55 in recent redaction-historical studies of the corpus. In the present form of the text, 42:22 reveals that the one who would deliver the prisoners (42:7), himself needed deliverance. 42:22 thus sets the stage for the re-commissioning of the servant in 49:1-6, who would help gather Yahweh's people from all the lands in which they were held captive (49:8-10). While 49:24-26 does not give the servant a role in the return of Zion's sons, the statement in verse 25 that Yahweh himself would take up the prisoners' cause, forms a strong contrast to the reproach reflected in 42:22.

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