SAMUEL E. BALENTINE

The Lure of Transcendence and the Audacity of Prayer

Forschungen zum Alten Testament
157

Mohr Siebeck

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Selected Essays

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For Walter Brueggemann,

with gratitude for decades of extraordinary friendship

Preface

The title of this book derives from the last essay in the collection ("Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: Retrospectives and Prospectives"). A paragraph from the end of that essay provides context:

> The discourse of prayer responds to the abiding lure of transcendence. From Gilgamesh to the primordial human beings in Eden to Odysseus, the quest for ultimate truths has summoned forth all manner of human effort – courageous, desperate, pious, impious, successful, failed, invited, forbidden – and like all such lures, one can never be certain whether the glimmer of transcendence is that of a bright and shining star that illuminates the shadows or only a shiny object that seduces one into an inescapable darkness (e.g., a fishing lure). Prayer's invocation of God transgresses the limits of human beings. Inviting, let alone commanding, God to speak may be the "acme of bardic pretention,"[1] but in the ancient world such transgression characterizes the audacity of prayer.

As I reflect on my work on prayer over the last four decades, I recognize that I have been nudging closer and closer to clarity on two fundamental observations: 1) in the ancient world a deeply rooted pessimism – both ontological and epistemological – accentuates an essentially unbridgeable divide between the divine and the human; and 2) embedded within this pessimistic perspective there is a persistent hope, indeed, expectation, that mortal minded human beings can close this gap. The two ideas represent centrifugal forces that pull in different directions, one toward sustaining boundaries, the other toward breaching them. At the same time, however, these are centripetal forces that depend on each other for their definition. As Jenny Straus Clay notes, "There exists a line, invisible and shifting, but nonetheless absolute, which separates gods from men. Only the moment of transgression reveals its presence."[2] Clay focuses on the Heroic Age in classical Greek literature, principally Homer and Hesiod, when she concludes the following: "By definition, the Greek hero exists on the margins of this boundary."[3] If we replace the words "Greek hero" with "the one who prays," I believe Clay's conclusion would still be accurate. In the ancient world, the person

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[1] I appropriate the language of Jonathan Culler, *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 231. Culler uses the expression with respect to Alphonse de Lamartine's poem, "Le Lac:" "Eternity, nothingness, dark abyss, / What do you do with the days you engulf? / Speak, will you give us back these sublime ecstasies / That you ravish from us?"

[2] J.S. Clay, *The Wrath of Athena: Gods and Men in the* Odyssey (New York; London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1997 [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983]), 181.

[3] Ibid.

who prays seeks to close the gap between heaven and earth, to come as close to divinity as it is humanly possible to do.

It is a truism to say that we no longer live in the ancient world where divinity is presupposed. Our world is "a place of disaffection," as T. S. Eliot says, a world where there is "neither plenitude nor vacancy," a world shadowed by "destitution" and "desiccation," a "twittering" world where all discourse about the divine amounts to nothing more than the "eructation of unhealthy souls."[4] Another poet provides additional descriptors. Once the ladder to heaven is removed, we can climb no farther than "the foul rag and bone shop of the heart."[5] And yet, even in a secular age like ours, there remains an "ineradicable bent to respond to something beyond life," as Charles Taylor puts it, "intimations of transcendence" that beckon us to the edge of what we can comprehend about the God who is ultimately incomprehensible.[6]

In a world that seems impervious to plausible reflection on God's presence, George Steiner argues for a "wager on transcendence." The wager is not only that God *is*, for that would amount to little more than a thin philosophical proposition. Steiner's bet is deeply theological. He reckons that the God who *is* is "capable of all speech-acts except that of monologue."[7] If human beings are to bear God's image, as Genesis asserts, then there must be some means of dialogue with God, some means of discourse not circumscribed by mortal limitations or rational analysis. To use the language of Coleridge, there must be some possibility, however incomprehensible or anarchic, for "a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[8]

The modern world offers various surrogate forms of transcendence.[9] Art, music, and poetry enlarge our conceptual constructs of beauty and splendor. Science and reason penetrate the mysterious and the unknown. Prayer may enlarge and enlighten in similar ways, but its ontology is different; its epistemological presuppositions are more capacious. Prayer is an asylum for the imagination of what is, what can be, what should be the relationship between God, world, and humankind. It is the wager that God is vulnerable to human

[4] Citations from "Burnt Norton III," in *T. S. Eliot: Collected Poems 1909–1962* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1970), 178, 179.

[5] W. B. Yeats, "The Circus Animals' Desertion," in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (Revised second edition; ed. R. J. Finneran; New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 348.

[6] C. Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MS; London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007), 638, 595.

[7] G. Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 4, 225.

[8] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria I* in *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Biographia Literaria,* edited by J. Engell and W. J. Bate (Bollingen Series LXXV; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 304.

[9] Cf. T. Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2014), e. g. ix, 175–208.

thinking. It is the audacity to believe that belief itself has a performative force unbounded by status quo certainties.

The essays that follow reflect my reading of ancient Israel's adventure in prayer. They are arranged thematically, which I hope will help readers identify the generative center of each essay, but the ordering is not meant to suggest a tidy sequencing of motifs. The what, when, how, and why of prayer in the ancient world ebbs and flows with the mutations of life, sometimes overfull with praise and thanksgiving, at other times (and more often, when the numbers are tallied) beleaguered by lament and protest. I have tried to regularize the style and format of the essays, but otherwise they appear here in their original form; even though my exegetical perspective on certain issues has changed over the years (e.g., on the historicity of Jeremiah [essay no. 5]), I have resisted the temptation to revise them. Three of the essays (nos. 4, 9, and 10) were subsequently modified and incorporated into a monograph (*Prayer in the Hebrew Bible: The Drama of Divine-Human Dialogue,* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993). Part I contains three essays that do not explicitly address the topic of "prayer;" nonetheless, they exegete important aspects of the nature and character of the God to whom prayer is addressed that are foundational for what follows.

I am grateful to Mark Smith and the editorial board of "Forschungen zum Alten Testament" for including the book in this series, and to Markus Kirchner and his colleagues at the press, who facilitated the project from beginning to end.

Finally, I dedicate this book to Walter Brueggemann, a valued conversation partner and an unwavering friend in all my endeavors.

Richmond, VA, July 19, 2021 Samuel E. Balentine

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Abbreviations

AB	*Anchor Bible*
ABRL	*Anchor Bible Reference Library*
BEATAJ	*Beiträge zur Erforschung des Alten Testaments und des antiken Judentum*
BJS	*Brown Judaic Studies*
BKAT	*Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament.* Edited by M. Noth and H. W. Wolff
BWANT	*Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten (und Neuen) Testament*
BZAW	*Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentlische Wissenschaft*
CBET	*Contributions to Biblical Exegesis & Theology*
CBR	*Currents in Biblical Research*
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CBQMS	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series*
EvT	*Evangelische Theologie*
FAT	*Forschungen zum Alten Testament*
FOTL	*Forms of the Old Testament Literature*
FRLANT	*Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*
HAR	*Harvard Annual Review*
HAT	*Handbuch zum Alten Testament*
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HeBAI	*Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel*
HSM	*Harvard Semitic Monographs*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JSOT	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*
JSOTSup	*Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplement*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KD	*Kerygma und Dogma*
LHBOTS	*Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies*
LNTS	*Library of New Testament Studies*
LS	*Louvain Studies*
NCB	*New Century Bible*
NICOT	*New International Bible Commentary on the Old Testament*
OBO	*Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*
OBT	*Overtures to Biblical Theology*
OIS	*Oriental Institute Seminars*
OR	*Orientalia*
OTL	*Old Testament Library*

OTS	*Old Testament Studies*
OtSt	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
RevQ	*Revue de Qumran*
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
SBLDS	*Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series*
SBLSP	*Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*
STDJ	*Studies on the Texts of the Desert of Judah*
SJOT	*Scandinavian Journal of Theology*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Edited by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromily, and D. E. Green. 8 vols. (Grand Rapids, 1974)
THAT	*Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament.* Edited by E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. 2 vols. Stuttgart, 1971–1976
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
USQR	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review*
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VTSup	*Vetus Testamentum Supplements*
WBC	*Word Biblical Commentary*
WMANT	*Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament*
WUNT	*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZDPV	*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

I. The God of Prayer:
"I Am Not a Human Being"

1. Isaiah 45: God's "I Am," Israel's "You Are"

The *locus classicus* of the expression *Deus absconditus* "the hidden God ," is Isaiah 45:15: "Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior" (NRSV). At least since the time of the Reformation, this verse has been adapted in both Jewish and Christian communities for a variety of theological assertions about God's hiddenness. Blaise Pascal observed that God is always *Deus absconditus*, hence the proposition set forth in his *Pensees*: "any religion which does not affirm that God is hidden is not true."[1] Martin Buber suggests that the Old Testament assertion of God as a self-concealing God invites people of faith to reflect positively on the apparent "eclipse of God" in the modern world.[2] In familiar fashion, Kornelis Miskotte sees in Isa 45:15 a positive rejoinder to an overly tragic nihilism. To declare the hiddenness of God, he argues, is to offer a confession of faith in the God who surrounds us with the "presence of an absence."[3] For Samuel Terrien, God's "presence-in-absence," or as he so elegantly puts it, God's "elusive presence," is the central theological assertion of both Old and New Testaments.[4] And to this list, we would be remiss if we did not add the name of Karl Barth, for clearly his assertion that all true knowledge of God begins with the knowledge of God's hiddenness remains an influential argument in contemporary theological discourse.[5]

Typical of much of this discussion, however, has been a tendency to isolate Isa 45:15 from its biblical context and to relocate it within various theological or religious systems of thought.[6] Pascal, for example, appropriated this one verse,

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[1] B. Pascal, *Pensees* (New York: Penguin Classics, 1996), 103, no. 242.

[2] M. Buber, *Eclipse of God: Studies in the Relation Between Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Harper, 1957), 66.

[3] K. Miskotte, *When the Gods Are Silent* (London: Collins, 1967), 51.

[4] S. Terrien, *The Elusive Presence: Towards a New Biblical Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), xxvii, 6.

[5] K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 183. Barth is quoted favorably by a host of others, e. g., G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology,* Volume II (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 377.

[6] R. Carroll has recently addressed this issue in a general way in his book *The Bible As a Problem for Christianity* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1991). In a chapter titled "God the Hidden Problematic" Carroll explores how the hiddenness of God theme is a problem for theology (53–61). It is fair to say that biblical writers were aware that God's presence was not necessarily an unproblematic matter. Indeed, the metaphor of divine hiddenness, though perhaps only a counter-theme or a subtext in the Hebrew Bible, is nevertheless, persistent and recurring. And it is precisely this counter-witness to who and how God is that is problematic for the effort to fit the Bible neatly into creeds, confessions, and theological systems of thinking. Although I do

with no commentary, as a proposition of evangelical Christian theology (by way of Jansenism). For him the basis of God's hiddenness had little or nothing to do with Isaiah or the exile. It derived instead from the Augustinian notion of humanity's total depravity. God is hidden because sin has separated humankind from God. Religion's task is to teach that God hides from those who sin and is revealed to those who seek God. Any religion that forsakes this assertion and its instruction is, therefore, not true. Barth also appropriates this text into a Christian theological system, again with little attention to its context in Isaiah. In Isaiah the issue to be resolved is whether verse 15 is a continuation of the confession of the nations (begun in verse 14), or a reflection of the prophet on the mystery involved in such a confession, or, as I shall argue, a confession/assertion of the Israelites themselves. Of these options there is no creditable way to see Isa 45:15 as an announcement by the deity. Yet, in a real sense, this is the gist of what Barth seems to be saying. All true know ledge of God begins with knowledge of God's hiddenness; i. e., hiddenness is part of a divine revelatory plan designed to lead to faith in God.

What I propose to do here is to reexamine Isa 45:15 within its biblical context. I do so not to remove the Hebraic witness to God's hiddenness from theological discussion, but rather to restore to the theological discourse something of both the surprise and the anguish that seem to me to inform this biblical assertion. I begin with an overview of the structure and primary rhetorical features of Isa 44:24–45:25. I will then attempt to clarify the assertion that God hides himself within the context of this particular literary unit, and then within the larger context of the metaphor of divine hiddenness in the Book of Isaiah and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible.

I. Isaiah 44:24–45:25: God's (Modified) Resume

The text presents three reasonably distinct divine speeches (44:24–45:7; 45:9–13; and 45:20–25), addressed respectively to Cyrus, Israel, and the nations. Only in 45:14–19 is the identity of the speaker less clear. And even here, the standard formula *kōh ʾāmar yhwh* identifies God as speaker in v. 14 and in vv. 18–19. The problem lies in vv. 15–17, verses which I will address in more detail in the pages to follow.

The general theme of all of the speeches is the uniqueness of God, especially as manifest in God's decision to call Cyrus as the agent of Israel's deliverance

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not share Carroll's general skepticism with respect to the Bible's importance for the community of faith, I do think he is right to call attention to ways in which theology (as practiced both by biblical scholars and theologians) often co-opts biblical texts for its own purposes. Isaiah 45:15 is but one case in point.

from Babylon. The entire unit has the appearance of a quasi-dialogue between God, on the one hand, and the nations and Israel, on the other. In the first speech (44:24–45:7), God speaks of God's unlimited capacities as Creator of the world and of all its inhabitants, including Cyrus. In this speech, divine claims extend to the farthest dimensions imaginable – the creation of both weal (*šālom*) and woe (*rāʿ*; 45:7), following which God summons heaven and earth to a response of praise (45:8). In a second speech, God refutes those who would contend with the Creator of the world (45:9–13), and then announces that the nations will make the appropriate response concerning the superiority of God (45:14, [16, 17]). And finally, the unit concludes with a trial speech (45:20–25) in which God summons both the nations and Israel to acknowledge the divine superiority.

Throughout this unit the most striking rhetorical feature of the divine speeches is the repeated use of the self-predication formula "I am YHWH / I am God" (10x: *ʾănî / ʾănōkî yhwh*, 44:24; 45:3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 18, 19, 21, 22). This self-asseveration introduces and sustains a rather lengthy presentation of God's resume. The rhetorical purpose of these "I am" declarations is to establish God's relationship with humanity and to elicit from Israel (and the nations) the affirmative response, "You are." In this unit, heaven and earth respond to God affirmatively (45:8); the nations are presented as responding affirmatively (45:14); but the only direct "You are" response is in verse 15. I submit that this is Israel's response to God 's self-presentation, albeit a response that even God finds it necessary to examine and address.

1. *Isaiah 44:24–45:7*. Against the backdrop of these general comments, I turn now to the individual components within this literary unit. Although it is common to distinguish 44:24–28 and 45:1–7 as two independent units, the first addressed to Israel, the second ostensibly addressed to Cyrus, a common divine asseveration links these verses together: 44:24: "I am the LORD who makes all" (*ʾănōkî yhwh ʿōśeh kōl*); 45:7: "I am the LORD who makes all these things" (*ʾănî yhwh ʿōśeh ʾēlleh*). As a rhetorical unit, these verses assert God's unparalleled superiority, both in heaven and earth. Whether stretching out the heavens (44:24) or controlling the mission of Cyrus on earth (44:28), God's actions on behalf of Israel attest that YHWH and YHWH alone is God (cf. 45:5,6: *ʾănî yhwh wĕʾên ʿōd)*.

Two rhetorical features buttress this assertion: 1) the repeated use of the asseverative formula "I am YHWH" (5x: 44:24; 45:3,5,6,7), a formula that functions to establish an intimate I-Thou relationship between God and humankind;[7] and 2) the use of a chain of bi-polar contrasts that asserts that God's superiority ex-

[7] Cf. Y. Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion. A Study of Isaiah 40–48* (Bonn: Linguistica Biblica, 1981), 183; T. Collins, *Line-Forms in Hebrew Poetry* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), 248. Collins includes the *ʾănî yhwh* formula as an important element within "semantic sets," i. e., lines with more or less identical structuring and ordering that carry virtually the same meaning (cf. 240).

tends to the farthest boundaries imaginable, and even beyond: v. 6: east-west (*mizrah,* literally, "the place of sunrise,", *maʿărābâ,* literally, "from its setting place"); v. 7a: "light-darkness" (*ʾôr-ḥōšek*); and v. 7b: "weal-woe" (*šālôm-rāʿ*).

This last pair of opposites extends to the limits the claim that all things belong to God. In this bald assertion that God creates both good and evil, God's self-predication goes further than anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible.[8] What kind of God is this, one might be expected to ask, who can do all these things, raise up a foreigner like Cyrus, create both light and darkness, both good and evil? In this connection, Westermann notes wryly: "It is hard to see why this verse does not bother commentators more than it seems to do."[9]

2. *Isaiah 45:8.* 45:8 represents a hymnic interlude, comparable to that which precedes the Cyrus oracle in 44:23. It is a summons for heaven and earth to respond to God's self-assertions by letting "righteousness" (*ṣedeq,*2x) and "salvation" (*yešaʿ*) rain down and spring up among them. Moreover, God summons forth this response with divine imperative ("Shower, O heavens;" *harʿîpû šāmayim*). Heaven and earth are addressed as passive and obedient respondents to God's initiatives.

To this point in the rhetorical unit, God has declared decisively "I am God ," in heaven as on earth, and in matters of good and evil "there is no other beside me" (45:5,6). And God has summoned forth praise as the desired response to divine initiatives. In the dialogue between God and creation, all is in order. God is in full control, not only of the farthest dimensions of divine activity, but also of the response of praise that is expected from creation.

3. *Isaiah 45:9–13.* If heaven and earth acquiesce in glad praise to God's self-declarations of superiority, others do not comply as readily. Verses 9–13 constitute the only incentive in Deutero-Isaiah.[10] The object of concern is those who rebel (*rāb*) against their Maker (*yōṣrô*; cf. 44:24) by questioning divine initiatives. Although, the identity of the addressees is uncertain, I am inclined to side with those scholars who see Israel as the intended audience.[11]

Following two expressions of woe (*hôy*; vv. 9,10), God's speech turns once again to rhetorical questioning (v. 11: "Will you question me … command me …;" cf. 44:24: "Who is with me?"). As there is no adequate response to these implicit charges, God returns to the same asseverative style of asserting control over all creation (*kol* [2x]; vv. 12,13; cf. 44:24; 45:7): earth and humankind, the heavens and all their hosts. The triple repetition of the first person pronoun in

[8] C. Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 161–162.

[9] Ibid., 161.

[10] Cf. J. Muilenburg, "Isaiah 40–66," *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 5, ed., G.A. Buttrick, et al. (New York: Abingdon, 1956), 526.

[11] Muilenburg, "Isaiah 40–66," 526; C. Stuhlmueller, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1970), 204; R. Melugin, *The Formation of Isaiah 40–55* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 121.

verses 12–13 (*ʾănî / ʾănôkî*) offers a good example of anaphora, and once again puts the rhetorical emphasis on God's intended "I–Thou" relationship with the created order.[12]

4. *Isaiah 45:14–19*. These verses clearly constitute the most difficult part of Isaiah 45, and a wide range of form-critical assessments have been offered.[13] In my view, verses 14–19 constitute a pivotal unit, framed at the beginning and the end with the assertion that YHWH and YHWH alone is God. In verse 14 the assertion is placed on the lips of the nations who come to Israel in order to acknowledge that "God is with you alone, and *there is no other* (*wĕʾên ʿôd*); in verse 18 the assertion is once more in the form of divine self-declaration: "I am the LORD, and *there is no other* (*wĕʾên ʿōd*). This assertion serves both to recall the previous addresses in which God has announced (44:24–45:7) and defended (45:9–13) divine claims to superiority, and to prepare for the trial speech that follows in verses 29–25. The trial speech, then, serves as the logical climax of God's claims to superiority in verse 18 (cf. 45:21: *hălôʾ ʾănî yhwh wĕʾên ʿōd*; 45:22: *kî ʾănî ʾēl wĕʾên ʿōd*).

The critical issues to be resolved occur in verses 15–17. Whereas verses 14 and 18 f, are clearly identified as divine speech (*kōh ʾāmar yhwh*), verses 15–17 are more ambiguous. Verse 16 consists of third person plural verbs that appear to continue the divine speech begun in verse 14 with reference to the nations, although the change from imperfect to perfect verbs may suggest a different time framework.[14] Verse 17 uses a passive verb to speak of Israel's salvation by God (*nôšaʿ*) and second person plural verbs that address Israel directly. The speaker in verse 17 is ambiguous. Some suggest the prophet; others see this as a continuation of the divine speech in verses 14 and 16. The latter option strikes me as more likely, although for the purpose of this investigation a decision one way or the other is not crucial.

Verse 15 is the crux of the unit, for here the occurrence of the second person pronoun *ʾattâ*, "you," suggests a shift in both speaker and addressee. Two proposals have generally controlled the explanation of this shift. First, Duhm's proposal to emend *ʾattâ* to *ʾittāk*, "with you ," has drawn considerable support from those who interpret verse 15 as a continuation of God's announcement of the nations' confession in verse 14. By this interpretation, the nations will come to Israel and declare "Surely, God is with you, and there is no other…" (v. 14), and

[12] Cf. Gitay, *Prophecy and Persuasion*, 177.

[13] Some find here two distinct oracles: vv. 14–17, addressed to Zion; vv. 18–20, addressed to the nations, e. g., Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 168–171; A. Schoors, *I am God your Saviour: A Form Critical Study of the Main Genres in Is. XL-LV* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 30. Others incorporate vv. 14–19 into vv. 20–25 as a part of an extended trial speech addressed to the nations, e. g., A. Wilson, *The Nations in Deutero-Isaiah. A Study on Composition and Structure* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1986), 88–113.

[14] Cf. M. Dijkstra, "Zur Deutung von Jesaja 45:15 ff," ZAW 89 (1977), 216.

"Surely with you God is a hidden God …" (v. 15).[15] The difficulty with this proposal is that there is no textual or semantic justification for the emendation, other than the assumption that verse 15 is better understood as a continuation of verse 14.

A second approach has been to retain the text as is, and to interpret the speaker of the pronoun "you" to be either the prophet himself, or an anonymous and subsequent reader of the Cyrus oracle who, as Westermann puts it, offers an "Amen gloss" in affirmation of God's mysterious ways.[16] Although this latter approach has the advantage of taking the text more seriously, there is nothing to suggest that we are dealing with a conscious gloss here, and no compelling reason to see this as a kind of theological reflection of the prophet on God's mysterious ways.

The structure of Isaiah 44:24 ff. invites us, I believe, to see verse 15 as Israel's own response to God's repeated self-presentations in the preceding verses. The asseverative style of divine speech functions as rhetoric of persuasion. It works at securing a public recognition of God's supremacy, as the responses offered by heaven and earth (45:8) and the nations (45:14) confirm. But as Gitay has seen, the concern of Deutero-Isaiah is not so much with the public's recognition of God, as with Israel's own recognition of God.[17] God's "I am" declarations address Israel and seek to persuade Israel that YHWH is fully capable of being God in exile. In exile both YHWH and Babylon are making claims for themselves (cf. Isa 47:8), claims that are mutually exclusive. Israel must decide between them. In this connection, it is instructive to note that here in verse 15, the text records the only "You are" response from Israel to God in the whole of Deutero-Isaiah.[18] The critical interpretive question then, in my view, is: What is the substance of Israel's response to God?

Several poetic and stylistic features in verse 15 deserve attention. The adverb *ʾākēn* is contrastive rather than asseverative, and functions to restrict or qualify what has immediately preceded. That is, in contrast to the nations' confession that God is uniquely with Israel, Israel responds here with a statement that begins with something like the words, "Yes, but …."[19] The second word in the verse, the pronoun *ʾattâ*, directs Israel's qualifying assertion to God: "Yes, but you (God) …." The deliberate use of this pronoun serves as a structural signal calling attention to God as the subject of this address (i. e. the one to whom the address is

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[15] Cf. B. Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaia* (Handkommentar zum Alten Testament; Second edition; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902), 311.

[16] Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, 170.

[17] Gitay, *Prophecy and Persu*asion, 191–192.

[18] Cf. P. Hamer. *Grace and Law in Second Isaiah: "I Am the Lord"* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellin, 1988), 68. Hamer, however, interprets this as a response from the prophet rather than the Israelite exiles (176, n. 176).

[19] Cf. B. Waltke, M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990, 670), who suggests that *ʾākēn* conveys "a sudden recognition in contrast to what was theretofore assumed."

directed). Moreover, with *ʾākēn, ʾattâ* at the beginning of the verse effectively disrupts the poetic line form.[20] There is clearly a parallelism at work in what follows, *ʾēl mistattēr* and *ʾĕlōhê yiśrāʾēl môšiaʿ* but with these two fronting words,[21] the line is unbalanced towards the beginning, a feature that further calls attention to the sudden shift in speaker and addressee that has occurred.

The parallelism in the two phrases *ʾēl mistattēr* and *ʾĕlōhê yiśrāʾēl môšîaʿ* is intriguing. The correspondence between *ʾēl* and *ʾĕlōhê* is clear enough. Perhaps this is an example of poetic intensification or seconding, with *ʾĕlōhê yiśrāʾēl* as a specification of the more generic term *ʾēl*.[22] But the use of *ʾēl* elsewhere in this unit, particularly in verse 21 where the divine assertion is that God is *ʾēl ṣaddîq ûmôšîaʿ* argues against making of this parallelism anything other than a straightforward semantic equivalence.

The more important issue concerns the linkage between *mistattēr* and *môšîaʿ*. What kind of parallelism is intended here? In terms of grammatical structure, two verbal forms are placed in association with each other, one a *hitpaʿel* participle, the other a *hipʿil* participle, here perhaps functioning as an "agent noun."[23] Both verbal roots are used in the Hebrew Bible with special reference to divine activity. *Sātar* is more common in the *hipʿil* stem, and in the collocation *histtîr pānîm*, it becomes the center of the language in the Hebrew Bible that is used to refer exclusively to God's hiddenness. Isaiah 45:15 represents the only occurrence of the root *sātar* in the *hitpaʿel* participial form with reference to God, although its meaning here cannot be very different than that which informs the collocation *histtîr pānîm*.[24] All references are assertions about divine hiddenness.

Yāšaʿ is also used in more than half of its occurrences in the *hipʿil* stem, some 33x times in participial form. In prophetic literature *hôšiaʿ* always occurs with God as the subject of the verbal action.[25] More than one-third of its occurrences in the prophets are in Deutero – Isaiah where the term *môšîaʿ* becomes a special title for God and conveys the sense that God, and God alone, is the "champion of justice" for the oppressed and downtrodden (cf. 43:3, 11; 45:15,21; 49:26; 60:16).[26]

In short, both *sātar* and *yāšaʿ* are special words in a vocabulary that is reserved almost exclusively for God. Their occurrence with reference to divine activity

[20] Cf. Collins, *Line Forms in Hebrew Poetry*, 235.

[21] Cf. P. D. Miller, "The Theological Significance of Poetry," in S. E. Balentine, J. Barton, eds., *Language, Bible, and Theology: Essays in Honour of James Barr* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 222–223.

[22] Cf. R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), 62–84; J. Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry: Parallelism and Its History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 51.

[23] J. Sawyer, "yšʿ," TDOT VI, 447.

[24] Three occurrences of the *hitpaʿel* participial *mistattēr* are used in a rather nondescript way with reference to David's hiding from Saul (1 Sam. 23:19 [= Ps. 54:2]; 1 Sam 26:1).

[25] For examples and discussion see Sawyer, "*yš*ʿ," 455–459; cf. P. E. Bonnard. *Le Second Isaïe* (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1972), 526–536.

[26] Cf. J. Sawyer, "What Was a Mošiaʿ," VT 15 (1965), 475–486.

is therefore not uncommon from either a grammatical standpoint or a lexical one. What is distinctive, however, is that Isa 45:15 is the only place in the Hebrew Bible where the two terms are used in the same verse with respect to divine activity. The critical issue, then, is not grammatical, but semantic: in what sense can God's hiding/hiddenness be parallel with God's saving/delivering? It is in the nature of parallelism to set up semantic relationships of both equivalency and contrast. Relationships of equivalency serve in the interest of "disambiguation," that is, they clarify the meaning of words or phrases through a variety of poetic means such as paraphrase, progression, or metaphor. Relationships of contrasts, on the other hand, create ambiguity, not disambiguity; they offer polysemic, often ambiguous, interpretations that provide alternate views of things. As A. Berlin has argued with considerable force, the mix of equivalence and contrast, sameness and difference, is at the heart of biblical parallelism.[27]

The result of the parallelism in Isa 45:15 is a complex parataxis which brings into conjunction assertions of both equivalence (*ʾēl / ʾĕlōhê yiśrāʾēl* and contrast (*mistattēr / môšîa*ʿ). There are no syntactical indicators to suggest that one assertion is subordinate to the other. The two verbal actions, hiding and saving, are joined in asserting a paradox of divine activity: God is both hidden from Israel and saving Israel. The language is assertive without being explanatory. It declares, but does not clarify. Of such poetic speech, Berlin comments that "The lines, by virtue of their contiguity, are perceived as connected, while the exact relationship between them is left unspecified."[28] The only thing that is clear in this parataxis is that the assertion is completed or closed only with the second statement. The two statements of God's hiding and God's saving, together, comprise the one assertion.

Coupled with the contrastive adverb *ʾākēn*, Israel's assertion both responds positively to God's self-declarations in preceding verses, and at the same time, asserts that God is hidden in ways that confound Israel's expectations. On the one hand, Israel joins with creation (45:8) and the nations (45:14) in recognizing God 's unparalleled superiority in heaven and on earth. On the other, whereas God effectively controls the responses of creation and the nations by placing the words of affirmation on their lips, Israel's assertion is not so managed. Israel speaks for itself. As previously noted, it is the only occasion in Deutero-Isaiah where Israel addresses God directly with the second person pronoun, "You, O Lord."

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[27] A. Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 96–99; cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*; Kugel, *The Idea of Biblical Poetry*. For examples of "deliberate ambiguity" see P. Raabe, "Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter," JBL 116 (1991), 213–227.

[28] Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism,* 6. See further L. A. Schökel (*A Manual of Hebrew Poetics* [Rome: Editrice Pontifico Instituto Bíblico, 1988], 91–94, 131), who cites Isa 45:15 as an example of "polarized expression."

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