

שָׂאֵר יְשׁוּב

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In שָׂאֵר יְשׁוּב, the name that Isaiah bestowed upon one of his children (Isa. 7 3 cf. 10 21 22), is found the only possible expression of the thought of a return of exiles that may legitimately be credited to the prophet himself. The only other passages in Isa. chaps. 1-39 containing the thought are 11 11 12 14 12, and 35 10. These are assigned to later hands by practically all scholars.¹ This fact seems to call for a careful consideration of the term שָׂאֵר יְשׁוּב. Is it probable that Isaiah confined his proclamation of so important a message as that of a return to the incorporation of it in the name of his boy? It would seem as though such a doctrine would need some elaboration and elucidation to make it intelligible to Isaiah's contemporaries. If this expectation formed part of his faith, he surely would have given it a relatively large place in his preaching, and it is hardly conceivable that it should have disappeared entirely from the written record of his career save as it may appear in שָׂאֵר יְשׁוּב. Nor had any of Isaiah's predecessors preached upon the return of exiles.²

The idea of a „remnant“ on the other hand, was in the air. Tiglath-pileser IV had made large use of the old Assyrian policy of the deportation of conquered tribes. These deportations practically always involved the leaving of a „remnant“ of the native population in the conquered territory. Amos had preached to the effect that Northern Israel was soon to be reduced to a mere handful (cf. Am. 3 12 5 3 15 and his „remnant of the Philistines“ in 1 8). This conception of a remnant as those who escape from destruction and deportation and so remain in their own land finds not infrequent expression from Isaiah's own lips.

¹ For example, by such careful and cautious workers as DRIVER, KITTEL, KÖNIG, STEUERNAGEL, G. A. SMITH, SKINNER, and G. B. GRAY.

² Hos. 11 9-11 is quite generally treated as foreign to Hosea's prophecies; so e. g. W. R. HARPER, R. SMEND, VOLZ, NOWACK, MARTI, GRIMM.

Isaiah's thought clearly embraces those who are to be left behind in the land, not those who are to be deported; see 1 9 5 13 6 12 13 7 22 14 30; cf. also the clearly late passages, 4 3 10 20 28 5 37 432. There is not a single passage that can with any plausibility be assigned to Isaiah, aside from 7 3 and 10 21 22, in which the term „remnant“ denotes that portion of a people which has gone into exile. Hence the thought of a remnant's return becomes harder to understand as coming from Isaiah without full and forceful exposition.

Seeing the practical impossibility of interpreting שאָר יִשׁוּב as „a remnant (of exiles) will return from exile“, modern scholars almost to a man assign another meaning to the phrase, making it yield „a remnant will repent.“¹ But this seems only one degree less difficult than the ordinary sense of the words. In the first place, it places upon שאָר a spiritual significance which Isaiah nowhere else assigns to it. It involves a doctrine of the elect for which Isaiah cannot rightly be held responsible. Isaiah's „remnant“ is never a group of spiritually superior people, but always that fragment of the nation which has survived destruction; see 1 9 14 30. The only passage, aside from שאָר יִשׁוּב, in which even the faint beginnings of such an idea might be found is 8 16. GRAY, who does find the spiritual remnant in 8 16 frankly qualifies his statement with this significant proviso, „if the doubtful and ambiguous v. 16 will bear the weight of the conclusion“ (p. 155). Here too, as before, it seems very unlikely that Isaiah's teaching regarding a spiritual remnant should have been so little emphasized.

If the use of שאָר in a spiritual sense by Isaiah is doubtful, the use of יִשׁוּב as meaning „repent“ is quite as much, if not more so. The only passages in Isaiah, aside from שאָר יִשׁוּב where the meaning „repent“ is at all permissible for the root שׁוּב are 1 27 6 10 and 30 15. The text of 1 27 is dubious, 6 and 5 having וְשָׁבְתֶינָה instead of וְשָׁבְתֶינָה which is at best a very vague way of saying „her penitent ones.“ Furthermore, 1 27 is denied to Isaiah by his best interpreters.² In 6 10, the phrase in question is, according to MT, וְשָׁב וְרָפָא לוֹ. This should almost certainly be read וְשָׁב וְנָגַד. As DUHM has rightly recognized, שָׁב is here not an independent verb, but is to be connected with the following רָפָא as supplementary to it (cf. 6 13), the meaning of the phrase being, „and it

¹ So e. g. DILLMANN, HACKMANN, DUHM, MITCHELL, WHITEHOUSE, GUTHE, GRAY.

² E. g. CHEYNE, DUHM, MARTI, GUTHE, WHITEHOUSE, BOX, HANS SCHMIDT, STEUERNAGEL, GRAY.

be healed again."¹ In Isaiah 30 15, the phrase is *בְּשׁוּבָה וְנַחַת תִּנְשָׁעוּן* which is ordinarily rendered, quite ambiguously, „by returning and rest shall you be saved.“ The idea of „repentance“ here seems wholly out of place. The passage describes the policy urged upon Judah at a critical juncture, when she was determined to enter into political conspiracy with Egypt and other states of Western Asia. Isaiah's policy was in direct opposition to this, viz: one of withdrawal from all political and military complications and of rest and trust in Yahweh himself. *שׁוּבָה* therefore seems to denote this withdrawal or turning away from the conspirators.²

In the genuine utterances of Isaiah, therefore, *שׁוּב* is not in any case clearly entitled to the meaning repent, unless it be in the phrase *שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב*. Nor is that meaning well attested by the writings of any prophet of that period. Hos. 3 5, even if a genuine oracle of Hosea's³, which is unlikely, may be rendered, „will again seek Yahweh, their God“. In any case, the meaning „repent“ is not required. In Hos. 11 5, it is a possible, though not a necessary meaning. „He will return (*יִשׁוּב*) to the land of Egypt, and Assyria will be his king, because they refused to turn (*לְשׁוּב*).“ The closing *לְשׁוּב* may mean „turn from the Baalim“ or „turn to Yahweh“; but neither of these is the same as „repent“.

We now come to the phrase *שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב* itself, as found in Isa. 7 3 and 10 21 22. We may dismiss 10 21 22 from consideration with a word. The passage 10 20-27 is assigned to a later writer by most interpreters.⁴ The grounds for this judgment have nothing to do with *שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב*. Indeed, this phrase is unanimously recognized as an „Isaianic“ element incorporated in the passage by the later writer. The use here made of the phrase can, of course, not be cited in support of Isaiah's interpretation of it. It shows only what the phrase was thought to mean by this late post-exilic writer.⁵ That meaning is crystal clear in v. 2, „a remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God.“ No

¹ So also MARTI, CHEYNE, (S. B. O. T.), WHITEHOUSE, BOX, GUTHE, CONDAMIN, GRAY, GLAZEBROOK, and H. P. SMITH (Religion of Israel, p. 150). The phrase is treated as a gloss by HANS SCHMIDT (Schriften des A. T.).

² So also DUHM, BROWN, DRIVER, BRIGGS (*Heb. Lex. s. v.*), MARTI, et al. GRÄTZ, CHEYNE and BOX change *בְּשׁוּבָה* to *בְּשִׁבָה*

³ See W. R. HARPER, ICC, *ad loc.*

⁴ e. g. HACKMANN, CHEYNE, GUTHE, DUHM, BOX, KITTEL, MARTI, WADE, STEURNAGEL, GRAY.

⁵ On the likelihood of a change in meaning with the progress of time, cf. KENNETT, *The Composition of the Book of Isaiah* (1910) p. 3.

matter how populous Israel may be, only a mere remnant will return. The rest who do not so return will perish by a devastating stroke of justice (v. 22).

The main question now remains; is that meaning „a remnant will return (to Yahweh)“ the natural and inevitable one for 73? It will be seen at once that שאר ישוב forms no part of the oracle in chap. 7. The boy bearing that name simply accompanies his father as the latter goes out to meet Ahaz in order to urge upon him the necessity of putting exclusive faith in Yahweh. We do not know the circumstances under which the name was given, and we have no immediate context for it that might furnish a guide to its meaning. The presence of the boy with the prophetic name was, however, in all probability not incidental or accidental, but for the purpose of enforcing the message of Isaiah. Consequently the sentiment of שאר ישוב would naturally be in accord with that of the message spoken by Isaiah to Ahaz. That message, comprised two main elements, viz: (1) that Ahaz should trust in Yahweh for deliverance from Ephraim and Syria, (2) that Ephraim and Syria were to be destroyed. In the abstract, it is possible that שאר ישוב, in the sense „a remnant will return (to Yahweh)“ i. e. repent, might connect with the first half of this message. But in this concrete case, it seems very unlikely that the thought of penitence should be so vaguely expressed here, especially when ישוב, used absolutely, gives expression to it at no other time on Isaiah's lips. Its connection with the second part of the message in this sense is, of course, still more improbable. The literal sense, „a remnant will return“ (from exile), would apply very well to the second part of the message *per se*. But Isaiah nowhere else contemplates return from exile for either Israel or Judah, as we have already noted. Hence it is hardly credible that he could have had it in mind here.¹

It seems difficult then, if not impossible, to account for שאר ישוב in Isaiah 73 in either of its more likely meanings. This has led me to contemplate the possibility that שאר ישוב may be an error for שאר ישב „a remnant will abide“. For this usage of ישב, see Mic. 53 Jo. 420 Ps. 95 125 1 Gen. 4924 1 Kings 221. The word שאר is in the

¹ H. P. SMITH, *Religion of Israel* (1914), p. 159, gives the phrase this significance: Only a remnant of Judah will survive the Syro-Ephraimitish war. But why should Isaiah have used the word ישוב to express the idea of survival? The army of Judah would not be called upon to leave the land of Judah, for the foe was at the door. Hence a „return“ would hardly be possible.

emphatic position and probably is equivalent to „only a remnant“. The „remnant“ referred to might be either Judah, considered as a surviving remnant of the Hebrew people as a whole¹; or it might be the fragment of Northern Israel and Syria left after the devastation by Assyria. Either of these meanings meets the demands of the context, since each involves (1) a message of destruction from the north, (2) an assurance of deliverance for Judah. It is true that this name שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב was probably given two or three years before the time of the oracles contained in chap. 7. But the political situation in Western Asia as it then stood was not essentially a new one. Influences had been at work towards an uprising against Assyria for a long time, and Isaiah's messages in chap. 7 were in all probability of one piece with his preaching and policy during the preceding years, from the time of the birth of שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב².

The reading of שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב as יִשׁוּב is not at all difficult or surprising. As a matter of fact יִשׁוּב is sometimes written defectively (i. e. יִשׁוּב) even in the Massoretic text; so in Ps. 14 64 Lam. 3 3 Zech. 6 1, and in many cases in which the defective writing is used before affixes, e. g. Lev. 25 10 Jos. 22 18 I Kings 9 6 Judg. 2 19 II Sam. 23 10 Hos. 14 8 Gen. 8 3 Jer. 34 16. Confronted by the characters שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב, an exilic or post-exilic reader or editor would most naturally, in the light of the national experience, interpret them as שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב. So long as a critical interpretation of prophecy was held in abeyance, that reading passed in the sense of „a remnant will return (from exile)“ without question. When criticism began its work, this meaning was recognized as most improbable and an attempt was made, in defense of the Massoretic text,

¹ So e. g. HACKMANN, MEINHOLD, GRAY.

² KENNETT, *Composition of the Book of Isaiah* (1910), p. 11, makes שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב mean „only a remnant of Judah will return from the war against Northern Israel which the house of David is so wantonly provoking.“ That is, according to KENNETT, Judah was still actuated by the spirit that led Amaziah to endeavor to free himself and his people from vassalage to the Northern Kingdom. To this end a league had been made with Hamath, which likewise dreaded Jeroboam's power; but in 739 Tiglathpileser came West and smote „Azri-Yahu of Ja'udi,“ who is to be identified with Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah, and his allies as disturbers of the peace. This was the *raison d'être* of the attack upon Judah by Ephraim and Syria in 735. This interpretation loses practically all plausibility when the identification of Azri-yahu and Azariah of Judah is seen to be exceedingly doubtful. The existence of a north Syrian land of Ja'udi is beyond question and the name Azri-yahu finds its parallel in the name of Yahu-bidi of Hamath. If such a purpose to attack Northern Israel could be demonstrated as existing in Judah about 740 B. C. the interpretation proposed by KENNETT would be most natural. But since Amaziah's unfortunate campaign almost seventy years had elapsed without any renewal of the effort for freedom. Why should such a movement have started up again at this particular time?

to interpret the phrase in some other sense than its natural one. But that attempt can hardly be called successful and the way is left open for textual criticism. CHEYNE, with his characteristic keenness, has recognized the unfitness of the name שׂאֵר יִשׁוּב on Isaiah's lips.¹ But his proposed substitute אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁמְעָאֵל involves too wide a departure from MT to make its acceptance possible. The reading here offered Shear-Jesheb, may at least furnish a refuge from Asshur-Ishmael.

¹ *The Two Religions of Israel* (1911), p. 313. Cf. his earlier reading in *Critica Biblica* (*ad loc.*) viz: אֲשֶׁר יִשׁוּב „Asshur will return.“