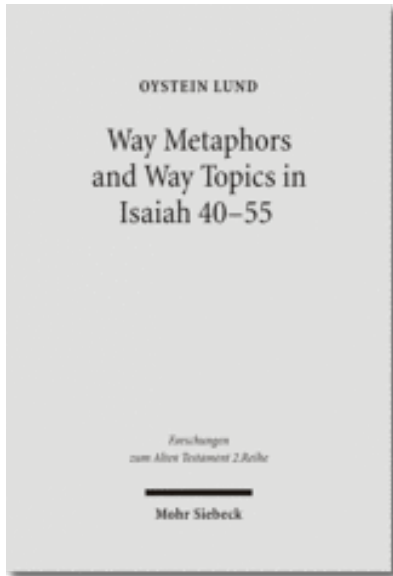


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Lund, Øystein

Way Metaphors and Way Topics in Isaiah 40-55

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James M. Kennedy
Baylor University
Waco, Texas

Lund's book is a carefully nuanced exploration of the metaphorical use of language deriving from fields of lexemes that denote "way" or "path" in Isa 40-55. Throughout the book he dialogues with scholars who see way metaphors in Isa 40-55 as deriving ultimately from traditions concerning the exodus and Israel's desert wanderings. He invites his readers to consider the metaphors as coming from a wider variety of domains. Lund concludes that texts in Isa 40-55 that portray Israel traveling through the desert in the wake of YHWH's acts of salvation do not advocate the imminence of a new exodus. Images of the desert overlaid with a road that YHWH reveals represents Israel as having to confront challenges that are systemic to human existence and therefore transcend allusions to the exodus. He configures these texts as exhibiting images drawn from the predictable kinds of dangers that any travelers going through a wilderness area would invariably encounter. Isaiah 43:1-11, for instance, conveys YHWH's promise to support Israel as the nation passes through waters and walks through fire. There are no reasons to see the wilderness wandering as the source of the metaphors in this text. Crossing dangerous waterways and progressing over dry and extremely hot terrain were, and are, perils for which desert wayfarers must be prepared. For further support, Lund appeals to a wide distribution of texts throughout the Hebrew Bible that depict the hazards and challenges of wilderness journeys and that are not integrally associated with the exodus and wilderness wandering traditions. Isaiah 40-55 thus builds its portrayal of YHWH as

Israel's divine leader and redeemer in terms that encourage the community to see its life as a journey through a dangerous landscape; YHWH knows the right way. The thematic interest that Isa 40–55 develops is not the arrival of a new exodus but the travails, challenges, and opportunities that Israel must engage in all places where Israelites might live. His reading is convincing.

At a terrestrial level, the metaphors for way allude to building ways or routes on which to travel as well as to the transformation of the semantic use of the same terms to refer to custom or manner. Similarly, at a cosmic level, Isa 40–55 establishes a sense of divine activity to provide a “way” for Israel in its distress; these chapters just as well underscore and consolidate terms for “way” to depict the essential rightness of YHWH's decisions or judgments. In a text as poetically rich as Isa 40–55, one would expect that the specific occurrences of metaphorical language drawn from any domain would interact to create new connotations and associations. Lund observes that the author of Isa 40–55 combines different meanings of the theologically central phrase *דרך יהוה* and to set this phrase into a larger system of signification. Thus, the call in Isa 40:3, “in the desert prepare the way of the Lord,” resists a simple literal rendering and, under the influence of occurrences in which the Lord's way evokes the sense of the Lord's customary mode of action, becomes a demand that Israel submit to the tutelage of the Lord and adjust its understanding of comprehensive of God's ways. Thus, Lund demonstrates that the so-called “prologue” of Isa 40:1–11 alerts the reader to the expansive and fluid character that terms for “way” will develop in Isa 40–55. When, therefore, Israel complains that the nation's ways are concealed from divine scrutiny (40:27), the Lord may properly respond by declaring that Israel has not followed the Lord's way. This is indeed a step forward in the interpretation of Isa 40–55.

Lund begins by discussing the variety of scholarly perspectives concerning texts in Isa 40–55 that contain terms generally denoting “way.” Lund summarizes scholarly opinions concerning how the words that denote a path to travel on become significant vehicles for metaphorical transformation. He notes that scholars have taken way metaphors in Isa 40–55 variously as alluding to no particular domain of traditions or as referring partly to conceptions of way in terms of ethical attitudes and acts or as a topographical feature—a road—that has Jerusalem as its destination. Scholars have taken the way metaphors as finding their thematic realization in a new exodus that will lead Israel from Babylon to a restored Judah. Lund depicts the way metaphors as significantly more complicated. They act at various levels of meaning. He thus asserts that his study “will seek to uncover several possible readings with the goal of presenting a breadth of alternative interpretations.” Lund then proceeds to isolate the semantic field of terms that deal with way or travel. Consequently, he aptly defines the lexemic parameters that determine his selection of passages to discuss.

Lund's work builds on the organic nature of the text as opposed to its atomization into discrete units, each of which are customarily read in a different historical context. Two examples can illustrate his approach. First, Lund observes that many scholars see Isa 42:24 as an addition that reflects a later Torah-piety and that the verse is part of a literary stratum that can be distinguished from the rest of Isa 40–55. Such a conclusion, he asserts, is without justification. After an examination of the verse's terminology, he concludes that Isa 42:24 adopts Israel's accusation that the nation's way or right is concealed from YHWH (40:27) and reconfigures it polemically to reinforce the divine word that it is Israel who does not know the way of the Lord. Second, each chapter contains a section in which Lund explores the interaction between how a particular text exhibits way metaphors and how the text relates to the wider textual world of Isa 40–55. By the time Lund's readers come to his discussion of Isa 55:6–13, the Lord's declaration of the inscrutability of the divine ways falls into place as the logical outcome of Israel being compelled to confess the wrongfulness of the nation's accusation that its way—custom, justice, or manner—is hidden from the Lord. Israel must learn to follow the way of the Lord and that the Lord's ways provide benefits that transcend Israel's capacity to comprehend.

Lund's contribution in this book is threefold. First, he presents a well-reasoned approach to how the metaphorical use of Hebrew words for "path" or "way" develop thematically in Isa 40–55. Lund refers to this as the "way-theme." Second, by reading the way metaphors as not necessarily drawing on the exodus and wilderness wanderings traditions, he convincingly proposes that Isa 40–55 is not thematically concerned with announcing a new exodus. He shows that Isa 40–55 does not neglect the needs of communities of faith that continue after the restoration period. The life of communities of faith is itself a journey. Third, his monograph serves as a case study for the exacting and patient methodological precision necessary for this kind of close reading. One of the guiding factors of Lund's study is that Isa 40–55 can be read as a unity apart from theoretical considerations of the material process of the text's origin. In Lund's perspective, the text of Isa 40–55 does not exhibit its way metaphors on the basis of simple associations with the major events of Israel's sacred history but employs a number of references simultaneously and cumulatively. The cumulative and simultaneous character of the way metaphors can make sense only if the interpreter explores them with the assumption that the relevant texts relate integrally to each other. To theorize about the compositional history of Isa 40–55 would divert Lund from his stated task.

Readers, such as the present reviewer, might resist Lund's restriction of analytical concern to Isa 40–55, but that does not render his book as having limited utility. It is a weakness, but not a determining one if scholars of Isaiah can adopt and adapt the contours of his approach to explore the use of way metaphors throughout all of its sixty-six chapters.