

THE MASTER'S UNIVERSITY  
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Passing Over the Bloody Bridegroom

ZACHARY URDANETA

There and Back Again: An Exodus Tale

FINN ERICKSON

The Servant of Yahweh: A New Moses

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## EDITORIAL

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First Peter 2:9 presents a beautiful summary of the identity and purpose of Christians. They are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God’s own possession. For that reason, they are to proclaim the excellencies of him who called them out of darkness and into his marvelous light. This description of the Christian’s purpose is consistent with the apostle Paul’s call for believers to do all things to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31), making it their aim to be pleasing to him (2 Cor 5:9). In every area of life, believers are compelled to offer praise to their Lord.

The Master’s University understands the Christian’s purpose, taking the general principle of glorifying God in all things and seeking to see it worked out in the realm of academics. The goal of education at this university goes beyond the grade received or even the knowledge accumulated, being rooted in the believer’s identity as a God-glorifier. Whether perusing Shakespearean tragedies or studying the data of an ordered universe, every discipline is to be a catalyst for worshipping the Author of our world and Savior of our souls. This is certainly the case within the School of Biblical Studies. Here, students are trained to dig deep into the riches of Scripture and then rightly handle the treasure they discover to build up the church. Their education is designed to equip them to work with excellence, reflecting and magnifying the excellence of their God.

*TMUJBS* desires to facilitate exceptional study of Scripture to the glory of God. Unlike many university journals, this one is student-initiated and student-driven. Every article was written by an undergraduate student at TMU and edited by student peers under the guidance of the university’s professors and staff.

The vision for this journal grew out of an upper-division elective course on the book of Isaiah. After being immersed in the beauty of the “prince of prophets,” students longed to share the excitement of what they had learned and to benefit from one another’s insights. This was especially true of the course’s research paper assignment. While it was easy enough to swap papers in an informal manner, the students desired a more organized collection of the papers. Therefore, with the encouragement of their professor, several students formed an editorial team, and this journal is the fruit of their efforts.

The inaugural issue of the journal is organized according to the canonical order of each article's subject. Naturally, this issue is largely composed of articles related to Isaiah, but it also includes articles written outside the course that inspired this endeavor. The goal for future issues is to represent a variety of subjects within the fields of biblical and theological studies. Each article is intended to demonstrate diligence in study as a commendation of the students and their professors. We hope to illustrate The Master's University's unshakable commitment to a hermeneutic of submission to Scripture, and we desire that this journal would become one more platform for the celebration of our Savior's excellencies. Our prayer is that it would inspire the reader to search out the depths of God's Word, follow wherever it leads, and dedicate his life, now and forever, to Christ and Scripture.

Shiloh Noorthoek and Julia Hildebrandt

## **PASSING OVER THE BLOODY BRIDEGROOM: EXODUS 4:24-26 IN ITS BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

Zachary Urdaneta<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

*Moses and Israel both embark on an exodus. The two exodus accounts turn on the hinge of a strange and graphic passage. In Exodus 4:24-26, Yahweh comes by night to put Moses to death for failing to circumcise his son. Despite difficult syntax, careful study reveals the biblical-theological significance of this narrative. The bloody circumcision of Moses's firstborn son causes Yahweh to leave Moses unharmed in a type of the Passover, foreshadowing the bloody sacrifices of the firstborn lambs that cause Yahweh to pass over the nation of Israel.*

Key words: circumcision, Exodus, Moses, covenant, blood, Passover

\* \* \* \* \*

The book of Exodus contains two accounts of salvation. The exodus of Israel receives the most attention, as God frees his people from slavery through miracles. Israel's exodus from Egypt, however, is actually the second exodus in the book. The first four chapters of Exodus focus on the exodus of Israel's leader, Moses. The Lord rescues Moses from Pharaoh so that Moses can rescue Israel from Pharaoh. Moses is threatened by Pharaoh, saved among the reeds of the Nile, sent out into the wilderness, and brought to "the mountain of God—Horeb," where Yahweh appears to him (Exod 2:3-10, 15; 3:1-6).<sup>2</sup> In a parallel fashion, Israel is threatened by Pharaoh, saved in the Sea of Reeds, sent out into the wilderness, and brought to Mount Horeb, where Yahweh appears to them. In the words of John Currid, "The structure casts the early life of Moses as a prototype and microcosm for the exodus event."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Translations of Scripture are the author's.

<sup>3</sup> Currid goes on to say, "The episodes of the life of Moses in Egypt, Midian, and Sinai model and prefigure the salient events in the life of the emerging nation of Israel." He cites Moses's slavery, water

The climax of Israel's exodus is the Passover, yet the almost-perfect paradigm set by Moses appears to lack the essential salvific event. Although it may not be obvious at first, Moses himself experienced a Passover. In fact, the Passover account in Exodus 11–12 is written in the pattern of Moses's Passover in his own exodus. Unfortunately, Exodus 4:24–26 is often overlooked, misinterpreted, and considered unconnected to the greater biblical-theological context of Exodus.<sup>4</sup> This paper will argue that Moses wrote his personal Passover in Exodus 4:24–26 to function as a paradigm for Israel's Passover.<sup>5</sup> After considering the narrative context, I will then translate and exegete this passage, analyzing it in its narrative and theological context. God completes the exodus of Moses with a dramatic shedding of blood, covering his covenant transgression and completing his identity as a member of Israel. Zipporah saves and receives her “bridegroom of blood” (4:25), marking the family's full membership in the covenant community. The circumcision of Gershom saves Moses from Yahweh in a Passover, allowing him to return to Egypt and lead Israel in the exodus through the greater Passover.

### The Context of Exodus 4:24–26

The context of the bloody bridegroom narrative can be viewed through three lenses: women, identity, and the covenant of circumcision. First, the salvation of Moses by women is a common thread throughout the opening chapters of Exodus, climaxing with Zipporah's intervention in 4:24–26. Second, Moses has a complex national identity, volleying between Hebrew, Egyptian, and Midianite. This narrative answers the question of his identity once and for all. Finally, circumcision—specifically its covenantal inauguration in Genesis 17—serves as the theological foundation for the bloody bridegroom text. His failure to circumcise his son constitutes a breaking of the covenant and excludes his participation in it. His obedience to the covenant command resolves this tension. The threads of salvation by women, identity, and circumcision in Genesis 17 and Exodus 1–3 are the foundation of the literary and thematic context of Exodus 4:24–26.

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salvation, escape to Midian, theophany, and hesitation as five points of contact between the exoduses of Moses and Israel (2:1–2, 3–10, 11–22; 3:1–22; 4:1–17). However, he notably does not reference Exodus 4:24–26, nor does he note a Passover connection between Moses and Israel. John D. Currid, “Exodus,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 99–100.

<sup>4</sup> Cornelis Houtman says Exodus 4:24–26 “is a passage causing exegetical headaches.” He further cites writers from antiquity and the New Testament period who ignored or softened the importance of the event (Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus*, vol. 1, Historical Commentary on the Old Testament [Kampen, NL: Kok, 1993], 432, 439).

Propp opens his renowned article, “‘The object of our inquiry is among the most controverted passages of Scripture.’ The cliché applies nowhere better than to Exod. iv 24–6, the so-called ‘bloody bridegroom’ story.” William H. Propp, “That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus iv 24–6),” *Vetus Testamentum* 43, no. 4 (October 1993), 495.

<sup>5</sup> The Passover and the Exodus itself are of course the biblical paradigms for redemption. James Hamilton writes that Moses “establishes the events of the exodus as a type, and later biblical authors show in their work that they have learned from Moses that the exodus is both an interpretive schema and a predictive paradigm.” James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns: How Old Testament Expectations Are Fulfilled in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 256.

## Women

In Exodus 1, Pharaoh commands the Hebrew midwives when delivering a baby boy, to “put him to death” (Exod 1:16). Shiphrah and Puah, presumably the head midwives, “feared God and they did not do according to what the king of Egypt had spoken to them, but let the boys live” (1:17).<sup>6</sup> The midwives’ pattern of obedience to Yahweh allows Moses to live, marking the first-time women save him (2:2). But when baby Moses can no longer be hidden, he is placed among the reeds of the Nile (בְּסוּף; 2:3), foreshadowing Israel passing through the Sea of Reeds (יַם־סוּף; 10:19; 13:18). His mother, the second woman in the book to rescue him, hides him for his safety as his sister Miriam stands by to watch (2:2-5). Then, the daughter of Pharaoh delivers Moses and his ark from the waters of the river and has “compassion upon him” (2:5-6). Miriam, likely fearing the death of her baby brother, intercedes, offering to bring a Hebrew woman to nurse the boy (2:7). In this way, the daughter of Pharaoh and the sister of Moses become the third and fourth women to rescue him. Yahweh uses the midwives, Moses’s mother, Pharaoh’s daughter, and Moses’s sister to save him from death.

The bloody bridegroom narrative is the capstone to this theme of salvation by women. Zipporah, Moses’s wife, saves him from the messenger of Yahweh who sought “to put him to death” (הָמִיתוֹ; 4:24). The *hiphil* infinitive construct form of מוֹת in 4:24 links back to the *hiphil we-qatal* form of מוֹת used by Pharaoh in 1:16 to form an inclusio. Moses is in the exact same danger in Exodus 4 as he was eighty years prior as a baby. Yahweh uses women to save Moses from death in Exodus 1–2, and he continues this pattern in 4:24-26. The exodus of Moses is bookended by his salvation from death by women.

## Identity

A crucial question in the exodus of Moses is his national identity. In Exodus 1:1–2:6, Moses is presented as a Hebrew boy who must escape the threat of Pharaoh through an exodus. His status as a Hebrew is affirmed by Pharaoh’s daughter as she says, “This is one of the Hebrew boys” (2:6; מִן־הָעִבְרִיִּים זֶה).<sup>7</sup> It is also confirmed by his descent from two parents of the tribe of Levi (2:1). After being nursed, Moses is adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter (2:10). Alexander states that the Egyptian princess’s act of naming “is her claim to Moses as her own son,”<sup>8</sup> resulting in a shift of Moses’s

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<sup>6</sup> For the argument that Shiphrah and Puah are the leaders of the midwives, see Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 76.

<sup>7</sup> The woman could have simply said that he was a יֶלֶד עִבְרִית (a Hebrew boy). The partitive מִן and singular זה emphasize that Moses is merely one out of many Hebrew boys, re-enforcing that he is identified as an Israelite. Stuart provides an interesting possible explanation of how Pharaoh’s daughter knew Moses was a Hebrew baby boy: “Her recognition that Moses was a Hebrew boy . . . probably was predicated on four things at least: the general physical differences between Hebrews and Egyptians, the type of baby clothes used, the fact that her discovery occurred in an Israelite settlement area, and the general situation (the need to hide Israelite baby boys but not Egyptian baby boys).” Ibid., 91.

<sup>8</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 62.



identity. With regards to his upbringing, Moses is an Egyptian, which is affirmed by the Midianite shepherdess identifying him as such (2:19).

Years after his adoption, Moses goes out “to his brothers” and sees “an Egyptian striking a Hebrew, one of his brothers” (Exod 2:11). This verse portrays Moses as Hebrew, not Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Moses kills the Egyptian, and after Pharaoh hears of the murder, he flees to the wilderness (2:12-15). Yet while Moses disassociates himself from the Egyptians, he is not yet fully Hebrew, for he marries Zipporah the Midianitess and lives with her family (2:15-22). Midian and his offspring were the descendants of Abraham and Keturah (Gen 25:1-2), not Isaac, the child of promise. So, for forty years, Moses dwells with those who are ethnically outside the Abrahamic covenant.

However, Moses does not become a Midianite, and in Exodus 3, God establishes his identity once and for all, saying, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exod 3:6). Moses will not serve the Egyptian gods, but the God of the Abrahamic covenant. Just as Yahweh appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so his messenger appeared to Moses (3:3),<sup>10</sup> placing a special calling on Moses’s life as with the patriarchs.<sup>11</sup> Moses may be an Egyptian by adoption and a Midianite by marriage, but he is first and foremost a Hebrew. Having identified Moses as a member of the covenant community, Yahweh then commissions Moses to go and lead his people in the exodus. Yet there is one aspect of Moses’s Hebrew status that is still in question, for those who true members of the covenant must receive its sign.

### Circumcision

When Moses sees the burning bush, Yahweh calls him to participate in the Abrahamic covenant and take part in the fulfillment of his promise to bring his people back to the land of Canaan (Gen 15:16; Exod 3:6). Yet, Moses has been living first as an Egyptian and then as a Midianite. He is married to Zipporah with whom he has two sons, Gershom and Eliezer. Therefore, Moses and his family must become full members of the covenant community. Resolving to obey God, he “took his wife and his sons and he mounted them upon the donkey, and he returned to the land of Egypt” (Exod 4:20). However, as the bloody bridegroom narrative shows in 4:24-26, Moses’s son has not yet been circumcised.

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 95. See also Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974), 30.

<sup>10</sup> The ordinary translation of מַלְאָךְ and ἄγγελος is “angel.” I have chosen the more generic term “messenger” to translate the words in order to reflect the broad usage of this term in the Old Testament. The texts referring to the messenger of the Lord emphasize his status as Yahweh’s representative, or messenger, not his spiritual or possible angelic character.

<sup>11</sup> God opens his call to Moses with the two-fold repetition of his name, “Moses, Moses” (Exod 3:4), as he called Abraham (Gen 22:11) and Jacob (Gen 46:2). Moses responds to God’s call with “Here I am” (הִנְנִי; Exod 3:4) and so do Abraham (הִנְנִי; Gen 22:11) and Jacob (הִנְנִי; Gen 46:2). Although Isaac is never greeted with his repeated name and does not respond with “Here I am,” Genesis makes it clear that the line flows from Abraham, through him, to Jacob. God affirms Isaac’s status and role in the covenantal plans in Genesis 26:24. The similar callings of Moses, Abraham, and Jacob are part of a larger thread tying Abraham and Jacob to the story of the Exodus. Hamilton rightly argues that Moses “wrote the narratives so that the exodus pattern is typified in the lives of Abraham and Jacob, then the exodus itself happened when God brought Israel out of Egypt, and Moses indicated that his audience could expect God to continue to act in the same way in the future.” Hamilton, *Typology*, 256.

God told Abraham, “Walk before me and be blameless, so that I may confirm my covenant between me and you, and so that I may multiply you with great excess” (Gen 17:1-2). Alexander argues from the Hebrew syntax that this is a purpose-result clause: “These must be obeyed before the covenant will be established. The Lord will ratify the covenant only if Abraham walks before God and is blameless.”<sup>12</sup> Abraham is called to obey in order to receive the covenant blessings. This is expanded in 17:9, when “God said to Abraham, ‘As for you, you shall keep (שמר) my covenant, you and your seed after you throughout their generations.’” For Abraham and his seed, this obedience is in the form of circumcision.

To participate in the Abrahamic covenant, obedience is required by God, who said to Abraham, “This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised . . . every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations” (Gen 17:10, 12). In the words of Samuel Renihan, “This is a demand for strict obedience from Abraham and his descendants. The way in which they will keep the covenant is the circumcision of all males on the eighth day after their birth.”<sup>13</sup> Circumcision is necessary for participation in the covenant. The penalty for breaking the covenant by not cutting off the foreskin is to be cut off from the covenant itself. God says to Abraham that “an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people. He has broken my covenant” (Gen 17:14). Hamilton puts it well, “Here is the choice: be cut or be cut off.”<sup>14</sup> This cutting off could refer to excommunication from the covenant community or to execution.<sup>15</sup> In the nation of Israel, the community would have performed the excommunication or execution to cut off the uncircumcised. However, in Genesis 17:14, the text does not say who will do the cutting off or how they will do it before the establishment of Israel. All the reader knows is that God will judge the uncircumcised by cutting them off. Circumcision is the necessary step of obedience to participate in the covenant community. This is the step of obedience that Moses failed to take with his son.

Moses has been saved from death by women to enter his new identity as a Hebrew and a member of the Abrahamic covenant. However, in order to be a member of the community, Moses and his household must be circumcised. Moses travels to Egypt, but he is traveling with his uncircumcised son. Unlike Abraham, he did not express faith in the covenant promises of God by circumcising his son. He cannot be a member of the community, so he must be cut off. To complete the exodus, Moses needs a Passover.

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<sup>12</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022), 74. He further notes, “Whereas the promissory covenant of Genesis 15 is unconditional, the establishment or ratification of the covenant of circumcision depends on Abraham’s continuing obedience to God” (73).

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ, His Covenant, and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2020), 92. For an exposition of the covenant of circumcision as a covenant of works and its correlation to the Mosaic covenant, see Renihan, 87–101.

<sup>14</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 249.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

## Exegesis of Exodus 4:24-26

וַיְהִי בַדֶּרֶךְ בַּמֶּלֶךְ וַיִּפְגְּשֵׁהוּ יְהוָה וַיִּבְקֶשׁ הָמִיתוֹ 4:24

“And it came to pass on the way, at the lodging-place, that Yahweh met him and sought to put him to death.”

The text of Exodus 4:24 opens with the macro-syntactical marker וַיְהִי (“and it came to pass”),<sup>16</sup> frequently used in Hebrew narrative as a transition device. How does this opening verb mark a narrative change? The structure of Exodus 3:1–4:17 begins with the messenger of Yahweh appearing to Moses and conversing with him. Following this, there are several shifts in the narrative in 4:18–31. In 4:18–19, Moses receives permission from Jethro and a command from Yahweh to return to Egypt. A summary statement is then given in 4:20, as “Moses took his wife and his sons and he mounted them upon the donkey and he returned to the land of Egypt, and Moses took the staff of God in his hand.” As Moses and his family begin their travel, Yahweh gives him instructions in 4:21–23. The purpose of Moses’s journey is to perform the wonders that God has given him (4:21). The purpose of the wonders is to create an opportunity for Yahweh to harden Pharaoh’s heart, which will result in the death of his firstborn (4:23). The outcome of this return to Egypt is Yahweh taking revenge for his firstborn son—Israel—by killing Pharaoh’s firstborn. The return narrative is marked by a summary statement (4:20), a mission statement (4:21–23), a meeting with Yahweh (4:24–26), a meeting with Aaron (4:27–28), and the belief of Israel (4:29–31).

## Return Narrative

- A. Summary Statement: Moses returned to Egypt (4:20)
- B. Mission Statement: Death of the firstborn (4:21–23)
- C. Meeting (פגש) with Yahweh: The bloody bridegroom (4:24–26)
- D. Meeting (פגש) with Aaron: Words and signs (4:27–28)
- E. Belief of Israel: Return completed (4:29–31)

The three middle units, i.e., the mission statement, the meeting with Yahweh, and the meeting with Aaron, all prepare Moses to return to Egypt. This first verb of verse 24, וַיְהִי (“And it came to pass”), serves to set the meeting with Yahweh within the return narrative of 4:20–31.<sup>17</sup>

Moses, Zipporah, and their sons Gershom and Eliezer are on the way to Egypt. As they are on the way (בדרך), they come to the lodging-place (במלון).<sup>18</sup> A מלון is “the

<sup>16</sup> וַיְהִי, *Qal, wayyiqtol*, 3MS, “and it came to pass.”

<sup>17</sup> Sarna (*Exodus*, 24) argues “the sketchy tale of the night incident in verses 24–26 is not as unconnected with the larger context as if often claimed.” Thus, he says, “The introductory phrase . . . immediately establishes the chronological linkage with verse 20.” Similarly, Koowon Kim writes, “Verse 24 reads most naturally as a narrative sequence of v. 20,” and he argues that 4:21–23 serves to connect 4:24–26 “to the broader context of redemptive history.” Koowon Kim, “A Christotelic Interpretation of Exodus 4:24–26,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 29, no. 1 (April 2015), 10.

<sup>18</sup> The lodging-place, מלון, is used eight times in the Hebrew Bible and is a derivative of the verb לָן—to spend the night.

place where people with their animals can find shelter for the night.”<sup>19</sup> The use of this word sets the location and the time of the attack (at night).<sup>20</sup> This may have simply been a place where Moses and his family set up camp,<sup>21</sup> or an established overnight location.<sup>22</sup> Either way, Moses and his family are at a place of safety and rest, presumably asleep. Any sort of encounter or attack would have been unexpected.

The attack of 4:24 is not only unexpected but also ambiguous. The text says “that Yahweh met him and sought to put him to death” (4:24). “Met him” translates ויפגשו, which is a general verb for encountering or meeting someone, usually in the course of travel.<sup>23</sup> By itself, the verb does not imply a negative or positive encounter. It is used in identical form for Aaron’s meeting with Moses (4:27), clearly there in a positive context.<sup>24</sup> The following phrase in verse 24 is what gives it a negative connotation, “and he sought to put him to death” (וַיִּבְקֹשׁ הָמָיִתוֹ). This is not a chance passing by between two travelers on a journey.<sup>25</sup> The infinitive construct, הַמָּיִתוֹ, indicates the purpose of God arranging this encounter—to put Moses to death. Yahweh is here to carry out a judicial judgment, to execute Moses.<sup>26</sup> There is something wrong in this narrative, and it is not Yahweh’s impending execution of an individual. Someone must be put to death for an action they have taken or failed to take. Herein lies the text’s ambiguity.

The reader knows that Yahweh is meeting Moses but does not know who Yahweh is going to execute. The object of the verb הַמָּיִתוֹ (to put him to death) is only marked by the third-person, masculine singular pronominal suffix. Speculations about his identity abound among rabbis, scholars, and translations. Pettit qualifies the search for the criminal by writing, “The pronoun has no clear antecedent, and it is therefore not clear who has come under attack. We may presume in light of the masculine pronoun that it is either Moses or one of his sons.”<sup>27</sup> Zipporah, as both a female and the heroine of this attack (4:25) is certainly not the one facing death.

<sup>19</sup> Houtman, *Exodus*, 433. See also Bob Becking, “Then Zipporah Took a Flint ... *Circumcision as a Rite of Passage in Exod 4.24-26*,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 37, no. 1 (January 2, 2023), 4.

<sup>20</sup> William H. Propp, *Exodus 1-18*, Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (New Haven, CT: Yale, 1999), 218.

<sup>21</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 103.

<sup>22</sup> As reflected by the LXX’s translation, καταλύματι—inn. Houtman takes this to mean the translators of the LXX understood Moses placing his family in a shelter, instead of the open air. Houtman, *Exodus*, 434.

There was no room for Christ at the καταλύματι (Luke 2:7), and there was no room for Moses with his uncircumcised son at the καταλύματι.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, “פגשׁ” In *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 803.

<sup>24</sup> Houtman notes, “Just as in 4:27 the encounter leads to touching, an embrace as a sign of affection, so in 4:24 the touching expresses the desire to kill.” Houtman, *Exodus*, 434.

<sup>25</sup> Becking differs, writing, “The verb has the connotation of a fortuitous meeting; the encounter was not planned but took place accidentally,” citing Genesis 32:18 in support. However, Exodus 4:27 shows that chance is not inherent in the meaning of פגשׁ, as Yahweh commands Aaron to meet (לִקְרָאתָ) Moses, and Aaron obeys by going to meet him (וַיִּפְגַּשְׁהוּ). Aaron did not encounter Moses by chance but sought him out. Becking, “Then Zipporah Took a Flint,” 4.

<sup>26</sup> Propp writes, “Although the causative of mw, ‘die’ can be synonymous with hrg ‘kill,’ hemit often has judicial connotations comparable to English ‘execute’ (e.g., Num 35:19, 21). The subject of hemit is frequently Yahweh, whose decrees are by definition justice; cf. 2Kgs 5:7: ‘Am I Deity, to put to death (lahamit) or to let live?’” Propp, *Exodus*, 218–19.

<sup>27</sup> David P. Pettit, “When the Lord Seeks to Kill Moses: Reading Exodus 4.24-26 in Its Literary Context,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 40, no. 2 (December 2015), 169.

Several scholars view the referent of the pronominal suffix to be Gershom, not Moses. Although not taking this approach, Alexander cites two common reasons to prefer Gershom over Moses: the fact that Moses is not explicitly named, while 4:21-23 focuses on firstborn sons, and the question of why Yahweh would harm an obedient Moses (4:19-20) who is journeying to Egypt as commanded.<sup>28</sup> For Stuart, the exclusion of the name Moses is enough to assume that one of his sons is in view, and he seeks to demonstrate the coherence of the text if Gershom is assumed.<sup>29</sup>

Adam Howell has written the most substantial defense of the Gershom view, arguing that “when vv. 24-26 are read following vv. 21-23, the most natural antecedent of the personal pronouns in vv. 24-26 seems to be Gershom, Moses’s firstborn.”<sup>30</sup> While it is true that 4:21-23 focuses on the impending death of Pharaoh’s firstborn in light of his persecution of God’s firstborn, this does not require the object of 4:24 to be the firstborn of Moses. Although Pharaoh’s firstborn is highlighted in 4:23, the recipient of the instructions is Moses (4:21-23). The emphasis in 4:21-23, as part of the return narrative (4:20-31), is to prepare Moses for Egypt through instruction. The key individual in the return narrative is Moses. The actions in the summary statement (4:20) are performed by Moses. The instructions are given to Moses (4:21-23). Moses has a meeting with Aaron (4:27-29). Moses and Aaron gather the elders of Israel (4:29-31). Although firstborn sons are mentioned in 4:21-23, the focus remains on Moses, as the recipient of God’s instructions and the executor of his judgment. Howell also views the rectification of the situation via circumcision as further evidence that Gershom was to have been killed, had he not been circumcised.<sup>31</sup> However, children were not responsible for circumcising. The anchor text for circumcision, Genesis 17:10-14, makes it clear that the responsibility to circumcise was on the father, not the child.<sup>32</sup> This command would be codified in the Mosaic Law, as Moses would command that when a male is born, “on the eighth day, the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised” (Lev 12:3). Gershom should certainly have been circumcised, but he was not at fault for his lack of circumcision.<sup>33</sup>

Since Gershom and Eliezer are not likely candidates for divine judgment in Exodus 4:24, we are left with Moses. The reasons for identifying the referent of the pronominal suffix as Moses are convincing. Moses is the last-named person in the narrative (4:21) and as such, would not need to be re-introduced again. As the most recently addressed person, he is the most natural antecedent to the third-person suffixes in 4:24. The dialogue of 4:21-23 stands between the summary statement (4:20) and the meeting with Yahweh (4:24-26). As noted above, Moses is the focus in each unit of the return narrative (4:20-31).<sup>34</sup> It would be odd to shift the focus of

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<sup>28</sup> Alexander, *Exodus*, 106–7.

<sup>29</sup> Stuart, *Exodus*, 152–56.

<sup>30</sup> Howell, Adam J. “The Firstborn Son of Moses as the ‘Relative of Blood’ in Exodus 4.24-26.” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 35, no. 1 (September 2010), 67.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>32</sup> This is true, not only of newborn children who were to be circumcised on the eighth day (Gen 17:12) but of every male of any age. The command is that males are to “be circumcised,” as מִלֵּא is used six times in the *Niphal* in Genesis 17:10-14, indicating passive action.

<sup>33</sup> Alexander further notes, “In the light of God’s compassion for the Israelite firstborn males it seems inconsistent to suggest that he wants to kill Gershom.” Alexander, *Exodus*, 107.

<sup>34</sup> Pettit, “When the Lord Seeks to Kill Moses,” 169.

the narrative without naming the new individual.<sup>35</sup> Further, the one circumcised is identified in 4:25 as Zipporah's son. If he was the object of Yahweh's attack in 4:24, why was he not designated as the son of Zipporah or Moses there?<sup>36</sup> Zipporah adds another dimension to the argument for Moses, as she is the one who rises to the aid of the one being attacked. Childs uses this as his primary argument for Moses, writing, "The fact that Zipporah took the lead in circumcising the child is another indication that Moses was under attack and incapable of responding."<sup>37</sup> It would be extremely odd for Gershom to be attacked, and for Zipporah to rise to his aid instead of Moses, especially since Moses had already experienced multiple encounters with Yahweh. The two verbs themselves strengthen the argument for Moses as the object of their pronominal suffix. As noted previously, פגש (meet) is used for Aaron's meeting with Moses (4:27). Second, מות (death) in the *hiphil* was used for Moses, among the rest of the Hebrew babies, when Pharaoh says to the midwives, "If he is a son, then you shall put him to death" (וְהָמָתוּ; 1:16). In conclusion, the majority view—that Moses is the one to be executed—is well substantiated.<sup>38</sup> Moses is the intended referent of the third masculine singular suffix in 4:24. He is the object of God's anger. As Moses and his family lie sleeping at the lodging-place, Yahweh meets him to put him to death.

וַתִּקַּח צִפּוֹרָה צִרְיָה וְתִכְרֹת אֶת־עֶרְלַת בְּנָהּ וַתַּגַּע לְרַגְלָיו וַתֹּאמֶר כִּי חֲסִין־דָּמִים אָהָה לִּי 4:25  
 "So Zipporah took a flint and she cut the foreskin of her son and she caused *it* to touch his feet. And she said, 'Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me.'"

The narrative continues in 4:25, showing Zipporah's surprising response to her husband's impending death: taking a flint to cut off the foreskin of her son.<sup>39</sup> The lack of circumcision of Zipporah's son shows that Moses had not walked in full

<sup>35</sup> Propp writes, "Were it the child, the text would read 'sought to put Moses' son to death.'" Propp, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus iv 24-6)," 499. Alexander (*Exodus*, 107) concurs, "Had the narrator intended the reader to understand that the life of one of Moses' sons was threatened, he would surely have identified him clearly at this stage."

<sup>36</sup> Kim says that if the son of Moses was attacked, "the mention of 'her son' in v. 25 would have been redundant." Kim, "Christotelic Interpretation," 6.

<sup>37</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 103. Hamilton makes the same observation, "one would think that if it was the son whose life was in danger, Moses would have been the one to leap into action instead of being passive." Hamilton, *Exodus*, 82. Houtman asks the question, "Remarkable is that the circumcision is done by Zipporah, a duty not elsewhere in the OT performed by women. Does the task fall to her because Moses, owing to the threat on his life, was unable to do it?" Houtman, *Exodus*, 437. Thomas Dozeman would answer in the affirmative, as he concludes, "The action of Zipporah as a rescuer suggests that Moses is the object of the divine attack, since his salvation by women is a central theme in the opening chapters of Exodus." Thomas B. Dozeman, *Exodus*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 155.

<sup>38</sup> Dumbrell notes, "The Syriac text twice inserts 'Moses' into this verse, as the subject of the sentence and as the object of *mūt*, but this is an obvious intrusion designed to clarify a difficult context." William J. Dumbrell, "Exodus 4:24-26: A Textual Re-Examination," *Harvard Theological Review* 65, no. 2 (April 1972), 285.

<sup>39</sup> "Flint" (צִרְיָה) simply refers to a flint rock, and the plural is paired with הרבות (cut) in another circumcision account, to mean flint knives (Josh 5:2-3). Joshua 5 features a circumcision with flint knives (5:2-8) followed by the celebration of the Passover (5:10-11). Exodus 4 features a circumcision with flint followed by the Passover of Moses, as will be developed in this paper.

obedience and faith to the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>40</sup> As Alexander rightly explains, “Moses’ failure to circumcise his own son, as required by the covenant of circumcision previously inaugurated with the patriarch Abraham, placed Gershom outside the benefits of the covenant. The failure to circumcise Gershom rests with Moses and so he is the one threatened with punishment.”<sup>41</sup> His failure to circumcise his son shows his lack of faith in God’s covenant promises. Zipporah responds to Moses’s peril by circumcising her son. This demonstrates that the lack of circumcision was the reason for Yahweh’s attack on his servant. As a result, Childs argues that the story “serves to dramatize the tremendous importance of circumcision.”<sup>42</sup> Moses was to lead the nation of Israel out of Egypt to serve Yahweh, yet he himself had failed to lead his family in faith and obedience to the Abrahamic covenant.

What Zipporah does next is even more surprising. After cutting the foreskin, “She caused *it* to touch his feet.” Her action of touching (וַתַּגֵּעַ) is an unusual word choice. Had Moses wanted to communicate her throwing the foreskin, he could have used שָׁלַךְ—throw or cast.<sup>43</sup> Instead, he intentionally uses the verb for touching to describe what Zipporah does with the foreskin. The verse depicts Zipporah taking the cut-off foreskin of her son, bending down, and touching it to the feet of Moses. Significantly, Moses uses the *hiphil* form of גָּעַ (touch) only one other time in Exodus: “And you shall take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood which is in the basin, and you shall cause some of the blood which is in the basin to touch [וְהִגַּעְתֶּם] the lintel and the two doorposts” (Exod 12:22). When Moses instructed Israel to bring out and slaughter the Passover lambs, they were to take some of the blood of the lamb and cause it to touch (גָּעַ) the lintel and the two doorposts of their houses. The blood that they touched the house with would be seen by Yahweh, who would then pass over that house (12:13). In the same way that the lintels and doorposts of the Israelite houses are touched with the blood of the Passover lambs, so Moses’s feet are touched with the bloody foreskin of Gershom. The spilled blood of the Passover lamb was made to touch the house, to stand between Israel and Yahweh. The spilled blood of Gershom was made to touch the feet, to stand between Moses and Yahweh. The salvation of Moses is described with the language of the Passover. He is saved in a Passover, to prepare him to lead Israel in *the* Passover.

Zipporah then turns to her husband and declares, “Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me” (4:25). Opinions on the meaning of חתן (“bridegroom” or “relative”) and דָּמִים (“bloods,” masculine plural) are copious. After rectifying her son’s lack of circumcision and causing his foreskin to touch the feet of her husband, Zipporah

<sup>40</sup> Childs says that this is the earliest Jewish interpretation. “Rabbinic midrashim (Mekilta, Exodus Rabbah) developed the idea that Moses had failed to circumcise the child by the eighth day. Various reasons were offered for the omission—he had been prevented by his father-in-law (Targum Onkelos, Neofiti I, Jer. Targum); he had been negligent for an hour—but all focused on the seriousness of the failure to perform the rite which almost cost him his life.” Childs, *Exodus*, 96.

<sup>41</sup> Alexander, *Exodus*, 107. Hamilton (*Exodus*, 82) concurs, “The reason for the attack . . . [is] Moses’s failure, for whatever reason, to minister paternally to his son by circumcising him.”

<sup>42</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Moses uses שָׁלַךְ 22 times in the Torah, meaning “throw” every time (except Gen 21:15). Nine of these occurrences are in Exodus: 1:22; 4:3; 7:9, 10, 12; 15:25; 22:30; 32:19; 32:24. On the other hand, he uses “touch” (גָּעַ) seven times in Exodus, and 54 times in the Torah, referring to touching, not throwing, every time.

issues this strange declaration. The narrator then repeats her words in the final phrase of the bloody bridegroom meeting, offering it as a sort of summary statement (4:26). The word חתן refers to a bridegroom or a son-in-law.<sup>44</sup> While it may be used as a general term for a male relative, it would still be an unusual choice if Zipporah's words were directed at Gershom. As shown above, the object of Yahweh's attack is Moses (4:24), and his feet are touched with the bloody foreskin of his son (4:25). Given this context, Zipporah's declaration refers to Moses. Zipporah stoops to touch the feet of Moses with the blood of their son, and then looks at him and calls him her bloody bridegroom. This is not the consummation of their marriage, but a reconfirmation of "the marriage bond between herself and Moses."<sup>45</sup> A fuller understanding of "bridegroom" requires a careful examination of "blood."

If "bridegroom" (חתן) refers to Moses as Zipporah's husband, how should "blood" (דמים) be interpreted? The first point of significance is that the plural form is used for blood (*damim*, literally "bloods.") Blood in the plural often refers to murder, bloodshed, or blood-guiltiness. The first uses of *damim* are in reference to the shed blood of the murdered Abel (Gen 4:10-11). There, the blood of the victim cries to Yahweh and is received by the ground. The next occurrence of דמים is here in Exodus 4:25-26. Propp sees a connection between the two texts and argues that the term describes "either the blood shed by a killer . . . or the miasma of guilt clinging to perpetrators of heinous crimes and to their land."<sup>46</sup> Propp best represents the view that understands the phrase "bridegroom of blood" to be Zipporah's realization of Moses's guilt for murdering an Egyptian (2:11-12).<sup>47</sup> Moses had murdered an Egyptian and fled to Midian, which functioned like a city of refuge for him according to Propp and writers following his tradition. Kim notes that "living in the city of refuge does not expiate a murderer's bloodguilt, which must be paid either by his own death or someone else's."<sup>48</sup> He thus regards Moses as a murderer who is attempting to leave the city of refuge (Midian, or the mountain of God; Exod 3:1). Moses is a man of bloodshed, which is why, according to Propp, Yahweh is about to execute him. "When Yahweh attacks Moses, Zipporah realizes that the violent stranger she married is a felon."<sup>49</sup> Kim provides a concise summary of this view: "Unless blood was shed, Moses's bloodguilt would remain with him and Yahweh would not allow him to return to Egypt. This points to the expiatory effect of the blood shed and smeared on Moses' feet."<sup>50</sup> While Kim is right that there is an expiatory effect to the shedding of Gershom's blood, as will be seen in 4:26, it is not

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<sup>44</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, "חתן," in *Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon*, 368; Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, "חתן," *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, translated by M. E. J. Richardson (New York: Brill, 1994), 365; Dozeman, *Exodus*, 155; Propp, *Exodus*, 219; Houtman, *Exodus*, 444. For the most comprehensive study of חתן, see T. C. Mitchell, "Meaning of the Noun Chtn in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 19, no. 1 (January 1969): 93-112.

<sup>45</sup> Becking, "Then Zipporah Took a Flint," 15.

<sup>46</sup> Propp, *Exodus*, 219-20.

<sup>47</sup> In addition to his commentary, see also Propp's earlier publication, "That Bloody Bridegroom (Exodus iv 24-6)." His article and commentary have had a significant impact on the study of this passage, as his view has been widely adopted.

<sup>48</sup> Kim, "Christotelic Interpretation," 12.

<sup>49</sup> Propp, *Exodus*, 234-35.

<sup>50</sup> Kim, "Christotelic Interpretation," 12.



to cover any guilt attached to Moses from his killing of an Egyptian. The problem with this approach lies in the meaning of “blood,” the analogy of a city of refuge, and verse 26 itself.

Although blood in the plural frequently refers to bloodshed or the guilt attached to a murderer, these are not the exclusive usages of the plural. The usage of the plural can be categorized more broadly as “abundance, blood in quantity.”<sup>51</sup> It can refer to ordinary blood, such as menstrual bleeding in Leviticus 12:4-7 and 20:18 or to warfare, which would certainly not be considered murder or have implications of guilt (cf. Isa 9:5; 1 Chr 22:8).<sup>52</sup> Bloodguilt is not inherent in the meaning of *damim*, and the word alone does not necessitate Zipporah referring to the murder of an Egyptian. In addition, interpreting Zipporah’s phrase in this way requires a lot of material to be read into the text. Propp is eager to compare the actions of Moses in Exodus 2–3 to fleeing to a city of refuge. However, there are no lexical links to support this connection, and neither Midian nor Sinai are presented as a city or mountain of refuge in Scripture. Furthermore, the concept of cities of refuge and specific laws outlined for the punishment of murderers is a concept found in the Mosaic law, but nowhere prior to Exodus 4. Taking a later system and imposing it on this text seems unwarranted. Understanding Zipporah’s use of *damim* with connotations of guilt overlooks other usages of the word and unnecessarily inserts later concepts into an earlier passage.

A better approach is to follow a straightforward reading of the phrase, “bridegroom of blood.” The overwhelming focus in the passage is on the actions taken: Yahweh seeks to execute Moses, Zipporah circumcises her son, and Yahweh releases Moses. Childs writes, “The whole emphasis of the passage [is] on circumcision . . . this is what saved Moses.”<sup>53</sup> The narrator neither gives information regarding the state of the individuals nor explains the meaning of Zipporah’s words. It is as if he wants the reader to focus on the intervening circumcision by Zipporah, not ultimately why Gershom was circumcised, but simply to emphasize that the blood of the son’s circumcision touched the feet of Moses. Keeping the focus on circumcision, without reading concepts of guilt and refuge into the text, leads to a plain understanding of the blood, used here in the plural to refer to a large amount of blood. It makes perfect sense for Zipporah to use the plural to refer to the actual blood of Gershom. Gershom was not an infant at this time, so he would have bled significantly from the circumcision, making the plural of blood appropriate to use. Gershom’s bleeding is excessive, and his bloody foreskin is touched to the feet of Moses. Zipporah’s words refer not to any supposed guilt of Moses, but to the circumcision she has just performed. The syntax of verse 26 makes this explicit.

וַיִּרְךָ מִקֵּנוֹ אֶזְרָא אֶתְּמִי אֶתְּמִי לְמִוֹלֶת 4:26

“Then he released him. At that time, she said, ‘Bridegroom of blood,’ regarding the circumcision.”

<sup>51</sup> Francis Brown, Samuel R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, “דם” In *Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon*, 196.

<sup>52</sup> The usage of *damim* for warfare would fit with the meaning of quantity, as referring to the large amount of blood shed in war.

<sup>53</sup> Childs, *Exodus*, 100.

After Zipporah circumcises her son and declares Moses to be her bloody bridegroom, the focus shifts back to Yahweh with the phrase, “Then he released him.” Yahweh’s release of Moses means that the death threat has passed. This verb for release (רפה) refers to laziness, relaxing, letting something go, or becoming limp. Yahweh may have grasped Moses in 4:24, and now physically releases him in 4:26. Alternatively, the phrase could be understood to mean that the Lord departed from Moses. Either way, the meaning is clear—Moses’s life is no longer threatened by God.<sup>54</sup> The blood of Gershom’s circumcision touching the feet of Moses is enough for Yahweh to remove the sentence of death.

The narrative then concludes with an editorial phrase, “At that time she said, ‘Bridegroom of blood,’ regarding the circumcision.” The adverb of time (אז) reiterates that Zipporah spoke the declaration after circumcising Gershom. This clarifies that the circumcision and release were the reason for the bloody bridegroom phrase. After repeating the phrase, Moses then shows through Zipporah’s words what it reference: “on account of the circumcision” (למולת). The bloody bridegroom phrase was spoken regarding the circumcision of Zipporah’s son. It is not necessary to read ideas about cities of refuge into the meaning of blood to understand Zipporah’s phrase, when the word למולת (“on account of the circumcision”) makes it plain. The phrase “bridegroom of blood” is used in relation to Zipporah’s circumcision of Gershom on Moses’s behalf, not in relation to Moses’s murderous past. Zipporah calls Moses a bloody bridegroom because of the blood of the circumcision that is touching his feet. Her words then appear to be a declaration of acceptance. Moses is her bridegroom, and their bond is not separated by death but sealed by blood. The circumcision joins Zipporah and Moses in a special way. In her declaration of “bridegroom of blood,” Zipporah affirms her union with the leader of God’s people. The feet of Moses are bloodied, but he is alive. Yahweh releases him to continue his return to Egypt. The salvation of Moses is accomplished by his wife, establishing his identity as a Hebrew through the ritual of circumcision. This is Moses’s Passover.

### Biblical Theology

As seen in the exegesis of Exodus 4:24-26, Moses is saved from death at the hands of Yahweh by the blood of his son’s circumcision being touched to his feet. In Exodus 1-4, Moses has his life threatened by Pharaoh, is saved among the reeds, departs for the wilderness, and comes to the mountain of God. Then, in Exodus 4:20-31 he embarks on his return to Egypt. His salvation climaxes in the center of the return narrative—the bloody bridegroom account—in 4:24-26. Moses and his family lie down at the lodging-place at night, just as Israel gathered in their homes in the middle of the night (12:29). Yahweh meets Moses and seeks to put him to death, as he will pass through Egypt at night to put the firstborn sons to death (11:4-5; 12:29). Zipporah circumcises her son and causes his bloody foreskin to touch the feet of Moses. The sons of Israel slay the Passover lambs and cause the blood to touch the lintel and doorposts of their houses. When he sees the blood, Yahweh releases Moses and passes over the houses of Israel. The bloody bridegroom narrative is the Passover of Moses.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 104.

Moses ties the two Passover accounts together with the word “touch,” making the connection between the two narratives lexical, as well as thematic. As Morales observes, “The pattern of divine death threat avoided through the application of blood surely does bring us into the realm of Passover theology.”<sup>55</sup> As Moses escapes death when the blood is touched to his feet, so Israel would escape death when the blood was touched to their houses. Thus, Alexander concludes, “Here, as at the Passover, blood averts death.”<sup>56</sup> The Passover of Moses serves as the paradigm for the Passover of Israel.

Moses wrote Exodus 1–4, the story of his own exodus, to prepare the reader for the exodus of the nation in the following chapters. These verses, according to Fishbane, “anticipate the redemption of the Israelites, God’s own firstborn (cf. v. 23), by focusing on the salvation and protection effected for Moses by the blood of his own son’s circumcision.”<sup>57</sup> Israel’s deliverance is played out in the life of Moses, culminating in the passing over of the bloody bridegroom. In the words of Morales, “Moses had experienced a Passover deliverance himself even before the plagues in Egypt had begun. As Israel’s mediator, Moses was also Israel’s frontrunner in deliverance.”<sup>58</sup> Moses was saved in a Passover to prepare him to lead Israel in the Passover. Moses walked the path of individual exodus so that he could lead the nation in corporate exodus.

### Conclusion

The bloody bridegroom narrative is framed in the context of salvation by women, the identity of Moses, and the covenant of circumcision. Moses transgressed the covenant by failing to circumcise his son. God comes to execute Moses for his sin, but Zipporah intervenes through circumcision. Having been previously saved by the midwives, his mother, his sister, and Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses is now saved by his own wife. The bloody bridegroom narrative also establishes his identity once and for all.<sup>59</sup> Moses may have been adopted by the Egyptians and lived with the Midianites, but he is commissioned to be the leader of God’s people. Through the circumcision of Gershom, Moses and his family are fully members of God’s covenant. Having been saved in his Passover, Moses can now lead Israel in the national Passover. Both Moses and Israel are saved from death at the hands of Yahweh by the touching of blood. The two Passover accounts point forward to the firstborn who sheds his blood in the ultimate Passover. Moses becomes Zipporah’s bloody bridegroom through the circumcision of his son. The people of God become his bloody bride through the death of his Son.

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<sup>55</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 75.

<sup>56</sup> Alexander, *Exodus*, 107.

<sup>57</sup> M. A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken, 1979), 71.

<sup>58</sup> Morales, *Exodus*, 75.

<sup>59</sup> See Pettit, “When the Lord Seeks to Kill Moses,” 172–74.

## THERE AND BACK AGAIN: AN EXODUS TALE

Finn Erickson<sup>1</sup>

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*The overarching narrative of the Bible can be viewed through the lens of the exodus story. Though man was placed on the mountain of God, he rebelled and was cast down in exile. But God provided hope through a savior born of the woman who would lead fallen man in an exodus journey through the waters of God's judgment in an ascent back to the mountain of God. Moses established this exodus pattern in the Torah and Isaiah expands on it, retelling the tale that causes God's people from all generations to sing, "Yahweh has become my salvation" (Exod 15:2; Ps 118:14; Isa 12:2).*

Key words: Exodus, exile, waters, mountain, Isaiah

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Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for Yahweh has spoken by the word of his servant Isaiah. Isaiah was commissioned by God to harden the hearts of the southern kingdom who were doomed to exile for their covenant violations. Looking back to the exoduses of the past, Isaiah uses the historical situation of his day to point to a future exodus of God's people from death to life. In his writing, the prophet Isaiah draws from Moses's exodus themes of exile, passing through the waters of judgment, and ascending back to the mountain of Yahweh to tell the ultimate exodus story: the journey back to the Edenic mount through the seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

### Exile

"Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right" (Ps 15:1-2). Though blameless from the day he was created, Adam transgressed the covenant so Yahweh God drove him out of life-giving Paradise to exile, to die a living death and return to the dust from whence he came. Thus the epic

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of humanity began, with exile from the spring of life, alienated from Yahweh God. “This is the tragedy of the garden.”<sup>2</sup> But God provided hope for Adam’s race through the seed of the woman who would lead them out of exile in an exodus journey back to Eden’s eastern gate. This exodus theme of exile runs through the Scriptures, appearing in Abram’s call out of Ur, Israel’s exile in Egypt, and Isaiah’s promised exile.

When the men of Babel rebelled against God, he scattered the nations in further exile (Gen 11:1-9).<sup>3</sup> But as with the exiled Adam and Eve, God did not leave humanity without any hope. God would use Shem’s seed to end the curse and exile for all the nations.<sup>4</sup> He drew Abram, the seed of Shem, out of the darkness of Ur where he worshiped other gods and was ignorant of the one true God, to go to a new land (Gen 12:1; Josh 24:2). This God personally related himself to Abram and cut a covenant with him, introducing himself, “I am Yahweh who brought you out of Ur” (Gen 15:7). Morales calls this journey from Ur an exodus.<sup>5</sup> Abraham’s life was characterized by this transformative exodus pattern, prefiguring his seed whose story would also be characterized by an exodus journey, the “movement out of death and into life.”<sup>6</sup>

Israel, like their father Abraham, experienced a similar exodus story.<sup>7</sup> The story of Israel’s historical exodus began with death and exile in a coffin in Egypt (Gen 50:26). Just as Abraham’s story began in darkness and progressed to light, so the

<sup>2</sup> Alastair Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption Through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 60.

<sup>3</sup> On the “exile” of Babel: The trajectory of mankind in Genesis is a downward trend of exile. Adam begins on Eden but after his rebellion is exiled in judgment. After murdering his brother, Cain is driven out even further in judgment. When the men of Babel rebel against God, they are confused and scattered in judgment. While the scattering of Babel is not explicitly called “exile,” it follows the pattern of Adam’s judgment: being driven farther away from God’s life-giving presence, living to die under the curse. Genesis begins in life-giving Eden and ends in a coffin in Egypt. But within this story of exile are hopeful glimpses of the journey back to God through the seed of the woman. This journey can be called the exodus.

<sup>4</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 21. On the word *shem*: Shem was in the line of the promised seed to Eve. His name Shem is also very significant. Like Adam and Eve’s sin, the heart of Babel’s sin was to be God, a manifestation of pride. For Adam and Eve, the temptation was to become God by having divine knowledge of good and evil. For the men of Babel, the temptation was to become God by making a *shem* (name) for themselves. In multilayered irony, God divided them and established for them a *shem* (name) of shame instead of glory. The name that became the emblem of man’s unified rebellion against God was *Babel* (“confusion”). Immediately after the Babel narrative came the *toledot* of Shem (whose name means “name”), whose descendant God called out of Ur and would make a *shem* (name) for. Unlike the men of Babel, Abram could not rely on his own efforts for this name but needed to trust God to fulfill his promise.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>7</sup> Israel’s exodus follows the pattern of Abraham’s exodus from Ur to Canaan, but also Abraham’s exodus from Egypt to Canaan. In Genesis 12, a famine caused the seed (Abraham) to descend into Egypt where he sojourned in a land not theirs and was afflicted. The woman was taken by the lurking dragon that threatened the promised seed. But God brought judgment on the nation, afflicting Pharaoh’s house with plagues. Compelled by a strong hand, Pharaoh sent him out with great possessions as he made his ascent from Egypt to claim the land of the cursed serpent Canaan, to work and keep the Paradise that was lost.

This same story is played out again in the exodus story. A famine caused the seed (Israel) to descend into Egypt where they sojourned in a land not theirs. They were made slaves and their seed (sons) were threatened by the dragon-like Pharaoh. But as he did for Abram, God sent plagues on Pharaoh’s house until he sent out Israel, who plundered the Egyptians as they made their ascent out of Egypt. Like Abram before them, God led them back to the serpent-infested land of Canaan to reclaim it from the line of Ham.

story of his seed began in death and moved to life. It is also noteworthy that exile in Egypt is closely linked with overtones of death. Joseph's descent to the Sheol of Egypt with funerary supplies established an ominous aura of death surrounding Egypt (Gen 37:25).<sup>8</sup> Literary scholar Nicolas Wyatt compares Egypt to being in a tomb,<sup>9</sup> and Morales suggests that Israel's exile in Egypt symbolizes death theologically.<sup>10</sup> This spiritual darkness Israel experienced in Egypt was similar to that of Abram in Ur. When Abram served other gods in the darkness of Ur, he did not know Yahweh (Josh 24:2). Likewise, Israel did not know Yahweh in Egypt (Exod 3:13-15). But this God revealed himself to these people and would make a covenant with them, that they would know "I am Yahweh who brought you out of Egypt" (Exod 20:2). This parallels God's introduction to their ancestor Abraham when he made his covenant with him, and it further confirms that their two exiles are connected (Gen 15:7). The stories of Abraham and Israel were both characterized by an exodus journey from exile.

Isaiah continues this exile thread. In his song of the vineyard, he compares Judah to an Eden-like vineyard that, like Adam and Eve, was expected to yield righteous fruit (Isa 5:1-7). But the vineyard Judah yielded the rotten fruit of wickedness. As a result, this vineyard would be reduced to a desolate wasteland, marked with the emblem of the curse, "briers and thorns" (Isa 5:6; cf. Gen 3:18). Because of their sin, "My people go into exile... Sheol has enlarged her appetite," and they will go down to be swallowed up (Isa 5:13-14).<sup>11</sup> Isaiah understood exile and death were bound together. This is consistent with the exile in Egypt being seen theologically as death. The prophet refers to this theological death as blindness (Isa 6:9-10). This blindness to the ways of God corresponds to Abram not knowing Yahweh in Ur and Israel not knowing Yahweh when they were enslaved to Egypt. Just as Moses and Israel were introduced to the light of God, so in Isaiah's exodus the people walking in spiritual darkness will see a great light (Isa 9:2).

Isaiah also ties his future exodus to Abraham's going out from Chaldea and Israel's exodus from Egypt (Isa 48:19-21). He laments that if only Israel had paid attention to his commandments; then they would have had peace (48:18). And their seed would have been like the sand (*khol*) and their name (*shem*) would not be cut off (48:19). "Seed like the sand" and a "name" are reminiscent of God's dealings with Abraham, when he promised to make him a great name (*shem*) and seed as numerous as the sand (*khol*) (Gen 12:2; 22:17). But because of Israel's transgression of the covenant, they will go into exile, cut off from God's mountain. Isaiah's declaration, "Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea" proclaims that "Yahweh has redeemed his servant Jacob" (Isa 48:20). Just as Abraham was called out by God to leave Chaldea to mediate Yahweh's blessing to the nations, so too Israel will be called out of Chaldea to proclaim Yahweh's redemption. Isaiah's exile to Babylon takes Israel back to their beginning, Abraham's beginning. Isaiah also links his exodus with Israel's exodus from Egypt when he recalls "they did not thirst when he led them

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 51. Gum, balm, and myrrh were used for embalming.

<sup>9</sup> Nicolas Wyatt, *The Mythic Mind: Essays on Cosmology and Religion in Ugaritic and Old Testament Literature* (Sheffield: Equinox, 2005), 38.

<sup>10</sup> Morales, *Exodus*, 51.

<sup>11</sup> This exile echoes Adam's exile from the garden, which was accompanied by death.

through the deserts; he made water flow for them from the rock” (Isa 48:21; cf. Deut 8:15). Isaiah synthesizes these exodus stories together, all in anticipation of a greater exodus to come.

Isaiah reveals that Israel goes into exile for the same reason Adam did, a failure to trust God and keep his commandments. Just as Adam failed to crush the serpent that came into the garden and chose to serve the serpent instead of trusting Yahweh, Hezekiah chose to serve the serpent Babylon instead of trusting Yahweh.<sup>12</sup> And just as Adam’s sons lived with the consequences (exile) of his actions, so Hezekiah’s sons would suffer the consequences (exile) of his actions (Isa 39:7; 43:27-28). The exile of Isaiah is reflective of Adam’s exile—exile from life-giving Eden and Yahweh himself. But Isaiah also looked to a future exodus not merely deliverance from the oppression of a foreign power, but also deliverance from spiritual death and blindness and the cursed earth—an exile that could only be ended by the seed of the woman whose name is Immanuel.

### Waters of Judgment

On the ascending journey from exile back to the mountain of Yahweh, there stood an untraversable obstacle: the waters of God’s judgment. But Yahweh saved his exodus people by his chosen seed who pioneered the path through these waters of death. Using his chosen seed, God would safely lead his redeemed people through these waters. The exodus motif of crossing the waters of death into new creation flows through Noah’s flood, Israel’s crossing of the Sea of Reeds, and the water crossing in Isaiah’s prophecy, pointing to an ultimate exodus water crossing led by the ultimate shepherd.

In the days of Noah, the earth was corrupted (*shakhat*) by man’s sin (Gen 6:11-12). So, Yahweh resolved to destroy (*shakhat*) the earth in an act of creation reversal: the flood (Gen 6:13). He would return the earth back to its primordial chaos and begin anew. But faithful to his promise to Adam and Eve, he would preserve their seed. Yahweh commissioned the blameless Noah to build an ark (*tevah*) through which he and the remnant of humanity would be saved from the waters of Yahweh’s judgment.<sup>13</sup> When the rains came and the primordial deep burst open, the land was covered with waters once again (Gen 1:2; 7:18). While the serpentine seed of Cain were drowned, God preserved blameless Noah and those who identified with him in the ark. God remembered Noah and caused his wind (*ruakh*) to hover over the waters, as before in the beginning of creation (Gen 1:2; 8:1). The waters receded and Noah and his family walked out on dry land into the new creation. Those who trusted in the seed were spared God’s wrath and were reborn into the new creation. The path to the new creation in Noah’s exodus was through the waters of death itself.

This motif of salvation through the waters of God’s judgment is continued in the book of Exodus. The life of Moses, Israel’s pioneering savior, is characterized by the

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<sup>12</sup> I refer to Babylon (and other enemies of Israel) as “serpents” to highlight the strife between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent (Gen 3:15). Babylon is the spiritual seed of the serpent (Isa 14:12-21).

<sup>13</sup> Blameless Noah “walked with God” (Gen 6:9) like Enoch, who did not die (Gen 5:24). Adam also walked with God in the garden before he sinned (Gen 3:8).

same exodus journey of Noah. Moses is placed in an ark (*tevah*) as he is laid in the grave of the sea. Exodus 2 is the only place in Scripture outside the flood story where the word “ark” (*tevah*) appears.<sup>14</sup> This rare word emphasizes their connection. As with Noah’s *tevah*, Moses’s *tevah* was a means of salvation from the waters of death.<sup>15</sup>

Not only did Moses’s exodus through the waters draw from Noah’s exodus, it also prefigured the journey Israel would take. The journey through the waters of death was first pioneered by Israel’s savior before he shepherded them through the same wine dark waters. After Israel was sent out from Egypt, they were trapped between the pursuing host of Egypt and the Sea of Reeds. But that night, a wind (*ruakh*) blew over the waters<sup>16</sup> and separated them so that Israel could pass through God’s judgment walking on dry ground.<sup>17</sup> When the dragon Pharaoh and his serpentine host pursued them, they were covered in the waters of judgment like the serpentine seed of Cain. After crossing the sea, Israel sang, “Sing to Yahweh for he has triumphed gloriously. . . . Yahweh is my strength and my song and he has become my salvation” (Exod 15). Like Noah, salvation was provided through the waters of God’s judgment as Israel was, in a sense, reborn. Morales calls this a journey through “the waters of death and rebirth.”<sup>18</sup> Israel symbolically participated in new creation (as did Noah), pointing to a still greater exodus through the waters of spiritual death, pioneered by a shepherd greater than Moses.

To speak of this greater exodus, Isaiah used the historical events of his day to illustrate what this greater exodus would be like. When King Ahaz was faced with the Aram-Israel threat, he trusted in Assyria (Isa 7–8). Like Adam before him, he refused to trust God, so God would destroy Judah with a “great flood of Assyrians,” leaving behind a remnant (Isa 8:7–8; 10:19–22).<sup>19</sup> This hearkens back to the flood in Genesis where humanity was judged but a righteous remnant was saved. By recalling the flood in Genesis, Isaiah also connects to the flood theme in the exodus. Isaiah builds on this motif with the Assyrian flood. He writes, “Yahweh will utterly destroy the tongue of the sea of Egypt and wave his hand over the River with his scorching breath” and “there will be a highway from Assyria... as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt” (Isa 11:15–16). As a result of this sea crossing, God’s people would once again sing, “God is my salvation . . . Yah Yahweh is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation . . . sing praises to Yahweh for he has done gloriously” (Isa 12:2, 5). Like Israel in the days of Moses, God’s

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<sup>14</sup> Roberts and Wilson, *Echoes*, 35–36.

<sup>15</sup> Morales, *Exodus*, 79.

<sup>16</sup> This echoes Genesis 1:2 when God initiated creation and Genesis 8:1 when he “recreated” the earth in the aftermath of the flood.

<sup>17</sup> On “dry ground”: After the flood subsided, Noah and his family went out on dry (*kharev*) ground (Gen 8:13). When trapped between the Egyptian host and the Sea of Reeds, Yahweh makes the sea into dry ground (*kharavah*) for them to pass through (Exod 14:21). Isaiah, recalling God’s deliverance through water judgment, says he dried (*kharev*) up the sea (Isa 51:10). Genesis, Exodus, and Isaiah also all use the word *yavesh* to describe the dry ground (cf. Gen 8:7, Exod 14:16, Isa 19:5).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>19</sup> Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2007), 224. King Ahaz’s trust in an Assyrian alliance could subtly echo the sons of God (interpreted as the godly seed) intermingling with the ungodly daughters of man (Gen 6). As a result of their forbidden union, God wiped them both out with a flood.



people would find salvation and rebirth in passing through the waters of death. And this exodus journey would be led by the root of Jesse (Isa 11:10-12).

Central to the exodus water crossing is the crushing of the head of the serpent. This trope is repeated by Isaiah in his overarching narrative of the slaying of the dragon in the sea (Isa 27:1). Just as the serpentine seed of Cain were slain in the sea in the days of Noah and the dragon Pharaoh and his chariots were slain in the sea, Isaiah looks forward to the day when the ultimate serpent's head is crushed once and for all by the seed. Like Noah and Moses, this promised holy seed would once again pioneer the way through the waters of death, gently leading his people, while the chariots and horses of the serpents were extinguished in those waters. Isaiah invokes the past deeds of the arm of Yahweh to support this, writing "Awake, awake, O arm of Yahweh, awake as in the days of old . . . Was it not you who cut Rahab in pieces" and "made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?" (Isa 51:9-10). Isaiah again looks back to Israel's exodus from Egypt. He recalls the dragon Rahab that was pierced at the sea.<sup>20</sup> As God judged the serpent, he made through his water judgment the pathway by which they would find salvation. Estelle suggests that this invoking of the old exodus "anticipates a new act of deliverance, not just temporarily from the latest invader, but once and for all."<sup>21</sup> Though Noah's flood deliverance brought him into a still sin-corrupted new creation, the exodus Isaiah looked to would bring God's people to a perfect "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa 65:22).

The way back to the garden was through death itself. Noah's journey through the waters demonstrated this as well as Moses's water crossings. But both anticipated a shepherd greater than Moses and a righteous one greater than Noah to lead this journey. Isaiah revealed that this servant would offer a greater offering than Noah, his own body, to make peace with God (Gen 8:20-22; Isa 53:10). Isaiah revealed this servant would pioneer a nautical journey far greater than that of Moses (Deut 34:10-12; Isa 51:9-11). He would swallow up death and slay Leviathan by being swallowed up by its waters.

### The Mountain

The final part of the exodus journey is the ascent up the mountain of Yahweh, the "meeting place of heaven and earth, where celestial and reality came together."<sup>22</sup> The exodus journey ultimately points to the return to Eden, the first sacred mountain where God established his temple and walked with man.<sup>23</sup> The final exodus destination is a mountain; this can be seen in the exoduses of Noah, Abraham, and Isaiah.

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<sup>20</sup> The dragon Rahab is Pharaoh the King of Egypt. See Isa 30:7 and Ezek 29:3.

<sup>21</sup> Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 16.

<sup>22</sup> William J. Dumbrell, "A Foreshadowing of the New Creation" in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 57.

<sup>23</sup> The biblical theme of the mountain of God first begins in Genesis with Eden, the first mountain of God. Moses establishes this when he describes a river flowing down from Eden (Gen 2:10). Ezekiel also calls Eden "the holy mountain of God" (Ezek 28:13-14). The cosmic Mount Zion finds its root in the first mountain of God, Mount Eden.

Noah's exodus journey through the waters led him to a mountain in the new creation. After he passed through the waters, the ark "rested" (*nuakh*) on the mountains of Ararat (Gen 8:4).<sup>24</sup> This is the same word used when God "rested" (*nuakh*) Adam on Mount Eden (Gen 2:15).<sup>25</sup> On this mountain, Noah offered an appeasing sacrifice to God, which turned away his wrath (Gen 8:20-22). As a new Adam, his obedience and sacrifice transformed divine wrath into divine mercy.<sup>26</sup> And on this mountain, God blessed this new Adam, telling him to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28; 9:1). Then he made his covenant with Noah that he would not flood the earth again. Afterward, this new Adam planted a fertile vineyard. Noah was a picture of the seed who would bring humanity through the waters of death into the new creation and experience the rest (*nuakh*) of Eden. Noah provides a glimpse of the one Lamech longed for, the seed who would bring relief from the curse and lead mankind back to Mount Eden (Gen 5:29).

Like Noah's journey through the waters, the newly born Israel's water crossing led them to a mountain, Mount Sinai. This mountain is in congruence with the ancient Near Eastern conception of the cosmic mountain where the divine presence is revealed.<sup>27</sup> Roberts observes the similarities between Sinai and Ararat: "Just as God remembered Noah and brought him to a mountain where he received a new covenant, new laws, and rest, God remembered Israel and brought them to a mountain where he gave them a new covenant, new laws, and rest. Noah is Moses. Ararat is Sinai."<sup>28</sup> As with Noah, Yahweh made a covenant with Israel on this mountain. He revealed his glory to them by descending upon Sinai as a devouring fire and a cloud on top of the mountain (Exod 19:16-18). Moses and his sons along with seventy elders went up part of the way and enjoyed a meal with God as they beheld him. However, only Moses was allowed to come near to Yahweh; the people were not to come near (Exod 24:2). Moses served as the mediator between the holy God and sinful Israel. When they corrupted (*shakhat*) themselves with golden calf worship, Moses interceded on their behalf with God and offered up his own life in their place (Exod 32:30-32).<sup>29</sup> Even though this mountain was like Eden, God's people were still alienated from him, and they did not get to see him face to face. They were still in need of a better arbiter who could come between them.

Isaiah builds on this theme of the cosmic mountain of God. Following exodus imagery, he describes a cloud hovering over Mount Zion by day and fire by night (Isa 4:5). This is a clear reference to the presence of God that led Israel out of Egypt (Exod 13:21-22). He continues to describe Yahweh's glory over the mountain like a canopy (Isa 4:6). Although this echoes his unapproachable glory descending on Sinai, Isaiah is looking toward a day when, unlike on Sinai, all of God's people can

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<sup>24</sup> Ararat was where the Assyrian flood stopped, too. Sennacherib was killed by his sons who fled to Ararat (Isa 39).

<sup>25</sup> L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 37 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 60.

<sup>26</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, "Genesis," in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book by Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 35.

<sup>27</sup> Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus*, 122.

<sup>28</sup> Roberts and Wilson, *Echoes*, 63-64.

<sup>29</sup> Just as Noah offered an appeasing sacrifice mediating between God and the corrupt (*shakhat*) earth, Moses mediated between God and his corrupt (*shakhat*) people (Gen 6:11; Exod 32:7).

approach his mountain because their filth will be washed away, and they will be called holy (Isa 4:3-4). On that day, Israel will not need a Moses-like mediator to go between them and God. Still echoing the Exodus events on Sinai, Isaiah also describes a feast on God's mountain. Not a feast that only seventy representatives could partake in, but a feast of rich food and well-aged wine for all peoples (Isa 25:6). This vision would be fulfilled by Isaiah's greater mediator who would, like Moses, offer himself up to be stricken for the transgression of his people (Exod 32:30-32; Isa 53:8). His wrath-appeasing offering that made the many counted righteous would be greater than that of Noah (Gen 8:20-21; Isa 53:10-11).<sup>30</sup> The new covenant Yahweh would make with his people would be superior to those made on Mount Ararat and Mount Sinai. He promised to give himself as a covenant, and his Spirit would be poured out on his people and his words would not depart from their mouths (Isa 42:6; 59:21).

### Conclusion

Death came to all men on that mountain when Adam ate the fruit of sin and had his fill, but that death would be swallowed up forever by the greater Adam, who would drink the cup of death, being laid down in the dust of death. Greater than Noah, his everlasting covenant would bring true rest to Adam's race in the new creation. As Abraham's seed, he would bring blessing to all the families of the earth, pouring out his promised Spirit on the true children of Abraham. This prophet greater than Moses would for the sake of his great name bring his people out of the waters of death to ascend the hill of Yahweh. This greater servant Israel would faithfully bring forth justice and righteousness, redeeming the repentant Zion in the ultimate exodus journey from death to life. But those who harden their hearts against him will join the Serpent's seed, consumed as stubble in Yahweh's fury, their burning corpses an abhorrence to all flesh.

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<sup>30</sup> As both Moses and Noah interceded for corrupted (*shakhat*) humanity, the mediator Isaiah looked to would also make intercession for children dealing corruptly (*shakhat*, Isa 1:4).

## THE SERVANT OF YAHWEH: A NEW MOSES

Julia Hildebrandt<sup>1</sup>

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*The book of Isaiah's presentation of the Messiah as the servant of Yahweh offers glorious hope to a nation that is facing judgment for its rebellion against God's covenant. This article examines Moses's role as a servant of Yahweh, giving particular attention to his relationship to Israel and the nations. In so doing, it recognizes a parallel between Moses and the messianic servant of Yahweh presented in the Servant Songs of Isaiah. This parallel establishes the servant in Isaiah as the second Moses who enables the nation of Israel to finally fulfill its original purpose of being Yahweh's servant-nation with an international impact.*

Key words: Isaiah, servant, Moses, Messiah, Israel, exodus, prophet, nations

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At the time of Isaiah, Israel is in a dismal state. The people are laden with sin, and they are headed into exile as a result. Isaiah enters the scene not only to declare Israel's failure and coming judgment, but also to offer the hope the nation so desperately needs. He primarily does this by looking forward to the restoration God will accomplish through his Messiah. A commonly recognized aspect of Isaiah's messianic expectation is the role of the new David. Indeed, Isaiah clearly anticipates a future individual who will be the ultimate king to fulfill the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7). He will establish a righteous kingdom and rule on an eternal throne in Jerusalem, which offers great hope to a nation whose kings are failing and whose kingdom is disintegrating. God is not done with his promise to David, and this means he is not done with his promises to Israel.

Yet Isaiah is not only concerned with presenting the hope of a restored Davidic monarchy through the Messiah. Throughout his book, the restoration promised to Israel is tied to a theme that reaches further back into Israel's history, far before the monarchy was established, David was made king, or Yahweh promised a future king to reign on David's throne forever. Isaiah is not only concerned with a second

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kingdom, but he is also concerned with a second exodus. After all, it was the first exodus that made the establishment of the kingdom possible.<sup>2</sup> If Israel is to have a restored kingdom, yet is going into exile, then what is needed is a second exodus.<sup>3</sup> It is no surprise, then, that Isaiah develops this theme throughout his book (e.g., Isa 10–11; 14:1–2; 27:12–13; 35:5–10; 43:4–7; 48:20–21; 51:9–10; 52:11–12; 55:12–13; 58:8; 63:1–19).

The theme of a second exodus heralds another aspect of Isaiah's messianic expectation: the Messiah will fulfill the role of the new Moses.<sup>4</sup> Just as the theme of the second kingdom directly ties to a promise of a second David, the theme of the second exodus directly ties to a promise of a second Moses. Hints of the Messiah's role as a prophet like Moses (Exod 18:18; Deut 34:5) can be seen in many passages of Isaiah, but they are most pronounced in the Servant Songs and their context (Isa 40–55). While this is where the promises of a second exodus are most vibrant,<sup>5</sup> these promises are only one portion of the link between the Messiah and Moses. The more foundational connection is found in Isaiah's use of servant language for both the Messiah and Israel, which recalls the servanthood of Moses and Israel in the Pentateuch. By presenting the Messiah as the Servant of Yahweh, Isaiah identifies him as a new Moses who will lead Israel in a second exodus and represent Yahweh's word to Israel, enabling the nation to finally fulfill its purpose as a servant of Yahweh to the nations.

### Moses in the Pentateuch: An Individual Servant to Create a National Servant

#### Moses as the Servant of Yahweh

The title “servant [עֶבֶד] of Yahweh” is not often bestowed on individuals in Scripture, yet in the instances that it is, it is most often given to Moses.<sup>6</sup> As for more general references to an individual as God's servant, these are attributed to Moses more than anyone besides David.<sup>7</sup> Clearly, Moses's identity as a servant is central to his role. This is confirmed by the fact that the title “servant of Yahweh” is how Moses is identified at his death (Deut 34:5). Harmon states, “Of all the possible epitaphs the author could have chosen for Moses in summarizing his death, the author chooses, ‘servant of the LORD.’”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 264.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon P. Hugenberger, “The Servant of the Lord in the ‘Servant Songs’ of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure,” in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 117.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper, 1962), 2: 261.

<sup>5</sup> Hugenberger, “Servant of the Lord,” 122.

<sup>6</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 453; Hugenberger, “Servant of the Lord,” 129; Matthew S. Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme through the Canon*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (London: IVP Academic, 2021), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Hugenberger, “Servant of the Lord,” 129.

<sup>8</sup> Harmon, *Servant of the Lord*, 53.

If a central aspect of Moses's role is his service to Yahweh, one might wonder what that service entails. While his life contains many different stages and events, two main spheres of his service can be considered. The first is his service in relation to Israel, and the second is his service in relation to the nations. It is through Moses's service to Israel that the nation is formed into a servant of Yahweh. In turn, it is through the formation of this national servant that both Moses and the nation are to have an international impact.

### Moses's Role in Relation to Israel

Moses's service in relation to Israel has one central mission, which is to create a servant people. This is carried out through his two most central tasks: to lead Israel in the exodus and to act as a prophet for Israel. Neither of these tasks are ends in and of themselves. Rather, both have the purpose of creating a nation that serves Yahweh.

#### *As the Leader of the Exodus*

The beginning of Moses's role in Israel's history revolves around bringing the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. The book of Exodus opens with the reality that the Israelites are being forced to serve as slaves [root: עבד] of Pharaoh (Exod 1:13, 14). However, God is not oblivious to His people's grim state (Exod 2:24-25), and he raises up Moses to be his means of deliverance (Exod 3:7-10).

The purpose of God's deliverance of Israel is clear—it is so that the people can serve [root: עבד] Yahweh (see Exod 7:16; 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 10:3, 7-8, 11, 24, 26; 12:31).<sup>9</sup> In other words, God is transferring Israel from service to Pharaoh to service to Yahweh. Through the exodus, he is redeeming Israel to be a servant-nation.

The creation of this servant-nation through the exodus is inherently bound to the means of God's deliverance, Moses. In fact, it is against the backdrop of Israel's salvation from Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea that Moses is first called Yahweh's servant (Exod 14:31). The interplay of the national servant and individual servant could be summarized this way: Moses, the individual servant of Yahweh, is meant to lead the people out of Egypt so that they can become a national servant of Yahweh.<sup>10</sup>

#### *As a Prophet*

Yet as the rest of the Pentateuch makes clear, Moses's role in Israel's history does not end when the people have safely left Egypt. In fact, it could be said that his role as a leader of Israel's exodus is only an important step toward his most notable ministry: to represent God's word to the people. Indeed, it is this aspect of Moses's service to the Lord that Deuteronomy focuses on when it anticipates a future prophet like him (Deut 18:15-19; 34:10-12). Therefore, Moses's prophetic role is that which most distinguishes him in his service to Yahweh.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 53.

The purpose of Moses's declaration of God's word to Israel is the same as the purpose for which God delivered the nation from Egypt. Moses's prophetic role picks up where his exodus role leaves off. With the people liberated from Egypt (Exod 19:4), Yahweh declares that they are now to become his treasured possession and holy nation amongst the rest of the nations. While servant language is not explicitly used, the idea is similar. The nation is now to be Yahweh's possession (Exod 19:5), not Pharaoh's. However, there is a condition that must be met for Israel to fulfill its role as God's possession. The people must obey his voice and keep his covenant (Exod 19:5). To do that, they will need someone to communicate God's word to them, for they are too afraid to receive such transcendent revelation directly (Exod 20:18-19; cf. Deut 5:5, 23-27).<sup>12</sup> This is where Moses's role as prophet comes in, for God uses him to communicate the divine commandments and covenant to the people (Deut 5:5, 28-33). As Yahweh forms a holy nation through the giving of his law (Exod-Deut), Moses will be a prophet who mediates God's covenant.<sup>13</sup> He will declare Yahweh's commands to his people so that they can in turn obey Yahweh and be his servant-nation.

### Moses's Role in Relation to the Nations

In addition to his national role, Moses also has an international role. While God raises up his servant Moses to create a servant Israel, he also raises him up to impact the nations. Yahweh accomplishes this international impact through Moses in two ways: first through Moses's individual service to Yahweh, and ultimately through Israel's national service to Yahweh that Moses makes possible.

#### *As an Individual Servant*

First, Yahweh uses Moses directly to have a global impact. The importance of his international ministry is clear in Deuteronomy 34:11, which notes the uniqueness of Moses's prophetic role given "the signs and wonders that Yahweh sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land." Evidently, Moses's role as the servant of Yahweh did not just influence the Israelites, though it did indeed do that (Deut 34:12). It also influenced the nations as Yahweh used him to do great signs and wonders.<sup>14</sup>

The idea that God used Moses to be a witness to the nations is repeatedly emphasized in the exodus narrative alluded to in Deuteronomy 34:11. In delivering Israel out of Egypt, God is not only going to make Israel know that he is Yahweh (Exod 6:7; 10:2), but he is also going to make all the Egyptians know that he is Yahweh (Exod 7:5, 17; 8:22; 14:4, 18). This clarifies the impact that Moses, as an individual servant, is to have on the nations. He is to reveal the reality of who God is (Exod 3:14). His servanthood is to bring nations to a knowledge of Yahweh.

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<sup>12</sup> Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 273.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

### *Through the National Servant*

Yet Moses's international role goes beyond his individual impact to the impact he enables the nation of Israel to have. Moses's function in creating a servant-nation has the ultimate purpose of influencing the nations. In Exodus 19:5-6, God declares that Israel is not only to be his treasured possession, but also "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5). Stuart summarizes the implications of these titles for Israel well: "They were not to be a people unto themselves, enjoying their special relationship with God and paying no attention to the rest of the world. Rather, they were to represent him to the rest of the world and attempt to bring the rest of the world to him."<sup>15</sup>

As the national servant created through the individual servant, Israel is now to have international influence. Not only are the people to do as a nation what Moses did as an individual, making Yahweh known before pagan nations, but they are also to be the means by which those nations enjoy a relationship with God.

### The Failure of the National Servant and the Need for a New Individual Servant

With a better understanding of how Moses's role as a servant led to Israel's role as a servant, we can now turn to Isaiah. Here we see that there is a problem. The nation of Israel, some 700 years after the time of Moses, is not functioning as the servant of Yahweh. The nation is failing to obey God's voice and covenant, so it is being returned to the forced servitude of the nations (cf. Isa 5:26-30; 6:9-12).

The theme of the Israelites' failure to heed God's word and their resultant exile is seen throughout the book of Isaiah, yet it is specifically addressed in the context of the Servant Songs (Isaiah 40-55). Here Israel is explicitly identified as Yahweh's servant, drawing on the Pentateuchal theme of Israel's original purpose. In Isaiah 42:20-21, Yahweh declares that he has magnified his law among his servant Israel, letting the nation see and hear many things. He builds on this in Isaiah 48:17, reminding the Israelites that he is the one who has taught them and led them in the way they should go. However, in response to the revelation of God's law, the servant Israel is blind and deaf (42:18-19), and the people have failed to pay attention to Yahweh's commandments (48:18). Because of this failure, God is allowing them to be plundered and imprisoned (42:22, 24).

Moses's service in forming Israel as a national servant has been undone. Though the people were originally delivered from the oppression of the nations and given God's law, their current state shows that they have failed in their consequent role. Instead of obeying God's word, they have rebelled, and instead of having an international impact, they are facing renewed slavery to the nations.<sup>16</sup> With Israel back where it started, the people need a new individual servant of Yahweh to

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 423.

<sup>16</sup> Harmon expands on this idea: "Instead of being the servant through whom Yahweh is working to overcome the blindness of and deafness of the nations, Israel as a nation has instead become blind and deaf themselves. Despite the Lord giving Israel his law, they have been plundered by the very nations they are supposed to enlighten and are therefore handed over to the nations by Yahweh himself" (*Servant of the Lord*, 117).



re-establish the work of Moses. The situation can be summarized with the following diagram.

Moses was raised up as an <b>individual servant</b> of Yahweh.
Moses was sent to Israel to create a <b>national servant</b> with an <b>international impact</b> . He would do this through
delivering Israel from <b>service to the nations</b> and
proclaiming <b>God’s word</b> and <b>law</b> to them that they might <b>obey</b> it.
However,
Israel has been <b>disobedient to God’s law</b> and the people’s hearts are hardened to the proclamation of <b>His word</b> , so
Israel is being delivered into <b>service to the nations</b> .
Since Israel is not functioning as a <b>national servant</b> with an <b>international impact</b> ,
Yahweh will raise up a new <b>individual servant</b> .

Yet the people also need a servant who is greater than Moses. If a second Moses is all that Yahweh sends, what hope does Israel have of truly becoming the servant-nation it was supposed to become under the first Moses? The new servant of Yahweh must re-accomplish the work of the first servant, namely, leading Israel out of slavery and revealing God’s word. Yet for those tasks to be successful in their purpose of creating a servant-nation with an international impact, the new servant must do something more than the first did. He must also address the root of Israel’s failure and thereby remove the possibility of his work being reversed.

It is against this backdrop that Isaiah steps in to present the Messiah as the individual servant of Yahweh. This servant leads the second exodus and exercises the distinct function of proclaiming God’s word to Israel. He does this precisely because Israel is failing in its purpose as a servant of Yahweh. He comes to restore Israel to that purpose, and by so doing to spread the knowledge of Yahweh to the nations. Therefore, like the first Moses, his role has both a national dimension and an international dimension. In both spheres he will mirror Moses, yet he will also far surpass Moses’s achievements to resolve forever the issue that has kept Israel from becoming a national servant with an international impact.

The Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah:  
An Individual Servant to Restore the National Servant

The Servant of Yahweh as the Messiah

Proving that the servant in the Servant Songs of Isaiah is the Messiah is beyond the scope of this article. Indeed, untangling all the references to a servant in Isaiah 40–55 is a task many have tackled, and just as many supposed solutions have been

proposed.<sup>17</sup> As a result, even identifying the Servant Songs is a monumental task. Therefore, this paper will take the view that the servant in the Servant Songs is indeed the Messiah, and it will understand the Servant Songs as Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; and 52:13–53:12.<sup>18</sup> However, the exploration of how this servant connects to Moses and the promise of a prophet like him will affirm a messianic understanding all the more.<sup>19</sup>

## The Servant's Role in Relation to Israel

Like Moses, the individual servant of Yahweh has a distinct role in relation to Israel. For Moses, that role was the creation of a national servant through leading the exodus and proclaiming God's word. For the servant in Isaiah, that role is the restoration of the national servant through leading a second exodus and proclaiming God's word. In this restoration, the messianic servant will go beyond Moses's role, addressing the root of Israel's failure to be a national servant.

### *As the Leader of the Second Exodus*

The theme of the second exodus is prevalent in the Servant Songs and their context (Isa 40–55).<sup>20</sup> That this new exodus is connected to the servant of Yahweh is especially evident in the second Servant Song (Isa 49:1-13). In verse 5, we see that the servant's mission is to gather Israel back to Yahweh,<sup>21</sup> hinting at a second exodus to restore the nation. This mission is then confirmed through the explicit exodus language in verses 8-12.<sup>22</sup>

The identification of the servant of Yahweh as the leader of the second exodus ties him to the leader of the first exodus, the servant Moses.<sup>23</sup> The servant in Isaiah will re-accomplish what Moses did, delivering the Israelites from oppression by gathering them from the nations. Yet Isaiah 49 offers hints of how the servant's leadership of a second exodus is greater than Moses's leadership of the first. The messianic servant will not only deliver Israel from imprisonment (v. 9) but also "restore the land" and "apportion desolate heritages" (v. 8). In other words, his role in the exodus will go beyond Moses's role of simply bringing Israel out of slavery to the nations. Oswalt notes that the language in verse 8 "involves the reestablishment of Joshua's work."<sup>24</sup> This is significant because Moses's own disobedience to Yahweh was the reason that he did not enter the land and apportion heritages to Israel

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<sup>17</sup> For a brief survey of various identifications of the servant in the servant songs of Isaiah, see Hugenberger, "Servant of the Lord," 106–19.

<sup>18</sup> For a similar identification of the Servant Songs, cf. *ibid.*, 106; Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 337.

<sup>19</sup> Hugenberger makes the argument that an understanding of the servant of Yahweh as a second Moses figure is actually the best argument for a messianic interpretation of the Servant Songs ("Servant of the Lord," 105, 119, 138–39).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 122–23.

<sup>21</sup> Harmon, *Servant of the Lord*, 122.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 130; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40–66*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 299.

<sup>23</sup> von Rad, *OT Theology*, 261.

<sup>24</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 298.

(Num 20:1-13).<sup>25</sup> His failure to heed Yahweh's commands meant that he had to pass this task off to Joshua. Unlike Moses, however, the servant in Isaiah will not only bring forth the captive Israelites, but he will also establish them in the land. This indicates that his ministry will not be interrupted by his own sin, making him not only a new Moses but also a new Joshua.

Yet is this enough? Even if this servant's ministry is not cut short because of his own failure, what about Israel's failure? What guarantee does Israel have that their ultimate problem of breaking Yahweh's covenant will be remedied? The people need something more than a new exodus with a new distribution of the land. They need a servant who will ensure that they will be able to fulfill the purpose for which they are delivered, namely, to serve Yahweh themselves. Thankfully, Isaiah presents the servant of Yahweh as the one who meets Israel's ultimate need, a presentation closely tied to the servant's role as prophet.

### *As a Prophet*

Throughout the Servant Songs, a distinct emphasis is put on the servant's words. Many scholars have recognized how this emphasis reveals that a prophetic ministry is an essential element of the servant's role. Westermann notes the prophetic tones of the servant's task in Isaiah 42:2-4,<sup>26</sup> and Blocher points to the importance given to the servant's mouth in Isaiah 49:2 as proof that the servant is primarily meant to be seen as a prophet.<sup>27</sup> Oswalt also picks up on the prophetic element of the servant's role, specifically in Isaiah's third Servant Song (Isa 50:4-9). He suggests that this passage shows the servant's mission to be "centered on the proclamation of the Word," especially through 50:4.<sup>28</sup> Clearly, the servant of Yahweh is a prophet.

Isaiah's emphasis on the servant's words does not associate him with just any prophet. Rather, it particularly brings Moses to mind. This is first seen in Isaiah 42:4, where God says that the coastlands will wait for the servant's law, or *torah*. The word *torah* is often used to communicate "the whole body of instruction that Moses delivered to the people."<sup>29</sup> As the one who communicates the *torah*, the servant will be a new Moses. This is confirmed by his close relationship to the covenant, seen in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8. Just as Moses mediated God's covenant, so will the servant.<sup>30</sup> The servant of Yahweh is a prophet like Moses.

While the servant's prophetic role is like Moses's in many ways, one cannot miss how it is also different. For example, in Isaiah 42:4, God says that the coastlands wait for the *servant's* law. Unlike Moses, who simply delivered Yahweh's law, this servant will give a law of his own. The uniqueness of Yahweh's plan to give the servant *as* a covenant to the people (Isa 42:6; 49:8) must also be noted. While Moses

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<sup>25</sup> Merrill observes that Deuteronomy 34:7 indicates that Moses's death was premature, emphasizing that his death and consequent inability to enter the land of Canaan were the direct result of his own failure (*Deuteronomy*, 435–54).

<sup>26</sup> Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (London: SCM, 1969), 97.

<sup>27</sup> Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 38.

<sup>28</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 323.

<sup>29</sup> Blocher, *Songs*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 117.

simply communicated God's covenant, the servant in Isaiah will embody it. The servant of Yahweh does not simply mirror Moses's role but surpasses it.<sup>31</sup>

It is in the servant's unique prophetic role that the remedy for Israel's failure as a national servant is found. This is seen most clearly in the last Servant Song (Isa 52:13–53:12). The description of the servant's suffering here bears many linguistic similarities to the covenant curses promised to Israel if they break God's covenant (Lev 26:14-39; Deut 28:15-68).<sup>32</sup> Yet we know that this servant has not rebelled against God's commands. In fact, the previous song shows how completely he attends to, submits to, and trusts in the word of Yahweh, proving his total innocence (Isa 50:4-9). Far from suffering for his own rebellion against God's commands, then, the servant is acting as a substitute for sinful Israel (Isa 53:4, 6, 11, 12).<sup>33</sup> By taking the people's sins upon himself, he will then bring healing to the nation and make many accounted righteous (Isa 53:5, 12). Through the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah, the nation of Israel will be treated as if it had never broken Yahweh's covenant.<sup>34</sup>

Yahweh's promises to give the servant as a covenant to the people are understood in this light (Isa 42:6; 49:8). Israel has broken the Mosaic covenant, which is why they are in exile. However, God will give them the servant as a new covenant.<sup>35</sup> Because the servant will bear their curses himself, the people can be sure that they will be restored from exile and finally enabled to be God's servant.

Therefore, Isaiah's presentation of the servant of Yahweh identifies him as a prophet like Moses who not only communicates Yahweh's word to the people, but also intervenes for the people when they rebel against it. Rather than simply conveying Yahweh's demand for obedience to the nation, he steps in and bears the consequences for the nation's disobedience, doing what sinful Moses could never have done. In so doing, the servant makes it possible for Israel to be restored to its role as a servant-nation.

### The Servant's Role in Relation to the Nations

The final topic that must be considered is how the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah relates to the international impact Yahweh intended to have through his servant Moses. It was previously noted that Moses was to influence the nations in two ways: first through his individual service to Yahweh, and ultimately through Israel's national service to Yahweh that Moses makes possible. The problem is that Moses did not make Israel's service to Yahweh possible. Indeed, when we come to Isaiah, Israel is failing in its role as a servant (e.g., 42:18-25; 48:18-19). And if Israel is not functioning as a national servant, then it is certainly not functioning as an international witness.

Yet just as Isaiah presents the servant of Yahweh as the solution to the nation's broken relationship to God, so he presents the servant of Yahweh as the solution to the nation's broken relationship to the world. Isaiah 40–55, as well as the chapters

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>32</sup> Harmon, *Servant of the Lord*, 130.

<sup>33</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 334.

<sup>34</sup> Oswalt offers a helpful explanation of the covenant in Isaiah 42:6 (ibid., 119).

<sup>35</sup> Commenting on Deuteronomy 34:10, Craigie notes that the ultimate prophet like Moses will bring the New Covenant (*Deuteronomy*, 407).

that follow, reveal that the servant will have an international impact that is similar yet superior to that of Moses, influencing the nations both individually and through the nation of Israel.

### *As an Individual Servant*

In many ways, the stress in the Servant Songs is on the international influence of the individual servant rather than that of the national servant. This is because Israel is not functioning as the kingdom of priests it was called to be (Exod 19:5). Therefore, the individual servant of Yahweh will step in and communicate to the nations what Israel failed to communicate. Indeed, he will be the ideal Israel in whom Yahweh is glorified (Isa 49:3).<sup>36</sup>

Moses's individual role in relation to the nations had to do with spreading the knowledge of Yahweh, and the same can be said of the servant in Isaiah. Earlier we saw that the servant acts as a prophet for the nation of Israel. Yet the reality is that his prophetic role is also intended for the nations. In Isaiah 42:4, it is the coastlands that wait for his law, and in Isaiah 49:1, these same coastlands are told to listen to him. The idea is that the servant will bring God's word to "the uttermost parts of the earth."<sup>37</sup> In Isaiah 42:6-7, he is given not only as a covenant for Israel, but also as a light for the nations. This idea is reemphasized in Isaiah 49:5-6, where Yahweh declares, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Indeed, the scope of the servant's ministry goes far beyond Israel. This was true of Moses's ministry as well, but on a far more limited scale. While Moses was called to make Yahweh known before Pharaoh and the Egyptians, this servant will make him known before all the world.

Yet the servant's international role is not only greater than Moses's in its scope, but also in its function. The literal rendering of the last phrase in Isaiah 49:6 makes this clear. A better translation would be, "I will make you a light to the nations and *you will be my salvation* to the end of the earth" (emphasis added). As Oswalt writes, "The Servant is not merely to be the means of God's salvation coming to the world, he is to *be* that salvation."<sup>38</sup> This shows that the escalation of the servant's prophetic role, namely, to not only declare God's word but also remedy disobedience to it, will be applied to the nations (cf. Isa 50:4-6; 52:15).

### *Through the National Servant*

Finally, the servant of Yahweh will also have an international impact through the national servant. Though Israel's failure to be a global witness demands that the servant step in and accomplish this witness in the nation's place, that does not mean God has discarded his intentions to use Israel internationally. As he restores the nation through the servant, he will also restore the nation's international influence.

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<sup>36</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 291.

<sup>37</sup> Blocher, *Songs*, 31.

<sup>38</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 294.

The emphasis in the Servant Songs is that God's very act of redeeming Israel through his servant will be the means by which he will make himself known through the nation. Therefore, Israel's restored global witness is largely passive. Israel will impact the nations simply by being acted upon, which is good news for a nation that cannot restore its international witness itself.<sup>39</sup> The reality that God has saved Israel through his servant will spread the knowledge of his name, glory, and saving power through all the earth (Isa 49:26; 52:10).<sup>40</sup>

However, Israel's restored role as a national servant does not stop there. Once redeemed and participating in Yahweh's new covenant through the servant (e.g., 42:6; 49:5, 8; 54:10), the nation will finally function as the kingdom of priests it was always supposed to be, taking an active role in its international witness. This is seen especially in the chapters that follow the Servant Songs (Isa 56–66), where the focus is largely on what the servant's accomplishments mean for the nation. For example, Oswalt writes of Isaiah 56:1–8,

The earlier chapters spoke of the Servant's ministry to bring justice to the nations, and the ministry of the servants to be the living evidence (witnesses, 43:10, etc.) to the nations of the salvation of God. Now the prophet begins to work out the implications of all of that. Because of the two ministries, all the nations will flow to Jerusalem to learn the Torah of God (51:4; cf. 56:1, where *mispāt* is the functional equivalent of *tora*), to lay hold of his covenant (cf. 49:8; 54:10; 55:5; 56:4,6), and to love his name (55:13; 56:6).<sup>41</sup>

This discussion of Israel's restored witness to the nations following its salvation finds its climax in Isaiah 60–62.<sup>42</sup> It is here that the servant's light to the nations is inextricably linked to Zion (60:1–3),<sup>43</sup> that the nations recognize the Israelites as priests of Yahweh through the work of the servant (61:1–4, 6; cf. Exod 19:6),<sup>44</sup> and that Zion is promised, in the sight of all nations, not only future righteousness but also a future identity as God's treasured possession once again (62:1–5, 12).<sup>45</sup> Therefore, Israel's purpose as a national servant of Yahweh to the nations has not been annulled but will find its ultimate fulfillment through the restoration accomplished by the messianic servant.

## Conclusion

The book of Isaiah presents Israel as a failing servant. The people have not obeyed God's commands, and as a result, they are headed into exile. Yet through the Servant Songs and their context, Isaiah offers glorious hope. This hope is rooted in the reality that God is going to raise up a servant who will not only be like Moses,

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 287.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Isaiah* 40–66, 373.

<sup>41</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 454–55.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 534.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, *Isaiah* 40–66, 615.

<sup>44</sup> See Oswalt's discussion of 61:5, 6, 9 in *Book of Isaiah*, 571–74.

<sup>45</sup> Commenting on 62:3, Oswalt writes that Zion/Jerusalem “are a priceless possession, a thing of delight, honor, and beauty” (ibid., 580).

but also be far superior to him. Like Moses, he will lead Israel in an exodus and exercise a prophetic role. Yet superior to Moses, he will go beyond revealing what is required for Israel to become a servant-nation to address the rebellion that keeps it from fulfilling that role. Like Moses, he will be a means of global witness to the nations, both individually and through his relationship to the nation of Israel. Yet superior to Moses, his global witness will not just spread knowledge to the nations, but also offer them salvation. Further, his redemption of Israel will allow it to finally fulfill its role as a servant of Yahweh to the nations. Isaiah 40–55 thus presents the Israelites with incredible hope. Yes, they are facing judgment and exile. Yet Yahweh is sending a new Moses who will deliver the nation in a second exodus, reestablishing Israel as the faithful servant of Yahweh it was always intended to be.

## THE SONG OF MOSES IN ISAIAH

Shiloh Noorthoek<sup>1</sup>

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*Isaiah begins his book by calling on the heavens and the earth to bear witness against Judah for their covenant disobedience. In doing so, Isaiah intentionally alludes to the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. This intertextuality builds an undeniable case of the wickedness of Judah and justifies the judgment of God for their sins. Isaiah weaves the themes and language of the Song of Moses into his prophecies so that the children of Israel would stand utterly condemned. Yet in following the Song of Moses, Isaiah provides hope for a remnant that would be vindicated by the vengeance of God on their enemies.*

Key words: Song of Moses, Isaiah, vengeance, restoration, intertextuality

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“Have you not known? Have you not heard?” Isaiah repeats this question many times during one of the most well-known chapters in his book (Isa 40:21, 28). While calling Israel to remember and consider the majesty of their God, Isaiah repeatedly assumes their understanding with rhetorical questions. Did Israel know? Had they heard? Isaiah builds on themes and ideas found in earlier writings in the canon. A particularly powerful example of this development of inspiration is found in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Studying Deuteronomy 32 demonstrates the continuity of inspiration between Isaiah and previous revelation.

Moses, in that song, had already taught Israel the glimmerings of what Isaiah prophesied. Isaiah’s message should not have surprised the ancient Israelite readers. Instead, it should have struck a chord that brought them all the way back to the chorus of Moses in the desert. The song that Moses taught the children of Israel was intended to be a witness against them when the judgment of the Lord came upon them. Examining the developed themes of Isaiah and the Song of Moses will show Isaiah’s intentional intertextuality between the song of the exile and his prophecies. This

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intertextuality justifies the judgment of God on his people and provides hope for a future salvation of the nation.

### Isaiah's Allusion to Moses in Linguistics

By using similar language and motifs as Deuteronomy 32, Isaiah intended for his book to be seen as borrowing from and interacting with the Song of Moses. For example, Moses begins his song by calling on the heavens and the earth to hear the words of his mouth, a standard motif of extrabiblical covenants and treaties.<sup>2</sup> When Isaiah begins his prophecy, Yahweh speaks against his people, calling on the heavens and the earth to witness against them.<sup>3</sup> The reader of Isaiah would automatically recall the familiar Song of Moses in the very beginning of Isaiah's prophecy.

The connection between Isaiah and Moses can be illustrated in two ways: by looking at the unique vocabulary that both texts utilize and by studying the themes that both texts address. Isaiah uses phraseology that pulls on the same theology as the Song of Moses. He employs terms like rock, vengeance, and Sodom and Gomorrah to make Israel remember what Moses had infused into the DNA of Israel by his song. When Isaiah asks if Israel had known and heard, the way that these terms and phrases are used helps to demonstrate that they truly did know and had heard. By using Mosaic language and themes, Isaiah reminds the house of Judah that they have been warned by Moses and are without excuse for breaking the covenant.

### Sodom and Gomorrah

In Deuteronomy 32:32 Moses speaks of the enemies that are void of counsel, whose vine comes from the vine of Sodom and the fields of Gomorrah. The enemies that God uses to judge his people are wicked in the manner of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those two cities were destroyed by the Lord because of their evil. Moses uses the complete devastation of Sodom and Gomorrah as an object lesson of the retribution of God. Since the enemies of Israel come from the vine of Sodom, they will also face the wrath of God. Those who follow the way of Sodom will be punished (Deut 32:34-36).

By identifying the Israelites as Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaiah condemns the people of Judah. In chapter 1 Jerusalem is compared to Sodom and Gomorrah because of their wickedness (Isa 1:10-11). Again, Isaiah says in 3:9 that Judah

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<sup>2</sup> Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 2002), 794. Christensen does not agree with the interpretation that Moses intended his appeal to the heavens and the earth to be related to covenantal witnessing. He thinks that the concept of father and son contradicts the concept of treaty and its vassals. However, he does point out the use of calling on the heavens and the earth in extrabiblical texts and treaties. The context of Deuteronomy 31:19-22 and the purpose for writing the song convince the author that Moses did in fact intend for his song to be a judgment against Israel, and he illustrates that by the inclusion of heavens and earth. Furthermore, the dual metaphor of father to son and lord to vassal is also in Isaiah 1, which gives precedence in Scripture for holding both simultaneously. See G. Ernest Wright, "The Lawsuit of God: A Form-Critical Study of Deuteronomy 32," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter J. Harrelson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 26–67.

<sup>3</sup> John L. Mackay, *Isaiah, Volume 1, Chapters 1–39*, EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2008), 46.

proclaims their sin like Sodom. The sins of Judah and Israel follow and match the sins of Sodom and Gomorrah. Because Judah has polluted themselves like Sodom and Gomorrah, the same condemnation will come upon them. Isaiah pulls on Moses's lesson of the overthrowing of Sodom and Gomorrah to form the basis for the destruction that will rush over Israel.

### God as Israel's Rock

References to God as the rock of his people are not unique to Isaiah and Deuteronomy. They appear in many of the psalms as an example of the kind of trust that God's people can put in him. However, in the Song of Moses the term "rock" is used specifically as a measure of condemnation to the children of Israel. Isaiah uses this term in similar ways. Moses mentions "rock" in verses 4, 15, 30, 31, 37,<sup>4</sup> and Isaiah uses "rock" in the same way to refer to gods or the true God in 17:10; 22:16; 26:4; 30:29; 31:9, and 44:8.<sup>5</sup> In the song of Moses, the rock refers to the one whom nations depend on; Israel can only find true security in her rock.<sup>6</sup> As an example, God compares himself to the false gods of the nations, their "rocks." He uncovers the false hope that they bring by asking a rhetorical question of where Israel's false gods are. Israel took refuge in a false rock and faced utter destruction as discipline from the Lord (Deut 32:31-37). Unlike the pagan nations, God, in the Song of Moses, is an incomparable, unchanging steady rock of salvation, but Israel is a stubborn nation that trusts in other rocks to their own hurt.<sup>7</sup>

This pattern of idolatry is repeated in the book of Isaiah. In Isaiah 17:10 the prophet says that the Lord's people have forgotten the rock of their refuge, so the Lord's judgment comes upon them. Their amnesia about the rock of their refuge echoes Deuteronomy.<sup>8</sup> In Isaiah 31 the Lord warns against trusting in the arm of Egypt or Assyria, declaring, "The Assyrian will fall by a sword not wielded by a man, and a sword not of man will devour him. . . . His rock will pass away because of panic" (31:8-9). The enemies of Israel all depend on many false rocks. These rocks will lead to their own destruction. Yahweh exhorts Israel to not be afraid because he alone is God (Isa 44:8). Yahweh knows of no other rock than himself. When his people trust in him, they will be set in perfect peace (Isa 26:3).

Israel was tempted to trust in the nations around them, but Isaiah warns them of the futility of depending on these rocks. Trusting in the nations will only lead to

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<sup>4</sup> Block divides the use of rock in Deuteronomy 32 into three categories. He writes, "The word rock appears twice in its natural sense (vv. 13a, 13b), five times as an epithet of Yahweh (vv. 4, 15, 18, 30, 31b) and twice in reference to foreign gods (vv. 31, 37)" (Daniel Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012], 750-51).

<sup>5</sup> The word "rock" is used seven other times in the book of Isaiah (2:10; 8:14; 10:26; 22:16; 32:2; 48:21; 51:1). Except for 8:14 and 51:1, each of these times refer to a literal rock. Isaiah 8:14 is the promise to put a rock of stumbling in Jerusalem, and Isaiah 51:1 is the call to return to the rock from which Israel was formed, the rock being Abraham. Six out of the thirteen times that "rock" is used in the book of Isaiah it refers to either the gods of the nations, or the true God of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 750.

<sup>7</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 378.

<sup>8</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 353-54.

destruction. Israel faces the judgment of God for depending on false gods instead of the rock of their fathers (Isa 17:10). It is the redeemed ones of Jacob who sing a song of praise to God saying, “Trust in Yahweh forever, for Yahweh God is an everlasting rock” (Isa 26:4).<sup>9</sup> In Isaiah, the steady rock of Israel is forgotten by his people and brings judgment upon them, but their God continually encourages them to trust in him as the only rock. Eventually Judah recognizes their rock and sings his praises as a righteous nation. Isaiah perfectly captures the sins of Judah and the faithfulness of their God through the language of Deuteronomy 32.

### Yahweh’s Vengeance

Isaiah promises a future where the restored children of Israel will praise their rock (Isa 26:4). Israel’s trust in their God leads to their restoration. With this restoration, Isaiah follows the Song of Moses. Moses uses the term “vengeance” to speak of a time in which Yahweh will bring recompense to the enemies of Israel (Deut 32:35). He sharpens his flashing sword to judge the nations and take vengeance on his adversaries (Deut 32:41). However, God’s vengeance also causes the cleansing of his people’s land and their vindication. The restoration of Israel comes through the vengeance on the adversaries of God. The children of Israel experience the compassion of Yahweh toward them; it is a time of rejoicing and not mourning (Deut 32:36, 43).

This reversal of fates that comes through the judgment of God aligns perfectly with the book of Isaiah, who adds more context to the concept of vengeance in the Song of Moses. In chapter 34–35 especially, Isaiah builds on what Moses teaches the children of Israel in the Song of Moses. Chapter 34 tells of a day of vengeance and a year of recompense for Zion. God sates his sword with blood as it drinks its fill in the heavens and descends upon Edom.<sup>10</sup> By contrast, Isaiah 35:4 says that God will come with vengeance and recompense to save Israel. These chapters are connected in theme and content. The day of vengeance that leads to the emptying, burning, and destruction of the land in chapter 34 corresponds to the day of redemption that brings

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<sup>9</sup> The context of the song in Isaiah 26 is that the entire world has been eviscerated and emptied as a curse devours the earth (24:1-6). Judgment falls on the entire world and it is broken asunder, split through, and shaken violently (24:19). As cataclysmic destruction envelops the entire earth, Isaiah inserts songs of praise to the Lord. The destruction of the earth has a cleansing factor that causes a strong nation to glorify the Lord, and the reproach of his people to be removed from the earth (25:3, 8). Because Israel trusts in their rock, they are rescued from their reproach and from the devastation of the rest of the earth (26:3-5).

The fundamental issue is whether Israel will trust in their own strength or if they will seek their God and trust in him. The designation of Yahweh as a rock does highlight the trustworthiness of his character, but time and time again Isaiah shows the unfaithfulness of Israel. Israel continues to trust false gods and false rocks; therefore, they receive the punishment of God. However, from this passage in chapter 26, Isaiah reveals that a faithful people will give glory to their God. They will finally turn to their Lord and trust in him. The Song of Moses hints at this restoration with the concept of vengeance and God atoning for his land and people through the strength of his sword (Deut 32:42-43). The people will indeed become a faithful town but only through fire (Isa 1:25; 4:4).

<sup>10</sup> The context of verse 1-4 demonstrates that this day of vengeance does not only affect the nation of Edom. Yahweh calls for all nations, he has devoted them all to destruction, and all the host of heaven rots away. When this chapter narrows down to Edom, God uses that nation as an example of the further judgment that will come on the rest of the nations as well. The judgment on Edom exemplifies the “day of vengeance” in verse 8.

about the flourishing of the desert and the filling of Zion with the Yahweh's redeemed.

In 63:1-6 Isaiah describes a mighty warrior coming from Edom, covered in the blood of his enemies. He has trodden on them in his anger and trampled them in his wrath. This is the day of the Lord's vengeance (Isa 63:4). This day has come because this triumphant warrior saw that there were no people to help and none to uphold (Isa 63:5); therefore, his own arm brought salvation. Once again, the vengeance of the Lord brings help and salvation at the same time. Verses 7-14 show that this promise of vengeance naturally leads into a prayer for the compassion of the Lord. Isaiah waits for the Lord to act and avenge himself on his enemies, knowing that the vengeance of the Lord leads to the salvation of Israel.

### Isaiah's Allusions to Deuteronomy 32 in Themes

Not only does Isaiah connect to Deuteronomy 32 in linguistics, but the book also thematically echoes the story that Moses tells in his song. The progression of the song from the creation and guiding of Israel, to their disobedience and punishment, to the song's cumulation in the vengeance of Yahweh on Israel's enemies and compassion towards Israel, provides the pattern that Isaiah follows. Moses and Isaiah both unfurl their prophecies in a similar way, tracing the past and future of the nation of Israel.

### Israel's Beginnings

Both the Song of Moses and Isaiah begin by looking to the beginning of Israel's history. Moses starts by proclaiming the excellencies of the rock in light of the corruptness of his children.<sup>11</sup> He says that the children of Jacob have dealt corruptly with their father and are blemished. They prove to be a foolish and senseless people. They should have considered that God is the father who created and established them (Deut 32:4-6).

Moses continues by telling of the way that God was gracious to his people. He calls on the people to remember the days of old when Yahweh chose his people over all the nations of the earth and made Jacob his allotted heritage. Moses describes God finding his people in the desert land, caring for them, and guiding them (32:7-12).<sup>12</sup> The Lord provided for his people and gave them the richest produce of the land: milk, honey, fine wheat, and foaming wine. This is the same idea that Isaiah gives in Isaiah 5:3-4, "What more could have been done?" The owner of Isaiah's vineyard is completely excused from any blame.<sup>13</sup>

In the first chapter of his book, Isaiah also condemns Israel as faithless children. They are children of God who do not understand their position before God. Isaiah 1:3 says, "The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master's crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand." They are children who are obstinate in their sinfulness and who refuse to return to the Lord. They are more stupid than an ox or

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<sup>11</sup> Christensen, *Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12*, 798, 808.

<sup>12</sup> Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 381.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 68–69.

donkey because they do not honor God as their creator. Once again, Isaiah follows the same pattern of Moses by beginning with Israel's sins and using specific language to condemn them as disobedient sons of a solicitous and caring father.

Isaiah echoes these ideas about the beginning of Israel's history in Isaiah 63:8-14. There Isaiah meditates on the graciousness and lovingkindness of God by remembering his patience with his people in their desert wanderings. Isaiah says that they were lifted up and carried in the days of old. God brought the children of Israel out of the sea, put the Holy Spirit among them, divided the waters before them, and gave them rest as they went along the way (Isa 63:8-13). This demonstrates the same kind of care and affection that Moses speaks about in his song. Yahweh cared tenderly for his people and provided them with all that they needed. Isaiah pleads for Yahweh to return to his people for the "sake of your servants, the tribes of your heritage" (Isa 63:17). Moses recounted Yahweh's graciousness to Israel when they were taken out of Egypt and his ownership of them, and Isaiah borrows that memory in chapter 63.

### Israel's Rebellion

The progression of the story in the Song of Moses speaks of the wickedness of the people of God. They grow fat and forsake their God (Deut 32:15). They scoff at the God who made them, and they stir him to jealousy with strange gods that were demons and not gods (Deut 32:16-17). They cling to new gods and not the true God of their fathers. They forget the rock that bore them and forsake their Father (Deut 32:17-18).

Isaiah 1 capitalizes on these themes by describing the relationship of Israel to the Lord as a sinful son to their father. Isaiah also condemns worship or trust in gods that are not gods. Chapters 40–48 provide arguments that warn against the folly of worshipping and trusting in idols which can never save. These chapters proclaim the incomparable nature of God who stands far above all false gods. In chapter 41 he challenges the gods of the nations to defend their deity. In chapter 44 he mocks the creation of false gods by a master workman. In chapter 47 the idols of Babylon are unable to deliver themselves from exile, but God carries his people from their youth until their old age. Yahweh says these things because Israel and Judah were trusting in the nations and their gods to deliver them instead of trusting in the true God.

Trusting in the Lord instead of the nations is a crucial issue of Isaiah. Chapters 7–39 address this matter by presenting the two options: either Judah trusts in the nations, or they trust in the Lord. If Judah relies on the nations, they will receive the judgment of God.<sup>14</sup> The issue begins with King Ahaz in chapter 7. Yahweh commands Ahaz not to fear but to depend on the Lord. However, because the king sends to Assyria for help, God judges him with Assyria. In chapter 30 God condemns his people for not trusting in him, and instead running on horses and furthering their dependence on themselves and other nations. Because Israel refuses to trust the Lord, Yahweh will bring judgment on their heads.<sup>15</sup> Isaiah's description of Israel's rebellion matches that sung about in the Song of Moses.

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<sup>14</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 193.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1–39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1988), 244–45.

## Yahweh's Retribution on Israel's Enemies

In the Song of Moses, God worked to provide for Israel when they were infants and gave them the beautiful produce of the land, but Israel wronged the Lord by responding in unfaithfulness. Jeshurun grew fat and kicked against their Lord (Deut 32:15). They forgot the tender mercies of their rock in bringing them from the wilderness and went after false gods (Deut 32:16). Israel provoked Yahweh to jealousy with their unfaithfulness and caused him to hide his face from them, to remove his blessing, and to heap disasters upon them. The Lord brought plagues, pestilence, wild beasts, venomous animals, and foreign nations against them (Deut 32:23-24). Yahweh's judgment devours his people with terrors on the inside and swords outside (Deut 32:25).

Yet, that judgment is not complete or final—not for Israel's sake, but for the sake of the name of the Lord. Israel deserved to be cut to pieces and wiped out from human memory, but because their adversaries might have exalted themselves and claimed their own power over Israel and their God, Yahweh restrains the nations and preserves his people from complete destruction (Deut 32:26-27, 39). God relents of his destruction against Israel so that both the nations and his people would know where the judgment comes from.

Likewise, Isaiah presents the same progression as the Song of Moses in the Lord's mitigation of judgment against Israel on account of the pride of the nations. Isaiah begins his book with the enemies of Israel being called from the ends of the earth to judge his people. Repeatedly in the early chapters of Isaiah, God whistles to Assyria to come and judge his people and calls them the rod of his anger (Isa 5:26-30; 7:18-19; 10:5). However, the Lord casts Assyria away and brings retribution against the king of Assyria because of his pride (Isa 10:13-19). Israel's destruction was halted because of the pride and arrogance of the nations that God called to judge them.

Isaiah 13 and 14 demonstrate this as well. Isaiah 13 records the destruction of Babylon, and Isaiah 14 taunts the prideful ruler of Babylon. However, Isaiah includes an epilogue to chapter 13 in 14:1-3. There the prophet says Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob and choose Israel. Babylon will be destroyed because of the compassion that God lavishes on his people.<sup>16</sup> The taunt of Babylon in chapter 14 sketches the arrogance of Babylon as leading to their destruction by God. The ruler of Babylon was prideful, and so God destroyed them.<sup>17</sup> Because of the pridefulness of the nations, God allows a remnant to remain. Just as the judgment of God is mitigated in the Song of Moses, so it is in the prophecies of Isaiah.

## Israel's Restoration

In the Song of Moses, Israel's enemies are stubborn in their blindness and unable to discern God's judgment, not considering that the only reason one man could chase a thousand was if the rock of Israel had sold them (Deut 32:30). Yahweh abandoned

<sup>16</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 312.

<sup>17</sup> Oswalt sees chapter 14 as continuing the “pronouncement of judgment on creaturely pride” where the lament form expresses “delight and satisfaction” in death leveling the tyrant's prideful ambition (*Isaiah*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003], 207–8).

his people to destruction; everything that happened to his people was sovereignly orchestrated by the word of God. However, the end of Israel's enemies will be vengeance from the Lord (Deut 32:32-36). God had never abandoned his people, and the nations will understand this in the end. After sorely pressing Israel, the nations will face his condemnation (Deut 32:36).

The Song of Moses promises that Yahweh will not abandon his people to terror and distress on every side. When they are crushed to the dust and have almost vanished from the face of the earth, God will vindicate them and have compassion on them (Deut 32:36, 43). When they no longer have their false gods among them and cannot depend on them anymore, and when they finally are brought to the end of themselves, God will demonstrate that there is no god beside him who kills while making alive and wounds while healing (Deut 32:39). He will sharpen his sword and take vengeance on his adversaries, repaying those who hate him. God will have a day of war against all the nations that surround Israel. He will satisfy his arrows with blood and his sword with flesh of his enemies (Deut 32:40-42).

The Song of Moses ends by calling the people to rejoice and shout for joy (Deut 32:43). Because God has avenged the blood of his children and avenged himself on his adversaries, all the powers bow down to him and praise his name. They will praise God for repaying those who hate him and atoning for the land and his people.

Isaiah follows this same progression with the reversal of the fates of the nations and themselves. One moment the nations are dominating and oppressing the children of Israel, and the next they have vanished (Isa 29:8).<sup>18</sup> One time the children of Israel are under the feet of their oppressors, and the next they experience a complete change of fortunes. Just as Moses hints, through an act of divine compassion, Israel will be chosen once more and exalted over their enemies (Isa 14:1-2).<sup>19</sup>

The story that Isaiah presents ends the same way as the Song of Moses: with rejoicing and submission to the Lord as the only true God. Isaiah writes many songs of salvation that Israel will sing after being delivered from their enemies, particularly following the redemption of the earth (12:1-6; 24:14-16a; 26:1-6). An even closer connection can be made from Isaiah 49:13, where the heavens and earth are called to exult because the Lord has comforted his people and will have compassion for his afflicted. Moses also points to the Lord's vengeance on Israel's enemies, resulting in Israel's salvation and consequent rejoicing. (Deut 32:43) Isaiah and the Song of Moses both conclude in this same way.

## Conclusion

The study of the theology of Isaiah in light of the Song of Moses demonstrates that Isaiah did not write in a vacuum. He built his prophecies completely in line with

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<sup>18</sup> Mackay, *Isaiah 1-39*, 604-6.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 1-39*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 281. Blenkinsopp denies that this prophecy has any application to the modern time and relates it to periods in Israel's history. Though this paper only attempts to show the correlation between the song of Moses and Isaiah's theology and is not primarily concerned with the dating of these events, the writer would support a future fulfillment of these promises even today. The demands of the context and content of Isaiah 13-14, with the universal nature of the Day of the Lord, are not satisfied in any period of Israel's history from the writing of Isaiah 13-14 to the present day; therefore, Israel still awaits the complete fulfillment of these promises.

the revelation of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Isaiah grew the seed ideas of Moses into a developed theology; he took the beginnings of theology in Moses and wove it into his new revelation. The similar use of linguistics and themes in the book of Isaiah was intended to help Isaiah's audience hear the resonance of the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. They could not have helped but see the strong connection that Isaiah made between his prophecies of judgment, exile, and restoration and the song that Moses taught the people of God as a witness against them before they even entered the land. God had cared for them, brought them out of Egypt with wonders, made a covenant of peace with them, and yet they had still rejected him. Their condemnation in Isaiah has the full force of their history behind it. But Isaiah also follows Moses's song, not concluding with destruction for God's children, but with the heavens and the earth praising the Lord because he has atoned for his land and his people. By using the Song of Moses, Isaiah not only defends God's just punishment of his people but assures them of their future salvation. Comfort will surely come to Israel. The hope of Moses is the confidence of Isaiah.



## THE HUMBLE SERVANT

Elliott Lownsbury<sup>1</sup>

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*This article contrasts the character of the contemporary kings with the Servant in the book of Isaiah in order to show that the Servant stands alone. Unlike the kings of the earth who seek exaltation, he humbles himself and is exalted as a result. His genuine humility is the pattern that believers must follow.*

Key words: pride, submission, exaltation, meekness, authority, Servant, Isaiah

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Genuine humility is elusive to mankind. Pride roots itself in the heart of man such that the effort to be humble becomes an effort to exalt oneself. How can man free himself from pride? There must be someone who can lead. There must be someone who can be trusted who has never known pride. There is such a man. Isaiah once met him in a vision, and he wrote about him in detail. He is the one who can remove pride from the hearts of men. The Servant prophesied in the book of Isaiah is the pattern of humble authority that contrasts with the prideful kings of the earth.

### Self-Exalted Servants

Pride is often manifested in assuming a place of undeserved exaltation. It involves taking credit when it is not deserved. In Isaiah 1, Israel is in a state of rebellion against God. Rebellion itself is not necessarily a manifestation of pride, but rebellion from an omniscient God certainly is, because it claims that the way of the rebel is better than the way of God. As John Oswalt observes, “One of the chief marks of this rebellion is the tendency to glorify humanity at the expense of God. But such folly can only result in the humiliation of humanity, for only God’s glory fills the earth.”<sup>2</sup> Israel exalts themselves and the gods they made in their image. Yet the Lord makes it clear that he alone will be exalted. Isaiah shows that man ignores this

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<sup>2</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel: Studies in the Book of Isaiah* (Eugene: Cascade, 2014), 17.

warning to his own peril. “The proud look of man will be abased and the loftiness of man will be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day” (Isa 2:11).

The daughters of Zion exemplify pride in external beauty. They “walk with heads held high and seductive eyes” (Isa 3:16). Everything about them is meant to draw attention to themselves. They want people to think as highly of them as they think about themselves. They perceive that they are great and beautiful, yet they are ugly on the inside. The Lord will expose them for who they are (Isa 3:24).

Assyria is a classic example of pride. John Goldingay writes, “Assyria is not only a conscript but an unconscious one. It undertakes action against Judah for its own reasons.”<sup>3</sup> Assyria does not know they are being used by God. They see their successful conquest as evidence of their might. “Are not my princes all kings?” (Isa 10:8). By whose might do they succeed? According to Assyria it is “by the power of my hand and by my wisdom I did this” (Isa 10:13). They have elevated themselves to the position of mighty conqueror. That position does not belong to them. They are merely a tool in the hand of a mighty arborist (Isa 10:15).

The kings of the earth are associated with darkness rather than light. Their conquest of the earth is darkness because they do not extend grace. Instead, they destroy whatever is in their path. Pride has no room for grace. The kings of the earth see no need to extend grace. They are taking what is due to them, or rather, what they think is theirs. As Assyria dominates the nations surrounding Judah, they elevate themselves to an undeserved status (Isa 10:8). Their goal is to “trample [their enemies] down like mud in the streets” (Isa 10:6). Assyria’s reign is associated with darkness and destruction. What would have happened if they humbled themselves and gave glory to God for being used as his instrument?

Not only does Isaiah show that the foreign kings were guilty of pride, but the kings of Judah were as well. King Ahaz was too proud to accept help from the Lord. Rezin and his coalition threatened to overthrow and kill Ahaz (Isa 7:6). Therefore, Ahaz desperately tried to change the situation. Through Isaiah, the Lord encouraged him to ask for help. Being proud, he made himself out to be too humble to test the Lord (Isa 7:12). He attempted to change the outcome without acknowledging the sovereign God. He elevated himself to the position of humble king—a status that he did not deserve.

What did Ahaz do? He went to the king of Assyria and offered himself as a servant. Walther Zimmerli aptly wrote, “He who confesses allegiance to a master withdraws himself from the dominion of all other possible masters.”<sup>4</sup> Ahaz will not admit his weakness to God because he hates God. He does not value God, but he values the king of Assyria. He cannot serve both God and man. His pride caused him to rebel against God (2 Kgs 16:8-9).

The earthly kings sought strength without meekness, and they fell to their own pride. The pattern continued with Ahaz’s son Hezekiah, who did many good things in the eyes of the Lord, yet was guilty of pride. Like Ahaz, he sought help from another kingdom—Babylon (Isa 39). He wanted to impress the Babylonians with his riches. Perhaps he thought that they would think highly of him, but he forgot that the Lord gave him those riches. Instead of elevating himself, he should have given glory

<sup>3</sup> John Goldingay, *The Theology of the Book of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 28.

<sup>4</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *The Servant of God*, rev. ed. Studies in Biblical Theology (London: SCM, 1965), 14.

to God for his riches in front of the Babylonians. Hezekiah sought strength but gained it without meekness which led to his failure. If he had been strong, yet still humbled himself under the Lord, he would have done well.

King Cyrus is another example of earthly might in the book of Isaiah. Cyrus destroyed kings, and the nations feared him (Isa 41:2, 5). In the Cyrus Cylinder, it is clear where his allegiance was. He said, "I am Cyrus, king of the world."<sup>5</sup> Instead of recognizing and submitting to the authority of God, he made himself the authority. Goldingay writes, "The fact that Cyrus did not recognize YHWH was no bar to YHWH's using him, out of concern not for Cyrus himself but for Jacob-Israel."<sup>6</sup> The Lord still used Cyrus, regardless of his unwillingness to acknowledge the God who gave him success. He thought himself to be God, however God was doing this for the sake of Israel, and ultimately for his own glory.

Babylon was a kingdom that failed to wield their authority with humility. John Hamlin writes, "God would use Babylon's power for His own purpose . . . But the Babylonians went beyond God's purpose, and put oppressive burdens on the captive Israelite slaves, in order to support their own imperial power."<sup>7</sup> The Babylonians gave themselves the authority to go beyond God's purpose. They should have turned to God and accepted their assignment of defeating the Israelites and exiling them. Instead, they presumed to have the authority to place oppressive burdens on the Israelites (Isa 47:6). Much like Assyria, God was using Babylon as a tool. He used their own propensity for power and pride to judge Israel. This pattern of pride was exemplified in the king of Babylon. He sought to make himself "like the Most High" (Isa 14:14). His example shows that self-exaltation leads to utter humiliation and death (Isa 14:15, 19).

### God's Humble Servant

The Servant of the Lord stands alone. He is nothing like the prideful kings of the earth. Instead of rebellion, he is characterized by submission (Isa 50:5). Instead of external pride, he shows humility and inner strength. Instead of being used by God as a witless axe, he intimately knows the will of God (Isa 50:4). Instead of taking what is undeserved, he gets exactly what is due to him (Isa 49:4). Instead of being too proud to accept the help of God, he is sustained by it (Isa 50:7). Instead of trying to change the outcome of his situation, he fully trusts the Lord that he will be vindicated in the end (Isa 50:8-9).

The Servant is introduced in the book of Isaiah as a mere child (Isa 53:2). In contrast, the kings of the earth are introduced with their proper titles: "Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, king of Judah" (Isa 7:1). David Baron explains the humble beginnings of the Servant: "There was nothing in His appearance or surroundings that the carnal or worldly minded could be attracted by; everything was

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<sup>5</sup> Mordechai Cogan, "Cyrus Cylinder," in *The Context of Scripture*, vol. 2, ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 315.

<sup>6</sup> John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 266.

<sup>7</sup> John E. Hamlin, *Comfort My People: A Guide to Isaiah 40-66* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980), 100.

so different from what they [the Jews] had pictured or anticipated.”<sup>8</sup> He is introduced not with fanfare but arrives humbly instead. The kings of earth are concerned with pomp and circumstance, but the Servant enters as a lowly child.

The title “Servant” speaks to his meekness. Zimmerli notes, “The omission of any proper name is meant to express the fact that the true essence of this mysterious figure lies in its belonging to another—here Yahweh.”<sup>9</sup> The very word “servant” connotes submission. In his submission to the will of God, the Servant shows that his allegiance lies with God alone. John Brown explains that “the Messiah is not termed ‘the servant of Jehovah’ to designate essential inferiority.”<sup>10</sup> Humanity tends to naturally view servitude as inferiority. The servant’s submission is not inferiority but humility. A true servant of God humbles himself, and God exalts him (Isa 52:13). A prideful heart exalts the self.

Submission to God is a primary characteristic of the Servant. The Lord says of his Servant, “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; my chosen one in whom My soul delights” (Isa 42:1). The Lord chose his Servant and the Servant chose to submit. “The Lord God has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient nor did I turn back” (Isa 50:5). This is a servant who has submitted to God because he belongs to God. Henri Blocher writes, “When we read that the Lord’s soul delights in the Servant, we may understand it to mean that the Servant will be the man who fulfils and satisfies all the Lord’s desires for humanity.”<sup>11</sup> In contrast to the self-exalted servants, who rebelled against God, the Servant knows and enacts the will of God. His willful submission to God exhibits his humility.

The Servant’s submission to the Father’s will is exemplified in his suffering (Isa 50:4-6). Anyone suffering unjustly cries out in protest, but the Servant trusts in the will of God. Trust in God during trials is a characteristic of humility, because it admits that God is in control. Ahaz experienced a trial when he was under threat from Rezin, but he chose to trust in Assyria rather than God. The Servant trusts that the Lord will make things right at the end of the trial. The earthly kings take matters into their own hands, desperately trying to control the outcome. The Servant leaves the outcome up to the Lord. Oswalt explains,

The Servant has none of the outward accoutrements of power, position, and success. People will not be attracted to him for superficial reasons. Instead, they will be shocked by his lack of all these things (52:15). It is simply unheard of from a human perspective that strength should be achieved through weakness, or that victory should be achieved through being killed (53:12).<sup>12</sup>

Though the Servant is meek, he is not weak. Baron compares the shoot in chapter 11 to the twig of chapter 53: “There, the figure is that of a strong, vigorous shoot coming out of the root of the decayed house of David; here, it is the frail ‘tender twig’

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<sup>8</sup> David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah: The Sufferings of the Messiah and the Glory That Should Follow: An Exposition of Isaiah 53* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922), 72.

<sup>9</sup> Zimmerli, *The Servant of God*, 26.

<sup>10</sup> John Brown, *The Sufferings and Glories of the Messiah: An Exposition of Psalm 18 & Isaiah 52:13–53:12* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 184.

<sup>11</sup> Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 26.

<sup>12</sup> Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel*, 148.

or sapling, struggling out of the dry ground.”<sup>13</sup> There is a dichotomy to the Servant. He is a great shoot, but a humble shoot as well. This is true humility. It takes great strength to bring about justice and righteousness, but it does not take pride. Pride is not only unnecessary to accomplish the will of God, it is antithetical to the work of God. Oswalt observes,

One of the chief marks of God’s high holiness is in his delight to dwell with the lowly and the contrite (57:15). God’s power is not so much in his ability to smash the wicked as it is in his ability to take all the wickedness of the earth into himself and give back love. Only one who has utterly abandoned himself in service to God and his people can dare to take the crown upon his head.<sup>14</sup>

How can a God who is so separate and holy have a desire to dwell with his sinful people? How could the Immanuel child bear to be with the people who have turned from him? The Servant will certainly smash the wicked, but his power is not separated from his meekness (Isa 11:4). In humility, he came to dwell with his people as a Servant of God. He came to restore the tribes of Israel and bring the salvation of the Lord to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6). His power is shown in his ability to save his people, though everyone has gone astray and deserves the title “wicked” (Isa 53:6). The power of salvation is accomplished through humility (Isa 53:2, 6, 11).

The character of the servant does not change modes. When the servant is humble and lowly in his birth, he is also full of strength. He is strong in his meekness because his strength comes from the Lord (Isa 50:7, 9). Strength comes from meek submission to an almighty God. This is clear, as the Servant is humble but is destined for triumph. “Behold, my servant will prosper, he will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted” (Isa 52:13). The Servant does not need to take on pride to be exalted. He is humble and God exalts him. Therefore, his character is consistent even in his triumph. In contrast, the king of Babylon desperately sought a place of exaltation but instead was brought low (Isa 14:13-15). The Servant sought humility and submission, yet was exalted (Isa 52:13). His exaltation was a result of his humility. The exaltation and the humility of the Servant are separate events, but his character of glory and meekness cannot change. His humility does not disappear once he is exalted. Again, Oswalt writes of the Servant,

He knew who he was, he did not have to prove anything to himself, and thus he could lay aside the robes of royalty and assume the towel of a servant (John 13:3-5, 12-17). It is only those who do not know who they are and what their destiny is who must puff themselves up and lord it over others.<sup>15</sup>

The Servant did not need to pine for glory. He had it already and he knew that he had it. He had nothing to prove, and he had every right to take what was due him. Yet he chose to extend mercy and grace—something the kings of the earth severely lacked.

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<sup>13</sup> Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel*, 25.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

In Isaiah 42:1-3, the Servant is the pattern of humble authority. “There is something ineffably tender in the Servant’s compassion; he will stoop over us, he will not quench us, he will spend his own life to heal the bruised reed, to revive the fainting wick. There is only one word for this—grace.”<sup>16</sup> What could be more comforting? The reigning king, the Servant who will establish righteousness and justice, who had every right to stamp out the fainting wick, showed compassion (Isa 42:1-4). He willingly humbled himself, was despised and rejected, suffered great pain, bore the iniquity of his people, and was crushed by his own Father to the point of death so that he may justify the many (Isa 53). The Servant established justice in humility. What earthly king has ever done that?

### Conclusion

The kings of earth exalt themselves. They submit to their own will. They look to their own strength. Assyria’s pride caused them to believe that their own strength and wisdom that led to their successful conquest, when in reality they were being used by the Lord for his own purposes. King Ahaz was too prideful to submit to God and accept help. King Hezekiah sought to impress Babylon by exalting himself rather than God, which led to the downfall of the nation. Like Assyria, King Cyrus was used by God yet gave himself the credit. Babylon gave itself the authority to go beyond God’s purpose. The king of Babylon sought to exalt himself to the level of God and was destroyed and humiliated as a result. On the other hand, the Servant humbles himself. He has no reason to show off. He fully submits to the will of God. He finds his strength in God. What then is the proud man to do? He must humble himself and look to the Servant as his example.

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<sup>16</sup> Blocher, *Songs of the Servant*, 32.

## THE VOICE OF THE MESSIAH IN ISAIAH 8

Joseph Canfield<sup>1</sup>

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*Hebrews 2:13 seems to imply that Jesus is speaking in Isaiah 8:17-18. While most commentators take this as a case of typology or NT reinterpretation, this article proposes that the speaker is not Isaiah but the Messiah. This conclusion is formed largely from the context of Isaiah 8. Particularly, the “stone of offense” will be identified with the Messiah, preparing the reader for his speech in verse 16. Then the attributes of this speaker will be compared with the Servant-King, supporting a messianic interpretation.*

Key words: Isaiah 8, Hebrews 2, Isaiah 28, Psalm 118, Messiah, stone of offense

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The author of Hebrews often applies Scriptures to Christ that seem at odds with the intent of the original authors. This is especially the case with Hebrews 2:13. Here, while explaining Christ’s solidarity with his people, he quotes Isaiah 8 as if Jesus is speaking the words: “I will hope in him . . . I and the children whom the LORD has given me” (Isa 8:17-18).<sup>2</sup> But when we look at that passage, it seems that Isaiah is the speaker. And even though Isaiah does not elsewhere give speeches of this nature, we do not question our brisk assumption because commentators of Isaiah do not mention Hebrews 2, or if they do, they merely attribute the quotation to typology. They say that Isaiah was a type of Christ in that moment, and thus his words can be put into Jesus’s mouth. Yet a careful study of the context (Isa 7–8), the stone of offense (8:11-15), and the speech itself (8:16-22) reveals that we can take the author of Hebrews literally and recognize that the Messiah is speaking.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations come from the ESV.

<sup>3</sup> For views similar to the one expressed in this paper, see James E. Smith, *What the Bible Teaches about the Promised Messiah* (Nashville: Nelson, 1993), 256–60; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–18* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 313–22.

## Broader Context: Immanuel Is the Focus

The context of the disputed passage begins in chapter 7 and the beginning of 8. Here we see why Isaiah is such a tempting option for the speaker's identity, since his two sons enter the narrative. Why would they be mentioned, scholars ask, if not to be the "children God has given" Isaiah, who are also "signs and portents in Israel?" (8:18). Yet there is another sign in this chapter, Immanuel, and he is the clear focus.

The story begins with Ahaz and the people of Judah "left like a booth in a vineyard" (1:8). Ephraim had just launched an attack against them, killing 120,000 (2 Chr 28:6). But the Northern Kingdom was not done, and together with Aram they were ready to invade a second time in order to "split [Judah] open" and set up their own king over it (Isa 7:6). Unsurprisingly, the "people shook as trees of the forest shake before the wind" (7:2).

In the midst of this, Isaiah relayed God's message that these northern enemies are of no consequence. If Ahaz would only trust in the Lord, he would be delivered. As a show of God's sincerity, he offered Ahaz the privilege of asking for any sign to confirm that his promise was true (7:11). Yet the king refused, determined instead to seek the help of Assyria (2 Chr 28:16). Therefore the Lord gave his own sign. A child would be born named Immanuel, "God with us" (Isa 7:14). And by the time he came, Ephraim and Aram would be destroyed.

Who is this child? The answer is in the name "God with us." The child would be divine, yet born of a human mother.<sup>4</sup> The prophecy encourages the reader to make the connection with chapter 9, where a son will be born called "Mighty God" (9:6).<sup>5</sup>

There are some who say that Immanuel needed to be born immediately in order to be relevant for Ahaz, and thus he could not be the Messiah. But they do not see the Lord's sense of irony. Ahaz was a wicked king who caused his own sons to pass through the fire and participated in the idolatry condemned in Isaiah 57 (2 Kgs 16:4). Not least among his failures was his refusal to trust God in this moment. Thus it is as if the Lord is saying: "I will give you a sign, but he will not come in your lifetime. Instead of the Prince of Peace, you will get destruction from the King of Assyria."<sup>6</sup>

That destruction is solidified in the first verses of chapter 8 as Isaiah's son Maher-shalal-hash-baz is born. He is similar to Immanuel, since he is a sign that Assyria is coming. But his purpose in the Book of Isaiah ends here. Once again, the clue is in the name. Maher-shalal-hash-baz, means "hasten to the spoil, speed to the plunder," and thus he is relevant only for this specific period of Assyrian conquest.<sup>7</sup> Immanuel, on the other hand, is the main character who appears two more times in the chapter.

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<sup>4</sup> For a full argument of a messianic interpretation of the Immanuel prophecy, see Todd Bolen, "The Messiah in Isaiah 7:14: The Virgin Birth," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 33, no. 2, (2022): 271–95.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 278. Note the similar language of "God with us" and "A child will be born to us" (Isa 7:14; 9:6).

<sup>6</sup> Ahaz sent tribute to the king of Assyria to rescue him from Ephraim and Aram, but the king of Assyria "afflicted him instead of strengthening him" (2 Chr 28:20).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.



## Direct Address

His distinctiveness is seen in verse 8 as the Lord directly addresses him, though he is yet to be born, and tells him that the Assyrians are in *his* land. This has implications for the speaker of verse 16. If Immanuel can be spoken to, he can also give a response. As for the fact that he has land, this supports the interpretation that Immanuel is the divine son of chapter 9, since only God truly owns the land. As Isaiah says elsewhere, “The LORD of Hosts has sworn . . . I will break the Assyrian in *my* land” (14:24-25). Paul House writes,

Yahweh protects through the Messiah and . . . as He does so the lines between Yahweh and Messiah become blurred. What Yahweh does, the Messiah does. Yahweh’s land is Immanuel’s land. The Messiah’s work is simultaneously Yahweh’s work. When one invokes Immanuel’s name one invokes Yahweh’s help.<sup>8</sup>

## Immanuel and Psalm 2

The reader, barely recovering from his confusion at the strange address to Immanuel, now deals with another abrupt shift. The tone in verses 9-10 is suddenly eschatological, and nations are seen strapping on their armor to do battle against God’s people. But they will not stand because “God is with us.” With the exception of House, few commentators address the connections to Psalm 2 and 110.<sup>9</sup> When Isaiah commands the people to “be broken,” he uses the word רעע. The same word is found in Psalm 2:9: “You shall break them with a rod of iron.” In both cases, the nations are also “taking counsel together.” There are other possible connections between Isaiah 8 and Psalm 2:

Psalm 2	Isaiah 8
The ends of the earth your possession (8)	Your land O Immanuel (8)
You shall break them (תִּרְעָעם)/dash them in pieces (9)	Be broken you peoples (רעע), and be shattered (9)
Rulers set themselves/take counsel (2)	Counsel together . . . but it will not stand (10)
Fear the Lord (בְּיִרְאָה)/take refuge in him (11-12)	Fear the Lord (וְהוּא מִוִּרְאָתָם)/he will be a sanctuary (13-14)

<sup>8</sup> Paul R. House, *Isaiah Chapters 1-27: A Mentor Commentary* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2018), 246.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

What is the significance of this? Psalm 2 is about the Son being anointed as king over the world. It famously features a conversation between him and God, and I believe that it provides a model for the conversation in Isaiah 8, with Yahweh speaking in 8:11-15 and the Son speaking in 8:16-22.

#### Immediate Context: The Messiah is the Stone of Offense

Now we come to Isaiah 8:11-15. If it can be shown that the Messiah is the stone in this passage, it will support the argument that he is the speaker in verses 16-22. This is because the speech would be bracketed by two messianic references, the stone (8:11-15) and the kingdom prophecy (9:1-7).

In verses 9-10, Immanuel was seen as the instrument through which the nations will be shattered. Now in verse 11, Yahweh warns the people to pledge their allegiance to him or perish. The people were fearing the “smoldering stumps” of Ephraim and Aram (7:4), but they ought to fear the wrath of God’s Son.

The passage says, “Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what they fear...But the LORD of hosts, him you shall honor as holy. Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread. And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense...to both houses of Israel” (8:12-14). The claim that the above verses are talking about Immanuel is bold, since this would mean he is himself the Lord of Hosts. However, let us not ignore the emphatic use of the third person pronoun: “*him* you shall honor...Let *him* be your fear, and let *him* be your dread” (8:13). The Lord seems to be referring to someone distinct from himself, even though they are both called Yahweh. Additionally, the dichotomy of sanctuary versus offensive stone and salvation versus judgment can be connected with the Messiah in the rest of the book. In chapter 53, the Messiah is like a lamb who is a willing sacrifice for those who believe in him. But in chapter 63, he is pictured as a terrible warrior in blood-stained clothing.<sup>10</sup>

In order to give more evidence for a messianic interpretation of Isaiah 8:11-15, the Apostle Peter is a helpful guide. He focuses on the Messiah as the stone and puts forth three OT texts as proof: Isaiah 8:14, 28:16, and Psalm 118:22. He suggests that Christ is the living stone of each text, and that believers are built on him as their foundation (1 Pet 2:4-9). When testing Peter’s claim, it becomes clear that the passages are related. Each stone text is similar in length and located in a central position within its respective chapter. Additionally, the stone is always the focal point. In one case he is the cornerstone upon which the building rests, in another he is the stone that one must believe in or perish. In order to prove his thesis, we will need to look at Isaiah 28 and Psalm 118. It must be shown that they are connected to Isaiah 8 and that they are messianic in nature.

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<sup>10</sup> “Stone of offense” could be translated “stone of plague.” This might connect with the Angel of Yahweh who appeared to David at the threshing floor, or the one who killed the 185,000 Assyrians (1 Chr 21:16; Isa 37:36).

## Isaiah 28: The Foundation Stone

In Isaiah 28:16, the Lord says, “Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’”

Some argue that the stone in this passage is not the same as the stone of Isaiah 8.<sup>11</sup> But this fails to account for the striking similarities between the two chapters. First, they each begin by describing the Assyrian conquest of Ephraim. In chapter 8, this kingdom is like a raging river, and in chapter 28 the metaphor is expanded to describe a destructive tempest (8:7-8; 28:2). Second, they both speak about the message being hidden from the unbelieving. In Isaiah 8, the teaching is bound up among the disciples, while in chapter 28, God veils the message through a foreign tongue. Now all the people hear is “meaningless gibberish, senseless babbling” (28:13, NET).

It is here that Isaiah gives the most direct connection to chapter 8. After saying that Israel will no longer be able to hear the message, he states the reason: “That they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (28:13). This is a word-for-word quotation of Isaiah 8:15. But even the way that each stone passage is structured tells us that they are the same. They both contain a chain of nouns in apposition. Isaiah 8 speaks of “a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling.” Isaiah 28 has “a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone.”

This shows that the two passages are linked.<sup>12</sup> Thus if Isaiah 28:16 is found to be messianic, then 8:14 is as well. There are three reasons why this must be the case. First, as Price notes, this was how the earliest interpreters saw it. The LXX translates 28:16: “Whoever believes in him (ἐπ’ αὐτῷ) will not be ashamed.”<sup>13</sup> This is not a generic belief, but belief in a specific person. Additionally, the Aramaic Targum interprets the stone as a king: “I appoint a King in Zion, a King mighty, powerful, and terrible.”<sup>14</sup> This is significant because the targums were written apart from Christian influence.

The second reason is found in the wording of verse 16 itself. Isaiah often uses metaphors such as stones, staffs and foliage to signify rulers. The Messiah is called the “branch” and “shoot” (4:2, 11:1), and the leaders in chapter 3 are called “staffs.” Isaiah also adds exalted language when referring to the Messiah. In Isaiah 4:2 he says, “The branch of the Lord shall be beautiful and glorious.” The same exalted language is used for the stone. He is a “precious” stone and a “sure” foundation.

<sup>11</sup> Oswalt gives a somewhat unsatisfying answer to the question: “The cornerstone may be the whole complex of ideas relating to the Lord’s revelation of his faithfulness and the call to reciprocate with the same kind of faithfulness toward him.” John H. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 518.

<sup>12</sup> Paul combines the stumbling stone and foundation stone passages in Romans 9:33, showing that they are speaking about the same thing: “Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.” Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 651.

<sup>13</sup> J. Randall Price, “The Messianic Cornerstone,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, ed. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 876.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. The stone in the Targum of Ps. 118 is also called king.

Finally, the result of God laying the foundation in Zion is justice and righteousness (28:17). These two words together call to mind the reign of David's future son. We see this in Isaiah 9:7 and Psalm 72:1-2.<sup>15</sup>

#### Psalm 118: The Cornerstone

The last passage in the "Stone Testimonium" comes from Psalm 118:22.<sup>16</sup> It says, "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." This passage is related to Isaiah 28 because of the construction imagery.<sup>17</sup> But it is also related to Isaiah 8 since a sanctuary or a temple is the final result of the building.<sup>18</sup> What is the significance? The temple is where one comes to God, and because the Messiah is the cornerstone, we gain access to God only through him. As Peter says, when we come to the living stone, we are built into a "spiritual house." And, like priests, we can "offer sacrifices acceptable to God through [him]" (1 Pet 2:4-5).

Since it appears that all of the stone passages are connected, the next task is to show that Psalm 118 is messianic. This can be done through comparison of the man in Psalm 118 to the Servant in Isaiah.

First, they both have a close relationship with God. The speaker in Psalm 118 says, "The LORD is on my side as my helper," and he scoffs at his enemies: "What can man do to me?" (vv 6-7). The Servant of Isaiah also finds confidence in God in the midst of suffering: "Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?" (Isa 50:9).

Second, he is chastened by God and man. In the former passage the speaker is surrounded by all nations, but also disciplined severely by God (Ps 118:10, 18). In the latter, the Servant is "despised and rejected by men," "yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him" (Isa 53:3, 10).

Finally, he is rejected by his own people. The reader of Psalm 118 is meant to be shocked when he realizes that the "ring of foes" who surrounded the Messiah consisted not only of the gentiles but also of the builders (the Israelites).<sup>19</sup> Likewise we are astonished that among those who struck and spit on the Servant were the Jewish authorities (Isa 50:6; Matt 26:67).

Thus, it has been shown that the three stone texts of 1 Peter 2 are all connected. Since Isaiah 28 and Psalm 118 are messianic, they bolster the claim that the stone of offense is the Messiah.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 877.

<sup>16</sup> A name for the three stone texts which have been discussed. Douglas A. Oss, "The Interpretation of the 'Stone' Passages by Peter and Paul: A Comparative Study," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 32, no. 2 (1989): 181–200.

<sup>17</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of the building imagery in the stone passages, see Geoffrey W. Grogan, "Isaiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland, vol. 6, revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 650–52.

<sup>18</sup> J. Randall Price, "The Messianic Cornerstone," 879–80.

<sup>19</sup> Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73–150* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1975), 448.

## Is the Messiah Really Yahweh?

Some might still hesitate to identify the stone in Isaiah 8 as messianic, since they do not think that he could be both Yahweh and Messiah. However, the text allows more than one referent of the name “Yahweh.” It says, “The LORD spoke thus to me . . . Do not fear what they fear . . . but the LORD of Hosts, him you shall honor” (Isa 8:11-13). There are other cases in the Bible that seem to suggest the same plurality, the most famous one being Genesis 19:24: “Then the LORD rained on Sodom and Gomorrah sulfur and fire from the LORD out of heaven.” In the previous chapter of Genesis, Yahweh was on earth and met Abraham at his tent, thus he is distinct from Yahweh in heaven.<sup>20</sup>

Isaiah 8:11-15 is different, however, because it has the Lord *speaking* about the Lord. This does not always indicate multiple persons but can be the rhetorical device known as “illeism” or third-person self-reference.<sup>21</sup> An example would be a father saying to his toddler, “Dad has to go to work now.” There are numerous instances of this in Isaiah, including one earlier in chapter 8: “The LORD spoke to me again: ‘Because this people has refused the waters of Shiloah . . . therefore, behold, the Lord is bringing up against them the waters of the River’” (vv. 5-8). Could this be a hint of the Trinity? Martin Luther, with his characteristic zeal, writes, “Wherever in Scripture you find God speaking about God, as if there were two persons, you may boldly assume that three Persons of the Godhead are there indicated.”<sup>22</sup> I resonate with Luther in wanting to find the Trinity in the Old Testament. Yet I believe that there must be additional evidence in the passage showing there are multiple “Lords.” Since we have seen such evidence in Isaiah 8:11-15, we may “boldly assume” that the Messiah can be called Yahweh.<sup>23</sup>

## The Messiah Is the Speaker in Isaiah 8:16-22

So far, we have seen that Immanuel is the “main character” of Isaiah 8. He is the Anointed One who will judge the earth, and he is the stone whom Yahweh commands the people to fear. But in verse 11 there is an abrupt shift in content suggesting that there is a new speaker. The passage says, “Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the LORD . . . Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are signs and portents in Israel” (8:16-18).

## Traditional Interpretation

Though this speaker does not introduce himself, the traditional interpretation holds that he is Isaiah. This is supported by the fact that Isaiah was commissioned by God in chapter 6 to give a message of blinding to Judah, which seems to be what he

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<sup>20</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 46–47.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Malone, “God the Illeist: Third-Person Self-References and Trinitarian Hints in the Old Testament,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52/3 (2009): 499.

<sup>22</sup> Cited by *ibid.*, 501.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, Yahweh is the stone (Isa 8:14) but he also lays the stone (28:16). Price, “Messianic Cornerstone,” 877.

is doing here by “binding the teaching among [his] disciples” (v. 16). Furthermore, “I and the children” seem to be Isaiah and his two sons, who were “signs in Israel” (v. 18).<sup>24</sup> On the face of it, this seems compelling, but it is not the correct view of the passage. The fact that Isaiah appears to fit into the speaker’s shoes is an intentional point of ambiguity, perhaps meant to prevent unbelievers from seeing the Messiah they rejected.

The view that Isaiah is the speaker poses some serious problems, the first of which is that the passage begins with two singular imperatives: “Bind up the testimony, seal the teaching among my disciples” (v. 16). If the speaker is Isaiah, whom is he commanding? It is better to view Isaiah as the one being commanded.

Along that line, in no other passage does it say that Isaiah has disciples. Though many scholars assume that there was an “Isaianic school” surrounding the composition of the book, the claim remains unsupported.<sup>25</sup> Motyer sees this problem and writes elegantly:

My [disciples] could refer to Isaiah, and the whole verse [16] would then be his prayer that the Lord would safeguard what the prophet has taught [them]. But it is better to understand it as meaning that the Lord is claiming the remnant as his own. Their relationship is to him, their hallmark is to be under instruction, and their privilege is their possession of his testimony and law.<sup>26</sup>

Motyer puts himself into a predicament, however, because he still wants to see Isaiah as the speaker in verse 17. But this would overly complicate the passage. Rather, the one who commands the teaching to be bound among the disciples is the same one who waits with his children.<sup>27</sup> The disciples and the children are a single group, otherwise known as the remnant. This is clear from Isaiah 54:13: “All your children shall be taught by the LORD.”<sup>28</sup>

### Messianic Interpretation of 8:16-22

Thus we conclude that the Messiah is speaking. We noted that he commands Isaiah to bind the teaching among the disciples. But what is the teaching? This seems to refer to the very scroll on which Isaiah has begun writing his prophecies. They tell of a future king who will rule over the earth with righteousness forever (4:2-6; 9:1-7; 11:1-9). The Messiah waits for God to fulfill these promises, and as he does so he teaches his children to wait according to his example. He calls himself and his children signs from the Lord (8:18). We should note that Immanuel was to be a sign for the house of David. And his children, who could also be called the remnant, are a sign that God has not rejected his people and will restore the kingdom to Israel.

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<sup>24</sup> This is based on the meanings of their names (e.g., Isaiah means “Yahweh is salvation”). When their names are added together, the message is: Even though judgment is coming, a remnant will return because Yahweh is salvation.

<sup>25</sup> John Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 35.

<sup>26</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 96.

<sup>27</sup> Smith, *Promised Messiah*, 259.

<sup>28</sup> Though in the context this is speaking about Jerusalem’s children, it still demonstrates the connection between disciples and children.

Immanuel tells his disciples in the period of their waiting not to turn to mediums and necromancers (v. 19). Modern readers might be confused at this prohibition. Yet witchcraft was a temptation for the Israelites, as even their first king, Saul, sought advice from the dead prophet Samuel (1 Sam 28). Instead of seeking sorcerers, they should run to the Lord of Hosts who dwells among them on Mount Zion, an example modeled by Hezekiah (Isa 37:1). Finally, Immanuel says that whoever does not speak according to God's word has no dawn, that is, no hope. They will be distressed and hungry, enraged at God and lost in darkness (8:20-22).

### Disciples Need a Teacher

The messianic identity of the speaker is confirmed by the fact that he is a teacher and a father. We first hear about a teacher in Isaiah 2:3, as the nations say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD...that he may teach us his ways." Though the Messiah is not specifically mentioned here, he cannot be divorced from the kingdom prophecies. He is the human and divine agent through whom God will instruct the nations. Thus chapter 9 calls him "Wonderful Counselor" (a synonym for teacher) as well as "Mighty God." We also see the Servant as a teacher. Isaiah 42:4 says, "In his teaching the islands will put their hope" (NIV). Finally, the most explicit reference to the Messiah as teacher is in Isaiah 30:20: "your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher."<sup>29</sup> Since the word for "teacher" here is plural, yet the verb is singular, this is a plural of Majesty. The author intended this to be a reference to the Messiah's divinity, since "Elohim" (God) is another word that is plural in form but singular in function.

The New Testament confirms that the teacher is Jesus the Messiah. He was called by the Jewish synonym "Rabbi," and he chose twelve disciples and instructed them before he ascended to heaven. At a certain point in his ministry, he even started teaching in parables as a judgment on the stiff-necked people (Matt 13:10-12). But to his disciples he privately gave the interpretation, which is reminiscent of "seal the teaching among my disciples" (Isa 8:16).

### Children Need a Father

The theme of the Messiah as a father begins in chapter 9 with one of his names being, "Everlasting Father." In addition, he is said to have offspring: "When his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring" (53:10). But perhaps most relevant for the discussion is Eliakim, who is called the Lord's servant and a father to the inhabitants of Judah (22:21). It is true that Eliakim comes to an abrupt end for such a lofty entrance in chapter 22. Yet he shows that the true Servant of the Lord will necessarily be a father to God's people.

The fatherly attributes of the Messiah are revealed in the NT. He had compassion on the crowds and fed them, and he said to the paralytic: "Son, your sins are forgiven" (Matt 6:34; Mark 5:2). We also see him praying for the children God has given him

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<sup>29</sup> The emphasis on seeing him also connects with Isaiah 33:17: "Your eyes will behold the king in his beauty."

in John 17.<sup>30</sup> Five times in this prayer Jesus says that believers were “given” to him, as in John 17:6: “Yours they were, and you gave them to me.”

As for the Messiah’s children being “signs,” Isaiah 55:13 says: “And it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.” Motyer states, “The transformed people in a transformed world will be an everlasting sign . . . this is what the Servant accomplished.”<sup>31</sup>

Isaiah 50

As a final note, the speaker in Isaiah 8 matches the Servant’s speech in Isaiah 50, particularly in the final two verses (50:10-11).<sup>32</sup> These speeches are similar in that they both call for fear of the Lord, talk about walking in darkness for those who choose their own way, and end in harsh words of judgment. Since they are so similar, it is likely that they are the same speaker.

Isaiah 8:13-22	Isaiah 50:10-11
Let him be your fear, and let him be your dread (13)	Who among you fears the LORD?
If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn (20)	Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the LORD
Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter (19)	Walk by the light of your fire, and by the torches that you have kindled!
should not a people inquire of their God? (19)	Trust in the name of the Lord and rely on his God.
And they will be thrust into thick darkness (22)	you shall lie down in torment

Hebrews 2:12-13

Finally, we come to Hebrews 2:12-13, where the whole argument can be made. We simply need to discern how the author used Isaiah 8:17-18. The passage reads:

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 260.  
<sup>31</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 458.  
<sup>32</sup> I am aware that some see these verses (Isa 50:10-11) as the words of Yahweh. I believe that the Servant is more likely, but in either case it supports a Messianic reading of Isaiah 8:16-22, since the individual is speaking with too much authority to be Isaiah.



That is why he [Jesus] is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying,  
“I will tell of your name to my brothers;  
in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise.”

And again:

“I will put my trust in him.”

And again:

“Behold, I and the children God has given me.”

The initial quotation is from Psalm 22, which the New Testament authors clearly saw as a prophecy concerning Christ (Matt 27:39; Mark 15:34; John 19:23-24). It speaks of a man who trusted in God from his mother’s womb. He was forsaken by God and man and put to death: “You lay me in the dust of death” (Ps 22:15). But then the Lord rescued him.

Though not fully explained in the Psalm, somehow this death and salvation is shared by his brothers. The Messiah is the forerunner. We see this in the (1) singular afflicted and the many afflicted (22:24, 26), (2) he who went down to the dust and the many who go down to the dust (vv. 15, 29), and, of course, (3) the Messiah telling his brothers about God.

But then the author of Hebrews puts the Isaiah passage on the very same level of direct quotation from Jesus. This is astounding. We initially read Isaiah 8 and did not see the Messiah right in front of us, but then the writer of Hebrews opened our eyes.<sup>33</sup>

Some have tried to undo the shocking nature of this quotation by attributing it to typology. They assert that the author of Hebrews was merely showing how the words of Isaiah can be *applied* to Jesus. For instance, Brian Pate says that certain Old Testament individuals “prefigured” Christ, so that when Christ was on earth he did what they did and said what they said.<sup>34</sup> Since Isaiah was a type of Christ, his words became Jesus’s words.<sup>35</sup> Pate believes that it is justified to look for other passages from Old Testament figures that can be “put into the mouth of Jesus.”<sup>36</sup> For example, he sees Joseph’s speech to his brothers as a good candidate: “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20).<sup>37</sup>

But this approach does not see the intent of the writer of Hebrews, who gives every indication that the passages were speeches from Christ. Furthermore, the writer of Hebrews is drawing our attention to a theme that is woven throughout Isaiah but finds its focal point in Isaiah 8:16-22: The Messiah is like his people.

He is like them because he shows them how to wait patiently for the kingdom. He knows that the temptations to turn back from trusting the Lord are everywhere. The mediums and necromancers are simply a few of the “millions of voices that

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<sup>33</sup> Not in the sense that he changed the meaning of the passage. It is possible to interpret Isaiah 8:16-22 as messianic without ever reading the Letter to the Hebrews. Rather, the author of Hebrews “opened our eyes” by showing what was hidden in plain sight (Luke 24:31).

<sup>34</sup> Brian Pate, “Who Is Speaking? The Use of Isaiah 8:17-18 in Hebrews 2:13 as a Case Study for Applying the Speech of Key OT Figures to Christ,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59, no. 4, (2016): 738.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 737.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 739.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 743.

whisper,” seeking to discourage the remnant or lead them astray.<sup>38</sup> But they ought to be encouraged that the Messiah is waiting for the kingdom just as they are, knowing that the one who promised to make his enemies a footstool for his feet will not lie (Ps 110:1). Even in our own time we are waiting for the Lord’s return, and though the “truth is that it can be hard,” we must “stand on the promise, because we know that the promise is sure.”<sup>39</sup>

There are three more ways that the Messiah is like his people. First, he took on our very humanity. As F. F. Bruce writes:

Who are these “children” whom God has given to Christ? Men and women, creatures of flesh and blood. But if his solidarity with them is to be real, he must also be a true human being, a genuine partaker of flesh and blood. Moreover he must partake of flesh and blood in “like manner” with them—that is to say, by the gateway of birth.<sup>40</sup>

Second, the Messiah is like us in that he bore our punishment. Originally, God was hiding his face from the house of Jacob (Isa 8:17), but in order to save his children, he hid his face from his only Son. When the saved Israelites finally recognize their Messiah, they cry: “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows,” acknowledging that he has died in their place (53:4).

Finally, the Messiah is like his people in that he leads them in a song of victory and praise to God. In Isaiah 11, he is the one who guides them in a second exodus, striking the river into seven channels. And the Messiah is the one in chapter 12 that acts as the choirmaster in the new song of Moses.<sup>41</sup> The Lord was angry with him, but “your anger turned away, that you might comfort me” (12:2). It is *because of this* that the many can draw water from the wells of salvation and give thanks to the Lord (12:3). His solidarity with his people is even in his name: God with us.

## Conclusion

It should not be taken for granted who is speaking in the book of Isaiah. In 8:16-22, it seemed to be Isaiah, but the author of Hebrews suggested that it was the Messiah. After a careful examination of the context, his interpretation was found to be more likely. The “I and the children” of verse 18 are Immanuel and the remnant.

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<sup>38</sup> Rich Mullins, “Waiting,” track 5 on *The World as Best as I can Remember it*, Reunion Records, 1992, compact disc.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 48.

<sup>41</sup> The quotation from Hebrews 2:13 above is split into two parts when it does not have to be. This could be because the author wants to draw our attention to another passage in which the words, “I will put my trust in him” appears. This would be Isaiah 12:2 (LXX). Cf. Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 169. Additionally, it is clear that Isaiah 12 is drawing on Psalm 118, which also contains praise by the Messiah and his people. It is significant that the only direct quotation of Exodus 15 (the first song of Moses) is also the one shared by Psalm 118:14: “The LORD is my strength and my song, he has become my salvation.” Also, the verb for thanksgiving (תָּרַן) is shared by Psalm 118 but not by Exodus 15. Finally, Isaiah 12:2 and Psalm 118:18 contain the same idea of the Messiah’s suffering and salvation.

This is supported by the broader context as Immanuel is directly addressed by God. It is also supported by the immediate context (vv. 11-15) as the Messiah is the stone of offense, making it likely that he speaks in the next verse.

In the speech itself, the fatherly and teacherly attributes of the speaker relate to the Messiah more than they do to Isaiah. Furthermore, the notion of the Messiah's waiting contributes more theologically than Isaiah's waiting. The Messiah is like his people as he waits for the promises of God.

## WHO IS ELIAKIM? MESSIANIC EXPECTATIONS IN ISAIAH 22

Max Kokubun<sup>1</sup>

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*Isaiah 22:15-25 is a little-known passage that contains language suggestive of messianic themes. Through studying the immediate and broader context of the passage, as well as its placement in the book of Isaiah, the significance of Eliakim is found. This article hopes to show that although Eliakim is spoken of in terms that recall earlier messianic prophecies, he is not a messianic figure. The prophecy in this section is fulfilled in Eliakim's lifetime, but his political exaltation and downfall directly contribute to the great Old Testament longing for the Messiah himself. Through the preservation of God's servant Eliakim, God's people are encouraged that Yahweh has forgotten neither his covenant nor his people, and this passage continues Isaiah's work of preparing his readers' hearts for the coming Messiah.*

Key words: Eliakim, Messiah, Isaiah, Shebna, prophecy, servant

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Isaiah is a book of messianic expectations. Even the prophet's name (literally, "Yahweh is salvation") encourages the reader to look forward to the coming Messiah. Indeed, the most well-known texts in the book are famous because of their relevance to Christ (e.g., 7:14; 9:6-7; 52:13-53:12). However, the popularity of these select Isaianic passages often leads to equally significant passages being neglected. Such is the case with Isaiah 22:15-25, the prophecies concerning Shebna and Eliakim. This section is found near the end of eleven chapters of divine judgment on the wicked nations of man (Isa 13-23). Here, Isaiah takes a break from the broad perspective of national judgment and narrows his view down to two men in King Hezekiah's court. These two are hardly seen outside of this passage (Isa 36-37 and the parallel account in 2 Kgs 18 are the exceptions), so it is easy to overlook these verses altogether. However, the language used in these verses indicates that Shebna and Eliakim must

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have significance that extends beyond this chapter.<sup>2</sup> This prophetic narrative deserves a careful study which will not only display the beauty of Isaiah, but also reinforce the themes God communicates to his people through the prophet.

The context and content of Isaiah 22:15-25 reveal that the short narrative of Eliakim and Shebna is an illustration of an Isaianic theme. Eliakim is representative of godly leaders, while Shebna represents wicked leaders. A contrast between Eliakim, a faithful servant, and Shebna, a selfish ruler, contributes to Isaiah's argument concerning the wickedness of Israel and her leaders. Further, Eliakim's life plays a part in the messianic theme of Isaiah, but the messianic nature of this text is limited to expectations, not explicit prophecy.

### Preceding Context (Isaiah 13:1–22:14)

The immediate context of the passage (Isa 22:1-14) will be better understood if the reader is also familiar with chapters 13–21. These nine chapters are separated from chapters 1–12 by their content and by authorial word choice (13:1; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:1; 22:1; 23:1).<sup>3</sup> Isaiah turns his attention to the divine judgment on the nations of the world, and his Hebrew audience may feel relieved, for multiple pagan nations fall before the righteousness of Yahweh. However, God turns his righteous judgment towards Judah in Isaiah 22, for she too has become corrupt.<sup>4</sup>

Failure to trust in Yahweh is a perpetual sin of the Israelites in the book of Isaiah. King Ahaz fails to trust in Yahweh in a moment of crisis (Isa 7), and his son Hezekiah also looks to pagan nations for salvation (39:1-2).<sup>5</sup> It is all too characteristic of Israel to be found “[looking] to the weapons...[collecting] the waters of the lower pool...[fortifying] the wall,” yet failing to “look to him who made it” (22:8-11). Like Ahaz, Jerusalem relies on her own cunning in the midst of crisis. The people refuse to look to the Lord, and it is for this sin that Yahweh brings judgment upon his holy city.<sup>6</sup>

It is likely that in Isaiah 22:6-7, Jerusalem faces an imminent Assyrian invasion.<sup>7</sup> The Assyrian advance on Jerusalem makes the self-reliance of the people in chapter

<sup>2</sup> John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 421. Oswalt notes that “servant” (22:20) is a “title of great significance in [Isaiah] as a whole.”

<sup>3</sup> Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, New American Commentary (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 88–90, 286–88.

<sup>4</sup> Isa 22:4-10 clarifies that “valley of vision” refers to Jerusalem. Isaiah calls the people of this city “my people” (22:4), and it is the “defenses of Judah,” and “wall of the city of David,” that are spoken of (22:7, 9).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 212, 360. Smith provides helpful takeaways and practical thinking for both instances. Ahaz is also an example of a related, yet secondary pattern in Isaiah: wicked leaders. Isaiah 3 is the first explicit mention of this theme. Smith notes that Judah's leaders are “those who are apt to be proud and who tended to trust in human accomplishments” (144).

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 382–86; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), 289.

22 all the more frustrating. The most powerful nation in the world is approaching her doorstep, and Jerusalem fails to look to God for deliverance.<sup>8</sup>

### An Overview of Isaiah 22:15-25

Considering the impending Assyrian invasion and Judah's perpetual self-reliance, Isaiah 22:15-25 is a prophetic narrative concerning the fate not only of two men, but also of those who would act similarly to Shebna and Eliakim. John Oswalt sees 22:15-25 as a "graphic illustration," one that reflects not only the message of the previous verses, but also of previous chapters like 13–21.<sup>9</sup> The punishment for one who is focused on self-preservation (22:15-19) is contrasted with Yahweh's promise to lift up one who is faithful to him (22:20-25). The connection between verses 1-14 and 15-25 is clear: self-dependent Jerusalem is set to suffer the same fate as Shebna if the people continue in their stubborn refusal to look to Yahweh alone for salvation.

### Shebna: The Arrogant Steward (Isaiah 22:15-19)

Outside of a brief mention in Isaiah 36–37, this passage contains all that Isaiah says about "Shebna, who is in charge of the royal household" (22:15). There are several views concerning his role in Hezekiah's court. "Steward" (*soken*) seems to be his title, while his position over the royal household (noted in 22:15) emphasizes his responsibilities.<sup>10</sup> Oswalt goes as far as to assert that this position was an ancient equivalent to the more familiar office of prime minister.<sup>11</sup> Based on an alternate interpretation of the word "steward," John Calvin suggests that Shebna was communicating with the enemy for his own safety.<sup>12</sup> Motyer offers yet a third possibility, that "steward" and its demonstrative pronoun (*hazzezh*) are an indictment against Shebna for a "fawning, 'anything to please' attitude whereby Shebna achieved promotion."<sup>13</sup> However one understands the nuances of the word "steward," it is clear that Shebna is a man who has been trusted with remarkable power and authority over God's people.

As Assyria and the king of Babylon did in chapters 10 and 14, respectively, Shebna shows that human arrogance often follows great power. Through Isaiah, Yahweh confronts Shebna for building himself a tomb in Jerusalem as the Assyrian

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<sup>8</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 417–18. Oswalt points to the shared language of 22:14-15 to say that it is important to understand the historical context provided by 22:1-14 prior to a study of 22:15-25, though some scholars seek to detach the two.

<sup>9</sup> John Oswalt, *Isaiah*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 263.

<sup>10</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 418. Oswalt also suggests that "one over the house" may be synonymous with *soken*. Regardless, both phrases show that Shebna was trusted with considerable power and influence in the palace.

<sup>11</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 264. Oswalt suggests that Eliakim, who bears the same title in 36:3 that Shebna does in 22:15, is the leader of the group of officials that Hezekiah sends to Rabshakeh.

<sup>12</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 2, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 128. Calvin presents a handful of different understandings of *soken*. While his own conclusion relies heavily on a mere possibility (*soken* and *sakan*), the idea that Shebna is one who is finding refuge in foreign power is appealing because of how accurately this would represent the nation of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 187. See also Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 390. Smith also sees a negative connotation in the definite article, and he points back to Isa 7:4 for support.

forces move through Judah, conquering every city that stands in their way (36:1). Surely, a man with Shebna's influence can be expected to use the vast resources at his disposal to ready the inhabitants of Jerusalem for the coming attack. However, in a move of sickening selfishness, Shebna is found using his power and resources to build his own tomb (22:16).<sup>14</sup>

John Goldingay points out that verse 16 indicates that Shebna has not only built himself a tomb, but has done so in "a place of particular splendor and honor."<sup>15</sup> Engineers and architects that could be employed to protect the people of Jerusalem are instead commissioned to make sure that Shebna will be remembered when he dies.<sup>16</sup> Yahweh expects the leaders of his people to be those who will lead the Israelites to trust in Yahweh and walk in wisdom even during crises, but "the human craving for recognition and power, and the worldly love of status symbols"<sup>17</sup> dictates the way Shebna acts, and it is this arrogance that invites the righteous anger of the Lord of Hosts.

The actions of Shebna and Eliakim and the results that follow must not be viewed as merely a short anecdote in the midst of judgment-laden chapters. Everything Isaiah reveals about these two men is related to the message of the book. Concerning Shebna, the message of 22:17-19 is simple: Yahweh will no longer delay judgment on his wicked people. Shebna's high rank means that his arrogance will affect a far greater number of people than would the arrogance of the average Israelite. Therefore, he is held to a higher standard, and since he has made it clear that he is most concerned about his own legacy, Yahweh promises death in exile.<sup>18</sup>

#### Shebna's Punishment (Isaiah 22:17-20)

The punishment of exile for Shebna is consistent with the Lord's promises to punish arrogant leaders throughout Isaiah. In 2 Kings 16:7-9, Ahaz cried out to Assyria for help against Israel and Aram despite being urged to trust in God (Isa 7:4-12). As a result, Assyria would come to carry Israel into exile (7:17; 8:1-8). In Isaiah 39, Hezekiah shows off his wealth to the Babylonians in hopes of protection via a military alliance (39:1-2). Hezekiah's punishment, like his father's, reflects his sin: the desired "savior" would come and carry off both people and possessions into exile (39:5-7). Here in chapter 22, Shebna has sought security in his power and military might ("your glorious chariots," verse 18). Consequently, when an enemy comes to carry away Shebna's chariots and wealth, Shebna will be taken too. The chariots he surrounded himself with in self-preservation will indeed surround him, yet it will not be for protection, but in a procession into exile. Shebna is not separated from his

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<sup>14</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 419.

<sup>15</sup> John Goldingay, *Isaiah*, New International Bible Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001), 130. Notice the threefold repetition of "here" (*foh*) in verse 16.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 390.

<sup>17</sup> Derek Kidner, "Isaiah," in *The New Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed., ed. Donald Guthrie and J. A. Motyer (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 603. The potential discovery of this tomb is also mentioned in the comments on 22:15.

<sup>18</sup> In Leviticus 26, exile is the last and most severe of all punishments for disobedience. It is preceded by several other "tiers" of judgment (26:16, 18, 21, 23-24). God's choice to skip to the final tier of judgment may be understood as harsher judgment for those in positions of leadership, or it may be an indicator that Shebna and the people have already persisted in wickedness beyond each of the previous tiers.

chariots, Ahaz receives “salvation” from Assyria, and Hezekiah gets the attention of the Babylonians. These three leaders learn the same lesson: God ultimately gives people what they most desperately desire.

There is additional irony in that although Shebna strives to be remembered in his own country, his judgment is removal from his land and death in exile (“cast into a vast country; there you will die,” 22:18).<sup>19</sup> The idol of Shebna’s heart is exposed in the way he is humiliated, for God humiliates the one who finds pride in his position. Through Shebna’s judgment, Yahweh makes it clear that he is God Most High, and “the men made high will be bowed down, and Yahweh alone will be exalted” (Isa 2:11).

### Eliakim: The Faithful Servant (Isaiah 22:20-25)

Eliakim, the main individual in this mini-narrative, finds a strong foil in Shebna. The prophecies that accompany Eliakim are vague at times, and it is tempting to focus on the minutiae and consequently miss the greater point of the chapter. However, our focus is to evaluate Shebna and Eliakim contextually and determine their significance to the message of Isaiah.

As with Shebna, Eliakim appears elsewhere in Isaiah only in the narrative of chapters 36–37 and the parallel account in 2 Kings 18–19. In Isaiah 22, Eliakim’s current office is not mentioned; he is simply identified by Yahweh as “my servant” (22:20).<sup>20</sup> Context indicates that this title for Eliakim is to be understood positively, for Yahweh raises up Eliakim and places him in a position of authority, namely, the office Shebna currently holds (22:21).<sup>21</sup> Yahweh’s approval of Eliakim is affirmed by the rewards Yahweh promises Eliakim for his righteous life. As Shebna’s punishment fit into the Isaianic paradigm of divine judgment for the arrogant, Eliakim’s exaltation fits into the antithetical paradigm of divine reward for the righteous (cf. Isa 1:19).

Eliakim’s faithful life is emphasized by the author in multiple ways. Not only is Eliakim thoughtful and loving towards those around him (“father,” 22:21), but Oswalt also suggests that the reference to “the house of David” (22:22) indicates that “Eliakim’s interests are not merely for temporal affairs...they are for the larger spiritual matters that ought to be concerning the court.”<sup>22</sup> This concern for the line of David implies familiarity with the promises of God to bring a future Davidic ruler to establish righteousness on earth. Eliakim’s commitment to the house of David was likely fueled by his knowledge of God’s promises to David’s descendants, including what was written in 2 Samuel 7 and Psalms 2, 72, and 110.

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<sup>19</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 420. Oswalt provides a more extensive treatment of the “very difficult” language in this passage and notes the reversal when Shebna’s judgment is compared to his present situation.

<sup>20</sup> There is no textual suggestion that Eliakim was one of Isaiah’s disciples, as Plumptre suggests. “My,” in 22:20 is best understood as Yahweh speaking, since he was introduced as the speaker in verse 15 and there has been no indication of change. See E. H. Plumptre, *Ellicott’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 479.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (1847; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1953), 389.

<sup>22</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 265.



## Eliakim's Reward (22:20-23)

Someone who is familiar with the themes of Isaiah will not be at all surprised to read of a promotion for Eliakim. Throughout the book, Isaiah repeatedly emphasizes the divine preservation of God's faithful people. This theme is found in its earliest form in Isaiah 1:26-27, where Yahweh promises that his judgment on wicked Israelites will be followed by the establishment of righteous rulers.<sup>23</sup> In Isaiah 26, Yahweh establishes peace and a reward for his people, who are characterized as those "who keep faithfulness" (26:3).<sup>24</sup> Later, the narrative of Hezekiah and Assyria shows that the Lord listens to and rescues those who look to him alone for salvation (Isa 37). Therefore, when Yahweh declares that his servant Eliakim will be elevated to the office that Shebna currently occupies, this theme is developed (22:20-21). When Shebna and Eliakim reappear in Isaiah 36:3, the prophecy of 22:20-21 has been fulfilled and Eliakim occupies Shebna's former position, further emphasizing that Yahweh is faithful to preserve the faithful and depose the wicked.<sup>25</sup>

Verses 22-23 are striking to those who love messianic passages. The mention of "the house of David," and Yahweh's promise to "drive [Eliakim] into a firm place," sound messianic. Mention of "the house of David" alone alerts the reader to the potential of a messianic prophecy, especially considering that the usage of the same phrase in Isaiah 7:2 and 7:13 is in such close proximity to the famously messianic 7:14.<sup>26</sup> The promise in 22:23 that Yahweh will "drive [Eliakim] like a peg in a firm place," adds to the messianic potential of this chapter, for a key aspect of the Messiah's future reign is that it will be established forever (2 Sam 7:16; Isa 9:6-7). Given the strong messianic focus of earlier chapters in Isaiah, the reader perks up as Isaiah turns his attention to Eliakim.

However, the establishment of Eliakim as "a peg in a firm place" is best understood as divine protection and security in his new office, not as an indicator of an eternal rule over the kingdom of God. The preservation of the faithful is a common theme throughout the book. Isaiah 6:13 tells of a "holy seed" that is preserved through the coming judgment on the land. Chapter 11 tells of the gathering of a remnant from distant lands as Yahweh leads a glorious second exodus (11:10-16). In 19:20-21, the oppressed cry out to Yahweh, and he delivers them so that they might worship him. The glorious fortieth chapter of Isaiah promises that God will lovingly come to shepherd his people (40:9-11), and similar comfort is found for Israel in chapter 43.

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<sup>23</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 114.

<sup>24</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 471. Oswalt notes that those who meet this "mark of acceptability" are also those who are obedient to the Mosaic covenant. Therefore, the exaltation of a man like Eliakim, one who keeps God's commands, cannot be properly understood without acknowledging Yahweh's faithfulness to the promises of covenant blessing made in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 (see especially Deut 28:28).

<sup>25</sup> The phrase used for Shebna in 22:15 (*ašer habbayit*) is used verbatim for Eliakim in 36:3. John Goldingay says that Eliakim's promotion in 36–37 "hardly counts as a fulfillment of the threat expressed here." He looks past the swapped offices to the point of the narrative holistically. However, it is hard to deny that there is indeed fulfillment of ch. 22 in chs. 36–37. The repetition of Shebna's former title is a way for Isaiah to point his readers back to ch. 22 so that they can see that Eliakim has replaced Shebna, fulfilling the prophecy of 22:20-21. See Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 130.

<sup>26</sup> It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the various views on the interpretation of 7:14. For an excellent defense of the messianic-only position in light of alternate interpretations, see Todd Bolen, "The Messiah in Isaiah 7:14: The Virgin Birth," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 33, no. 2 (2022): 271–95.

Isaiah 44:28–45:1 names the man whom God will use to bring his people back, giving increasingly tangible hope to the faithful remnant amongst God’s people. These references are by no means exhaustive, but the point is clear: Yahweh repeatedly assures his people that he has not forgotten them, and even in the midst of the most threatening circumstances (the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles), he is working out a plan to restore them to their land under a faithful ruler. Therefore, the idea that 22:23 and its fulfillment refer primarily to the protection of God’s faithful servant Eliakim fits well with this emphasis of Isaiah, and his preservation is a specific example of God’s omnipotence over the faithful remnant of his people. Eliakim’s vocational security is promised to display one instance of God’s compassion towards and preservation of the faithful, which will most climactically be seen in Yahweh’s preservation of the Messiah.

When this promise (22:20-25) is fulfilled in Eliakim, God’s people can be reassured that Yahweh is the one who preserves the faithful remnant of his people, and yet Eliakim’s preservation is only temporary, as 20:25 will show. The failure of another promising Davidic individual leaves both the nation and the reader longing for someone greater. The fulfillment of verses 20-25 in Eliakim’s future rise and fall is a testimony that God continues to watch over his covenant people, but true comfort for God’s people (as in Isa 40:1-5) is future still. Our passage does not speak directly of this lasting, messianic peace. Rather the inevitable removal of Eliakim (22:25) contributes to the OT longing for the peace that will result in the praise we find in chapter 26.

Despite the apparently messianic language in this passage, it is incorrect to identify Eliakim as a messianic figure.<sup>27</sup> The reference in verse 22 to “the house of David” need not be understood as portraying Eliakim as a messianic figure.<sup>28</sup> As Calvin notes, this phrase simply indicates the royal line. “The keys of the house are delivered to those who are appointed to be stewards...the delivering of keys is commonly regarded as a token of possession.”<sup>29</sup> It may be argued that this possession is indicative of the Messiah coming to take the keys to his own kingdom, similar to the scene found in Daniel 7:13-14 and the apparent quotation of Isaiah 22:22b in Revelation 3:7. However, this prophecy is given with Eliakim as its subject, and it is primarily concerned with the removal of Shebna and promotion of Eliakim.<sup>30</sup> Eliakim

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<sup>27</sup> A “messianic figure” is an individual in OT Scripture that directly represents the Messiah. See Michael B. Shepherd, “Targums, New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah,” in *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy*, eds. Michael Rydelnik and Edwin Blum (Chicago: Moody, 2019), 222. See also, in the same volume, Eugene Merrill, “Genesis 49:8-12: The Lion of Judah,” 272. Shepherd and Merrill both use the term in a way that implies the OT passages speak specifically of the coming Messiah, which is how the *Handbook* typically understands “messianic figure.” It is this direct prophecy that is not found in our passage.

<sup>28</sup> Alternatively, see H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah* (New York: Loizeaux, 1952), 131, and Walter Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 219, for two views that lean toward a directly messianic interpretation of Isa 22:15-25.

<sup>29</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, 137.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Calvin takes the non-Messianic position on this passage to an extreme, but he is correct in saying that Isaiah’s main intent here is to “draw a comparison between two men, Shebna and Eliakim.” See also Oswalt, *Isaiah 1–39*, 422; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 187–88; Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 392–93; Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, 292. Each of these commentators, while disagreeing on a handful of other interpretive points in this passage, see the fulfillment of the passage as the political demotion and promotion of Shebna and Eliakim, respectively.

receiving the “key” mentioned in verse 22 demonstrates that Hezekiah trusts him with power and responsibility within the royal court. Therefore, the fulfillment of this prophecy is in Eliakim’s political exaltation, eliminating the possibility that he is a messianic figure.<sup>31</sup>

The language in the passage does indicate that there are messianic undertones throughout in these verses. Further, there is an important distinction to be made between Eliakim being a messianic figure and this passage having messianic implications. The fulfillment of the prophecy in verses 20-25 is Eliakim’s promotion; the prophecy itself is not messianic, nor is Eliakim a messianic figure or type. However, the significance of this passage does not terminate with his new position. Rather, there are messianic implications that are derived from this prophecy and its placement in the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah is characterized by messianic hope, but this great hope of Israel often appears threatened by the perpetual wickedness of the people. The placement of this chapter’s condemnation of Jerusalem in the midst of the judgment-laden chapters 13–23 shows that Israel is as sinful as the likes of Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt, and Tyre. God’s chosen nation has rendered themselves worthy of the same judgment that will be sent against the pagan nations that surround them. However, in the midst of national sin (22:1-14), Yahweh preserves and exalts his faithful servant, Eliakim.

The fulfillment of the prophecy in 22:15-25 is found in Eliakim’s promotion, but the significance of this chapter to the messianic message of Isaiah goes far beyond the number of years for which Eliakim will enjoy his new office. Though Eliakim is not a messianic figure, this narrative contributes to the messianic themes of the book by reassuring God’s people that a righteous remnant will be preserved in the midst of a deeply wicked nation. Though his people have gone astray, Yahweh remains the God who sees, preserves, and rewards his faithful ones. By placing Eliakim in a place of power over the Davidic house, God is working through a faithful remnant to continue his plan of redemption as he fulfills the promises he gave to David (2 Sam 7:8-16), Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), and all of mankind (Gen 3:15). Eliakim is like the promised son of David in that he is given the “responsibility of the Davidic government.”<sup>32</sup> His exaltation maintains and contributes to the building messianic expectations of the book as Isaiah clearly portrays Eliakim as a faithful servant of Yahweh, and thus a potential fulfillment of messianic hope. However, the unexpectedly grim conclusion of the prophecy against Eliakim leaves the reader desiring someone who is greater.

### Eliakim’s Downfall (22:24-25)

The final verses of the chapter have caused considerable disagreement amongst scholars. There are two major points of contention: nepotism in verse 24 and the subject of verse 25. Nepotism occurs when an individual uses their power to unjustly favor their own family. Some scholars see an example of such behavior by Eliakim

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<sup>31</sup> Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 19–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 114–15. Young points out the intentional use of Davidic language in verse 22, suggesting that such language points to messianic implications (114, n. 47).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

in 22:24.<sup>33</sup> Though this view misses the bigger point of the chapter, the shift in subjects from Yahweh to Eliakim's family provides textual warrant for it. In 22:19-23, there are nine verbs of which Yahweh is the subject. However, in verse 24, "they," ("his father's house," 22:23) are the subject of the verb ("will hang"). This could be understood as the author showing that Eliakim's family will take advantage of what the Lord is doing for Eliakim, using his position for their own gain. In this interpretation, the "hanging" of great and small vessels would be Eliakim's family "suspended on him as their sole support."<sup>34</sup> However, "God's firmest pledges are never guarantees to cover this," and so Eliakim is removed in 22:25.<sup>35</sup>

Advocating for nepotism in verse 24 requires the interpreter to stretch the text beyond what Isaiah naturally allows for. The hanging of "all the glory of his father's house" refers to the significance that is brought to Eliakim's family as a result of his promotion.<sup>36</sup> This is easy for modern readers to conceptualize. Simply consider the level of security surrounding the wife and children of the president of the United States. The prominence of their husband and father brings significance to them as well. So will it be with Eliakim's family, who will find a new sense of importance as Eliakim is promoted. Though nepotism is surely possible for a man in his position, it is not in view in this text. Just as the Hebrews were treated well during Joseph's rule yet forgotten in his death (Gen 45:16-18; 47:5-6; Exod 1:8-10), so will Eliakim's family derive significance from his office, yet be forgotten in the "shearing" foretold in 22:25.

Some commentators understand Shebna to be the subject of verse 25. Calvin sees the application of this verse to Eliakim as incompatible with the previous promises concerning him.<sup>37</sup> Ironside agrees, saying such an interpretation "would be a direct contradiction of what was just said."<sup>38</sup> However, as Alexander says, "The most natural and obvious application of these words is to Eliakim, who had just been represented as a nail in a sure place."<sup>39</sup> Smith holds a similar position, as does Oswalt, with both looking to the context of the verse for support.<sup>40</sup> The attempt to ignore both the repeated verb root (טָקָה; *taga*) and noun (טֵקֶה; *yated*) is a mistake. The imagery for Eliakim in verse 23 is a clear indicator that Isaiah has Eliakim in mind in verse 25, for he has already mentioned Shebna by name, and to mention him again would have been easy and immediately cleared up any confusion. Concluding that verse 25 refers to Shebna requires the reader to ignore Isaiah referring to Eliakim in the most blatant

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<sup>33</sup> Plumptre, *Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 480, and Kidner, "Isaiah," 603. Watts does not explicitly state that Eliakim is guilty of nepotism, but hints at it (*Isaiah 1-33*, 292).

<sup>34</sup> Alexander, *Isaiah*, 390.

<sup>35</sup> Kidner, "Isaiah," 603.

<sup>36</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 393. Smith goes as far as to say that "everything and everyone will depend on [Eliakim]," and this is represented by the various vessels that are depicted hanging on the peg of verse 23. Smith does not see nepotism in this verse and rejects the suggestion that verse 24 is a warning about nepotism that Eliakim does not heed, leading to the punishment in verse 25.

<sup>37</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Prophet Isaiah*, 141.

<sup>38</sup> Ironside, *Expository Notes*, 132. Alexander does not confidently take a side but provides a discussion of both interpretations. See Alexander, *Isaiah*, 391.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 390.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 393, n. 314; Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 423.

way possible outside of using his name itself.<sup>41</sup> It is not the case that if Eliakim is raised up by Yahweh, he cannot be brought down at a moment's notice; the fate of Assyria and Babylon earlier in Isaiah make this clear.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, whether it be for arrogance, idolatry, or death, verse 25 is to be understood as the previously-favored Eliakim losing his prominence, bringing down with him any significance he brought to his father's house.<sup>43</sup>

The key to a proper interpretation of this passage, as with any biblical passage, is understanding surrounding context and determining authorial intent. The themes and message of Isaiah are crucial in the interpretation of 22:15-25. By understanding God's prophecies against Assyria (Isa 10), Babylon (13-14), Moab (15-16), Damascus (17), Cush (18), and Egypt (19), the reader understands that Isaiah emphasizes God's judgment on those who are given power yet use it for their own glory and preservation.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, the prophecies of Isaiah 11:1-5, 37:21-35, and 42:1-4 (and others), coupled with the implications of the judgment against the nations, lead the reader to conclude that those who are faithful to live righteously will be lifted up, just as their king will be in the future (11:1-5). Shebna and Eliakim embody these complementary principles; this brief, prophetic narrative is used by Isaiah to illustrate a key aspect of his prophetic message.

### The Messianic Significance of Eliakim

When referring to Eliakim, Isaiah uses language that appears messianic. "My servant" (22:20) is the most obvious, given the rich messianic prophecy found especially in Isaiah's Servant Songs. The mention of "the house of Judah" (22:21), and "the house of David" (22:22), is reminiscent of Isaiah 7, which contains the messianic prophecy of 7:14. Additionally, 22:22b is repeated nearly word for word in Revelation 3:7, and Christ is clearly the subject. However, a careful study of the passage reveals that the prophecies given to Eliakim are just that: to Eliakim.<sup>45</sup> We see the fulfillment of 22:20-21 in 36:3, and it is certain that the prophecies of verse 25 came to pass at a later time.

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<sup>41</sup> See Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, 158, for a more neutral view. Motyer suggests that this verse be taken as a warning to Eliakim. While this is certainly more mindful of the text than the Shebna view, the language in 22:24-25 indicates that verse 25 is a prophecy of a specific future time in which Eliakim will lose his position and his family will be greatly affected.

<sup>42</sup> Isaiah 7:17-25 and 8:5-8 prophesy that Yahweh will raise up Assyria in order to judge Israel, yet he disposes of her just as suddenly in ch. 10 when she has arrogantly overstepped her bounds. Similarly, 39:6-7 tells of a day when Yahweh will use Babylon as his instrument of judgment for Hezekiah's lack of faith, yet the reader already knows from chs. 13-14 (and later from ch. 47) that Babylon is headed for ultimate destruction. Surely Calvin, Ironside, and Alexander would not claim that chaps. 13-14 contradict 39:6-7, nor 7:17-25 with ch. 10.

<sup>43</sup> See Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 130, for a similar interpretation.

<sup>44</sup> Smith, *Isaiah 1-39*, 391, and Oswalt, *Isaiah 1-39*, 421.

<sup>45</sup> Young, *Isaiah 19-39*, 115. "Those duties which Christ Himself would exercise . . . might, in the Old Testament, be delegated to ministers. We are then, first of all, to regard Eliakim as one who is a minister, a fact that is seen in the designation 'my servant.'" The similarities of 22:22 and Rev 3:7 do not cement Eliakim as a messianic figure. Rather, the imperfect way in which Eliakim steps into the role as a steward over the messianic line leaves the reader longing for the Davidic ruler who will fulfill these responsibilities perfectly.

However, the messianic nature of Isaiah cannot be ignored when studying this passage. It is not happenstance that Yahweh (through Isaiah) uses language that seems to connect this section to other messianic passages. As is common in the Old Testament (especially with the kings of Judah), Eliakim is initially seen as a potential fulfillment of messianic expectations. He appears to check all the boxes, for he is a faithful “servant” of Yahweh (as prophesied later in Isa 42:1-4), associated with the Davidic line (as the Messiah would be, per 2 Sam 7:8-16), and exalted to a place of authority by Yahweh himself (as the Messiah is in Pss 2 and 110). As has been the pattern since Genesis, a promising, godly individual steps into the spotlight of the biblical narrative, prompting the reader to wonder if he is the one promised in Genesis 3:15, the one who has come to finally crush the seed of the serpent. However, as with every other promising individual thus far in Scripture, Eliakim ultimately fails to meet the standard set for the promised savior. Though we are not told what leads to his demise or whether he simply dies of old age, one thing is clear: Eliakim is not the Messiah. He is an example of a godly individual who contributes to our understanding of what a servant of Yahweh looks like, but he is nothing more. He will die just as every Davidic king thus far has died, and the consequences that his death has on his family (Isa 22:24-25) are a stark contrast to the one who will reign “on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and uphold it with justice and righteousness . . . forevermore” (Isa 9:7, emphasis mine).

Though the prophecies in this passage are not directly messianic, the narrative of Shebna and Eliakim contributes to the messianic hope of the book. Eliakim appears messianic at first, but his downfall in 22:25 cultivates a longing within the reader for someone better. Goldingay understands that “the city and the royal house are only as safe as Shebna and Eliakim [or any other human ruler].”<sup>46</sup> The commendable morality of a single individual is not enough to rescue God’s people from their rebellious state. Israel has enjoyed her Davids, Hezekiahs, Eliakims, and Josiahs, but still “Israel does not know; [they] do not perceive” how estranged from their God they truly are (Isa 1:3). The nation remains the “rebellious children” who seek refuge in pagan nations (30:1-2; cf. 31:1). Ultimately, it is not just a moral king that they need, but one who can lead them in true physical (54:1-17) and spiritual (55:1-13) restoration.<sup>47</sup>

### Conclusion: The Isaianic Longing for a Savior

Isaiah 22:15-25 is a prophetic narrative concerning two officials in Hezekiah’s court. The direct fulfillment of this passage is found in the demotion of Shebna and promotion of Eliakim and is reflected in the reversed titles in Isaiah 36:3 and 37:2. Shebna and Eliakim, as representatives of selfish and righteous rulers, respectively, reinforce the principle that God will ultimately depose the wicked and exalt the faithful. Further, the canonical placement of this chapter shows that despite the godly

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<sup>46</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 130.

<sup>47</sup> Chapters 54–55 are by no means the extent of Isaiah’s treatment on spiritual and physical restoration, but their placement immediately after the work of the Servant in 52:13–53:12 makes them instrumental in understanding Isaiah’s view of who and what brings about true restoration in the hearts and lives of Yahweh’s people.

men that may come to power in Israel, the nation is still helplessly far from God. Their sin warrants the same divine punishment as the wickedness of other pagan nations. However, despite the discouraging spiritual state of Israel, this passage contributes to the messianic expectations of Isaiah.

The language used when Yahweh speaks about Eliakim builds messianic potential for the faithful servant (22:20-24). However, his failure in verse 25 silences any such hope and puts an end to the prominence of a promising Davidic individual. Eliakim is unable to save Jerusalem from the judgment that their sin deserves (22:1-14). God's people are seen as equivalent with Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Cush, Egypt, and Tyre: a people steeped in wickedness who will encounter the wrath of a holy God. Indeed, both author and audience are led to long for someone greater than Eliakim who will come to rescue God's people from the sin which has condemned them.

The great need of Israel—and the rest of the world—is not a man like Eliakim, but one like the servant of Isaiah 42:1-4. They desperately need a king who will “delight in the fear of Yahweh” (11:3), one who will lead his people to “cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, reprove the ruthless, execute justice for the orphan, plead for the widow” (1:17). Indeed, we need a mighty counselor to exact justice (2:4a), but a prince of peace to end man's violent ways (2:4b). We need a mighty God to destroy the wicked (Isa 14), yet an eternal father to gently shepherd his wayward people (40:11). We need one both perfectly loving and infinitely powerful, one who will say to the vilest sinner, “Come now, and let us reason together . . . though your sins are as scarlet, they will be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool” (1:18). We need Immanuel, and it is to him that Isaiah 22:15-25 points.

## IDENTIFYING JESUS AS YAHWEH: AN ARGUMENT FROM ISAIAH 42

Gianni Russo<sup>1</sup>

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*This article briefly explores the history of Arian doctrine from its pre-founding in the lives of Tertullian and Origen to Arius's teachings and their responses throughout the last two millennia of Christian history. Special focus will be given to the earliest foundation of the heresy for a cursory understanding of its establishment, followed by an analysis of flaws and weaknesses in traditional trinitarian vindication. An unconventional argument will then be proposed from Isaiah 42, examining its logical implications for the New Testament and what it teaches. Deductive reasoning will be employed to validate the argument being made in this article, and the significance of a Jesus who is Yahweh will be established as a core tenet and essential belief of the Christian faith.*

Key words: Arianism, Trinity, Isaiah, Consubstantiality, Deity, Divinity

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In ancient times, Gnosticism taught that Jesus was certainly godlike, yet not human. In today's era, the opposite is true. Many find no problem calling Jesus Christ a great teacher, wonderful man, wise person, and real historical figure. However, what they deny is the Jesus of Scripture—an orthodox understanding of the trinitarian faith. This rejection of the Messiah who is God himself made manifest began long ago and exists in varied forms still today. When did this thinking begin? Why did it start anyway? And Christianity's responses since then—what exactly have they been? It has often been said that the New Testament cannot be properly understood without first grasping the Old Testament. In this article, that truth is reestablished and solidified through an examination of Isaiah 42:8, which serves as a powerful argument to the *unique* divinity of Jesus, providing evidence from the Old Testament that he is truly of the same essence as God.

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## Historical Context of Arianism

Circa AD 155–160, there was born in Carthage a man by the name of Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, most commonly known as Tertullian, the early Christian theologian, polemicist, and moralist. This great man—though flawed in many respects—was the first to espouse the idea that God the Son was subordinate to God the Father.<sup>2</sup> Depending on which definitions are used, this notion of subordination is not inherently defective. Within the doctrine of subordinationism there exists both *economic* (or *relational*) subordination and *ontological* subordination, with the former being within the bounds of Christian orthodoxy and the latter heresy. It seems that Tertullian held the former view, though admittedly it has been a difficulty among scholars to classify his beliefs on the issue. In his work entitled *Adversus Praxeas* ('Against Praxeas'), we read, "These three [the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit] are one substance (or essence), not one person."<sup>3</sup> He is often referred to as an early proponent of Nicene doctrine, though his beliefs and later life are highly questionable. Nonetheless, we find Tertullian to be an early defender of the Trinity, and likewise an early defender of economic subordinationism.

In circa AD 185 Oregenes Adamantius was born, likely in Alexandria. Origen was perhaps the most important theologian and biblical scholar of the early Greek church. Tertullian's work laid a foundation upon which Origen later built his (false) ideas of subordinationism.<sup>4</sup> Heavily influenced by the Greek Gnosticism of the time, Origen came to unbiblical interpretations of the Scriptures. Over-mystifying the texts and merging them with Greek philosophy, he allegorized the Bible, speculated about preexistent souls, denounced hell, adopted universalism, and embraced other unorthodox doctrines.<sup>5</sup> Though a successor in thought to Tertullian, Origen was a theologian of poorer quality. He took the doctrine of subordinationism further by explicitly teaching that the Son is subordinate to the Father *in respect to essence*.<sup>6</sup> In making the Son inferior to the Father, ontological subordinationism was now taking root.

The ideas that Tertullian and Origen promoted were the grounds for Arius's work in the beginning of the fourth century AD. Arius was born in AD 256 in the Roman city of Ptolemais. He was a priest, ascetic, and presbyter. According to the Trinitarian historian Socrates of Constantinople, Arius was sitting in the pews of his congregation when his bishop, Alexander of Alexandria, was giving a sermon. Alexander was preaching Christ in a manner that deemed the Nazarene's essence identical to that of the Father's. His sermon angered Arius so much that he began to publicly denounce his own bishop in front of the crowds. Infuriated by Alexander's teachings, Arius declared, "If the Father begat the Son, he that was begotten had a beginning of existence: and from this it is evident that there was a time when the Son

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<sup>2</sup> Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 206.

<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Praxeas*, Chapter 25. <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0317.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Enns, *Moody Handbook*, 206.

<sup>5</sup> When we take a chicken, we eat its meat, yet throw out the feathers. So too is it the case with these foundational figures in Christendom. Much of what these men opined and taught was valuable, correct, and highly influential. This is the meat that we fervently chew on and digest. Their theological perspectives which were erred, however, are mere feathers to be discarded.

<sup>6</sup> Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 82.

was not. It therefore necessarily follows, that he [the Son] had his substance from nothing.”<sup>7</sup> Arius denied the Son’s consubstantial<sup>8</sup> nature with God and viewed him as the first created being of the Father. Arius also thought of the Holy Spirit as being but a later creation of the Son. Though Arian doctrine maintained three persons in the Godhead, they were all made to differ in ontological rank. Arius assumed that Trinitarianism led to polytheism, for suggesting that Christ is eternal would affirm two gods. Therefore, Arius thought, the Son was not of the same substance (ὁμοούσιος, *homoousios*) as the Father, but rather dissimilar to or unlike (ἀνόμοιος, *anomoios*) him. His false Christ had divine elements and possessed the highest rank among all other created beings but remained nevertheless unequal with the Father. Arius evidently struggled with reconciling passages concerning the humanity of Jesus with the one true and living God (e.g., Matt 24:36; John 4:6). He also misunderstood texts relating to Christ’s preeminence (e.g., Rom 8:29; Col 1:15).<sup>9</sup>

In AD 325, Constantine I arranged a council which became the first to formulate Trinitarian doctrine. Approximately three hundred bishops attended the meeting, including Arius and his former bishop, now adversary, Alexander. Out of the three hundred, only twenty-two bishops defended Arius. This event gave the world what we know of as the Nicene Creed, taking place in the history books as the First Council of Nicaea.

### The Development of Arianism through Church History

When Constantine’s son, Constantius II, succeeded his father to the throne, he sought to reverse the Nicene Creed. As an avid supporter of the Arians, he used his power to exile bishops who held to the Nicene Creed. In AD 357, the Third Council of Sirmium adopted and promoted the Arian heresy in its totality—later coming to be known as “The Blasphemy of Sirmium.”

From the fifth to seventh century, religious war was common among the Arians and Trinitarians since the heresy was still widely accepted. Due to the devotion of the Arian missionaries, their false doctrines continued to be circulated in the centuries that followed. Arianism was engrained in the minds of Germanic tribes, making this theology prevalent throughout Europe up until the eighth century. From the time of the Byzantine Empire until its fall in the fifteenth century, Arianism ceased to be the major issue of theological dispute as it had been in the early centuries of the church. The Protestant Reformation period of the sixteenth century onwards was, ironically, a moment of resurgence for Arian theology. Nontrinitarians arose from every corner of Europe among the Italians, Polish, Romanians, and others.<sup>10</sup> These ideas

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<sup>7</sup> Socrates of Constantinople, “The Dispute of Arius with Alexander, His Bishop.” *The Ecclesiastical Histories of Socrates Scholasticus*. <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf202.ii.iv.v.html>.

<sup>8</sup> That is, consisting of the same substance, being, or essence. The identical nature between distinct equals, most notably the Holy Trinity. *Coessential* is another synonymous term which modern scholars have preferred over *consubstantial*, however no distinctions will be made between the two words in this article for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>9</sup> R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 6–17.

<sup>10</sup> The terms *anti-Nicenean*, *nontrinitarian*, or *antitrinitarian* will be used for a wider embodiment of that theology which rejects Jesus Christ as coequal and coeternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, as opposed to *Arians*.

flourished into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries around Europe, particularly in Britain. Different branches or denominations of nontrinitarianism emerged, and the ancient heresy gained wider acceptance.

Modern-day nontrinitarian beliefs contain a multitude of caveats and nuances with original doctrines, some of which have come to be recognized as entirely new religions. Joseph Smith, for example, author of *The Book of Mormon*, put forth a great number of novel doctrines in the early- to mid-1800s, many of which were anti-Nicene (e.g., a multiplicity of gods, siblingship between Lucifer and Jesus, a denial of God's eternality). His teachings spread during his life, and even more so after his death. Smith's followers today have named themselves "Latter-Day Saints" and adhere to the anti-Nicene creeds of their founder's making.

In the latter 1800s, Charles Taze Russell began teaching anti-Nicene theology. Apart from promoting views which were unorthodox for much of the Christian faith (e.g., denying the immortality of the soul, the physical return of Christ, and hellfire), he also taught that Jesus Christ was not ontologically equal to the Father but was rather created by the Father. Other well-known anti-Nicene groups today include the Oneness Pentecostal and Unitarian churches.

Historical context is necessary for the argument being made in this paper for the following reasons: (1) Arius never denied consubstantiality because he followed another book's teaching, as do Mormons (or Latter-Day Saints), which means that (2) Arius claimed to base his faith on the Bible's teaching; (3) nontrinitarians differ so greatly amongst each other that they cannot be classified as a single group; (4) the denial of the trinitarian Jesus dates much earlier than the 1800s, which gives a unique perspective to antitrinitarian progression; (5) an understanding of nontrinitarian beliefs enables the reader to appreciate the contribution of Isaiah 42; (6) an understanding of the nontrinitarian views and their subtleties explains why some arguments have been unconvincing, but the argument of consubstantiality from Isaiah 42 proves much stronger.

### The Issue We Face

There are various reasons why anti-Niceneans have emerged throughout the centuries. Many factors are involved, such as self-deception, demonic influence, pride, greed, and the desire for wealth and fame. However, with those to whom these explanations do not apply, an inadequate understanding of the Old Testament contributes to their unbiblical interpretations of the New Testament. For example, anti-Nicene theology has been defended by ignoring certain Old Testament texts and reading New Testament passages out of context, such as "The Father is greater than I" (John 14:28), "Now concerning that day and hour no one knows—neither the angels of heaven nor the Son—except the Father alone" (Matt 24:36), and "No one is good except God alone" (Mark 10:18).

There are, undoubtedly, orthodox interpretations for these texts given above. However, there are not sufficient orthodox refutations for the nontrinitarian interpretations of these texts. The reason for this is because theologians have argued for the consubstantiality of the Godhead in a manner that still allows for other interpretations. The divine, trinitarian nature of Christ has been extensively argued

from the New Testament; however, the debate is not resolved when a nontrinitarian proponent agrees with the passages used to support the orthodox position.<sup>11</sup>

Due to the vastly diversified thought among those who deny the consubstantiality of the Father and Son (and Spirit), arguments of antiquity have not proven effective. Throughout the centuries, Nicene theology has been generally defended with certain New Testament verses that seem to clearly support the trinitarian Jesus, including John 1:1, 3; 8:19, 58; 10:30, 33; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Romans 5:8, 9:5; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Colossians 1:14-19; Titus 2:13; Hebrews 1:8; Revelation 19:10.<sup>12</sup> However, the reason why these passages seem like explicit evidence to Trinitarians is because we interpret these texts through a Nicene influence. The difficulty in this is that certain anti-Nicene theologies allow for valid interpretations of these texts which are, in effect, not “problem passages” for the nontrinitarians.

This is so for five reasons. First, the doctrine of Jesus being creator of all things (e.g., John 1:3; Col 1:16) is one that nontrinitarians would agree with if they assume either (1) the preexistence of Christ, or (2) that the interpretation must mean everything ever created apart from Jesus came into being through him. Of course, they come to these conclusions because their presuppositions allow for the interpretation of these passages to accord with their theology. Both the former and latter assumptions given above, nevertheless, qualify the nontrinitarian position to a certain degree.

Second, the texts which ascribe worship to Jesus (e.g., Heb 1:6; Rev 19:10) are interpreted by the anti-Niceneans to fit their theology. They argue that (1) many people were worshiped in ancient times, including rulers and the wealthy, (2) that Jesus is divine or a deity of some sort, therefore worship is valid, or (3) that the worship which is given to Jesus is not the same kind of worship that is given to the Father. Even the statement that “worship patterns in the very earliest church indicate an immediate veneration of Jesus as divine following his crucifixion”<sup>13</sup> is problematic because many nontrinitarians would ascribe some kind of deity to Jesus or would recognize him to have certain divine qualities. Jehovah’s Witnesses would claim to worship Jesus, and so too would the third- and fourth-century Arians. Their justification rests upon their understanding that Jesus is truly a god. For the Jehovah’s Witnesses, he is the firstborn of God’s creation, Michael the Archangel, thus glory, honor, and praise are due him. Arguing for the early church history of Jesus’s veneration is not the strongest argument for Nicene trinitarianism.

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<sup>11</sup> Due to Mormonism’s highly divergent belief system containing even its own holy book, the remainder of these ideas are not directly applicable to believers of that religion. Those who hold to Mormonism do not accept the Bible’s authority; for them it has been corrupted. Some nontrinitarians are more genuine in their search for truth and accept the Old and New Testaments as their guide to faith.

<sup>12</sup> The term “deity of Jesus” is rather imprecise language. Using this expression (or “the divinity of Jesus”) is not the most effective terminology that could be used since there are grounds for the nontrinitarians to say that their Jesus is indeed a deity (or divine). Many would classify Jesus as a supreme deity or “god,” thus giving him proportioned “divinity” as well. In this sense, the anti-Niceneans would most certainly agree with the trinitarians that Jesus is both a deity and divine. The error in their thinking regards the consubstantiality of Jesus and the Holy Spirit with the Father, as well as this triunity which has remained eternal and uncreated.

<sup>13</sup> Dean L. Overman, *A Case for the Divinity of Jesus: Examining the Earliest Evidence* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 17.

Third, the texts which seem to call Jesus God (e.g., John 1:1; 10:33; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Titus 2:13; Heb 1:8) have been explained away by various arguments from the Koine Greek text or by the belief that Jesus is indeed a god of some sort. Fourth, the texts in which Jesus indicates some measure of equality between himself and the Father (e.g., John 8:19; 10:30) have been interpreted as a form of Sabellianism/Patropassianism/Modalism, all of which are anti-Nicene theologies.<sup>14</sup> Fifth, the texts which assume the preexistence of Christ (e.g., John 1:14; 3:13; 6:33, 38, 62; 8:23; 16:28) are likewise compatible with many nontrinitarian ideas. In sum, it is clear that antitrinitarians have not been persuaded by various texts and arguments offered over the centuries.

It is of supreme importance to note that these pro-Nicene arguments are not necessarily erroneous, nor do they contain fallacious reasoning in and of themselves. In fact, when compiled and analyzed, they are viable defenses of trinitarianism. However, this survey helps reveal why Arius was so influential, with the result that anti-Nicene theologies have continued in varied forms across the ages and into the modern era.

Within the field of theology and other sciences, there exists what is known as a “rescuing device,” which can be defined as an alternate explanation for what seems to be contrary evidence against one’s particular worldview or presuppositional understanding. We all have rescuing devices, whether we would like to admit it or not. In the first example above, the nontrinitarians’ rescuing device is “the ascription of deity or divinity to Jesus” (which does not contain consubstantiality). The same rescuing device could be used for the four other examples.

Apart from rescuing devices, those who believe anti-Nicene doctrines find their support from certain passages in the New Testament. Instead of being puzzled by a text’s seeming contradiction and employing a rescuing device, the reader instead adopts an anti-Nicene interpretation. Modalists have understood John 8:19 in this fashion: “So they were saying to him, ‘Where is your Father?’ Jesus answered, ‘You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also.’”<sup>15</sup> They do not necessarily believe that this text affirms that Jesus is God the Son, Second Person of the Trinity. It can simply mean that Jesus is a divine, heavenly being, perfect as all other angels, albeit greater than angelic creatures in position and authority. The same is true for John 10:30: “I and the Father are one.” If taken in light of the above presupposition, the Modalists presume Jesus to be proving their doctrines. The heart of the matter deals with anti-Nicene theologians relying upon rescuing devices and presuppositions to support their errant interpretations. However, there exists a compelling argument for Nicene doctrine which comes not from the New Testament, but from the Old.

Why exactly have nontrinitarians been unsatisfied with the New Testament verses trinitarians have given them? It is because the lenses these individuals wear when reading the Scriptures contain an insurmountable weight of preconceived

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<sup>14</sup> These three beliefs differ in subtle ways, yet all encompass a similar nontrinitarian creed, as will be explained below.

<sup>15</sup> Modalism is a doctrine which states that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not distinct persons but different modes or manifestations of the same divine being, essentially making the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit but one person who manifests in different forms. This belief was condemned as heresy in AD 382 at the Council of Rome.

notions. Of course, rescuing devices are frequently employed, but a large part of this is due to their presuppositions. Perhaps there is a better way forward that would be less susceptible to the common misinterpretations we face. Perhaps there is a biblical text that provides a powerful, reason-based argument for the consubstantiality of the Father and the Son. An axiomatic biblical foundation for the Trinity must be presented. An axiom from which the entirety of the Bible—specifically the New Testament all the more—must be understood and interpreted.

### Theological and Contextual Analysis of Isaiah 42:8

It is now that we come to Isaiah 42:8, which states, “I am Yahweh; that is my name. *I will not give my glory to another*, nor my praise to carved idols” (emphasis added). An alternate translation which is likewise accurate is, “I will not share my glory with anyone else.” A similar expression is given in Isaiah 48:11, “For how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.”

The prophet Isaiah wrote his book to the kings and people of Israel and Judah just over 700 years before the birth of Jesus the Nazarene. Isaiah’s name means “the Lord saves,” a meaning essential to the theme of the book. He uttered words of God to foretell Israel’s destruction, while also giving hope concerning Yahweh’s salvation. The name Yahweh (יהוה) means “I am that I am” (Exod 3:14). It speaks of God’s nature, being, or who he is. This divine being is what Aristotle called “the Unmoved Mover,” essentially signifying that God is the only being to exist from eternity unto eternity. He was not made nor created. He does not derive power from anything but himself. He is power. He is glory. He is might. He *is*. All that is in God is God. The glory of Yahweh involves creation’s praise and worship, though that praise is not necessary for him. God is infinitely glorious in and of himself, so he cannot receive “more” glory from anyone or anything. Therefore, when we speak of “glorifying God,” we speak only in human terms. It is a way in which we as creatures can understand our place in this universe. Only God has glory, and he receives it (extrinsically) from creation.<sup>16</sup> He does not need supplementary glory, for to have needs is to be incomplete, and thus imperfect. He likewise does not desire additional glory, for to do so would make him unsatisfied in his very being, and the God Christians worship is perfectly satisfied with who he is.

God’s perfection requires that he need nothing from no one, nor desire glory that he already perfectly has. If he needed more glory or desired more glory, he would not be God. What we do as humans is point our hearts and minds to serve the God that is in need of nothing and direct any glory that we might give to others (whether people, animals, objects, or creation) to God himself. God will not share his glory with anyone or anything because God is a jealous God. This is why theologians have

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<sup>16</sup> Intrinsic glory is also known as *glory possessed*, referring to the glory that is inherent within God’s self which belongs to him alone. Extrinsic glory is also known as *glory ascribed*, referring to the glory which is partially revealed in creation, providence, redemption, and consummation, that is recognized by created beings. Therefore, when Psalm 19:1 says, “The heavens declare the glory of God,” it speaks of his external glory as seen in creation. Thus, if the skies cease to exist, so too does a portion of God’s extrinsic glory. His intrinsic glory, however, abides forever without cessation or defect.

been careful to make distinctions between God's intrinsic and extrinsic glory.<sup>17</sup> Regardless, the context of Isaiah 42:8 shows us how it was necessary for all of God's people to understand that they ought to serve Yahweh and him alone. They must not give praise or glory to anyone else but the great I Am.

### The Case for Consubstantiality in Isaiah 42:8

The one passage that I wholeheartedly believe cannot be misrepresented or misinterpreted by *logical* necessity is Isaiah 42:8 (with 48:11 being virtually synonymous). God explicitly states that he will not share his glory with anyone or anything. It is blasphemous for another being apart from Yahweh to be given glory, honor, and praise. Yet in Revelation 5:11-14, Jesus is given glory, honor, and praise:

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and *glory* and blessing." And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be the blessing and the honor and the *glory* and the might forever and ever." And the four living creatures kept saying, "Amen." And the elders fell down and worshiped.

It is striking that nontrinitarians will not take offense with the phrases "worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor... and blessing," and perhaps "the elders fell down and worshiped" as well. Nor do they find their views challenged by the repeated "to him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be the blessing and the honor and... the might forever and ever." What anti-Niceneans cannot claim is true for their religion, what they cannot assert as valid for their doctrines, what they cannot reconcile in any fashion whatsoever with their creeds regardless of the rescuing device used, is the passage with the addition of the simple word "glory" (δόξα, *doxa*). They must submit to this text and the implications that follow lest they make their God a liar.

The argument relies on reasoning in the form of a syllogism. In formal logic, *deductive reasoning* is the mental process of drawing deductive inferences. An inference is deductively valid if its conclusion follows logically from its premises. If it is impossible for the premises to be true, then by logical necessity, the conclusion must be false. The following example applies deductive reasoning through syllogistic thinking to our discussion:

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<sup>17</sup> For this reason, passages such as John 17:22 or Hebrews 2:7 do not suffice as adequate refutations to the argument being made in this study. Uncomplicated intelligibility in Isaiah 42:8 prohibits any notion which grants creatures *ontologically-equal* glory, intrinsically. Therefore, due to syllogistic thinking (as presented below), John 17:22, Hebrews 2:7, or other texts as such do not and cannot by logical necessity equate humanlike glory with godlike glory.

Premise 1: God is Yahweh.  
 Premise 2: Yahweh receives glory.  
 Premise 3: Yahweh does not share his glory.  
 Premise 4: Jesus receives glory.  
 Premise 5: Yahweh does not forbid premise four.  
 Conclusion: Jesus is Yahweh.

Thus, it is plain to the eye and evident to the intellect that Jesus must be God, no matter what other interpretation one might come up with for any other verse. We must remember that our God is a God of perfect logic, therefore logic corresponds to truth—thus it could be rightly said that this syllogism gives us a logical argument which corresponds to truth. The truth, then, is that Jesus is God. This cannot mean that Jesus is merely *a* god for the simple reason that Yahweh will not share his glory. Only if consubstantiality is accepted does Isaiah 42:8 make reasonable sense. Another passage that supports this deductive argument is found in the words of the Christ himself: “Now is the Son of Man *glorified*, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, *God will also glorify him* in himself, and will *glorify him immediately*... Father, the hour has come; *glorify your Son*, that the Son may glorify you... Now, Father, *glorify me* together with yourself, *with the glory which I had with you* before the world was” (John 13:31-32; 17:1, 5, emphasis added). The fact that Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, does not negate nor disapprove of these words undermines nontrinitarian arguments.

It is true that Arius misunderstood the words μονογενής (*monogenēs*) and πρωτότοκος (*prōtotokos*), as do present-day nontrinitarians. Though these words have been debated for as long as Christianity has existed, there is a proper method of ascertaining their correct meaning. Theologians and linguists recognize that *monogenēs* is and has been used both literally, meaning “only begotten,” and metaphorically, meaning “one-and-only” or “unique.”<sup>18</sup> The same is true for *prōtotokos*. Depending on the context, it could indicate one who is literally the “firstborn” of the family, or one who is metaphorically “preeminent” among others.<sup>19</sup> The misunderstanding for both words has no root in etymology or even contextual analysis. A nontrinitarian studying both words in their proper context would find their interpretations to accord with their theology, and the meaning given to each word respectively would remain either positive or neutral for anti-Nicene doctrines. The reason for this is because they have already presupposed that Jesus is either (1) a god, (2) divine, (3) a deity, or (4) a being superior to all the heavenly angels.

Therefore, correctly defining these words requires a proper understanding of Isaiah 42:8. If God the Father will not share his glory with anyone, yet he does so with Jesus his Son, then it follows that the Father and the Son hold the same nature or essence for any such sharing of glory to take place. The only two other possibilities are that (1) God the Father was a liar, or (2) Jesus the Son was deluded (when asking for a resurgence of his former participation in glory [John 17:1, 5]), neither of which even nontrinitarians would hold to be true. Hence the presuppositional understanding

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<sup>18</sup> Mark L. Strauss and Tremper Longman III, *The Baker Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2023), 863.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 312–13.



that the Father and Son are consubstantial from Old Testament passages like Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11 necessarily does away with improper understandings of *monogenēs* and *prōtotokos*. Jesus could not have been temporally begotten by the Father, as Arius taught, because that would naturally assume he had a beginning, a created point in time, which is unbiblical and anti-Nicene. The correct understanding of Isaiah 42:8 leaves us with no other option but to define the word *monogenēs* as “one and only” or “unique” whenever it concerns Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Trying to escape this conclusion by saying that the word means a temporal begetting in some contexts, and perhaps so etymologically, falls short of a holistic understanding of the indispensable reconciliation between the Old and New Testament. This notion concurs with *prōtotokos* as well. Because the Father and Son must be consubstantial by logical necessity in Isaiah 42:8, this word when referenced to Christ cannot mean a literal firstborn. It must mean a metaphorical preeminence, which agrees with contexts that allow for both literal and metaphorical understandings of *monogenēs* and *prōtotokos*.

### The Great Importance of the Consubstantial Doctrine

This discussion may appear to be an insignificant debate among countless creeds, but careful reflection reveals otherwise. The reconciliation between God and man, it has been rightly said, happened at the cross. This reconciliation is only possible because of the sacrifice of Jesus, as it is well known, according to Old Testament law: “The life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for *it is the blood that makes atonement by the life*” (Lev 17:11, emphasis added). The New Testament, however, reveals a major problem with sacrifice: “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb 10:4). This impossibility does not rest upon the inadequacy of a bull’s blood or the insufficiency of a goat’s death; the impossibility concerns a creature-creature relationship. Created beings do not hold innate power to replace created beings for an eternity. Creatures cannot be sufficient substitutes for creatures. Mortals cannot be substitutes for mortals. Therefore, only uncreated beings are a sufficient substitute for created beings for an eternity. A finite being—even a sinless one—could not bear the infinite weight of all the sins of the world.

Revelation 22 develops this truth further: “I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me, but he said to me, ‘You must not do that! *I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God*’” (Rev 22:8-9). The angel was saying that, like John, he also was created. Thus, it is evident that every created being is ontologically subordinate to Yahweh. This is the only reason why the angel told John not to bow before him—he too was a fellow creature brought into existence by Yahweh. The

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<sup>20</sup> Some who hold to the doctrine of eternal generation would beg to differ. The Nicene Creed seems to explicitly teach eternal generation by its statement, “begotten, not created,” speaking about Jesus. Their argument, then, would reject *monogenēs* to mean “one-and-only” or “unique,” and would instead translate the word as “only begotten.” This could be granted only if the begetting does not refer to a begetting in time, which is a given for those who composed the Nicene Creed and for those who believe in eternal generation. Therefore, a disagreement on the exact translation of the word is not so much the issue, but rather the idea that the Son came into being at a certain point in the space-time continuum.

angel is a servant of God due to being a finite, mortal creature. Therefore animals, humans, and celestial beings all serve God in one way or another by virtue of their createdness.

Consequently, the question must be raised: What mere man can atone for sins? The answer is simply no man, but Christ, for God he is. Who can satisfy the wrath of God? What angel? What beast? What mortal blood? Eternal sins demand eternal saviors; eternal debts demand eternal natures. The death of Christ was a divine exchange between God and God: an eternal salvation for an eternal Savior. What Christ accomplished, no mortal could ever consummate. The nontrinitarian Jesus who had a beginning in time has to be, by definition, a servant of God as are all other creatures—and thus ontologically inferior. It only follows, then, that if consubstantiality is denied, the gospel itself is eradicated. Salvation is done away with completely and the good news is nullified. The Jesus of Arius, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses cannot save anyone. Their god is a created god, unable to atone for humanity at the cross. What is needed is an immortal being, and without a consubstantial Christ, the whole human race is bound for everlasting condemnation. God cannot atone for humanity's sins by replacing one creature with another—Hebrews 10:4 forbids that possibility. Thus, our review of a consubstantial doctrine brings us to a doxological conclusion: May a holy God be glorified, through a holy God being sacrificed. Amen.

### Concluding Thoughts

Any doctrine which undermines ontological unity in the Godhead in any fashion remains unsubstantiated by scriptural reasoning and logic. There is no need to deal with etymology, presuppositions, or semantics when addressing the issue. First, *prōtotos* cannot mean Jesus was created because deductive reasoning in Isaiah 42:8 eliminates that possibility. Second, *monogenēs* likewise cannot mean Jesus was created or had a beginning because that notion is prohibited by Isaiah 42:8. Third, those passages in which Jesus performs creation-like acts of all things cannot merely presuppose the preexistence of Christ, but the consubstantiality also (as reasoned in Isaiah 42:8). Fourth, the texts which ascribe worship to Jesus cannot be explained away by ascribing some form of divinity or deity to him because Isaiah 42:8 requires exact consubstantiality, not mere resemblance of quality or characteristics. Fifth, those passages which seem to call Jesus God cannot be explained away by the assumption that Jesus is indeed a god of some sort; again, precise consubstantiality is necessary due to logical explicitness in Isaiah 42:8. Sixth, those passages which assume the preexistence of Christ cannot be understood correctly in light of Isaiah 42:8 if ontological subordination is assumed.

There must be undoubted consubstantiality in the Godhead for any theological interpretations of the New Testament which are and have been misunderstood or wrongly interpreted, otherwise the very thought of God being truthful, logical, perfectly reasonable, and jealous all fall apart—attributes which are certainly undeniable from the Scriptures. What more need be said? Logical deduction from Isaiah 42:8 and 48:11 is the irrefutable starting point for discussion of New Testament texts. Whether we are defining words in a certain context, ascribing meaning to utterances of the Lord Jesus, or constructing a theology of the Godhead and its

interrelation, the foundational starting point cannot come from isolated verses in the New Testament or Greek and Hebrew definitions of particular words, but an irrefutable logic which merges the Old and New Testaments in perfect synchronicity and flawless coherence.

Isaiah 42:8 leaves no room for Arian doctrine or nontrinitarian, antitrinitarian, anti-Nicene theologies. Jesus is not only *a* god, or some divine being, or an exalted creature with divinity, but Yahweh God himself, the God of the Old Testament, coequal to and coeternal with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, together in perfect unity and one in ontological being. It is impossible to accurately understand the New Testament and what it reveals about Jesus Christ if Isaiah 42:8 is not exegeted truthfully, for God “will not share his glory” with anyone or anything—therefore consubstantiality remains undeniable as the indisputable teaching of both Testaments.

## ISAIAH’S INFLUENCE ON ZECHARIAH: HOW ZECHARIAH’S MESSIANIC HOPE WAS DERIVED FROM ISAIAH

Matthew James Wineke<sup>1</sup>

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*The goal of this article is to demonstrate the impact the book of Isaiah had on the book of Zechariah and its effect on a messianic interpretation of Zechariah’s prophecies. Zechariah exhibits a great understanding of Isaiah’s prophecies of the Child, the Branch, and the Servant and recognizes them as being one and the same—the Messiah. To convey this, key messianic prophecies in Zechariah will be examined with regard to the book of Isaiah. In doing so, this study will provide a greater understanding of the person and mission of the Messiah so that we may better worship and glorify the One who sent him.*

Key words: Isaiah, Zechariah, intertextuality, Messiah, Servant, Davidic king

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The book of Isaiah is one of the most influential books in all of Scripture. It encompasses the whole of biblical theology more than any other single book of the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Isaiah’s “versatility of expression and brilliance of imagery” have no rival.<sup>3</sup> Oswalt asserts that Isaiah’s “scope is unparalleled” and “the breadth of its view of God is unmatched.”<sup>4</sup> The glory of God’s kingdom, the Messiah that will bring about salvation and restoration, and the judgment and suffering that must happen beforehand are so wonderfully described in this book. Isaiah truly is a masterful work.

Many of the prophets and apostles drew upon this magnificent book in their writings. The fact that later authors understood, employed, and even built upon Isaiah’s writings demonstrates the significance and influence of the book. Much work

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<sup>2</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Holy One of Israel* (Cambridge: James Clark, 2014), 16.

<sup>3</sup> George L. Robinson, “Isaiah,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr et al., vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 1496.

<sup>4</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 3.

and research have been done on the use of Isaiah in the New Testament, while little has been done regarding the Old Testament's use of Isaiah. However, Isaianic themes and ideas can be clearly found later in the Old Testament. For instance, it is widely recognized that, in Zechariah 2:11, Zechariah draws from passages in Isaiah such as Isaiah 56:3-7 to convey that foreign nations will attach themselves to Yahweh in his future kingdom.<sup>5</sup>

Zechariah is a highly intertextual work which employs previous Scripture in a variety of ways. Through study, it becomes clear that Isaiah and its picture of the Servant-Messiah had an immense impact on the book of Zechariah. Because the book of Zechariah primarily builds upon earlier revelation in presenting the Messiah and his purpose, an understanding of Isaiah's prophecy provides a beautiful and fuller picture of the Messiah and the work he will accomplish through his suffering and glory.<sup>6</sup>

### Grounds for Intertextual Reading of Zechariah

The intertextuality of Zechariah is not a new idea as many scholars have recognized the allusions made to previous Scripture. Bernhard Stade was among the first to study the idea of allusions in Zechariah 9–14.<sup>7</sup> Rex Mason's dissertation on inner-biblical allusion was also a seminal work in the study of Zechariah.<sup>8</sup> David Baron writes, regarding Zechariah 1:1-6, "We have here incidentally given us a kind of inspired résumé of one great part of the work 'of the former prophets' and its result."<sup>9</sup> Michael Stead also notes this call to the people in Zechariah 1:1-6 and writes that Zechariah "makes explicit that it is to be understood in the context of 'the former prophets'" and that is "further underscored by a number of unmistakable allusions in Zechariah 1–8 to the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah."<sup>10</sup> The call back to "the former prophets" in Zechariah 1:1-6 and the immense number of allusions throughout provide enough evidence to read Zechariah in the backdrop of "the former prophets," specifically Isaiah.

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<sup>5</sup> See Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Haggai, Zechariah 1–8* (New York: Doubleday, 1987), 168–69. See also George Klein, *Zechariah* (Nashville: B & H, 2008), 125–27. Other passages may include Isaiah 2:2-4, 14:1-2, 25:6-10, and 66:18-24.

<sup>6</sup> A common issue in Isaiah and Zechariah studies is that many scholars will split both books into Proto and Deutero (or even Trito). A disunified reading often leads to wild solutions that do not fit the greater context of the book or the whole of Scripture. Simply reading the books in the form in which we have them leads to a more satisfying and clearer understanding of the Bible. However, recently there has been a trend toward reading these books as a whole. For instance, Anthony R. Petterson argues for a unified reading of Zechariah to show that the hope for a future Davidic king still remains (*Behold Your King*, The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies [London: T & T Clark, 2009], 1–11). Another prevalent issue is how messianic prophecies in Isaiah and Zechariah are interpreted. A great deal of scholars have a hard time "seeing the forest for the trees." This narrow focus frequently leads scholars to deny a messianic reading and demand a near fulfillment. But as will be shown, Scripture must be read in light of the "forest."

<sup>7</sup> For a short history on the varying views of the authorship and unity of Zechariah, see Klein, *Zechariah*, 34.

<sup>8</sup> Rex Mason, "The Use of Earlier Biblical Material in Zechariah 9–14: A Study in Inner Biblical Exegesis" (PhD diss., University of London, 1973).

<sup>9</sup> David Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah* (Fincastle: Scripture Truth, 1962), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Michael R. Stead, *The Intertextuality of Zechariah 1–8* (New York: T & T Clark, 2009), 2.

## The Branch

Reading Zechariah in light of Isaiah provides much help in addressing the controversial subject of the Branch's identity in Zechariah 3:8-10. Many scholars will look right to Jeremiah 23:5-6 to aid in interpreting this passage. Though they are right to connect Jeremiah 23:5-6 and Zechariah 3:8-10, they fail to recognize Zechariah's prophecy as messianic. They find Zerubbabel as the fulfillment of the Davidic branch. When Zechariah 3:8-10 is read in the backdrop of Isaiah, the pieces start to come together, and the picture becomes more clear that the Branch is the Messiah.

The first thing to note in Zechariah 3:8 is that Yahweh calls the Branch his servant. This should immediately call the reader back to the Servant of Isaiah. The Servant was tasked with doing God's will, being a light to the nations, being Yahweh's salvation, opening blind eyes, bringing justice and righteousness, and suffering and dying for the atonement of sin (Isa 42:1-4, 6-7; 49:1-7; 53:1-6). Baron suggests this connection between the Servant in Isaiah and writes:

But it is perhaps particularly Isa liii... that our thoughts are directed... to the innocent and absolutely holy One who is wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, who pours out His soul unto death as an atonement for sin—to the “Righteous Servant” through the knowledge of whom the many are justified, or “made righteous,” and in whose redeeming work Zechariah... saw the solution of the great moral problem, how those morally defiled... can be acquitted and justified by a holy God, and how ‘the iniquity of the land shall be removed’ in one day.<sup>11</sup>

Not only do we see the allusion to Isaiah with the term “servant,” but also through the purpose and work of the Servant. “For behold, I am going to bring in My servant the Branch... And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day” (Zech 3:8-9).<sup>12</sup> In Isaiah, the Servant was tasked with being Yahweh's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6). Here, in Zechariah, we have the same designation “servant,” and the Servant is associated with Yahweh's removal of iniquity (Zech 3:10).

Zechariah's use of Isaiah's prophecy of the Branch is made even more apparent through the Branch's mission. For example, in Isaiah 4 the Branch's coming brings about abundance of the land, purification of the people, and protection. In Zechariah the Branch serves the same key purposes. When the Branch comes, the iniquity of the land will be removed and everyone “will call for his neighbor to sit under his vine and under his fig tree” (Zech 3:10), indicating the peace and abundant prosperity of this kingdom. David Petersen notes a connection between the branch (*šemaḥ*) and the people sitting underneath their own vine and fig tree.<sup>13</sup>

There is another passage of Isaiah that deserves to be part of this discussion—Isaiah 11. Although the Hebrew word *šemaḥ* is not employed in Isaiah 11, the imagery certainly indicates a connection between the branch (*šemaḥ*) and the shoot (*ḥōṭer*). Isaiah 11:1 says, “Then a shoot (*ḥōṭer*) will spring from the stem (*geza*) of

<sup>11</sup> Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture translations come from the Legacy Standard Bible.

<sup>13</sup> David L. Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 213.

Jesse, and a branch (*nêšer*) from his roots (*sheresh*) will bear fruit.” Petterson notes the connection between Isaiah 11 and Zechariah 3:8 and draws it in with Isaiah 4 to display the hope for a future king from the Davidic line.<sup>14</sup> The branch and shoot imagery demonstrate the new beginnings of the house of David. He writes that Isaiah compares “the house of David to a tree that is cut down or severed in judgment, and from which new growth will come and grow into something vast. This shoot is a Davidic king of humble origins who will bring in the kingdom of Yahweh with all its blessings.”<sup>15</sup> Similarly, Oswalt writes of the new beginnings of the Davidic line in Isaiah 11:

When Assyria was finally cut down in 609 B.C. by the combined forces of Babylon, Media, and Persia, nothing ever arose from the stumps again. Not so with Israel. From one of her stumps, as we are told in the call narrative (6:13c), the smallest shoot would venture forth. From that helpless shoot (53:1, 2) would come the restoration of that nation and with it the end of the war and the establishment of that which the world has sought but never attained, namely, genuine security.<sup>16</sup>

Oswalt not only recognizes the new beginnings for the Davidic line, but he also notes that Zechariah draws this from Isaiah.<sup>17</sup> The arboreal imagery of the branch, the vine, and fig tree demonstrate that the one who will bring about this peace and prosperity is the Shoot who will create a new beginning for the house of David and usher in Yahweh's kingdom—the Messiah.<sup>18</sup>

The shoot and branch imagery do not only convey the new start for the house of David, but also the lowliness of the Branch. This brings together the Branch and the Servant (Isa 53:2), and shows that Zechariah understood Isaiah's prophecies when he wrote, “My servant the Branch.” Regarding the use of *šemaḥ* in Zechariah 3:8-10, Charles Feinberg observes that “it brings out the lowliness and humiliation of the Messiah” and “it reveals His eminence.”<sup>19</sup> This certainly correlates with the description of the Servant in Isaiah 53, who had no stately form or desirable appearance. Along with the description of lowliness and humiliation, we have the same shoot imagery in Isaiah 53. “For he grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; he has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him, nor appearance that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2).

In addition to these connections, a recurring theme is that the Messiah will bring salvation. As noted before, the work of the Branch in Isaiah 4 and Zechariah 3:8-10 is to purify and bring peace and abundance. But can the same be said about the Servant of Isaiah? And can a connection be made through this key idea? The Servant's mission in Isaiah was to bring forth justice (Isa 42:1), regather Israel (Isa 49:5), be a light to the nations, and be salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:6). The Branch's mission is the same: he is a king who will bring forth justice and

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<sup>14</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 88–89.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>16</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 278.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

<sup>18</sup> Petersen, *Haggai and Zechariah 1–8*, 213.

<sup>19</sup> Charles L. Feinberg, *God Remembers* (Wheaton, IL: Van Kampen, 1950), 64.

righteousness (Isa 11:3–5), regather Israel (Isa 11:10–16), and bring salvation (Isa 4:3–4, Zech 3:9).

Zechariah shows a deep understanding of the Messiah in Isaiah. Not only does he understand what the Branch and Servant are prophesied to do, but he also recognizes them as being one and the same, that is, the Messiah. Claiming that this passage was already fulfilled in someone like Zerubbabel undermines and twists God's promises of a hopeful future for Israel. When Zechariah 3:8–10 is read in the purview of Isaiah 4, 11, and the Servant Songs, the identity of the Branch becomes clear, and the understanding of his mission becomes more beautiful.

### The Coming King

Zechariah 9:9–10 is a well-known prophecy due to its fulfillment on Palm Sunday. This glorious prophecy speaks of the coming righteous king of Zion who will bring salvation and peace to the nations. Yet, the king comes not in a chariot or on a horse, but on a donkey. This lowly king is not like the other prideful kings of Israel or of the nations but rather, he is the Messiah himself. Reading these two verses through the lens of Isaiah proves to be very helpful in understanding the identity of the coming king.

The first part of verse 9 is a call to rejoice because of the coming king. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Make a loud shout, O daughter of Jerusalem!” (Zech 9:9a). This verse hearkens back to Zechariah 2:10, which says, “‘Sing for joy and be glad, O daughter of Zion; for behold, I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,’ declares Yahweh.” What is more interesting is not the intratextual connection here, but the intertextual connection between Zechariah 2:10, 9:9, and Isaiah 12:6. Isaiah 12:6 says, “Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.” Isaiah 12:6 is the concluding verse to the book of Immanuel in Isaiah, which is significant given that Immanuel means “God with us,” and the verse itself speaks of rejoicing in the day when Yahweh will come and dwell in their midst. Many scholars find a connection here with Zephaniah 3:14, but not all recognize the connection to Isaiah 12:6.<sup>20</sup> Yet the connection between Zechariah 2:10, 9:9 and Isaiah 12:6 is undeniable.

After noting the connections between Zechariah 2:10, 9:9 and Isaiah 12:6, questions remain, including: What does this mean for the king? Is the king Yahweh? Or is the king simply acting on behalf of Yahweh? Petterson writes:

Several scholars are happy to leave the ambiguity between Yahweh and the king, and see Zech 9:9 both a distinction and a merging of the two. Others argue that the activity of the king becomes passive, with Yahweh becoming the active party. Still other scholars argue on the basis of parallels with Zech 2:10 and 3:14 that what is being said is that the arrival of the king deserves the same reception as that of Yahweh. For the present, it can be noted that this king has a central role in the coming of Yahweh's kingdom, but this relationship between the king

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<sup>20</sup> Rex Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 88.



and Yahweh is something that will be developed in the subsequent chapters of Zechariah.<sup>21</sup>

Petterson is right in saying that the king plays a central role in Yahweh's plan and that the relationship between the two will be revealed later. One cannot simply create their own hypothesis. In exegesis, the reader is to draw meaning from the text, not insert their own meaning. Our finite minds are not able to comprehend Scripture independent of Scripture. This relationship between the king and Yahweh becomes clearer in later revelation. When read at face value, the text implies that this king is Yahweh, yet distinct from Yahweh.

A primary characteristic of the king is that he is "righteous." Isaiah clearly describes a righteous king who will reign in Jerusalem. Isaiah 9:6-7 speaks of a righteous Davidic king who interestingly is called "Mighty God," which adds to the earlier argument pertaining to the relationship between Yahweh and the king. Furthermore, Isaiah 11 speaks of the shoot of Jesse who will reign in justice and righteousness. This description of "righteous" is not only attributed to the king and the Branch, but also the Servant. The Servant was called in righteousness (Isa 42:6) to bring forth justice to the nations (Isa 42:1-4) and was called "the Righteous One" (Isa 53:11). George Klein recognizes all these connections and further connects the righteous king to the one of Isaiah 32.<sup>22</sup>

This righteous king also comes "endowed with salvation." The Niphal participle in Zechariah 9:9 has been understood differently by many scholars. There are two possible senses of the word: the passive and the reflexive.<sup>23</sup> The passive is translated as "saved" and the reflexive is rendered as "bearing salvation." Mark Boda takes it in the passive sense and says that "throughout the OT, the ideal royal figure in Israel is not one capable of saving Israel from its national crises by his own military prowess and wise leadership. Rather, the ideal king is one who will trust in Yahweh for military victory and for the wisdom to rule."<sup>24</sup> Taking the reflexive sense, Klein writes, "One can hardly read Zechariah's vision about the future king without appreciating the hope that a Messiah bearing salvation offered to Judah. More importantly, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would ultimately fulfill this prophecy beyond any measure the post exilic community could appreciate."<sup>25</sup> Some scholars read the passage in both senses. Petterson takes this approach, concluding that the king is being saved by Yahweh's might and it is through the king's own salvation that he comes bearing salvation for the people.<sup>26</sup>

The Servant was sent by God to be salvation to the end of the earth. "'I will also give You as a light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'" (Isa 49:6c). Yahweh's king will come bearing salvation for the people. Isaiah 53 develops this further. The Servant brings salvation through his suffering and death, and Yahweh prolongs his days and rewards him. When Zechariah 9:9 is read, as Petterson does, with both senses of the Niphal participle, the connection becomes

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<sup>21</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 138.

<sup>22</sup> Klein, *Zechariah*, 272.

<sup>23</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 139.

<sup>24</sup> Mark J. Boda, *The Book of Zechariah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 566.

<sup>25</sup> Klein, *Zechariah*, 273.

<sup>26</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 139.

more clear. The Servant/king was saved by Yahweh (Isa 53:10–12) and through this, the salvation of the people is sure (Isa 53:4–5). Baron puts it this way: “If the king of Israel is ‘saved,’ His people (whose Head and Representative He is) must be saved likewise.”<sup>27</sup> The Servant and the king, both having been saved by Yahweh, will be salvation to the end of the earth.<sup>28</sup>

The king will not come riding in a chariot or on a war horse, but he will be lowly and riding on a donkey. The Hebrew word *ānī* is often translated as “poor,” “lowly,” or “afflicted.”<sup>29</sup> Boda clarifies the connotations of this word writing, “At times the term is used to refer to humility as a more general inner quality” and an indication of submission.<sup>30</sup> Boda further says, “Humility is a key quality for one able to fulfill this role of submission to and reliance upon Yahweh as the high king.”<sup>31</sup> The king’s means of transportation only adds to his lowliness. Feinberg writes, “Pride was as foreign to Him as it is common to the world’s kings.”<sup>32</sup>

Building on the allusions to the Servant, the king of Zechariah 9 is “afflicted” just as the Servant is in Isaiah 53. “He was despised and forsaken of men” and “was oppressed and afflicted” (Isa 53:3, 7). Boda notes the parallels between the king and the Servant. He writes, “The important role that the servant figure plays in relationship to the salvation of the female Zion figure, and the bracketing of the servant section in 52:13–53:12 by two instances of the *Aufruf zur Freude* form, makes more likely a connection between the two passages.”<sup>33</sup> Baron observes:

Those who feel themselves constrained to recognise in that great prophecy in Isaiah a vivid description of the suffering and death of the Messiah cannot regard it strange that Zechariah, who was doubtless acquainted with the writings of Isaiah, and who in all his Messianic passages—both in the first and second parts of his book—tersely summarises the great predictions of “the former prophets,” should be led to describe Israel’s Redeemer-King as “afflicted” and suffering.<sup>34</sup>

There is no doubt that Zechariah was aware of the prophecy of Isaiah and understood it well. The king would come and be afflicted, lowly, and humble, even though he was “bearing” their salvation.

A final characteristic of this king in Zechariah 9 is the extent of his peaceful reign. Zechariah 9:9 says, “He will speak peace to the nations; and His reign will be

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<sup>27</sup> Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, 308.

<sup>28</sup> This is also relevant to the relationship between Yahweh and the Servant/king. If the king is Yahweh, yet distinct from him, then it would make sense to read the Niphal participle in the passive and reflexive senses. But it cannot be said that in this text, beyond a reasonable doubt, that the Messiah is Yahweh. Although there are many indications in the OT as to the deity of the Messiah (such as “Mighty God” in Isa 9:6–7), it becomes much more clear in the New Testament when Jesus is explicitly shown to be God (e.g. John 1:1–5).

<sup>29</sup> Klein, *Zechariah*, 198.

<sup>30</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 567.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Feinberg, *God Remembers*, 165.

<sup>33</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 567. The *Aufruf zur Freude* form was created by Frank Crüsemann and had three elements. It was (1) a call to an audience personified as a woman, (2) contains vocabulary of celebratory shouts, and (3) “a clause expressing the reason for rejoicing which follows the style of the prophetic oracle of salvation rather than the psalms” (*ibid.*)

<sup>34</sup> Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, 308.

from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Zech 9:10). This characteristic is also found in Isaiah 9 and 11 which portray the Davidic king as "the Prince of Peace," who will bring about worldwide peace. "There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace" (Isa 9:6–7). In his kingdom, "The wolf will dwell with the lamb" and there will be no evil or corruption because "the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh" (Isa 11:1–9). Furthermore, "there will be no end to the increase of His government." Oswalt comments on Isaiah 9:6, "This person will not be a king among kings in Israel. Rather, he will be the final king, the king to end all kings. Thus the prophet envisions the ideal Davidic monarch."<sup>35</sup> The coming righteous king will usher in an era of peace that will extend to all the earth and will never end.

The numerous allusions to Isaiah demonstrate that Zechariah knew Isaiah was writing about a single messianic figure who will bring salvation and establish Yahweh's kingdom. The connections simply cannot be ignored. Zechariah sums up these key characteristics of the Messiah found in Isaiah in just two verses.

### The Pierced One

There is great controversy surrounding the identity of the "pierced one" in Zechariah 12:10–13:1, often because many scholars interpret this passage solely through the lens of "Deutero-Zechariah." Carol and Eric Meyers rightly say that this "is surely one of the major interpretive cruxes in Second Zechariah, if not in all of prophecy."<sup>36</sup> However, when this passage is read in light of the Servant of Isaiah and with the broader scope of revelation in mind, there can be very little doubt as to the identity of the "pierced one."

Mason and Boda both reject a messianic reference or allusion to Isaiah in this passage. Mason believes that "there might be a reference to the prophet and his circle, and that when the people return to God they will see that in rejecting him they have in fact been rejecting God and his word to them."<sup>37</sup> Boda believes that the "pierced one" is Yahweh and that "Yahweh here likens the people's past treatment of him as a fatal stabbing, as they disregarded and abandoned him to the point that his existence was irrelevant to their lives."<sup>38</sup> However, this just leads to more interpretive difficulties. Klein argues against identifying the "pierced one" with Yahweh because "this view does not explain how God's symbolic wound could provide for cleansing for sin, nor does it account for the sense of the same verb 'pierced' (*dāqārū*) that has a literal sense in 13:3."<sup>39</sup> Thus, Zechariah 12:10 needs to be read in light of Isaiah 53. Trying to solve this puzzle within "Deutero-Zechariah," as scholars often do, will prove to be fruitless and unsatisfying. This passage must be read in light of the whole of Zechariah, Isaiah, and even all of Scripture.

Zechariah 12:10 opens with Yahweh declaring that he will pour out the Spirit of grace and of supplication on Israel. Then the people "will look on Me whom they

<sup>35</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, 248.

<sup>36</sup> Carol L. Meyers and Eric M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 337.

<sup>37</sup> Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 119.

<sup>38</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 717.

<sup>39</sup> Klein, *Zechariah*, 366.

have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son” (Zech 12:10). In that day, Yahweh will open a fountain for Israel, for sin and impurity (Zech 13:1). The first thing to note in Zechariah 12:10 is that the people “will look on Me whom they have pierced.” Baron writes that “this sets forth the character and majesty of Him whom they shall behold as their great Deliverer, for the one who speaks throughout the chapter... is none other than Jehovah.”<sup>40</sup> He further adds, “But just as the words, ‘they shall look unto me,’ set forth the essential oneness of the ‘pierced one’ with Jehovah, so does the sudden transition in the same verse from the first person to the third, and the words, ‘they shall mourn for Him,’ teach us that, as to his person, he is yet distinct from God.”<sup>41</sup> Again, we run into this relationship between Yahweh and the Messiah. The “pierced one” (Messiah) is Yahweh, yet distinct from Yahweh.

There are several pieces of evidence within Zechariah that support a messianic interpretation, including that Zechariah 12:10–13:1 has many parallels with Isaiah 53.<sup>42</sup> “Pierced” should call the reader back to Isaiah 53. “But he was pierced through for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities” (Isa 53:5). The Hebrew word used is *dāqar* and it means “to stab,” “to pierce through,” or “thrust through.”<sup>43</sup> In Isaiah 53, the Servant suffers and is pierced through. Zechariah 12:10 describes a day when Yahweh will pour out the Spirit of grace and supplication on Israel and they, who have pierced the Servant, will mourn for him like no other mourning that has been seen in Israel.

But the Servant did not die in vain or without a purpose. “He was pierced through for our transgressions . . . and by His wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5). The suffering and death of the Servant was to provide atonement and salvation for the people. He bore their iniquities and poured out his soul to death. In Zechariah, the mourning for the “pierced one” leads to Yahweh opening a fountain for sin and impurity (Zech 13:1). As shown before, the interpretation that it is the symbolic piercing of Yahweh falters in light of Zechariah 13:1. A literal, physical death is needed to atone for sin, and that was provided through the Servant.

The picture of the suffering Messiah in Isaiah 53 is unparalleled in Scripture. Thus, it is no surprise to see how Zechariah makes constant allusions to this famous Servant passage. Petterson notes,

Zechariah is not saying any more than Isaiah did before him. Zechariah expresses it differently, but the underlying concepts are the same. In the battle that wins victory for Yahweh’s people, a victory that brings cleansing and a restored covenant relationship with all of its blessings, the death of Yahweh’s king plays a pivotal role in the purification and cleansing of the people.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Baron, *The Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*, 446–47.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 447–48.

<sup>42</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 237–39. Petterson shows that this prophecy is about one figure who has been repeatedly mentioned throughout Zechariah. He draws the “pierced one” in with the Branch in Zech 3:8–10, 6:9–15, and the king of 9:9–10 as well as tying it in with previous messianic references in Ezekiel and Jeremiah.

<sup>43</sup> Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9–14*, 338.

<sup>44</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 241. Petterson also notes a connection between Isa 53:12 and Zech 14:1 with the spoil that is divided.

Zechariah's depiction of the One who is pierced is no different from that of the Servant. The Messiah was rejected by his own people. They despised him. And yet, he was to be their salvation, the One who will bring atonement for their sins. "Now in this prophecy, here is One suffering for sins which he never committed—enduring what others deserved—standing in the transgressor's place, as if Himself the transgressor."<sup>45</sup>

### The Stricken Shepherd

Zechariah's prophecy of the stricken shepherd in Zechariah 13:7-9 proves to be very problematic when it is interpreted exclusively through the second half of Zechariah.<sup>46</sup> At the forefront of these interpretive issues is the identity of the shepherd. Boda tries finding a fulfillment in the postexilic period and concludes that the shepherd may be either Zerubbabel or Elnathan, thus signifying the end of the Davidic line.<sup>47</sup> Eugene Merrill believes that any appeal to Isaiah 53 is "wide of the mark" and then goes on to say that, in light of the New Testament, Zechariah 13:7 is a "prefiguring" or "prototype" of a "suffering Messiah."<sup>48</sup> He further adds that the New Testament "does not invalidate the meaning of Zech 13:7-9... but it raises it to another dimension in which messianic truth can be communicated by a text that may never have been so intended by the original prophet-author."<sup>49</sup> Finding a fulfillment in a figure other than the Messiah leads to more interpretive problems. For example, if the shepherd in 13:7 is the prophet, how does his striking lead to the scattering of the people and restoration of the people? The issue in these interpretations is not only that they are unsatisfying and lead to more issues, but they undermine and dismiss any hope that God has promised to his people.

Klein, on the other hand, recognizes several indicators that connect the Shepherd with the "pierced one," particularly the close relationship between the figures and Yahweh.<sup>50</sup> Petterson argues that, through process of elimination, the identity of the Shepherd is none other than the "pierced one," the Branch, the Messiah.<sup>51</sup> Reading Zechariah 13:7-9 as prophetic of the One Isaiah and the "former prophets" spoke of not only solves the puzzles of interpretation but leads to a more satisfying and hopeful reading of the text.

In order to examine these passages, the context must first be considered. Zechariah 13 opens with a prophecy of the day when a fountain will be opened for sin and impurity. This continues from the "pierced one" and the mourning of the people in 12:10-14. So not only will his piercing open a fountain for sin and impurity, but in that day Yahweh will cut off all idols and false prophets (Zech 13:1-6). The text then shifts in v. 7 to Yahweh awakening a sword against his Shepherd. The result

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<sup>45</sup> David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah* (London: Morgan & Scott, 1922; repr., Minneapolis: James Family, 1978), 91.

<sup>46</sup> Mason, *Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi*, 110. Mason argues that Zechariah 13:7-9 was originally with and should be with Zechariah 11.

<sup>47</sup> Boda, *The Book of Zechariah*, 738.

<sup>48</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 337-39.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>50</sup> Klein, *Zechariah*, 387.

<sup>51</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 206-7.

of Yahweh striking his Shepherd is that the sheep will be scattered and Yahweh will turn his hand against the little ones (Zech 13:7b). Yahweh declares that two parts will be cut off and the third that remains will be put through the fire, refined, and tested (Zech 13:8–9a). The result of the refinement leads them to a restored covenant relationship with Yahweh (Zech 13:9).<sup>52</sup>

“Awake, O sword, against My Shepherd and against the man, My Associate,” declares Yahweh of hosts” (Zech 13:7a). Zechariah uses the word *rō‘eh* to describe the Shepherd. This word is very often used of the kings of Israel.<sup>53</sup> Although one cannot say with all certainty that this is what Zechariah meant, it may be possible that Zechariah was alluding to the King he described in Zechariah 9:9 and the recurring theme of a future Davidic king (Isa 9:6–7, 11:1–16, 16:5; Zech 3:8–10, 6:9–15, 9:9). The names “My Shepherd” and “My Associate” indicate a close relationship between the stricken one and Yahweh. This close relationship recalls the King of 9:9 and the “pierced one” of 12:10. It also is found vividly in Isaiah. Isaiah 50:4–11 demonstrates the great reliance and personal relationship the Servant has with Yahweh.

What comes as a shock to the reader is not this close relationship, but that Yahweh awakens a sword to strike the Shepherd, his Associate. Merrill comments, “It is YHWH’s command, not permission, that he be slain.”<sup>54</sup> If the Shepherd is connected with the “pierced one” and the Servant, we see the same action in Isaiah 53:10. “But Yahweh was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief” (Isa 53:10a). The Servant and the Shepherd were both struck because Yahweh intended it.

What follows the striking of the Shepherd in Zechariah 13:7 is the scattering of the sheep. This was an act of judgment on the people (Deut 4:23–27, 28:25). But what is clearly demonstrated throughout Isaiah is that judgment must come before blessing and restoration. “‘And it will be in all the land,’ declares Yahweh, ‘that two parts in it will be cut off and breathe their last; but the third will be left in it’” (Zech 13:8). Israel’s judgment is further elaborated by showing that only a remnant will be left, specifically, a third. Similarly, Isaiah prophesies that Yahweh will preserve a remnant, but does not specify that it will be a third (Isa 10:20–22).

“‘And I will bring the third part through the fire and refine them as silver is refined and test them as gold is tested. They will call on my name, and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are My people,’ and they will say, ‘Yahweh is my God’” (Zech 13:9). This parallels Isaiah 1:24–26. “‘I will also turn my hand against you, and smelt away your dross as with lye and will remove all your alloy... Afterwards you will be called the city of righteousness, a faithful town’” (Isa 1:25–26). The remnant that will be left will be refined and tested by Yahweh. All the evil, sin, and corruption that is among them will be purged, and they will be made holy. Then they will finally enter into a restored covenant relationship with Yahweh their God (Isa 1:26; Zech 13:9).

The striking of the Shepherd and the Servant provide the same result: atonement for sin. Klein writes, “Both figures suffer in order to effect purification for sins. The result of the suffering of the servant and the shepherd will bring great benefit to God’s people. Although v. 7 states this point somewhat more obliquely than Isa 53:10, Zech

<sup>52</sup> Petterson, *Behold Your King*, 200.

<sup>53</sup> Klein, *Zechariah*, 386.

<sup>54</sup> Merrill, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, 337.

13:7 does indeed affirm purification for God's people."<sup>55</sup> The Messiah will suffer and die at the hands of the people (Isa 53:1-9; Zech 12:10, 13:7), by Yahweh's intent (Isa 53:10; Zech 13:7), in order to bring atonement for sin (Isa 53:4-5, Zech 13:1), thus resulting in a restored, holy people (Isa 1:26; Zech 13:9).

### Conclusion

The Messiah demonstrated in these glorious prophecies is one who will bring salvation and blessing to the world, but not through means that might be expected. The Messiah was sent by God to be salvation to the end of the earth (Isa 49:6), but he was despised, abhorred, forsaken of men, and afflicted (Isa 49:7; 53:1-4, 7; Zech 9:9; 11:4-14). He was pierced and killed at the hands of the people (Isa 53:1-9; Zech 12:10), yet by Yahweh's design (Isa 53:10; Zech 13:7). Through his vicarious suffering and death, he brought Yahweh's salvation to the end of the earth and atoned for sin and impurity (Isa 53:5; Zech 3:9; 9:9; 13:1). Because he poured out his soul to death and accomplished his mission, Yahweh will reward him greatly and exalt him (Isa 49:7; 53:11-12; Zech 9:10). He will be high and lifted up, and kings will bow down to him (Isa 49:7, 52:13). He will be a righteous priest-king on David's throne and bring forth justice, righteousness, and peace to the ends of the earth (Isa 9:6-7, 11:1-9, 16:5, 32:1, 42:1-4; Zech 3:8, 6:12-13, 9:9-10). Through him, Israel will be restored (Isa 1:24-26, 4:3-6, 11:10-16, 42:6-9, 49:5-6; Zech 12:1-13:1, 13:9), and the covenant blessings promised to Abraham and David will finally be fulfilled (Isa 4:2-6, Isa 11:1-9, 49:8-13; Zech 2:5-13, 3:10, 9:10).

The call to "the former prophets" in Zechariah 1:1-6 establishes the backdrop for reading Zechariah. Zechariah draws from numerous earlier prophetic works, but it is clear that the hope for the Messiah in Zechariah has largely stemmed from Isaiah. No other book in the Old Testament paints such a beautiful portrait of the Messiah as Isaiah does. Zechariah shows that not only is the hope for the Messiah still present "post-exile," but that this figure he writes about is the One whom Isaiah spoke of, the only One, the Branch, the Servant, the One who was pierced for our transgressions and the One who will reign in glory.

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<sup>55</sup> Klein, *Zechariah*, 273.