

# THE CHRISTOLOGICAL FULFILLMENT OF ISAIAH'S SERVANT SONGS

*Robert B. Chisholm Jr.*

ARTICLE ONE OF DALLAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY'S Doctrinal Statement affirms the Bible's Christological focus: "We believe that all the Scriptures center about the Lord Jesus Christ in His person and work in His first and second coming, and hence that no portion, *even of the Old Testament*, is properly read, or understood, until it leads to Him" (*italics added*). This does not mean one should arbitrarily allegorize the Scriptures or subject passages to typological interpretive fancy in an effort to conjure up their Christological import. It does mean, however, that the entire Bible, including the Old Testament, finds its full significance in Christ's person and work.

This Christological dimension may be discovered in every genre of Scripture, including those not normally viewed as sources for messianic texts. This includes legal material, narratives, wisdom literature, and even love poetry. For example the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Law prefigure Jesus' sacrificial atonement.<sup>1</sup> The story of Ruth presents a model of sacrificial love that finds its ultimate expression in Christ's redemptive work. Ecclesiastes demonstrates that any quest for meaning and fulfillment in life is a dead-

---

Robert B. Chisholm Jr. is Chair and Professor of Old Testament Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas.

<sup>1</sup> This is not to suggest that those living in the Old Testament period would have understood the redemptive and Christological significance of these sacrifices. Article five of the Dallas Theological Seminary Doctrinal Statement says, "We believe that it was historically impossible that they [Old Testament saints] should have had as the conscious object of their faith the incarnate, crucified Son, the Lamb of God (John 1:29), and that it is evident that they did not comprehend as we do that the sacrifices depicted the person and work of Christ. We believe also that they did not understand the redemptive significance of the prophecies and types concerning the suffering of Christ (1 Pet. 1:10–12)."

end street apart from God's special revelation found in the Law (Eccles. 12:13). But progressive revelation makes it clear that the Law points ultimately to Christ and is fulfilled in Him. The Song of Songs celebrates human love, but only Christ's redemptive work frees human beings to express genuine love in the robust manner envisioned in the Song.

The Old Testament's Christological dimension is perhaps most apparent in the Psalms and Prophets. At many points the New Testament correlates Jesus' experience with passages from the Psalms and Prophets and views these texts as fulfilled in Him. When one examines the New Testament's use of these texts, Jesus appears in two primary roles: (1) He is the ideal Davidic king envisioned by the prophets and depicted in the royal psalms, and (2) He is the suffering servant envisioned in Isaiah's fourth servant song who brings to culmination the long line of persecuted sufferers who speak in the Psalms. But how are these two seemingly contrasting images—one of royal majesty and the other of suffering servanthood—to be harmonized? The key to resolving this tension lies in Jesus' self-identification as the servant prophesied by Isaiah, for in the servant songs both roles are merged in the person of the servant, whose suffering is a prerequisite for his exaltation and a prelude to his *royal* task of establishing justice on the earth. This article seeks to validate these assertions and in the process to demonstrate the centrality of Isaiah's servant songs to the Christological fulfillment of the Old Testament and to Jesus' own understanding of His person and mission.

### JESUS IS THE IDEAL DAVIDIC KING

When God made His covenant with David, He promised him an enduring dynasty (2 Sam. 7:12–16; cf. Pss. 72:17; 89:4, 28–37). Later reflection on this covenant envisions a worldwide kingdom (Pss. 72:8–11; 89:25) characterized by justice (72:12–14). The royal psalms idealize the Davidic king, portraying him as God's vice-regent on earth who defeats God's enemies and establishes God's rule over the nations. For example Psalm 45, a song written for one of the Davidic kings on the occasion of his wedding, speaks in exaggerated terms of the king. He possesses an eternal throne, and because he is God's representative on earth, he is even called "God" (v. 6 [Heb., v. 7]).<sup>2</sup> Psalm 2 affirms the Davidic ruler's special

---

<sup>2</sup> The context indicates that the words of Psalm 45:6, though addressed to God, are directed to the Davidic king. The king is addressed in verses 1–5 (note especially

status as God's chosen king. He is God's very own "son" and is given the nations as his inheritance (vv. 7–8). This language recalls the Davidic Covenant, which established a special relationship between God and the Davidic rulers, comparable to that of a father and son (2 Sam. 7:14; Ps. 89:26–27 [Heb., vv. 27–28]). Psalm 110 envisions an ideal Davidic king who, in the role of a royal priest, will occupy a special position as God's representative on earth.

Faced with the dynasty's failure to live up to this ideal, the prophets anticipated a time when a Davidic king would make the ideal a reality. Isaiah envisioned this king as a mighty warrior (Isa. 9:2–7 [Heb., vv. 1–6]) who would establish a kingdom of peace and justice (11:1–10). Because he is a Davidic descendant (Jer. 23:5–6; 33:15–16) who will bring the Davidic promises to realization, this king is even called "David" by Jeremiah (30:9), Ezekiel (34:23–24; 37:24–25), and Hosea (3:5) and is depicted by Micah (5:2 [Heb., v. 1]) as the second coming of David.<sup>3</sup> Speaking from the perspective of their own geopolitical context, the prophets expected this ruler to reestablish the Davidic kingdom (Isa. 11:10; Amos 9:11) and to end the Assyrian menace (Mic. 5:5–6 [Heb., vv. 6–7]). Because the prophets envisioned an ideal Davidic king as an eschatological figure, the royal psalms may be read as eschatological.

By the intertestamental period at least some Jews were praying that the Lord would fulfill His promise to David by sending this ideal king to His people. The pseudepigraphic Psalms of Solomon 17:4 recalls God's covenant with David: "Lord, you chose David to be king over Israel, and swore to him about his descendants forever, that his kingdom should not fail before you."<sup>4</sup> Because of Israel's sin the Lord allowed nations to humiliate David's dynasty (v. 6), but the author prayed, "See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel in the time

---

"to the King" in v. 1) and in verse 7 (where God is referred to in the third person). It is unlikely that the psalmist interrupted his address to the king. Furthermore it is natural to understand the "scepter of justice" in verse 6 as the king's, since verse 7 speaks of his passion for justice. Calling the king "God" does not mean the psalmist had some notion of divine kingship in mind. The language is hyperbolic, emphasizing that God energizes the king for battle (see vv. 2–5, as well as Isa. 9:6). For a fuller discussion of this point see Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 39–40. Once the rhetorical, hyperbolic nature of the language is grasped, it is unnecessary to emend the text or to propose unlikely syntactical alternatives, such as those listed by Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 337.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller discussion of these passages see Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 277–78, 348, 423.

<sup>4</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 665.

known to you, O God. Undergird him with the strength to destroy the unrighteous rulers, to purge Jerusalem from gentiles who trample her to destruction; in wisdom and righteousness to drive out the sinners from the inheritance; to smash the arrogance of sinners like a potter's jar; to shatter all their substance with an iron rod; to destroy the unlawful nations with the word of his mouth. At his warning the nations will flee from his presence; and he will condemn sinners by the thoughts of their hearts" (vv. 21–25).<sup>5</sup> This king will promote righteousness and justice, restore Israel to prominence, and extend compassion to all nations who show him reverence (vv. 26–44).<sup>6</sup>

According to the New Testament Jesus fulfills the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament and embodies the Davidic ideal they envisioned. From start to finish the New Testament demonstrates that Jesus is the Son of David. The angel Gabriel told Mary that her supernaturally conceived child "will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). In Matthew 1:1 Jesus is called "the son of David" (cf. Rom. 1:3) and His lineage is traced to David (Matt. 1:6), and in Revelation 22:16 Jesus Himself declared, "I am the root and the descendant of David" (cf. 3:7; 5:5). When Jesus launched His Galilean ministry, Matthew identified Him as the light of salvation foreseen by Isaiah, who associated this light with the messianic King (Matt. 4:15–16; cf. Isa. 9:1–7 [Heb., 8:23–9:6]). In Romans 15:12 Paul quoted the messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11:10 (in a form almost identical to the Septuagint) as he told how Jesus has brought salvation to the nations (see Rom. 15:7–11). According to Hebrews 1:5, 8–9, 13; 5:5–6 the ideal king anticipated in the royal psalms finds fulfillment in Jesus, for He is the One through whom the promises to David are realized and the One who is God's Son. Jesus is the royal Priest who sits at God's right hand and holds the scepter of kingship.

### JESUS IS THE SUFFERING SERVANT

In addition to the royal psalms and messianic prophecies, Isaiah's fourth servant song (52:13–53:12) is another important text that

---

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 667.

<sup>6</sup> Expectation of a Davidic Messiah is also expressed in 4QFlorilegium I.10–13, where the coming king is called the "branch of David." See Michael A. Knibb, *The Qumran Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 259 (translation), 261 (commentary).

defines Jesus' person and mission. This passage, one of the best known in the Bible, depicts a suffering servant who plays a key role in God's redemptive program for His people and the nations.

The song begins with a startling announcement. The Lord proclaims that His servant will be elevated to a lofty position (52:13). This servant was once so disfigured and marred that he was repulsive to observers (vv. 14–15a), but now kings will stand before him in shocked silence. The prophet Isaiah heard this announcement and in 53:1–10 he spoke on behalf of the nation Israel. In this speech Israel finally comes to their senses. They confess that the one whom they rejected and wrote off as an object of divine wrath is really their savior and destined to be their king. Israel first expresses shock and surprise at what they have heard (vv. 1–3). Then in verses 4–6 reflection replaces shock, as they realize appearances can be deceiving. Israel essentially says, "When we saw this servant suffering, we assumed he was being punished by God for his own sin. But we were only partially correct. He was being punished by God, but for our sins, not his own sin." Israel's reflection continues in verses 7–10. They remember how the servant silently endured harsh treatment. At this point God speaks again (vv. 11–12), and the song ends as it began, with God announcing that the servant will be exalted and rewarded for his obedience.

How was the fourth servant song understood in the intertestamental period? The song exerted some influence on Jewish thinking, but not in a consistent, unified manner. Some texts develop the theme of the servant's exaltation. According to Hengel when such texts view the servant as an individual (as in 1 Enoch 62–63), the suffering motif fades from view, but when the servant is understood collectively (as in Wisdom of Solomon 2:12–20 and 5:1–6), the suffering theme is present. Hengel sees evidence of "a messianic interpretation" in 1QIsa<sup>a</sup> "probably applied—as the *Aramaic Apocryphon of Levi*<sup>b</sup> (4Q541) suggests—to the end-time high priest." He states, "An individual eschatological interpretation is also present in the Septuagint of Isaiah, which likewise refers to a suffering individual of the dawning end-times, perhaps to Onias II."<sup>7</sup> The suffering theme may also be present in the *Self-*

---

<sup>7</sup> Martin Hengel with Daniel P. Bailey, "The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, trans. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 146. For a thorough analysis of the Septuagint of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 see Eugene Robert Ekblad Jr., *Isaiah's Servant Poems according to the Septuagint: An Exegetical and Theological Study*, Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology 23 (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 167–266.

*Glorification Hymn* (4Q491) and the *Testament of Benjamin* 3:8. However, according to Hengel, “the motif of vicarious atoning death in the Hebrew text of Isaiah 53 recedes more or less into the background in the other pre-Christian texts.” Hengel concludes that there is evidence “that already in the pre-Christian period, traditions about suffering and atoning eschatological messianic figures were available in Palestinian Judaism . . . and that Jesus and the Early Church *could* have known and appealed to them.” He adds, “This would explain how first Jesus himself and then his disciples after Easter could presuppose that their message of the vicarious atoning death of the Messiah (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3–5) would be understood among their Jewish contemporaries.”<sup>8</sup>

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the suffering servant of Isaiah’s fourth song. Matthew regarded Jesus’ healing ministry as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4 (Matt. 8:14–17). Prior to His crucifixion Jesus Himself stated that He must be “numbered with transgressors” (Luke 22:37), in fulfillment of Isaiah 53:12. As Peter reflected on Jesus’ suffering, he incorporated several statements from Isaiah 53 in his description (1 Pet. 2:21–25). When the Ethiopian eunuch asked Philip to identify the servant described in Isaiah 53:7–8, Philip made it clear that the referent is Jesus (Acts 8:30–35). In addition to these and other direct references to the song there are more subtle references and allusions in Mark 9:31 (cf. Isa. 53:6); 10:45 (cf. 53:11–12); 14:24 (cf. 53:10–12); John 1:29, 36 (cf. 53:4, 7, 11–12); the “servant” references in Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30; Romans 4:25 (cf. 53:5, 11); 5:15–19 (cf. 53:11); 1 Corinthians 15:3–5 (cf. 53:5, 9–12); Hebrews 9:28 (cf. 53:12); and 1 John 2:1–2 (cf. 53:4–6, 10–12).<sup>9</sup>

Isaiah’s suffering servant is not an isolated figure in the Old Testament. His suffering has a unique redemptive dimension; yet it also epitomizes the suffering of the persecuted, righteous psalmists who expressed their pain in the laments of the Psalter. As the suffering servant, Jesus brings to culmination this long line of sufferers. In fact from the cross Jesus quoted from one of these la-

---

<sup>8</sup> Hengel, “The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period,” 146 (italics his).

<sup>9</sup> See Peter Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts,” in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, 147–62; and Otfried Hofius, “The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters,” in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, 163–88. On the impact of Isaiah 53 on Jesus’ self-understanding see the collection of essays in William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer, eds., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity International, 1998).

laments (Ps. 22:1) as He cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). By appropriating these words Jesus identified Himself as the righteous sufferer par excellence. Words and images from the laments become a lens through which one can view and appreciate more fully Jesus' suffering. One now realizes that these ancient words and images prefigured the suffering of God's special servant. John saw the dividing of Jesus' garments (John 19:24) as fulfilling the image depicted in Psalm 22:18. When the soldiers gave Jesus sour wine to quench His thirst (John 19:28–30), the words of another lament (Ps. 69:21) came to life. In their original context these words were probably metaphorical, but metaphôr materialized in Jesus' experience. Since He epitomizes the righteous sufferer, then His enemies could also be cast in a role corresponding to the evil persecutors faced by the psalmists. This is why Peter took the words of Psalm 69:25, which refers to the psalmist's enemies in general (the pronouns are plural in both the Hebrew and the Septuagint), and applied them to Judas, changing the plural pronouns of the original text to singular (Acts 1:16–20).

With Jesus' identity as suffering servant firmly established, other passages, such as Zechariah 12:10, are brought into the orbit of this theme. Because Jesus is God incarnate, His suffering at the hands of His own people also epitomizes Israel's rejection of God. Zechariah 12:10 states that Israel has "pierced" (that is, rejected) God.<sup>10</sup> John saw a literal fulfillment of this when a soldier pierced the crucified Jesus with a sword (John 19:34–37). Zechariah was not predicting this event as such, but the crucifixion of Jesus was the culmination of Israel's rejection of God. The piercing of Jesus, God's Son, was in essence what Israel had done to God. Poetic metaphor again takes tangible shape.

#### ISAIAH'S SERVANT SONGS AS THE LINK BETWEEN IDEAL KING AND SUFFERING SERVANT

How are the seemingly disparate motifs of ideal Davidic king and suffering servant linked? A close look at the servant songs shows they anticipate such a merging of roles in one individual. Furthermore they understand this individual's suffering as the basis for his exaltation to kingship.

Most scholars recognize the presence of four servant songs in Isaiah 40–55: (1) 42:1–7; (2) 49:1–13; (3) 50:4–9; and (4)

---

<sup>10</sup> On the syntax of Zechariah 12:10 see Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 474.

functions. In addition to his redemptive suffering, he is called Israel, in an idealized sense (49:3), and portrayed as God's obedient servant who succeeds where the disobedient nation failed. He is a prophetic spokesman who proclaims God's message (49:2; 50:4), as well as a new Moses who leads a new exodus out of bondage and mediates a new covenant (49:6–13).<sup>11</sup> His ministry extends beyond Israel, however. He brings the light of salvation to the nations and establishes justice on the earth (42:1–4, 6; 49:6).

It is here that a royal dimension emerges in the portrait of the servant. According to the first two servant songs the servant will "open blind eyes" (42:7a) and release prisoners from dark dungeons (v. 7b; 49:9a).<sup>12</sup> The recipient of this deliverance is not clearly identified in the first song, but in the second song the imagery describes the servant's deliverance of the exiled people (49:9b–13). The ser-

---

<sup>11</sup> On the servant as a new Moses see 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), 105–40. Hugenberger seems hesitant to stress the servant's royal function (*ibid.*, 114–19); he creates a false dichotomy, for the servant's roles as new Moses and ideal David are complementary, not antithetical.

The syntax of 49:8 has been debated, especially the meaning of *לְבַרִּיתָּהּ*, literally, "for a covenant of people" (cf. also 42:6). The present writer understands *בְּרִית* as metonymic, referring to one who on God's behalf mediates a covenant with a people, namely, those delivered from exile and restored to the land (49:9–13). Some understand the phrase in the sense of "covenant people," apparently taking *עַם* as appositional or as an attributed genitive (e.g., *JPS Tanakh Translation*). However, this seems unlikely for several reasons. First, the parallel phrase in 42:6 (*לְאֹרֶךְ יָמִים*) refers to the servant as one who is "a light of nations." "Light" is used metonymically, suggesting he is one who mediates light (salvation) to nations as God's instrument of deliverance. Second, the singular noun *עַם*, when following a singular noun elsewhere, is only rarely appositional (cf. Deut. 20:1, where it appears to be appositional to the preceding "horses and chariots"). When following a singular construct form, it is never used in a sense that would yield the meaning "covenant people" in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8. Third, when a genitival noun follows *בְּרִית* elsewhere, (a) it can be attributive (as in *בְּרִית עוֹלָם*, "perpetual covenant," *בְּרִית כֹּהֲנִים*, "covenant of priesthood," *בְּרִית מֶלַח*, "covenant of salt," *בְּרִית שָׁלוֹם*, "covenant of peace," *בְּרִית אֲדָמִים*, "covenant of brotherhood," *בְּרִית קֹדֶשׁ*, "holy covenant"); or (b) it can indicate the initiator of a covenant (e.g., *בְּרִית יְהוָה*, "covenant of the Lord," *בְּרִית אֱלֹהִים*, "covenant of God"), or (c) the one with whom a covenant is made (e.g., *בְּרִית אֲבוֹתֵינוּ*, "covenant with our fathers," *בְּרִית אַבְרָם*, "covenant with Abram," *בְּרִית לֵוִי*, "covenant with the Levites," *בְּרִית עַבְדְּךָ*, "covenant with your servant"). Fourth, furthermore, *בְּרִית* does not seem to be followed by an appositional noun or attributed genitive elsewhere. In light of this evidence the phrase "covenant of a people" in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 is most naturally understood as a construction meaning "covenant with a people," in which case the addressee can be understood as one who mediates a covenant with a people.

<sup>12</sup> The metaphorical language refers to treating the afflicted in a just and liberating manner. For the metaphor of opening blind eyes see Psalm 146:8; Isaiah 29:18–21; and 35:4–5. For the metaphor of freeing prisoners see Psalms 69:33 (Heb., v. 34); 79:11; 102:20 (Heb., v. 21); 107:10–14; 146:7; and Isaiah 61:1.



the servant's deliverance of the exiled people (49:9b–13). The servant also promotes justice on a worldwide scale (42:1, 3–4), a task that is compared to bringing light to the nations (v. 6; 49:6). The language of 42:7 finds parallels in Mesopotamian texts where kings are said to liberate the oppressed.<sup>13</sup> The statement יְשִׁים בְּאֶרֶץ מִשְׁפָּט, “he will establish in the land/earth justice” (42:4), is semantically equivalent to the Akkadian expression *mīšaram ina mātīm šakānum*, which appears in Mesopotamian royal edicts of liberation.<sup>14</sup> This royal portrait of the servant corresponds to the ideal Davidic king depicted in Isaiah 11:1–9.<sup>15</sup> The ideal Davidic king, like the servant, is endowed by the divine Spirit (v. 2; cf. 42:1) to establish justice (11:3–5).<sup>16</sup> This royal portrait of one who promotes justice also coincides with the ideal expressed in the royal psalms (Pss. 45:4, 6–7; 72:1–4, 12–14) and with the description of David's reign (2 Sam. 8:15).<sup>17</sup>

The royal character of the servant is not limited to the first and second songs. It is also apparent in the fourth song, which begins and ends with divine first-person announcements of the servant's coming exaltation (Isa. 52:13–15; 53:11–12). In 52:13a the Lord announces that the servant will act wisely (or, by metonymy, succeed, יָשָׁר). Jeremiah used this verb of the ideal Davidic ruler (Jer. 23:5). Two of the three verbs in Isaiah 52:13b, though not technical terms by any means, can be used of royal accession or honor (Num. 24:7 [יָרָם]; 2 Chron. 32:23 [niph'al of יָרָם]).<sup>18</sup> In isolation the language would not necessarily point to royal status, but Isaiah 52:15 makes the point that *kings* will close their mouths before the

<sup>13</sup> Shalom Paul, “Deutero-Isaiah and the Cuneiform Royal Inscriptions,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 88 (1968): 182. See also Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995), 141.

<sup>14</sup> Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 141. For excerpts from such edicts see *ibid.*, 47–52, 60–61.

<sup>15</sup> Several commentators have recognized the connection between the two figures. See for example J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 13–14; and John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 109–10.

<sup>16</sup> Once more, parallels with Mesopotamian royal edicts are apparent (Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 62–63).

<sup>17</sup> On parallels between these royal psalms and Mesopotamian royal edicts, see *ibid.*, 48–49, 62–64. On 2 Samuel 8:15 see *ibid.*, 46–47. In addition to the justice theme both the first and second songs contain several details that “fit well with the royal ideal” depicted in the psalms (J. H. Eaton, *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah* [London: SPCK, 1979], 48, 62–63).

<sup>18</sup> In Isaiah 6:1 and 57:15 these two verbs are collocated in a description of God's royal splendor (Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 378–79).

exalted servant.<sup>19</sup> Based on an analysis of the expression “close the mouth” in Job 5:16 and Psalm 107:42, Watts concludes that the language is metonymic for “the subjugation of the arrogant kings to the servant as Yahweh implements his *mišpāt*.”<sup>20</sup> This reference to kings is an intertextual link to a statement in the second song that describes kings or princes rising before the servant in respect and then bowing low to him (Isa. 49:7). This in turn links with Psalm 72:11, which describes all kings bowing down to and serving the Davidic king. The conclusion to the fourth song makes it clear that the servant’s exaltation is in reward for obediently submitting to suffering and thereby serving as God’s instrument of redemption (two logical connectors, *לכן* and *לפיכך*, occur in 53:12).<sup>21</sup>

Despite these intertextual links most interpreters do not equate the servant with the ideal Davidic king. After all, Isaiah did not directly link the two by designating the servant as the Davidic king. Schultz, who argues for a connection between the servant songs and the royal texts of Isaiah 1–39, asks, “Why is the servant not more clearly identified as King here [i.e., in the songs]?”<sup>22</sup> Fol-

<sup>19</sup> Traditionally this gesture is viewed as expressing shock and amazement. Michael L. Barré contests this, arguing that closing the mouth describes the kings as sulking (“Textual and Rhetorical-critical Observations on the Last Servant Song [Isaiah 52:13–53:12],” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62 [2000]: 10).

<sup>20</sup> R. E. Watts, “The Meaning of *‘ālāw yiqpēšū mēlāktm p̄them* in Isaiah LII 15,” *Vetus Testamentum* 40 (1990): 327–35. Watts points out that in Job 5:16 and Psalm 107:42 “the central theme is God’s justice, the implementation of which results in a reversal motif, viz. the simultaneous restoration of the powerless righteous and the judgement [sic] of the powerful wicked, and that it is this opposition that is played out in the contrasting responses of either hope or rejoicing, or the ‘closing of the mouth’” (ibid., 332). Watts argues that the Book of Isaiah depicts the kings “as cruel and arrogant oppressors” who in the end are subjugated (cf. Isa. 49:23) (ibid., 333). Barré contends that Watts “misses the basic import of the idiom, insofar as he thinks shutting the mouth reflects the fact that the parties in question fall under God’s judgment” (“Textual and Rhetorical-critical Observations,” 10 n. 46). This is an unfair criticism, for Watts is not discussing the meaning of the idiom as such, but rather its connotation in the biblical texts in which it appears, where it is metonymic. The point is that the idiom, whatever its primary meaning (sulking or not smiling, according to Barré), describes an effect of being subjugated in judgment.

<sup>21</sup> In addition to the exaltation language pointing to the servant’s royal role, it is also possible that the imagery of his suffering is rooted in ancient Near Eastern royal ritual. John H. Walton proposes that the fourth servant song reflects the imagery of “the substitute king ritual” known from Mesopotamian and Hittite sources (“The Imagery of the Substitute King Ritual in Isaiah’s Fourth Servant Song,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122 [2003]: 734–43). If this is the case, then the servant may be viewed as an ideal royal figure.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Schultz, “The King in the Book of Isaiah,” 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), 158.

lowing the lead of Wegner and Van Groningen, he suggests that the songs distance the servant from the Davidic king to emphasize the "fact that this future Ruler will carry out his responsibilities with a fidelity that was lacking in Judah's contemporary kings."<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Schultz is on the right track, but there may be a simpler explanation for the lack of a statement identifying the servant as Davidic king. The intertextual links noted above may be so obvious that such a statement is unnecessary. Perhaps if one were to ask the prophet about this, he would point to these links and respond, "Do I have to spell everything out?"

In addition to lack of a direct link there are two main reasons why most scholars do not identify the servant as the Davidic king. First, most identify the servant with Israel or the prophet, seemingly precluding a link with the Davidic king. On the surface, identifying the servant as Israel has merit, since Israel is called God's servant in the other songs (41:8–9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1–2, 21; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3).<sup>24</sup> While the statement in the second song demands that the servant be Israel in some sense, the servant is nevertheless distinct from the exiled nation. Unlike the disobedient and blind exiled nation (42:19), the obedient servant of the songs opens the eyes of the blind and brings light to the nations (42:6–7; 49:6).<sup>25</sup> His primary task is to deliver exiled Israel (49:5–6).<sup>26</sup> Others iden-

---

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 158–59.

<sup>24</sup> Some prefer to dismiss "Israel" in 49:3 as a gloss (e.g., R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah* 40–66, New Century Bible [Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1981], 137–38). However, there is minimal textual support for this decision. Whybray's main reason for not wanting to retain "Israel" is "the impossibility of reconciling it with the servant's mission to Israel in verse 5" (ibid., italics his).

<sup>25</sup> In this regard see Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 291. Commenting on Isaiah 49:3, he writes, "First, it is important to note that the term *Israel* is used not so much as a name as it is a parallel term to *servant*. It is as though the Lord had said, 'You are my Israel, in whom I will be glorified.' Thus it is the function, not the identity, of Israel that is emphasized. This servant is going to function as Israel. What was Israel's task, as indicated throughout the entire book, from ch. 2 onward? To be the means whereby the nations could come to God. But how could a nation that could not find its own way to God, a blind, deaf, rebellious nation, show anyone else the way? This is the dilemma that the Servant has come to solve. He will be for Israel, and the world, what Israel could not be. Faced with Israel's failure, God does not wipe out the nation; he simply devises another way in which Israel's servanthood could be worked out: through the ideal Israel" (ibid., italics his).

<sup>26</sup> There is some debate as to how the syntax of 49:5–6 should be understood. The present writer views the infinitives לַשׁוּב (v. 5) and לְהָקִים (v. 6) as indicating the purpose for God forming the servant: "in order to [i.e., so that he—the servant—may] restore Jacob to Him . . . in order to raise up the tribes of Jacob." The closest syntactical parallel—1 Samuel 2:28—favors this understanding of the syntax. In that passage the Lord declared, "I chose him from all the tribes of Israel for

tify the servant as the prophet, viewed by most as the so-called Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>27</sup> While the servant assumes a prophetic role as God's spokesman and is portrayed as a new Moses who leads a new exodus, no Old Testament prophet fulfills the royal dimension of the songs or redeems Israel by suffering.

A second reason why many do not link the servant with the Davidic king is that they view the Davidic promises as "democratized" in Isaiah 55:3–5, the only passage in Isaiah 40–55 that mentions David by name. The syntax of verse 3b is notoriously difficult;

---

Myself for a priest [i.e., to be My priest] in order to [i.e., in order that he may] go up on My altar, to offer incense, (and) to lift up an ephod before Me" (author's translation).

However, apparently troubled by the fact that this understanding of the syntax in Isaiah 49:5–6 results in the servant Israel (v. 3) rescuing Israel, some suggest a different interpretation. For example, the *JPS Tanakh Translation* translates verse 5, "And now the Lord has resolved—He who formed me in the womb to be His servant—to bring back Jacob." The verb *אָפַקַר* is given the nuance "resolved," the second line is treated as parenthetical, and the infinitive *לְשׁוּב* is viewed as an objective complement of *אָפַקַר*. (For possible lexical and syntactical support for this interpretation see Deuteronomy 9:25 and Esther 2:15.) In this case the servant Israel affirmed that the Lord had resolved to save him. But it seems odd, in light of the preceding and following lines, where the servant referred to himself in the first person, that he would refer to himself here in the third person, unless he briefly reflected the Lord's perspective.

In verse 6 this same translation reads, "It is too little that you should be My servant in that I raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel: I will also make you a light to the nations." Trygve N. D. Mettinger, citing several earlier commentators, also views God, not the servant, as the subject of the three infinitives in 49:5–6a (*A Farewell to the Servant Songs*, trans. F. Cryer [Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1983], 34–37). Mettinger translates verse 6 as follows: "And he said: 'It is too light a thing, considering that you are my Servant, that I should only raise up the tribes of Israel: but I shall also (or: I hereby also) make you a light to the nations, so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth'" (ibid., 37). He appeals to Isaiah 51:16 as a syntactical parallel, where, he argues, God is the subject of the three infinitives (ibid., 35–36). According to this understanding of the syntax the servant Israel, as in verse 5, is the one raised up through the restoration of the exiles. But it seems odd that the Lord would address Israel directly and also refer to Israel in the third person. Granted, in verse 3 the Lord addressed the servant directly and also called him Israel, but the syntax is entirely different there. In verse 3 "Israel" is either vocative or in apposition to "My servant." As for the alleged parallel in Isaiah 51:16, the syntactical structure differs there, for the infinitives are dependent on a first-person verbal form with no intervening prepositional phrase, whereas in 49:5–6 a prepositional phrase immediately precedes *לְשׁוּב* (v. 5) and *לְהִקִּים* (v. 6). The prepositional phrases are dependent on a participle (v. 5) and an infinitive (v. 6), not a first-person verb form. In light of the more exact syntactical parallel in 1 Samuel 2:28, it is more natural to understand the infinitives as expressing purpose and as indicating the reason why God has chosen the servant. For further discussion of this problem see Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1964), 189.

<sup>27</sup> For example Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 33–34, 71, 135, 151, 169. On the fourth song see idem, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet*, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield Press, 1978).

the two most challenging questions are these: Is **יְהוָה** a subjective or objective genitive? How does **יְהוָה חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה** relate syntactically to the preceding **עָלָם עֲבָרֵי**?

With regard to the first problem the plural **חֲסִדֵי** is followed by a genitive in five other texts. Four times **יְהוָה** follows and clearly functions as a subjective genitive (Pss. 89:1 [Heb., v. 2]; 107:43; Isa. 63:7; Lam. 3:22). The phrase **יְהוָה חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה** appears elsewhere only in 2 Chronicles 6:42, where the grammar is ambiguous. An objective understanding (promises to David) makes better sense there, though a subjective genitive (faithful deeds performed by David) is possible. In Isaiah 55:3 the phrase **יְהוָה חֲסִדֵי יְהוָה** is followed by the attributive participle **וְנִתְחַנְּנִים**. The presence of this adjectival modifier suggests that God's promises to David are in view (Ps. 89:28 [Heb., v. 29]) and that the genitive is objective.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the second question one may understand **חֲסִדֵי** as an adverbial accusative ("according to," "like") or as appositional. In the latter case the promised covenant is equated in some sense with the Davidic promises. Taking this approach, some assume that the Davidic Covenant is here democratized and transferred to the entire nation.<sup>29</sup> If one takes the phrase as appositional, the Davidic promises are indeed extended to the nation. However, this does not mean that the nation *replaces* the Davidic dynasty as the recipient of those promises. Isaiah 55:3–5 relates the New Covenant to the fulfillment of the Davidic promises and emphasizes that the nation will be a primary beneficiary of them.<sup>30</sup> The passage anticipates the national blessings that will result when the Davidic ideal is realized. Responding to the view that the Davidic promises are here transferred to the nation, Eaton writes:

But there is nothing in the text to express such a drastic change; it seems that these scholars are making it fit their own misreading of

<sup>28</sup> For a defense of this view see H. G. M. Williamson, "The Sure Mercies of David: Subjective or Objective Genitive?" *Journal of Semitic Studies* 23 (1978): 31–49.

<sup>29</sup> For example Otto Eissfeldt, "The Promises of Grace to David in Isaiah 55:1–5," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1962), 196–207; North, *The Second Isaiah*, 257–58; Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, trans. David Stalker, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 283–84; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 196; Benjamin D. Sommer, *A Prophet Reads Scripture: Allusion in Isaiah 40–66* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 112–19; and Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, trans. Margaret Kohl, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 470–71.

<sup>30</sup> See Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 438–39; Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 453–55; and Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David: Isaiah 55:3," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 45 (1989): 96–97.

royal elements in earlier chapters. For it is entirely natural that the text should mention blessings accruing to the nation from the Davidic covenant, without thereby implying a break with the central point of the covenant, a covenant expressly described here as eternal. God's work with the king always had implications for the people. . . . The nation is to be blessed within the radius of the Davidic covenant, but the destiny of the royal house remains. . . . It would be a poor sort of eternity that the covenant would have, if its heart were taken out.<sup>31</sup>

This explanation is more consistent with the way the Davidic dynasty is viewed in the exilic and postexilic periods. Israel's story as recorded in the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1–2 Samuel, and 1–2 Kings) ends with a reminder that the flame of the Davidic dynasty was still flickering, albeit in exile (2 Kings 25:27–30). For the historian there was still hope for a revival of the Davidic kingdom. Haggai attached great hope to David's descendant Zerubbabel (Hag. 2:20–23), and Zechariah viewed him as fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecies about David's "branch" (Zech. 3:8; 6:12–13; Jer. 23:5; 33:15).<sup>32</sup> It is important to remember that the servant's relationship to Israel is stressed in the songs. He is actually called Israel (Isa. 49:3) because he fulfills God's ideal for the nation while delivering the exiled, sinful nation from bondage.<sup>33</sup> The exaltation of the ideal king brings in its wake the fulfillment of God's ideal for Israel. King and nation are inextricably linked in the Old Testament (e.g., 1 Kings 9:6–7; Ps. 144). The same holds true in Isaiah 40–66, where the royal servant restores God's servant Israel by creating a new covenant community (Isa. 55:3–5; 59:21; 61:8) consisting of

---

<sup>31</sup> Eaton, *Festal Drama in Deutero-Isaiah*, 87–88. Joseph Blenkinsopp observes that the democratization view of Isaiah 55:3–5 "goes some way beyond what the author says" (*Isaiah 40–55*, Anchor Bible [New York: Doubleday, 2002], 370). He adds, "Furthermore, it is difficult to understand why this analogy [nation to David] would be used if the author was not persuaded of the permanence of Yahveh's commitment to David and the dynasty" (*ibid.*).

<sup>32</sup> Blenkinsopp marshals evidence, some of which is listed above, that hope for the restoration of the Davidic dynasty persisted in the exilic and postexilic periods (*ibid.*). Those who see the promises being democratized understand Isaiah 55:3–5 as "standing in contrast to the traditions of Jeremiah and Ezekiel and especially of Haggai and Zechariah" (Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hese in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* [Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1978], 203–4).

<sup>33</sup> Dirk H. Odendaal points to the fact that the servant of the songs is a covenant mediator (see Isa. 42:6; 49:8). "As covenant representative he can therefore also be called 'Israel' (49:3), because in himself he comprehends all the hopes, privileges, and responsibilities of Israel, and as Messianic King he leads Israel to the consummation of its calling in the history of salvation" (*The Eschatological Expectation of Isaiah 40–66 with Special Reference to Israel and the Nations* [n.p.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970], 134).

loyal followers, called the Lord's "servants" in 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–15; and 66:14.

### THE FIFTH SERVANT SONG AND JESUS' SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Because critics typically view Isaiah 40–55 and 56–66 as distinct literary units, it is easy to overlook the presence of a fifth servant song in Isaiah. In 61:1–3 an individual speaks of a commission he has received from the Lord to release captives and inaugurate a new era for God's people (vv. 4–9). Who is this speaker? A careful examination of the language suggests he is the servant of the earlier songs who, as already noted, is linked with the messianic King of Isaiah 11.<sup>34</sup> Like the servant/messianic King, the speaker in 61:1–3 is empowered by the divine Spirit (cf. 11:2; 42:1) to encourage the downtrodden (11:4), to proclaim the deliverance of prisoners (cf. 42:7; 49:9), and to console those who mourn (cf. 49:13; 50:4). The good news is that God will restore the exiles to the land, where they will rebuild their ruined cities (61:4; cf. 49:8). He will make a new covenant with them and richly bless them (61:8–9; cf. 49:8).<sup>35</sup> This passage corresponds thematically with the first two servant songs and may be viewed as Isaiah's fifth servant song. The first two songs focus on the servant's commission to bring justice to Israel and the nations, only hinting at his suffering (49:4). Songs three and four develop fully the theme of the servant's suffering, while this fifth song returns to the justice theme and closes the thematic loop.

The speaker in this song is clearly a royal figure. He states that the Lord has anointed him (61:1). The appearance of the verb משח suggests a royal anointing, especially following a statement that the Lord's spirit is upon him (cf. 1 Sam. 10:1, 6; 16:13; 2 Sam. 23:1–2).<sup>36</sup> This anointed one proclaims freedom (קרא דרוֹר) and the

<sup>34</sup> Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*, 562–65. Brevard Childs is sympathetic to this position, acknowledging that in "the final shape of the Isaianic corpus" there is a "resonance between the eschatological Messiah and the suffering servant." However, he considers a messianic figure foreign to the message of Isaiah 56–66 (*Isaiah*, Old Testament Library [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 504–5).

<sup>35</sup> On the parallels between Isaiah 61:1–3 and the servant songs, see Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, trans. James Martin (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 2:425. Having surveyed the linguistic links, Delitzsch states, "For these reasons we have no doubt that we have here the words of the Servant of Jehovah." See as well the helpful chart in Walton, "The Imagery of the Substitute King Ritual in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song," 742.

<sup>36</sup> Whybray acknowledges the close connection between Isaiah 61:1–3 and the servant songs, but he identifies the servant as Deutero-Isaiah and the speaker in

release of captives as he announces the year of the Lord's favor (a Jubilee of sorts; cf. Lev. 25:10). This task is a royal one. King Zedekiah proclaimed freedom (קָרָא דְּרוּר) for Jerusalem's slaves (Jer. 34:8, 15), only to go back on his word and enslave them again (v. 16). During the Old Babylonian period kings at times issued edicts providing temporary economic relief for certain distressed groups. These edicts were considered acts of justice (*mīšarum*) and provided for the remission of certain debts and the freedom of some native-born servants. The term *andurāru*, "release" (cognate to Hebrew דְּרוּר, used in Isa. 61:1), is frequently associated with the edicts.<sup>37</sup> References to these edicts appear often in royal year names and records of the kings of Isin, Larsa, Eshnunna, and Babylon.<sup>38</sup> At least two of these edicts, those of Samsu-iluna and Ammi-šaduqa, are extant.<sup>39</sup> The edict of Ammi-šaduqa is the better preserved of the two; it remits debts for certain individuals and provides freedom for any freeborn citizen who has been sold into slavery to pay off a debt.

At the beginning of His ministry Jesus stood up in the synagogue at Nazareth, read Isaiah 61:1–2a, and announced, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).<sup>40</sup> If Isaiah 61:1–3 is indeed a fifth servant song, then Jesus, by claim-

---

61:1–3 as Trito-Isaiah (*Isaiah* 40–66, 239–40). Goldingay acknowledges that the imagery of 61:1–3 is royal, but he sees the Davidic promises as democratized in 55:3–5 and regards the speaker in 61:1–3 as the prophet. "In effect, then, this prophet claims to be a David-like figure for the community, anointed (metaphorically) like David and endowed like David. The prophet is thus saying something parallel to 55:3–5. As David's task there passes from king to people, so David's commission and equipping here passes from king to prophet. The claim stands in the context of that other assumption that the prophet also stands for the people (see 59:21)" (*Isaiah*, New International Bible Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2001], 346).

<sup>37</sup> CAD, I, 2:115–16.

<sup>38</sup> F. R. Kraus, *Ein Edikt des Königs Ammi-šaduqa von Babylon* (Leiden: Brill, 1958), 196–235.

<sup>39</sup> For translations of these edicts see James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 526–28 (Ammi-šaduqa), 627 (Samsu-iluna), as well as William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger Jr., eds., *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 2:362–64 (Ammi-šaduqa).

<sup>40</sup> The text form from which Jesus read differs in some details from the Hebrew text of Isaiah 61:1–2a. He also omitted verses 2b–3, apparently for theological reasons. See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 404–5, 411. On the interpretation of Isaiah 61:1–3 in intertestamental Judaism see James A. Sanders, "From Isaiah 61 to Luke 4," in *Christianity, Judaism and Other Greco-Roman Cults: Part One, New Testament*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 75–106.



ing He fulfilled it, was identifying Himself as the servant. If it is correct to identify the servant as the Davidic king, this meant the kingdom of God was being offered to the nation in the person of Jesus. This indeed seems to be the case, for at Jesus' baptism the Spirit descended on Him and God declared, "You are my one dear Son; in you I take great delight" (Luke 3:22, author's translation). The bestowing of the Spirit fulfills Isaiah 42:1, while the quotation seems to combine language from Psalm 2:7 (a royal psalm celebrating God's choice of the Davidic dynasty) and Isaiah 42:1.<sup>41</sup> Shortly after the incident at Nazareth, Jesus declared, "I must preach [lit., 'preach the good news of'] the kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43; cf. Isa. 61:1, as well as Luke 7:22).<sup>42</sup> Of course by defining His ministry in light of the servant songs Jesus also assumed the role of the suffering servant. Actually this role was hinted at earlier, when Simeon, after identifying Jesus as the light of salvation for the nations (2:30–32; cf. Isa. 42:6), prophesied His rejection by Israel (Luke 2:34–35).

Matthew did not record the incident at Nazareth, but he too associated Jesus' ministry with the servant songs. According to Matthew 2:15 Jesus' journey to and from Egypt in his infancy fulfilled Hosea 11:1, "Out of Egypt I called My Son." Hosea 11:1, in its original context, refers to the exodus of God's "son" Israel from Egypt during the days of Moses; it is not a messianic prophecy as such. However, Jesus, God's Son, is the ideal Israel prophesied by Isaiah in the second servant song (Isa. 49:3). His experience parallels that of historical Israel and fills out the typological pattern in which Israel's experience foreshadowed that of Jesus. Assuming that Matthew was aware of Isaiah 49:3, then his use of Hosea 11:1 in this way becomes understandable. As Jesus inaugurated His ministry, He announced the arrival of the kingdom in His person (Matt. 4:17, 23), offering it to the nation ("repent" in v. 17), but also making it clear that the kingdom belongs to "the poor in spirit" (5:3; cf. Isa. 61:1). He declared that those who mourn (cf. *οἱ πένθοῦντες* in Matt. 5:4 with *τοὺς πενθοῦντας* in the Septuagint of Isa.

<sup>41</sup> In this regard see Adrian M. Leske, "The Influence of Isaiah 40–66 on Christology in Matthew and Luke: A Comparison," *SBL Seminar Papers* (1994): 904–5.

<sup>42</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer denies that Isaiah 61:1–3 is a servant song and depicts a royal figure. He says that by quoting it Jesus assumed a strictly prophetic role (*The Gospel according to Luke (I–IX)*, Anchor Bible [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981], 529–30). Bock acknowledges a "prophetic element" in Jesus' use of Isaiah 61:1–3, but he makes a convincing case for a "regal" dimension as well (*Luke 1:1–9:50*, 406–7). As noted earlier in note 11, it is not necessary to limit the Servant (Jesus) to one role. He is both Prophet and Davidic King, among other things.

61:3) will be comforted (cf. *παρακληθήσονται* in Matt. 5:4 with *παρακαλέσαι* in the Septuagint of Isa. 61:3).

The speaker in the fifth servant song seems to have arrived in person! When the imprisoned John the Baptist asked if Jesus was the messianic King, Jesus told the messengers to remind John that “the poor have the gospel [‘good news’] proclaimed to them” (Matt. 11:5; cf. Isa. 61:1). Matthew understood Jesus’ refusal to publicize His ministry (Matt. 12:17–21) as a fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1–4.<sup>43</sup> Ironically this is followed by the Jews’ rejection of Jesus, which prompted Him to allude to His coming death (Matt. 12:40). The role of servant entailed rejection and suffering as a prelude to kingship.

### CONCLUSION

The New Testament identifies Jesus as the ideal Davidic king envisioned in the royal psalms and messianic prophecies, as well as the suffering servant depicted in the servant songs and foreshadowed in the laments of the psalmists. While these roles may seem antithetical, they are merged in Isaiah’s servant songs. The servant of the songs assumes a variety of roles—he is an idealized Israel, prophetic spokesman, and new Moses all in one. In addition to these roles he is a royal figure who will provide salvation for Israel and will establish justice on the earth, thereby fulfilling Isaiah’s and the psalmists’ vision of the ideal Davidic king. This King suffers rejection by His people, but His suffering is redemptive and ultimately He is vindicated and exalted. Jesus identified Himself as Isaiah’s royal servant, offering the kingdom with the full realization that He must first suffer rejection. But His suffering qualifies Him to be king, a fact that Paul wrote about in Philippians 2:8–10. “He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason [or better, ‘As a result’] also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow.” Likewise the author of Hebrews affirmed, “But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone” (Heb. 2:9).

---

<sup>43</sup> On the use of Isaiah 42:1–4 in Matthew 12 see Jerome H. Neyrey, “The Thematic Use of Isaiah 42,1–4 in Matthew 12,” *Biblica* 63 (1982): 457–73.

#### Copyright and Use:

**As an ATLAS user, you may print, download, or send articles for individual use according to fair use as defined by U.S. and international copyright law and as otherwise authorized under your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement.**

**No content may be copied or emailed to multiple sites or publicly posted without the copyright holder(s)' express written permission. Any use, decompiling, reproduction, or distribution of this journal in excess of fair use provisions may be a violation of copyright law.**

This journal is made available to you through the ATLAS collection with permission from the copyright holder(s). The copyright holder for an entire issue of a journal typically is the journal owner, who also may own the copyright in each article. However, for certain articles, the author of the article may maintain the copyright in the article. Please contact the copyright holder(s) to request permission to use an article or specific work for any use not covered by the fair use provisions of the copyright laws or covered by your respective ATLAS subscriber agreement. For information regarding the copyright holder(s), please refer to the copyright information in the journal, if available, or contact ATLA to request contact information for the copyright holder(s).

#### About ATLAS:

The ATLA Serials (ATLAS®) collection contains electronic versions of previously published religion and theology journals reproduced with permission. The ATLAS collection is owned and managed by the American Theological Library Association (ATLA) and received initial funding from Lilly Endowment Inc.

The design and final form of this electronic document is the property of the American Theological Library Association.