

ISAIAH'S NAMELESS SERVANT

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The Son, who made himself Servant, is Lord, the Pantocrator. Our high priest who prays for us is also the one who prays in us and the God who hears our prayer (CCC 2749).

INTRODUCTION

Amidst the debate about the identity of the servant in Isaiah's servant songs, one thing remains unchanged, his anonymity. Many possibilities have been suggested—Job, Moses, Jeremiah, Zerubbabel, Cyrus, the prophet himself, an as yet unidentified Messiah—but Isaiah makes no explicit mention of his name except to call him Israel, which some have interpreted to mean the empirical nation of Israel. As none of these theories would have been put forth if there were not some evidence of their validity, I would make the claim that all are, to a greater or lesser degree, true. Arguably, this ambiguity should not be blamed on the author of Deutero-Isaiah. It is quite possible he did not know who this servant was. A better question would be, why would the Holy Spirit intentionally leave this information out?

In the Old Testament there are many examples of “temporary anonymity,” but the “perpetual anonymity of the Suffering Servant stands out as unique and unparalleled.”¹ Wolfgang Roth argues that this intentional anonymity serves to diminish the name of the servant and emphasizes instead his actions.² He points out that the nearest typological example in the New Testament is John's identity as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” In the latter instance, the disciple's name is less important than his role within the text.³ So too, the Servant's identity

¹ Wolfgang Roth, “The Anonymity of the Suffering Servant,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83, no. 2 (1964): 173.

² *Ibid.*, 174.

³ *Ibid.* The USCCB echoes this, “More important is the description of the mission of the servant.” United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. *NABRE: New American Bible Revised Edition* (Saint Benedict Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, loc. 104212.

becomes that which he does: bringer of justice, formed from the womb, redeemer of Israel, a light to the nations, unbreakable in the face of torment, despised and rejected, carrier of our transgressions, wounded for our griefs. These aspects, to Yahweh, are the embodiments of the “ideal servant.”⁴

This paper will explore the perpetual anonymity of the Suffering Servant arguing that this is an intentional omission that belies a single identity. Said another way, we have been asking the wrong question. Not who, but what is the Suffering Servant? Part one of my paper examines how the servant’s namelessness engenders in him a distinctive type which allows his identity to grow beyond a single individual located within a specific point in time. Part two argues that God’s chosen Servant, which should have been Jacob-Israel, is now Nameless-Israel, a new and superior servant that points both forward and backward, encompassing all of Scripture. Part three examines how this ubiquitous servant is ultimately realized in the Christ, he who throws open the doors of Servant-hood to all.

ISAIAH’S SERVANT AS A TYPE

Adele Reinhartz, in her book *Why Ask My Name? Anonymity and Identity in Biblical Narrative*, claims that if the Bible is read mimetically, anonymity allows the reader to ascribe a type to unnamed figures.⁵ The figure becomes that which he is, much like the way we assign identities to individuals “whose names are not known to us—store clerks, bus drivers, fellow pedestrians.”⁶ Because the individuality of nameless figures is cloaked in mystery, the only way in which we are able to know them is “as agents . . . in the typified roles they play for the

⁴ Ibid., 176.

⁵ Ibid., loc. 179-182.

⁶ Ibid.

functions they perform.”⁷ Devoid of a proper name, Isaiah’s Servant is allowed to grow beyond his individual identity, taking the shape of that which has been ascribed to him.

So, what are the characteristics we can ascribe to the servant? In the first servant song, Isa 42:1-7, he comes out as a covenant mediator.⁸ An argument can be made that this is Cyrus.⁹ In fact, much of this section of Deutero-Isaiah (40-48) is directed at Cyrus, “whose name is pronounced (45:3-4), who is to be a light for the nations (42:6), and one of whose honorific title is Servant of Yahveh (42:1-4).”¹⁰ Yet, Cyrus fall short of full embodiment as he is prone to violence and is far from meek and soft-spoken.¹¹ More, after chapter 48, attention shifts away from the Persian who had demonstrated that he would not rebuild Jerusalem (45:13) or “bring out the prisoners from the dungeon” (49:7).¹² Still, it is difficult to ignore the striking parallels between Isa 42:1-7 and the king who liberated Israel from Babylon (Ezra 1:1-2). How do we resolve this contradiction? Brevard Childs reasons that God’s purpose “at this juncture [includes] both the role of Cyrus and servant.”¹³ The Servant’s coattails are broad enough to include multiple identities indicating that servanthood—or, rather, the nature of God’s Servant—is a type whose traits include bringer of justice, soft-spoken, liberator of prisoners, a covenant for the people.

In Isa 49:1-13, the servant’s prophetic characteristics are highlighted. The language used in v. 1b, “Before birth the LORD called me, from my mother’s womb he gave me my name,” is

⁷ Ibid., loc. 183-184.

⁸ Robert Chisholm, Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2002), 99. I, the LORD, have called you for justice, I have grasped you by the hand; I formed you, and set you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations (Isa 42:6).

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 19A, Anchor Yale Bible (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 299.

¹¹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 99.

¹² Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 300.

¹³ Brevard Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, eds. William Brown, Carol Newsom, and Brent Strawn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 327.

nearly identical to the language of Jer 1:5, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you.” In fact, there are many parallels between these verses and the prophet Jeremiah. According to Shalom M. Paul, the entire chapter “is reminiscent of the prophecy of doom in Jeremiah 13:18, which features many of the same images and phraseology ... but which Deutero-Isaiah reverses into a prophecy of restoration and rehabilitation.”¹⁴ Another prophet jockeying for position in this servant song is Elijah. Joseph Blenkinsopp shows how the Hebrew is similar to that used at the end of the Latter Prophets. There it is prophesied that Elijah will effect the return of children to their parents which is interpreted by Sirach to mean the restoration of Israel.¹⁵ Yet others would style the servant as Deutero-Isaiah himself. R. N. Whybray explains that because of the strong parallels between Jeremiah and Isaiah 49:1-6,¹⁶ some exegetes believe this indicates that the servant is the writer himself.¹⁷ Because of v.3, “He said to me: ‘You are my servant, Israel,’” a very large contingent names the servant as corporate Israel. This has its own set of issues which we will explore in detail later. Trying to isolate a specific individual amidst all this conjecture is nearly impossible. Bryan Beyer suggests that it may be better to see the servant’s identity as a “blending of these views.”¹⁸ In other words, there are many possibilities that fit the description of the servant. When more than one individual possesses like attributes, rather than looking for reasons

¹⁴ Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40-66: Translation and Commentary*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), 322.

¹⁵ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40:55*, 301. “[The servant] is to bring Israel back to Yahveh (*šûb* Pilpel), which includes the idea of reintegration and return to the land (*cf.* Jer 50:19; Ezek 39:27), physical restoration (*cf.* Isa 58:12; Ps 23:3; 60:3), and moral regeneration. The usage is similar to *šûb* Hiphil at the end of the Latter Prophets (Mal 3:24[4:6]).”

¹⁶ Jer 1:5, Jer 1:9, and Jer 20:7-12.

¹⁷ R. J. Whybray, *The Second Isaiah* (New York: T&T Clark, 1995), 75.

¹⁸ Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah: A Historical and Theological Survey*, Encountering Biblical Studies, eds. Walter A. Elwell and Eugene H. Merrill (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), Kindle Edition, loc. 4866.

to exclude one or the other, we can instead include them all into a set, or a type, so that each one becomes a prophet, herald to all nations, a polished arrow named by Yahweh in the womb.

The third servant song (Isa 50:4-10) continues with the theme of a prophetic servant. The introduction of the first person in this passage emphasizes his commitment to his mission. Blenkinsopp feels there is strong evidence to support the theory that the “voice heard in ... 50:19 ... [is] the voice of the author ... of section 40-55.”¹⁹ This is upheld by the fact that other prophets also experienced suffering in their lives because of their role as spokesperson for the Lord. This passage does little else to shed light on the servant’s identity.²⁰ What is revealed is his willingness to submit to physical and verbal abuse (v. 6) and his firm belief that the Lord will vindicate him (vv. 7-8a).²¹ This gives the poem a judicial context. The speaker is sure of Yahweh’s judgment over those who would condemn him.²² We will see later on how St. Paul takes up this theme as he makes his case for a Christological Suffering Servant. For now, we will content ourselves with the descriptor ‘steadfast and determined prophet’ to add to our growing list of characteristics.

The last of the so-called servant songs, Isaiah 52:13-53:12, is by far the most famous. Framed by an inclusio that heralds a servant that will eventually be triumphant, the passage’s gestalt lies in the ultimate glory of God. Put more eloquently, “The theme is not simply humiliation and exultation, but rather that it is the humiliated one who *becomes* the exalted one by the intention of Yahweh.”²³ Walter Brueggemann suggests that the essence of the poem lies

¹⁹ Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40:55*, 320.

²⁰ Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, 4935.

²¹ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 114.

²² Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 40-66* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1998), 122.

²³ *Ibid.*, 142.

in the strange juxtaposition of the *marred* figure in v. 14 and the *awesome* one in v. 15.²⁴ This gulf between the imperfect and the perfect is bridgeable to no one save God.²⁵ Before jumping into the list of reasons why the disfigured yet glorified servant in this passage points forward to the Christ, it is important to discuss other candidates.

It is generally agreed upon that there are four possible identities of the servant in this last song—Isaiah, corporate Israel, the righteous remnant of Israel, or a future Messiah (which will be discussed elsewhere in this paper).²⁶ Like the servant, Isaiah was unremarkable in appearance (53:1) and was eventually rejected.²⁷ However, there is no indication in any of the Scriptures that he ever specifically suffered for other’s sins.²⁸ The second theory, the servant is the empirical nation of Israel, stems from v. 52:15 whereby the kings of the earth are astonished over Israel’s influence. Israel, primarily thought to be a nation of no import, suffers for the iniquities of the world.²⁹ There are significant holes in this interpretation as well. The very next verse, 52:14, "distinguishes Israel from the servant unless we adopt the textual variant with lesser support."³⁰ There is also nothing in Scripture that tells us Israel was a righteous sufferer for the sins of others.³¹ The views that the servant is the faithful remnant of Israel stems from the fact that when Israel was suffering for its sins, the righteous few suffered along with it.³² This view also faces the same objections as the previous one, the righteous may have suffered for the sins of others but they did not pay the price for them.³³

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, loc. 5165.

²⁷ Ibid., loc. 5227.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., loc. 5236-5240.

³⁰ Ibid., loc. 5241-5242. Beyer explains that both the MT and LXX translate 52:14a “many were appalled at you.” It is only later manuscripts that translate *you* as *him*.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Devoid of a consensus, the servant in this last song remains, by and large, nameless. However, does this make him unknowable? Returning to Reinhart's argument that anonymity breeds type, we can conclude that all the proposed candidates are to some degree true, thus partially fulfilling the prophecy. They all fall into a category, the category of the Lord's Servant. In fact, I would argue that there are many others in the Old Testament who also fit into the category of Servant as he is revealed in Isaiah; three good examples are Job, Moses, and Abraham who are all redemptive suffering figures.

Reinhartz tells us that anonymity is a "negative feature," drawing attention to that which is absent in a text.³⁴ I would argue that virtually every characteristic of the servant magnifies what he is not. Were the traits ascribed to him mundane or even normal, the author would not feel compelled to mention them. It would follow then that the traits of the servant are the opposite of what is expected.

What we have in the servant songs is a typology all its own. As Isaiah only ever mentions the name of the servant as "Israel" it would be fair to conclude that Israel *is* the type. However, I am not referring to the corporate Israel. Section 2 of my paper argues that Isaiah's Servant is an individual, the ideal Israel.

JACOB-ISRAEL OR NAMELESS-ISRAEL?

If we look at the characteristics of the servant in the four songs, what emerges is a picture of what God's chosen *should* be but isn't. To see how this is borne out, we must examine the passages surrounding the first servant song. Reed Lessing explains how Isa 42:1-4 refers to the nation of Israel.³⁵ To show this, he directs our attention to 41:8, "But you, Israel, my servant,

³⁴ Reinhartz, *Why Ask My Name?* loc. 3290.

³⁵ Reed Lessing, "Isaiah's Servants in Chapters 40-55: Clearing up the Confusion," *Concordia Journal* 37, no. 2 (2011): 131.

Jacob, I have chosen, offspring of Abraham, my friend.” When we return to chapter 42, in vv. 18-22 this same servant is decried as blind and deaf, “plundered and despoiled.”³⁶ According to Rikki Watts, “Jacob-Israel is declared to be Israel in name only in a statement which seems tantamount to divesting Jacob-Israel of her servant office.”³⁷ In the following songs, a new servant is named, one called to reconcile Israel with the Lord. This servant will be the obedient, righteous one, the one that Israel was supposed to be.³⁸

Jaap Dekker delves even further into this analysis. He contends that whereas the Servant in earlier chapters clearly refers to Jacob-Israel, at the beginning of chapter 49 we are introduced to a new servant, still Israel, but an individual, a prophet of mystery, a poised arrow with a sharp tongue.³⁹ Dekker’s analysis of the Hebrew text of Isa 49:3 gives it a slightly different reading. Instead of referring back to the Israel of the previous chapters, the name Israel is set in apposition to this new servant.⁴⁰ He paraphrases how the verse should be read. “You are my servant. Now, you are Israel.”⁴¹ In light of this, in v. 3, the Lord is effectively transferring to the servant all he originally bestowed upon Israel including the name Israel. This individual Israel is in possession of every attribute of the servant in the four songs. My argument is that Israel has become a type over a name and that this was transferred from Jacob-Israel to Nameless-Israel.

This is evidenced by the fact that references to Jacob-Israel appear less and less and the enigmatic “servant figure [takes] center stage set in a context now almost entirely comprised of

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rikki Watts, "Consolation or Confrontation? Isaiah 40-55 and the Delay of the New Exodus," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41, no. 1 (1990): 35.

³⁸ Lessing, "Isaiah's Servants in Chapters 40-55," 132.

³⁹ Jaap Dekker, "The Servant and the Servants in the Book of Isaiah," *Sarospataki Fuzetek* 3, no.4 (2012): 38. For further exposition on this see Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, 383-384.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 39.

salvation words.”⁴² The servant figure is now set in opposition to itself, it is “both identified with Israel and distinguished from it.”⁴³ Returning to the traits of the servant, we can begin to develop a kind of servant based on what the Lord has declared the him to be and where Jacob-Israel has failed to live up to that expectation. No longer is Jacob-Israel God’s chosen, no longer will he bring forth justice, no longer will he be a covenant to the people or a light to the nations. Jacob-Israel is blind and a prisoner to false gods (42:18-22)⁴⁴ so how can he “open eyes that are blind, bring out prisoners from the dungeon” (42:7)?

According to Watts, when Jacob-Israel failed in its calling it ceased to function as Jacob-Israel.⁴⁵ However, Watts tells us, the crucial point lies in the fact that “following the description of renewed Jerusalem-Zion and the well-being of her children (54:13ff), and for the first and only time in 40-55 the plural term עֲבָדֵי יְהוָה⁴⁶ appears (v. 17).”⁴⁷ This phrase indicates that the Israelites will be restored to their original calling because of the new and superior Servant. They will again become the faithful elect.⁴⁸ Nameless-Israel will redeem Jacob-Israel.

Up to this point we have only examined servants who partially fulfill Isaiah’s servant prophecy. There is yet one individual who encompasses every aspect of the Servant, the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SERVANT

It is not difficult to locate Jesus Christ within Isaiah’s servant songs. Indeed, much of the fourth song prophesies what we know of his life, suffering, and death from the New Testament.

⁴² Watts, "Consolation or Confrontation?" 49.

⁴³ USCCB, *NABRE*, loc.105789.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁴⁶ It is likely the Hebrew did not copy correctly.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

He had humble beginnings (53:2), he was rejected by many and was given no worth (53:3). He carried our infirmities but we thought he was the one who was afflicted by God (v. 4). He was silent before his tormentors (v.7), he was “crushed for our iniquities” (v.5), he was buried with the rich (v.9). What’s more, the New Testament clearly identifies the fourth song with Jesus.⁴⁹ Robert Chisholm gives just a few examples of direct references to Isaiah 52-53. Jesus’s healing ministry is equated with fulfillment of Isaiah 53:4 (Matt 8:14-17).⁵⁰ Jesus said that he was to be “numbered with transgressors” (Luke 22:37) which is fulfillment of 53:12.⁵¹ 1 Peter connects Jesus’s suffering with Isaiah 53 (1 Pet 2:21-25).⁵²

However, it is not only the fourth song that is linked to the life of Jesus. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus does many great works of healing but cautions those he heals to remain silent (Matt 12:15-16) which corresponds with Isaiah 42:1-4.⁵³ Beyer comments that even though Isa 50:4-10 is not cited in the New Testament, it still suggests a messianic connection. More, the voice of Christ clearly resonates in Isa 50:4, “The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word.” Jesus’s teaching abilities are well documented in the New Testament, and many marveled at the authority with which he taught them (Matt 7:28; Mark 1:27; Luke 4:32; Luke 4:36; John 7:46). No, finding Jesus in Isaiah’s servant songs is not difficult at all. But, although we can cast Jesus Christ in the role of Suffering Servant, we must not forget that the Nameless-Israel would redeem Jacob-Israel. What does this look like?

⁴⁹ Robert Chisholm, Jr., “The Christological Fulfillment of Isaiah’s Servant Songs,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163, no. 652 (2006): 392.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.* Chisholm lists several more: Acts 8:30-35 (*cf.* 53:7-8); Mark 9:31 (*cf.* 53:6), 10:45 (*cf.* 53:11-12), 14:42 (*cf.* 53:10-12); John 1:29, 36 (*cf.* 53:4, 7, 11-12); Acts 3:13, 26; Acts 4:27, 30; Rom 4:25 (*cf.* 53:5, 11), 5:15-19 (*cf.* 53:11); 1 Cor 15:3-5 (*cf.* 53:5, 9-12); Heb 9:20 (*cf.* 53:12); 1 John 2:1-2 (*cf.* 53:4-6, 10-12).

⁵³ Beyer, *Encountering the Book of Isaiah*, loc. 4452.

Had Christ not been the full embodiment of the Suffering Servant, the prophecy would be empty and no amount of partial fulfillment would matter. It wouldn't matter if Jeremiah, Isaiah, Moses, Job, or any of God's other righteous servants suffered, had a tongue like a sword, was a covenant for the people, or was with a polished arrow. They would never complete the prophecy. Without the Christ (Nameless-Israel), Jacob-Israel would never see redemption and the nations would never be brought into the covenant.

How can the one named Israel restore Israel? How can Israel restore itself? According to Lessing, "The Servant is called to embody the people's calling. ... [He] is an individual ... but he represents the nation for its restoration. 'He will be for Israel what Israel could not be in itself.'"⁵⁴ Israel as the Christ takes up the mantle of Jacob-Israel's sins becoming the vicarious sufferer in whose triumphant resurrection we are vicarious participants. As the perfect Servant, the new Jacob-Israel, he is first among those identified and set apart as God's chosen even before birth.⁵⁵

Interestingly, the restoration of Jacob-Israel did not happen at the resurrection.⁵⁶ We know this because in Acts 1:6, the disciples asked Jesus if now he would restore Israel.⁵⁷ At Pentecost, Peter urges people to repent "in order to bring about the (future) restoration of Israel (Acts 3:19-21)."⁵⁸ So when will it happen? Israel, and subsequently all nations, are still in a state of sin, but this does not mean God has rejected His servant. What God has promised is that Nameless-Israel

⁵⁴ Reed Lessing, *Isaiah 40-55*, ed. Dean O. Wenthe, Concordia Commentary, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2011), 479-480.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 476.

⁵⁶ Robert Thomas, "The Mission of Israel and of the Messiah in the Plan of God," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 8 no. 2 (1997): 205.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

will restore Jacob-Israel. He never says when. Although we are in a state of sin currently, we will not always be. And the way we know this is that God told us so (Isa 49:6).

Before Christ was born, he began fulfilling the prophecy of the Suffering Servant. Indeed, even before Isaiah issued the prophecy, its fulfillment was in its infancy. Scripture uses the words “My servant” to describe “10 individuals and one corporate body.”⁵⁹ They are, Abraham, Moses, Caleb, David, Eliakim, Nebuchadnezzar, Zerubbabel, Christ’s follower, Job, and Jacob-Israel.⁶⁰ Most if not all of these figures suffered in some way⁶¹ and many were on the scene pre-Isaiah. It is not unreasonable to conclude that the Lord always equated ideal servanthood with suffering. In fact, some of these figures were not exactly paragons of virtue. What is notable about them all is that God uses each to further his divine plan.

Chisholm, too, tells us that the Suffering Servant figure is not unique to Isaiah. And, while his suffering is uniquely redemptive, it also “epitomizes the suffering of the persecuted, righteous psalmists who expressed their pain in the laments of the Psalter.”⁶² In fact, Jesus names himself the righteous sufferer when he appropriates Psalm 22:1 on the cross, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46).⁶³ Jesus clearly sets his portion with the sick, the suffering, the meek and lowly. By numbering himself among these, among “the lepers and demoniacs, he identifies himself with humanity in its suffering.”⁶⁴

Even after his death and resurrection, he continues to fulfill the prophecy, through his disciples, through the martyrs and the saints, even through us. St. Paul incorporates Isaiah’s

⁵⁹ Ibid., 191-192.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 192.

⁶¹ Examples of this suffering include: the Aqedah, most of Job's life, David's persecution by Saul.

⁶² Chisholm, "The Christological Fulfillment of Isaiah's Servant Songs," 392.

⁶³ Ibid., 393.

⁶⁴ Davies and Allison, *Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 38.

Suffering Servant quite smoothly in his epistles. He makes good use of Isa 49:6 as he explores what it means to be a Christlike servant of the Lord; it is to be crucified, buried, and raised with him (Gal 2:20; Rom 3-4).⁶⁵ Lessing expounds:

Is 49:1–6 was foundational for Paul’s ministry. Like the Servant (Is 49:1), he was also set apart before birth, “from the womb of my mother” (Gal 1:15), while his hardships led him to echo “in vain I have labored” (Is 49:4) in, for example, 1 Cor 15:58; Gal 2:2; 4:11; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 3:5. Further, just like Paul, all the baptized are servants of the Servant, who share in the great commission of being a light to the world (Mt 5:14; cf. Phil 2:15).⁶⁶

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul borrows heavily from Isa 50:7-9 focusing on the words “vindicate” and “condemn.”⁶⁷ He is steadfast in his conviction that it is God who vindicates (justifies) and no amount of condemnation by sin, law, or death, can overcome this.⁶⁸ The servant will “wear out like a garment” (v. 9) those who would declare him guilty.⁶⁹ In fact, for Paul, the gospel of Christ was prefigured mainly through Isaiah (Rom 1:2).⁷⁰ Righteous suffering is central to his preaching. And, as “servants of the Servant,” we should all seek to embrace our suffering, to take up our cross, and use it to both glorify the Lord and help usher in the restored chosen Servant of God, Israel.

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we are quick to assign New Testament revelation to Old Testament prophecy. However, it is unfair to both Isaiah’s prophecy and the Christ to make an *a priori* assignation of the Suffering Servant to Jesus the God-man. We must encounter each example of Suffering Servanthood in the whole of Scripture. Singling out one solution to the exclusion of all others flattens the rich dimensions of prophecy to a lone event and revelation to something available to

⁶⁵ Lessing, *Isaiah 40-55*, 481.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Brueggemann, *Isaiah: 40-66*, 122.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Lessing, *Isaiah*, 613.

only the cleverest of scholars astute enough to decode the single truth buried in the text. Only when we have acknowledged all who partially fulfill Isaiah's prophecy can we proclaim Jesus as its fulfillment. And, we must remember that acknowledging Christ as complete fulfillment does not neuter the incremental revelations that have transpired before his arrival. Rather, it recapitulates his mission and message as it binds the whole of the divine economy under one umbrella, diminishing none and unifying all.

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