

# The Atonement in Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)<sup>1</sup>

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Many exegetes and theologians have mined Isa 52:13-53:12 for biblical instruction on the death of the Servant and expounded its meaning in terms of a penal substitutionary atonement, focusing in particular on the contribution of the third stanza (53:4-6). This exegetical study will focus specifically on the first and fifth stanzas (52:13-15 and 53:10-12) as improved interpretations of these stanzas can provide a full-orbed understanding of the meaning and significance of the death of the Servant.

## **Situating the Text in the Larger Work**

Interpretation of the Fourth Servant Song<sup>2</sup> should begin by situating the text within the larger literary structure of the book as a whole. Although recent studies of Isaiah have focused more on the canonical shape of the text rather than fragmentary sources adduced by critical scholarship, few have laboured to discover the larger literary structure inherent to the work as a whole.<sup>3</sup> Prophetic preaching and writing certainly does not follow the patterns of Aristotelian rectilinear logic so fundamental to our discourse in the western world. Instead, the approach in ancient Hebrew literature is to take up a topic and develop it from a particular perspective and then to stop and take up the same theme again from another point of view. This pattern is kaleidoscopic and recursive. The book of Isaiah is no exception to this technique. After the topic is presented in approxi-

mately seven major sections, the reader ends up with a full-orbed mental picture, the equivalent of stereo surround-sound in the audio world.<sup>4</sup>

Isaiah makes the first round of his theme in 1:2-2:5, beginning with the broken covenant between God and Israel—excoriating the people for their sins—and concluding with the vision of a future transformed Zion. From 2:6 to 4:6 Isaiah makes the second round of his theme, moving again in a short treatment from sin and judgment in the present corrupt Zion to the vision of a future transformed Zion.

Chapters 5 to 37 comprise at least three sub-units that treat in detail the issues of failure to keep the Covenant/Torah and the threat of judgment. Isaiah focuses on the failure of the people to practice social justice in spite of many, many acts of divine discipline. The covenant is broken and irreparably violated. Everything is in order in their services of worship, but the people have failed to demonstrate the lifestyle required of them as God's new humanity. The instruction in the covenant can properly be summarized by the term social justice.<sup>5</sup> As a community in covenant relationship to Yahweh, they are called to mirror to the world the character of Yahweh in terms of social justice and to be a vehicle of divine blessing and salvation to the nations. But the way that the people of God have treated each other is characterized by social injustice. The City of Truth has become a whore (Isa 1:21).

The Lord has no choice now but to fulfill the gravest curses and threats entailed in the Covenant in Deut 28. The final threat is exile, and this theme is taken up in chapters 5-37.

The Fourth Servant Song is found in the sixth section of thematic treatment (covering chapters 38 to 55), which is focused in particular on comfort and redemption for both Zion and the world. The following outline, adapted from the commentaries by Motyer,<sup>6</sup> is effective in clarifying the movement of thought in this cycle dealing with the transformation of Zion in the old creation to Zion in the new creation:

- Isaiah 38-55: The Book of the Servant
- A. Historical Prologue:
    - Hezekiah's Fatal Choice (38:1-39:8)
  - B<sup>1</sup>. Universal Consolation (40:1-42:17)
    - 1. The Consolation of Israel (40:1-41:20)
    - 2. The Consolation of the Gentiles (41:21-42:17)
  - C<sup>1</sup>. Promises of Redemption (42:18-44:23)
    - 1. Release (42:18-43:21)
    - 2. Forgiveness (43:22-44:23)
  - C<sup>2</sup>. Agents of Redemption (44:24-53:12)
    - 1. Cyrus: liberation (44:24-48:22)
    - 2. Servant: atonement (49:1-53:12)
  - B<sup>2</sup>. Universal Proclamation (54:1-55:13)
    - 1. The Call to Zion (54:1-17)
    - 2. The Call to the World (55:1-13)

The larger literary structure is crucial to correct interpretation of the Fourth Servant Song in at least three ways.

First, the outline of the literary structure of Isaiah 38-55 shows that the return from exile involves two distinct issues and stages. As already noted, Isaiah 38-55 looks farther into the future, beyond the judgment of exile, to the comfort and consolation of Israel, i.e., bringing them back from exile. Then the Lord will establish Zion as the people / place where all nations will seek his instruction for social justice. This is described in the language

of the Exodus so that the return from the Babylonian exile will be nothing less than a new Exodus—indeed a greater Exodus!<sup>7</sup> This new Exodus is also described by the term “redeem” (*gāʾal*) which refers to the duties of the nearest relative. Since by virtue of the Mosaic Covenant Yahweh is Israel’s nearest relative, he will “buy back” his people from exile as he once delivered them from bondage and slavery in Egypt. The return from exile, however, is not a simple task. The promises of redemption are divided into two distinct sections: release (42:18-43:21) and forgiveness (43:22-44:23). Release refers to bringing the people physically out of exile in Babylon and back to their own land; forgiveness entails dealing fully and finally with their sin and the broken covenant. It has been neatly expressed that you can take the people out of Babylon, but how do you get Babylon out of the people?<sup>8</sup> The books of Ezra and Nehemiah show that the people have returned from exile, but have not changed at all in terms of their relationship to God: the failure to practice social justice remains a central problem. That is why for a post-exilic prophet like Zechariah the return from exile is both a present reality and a future hope. The exile will be over only when God deals with their sin and renews the covenant, the temple is rebuilt and the Lord returns to dwell in the midst of his people as King. Zechariah 3:9 and 5:11 show that the forgiveness of sins is still future. Indeed, the major point of Daniel’s Vision of Seventy Weeks is that the exile will not be over in seventy years, but rather in seventy weeks of years: “seventy sevens are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision

and prophecy and to anoint the Holy of Holies" (Dan 9:24). So there are two issues in the return from exile: physical return from Babylon and spiritual deliverance from bondage and slavery to sin. And corresponding to these two issues there are two distinct agents of redemption: Cyrus and the Servant. The former will bring about the first task: physical return to the land of Israel (44:24-48:22); the latter will bring about the second task: the forgiveness of sins (49:1-53:12).

This first point cannot be emphasised sufficiently. One's doctrine of atonement is an understanding of what God *does* as an answer to a problem.<sup>9</sup> One's understanding of the problem determines one's understanding of the solution. The literary structure makes abundantly clear that the work of the Servant is to deal with the sin of Israel (and it turns out, also of the nations). Texts in the section entitled Promises of Redemption that address the issue most pointedly are 42:23-25, 43:22-28, 44:21-23. The last of these is worth citation and a brief comment:

Remember these things, O Jacob,  
for you are my servant,  
O Israel.  
I have made you, you are my  
servant; O Israel, I will not  
forget you.  
I have swept away your offenses  
like a cloud, your sins like  
the morning mist.  
Return to me, for I have redeemed  
you (NIV).

This passage is programmatic for Isaiah 53 showing that what will be involved is the permanent removal of offenses and sins as an act of redemption. The Hebrew word "redeem"<sup>10</sup> comes from the Torah and refers to the duty of the nearest relative to buy back their kin when either their property is mortgaged (Lev 25:23-38) or

their person is enslaved (Lev 25:39-55). The Mosaic Covenant establishes Yahweh as Israel's nearest relative (Exod 24) and the Exodus is a picture of this work. Thus the work of the Servant will bring about a deliverance from bondage to sin.

Second, the larger literary structure clarifies why there is a gap in the text between the first of the servant songs (42:1-9) and the last three (49:1-13, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12). The first Servant Song belongs to the introductory opening section which is devoted to the theme of the consolation of Israel and of the nations (40:1-42:17). The Abrahamic Covenant undergirds this introductory section. At the heart of the covenant with Abraham is the promise that blessing will come to the entire world through Abraham and his family, Israel. The arrangement in this section is important. The consolation of Israel comes first because at this time Israel is under a curse; she is part of the problem and not part of the solution. First God must console and restore Israel and only then can he use Israel to be an instrument of consolation and restoration for all the nations. After consolation is defined in terms of redemption (1) from exile and (2) from sin in 42:18-44:23, Isaiah describes in 44:24-53:12 the work of Cyrus to accomplish the former before proceeding to develop the work of the Servant of the Lord to accomplish the latter. At this point three passages on the Servant of the Lord are placed together to focus on redemption from sin. Each passage consists of a first presentation of the topic, a comment as a second presentation of the topic, and a response section.<sup>11</sup>

### Outline of Isaiah 49:1-55:13

- A<sup>1</sup>. The Servant's Double Mission: Israel and the World (49:1-6)
  - B<sup>1</sup>. Comment: Mission to World and Israel Confirmed (49:7-13)
    - C<sup>1</sup>. Response: Zion Despondent and Unresponsive (49:14-50:3)
- A<sup>2</sup>. The Servant Obedient and Responsive in Suffering (50:4-9)
  - B<sup>2</sup>. Comment: The Obedient and the Self-Willed (50:10-11)
    - C<sup>2</sup>. Zion Summoned to Respond (51:1-52:12)
- A<sup>3</sup>. The Servant Successful, Sin-bearing and Triumphant (52:13-53:12)
  - B<sup>3</sup>. Response: Invitation to Israel and the World (54:1-55:13)

Third, the literary structure sheds light on the identity of the servant. Debate over the identity of the servant has literally raged for centuries and continues to the present time unabated.<sup>12</sup> One good reason for this debate is in the text itself: it is characteristic of Isaianic style to begin discussing a topic in an ambiguous and mysterious manner and to add critical information bit by bit until the matter is plain.<sup>13</sup> For example, in the oracle against Babylon in 21:1-9, Isaiah begins by talking about the wilderness by the sea. Only at the end, in v. 9, does one realize that the prophet is speaking about Babylon. Isaiah's presentation of the Servant of Yahweh is similar. At the start in 41:8, the servant is Israel, who in the biblical theological scheme of the larger story has inherited the Adamic roles of son of God and servant king, and who in the covenant at Sinai in Exod 19:5-6 was called to be a holy nation and a kingdom of priests. The servant, however, seems to be deaf and disobedient in 42:18-19. This contradicts the picture of the servant in 42:1-9 and especially in 50:4-11. Israel as a servant

is in dire need herself, not just of rescue from exile and all that entails, but also of a full resolution of the problem of a broken covenant relationship (e.g., 43:22-28). Idolatry and social injustice are endemic in Israel. This is the dilemma: how can God keep his promises to Abraham when Israel has completely failed as the Servant of the Lord? Israel was to model three things to the rest of the nations: (1) faithfulness and loyalty in their relationship to God, (2) social justice in their human relationships, and (3) responsible stewardship of the creation / environment.

This matter is addressed immediately in the Second Servant Song which begins the detailed response to this question (49:1-13). At the beginning of this second song we hear again in 49:3 the affirmation that Israel is the servant, as in 41:8. So the servant is the nation. Yet in vv. 5-6, the servant's task is to bring the nation back. This is a return from exile, both physically and spiritually, as described earlier. How can the servant be both the nation and the deliverer of the nation? There is only one possible solution that resolves this conundrum fairly, and Isaiah has prepared us for this in the first part of his work: the Servant must be the future king described earlier (e.g., 11:1-10). As an individual, the king can say, "I am Israel." The king can represent the nation as a whole, yet he can be distinguished from Israel. This is difficult for Americans to grasp because we have no monarchy. In monarchies, both ancient and modern, there is a sense in which the king *is* the nation. At the same time, the king is the deliverer of the nation and fights her battles for her. Many Christians move too quickly to identify Jesus of Nazareth as the Servant of YHWH without following carefully the progression in the text. The main problem

with the standard Jewish interpretation of identifying the servant as the nation is that the nation of Israel is, neither in the text nor in history, able to rescue itself, let alone atone for its own sins.

A detailed discussion of the identity of the Servant is not possible here, but several points in the text, especially in the Fourth Servant Song, show that a future king descended from David is uppermost in the author's thought. First, D. I. Block's recent study "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah" provides strong evidence that need not be repeated here that the figure of the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah is both Davidic and royal.<sup>14</sup> To be called "the servant of Yahweh" is significant in itself and this title most frequently refers to David. Second, the reference to the root and shoot in Isa 53:2 clearly connects the Fourth Servant Song to the vision of the future Davidic King and Kingdom in Isaiah 1-37 by allusion to the majestic, stately tree cut down in Isa 6:13 and to the root and shoot of Jesse in Isa 11:1, 10. As J. Alec Motyer notes, "the reference to *Jesse* indicates that the *shoot* is not just another king in David's line but rather another David" (italics in original).<sup>15</sup> The connection between the future king of Isaiah 9 and 11 and the Servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53 in the history of interpretation is as old as the Septuagint. There the interpretive rendering of *yōnēq* ("tender shoot") in 53:2 by *παῖδίου* ("child" or "servant") shows a clear connection with the "child" of 9:5 in the mind of the Greek translator.<sup>16</sup> Thus the Fourth Servant Song resolves the dilemma put in sharp focus in Isa 49:3 and 6 in the Second Servant Song.<sup>17</sup> One text says the servant is Israel; another text affirms that the servant will restore the tribes of Jacob. The servant is Israel, yet restores Israel. How

can we resolve this enigmatic contradiction? When the Servant is seen as a royal figure, we can propose a solution. There is a sense in which the king *is the nation in himself*, and yet can also be the deliverer of the nation. In the New Testament, the Servant is understood to be Jesus of Nazareth because he is both the King of Israel and Servant of the Lord who accomplishes the task of bringing back the exiles. To see how this works we must now turn our attention to the Fourth Servant Song.

### The Poetic Structure of the Fourth Servant Song

The literary structure of the Fourth Servant Song is both clear and instructive. The poem is a song in five stanzas consisting of three verses each (although in the Hebrew text the five stanzas number 9, 10, 12, 13, and 13 lines respectively).<sup>18</sup> The first stanza forms a prologue for the poem as a whole where the main themes are adumbrated. After the prologue follow four stanzas: the second and fourth stanzas describe the sufferings of the servant and the third and fifth stanzas interpret the events described in the first and third stanzas respectively:

#### Outline of Fourth Servant Song<sup>19</sup>

- Stanza 1: Prologue (52:13-15)
- Stanza 2: Pains in Life (53:1-3)
- Stanza 3: For Us (53:4-6)
- Stanza 4: Pains in Death (53:7-9)
- Stanza 5: For Us (53:10-12)

An alternative analysis sees a chiasmic arrangement:

#### Chiasmic Outline of Fourth Servant Song<sup>20</sup>

- A<sup>1</sup> The Servant's Exaltation (52:13-15)
- B<sup>1</sup> The Rejection/Suffering of the Servant (53:1-3)
- C Significance of the Servant's Suffering (53:4-6)
- B<sup>2</sup> The Rejection/Suffering of the Servant (53:7-9)
- A<sup>2</sup> The Servant's Exaltation (53:10-12)

The first and last stanzas describe the exaltation of the Servant, the second and fourth describe the rejection and suffering of the Servant, and the centre stanza provides the significance of the suffering. Sometimes “discovery” of chiastic patterns actually forces the details of the text onto a Procrustean bed. Naturally the resurrection in 53:10-12 constitutes an exaltation of the servant, but this by no means exhausts the content of this stanza. Moreover, the resurrection is part of what stands as an interpretation of the Servant’s death. It demonstrates divine acceptance of the sacrifice (Rom 4:25b) as will be described later. Earlier the literary structure of the section from 49:1-55:13 revealed a pattern of topic, commentary, and response in the three passages on the Servant of the Lord. At first glance this pattern seems to break down for the Fourth Servant Song as the third passage in this sequence. Yet if the third and fifth stanzas are seen as commentary on the second and fourth stanzas according to the first outline of the Fourth Song, then the pattern of topic and comment is indeed there, but is doubled. The pattern is then completed with the response, which is an invitation to Israel and the nations (54:1-55:13).

The structure of the Fourth Song in terms of topic and commentary is instructive. Events are not self-interpreting. If we consider, by way of illustration, the crucifixion of Jesus and the people who actually witnessed it at the time, we would find a variety of different interpretations.<sup>21</sup> People passing by hurled insults at him: “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself” (Matt 27:40). They saw Jesus as a failed prophet. The Jewish leaders, the

chief priests, said “He saved others, but he can’t save himself! Let this Christ, this King of Israel come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe” (Matt 27:42). They saw him as a false King, a false Messiah. They saw him as a liar and blasphemer who was getting the penalty justly due him. The women were there who had supported Jesus in his ministry and cared for his needs. No doubt they were thinking, “Here was a gentle, meek soul who was always kind and loving and now he’s been betrayed by the system.” The bandits and insurrectionists were there, hanging on either side of him. One saw Jesus as a fellow bandit, the other trusted him as Messiah. Roman soldiers were there and the centurion in charge confessed, “Surely this was a righteous man” (Luke 23:47). Mark records the centurion as saying, “Surely this man was the son of God!” (Mark 15:39). The disciples, Jesus’ closest friends, did not know how to interpret the events as the debate on the Emmaus Road revealed. But Paul, in Rom 4:25 says, “he was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” Paul interprets the death of Jesus of Nazareth, and, as we will see, his interpretation is based upon that of Isaiah 53. The structure of the Fourth Servant Song indicates that Isaiah not only foretells and predicts events in the future, but he interprets these events as well. This is crucial for a proper understanding of the death of the Servant.

Space and time do not permit an exhaustive treatment of all that this text teaches concerning the death of the Servant and its relevance for a doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement. Since much has been made of stanza 3 in this regard, the focus in this brief treatment will be on the contribution of the Prologue

(stanza 1), where the essential teaching is given “in a nutshell,” and the contribution of stanza 5.

The Fourth Servant Song has more than its share of grammatical, lexical, and textual difficulties. Moreover some aspects of the evangelical exegetical tradition as seen in our commentaries and translations in the last one hundred years have obscured to some degree the clear teaching of this text.<sup>22</sup> As S. Lewis Johnson, Jr. said concerning Rom 5:12, so we may also say here of the exegetical issues: “to handle [them], we must retrace our steps a little, remembering humbly that the terrain is wild, rugged, infested with exegetical booby traps, and dotted with the graves of interpreters who fell into them.”<sup>23</sup> No apology is given here for dealing with these issues in depth as this is the only way forward to a better understanding of the redemptive work of the Servant.

### First Stanza: The Prologue of the Fourth Servant Song (52:13-15)

Between the Third and Fourth Servant Songs is a section calling upon Zion to respond (51:1-52:12). It begins with three brief paragraphs marked by a command to pay attention or listen (51:1, 4, 7). Then several sub-sections are marked off by double commands or imperatives: “Awake, awake!” (51:9), “Rouse yourself, rouse yourself!” (51:17), “Awake, awake!” (52:1), and “Depart, depart!” (52:11). These literary structures tie the pieces of this section together and so the attention-getting particle, *hinneh*, in 52:13 is the literary signal that marks the start of the Fourth Servant Song.

The Prologue consists of nine lines of poetry: the first two describe the Servant achieving success and lofty status (13ab); the third line (14a) and last three lines

(15bcd) note the astonishment of many, including great leaders in the world. Three lines in the centre (14bc-15a) describe what in the servant’s role and work cause this astonishment.

Three exegetical problems are crucial to the interpretation of the Prologue: (1) the “as ... so ... so” structure governing 14a-15a. (2) the meaning of the verb in 15a—should it be translated “sprinkle” or “startle”? (3) the meaning of the term in v. 14b rendered “marred” by the KJV (“his visage was so *marred* more than any man”). D. Barthélemy has offered excellent solutions to these issues,<sup>24</sup> but they are not widely known in North America since Barthélemy’s work is in French. I hope in what follows to build upon the proposals of Barthélemy.

Let us begin by considering the “as ... so ... so” grammatical structure. The clause structures of vv. 14-15a are governed by the sequence of particles *כִּן ... כִּן ... כִּן*. The following literal translation highlights these particles with italics:

- (14a) *just as* many were appalled / astonished at you
- (14b) *so* his appearance was disfigured (?)
- ...
- (15a) *so* he will sprinkle / startle (?) many nations

The particles correlate the two affirmations of 14bc and 15a with that of 14a. It is difficult, however, to make sense of the sequence of thought. Medieval Jewish interpreters construed the first “so” clause as quoting what the “many” say to “you” (in spite of a rapid shift to 3rd person). The Geneva Bible led Christian interpreters in a new direction by understanding the first “so” clause as a parenthesis. This solution was popularised by the KJV. In desperation, the commentator Duhm corrected the text from *כִּן* (“so”) to *כִּי* (“because”)

and was followed in the apparatuses of *Biblia Hebraica* and by many scholars. Few modern translations, if any, faithfully present the structure in Hebrew. The NIV is representative:

14 Just as there were many who  
were appalled at him—his  
appearance was so disfigured  
beyond that of any man and  
his form marred beyond human  
likeness—  
15 so will he sprinkle many  
nations,

Note how the first “so” is put immediately before the verb instead of before the clause. This is problematic since ׀ is normally clausal in scope and does not modify just the verb. In addition, the “as ... so ... so” is obscured to the reader. There is no reason to correct the text as Duhm did, for the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls (1Q<sup>a</sup> and 1Q<sup>b</sup>) support the reading of the Masoretic Text (MT). Moreover the structure in this poetic text is well substantiated in prose (e.g., Exod 1:12 and Josh 11:15), and the English versions faithfully represent it there. In sum, neither Christian nor Jewish interpretations in the past adequately come to grips with the grammatical structure in the text. This structure will affect how we deal with the disputed words in 14b and 15a. We must choose an interpretation that honors this syntactic structure.

First consider the verb *yazzeh* in 15a. Two main options have held the field of interpretation. The first option analyzes the form as Hiphil imperfect of *nazah* meaning ‘to sprinkle’: “so he will sprinkle many nations.” Objections have been raised to this interpretation because of the construction found in this verse. The normal construction for the verb *nazah* is to sprinkle a liquid (e.g., blood) on a person or thing (e.g. Lev 5:9; 8:11; 30) or before someone

(Lev 4:17; 14:16). In Isa 52:15, however, no liquid is mentioned, and there is no preposition על (“upon”) before “nations” to mark the object being sprinkled. This objection can be answered by a careful examination of all available occurrences of the verb. There are instances where the liquid that is sprinkled is omitted if it can be assumed from the context (Exod 29:21; Lev 14:7; Num 19:19).<sup>25</sup> There are also cases where the object or person sprinkled is the direct object of the verb instead of being indicated by a prepositional phrase using “upon” (Lev 4:6, 17). Since Isaiah is poetry, the direct object marker ׀ is normally omitted, and so “nations” can be construed as the object sprinkled, with the liquid (blood of a sacrifice) being omitted.

A number of scholars who have found the first option unacceptable have proposed to derive the verb from a root related to an Arabic verb *nazā* that means “to jump” or “leap up.” They then translate, “he will cause people to jump / leap up,” i.e., he will startle them. This may yield a contextually suitable sense, but support for this proposal is weak because the verb in Arabic is not used of being emotionally startled and then leaping up. The appeal to Arabic, therefore, is linguistically suspect. Also, the verb ׀׀׀ “to sprinkle” is well attested in MT as it occurs some twenty-three times. To suggest that Isaiah’s audience easily recognized an otherwise unknown verb instead of a common one is not plausible. Linguistically, then, “to sprinkle” has more to commend it if one can argue that it fits the context well.

The second disputed word is the noun *mišḥat* which is rendered “disfigure” (NIV) or “marred” (KJV). Barthélemy offers the most detailed and thorough



treatment of the history of interpretation of this word, and this will be conveniently summarized here.<sup>26</sup>

Almost all interpreters from ancient times to the present have connected the word with the root שחת (“to corrupt / ruin / spoil”). Most interpreters also do not indicate the analysis that supports their interpretation. This is the case with the Septuagint (a functional equivalence translation in Isaiah) rendering ἄδοξήσει, with the Aramaic Targum (דהוה חשוך), and with the medieval Jewish scholars Saadya and Yéfet ben Ely. Among exegetes who do give an analysis of the word, some treat it as a noun. Salmon ben Yeruham, for example, gives the meaning as “corruption, ruination” and suggests a noun of the pattern מִשְׁפָּט. Others such as Abraham ibn Ezra, Radaq, Aaron ben Joseph, and Shelomo ben Melek treat the word as an adjective. Finally, some have construed the word as a passive participle, either like a Niphal Participle מִשְׁחָת (so certain medieval Hebrew-French Glossaries and Tanḥum Yerushalmi) or as מִשְׁחָת—a Hophal participle (Abuwalid, Judah ibn Balaam, Isaiah ben Mali).

If the Masoretic Text is respected in both consonantal text and vocalization, there are two possibilities: (1) a noun with preformative *mem* (like מִשְׁפָּט) derived from the root שחת (“to ruin”), or (2) a feminine noun derived from the root מִשַׁח (“to anoint”) following a noun pattern like אִמְרָה. The meaning of the noun, then, is either “ruining” or “anointing” depending upon whether option (1) or (2) is adopted.

Before weighing the merits of these two options, note that the grammatical construction מִשְׁחָת מֵאִישׁ is unusual: we have a bound noun in a construct phrase where the free member is separated from

the bound member by the preposition *min* (= from) in between. This difficulty must be resolved by all interpreters regardless of the solution preferred for the meaning of the noun. Although normally nothing comes between the bound and free member of a construct phrase, this anomaly is attested elsewhere with the preposition *min* (Gen 3:22; Isa 28:9(*bis*); Jer 23:23(*bis*); Ezek 13:2; Hos 7:5). These examples show that the construction here is fastidious and refined rather than belonging to common speech.

Thus two translations are possible. Either “his appearance is an anointing beyond that of men” or “his appearance is a destruction beyond that of men.” The first option is to be preferred for the following reasons.

(1) The noun מִשְׁחָה (“anointing”) is well attested in the biblical text (sixteen instances in the absolute state and seven instances in the construct state) whereas a noun מִשְׁחָת (“destruction”) is otherwise unknown in the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>27</sup>

(2) Regulations concerning a special anointing oil devoted strictly for particular occasions and persons and not for common use by any others is found in Exod 30:30-33. The anointing of the high priest with this oil to install him into his office set him above his fellow priests (Lev 21:10), and the anointing of the king to indicate his divine election for this office set him above his fellow Israelites (Ps 45:8[7]). Such parallels show, then, that an expression “an anointing above that of men” is natural in biblical Hebrew while an expression “a destruction above that of men” is not and is otherwise unattested. To make the meaning “destruction” work, one might better construe the *min* as causal; hence “a destruction caused by men.” Yet this does not seem to be an

approach taken by commentators and exegetes.

(3) Parallel to *נִרְאָהוּ*, “his appearance” is *תְּאֵרָו*, “his form.” A lexical study of this parallel term is instructive. In form, the noun is a (U-Class) Segholate pattern which is frequently employed for infinitival nouns. The related verb has to do with marking / sketching / tracing the form of something, i.e., its outline. Thus the noun indicates the physical form or figure of an object: in one instance of fruit (Jer 11:16) and in two instances of animals (Gen 41:18, 19), but thirteen of the sixteen occurrences are of humans. As in our text, the term is paired with *נִרְאָה*, “appearance” also in Isa 53:2 and Gen 29:17, 39:6, Esth 2:7. The term may be neutral, hence requiring an adjective like *יָפֵה* “beautiful” (e.g., Gen 29:17; 39:6), or it may indicate a good figure by itself (Judg 8:18). Only in Lam 4:8 is the term used of a bad form, that of nobles or princes whose “form” is now no longer what it once was. Many renderings in English versions or other translations focus on someone as physically beautiful or handsome, but the word has to do with “form” or “outline” like a silhouette that indicates the fine bearing and dignity of a person. We have an expression in English: “he cut a fine figure.” This term is not just indicating that a person may be beautiful or handsome, but also connotes their bearing, rank, and social status indicated by their form. At least five or six of the thirteen instances referring to a human have to do with a royal figure (Judg 8:18; 1 Kgs 1:6; Esth 2:7; Lam 4:8; Isa 53:2). The example in Judg 8:18 is instructive:

Then he [Gideon] asked Zebah and Zalmunna, “What kind of men did you kill at Tabor?” “Men like you,” they answered, “each one with the bearing of a prince” (NIV).

In Isa 53:2 the same usage is found: “He had no form or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” This means that the servant does not have a royal bearing in his appearance. He does not cut a fine figure so that people will say, “We want him for a king.” This stands in contrast to Israel’s choice of Saul in 1 Sam 9:1-2, 10:23-24. Thus the word-pair “appearance and form” are well suited to describe the dignity and social status of a high office like that of the High Priest or King whose entry into office is symbolized by anointing.

(4) The meaning “anointing” suits the progression of thought from the first “so” clause to the second. According to the Torah, a priest can only sprinkle or make atonement when he is first anointed as priest:

The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father as high priest is to make atonement (Lev 16:32, NIV).

The meaning “anointing” makes excellent sense of the sequence in this text. The servant sprinkles *because* he is anointed. As we have already seen, the symbolism of anointing indicates that the High Priest was exalted above his fellow Israelites. This anointing qualifies him to atone for the nation. In the same way in our text, the servant is exalted above *all humans* and so atones for *all the nations*. This interpretation also explains the exaltation of the servant described in v. 13b better than any other proposal.<sup>28</sup>

(5) The meaning resulting from construing the term as anointing best honors the “as ... so ... so” structure in the text. This seems difficult for some to understand. Jan Koole’s commentary is an excellent exam-

ple of a scholarly treatment that evaluates Barthélemy's proposal and rejects it for the traditional view.<sup>29</sup> It is worth quoting Koole's objections at length:

All things considered, it seems that, generally speaking, we have to choose between a derivation from מִשָּׁח = "to anoint" and שָׁחַת = "to corrupt". The first possibility was considered by some medieval Jewish exegetes (in Barthélemy, 388f.), Foreiro, and L. De Dieu. But a positive sense of מִשָּׁחַת clashes with the previous stich, which does not talk about surprise but about aversion with regard to the Servant. The line should therefore not be connected with v. [14a] but with v. 15 (Barthélemy, 390ff.). The advantage of this is that the 2.p. form of v. 14a can be related to the past and the 3.p. forms of the other lines to the future, but the problem is that the nominal sentence structure does not yet suggest a future event and also that one expects in this line an explanation of the aversion of the "many" to the Servant. Apart from that, it is questionable whether מִשָּׁחַת can refer not to the anointment itself but to its object. For the same reason a deliberate ambiguity of "destruction" and "anointment" (Koenig, *loc. cit.*) seems unlikely. In my view, most exegetes and newer translations are right in believing that the line refers to the Servant's contemptible appearance.<sup>30</sup>

It is true that the best translation of v. 14a is "just as many were appalled at you." The action is one of horror at some object or person rather than surprise. But again, apparently Koole does not grasp the "as ... so ... so" structure in the text. Note the use of this structure in Exod 1:12:

just as they [the Egyptians] mistreated them [the Israelites], so they increased and so they spread.

Clearly, in this structure, the "so" clauses are the opposite of the "just as" clause. So here, too, the anointing and sprinkling of

the Servant is opposite to the horror many feel looking at him. The "so" clauses do not need to explain what causes their horror. The fact that they are appalled is sufficient anticipation of what comes later in the poem. The "so" clauses show a different situation: the exaltation of the servant. His exaltation in his anointing and sprinkling is proportional to the horror they feel in looking at him. This has already been alluded to in Isa 49:7. Koole violates the grammar and structure by correlating v. 14b and v. 15 and by construing the line as a parenthesis. The correlation is instead between 14a and 15bcd where the astonished horror of the many is turned to astonished recognition of the greatness of the Servant. And by adopting the traditional view, Koole admits he cannot explain the vocalisation of מִשָּׁחַת in our received text.

The sense of "anointing" is the interpretation that is easiest to support, which fits well with the meaning of *nazah* that is easiest to support, and which alone makes sense of the grammar of the "as ... so ... so" structure. While the meaning "destruction" does have the weight of tradition behind it, tradition cannot be equated with truth. Barthélemy discusses five Jewish interpreters from the twelfth to nineteenth centuries who adopted "anointing" as the best interpretation, and two Christian interpreters from the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries who held such a view.<sup>31</sup> In addition, this is clearly the understanding of the scribe of 1Q-a, the Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (100 BC). The actual reading of 1Q-a is מִשָּׁחַתִּי, which may be a syntactic facilitation, but nonetheless, its reading shows the antiquity of this interpretation.<sup>32</sup>

There is a final word that may be said in support of the interpretation for which I

have argued. The idea of many being horrified at the Servant and of an anointing and sprinkling that goes beyond that of Israel so that it applies to *all* the nations best explains the exaltation of the Servant and why so many in the end are told something they have never before seen or understood. And it is natural in the prologue of a poem to find in germ form the ideas unfolded later. The idea that the servant is disfigured more than others or beyond human recognition is both difficult to believe and not consonant with the rest of the song. The rest of the song affirms that the Servant is despised, but not that his appearance is disfigured more than others or beyond human recognition. But the idea of a priest offering a sacrifice that benefits the many is a major thought developed later. This interpretation, then, shows best how 52:13-15 suits the rest of the work *as a Prologue*. It fits the style of Isaiah well because frequently the introductory part of a major poem or section adumbrates cryptically the teaching to be unfolded within the section.<sup>33</sup>

A final brief comment on v. 13 is appropriate. The collocation of the terms “high” (רום) and “lofty” (נשא) which are ascribed to the Servant in this verse is found elsewhere only as an attribution of Yahweh (Isa 6:1, 57:15) although it is what the nations desire for themselves (2:12-14). This is the basis for the Apostle John’s identification of the Servant with Yahweh, and of both the Servant and Yahweh with Jesus of Nazareth in John 12:36-41. The context in John’s Gospel for this equation is the passage where Jesus talks about being “lifted up” as a way of describing his sacrificial death (John 12:32-33). It seems that the exegesis of the Prologue advocated here is consonant with that of the Apostle John’s. Thus the Prologue

ends where it started: the Servant will act with insight, prudence and skill. He will be successful. As a result he will be exalted to the highest position. Many will be utterly astonished; the greatest leaders of the earth will be left speechless.

### **Second Stanza: The Rejection / Suffering of the Servant (53:1-3)**

As indicated at the outset, the focus of the present study is on the first stanza (Prologue) and last stanza. Nonetheless, a brief overview and summary treatment is given here of stanza two to four in order to maintain the flow of thought necessary to connect the discussion of stanzas one and five.

A believing remnant is speaking in 53:1. They are bringing back a report concerning the act of deliverance brought about by the servant of the Lord. The act of deliverance is like the Exodus in its greatness, in its magnitude, so that these believers can say they have seen the arm of the Lord.<sup>34</sup> But the way that God brought about deliverance, the way in which he rolled up his sleeves and did his mighty work of salvation, was not at all in the way that they expected. And as they told people about it, they did not believe. It was contrary to all expectations. It was not only contrary to all expectations, the new Exodus is so much greater than the first that one can say “Where has the power of the Lord been seen at all except here in the sufferings of the servant?”<sup>35</sup> In one sense, the arm of the Lord has not been revealed at all until now.

First, the servant who delivers is a mighty king, but not recognized as one. Verse 2 speaks of him as growing up before people like a little sapling or sucker, like a root out of dry ground. This is once more the image of a tree that is a metaphor

for kings and kingdoms both in Isaiah and the Old Testament as a whole. In many passages, kings and kingdoms are pictured as plants, as vines, and especially as majestic, stately, tall trees.<sup>36</sup> In addition, the picture of the root from the dry ground directly recalls Isa 11:1, the passage that predicts not just a descendant of David, but a new David, not only someone better than bad king Ahaz, but also someone far greater than good king Hezekiah. He will bring into political reality the social justice of the Torah, the character of God himself expressed in the Torah, and a paradise, a new creation, will result. Isaiah intends a connection between the servant of Isaiah 53 and the coming King of Isaiah 11. The Septuagint actually translates “sapling” by the word “child,” to indicate that the translators connected the Servant of Isaiah 53 with the son given in Isaiah 9 who ends up as King in chapter 11. So this connection was not only really intended by Isaiah, but also understood by the earliest commentary we have on this text, two hundred years before Christ.

Second, having identified the servant as king, Isaiah reveals in his prophetic vision that this king will not look like one. He will not be majestic and royal in his bearing and form. He will not look like royalty. As a matter of fact, he will be the kind of person people look down on, someone who is really insignificant as far as the human race is concerned. The description goes further. The servant is not only insignificant, he is subject to much pain, sickness, and suffering. The poetry hits us like a hammer as the word “despised” is repeated along with the notion of people turning their faces away because of his sufferings. And the believing remnant acknowledge that they just did not reckon him to be anybody special.

The problem is that Israel did not recognize in the servant her own sorry state. In Isa 1:5-6, this was the description of Israel, and it has been transferred to the servant. This stanza, then, speaks of the humble and lowly bearing of the king and also of pain and suffering so that others turn away from him.

### **Third Stanza: Significance of the Servant’s Suffering (53:4-6)**

In the third stanza Isaiah turns from describing the details and facts of the sufferings of the servant to the meaning and significance of these sufferings. Verse 4 shows that the general population considered him to be punished by God for his own crimes and misdemeanors, but instead, he was paying the penalty of the sins of the people in their place, as a substitute for them.

The predictions of the sufferings of the servant are fulfilled in the death of Jesus of Nazareth by crucifixion. It is interesting to look at attitudes to crucifixion in the first century of the Greek and Roman world.<sup>37</sup> Crucifixion was considered by the Romans to be a barbaric form of execution of the utmost cruelty. It was the supreme punishment. “Barbaric” meant that not only was it cruel and inhuman, but it was only for peoples who were not Romans. This form of punishment could not be given to a Roman citizen. It was typically the penalty given to rebellious foreigners, violent criminals, insurrectionists, and robbers. Above all, it was the *slaves’* punishment, a penalty reserved for slaves. This gives a new meaning to the term “servant” used in Isaiah. It can also mean slave. Jesus died the death of a slave. Nowhere in Greek or Roman literature and myth had anyone been crucified and become a hero.

From the Jewish point of view, a person put to death by hanging was cursed by God. Paul brings this out in Gal 3:13. This conception goes back to the Law of Moses. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 indicates that a person put to death by hanging was cursed by God. It is interesting that this law is given next to the one about the rebellious son. Deuteronomy 21:18-21 describes the procedure for dealing with a rebellious son. This makes our text ironic. The servant was given a death penalty as if he were a rebellious son, but in fact, it is Israel that is the rebellious son. The servant dies in Israel's place.

There is an old story from England about how a fox gets rid of his fleas.<sup>38</sup> He goes along the hedgerow and picks up little bits of sheep's wool. Next he rolls the wool into a ball in his mouth. Then he goes down to the river. Slowly he walks out deeper and deeper until he is almost completely submerged—only his head and nose are showing with the ball of wool in his mouth. Last, he sinks below the surface and lets the ball of wool go with all of the fleas climbing onto it for safety. All of his fleas have been transferred to the sheep's wool and the fox emerges clean. This is a perfect picture of the suffering servant. The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all so that we might go free. This passage clearly teaches penal substitution. This creates problems for some. How can the servant take the sins of the world upon himself? One way to help us understand is to remember that he is the king. As king, he fights the battle with evil for his people. The next stanza brings forth the image of a lamb being led to slaughter. This would bring before the minds of Israel the sacrificial system where a human person would lay their hands on a sheep to symbolically transfer their sins to the animal and then

the animal would be put to death instead of them.

Verse 5 ends with the words, "by his wounds we are healed." Christians have debated hotly the meaning of these words. Some have said that the death of Christ guarantees physical healing while others have argued that it is spiritual healing that is the main thrust of the text. It is false to distinguish between physical and spiritual healing. The cross of Christ brings healing in the fullest sense of the word. The Book of Isaiah ends with a new Heavens and Earth, a new Creation. But the New Testament makes plain that there is an "already" and "not yet" to our salvation. If anyone is in Christ, he or she is new creation (present tense).<sup>39</sup> But it begins inside, and only at the resurrection will it include the outside. Pentecostals who insist on full physical healing now are actually diminishing the work of Christ. The healing will be much bigger than they think. It will include a new body in a new creation.

#### **Fourth Stanza: The Rejection / Suffering of the Servant (53:7-9)**

The fourth stanza returns to the theme of the second stanza: a description of the sufferings of the servant. Here we reach the climax: he suffers to the point of death. These verses speak of his death and burial. It is amazing how many predictions and prophecies from these verses were fulfilled in the events of the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Verse 8a is difficult to interpret. Several interpretations are possible and fit the context. It may mean he was taken from arrest and sentencing to execution, or it may mean he was taken without arrest and justice, indicating he had no fair trial.

The next sentence is also difficult. The

verb means “to complain,” or “to muse” or “ponder,” “to speak meditatively,” “to mutter about.” The word “generation” means his circle of contemporaries. “Who considered his contemporaries?” This may mean that people no longer gave consideration to the Davidic dynasty from which he came and thought that God had abandoned his promise of an everlasting dynasty and house to David.

Verse 7 is easier to interpret. As he is led away to death he is silent. Writers of the New Testament see this fulfilled in the trial of Jesus where he remained silent and did not defend himself before Pilate (Matt 27:12-14; Mark 14:60-61; 15:4-5; John 19:8-9) and before Herod (Luke 23:8-9).

In verse 9 we have a better text as a result of the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but his *tomb* (בִּרְמָחָו) was with the rich. Jesus was crucified with bandits and insurrectionists—those who led a group of outlaws to defy the might of Rome. But in the end, he was buried in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, because he had done no violence and did not deserve to be classified as a criminal.

### **The Final Stanza of the Fourth Servant Song**

The fifth and final stanza turns attention away from the details and facts reported concerning the suffering of the servant to the interpretation and significance of these events. Here we learn the most amazing and startling things concerning the suffering servant: his death is a guilt or reparation offering—not for his own sins, but for the sins of the many. And after his death he lives. He is a conqueror and victor over death and evil. The power of his resurrection is such that his victory is shared with the many. There are numer-

ous problems in the text and we must not shrink from carefully thinking through them if we desire an accurate and solid understanding of the atoning work of the servant. A literal translation is provided to give the reader help in following the discussion of the text by showing how the lines of poetry are divided and how decisions were made concerning difficulties in the text:

10 But Yahweh accepted the  
 crushing of him whom he had  
 made sick,  
 If his soul makes a reparation  
 offering  
 He will see offspring, he will  
 prolong days  
 What Yahweh wants will prosper  
 by his hand.  
 11 Because of the labor of his life  
 he will see light, he will be  
 satisfied;  
 By his knowledge, the just one my  
 servant will bring justification to  
 the many  
 and he will bear their offenses  
 12 Therefore I will apportion for  
 him among the many  
 And he will divide spoil with the  
 numerous  
 Because he bared his life to the  
 point of death  
 and was numbered with  
 transgressors  
 And he bore the sins of many  
 And interceded for their  
 transgressions.

Lines 10abcd and 11a describe the intention and plan of both Yahweh and the Servant in relation to the Servant’s death as well as the benefits accruing to the Servant from offering himself as a sacrifice. Lines 11bc-12abcdef detail the relation between the Servant and his many offspring.

First, in v. 10a, we see that the death of the Servant was no accident. It was part of God’s plan. It was also intentional on the part of the Servant. God accepted the crushing of his servant if he offered

himself as a guilt offering. For v. 10a the Masoretic Text has the words **וַיַּהֲנוּהוּ קָפַץ הַחֲלִי**. Let us consider the four words in reverse order. **הַחֲלִי** can be analyzed as a hiphil perfect 3 m.s. from the root **חלה** and can be construed syntactically as an asyndetic relative clause, “whom he made sick.” The form actually corresponds to the form of a III-**ס** root, but verbs from III-**ה** and III-**ס** are confused at times.<sup>40</sup> The Septuagint (**τῆς πληγῆς** - “of the plague”) as well as the later Jewish Revisors (Aquila **τὸ ἀρρώστημα** - “the illness,” and Symmachus **ἐν τῷ τραυματισμῷ** - “by wounding”) and Jerome in the Vulgate (*in infirmitate* - “in sickness”) all seem to have read a noun: **הַחֲלִי**. These are surely syntactic facilitations. Since 4Q-d is unvocalized (**החלי**) one cannot conclude whether a noun or a verb has been read. On the other hand, 1Q-a has **ויחללהו**, clearly substituting **חלל**, “to wound,” for the verb in MT to create an agreement with verse 5.<sup>41</sup> The Syriac Peshitta has interpreted the word as an infinitive like the preceding word and the midrash of the Targum cannot serve as a textual witness. It is possible, then, to construe the form in MT from **חלה** and to see the other textual witnesses as facilitations of a difficult text.

As Barthélemy notes, before coming to conclusions about the last word a satisfactory understanding of **הַכָּאוֹ** is necessary.<sup>42</sup> He observes that the medieval sages Abūwalid and Ibn Ezra construed the form as a bound infinitive (piel) and understood the pronominal suffix as direct object: “the crushing of him.” He prefers, however, the proposal of Gousset in 1702 that the form is a nominal (adjective or noun) **הַכָּאוֹ** found in Ps 34:19 and Isa 57:15. One must then explain why the long vowel is reduced (cf. **נִקְדָּשׁוּ** in Num 18:29 and **נִדְחוּ**

in 2 Sam 14:13) and show the pronominal suffix as agent (cf. **הַלְלִיךָ** = “those whom you have wounded” in Ps 69:27). According to this analysis **הַכָּאוֹ** = “his crushed one,” i.e., “the one whom he crushed.” When **הַכָּאוֹ** is taken as the direct object of **קָפַץ**, and **קָפַץ** understood in the sense of “accepting a sacrifice” (cf. Isa 1:11; Hos 6:6; Ps 40:7; 51:18, 21) **הַחֲלִי** fits naturally as an asyndetic relative sentence whose goal is to explicate the pronominal suffix on **הַכָּאוֹ**. Nonetheless, in spite of the proposal of Gousset and Barthélemy, a bound infinitive is much more likely. The suffix may be subjective “his crushing,” or objective “the crushing of him” = “his being crushed.” The net result of the latter option is identical in meaning to that achieved by Barthélemy without having to explain rare words and problems in vocalization since the reduction of the vowel in the infinitive is standard.

This exegesis not only handles well all the problems in the line, it makes better sense than that of the KJV and NASB which translate “it pleased the Lord to crush him.” This makes it seem that God took delight in making the servant suffer and much popular preaching and teaching has followed this point of view. This is not the meaning of the text at all. Here “delighted” is being used in the context of a sacrifice. God is delighted or pleased with the sacrifice in the sense that he accepts it as sufficient to wipe away his indignation, his offense and his outrage at our sin. This text contrasts with Isa 1:11 where the same verb is used, “I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats” (NIV). God will not accept the sacrifices of a corrupt Zion, but here he is pleased with the death of his servant, the king of the transformed Zion. He accepts his sacrifice. Why? Verse 10b explains it for us.



This line is also four short words in Hebrew: אִם־תָּשִׁים אֶשְׁמֶן נַפְשׁוֹ. Again we are confronted by difficulties. The language is sacrificial as indicated by the term guilt or reparation offering. Yet the verb for bringing an offering in Leviticus is normally the Hiphil of בָּרָא. Here the verb is תָּשִׁים, a Qal Imperfect from שָׂם, “to put / place / set.” MT is well supported here by 1Q-a and also probably 4Q-d (חַשֵּׁם) and 1Q-b, although the last of these preserves only the last three letters, while the versions (Greek, Syriac, Targum, and Vulgate) have free renderings. In Gen 22:9 this verb is used for placing the victim (i.e., Isaac) on the altar. It is natural here to take אֶשְׁמֶן as the direct object, leaving “his life/soul” as the subject: “if his soul offers a guilt offering.”<sup>43</sup> The NASB translates this way, but the KJV and NIV construe the verb as 2 m.s. instead of 3 f.s. This is possible, but not likely, since it involves an awkward shift from third to second person. The “you” might be an individual, Motyer thinks possible,<sup>44</sup> but how could the death of the servant be a guilt offering if some individual construes it that way? Or Yahweh could be the “you,” but then Yahweh is making an offering to himself. This is not as straightforward as the Servant offering himself. The Servant makes the offering, and at the same time he is the offering. He is both the priest and the sacrifice. This line indicates that the death of the Servant is intentional on his part as well as on the part of Yahweh.

The use of the term אֶשְׁמֶן is significant. The life of the servant is given as a “guilt” or “reparation offering,” not a burnt or purification/sin offering. This is the fifth offering described in Leviticus and is detailed in 5:14-26[6:7] and 7:1-10. New studies have cast light on this offering and show what is emphasized by this offer-

ing in contrast to the others that makes it significant for Isaiah 53.<sup>45</sup> First, this offering emphasizes making compensation or restitution for the breach of faith or offense. Sin involves a breach of faith against God as well as a rupture in human relationships and society. According to Lev 5:15-16 an offender would offer a reparation sacrifice, usually a ram, in order to make restitution. Isaiah is explaining here how restitution is made to God for the covenant disloyalty of Israel and her many sins against God. According to the Prologue, this sacrifice is sufficient not only for the sins of Israel, but also for those of the nations. Second, this offering provides satisfaction for every kind of sin, whether inadvertent or intentional. That is why Isaiah in 54:1-55:13 can demonstrate that the death of the Servant is the basis of forgiveness of sins and a New Covenant not only for Israel but also for all the nations. Third, D. I. Block notes that in the regulations given by Moses the *ʔāšām* is the only regular offering that required a ram or male sheep. Since this same word for ram is often used metaphorically of community leaders, the *ʔāšām* is perfectly suited to describe a sacrifice where the king suffers the penalty on behalf of his people.<sup>46</sup>

Verse 10b begins with אִם (“if”), indicating that this is the protasis (“if” clause) of a conditional sentence. Probably both 10a and 10cd-11a should be considered as the apodosis (“then” clause) so that the position of the protasis separates the benefits of the sacrifice to Yahweh in 10a on the one hand from those to the Servant in 10c-11a on the other.

The three lines of poetry comprising 10cd-11a, then speak of the benefits received by the Servant if he offers his life as a reparation sacrifice. These lines

contain five short sentences that are simple and straightforward apart from one problem in the textual transmission of v. 11a. There the first verb “he will see” has no object in the Masoretic Text which is supported by the first and second century Greek revisions of Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion<sup>47</sup> as well as the Vulgate, the Syriac, and the Aramaic Targum. Although this support seems strong, diverse, and earlier, witnesses such as the Septuagint, 1Q-a, 1Q-b, and 4Q-d have the word אור, “light” after the verb. Since the reading in the Masoretic Text may well be due to a scribal error or even a correction motivated by theology, the reading “light” is superior both in view of its textual witnesses and in terms of transcriptional probabilities.<sup>48</sup> The original text of Isaiah, then, is almost certainly “he will see light.”

Among the benefits given to the Servant for his atoning death is no less than resurrection. “There is no doubt,” says C. Westermann, “that God’s act of restoring the Servant, the latter’s exaltation, is an act done upon him after his death and on the far side of the grave.”<sup>49</sup> This must be the meaning of “he will see offspring, he will prolong his days” granted this context and comes to clearest expression in the fourth sentence: “after the painful toil of his soul he will see light.” The expression “to see light” generally refers to some kind of renewal or restoration. When the context is (the death of) exile (Isa 9:1) or physical death (Ps 36:10[9], Job 33:28), a restoration to life is indicated. The prepositional phrase אַחֲרֵי מְעֵמַל נַפְשׁוֹ may be translated “after his life’s painful work” or “because of his life’s painful work.” The context here is closest to that of Isa 9:1[9:2] where “they have seen a great light” is connected to 8:20[9:1] and indicates a restoration *after*

the darkness and death of exile, hence the first option is to be preferred.

So the Servant conquers death and lives again. Verse 10c speaks about seeing offspring in the context of a long life. This contrasts with verse 8 where the Servant seemed doomed not to have any offspring at all because of an early, untimely death. Yet just as parents give life to others in offspring, so the Servant gives life to others who can be considered his offspring. The background to this text and, indeed, to all of Isaiah 40-55 are the covenant promises to Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, and 17.<sup>50</sup> It is fundamental to the correct interpretation of the text. God’s plan and purpose was to choose Abraham and his family as a means of bringing blessing to all the nations. The fivefold repetition of the word “blessing” in Gen 12:1-3 matches the fivefold use of the word “curse” from Gen 1-11 (3:14; 3:17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). This promise of seed or descendants seems in great danger of being broken and unfulfilled as the judgment passages of Isaiah reduce Israel to a tenth, and then even the tenth is greatly wasted (Isa 6:13). Yet vv. 11-12 speak of many who will benefit from the Servant’s life work. The first will be Israel, but the nations will also be included as is clear from the fact that the many (רַבִּים) in 11b, 12a and 12e explicates the many in 52:14a and 15a, who are the nations.<sup>51</sup> The inclusion of the nations is clearly stated in 49:6 and many parts of the Servant Songs. Isaiah has a special way of bringing this out because the Servant who is the figure towering over 40-55 spawns the servants in 54:17 (cf. 54:13). Even more astonishing is 56:6 which makes plain that individuals from the nations are included as the servants of the Lord (cf. 66:21). Then in 63:17 the watchman on the walls of Zion prays for God to show mercy on his ser-

vants. This prayer is answered in prospect in Isaiah 65 as we see the blessings to be poured out on the servants of the Lord (65:8, 9, 13 (*ter*), 14).

Satisfaction comes from a long life with many offspring. This is true of the Servant. He will live a long life, and “the will of Yahweh will prosper by his hand” (53:10d). The noun  $\text{יְשׁוּעָה}$  can mean “delight” or “(good) pleasure,” and this statement is sometimes rendered “the (good) pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (KJV, NASB). Yet especially in Isaiah 40-55, the term refers to God’s plan or will to be accomplished, first through Cyrus in releasing his people from Babylon (44:28; 46:10; 48:14) and now through his Servant in redeeming his people from their sins.<sup>52</sup> The divine intention, plan, and will of God for the servant has been delineated clearly in the First and Second Servant Songs. Isaiah 42:4 declares, “he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his law [Torah] the islands will put their hope” (NIV). The vision in Isaiah 2 of the nations streaming to Zion to receive instruction or Torah from Yahweh is to be accomplished by Zion’s King according to 42:4 as the instructions for the King in Deut 17:14-20 and the fulfillment of them by means of the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:19) would lead us to expect. Isaiah 49:6 expands on God’s plan for the Servant: “It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (NIV).

The Servant’s job or task is described in 49:8. “He will be a covenant for the people. He will restore the land, he will apportion out desolate inheritances, he will announce to the captives to come out

of exile.” Where do these images come from? If we stop for a moment and think carefully, we will see that this is exactly the work God gave Joshua to do at the time of the Exodus when he brought the people out of Egypt into Canaan, the land promised to the Israelites. His job was to restore the land once belonging to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob back to Israel. His job was to apportion to them each an inheritance in the land. His job was to free the captives from Egypt by bringing them into the freedom of the land of Canaan. We see then, that the Servant is a greater Joshua, a new Joshua, who is bringing about a greater Exodus, a new Exodus. Micah, another prophet, speaks in exactly the same way. “As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders” (Mic 7:15). This is also a clear promise of a new Exodus. What kind of Exodus will it be? “Who is a God like you?” asks Micah three verses later, “who pardons sin and forgives the transgression?” The deliverance has to do with sin. Later he makes this even clearer. “You will hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea” (7:19). In the first Exodus, God cast the chariots of the Egyptians into the sea. With the work of the Servant, who is also called Joshua, or Jesus in Greek, he will cast the wrongdoings of our broken relationship with God to the bottom of the sea and bring us into the land of a restored relationship with our Creator.

So the Servant cannot be confused with Israel; he is the new Joshua who brings to completion the new Exodus.<sup>53</sup> “Why then is he called Israel?” asks H. Blocher in his study of the Servant Songs. His answer is so crucial to the understanding of the atonement in Isa 53 it must be cited in full:

There are two biblical concepts which can help us to understand the strange relationship of the Servant to the people, his bearing their name while being distinct from them. The first is that of headship—covenantal headship. Many scholars today think that what they call “corporate personality” is the key to Hebrew mentality. It is much better to recognize that this is not just a structure of Hebrew mentality, but the teaching of Scripture. Men are not merely individuals, added to one another yet independent of each other. No man is an island. We really belong together... God has created us in communities which must not be thought of as accidental groupings of self-contained units. Communities and the bonds that bind us are essential dimensions of human life. A community has a real unity which is expressed in its head. This applies especially to covenant communities. God’s covenant with Adam and thus with the whole human race; God’s covenant with Abraham and with Moses and thus with Israel; a man’s marriage covenant with a woman too: all exhibit the same structure. They institute headed communities. The head sums up or represents the whole, yet it cannot be mistaken for the body, not even in a kind of vague fluid dialectic between the two. It is the head, not the body. And yet, at the same time, the body is nothing without the head, and the head truly expresses the body. Now the Servant seems to be the head of Israel, the head of that community which he is to redeem and restore.

The second concept is what is known as Delitzsch’s pyramid. Franz Delitzsch was not an ancient Egyptian Pharaoh but a German evangelical scholar in the nineteenth century. He showed from the Bible that as the history of salvation proceeds, the scope of God’s redemptive dealings with man seems to grow narrower and narrower. God starts, as it were, with the whole human race, first at the time of Adam, and then again after the Flood. Then one line of the human race is chosen: God makes his covenant with Abraham and his descendants. But he does not make it with all Abraham’s

descendants: only Isaac and his line are chosen—Isaac, not Ishmael. Even among Isaac’s children, only one Jacob, not Esau, is chosen. And then, getting narrower, the prophets make it clear that not all those who descend from Israel (Jacob) are truly Israel. Only a remnant will inherit the promise. But where is this remnant when we look for it. When God looks for a man to intervene and establish justice in the land he finds none (Isa 59:16, Ezek 22:30). Ultimately only one person remains after the sifting process, only one is truly Israel, in whom God is glorified. And he said so. He said quite clearly, “I am the true Israel.” He used the Old Testament’s most common symbol for Israel; the vine: “I am the true vine” (John 15:1ff.; cf. Ps. 80:8-16; Is. 5:1-7; Je. 2:21; 6:9; Ho. 10:1; see also Mt. 21:33-43 and parallels). In him, the pyramid reaches its apex.

The lines, however, do not stop there. Starting from Christ, there is a symmetrical broadening. In him, the true Israel, the true vine, are the branches which feed on his life and are purified by him. Those who find salvation in him inherit the promise which belongs to the true remnant. To them also, in a secondary sense, the name Israel truly belongs (Rom 9:6-8; Gal. 3:6-9; 6:15, 16; Phil. 3:3). All the Gentiles who have faith in Christ are incorporated into this community. So this new Israel, the Israel of God, is a new humanity, spreading over the whole earth. As the Second Song puts it, the Servant is to be a “light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth”. What a perfect geometry in God’s plan!<sup>54</sup>

The plan and will of the Lord for the Servant, then, resolves the issue of the broken covenant between God and Israel made at Sinai, and moreover, brings to fulfilment the divine promises to Abraham which are now to be accomplished in and through the Davidic King.

Isaiah 54 and 55 show a New Covenant issuing from the sacrificial death of the Servant. The theme of chapter

54 is bringing back the exiles, bringing about reconciliation between God and his people, restoring the covenant relationship, and rebuilding Zion since the city of God in terms of people has been so decimated. What ties together the diverse paragraphs and sections is a metaphor in which the people of God are represented as a woman. In verses 1-3 the people of God are pictured as a barren woman who now has more children than the married woman. In verses 4-10 the people of God are portrayed as a deserted wife, someone who has long borne the reproach of widowhood, but who is now reconciled and married to her Creator God. Included in this section is a comparison of the promise of the New Covenant to the promise of the Noahic Covenant—just as God promised that never again would he judge by a flood, so now he promises never again to be angry with his people. Finally, in verses 11-17, the woman is the City of Zion, lashed by storms, but now fortified by redoubtable foundations and battlements and rebuilt with stunning precious jewels and stones. Thus, in the brief span of 17 verses, this New Covenant is in some way either compared or correlated and linked to all of the previous major covenants in the Bible: the barren woman represents the Abrahamic Covenant, the deserted wife the Mosaic Covenant, and the storm-lashed City of Zion the Davidic Covenant.<sup>55</sup>

It is important to realize that these are not digressions in explaining the last stanza of Isaiah 53. Isaiah's Hebrew patterns of thought follow a cyclical and recursive treatment of themes and topics rather than the Aristotelian rectilinear mode of discourse so entrenched in our culture from our Greco-Roman heritage. As a result, the explanation of the text of

Isaiah 53 must tie together the passages in the cycles treating the same topics. This is the only accurate and effective way to explain all that is meant in the statement "the will of the Lord will advance successfully by his hand" in Isa 53:10d which is now a shorthand reference to these other treatments.

Lines 11b-12f now detail the benefits of the Servant's death given to others who are simply referred to as "the many" (11b, 12a, 12e). Again we cannot shrink from the problems in the text if we are to gain a full-orbed understanding of the Servant's work.

Two problems in textual transmission in v. 12 can be handled quickly. First, in v. 12e I have translated "and he bore the sins of many." The plural *וְלַפְשֵׁיהֶם* is supported by the Dead Sea Scrolls (1Q-a, 1Q-b, 4Q-d), the Septuagint, Symmachus, the Syriac, and the Targum. The singular is only supported by our Masoretic Text and the Vulgate, where it seems to be an assimilation to the singular of vv. 6 and 8. Clearly the reading in MT is secondary.

In the next line, 12f the original text is probably *וְלַפְשֵׁיהֶם* ("for their transgressions") rather than MT *וְלַפְשֵׁיָם* ("for their transgressors"). The former reading is supported again by the three Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint, while the latter by the Vulgate and the three Jewish Revisors, Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion. The text of MT may be explained as an assimilation to *פְּשָׁעִים* in 12d or a correction motivated theologically. The standard construction in Hebrew for the verb is "פָּנַע בַּאֲ לַעֲ" meaning to entreat someone (x) with respect to something (y). Thus *וְלַפְשֵׁיהֶם* fits the construction that is normal, while the phrase *וְלַפְשֵׁיָם* is anomalous in the Hebrew Bible.

A major misunderstanding of v. 12,

however, is due to bad exegesis persisting in the Christian tradition. The meaning is obscured by most modern translations; the KJV, NASB, and NIV are all basically the same: “therefore I will divide him a portion with the great and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.” The word being rendered “great” is רַבִּים. Exactly the same term is also found in 11b and 12e where all translate by “many” in English. Why, then, should it be translated “great” here in 12a? Probably because the term in the line parallel to this has עֲצוּמִים and the common equivalent in English for this is “strong.” Hence “great” is chosen for רַבִּים to make the parallelism work. But the Hebrew term עֲצוּמִים could also be translated “the numerous.” The root can mean either “to be many” or “to be mighty.” The relationship between these two meanings is obvious: strength comes from numbers. Amos 5:12 and Prov 7:26 are excellent examples where רַבִּים and עֲצוּמִים are paired in synonymous lines, and the clear meaning is “the many” and “the numerous.” It is interesting to note that “great” is not a common meaning for רַבִּים and that often גְּדֹלִים is paired with עֲצוּמִים when the meanings “great” and “mighty” should be selected (e.g., Deut 9:1; 11:23; Josh 23:9). A better approach, then, is to give רַבִּים the same value it has in 11b and 12e, i.e., “many,” and then maintain the parallelism by translating עֲצוּמִים as “numerous.”<sup>56</sup> We can then translate as follows: “therefore I will divide for him a portion among the many and he will share spoils with the numerous.” Not only does this translation preserve a consistent value for רַבִּים from 11b through 12a and 12e, but also preserves a consistency of thought: this section begins in 11c focused on the relationship of the one and the many and ends in 12ef in the same way.

It is this same relationship that is being pursued in 12a and b. In fact, there may be a chiasmic structure. The section begins and ends by stating that the one bore the sins of the many, and the middle affirms that the many receive the spoils of the victory of the one. Here Isaiah draws out the relationship between the one and the many, between the king and his people, and shows that the work of the Servant is to justify the many, to bring them into a right relationship to God.

Central to the last section, 11b-12f, describing benefits of the Servant’s death is the corporate solidarity of the one and the many, which it turns out, is the relationship of the king and priest to his people. Here the priestly picture from the first stanza and the kingly role of the servant from the second stanza come together. First, according to the bookends in 11bc and 12ef, the one has born the misdeeds (*āwôn*, 11c), offences (*pešaʿ*, 12f) and sins (*ḥēṭʿ*, 12e) of the many. All the major words for sin in the Old Testament are here in the plural, showing that the sacrificial death of the Servant is all-encompassing, effectively compensating for the guilt of the many. Moreover the Servant renders the verdict “not guilty” for the many. From a negative perspective, the many are acquitted; from a positive perspective, the many are reckoned as righteous. The statements in Isa 53 assume the corporate solidarity of king and people. Why should the king not fight the battle for and on behalf of his people? Since the Enlightenment Period, various voices have complained that the one bearing the guilt of others is immoral. In America, a worldview derived from the Enlightenment has idolized a rugged individualism and fails to think in terms of corporate categories. And it is this worldview that fails the test of morality

when offence is taken at the teaching on penal substitution in this text.

Second, according to 12ab, God shares the Servant's victory among the many and the servant himself distributes spoils with the many. Thus the many share the the triumph and victory of the one: healing, peace or reconciliation, righteousness, and resurrection. There can be no doubt that it is this text that is the foundation of Paul's teaching in Rom 5:12-21 where the central thought is also the one and the many in the same way that we see in Isaiah 53. Specific reasons given in the text as to what act of the one made possible such a victory for the Servant and for those associated with him is that he bared his soul to the point of death and was counted as an offender (12cd). Those who do not understand why death is the penalty required to make restitution have not understood from the first pages of the Scriptures that disloyalty in a covenant relationship results in death. This is what the fivefold curse of Genesis 1-11 makes plain. And the fivefold blessing of Abraham's family, coming now through the King of Israel, will remove this curse and bring salvation for both Israel and the world.<sup>57</sup>

The prepositional phrase בְּדַעְתּוֹ, "by his knowledge" is connected by the accents in MT to 11b and not to 11a as in the Septuagint and modern printed Hebrew Bibles.<sup>58</sup> The spacing in 1Q-a and 4Q-d supports this division of the text in MT while 1Q-b has a lacuna and so cannot attest either way to this issue. The uncials of the Vulgate and Jerome's Commentary on Isaiah also support this interpretation. So exegesis and translations following our modern printed Hebrew texts should be disregarded. In addition, the division of the stichometry adopted here results in 11a and b matching in line length, whereas

the alternate approach creates problems for analysis of the poetic structure.<sup>59</sup> The third m.s. pronominal suffix may be interpreted in two ways: "by his knowledge" or "by knowledge of him." If the first is intended, then Isaiah is saying that by means of the knowledge possessed by the servant, he succeeds in justifying the many. This knowledge is the knowledge he has of God and his ways. In this text we see that instead of paying back evil with evil, he bears the evil of others paid to him and gives only love in return. It is this knowledge or way that justifies the many. Or it could mean by knowing him. That is, if we by faith come to know him, we become part of the community, part of his offspring who are justified so that our sins are exchanged for his long life and success in advancing the will of God. Either statement is true according to teaching elsewhere in Scripture. The first meaning is probably what Isaiah had in mind. In the Third Servant Song, the Servant learns morning by morning and this knowledge results in him giving his body, his back and his cheeks to those who mistreat him, and trusting the results to the Lord (Isa 50:4-9).

R. N. Whybray has argued that it is a heinous crime for the wicked to be justified by exploiting to the full the statement in Exod 23:7 where Yahweh says, "I will not justify the wicked." Whybray concludes, "it is clear that such an action would never be performed or approved by God."<sup>60</sup> Apparently in the Fourth Servant Song this is exactly what Yahweh does and it is precisely because of the suffering Servant! The Servant entreats God on behalf of the many, bears their penalty, and offers himself as a restitution sacrifice—vicarious suffering is the only way to resolve this dilemma!

## Conclusion

The “atonement theory”—to employ an anachronistic term—provided by Isaiah’s depiction of the work of the Servant in the Fourth Servant Song is multifaceted and variegated. The Servant is a figure both Davidic and royal. He is Israel and he restores Israel (Isa 49:5). He endures enormous suffering as evil is heaped upon him by his own people and by the world. But the description is more specific than this generality. He dies as a *restitution sacrifice* to pay the penalty for the offenses, sins, and transgressions of the many.<sup>61</sup> This brings the forgiveness of sins and a right relationship to God. This brings reconciliation with God resulting in a new, everlasting covenant of peace where faithful loyal love and obedience are maintained in our relationship to God. This also brings redemption in that just as the Exodus delivered Israel from years of slavery to Egypt, so the new Exodus delivers the many from bondage to sin. The Servant is not only the sacrifice, he is also the priest (also clearly expressed in Jer 30:21). He makes the offering. Moreover, he is a super-High Priest. The High Priest sprinkles only Israel, but this priest sprinkles the nations who are also included in the many. His ultimate anointing leads to an ultimate sprinkling on an ultimate day of atonement! And as King, the Servant fights the battle for his people and wins. He conquers not only their sin, but death itself. The many share in the victory of the one just as the one has borne the sins of the many. The broken Mosaic Covenant is replaced by a New Covenant in which all the promises of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants come to fruition and fulfillment.<sup>62</sup> The Servant does for the nation what it could not do for itself and at the same time brings blessing

to all the nations.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>I acknowledge with gratitude Daniel I. Block, Stephen G. Dempster, John Meade, Jim Rairick, and Jason Parry for constructive criticism of earlier drafts. They not only rescued me from many mistakes, but stimulated my thinking in significant ways.

<sup>2</sup>The four songs were demarcated and labelled by Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1892): 42:1-9, 49:1-13, 50:4-9, 52:13-53:12.

<sup>3</sup>A notable exception is the commentary by Motyer.

<sup>4</sup>The major recursive sections of Isaiah may be roughly delineated as follows:

The Book of Isaiah:  
From Zion in the Old Creation to  
Zion in the New

- (1) The Judgment and Transformation of Zion Part 1 (1:2-2:5)
- (2) The Judgment and Transformation of Zion Part 2 (2:6-4:6)
- (3) The Judgment of the Vineyard and Immanuel (5:1-12:6)
- (4) The City of Man versus the City of God (13:1-27:13)
- (5) Trusting the Nations versus Trusting the Word of Yahweh (28:1-37:38)
- (6) Comfort and Redemption for Zion and the World (38:1-55:13)
- (7) Keeping Sabbath in the New Creation (56:1-66:24)

This outline is indebted in part to J. Alec Motyer. Discourse grammar markers demand a major break between 37:38 and 38:1 which considerations of space do not permit to be set forth here.

<sup>5</sup>See Thomas L. Leclerc, *Yahweh is Exalted in Justice: Solidarity and Conflict in Isaiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) and



especially, Peter J. Gentry, "Speaking the Truth in Love (Eph 4:15): Life in the New Covenant Community," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 70-87.

<sup>6</sup>See J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993) and idem, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999).

<sup>7</sup>For a discussion of Exodus language and themes in Isaiah see Bernhard W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg* (ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson; New York: Harper, 1962), 177-95.

<sup>8</sup>The vision in Zech 5:5-11 of the woman in a basket carried by flying women back to Babylon seems to symbolize the task of removing Babylon from the people.

<sup>9</sup>See the emphasis in N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006) that the Bible is more about what God does in response to evil than a description of its origins.

<sup>10</sup>The root is גָּאַל. Psalm 130:8 speaks of redeeming Israel from all her offense, but employs a different root, פָּדָה ("to ransom").

<sup>11</sup>Once again I have adapted my outline from Motyer, *Isaiah*, 383.

<sup>12</sup>See Murray Rae, "Texts in Context: Scripture in the Divine Economy," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1.1 (2007): 1-21, for documentation of recent discussion. His concern for a canonical interpretation is commendable, but his post-modern

solution to keep both Christians and Jews happy is implausible. Even during the last year discussion on the Internet between Christians and Jews was considerable.

<sup>13</sup>Goldingay has noted this as well in his study of Isaiah: "As is often the case, the prophet begins by hinting at something that will receive further explication" John Goldingay, *The Message of Isaiah 40-55: A Literary-Theological Commentary* (London: T & T Clark, 2005), 492.

<sup>14</sup>Daniel I. Block, "My Servant David: Ancient Israel's Vision of the Messiah," in *Israel's Messiah in the Bible and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 17-56. See also Ivan Engnell, "The 'Ebed Yahweh Songs and the Suffering Servant Messiah in 'Deutero-Isaiah'," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 31 (1948): 93; and E. J. Kissane, *The Book of Isaiah: Translated from a Critically Revised Hebrew Text with Commentary* (2 vols.; Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1943), 2:179-80.

<sup>15</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 121.

<sup>16</sup>This insight I owe to Stephen Dempster.

<sup>17</sup>I am painfully aware of the brevity of my statement concerning the identity of the servant in contrast to the difficulties in interpretation and the voluminous literature on this topic.

<sup>18</sup>This division into stanzas is essentially identical to the work of Korpel and de Moor; although, I differ in many details of exegesis—see Marjo C. A. Korpel and Johannes C. de Moor, *The Structure of Classical Hebrew Poetry: Isaiah 40-55* (Leiden:

Brill, 1998), 545-75. Their proposed resolution of exegetical problems in 10a is not satisfactory and this led them to include 10a wrongly with Stanza 3. See discussion below for a response to them.

<sup>19</sup>Adapted from Henri Blocher, *Songs of the Servant* (London: Inter-Varsity, 1975), 61.

<sup>20</sup>Motyer, *Isaiah*, 423.

<sup>21</sup>See S. Craig Glickman, *Knowing Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 89-129.

<sup>22</sup>Note that the recent study of Barthélemy (see below) has not been disseminated widely in North America because it is in French. See my review of John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah in The Baptist Review of Theology* 8 (1998): 150-55.

<sup>23</sup>S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., "Romans 5:12—An Exercise in Exegesis and Theology," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* (ed. Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 300.

<sup>24</sup>See Dominique Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle de l'Ancien Testament*, vol. 2, *Isaïe, Jérémie, Lamentations* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986).

<sup>25</sup>Some compare the use of *nazah* to constructions with *yarah* and appeal to Ps 64:5 and 64:8 as examples where the object is omitted, but this seems weak because these are cases of gapping in Hebrew poetry. See Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle*, 387.

<sup>26</sup>See *Ibid.*, 385-86.

<sup>27</sup>The closest form is the noun מְשֻׁתָּה ("corruption") found only in Lev 22:25.

<sup>28</sup>Goldingay adds significant support: “[t]he observation that, following his desolation, the servant is superhumanly anointed fits with the description of his superhuman exaltation in v. 13. The reference to anointing (mišḥat) parallels the account of David’s anointing as a person good in appearance and a man of [good] looks (1 Sam. 16:12-13, 18; cf. \*Grimm/Dittert). It also again parallels Ps. 89:19-20, 50-51 [20-21, 51-52], where Yhwh’s ‘servant’ David is ‘anointed’ as well as ‘exalted’ and his successor as Yhwh’s ‘servant’ and ‘anointed’ is taunted by ‘many’ peoples. Further, the anointing of this servant as if he were a king parallels the designation of Cyrus as Yhwh’s anointed in 45.1. Tg was not so outlandish in adding reference to Yhwh’s anointing in 52.13 as at 42.1” (Goldingay, *Isaiah 40-55*, 491).

<sup>29</sup>Another recent scholar who maintains the traditional view is Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001). He renders the word “maltreated” and proposes in a critical note reading מוֹשָׁחַת on the basis of one manuscript or מוֹשָׁחַת as in the Babylonian Tradition (see p. 392). In terms of principles of textual criticism, the appeal to one medieval manuscript (Kennicott MS 612) is ludicrous. The form given by Kennicott is unvocalized and probably is a plene spelling for the form in the Babylonian Tradition (see B. Kennicott, *Vetus Testamentum Hebraicum cum Variis Lectionibus* [Oxford, 1780] 2:68). The critical edition of the Babylonian

Tradition has a lacuna at Isaiah 53, see Amparo Alba Cecilia, *Biblia Babylonica: Isaias* (Madrid: CSIC, 1980). Baltzer should have consulted a better edition than BHS, e.g., M. H. Goshen-Gottstein, *The Book of Isaiah* (Hebrew University Bible; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995). The sole support for the Babylonian Tradition is a fragment from the Cairo Genizah (Kb 13) in which a corrector has changed the vocalization to מוֹשָׁחַת. This demonstrates an exegetical tradition within medieval Judaism more than a witness to a pristine text.

<sup>30</sup>Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III: Volume 2 / Isaiah 49 - 55* (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 269.

<sup>31</sup>Barthélemy, *Critique Textuelle*, 388-90. It is noteworthy that the interpretation proposed by Barthélemy and developed here is also that expounded recently by John Goldingay, *Isaiah 40-55*, 490-92, although no reference is made to Barthélemy and discussion of grammatical, lexical, and textual issues is extremely limited (these, however, are not the focus of his work).

<sup>32</sup>Again, Koole misses the import of this variant. See Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah 49 - 55*, 269.

<sup>33</sup>E.g., 65:1 cryptically expresses the idea of an offer of salvation to the nations which is developed more fully in 66:18-24 at the end of this section.

<sup>34</sup>Although the use of “arm” or “hand” to express power is common ancient Near Eastern idiom, the expression “the arm of the Lord” is stereotypical of the Exodus (Exod 6,

12, 16) and later references to it (Isa 51:5, 9; 52:10).

<sup>35</sup>See D. J. A. Clines, *I, He, We and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1976), 15.

<sup>36</sup>Examples of kings or kingdoms pictured as majestic, stately trees: king of Israel (Ezek 17), kings of Egypt and Assyria (Ezek 31), Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Daniel 4:10-12). General instances: Isa 10:19 (עֵץ יַעַר), cf. 10:33-34; cedars Isa 2:13; 14:08 (אַרְזֵי הַלְבָּנוֹן); firs Isa 14:08 (בְּרוֹשִׁים); oaks Isa 2:13 (הַבְּשָׁן). Not only trees as a whole represent kings or kingdoms, but also parts of trees as well: root (שָׁרֵשׁ) Isa 11:01, 10; 53:2; Dan 11:07; stem, stump (גִּזְע) Isa 11:01; branch (חֹטֵר) Isa 11:01; growth (צִמְחָה) Jer 23:05; 33:15; Zech 3:08; 6:12 (cf. Ps 132:17); shoot (יֹנֵק) Isa 53:2; shoot (יִנְיָקָה) Ezek 17:04; shoot (נֹצֵר) Isa 11:01; 14:19; Isa 7:4 זנבות האורים העשנים = from these two tails of smoking sticks; shade (צֶל) Isa 30:3.

<sup>37</sup>This paragraph summarizes the important research in M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

<sup>38</sup>Adapted from N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 48.

<sup>39</sup>Not “a new creature” or even “a new creation,” but “he / she is new creation” is what the grammar of the original text requires as the correct translation.

<sup>40</sup>2 Kgs 13:6 would be an example of תִּחַלְאִים from חטא and החטי from חלה in 2 Chron 16:12 shows חלה treated as a III-א verb.



<sup>58</sup>Korpel and de Moor place בְּרֵעָתוֹ with 11b citing the Septuagint and the Syriac for support, but not mentioning that the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls listed in their sources is against this division. See Korpel and de Moor, *Hebrew Poetry*, 557.

<sup>59</sup>According to O'Connor's method of analyzing poetry in Hebrew, 11a and b would constitute "heavy lines," and this would appropriately function to articulate the division in the stanza between benefits to the Servant and benefits to the many associated with him. See M. O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1980).

<sup>60</sup>R. N. Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: An Interpretation of Isaiah 53* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1978), 67. See also John T. Williams, "Jesus the Servant—Vicarious Sufferer: A Reappraisal," 53-80. Their approaches are well answered by Stephen G. Dempster, "The Servant of the Lord," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 128-78.

<sup>61</sup>N. T. Wright describes the work of Jesus Christ in terms of taking upon himself all the evil of the world and completely exhausting it, giving only love in return. This ends the vicious cycle of paying evil for evil and shows the power of love instead of the love of power, e.g. N. T. Wright, *Evil and the Justice of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 89. While he does clearly speak of Jesus bearing the sins of Israel, his depiction of the

larger picture can be reductionistic in terms of the actual emphasis in Scripture. Isaiah 53 talks about the Servant bearing offences, sins, and transgressions, not just evil in a general sense.

<sup>62</sup>In general, the expression employed by the prophets indicate a New Covenant initiated which takes the place of the Mosaic Covenant (כְּרִית בְּרִית). Occasionally, this is also seen as a renewal of the Mosaic Covenant (כְּרִית בְּרִית, e.g. Ezek 16:60). The distinction between these expressions established by Dumbrell in general holds up to careful scrutiny and the attempt by Paul Williamson to critique Dumbrell fails utterly; see W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 16-26; and Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed With an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 69-75. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23-27* (Anchor Bible 3B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 2343-46, supports Dumbrell's thesis.