

## JESUS MESSIAH AS ISAIAH'S SERVANT OF THE LORD: NEW TESTAMENT EXPLORATIONS

JEANNINE K. BROWN\*

**Abstract:** *Over the past 60 years, scholars have raised major questions about the long-standing view that Jesus and the early church understood Jesus to be the servant of the Lord identified in Isaiah 40-55. In this article, I propose that Second Temple Judaism discerned a discreet servant figure from Isaiah and that New Testament writers drew on that figure for their Christology. Specifically, I take a deeper look at Matthew, Luke, and 1 Peter to explore their distinctive uses of the servant figure and the Isaiah material pointing to that figure. Matthew draws primarily from Isaiah 42 and 53 to show Jesus to be the representative Israelite who brings justice, mercy, and forgiveness to his people. Luke in his two volumes draws frequently from Isaiah 49 to enhance his emphasis on Gentile inclusion. And the author of 1 Peter uses Isaiah 53 primarily to show the servant Jesus as exemplar for the Petrine audience. I conclude by suggesting that this variegated use could go back to Jesus through enigmatic references that he himself was Isaiah's servant of the Lord.*

**Key words:** *Isaiah, servant of the Lord, Matthew, Luke-Acts, 1 Peter, intertextuality, Christology, atonement*

I grew up in church. We were faithful members who attended not only on Sunday but on Wednesday nights, the once-a-month Sunday night missionary evening, and more. And one thing I learned, one thing I knew definitively, was that Isaiah, and chapter 53 particularly, spoke about Jesus. If someone outside the fold needed proof from the OT that Jesus was who he claimed to be, they didn't need to go any further than Isaiah 53. It was proof because Jesus fulfilled the prophecies about the suffering servant in every way. Morna Hooker, who has been a key advocate for the view that the connection between Jesus and Isaiah's suffering servant *does not* go back to Jesus himself, speaks of the traditional reading with clarity and great effect: "Isaiah 53 has, above all other passages, seemed to be the most relevant and divinely inspired: here, apparently, we have a vision of one man suffering vicariously for the sins of others. What Christian can read that moving passage in Isaiah 53 and fail to say, 'Amen?'"<sup>1</sup>

Yet this supposedly clear path from Isaiah's suffering servant to Jesus has not gone unchallenged, not least by Hooker herself. In fact, as I learned when I came into the guild of NT studies, almost every part of the trail leading from the suffer-

---

\* Jeannine Brown is Professor of New Testament and Director of Online Programs at Bethel Seminary, 3900 Bethel Drive, St. Paul, MN 55112. She delivered this plenary address at the 71<sup>st</sup> annual meeting of the ETS in San Diego, CA on November 21, 2020.

<sup>1</sup> Morna D. Hooker, "Did the Use of Isaiah 53 to Interpret His Mission Begin with Jesus?," in William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer, eds., *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), 88–89.

ing servant to the NT writings is contested. First, can we even know if there was a discreet servant figure intended in Isaiah? (In other words, do the servant songs hang together internally?) Second, did Second Temple Judaism see in Isaiah a coherent servant of the Lord figure? Third, did Jesus understand himself to be Isaiah's servant and, if so, did he clearly communicate this understanding to his followers? Finally, do NT authors offer the category of Isaianic servant within their Christological portraits (aside from 1 Peter, which is routinely acknowledged as doing so from Isaiah 53)?

I'd like to address these questions by focusing on a few key NT authors. I'll begin by addressing the Second Temple question of whether Judaism read a discreet and identifiable servant figure from Isaiah, since this is important for understanding what the NT writers are doing.

Then I'll turn to three NT writers who, I will argue, clearly employ the Isaianic servant figure for their Christology—Matthew, Luke (in Luke/Acts), and the author of 1 Peter. I'll spend the majority of my time in these texts, returning now and again to Isaiah and to Isaiah's reception in the Second Temple period. Finally, I will suggest that my readings of Matthew, Luke and Acts, and 1 Peter offer evidence that Jesus likely did understand himself to be the Isaianic servant.

## I. ISAIAH'S SERVANT IN SECOND TEMPLE JUDAISM

We begin with the question of whether Second Temple Judaism read a servant figure from Isaiah, and more specifically from Isaiah 40–55. You may have notice that I've already widened the question from the way it is often framed, "Did Judaism discern a suffering Messiah from Isaiah 53?," a question that was raised and (for many) persuasively argued against by Morna Hooker in 1959.<sup>2</sup> This more narrow question has given rise to quite a number of edited volumes, including those by Janowski and Stuhlmacher, Bellinger and Farmer, and Bock and Glaser.<sup>3</sup> Each has the "Suffering Servant" in their titles or subtitles; and each focuses on Isaiah 53 almost exclusively. While there is a rationale for this laser-sharp focus, my goal is both broader and therefore, I'd suggest, more easily argued. I suggest that Second Temple Judaism did perceive and draw upon a discreet servant figure from Isaiah, and that this figure become an ideal category for the church's Christology.

In this look at Second Temple literature, I'm drawing on the recent work of an ETS member, Holly Beers of Westmont College. In her monograph on Luke-Acts, *The Followers of Jesus as the 'Servant,'* she walks through the literature with the

---

<sup>2</sup> Morna Dorothy Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959), 56–57.

<sup>3</sup> Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (trans. Daniel P. Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004; German orig. 1996); Bellinger and Farmer, *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*; Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser, eds., *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012).

wider framing of the Isaianic servant and the Isaianic New Exodus, with a view to “the Isaianic servant [as] the human agent of the [new exodus].”<sup>4</sup>

Two provisos are in order. First, the identification and isolation of four servant songs by Bernhard Duhm in 1892 can guide us but need not constrain our study.<sup>5</sup> Although these four passages (Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12) are central servant texts in Isaiah, we can easily expand to include other texts in this part of Isaiah (e.g. Isa 41:8–10; 42:5–9, 18–19; 43:1–13; 44:1–8; 49:7–13; and even 61:1–11). There are pronounced conceptual and linguistic connections among the four servant texts that are also found in these and other parts of Isaiah 40–55 (along with Isaiah 56–66).<sup>6</sup> For our purposes this afternoon, however, I will be focusing on the four servant texts as traditionally delineated.

Second, what we see in the reception of Isaiah’s servant figure fits the parameters of Isaiah itself. Two strands emerge in Jewish interpretation: the Isaianic servant interpreted corporately as Israel (or as a faithful remnant of Israel) and the servant interpreted as an individual who acts on behalf of the nation. These two lenses cohere with servant passages in Isaiah, where the servant is variably identified as Israel (41:8; 44:1, 21; 45:4; 49:3) and also as an Israelite individual acting for Israel (49:5–6; 52:13–53:12), what Bo Lim refers to as “an individual originating from within Israel ... who can stand apart from Israel in order to restore [Israel].”<sup>7</sup>

Starting with the earliest reception of Isaiah, later prophetic books show dependence on the Isaianic servant material.<sup>8</sup> The clearest example is found in Dan 11:33–12:3, which alludes to Isaiah through the shared language of “the wise” (יִשְׁכָּרְתִּים), “the righteous” (from צַדִּיק), and “the many” (רַבִּים) as well as themes of abasement and exaltation (cf. Isa 52:13; 53:11–12). Daniel 11:33 reads:

Those who are wise will instruct many, though for a time they will fall by the sword or be burned or captured or plundered.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Holly Beers, *The Followers of Jesus as the ‘Servant’: Luke’s Model from Isaiah for the Disciples in Luke-Acts* (LNTS 535; New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2015), 88.

<sup>5</sup> Moo, while acknowledging that these passages shouldn’t be unduly isolated, speaks of the validity of “continuing to speak of four ‘Servant Songs’ in which the nature and mission of this enigmatic figure are the central themes.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 80.

<sup>6</sup> Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 50.

<sup>7</sup> Bo H. Lim, “The Lynching of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah: Death at the Hands of Persons Unknown,” *ExAnd* 31 (2015): 114.

<sup>8</sup> Already in Isaiah 56–66, we can trace the expansion of “the servant of Yahweh” from chaps. 40–55 to a group of servants (plural) who come after the servant and take up the servant’s mission (see Isa 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8–15; 66:14). This expansion from servant to servants indicates a thoughtful use of the servant figure for a next generation of the faithful. Whether one sees Isaiah 56–66 as by the same author as Isaiah 40–55 or a different one, the extension of a servant figure to a group of (plural) servants in the final sections of Isaiah is a helpful exegetical insight (though in the former case, it would not be an instance of reception).

<sup>9</sup> Translations are from the NIV unless otherwise noted.

We see the movement to exaltation in 12:3:

Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Following a pattern of suffering to exaltation, we hear of a group—the “wise”—who will act on behalf of the “many” and who will enact “righteousness” for them.<sup>10</sup> This recalls the servant from Isa 52:13 and 53:11 (the fourth servant song, as it is called), who is portrayed as “act[ing] wisely” and “justify[ing] many” as his fate moves from suffering to exaltation. Two things are significant about this usage. First, already in Daniel we see that the servant figure from Isaiah has had an impact on Jewish reflection and is being interpreted discreetly. Second, Daniel provides evidence for a *corporate interpretation* of the servant, as a group referred to as “the wise” take on at least part of the role of the individually framed servant of Isa 52:13–53:12.

Zechariah provides another possible set of allusions to Isaiah 53. If so, Zechariah interprets the servant as an individual corresponding to the Davidic figure of Zechariah 12–13 (12:9–13 and 13:7–9).<sup>11</sup>

Beyond the Hebrew Bible, we hear strains from the Isaianic servant songs in a variety of Second Temple texts, including the Dead Sea Scrolls, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach, *1 Enoch*, and the Targums. The DSS provide evidence that the Qumran community claimed the Isaianic servant’s vocation and mission for themselves, sometimes tying the servant to a leader in the community, other times reading the servant collectively.<sup>12</sup> Wisdom of Solomon, which explicitly mentions the *παῖς κυρίου* (“servant of the Lord”) at 2:13, appears to interpret the figure collectively by identifying the servant with “the righteous” at Wis 3:1.<sup>13</sup>

The collective interpretation can also be seen in the Septuagint’s identification of the servant as “Jacob” and “Israel” at Isa 42:1, providing a clearly corporate reading of the servant figure (at least in the earlier Isaianic material).<sup>14</sup> As Huizenga notes regarding the Septuagint of Isa 42:1, “it is the nation of Israel/Jacob that is

<sup>10</sup> Hengel and Bailey note the alternate interpretation of Dan 11:35, with the third-person plural pronoun referring back to the wise themselves or a smaller number within their group. Martin Hengel with Daniel P. Bailey, “The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period,” in *Suffering Servant*, 92.

<sup>11</sup> Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 51–55; Hengel and Bailey, “Isaiah 53,” 85–98.

<sup>12</sup> Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 74. See especially 1QS (3.13; 6.8, 11–18), the two Isaiah scrolls, 4Q540–541, and the Self-Glorification Hymn.

<sup>13</sup> See Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 77–79; Hengel and Bailey, “Isaiah 53,” 129–32; Sydney H. T. Page, “The Suffering Servant between the Testaments,” *NTS* 31 (1985), 482. Each of these authors also reviews allusions to servant material in Sirach and *1 Enoch*.

<sup>14</sup> Hengel and Bailey’s final assessment of the LXX of Isaiah 53 is that it offers an “individual eschatological interpretation” (“Isaiah 53,” 146), without setting at odds the collective and individual interpretations (121). Stuhlmacher also eschews the dichotomy between an individual and corporate interpretation of the servant. Peter Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts,” in *The Suffering Servant*, 161. Also Moo, *Passion Narratives*, 81.

envisioned as bringing justice/judgment (*κρίσις*) and hope to the nations, not an anonymous servant.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, the Targum of Isaiah, contemporaneous with later parts of the NT, appears to provide an example of interpreting the Isaianic servant (of Isaiah 53) as individual and messianic, with the emphasis of the Targumist landing on the Messiah's triumph rather or more than his suffering.<sup>16</sup>

To sum up, the Second Temple evidence points to the influence of Isaiah's servant texts on later Jewish writings, though not in the ways we might expect if we only focus on the portrait of an individual who suffers on behalf of others. There is a significant interpretive strand which sees the Isaianic servant as a collective for Israel (or a remnant of Israel), even in the reception of Isa 52:13–53:12, where we might most expect an individual interpretation.<sup>17</sup> In addition, in the interpretation of the fourth servant song, the theme of the servant's exaltation often receives greater emphasis than the servant's suffering, as Hengel and Bailey have noted (although both themes are evidenced).<sup>18</sup> Taking our revised question, "Did first-century Judaism recognize a discreet Isaianic servant of the Lord?," we can answer "yes" with some confidence and with these qualifications.<sup>19</sup>

## II. THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE ISAIANIC SERVANT: EXPLORATIONS IN MATTHEW, LUKE, AND 1 PETER

Moving to the NT, we will focus our attention on Matthew, on Luke-Acts, and on 1 Peter as representative voices who each "sing" in some distinctive way the Isaianic servant songs.

I begin with a brief word on the direct identifications of Jesus as (Isaianic) servant (*παῖς*). Only in Matthew and Acts is Jesus explicitly referenced as the

<sup>15</sup> Leroy Andrew Huizenga, "The Incarnation of the Servant: The 'Suffering Servant' and Matthean Christology," *HBT* 27 (2005): 35.

<sup>16</sup> See Jostein Ådna, "The Servant of Isaiah 53 as Triumphant and Interceding Messiah: The Reception of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in the Targum of Isaiah with Special Attention to the Concept of the Messiah," in *The Suffering Servant*, 189–224. Ådna dates the Isaiah Targum between 70 and 135 CE (189), in the period shortly before the Bar-Kochba revolt (197).

<sup>17</sup> Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 50: "The figure of the Isaianic servant was often used in [the Second Temple] period," sometimes individually and at other points corporately.

<sup>18</sup> As Hengel and Bailey extrapolate from their close analysis, "The strongest influence [of the 'fourth Servant Song'] upon other texts is exerted by the motif of exaltation in Isaiah 52:13–15 together with 53:11" ("Isaiah 53," 145). They support this statement via a summary of their extensive review: "This motif is applied collectively to the true Israel or the righteous ones in Daniel 11–12 ..., allusively in the *Testament of Moses* 10:9–10 (see §4), clearly in Wisdom 2 and 5 (see §8), and possibly in the *Self-Glorification Hymn* 4Q491 (see §10). ... Whereas in the collective interpretation in Daniel 11–12 and Wisdom 2, the motif of suffering comes clearly to the fore, it is almost completely suppressed in the Similitudes, where suffering affects only the righteous and elect ones" (145–46; emphasis original). Bock notes the textual emphasis on exaltation in the fourth servant song: "vindication for this suffering ... is stressed by bracketing the entire unity (52:13–15; 53:10–12)." Darrell Bock, "Isaiah 53 in Acts 8," in *Gospel According to Isaiah* 53, 137.

<sup>19</sup> Huizenga ("Incarnation of the Servant") helpfully presses for a broadening from the first question to the second, although he doesn't engage that second question much.

Isaianic *παῖς*, the term most often used in the Septuagint for the servant.<sup>20</sup> Luke in Acts makes this connection plain with his multiple references to “[God’s] servant Jesus” (3:13; 4:27, 30; cf. 3:26),<sup>21</sup> especially as the first in this series of references includes a cluster of echoes from Isaiah 53: God “has *glorified* his *servant* Jesus .... You disowned the holy and *righteous* one.”

- Jesus as the “servant” (ὁ *παῖς* in Acts 3:13; Isa 52:13)
- the servant Jesus “glorified” (δοξάζω in Acts 3:13; Isa 52:13; cf. 52:14; 53:2)<sup>22</sup>
- the servant Jesus described as “the holy and righteous one” (ὁ *δίκαιος* in Acts 3:14; Isa 53:11)<sup>23</sup>

Matthew, though only identifying Jesus as *παῖς* once in his Gospel, clearly makes a connection to the Isaianic servant in his citation of Isaiah 42 in Matthew 12. Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy: “Look, my servant whom I have chosen” (Matt 12:18, citing Isa 42:1). This is a crucial and extended citation in Matthew, so as we turn to the first Gospel we’ll begin by looking more closely at Matthew 12.

### III. THE USE OF THE ISAIANIC SERVANT IN MATTHEW: JESUS’S MISSION AS ISRAEL AND TO ISRAEL

Matthew draws on Isaiah’s servant songs—in two quotations and a number of clear allusions to Isaiah 42 and from 52–53.<sup>24</sup> Most prominently, Matthew cites Isa 42:1–4—the longest of his OT citations, near the center of Jesus’s Galilean ministry (12:18–21). By using such a lengthy citation, Matthew can foster quite a number of connections between Isaiah 42 and Jesus’s Galilean ministry.

But, first, why Isaiah 42? This opening ode in Isaiah to the Lord’s servant makes no mention of suffering or death. How does Matthew find it useful? I would argue that he harnesses this particular text, because it offers an *idealization* of the servant, who serves the nations by enacting mercy and justice.<sup>25</sup> We have already noted the collective interpretation of this text in the Septuagint—Israel itself is to

<sup>20</sup> The word *δοῦλος* is used twice for the servant in Isa 49:3, 5; cf. 48:20. The limited use of *παῖς* for Jesus by NT writers is not a significant argument against their reliance on the Isaianic servant figure since, as we will see, the conceptual and textual connections are significant.

<sup>21</sup> With the language of the servant forming two sets of inclusions at Acts 3:13–26 and 4:27–30.

<sup>22</sup> Bock (“Isaiah 53,” 142) suggests that “the juxtaposition of ‘servant’ with the idea that God has *glorified* the servant [in Acts 3:13]” increases the likelihood “that it is the Isaianic Servant that is being involved” (along with the citation of Isaiah 53 in Luke 22:37).

<sup>23</sup> These echoes prepare the reader of Acts to hear the subsequent references to Jesus as servant in connection to Isaiah’s servant of Yahweh, a connection fostered, as we will see, by regular citations or allusions to the Isaiah servant texts. Contra Tiede, who sees these references in line with the commonplace language of ‘servant of God/the Lord’ in the OT, which was applied broadly to any number of OT persons. David L. Tiede, *Prophecy and History in Luke-Acts* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 45.

<sup>24</sup> Although the question of the text type of Matt 12:18–21 is difficult, in neither that text or in 8:17 is the LXX of Isaiah the obvious precursor.

<sup>25</sup> John Goldingay, “Servant of Yahweh,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets* (ed. Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 706. Goldingay suggests, “We might see Yahweh’s servant in Isaiah 42:1–4 as ‘the ideal Israel.’”

fulfill the vocation of reaching the nations: “Jacob, my servant ... Israel, my chosen” (Isa 42:1 LXX). Yet as Isaiah makes clear later in the same chapter (42:18–25), “Israel’s identity and role as servant is compromised” through lack of responsiveness,<sup>26</sup> so it will fall to a remnant or an individual from within Israel to fulfill the divine commission.

This Isaianic vision for Israel’s mission in 42:1–4 fits Jesus’s Galilean ministry to a tee. Matthew has been accenting how Jesus ministers in the power of the Spirit with compassion to his own people (and a few Gentiles of faith), showing justice on behalf of those who have been “distressed and discarded” (9:36; my translation). As Frederik Poulsen suggests, this extended Isaiah quotation in Matt 12 provides “a kind of micro-cosmos of the larger story of Jesus.”<sup>27</sup> And as I suggest in an essay on “Matthew’s Christology and the Isaianic Servant,” Matthew locates his servant Christology within (or at least in close proximity to) his Israel Christology—Jesus comes as representative Israel for Israel’s redemption.

From this citation in Matthew 12, we can glance backward and forward to hear the resonance between Isa 42:1 and the divine words affirming Jesus at Matt 3:17 and 17:5—at his baptism and at the transfiguration. While Matthew likely borrows these lines from Mark, where both Ps 2:7 and Isa 42:1 provide possible allusions, Matthew bends the allusion at the baptism in the direction of Isaiah 42:1, first by moving from Mark’s second-person “you” (1:11) to third person: “*This is my son*” (3:17).<sup>28</sup> Matthew also takes Mark’s description from 1:10 of the Spirit coming “on [Jesus]”—εἰς αὐτόν—and aligns it more closely with the Septuagint of Isa 42:1: ἐπ’ αὐτόν. In addition, Matthew alone among the Synoptics has “with him I am well pleased” in the Transfiguration account, aligning it more closely with the baptism affirmation and with the citation of Isa 42:1 at Matt 12:18.

All to say, whatever Mark’s intended allusion(s) at the baptism and transfiguration, Matthew points clearly in the direction of Isaiah 42 for framing Jesus’s Galilean ministry from beginning to end. As Stuhlmacher puts it, Matthew’s “understanding of Jesus’ mission on the basis of the ... tradition of the (suffering) Servant has been extended from Jesus’ passion predictions and the passion story to encompass the whole story of Jesus.”<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Jeannine K. Brown, “Matthew’s Christology and Isaiah’s Servant: A Fresh Look at a Perennial Issue,” in *Treasures New & Old: Essays in Honor of Donald Hagner* (ed. Carl S. Sweatman and Clifford B. Kvidahl; Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2017), 100.

<sup>27</sup> Frederik Poulsen, *God, His Servant, and the Nations in Isaiah 42:1–9: Biblical Theological Reflections after Brevard S. Childs and Hans Hübner* (FAT 2/73; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 181.

<sup>28</sup> On the question of Matthew’s (and Mark’s and Luke’s) use of υἱός not παῖς in the baptism affirmation, it is interesting to notice that these two terms have semantic overlap and, as argued by de Troyer, are virtually identical in Wisdom of Solomon (an important Jewish text that draws on Isaiah’s servant figure). Kristin de Troyer, “An Exploration of the Wisdom of Solomon as the Missing Link between Isaiah and Matthew,” in *Isaiah in Context: Studies in Honour of Arie van Der Kooij on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (ed. M. N. van der Meer, P. van Keulen, W. van Peursen, and B. ter Haar Romeny; VTSup 138; Leiden: Brill, 2010), 224 (see also her discussion of the mixing of terms παῖς and δοῦλος in the various Greek translations of Isaiah; 221).

<sup>29</sup> Stuhlmacher, “Isaiah 53,” 158.

Along with the first servant song, Matthew also understands the fourth song to fit hand in glove with Jesus's ministry. We see this first in chapters 8–9, which spotlight Jesus's healing ministry in Galilee. After the first trio of healings, Matthew cites from Isa 53:4 to show Jesus to be the Isaianic servant who removes illness to bring healing to his people:

He took our sicknesses [τὰς ἀσθενείας],  
And carried our diseases [τὰς νόσους]. (Matt 8:17)

Notice that Matthew finds this text a fitting one (as he does Isaiah 42) for Jesus's ministry *apart from his suffering and death*. Rikki Watts has argued that “Mat[t]hew's purpose in 8:17 is not primarily to identify Jesus with the vicariously suffering servant of Isaiah 53 ... his fundamental concern is to identify Jesus's all-inclusive healings as the fulfillment of the long-awaited full restoration of Israel.”<sup>30</sup>

It is not until Jesus predicts his passion that we begin to hear allusions to the fourth servant song used to highlight his death on behalf of his people and for the nations. A prominent allusion to Isaiah 53 comes at the conclusion to Jesus's travels to Jerusalem (20:28), and another at his celebration of the Passover with his disciples (26:28), with the shared language of “the many” (πολλοί), taking sin (ἁμαρτία), and the giving of a life (δίδωμι, ψυχή).<sup>31</sup>

Matt 20:28: “just as the son of man did not come to be served but to serve [διακονέω] and to give [δίδωμι] his soul [life; ψυχή] as a ransom [λύτρον]<sup>32</sup> for many [πολλοί].”

Matt 26:28: “for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many [πολλοί] for the forgiveness of sins [ἁμαρτία].”<sup>33</sup>

Isa 53:11–12: “a righteous one who is well subject [δουλέω] to many ... his soul [life; ψυχή] was given over to death ... he bore the sins [ἁμαρτία] of many [πολλοί], and because of their sins he was given over [παραδίδωμι].” [NETS]

These verses alluded quite clearly to Isa 53:11–12.

We could also note the echoes from Isaiah 50 and 53 sprinkled across Matthew's passion narrative:

<sup>30</sup> Rikki Watts, “Messianic Servant or the End of Israel's Exilic Curses? Isaiah 53.4 in Matthew 8.17,” *JSNT* (2015): 82. Wilkins suggests that “while this does not explicitly introduce Jesus' vicarious suffering and death for sin, it certainly prepares the way for it.” Michael J. Wilkins, “Isaiah 53 and the Message of the Salvation in the Gospels,” in *Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, 122.

<sup>31</sup> While πολλοί (“many”) is a commonplace word in the NT and LXX, Farmer helpfully notes its distinctiveness in the contexts of Isaiah 53 and Matthew 20, 28 (and Mark 10, 14): “Nowhere else in the life and faith of Israel outside of Isaiah 53 do we find a reference to a savior figure who gives his life in a redemptive act that benefits ‘the many.’” William R. Farmer, “Reflections on Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 264.

<sup>32</sup> Moo (*Passion Narratives*, 125) suggests that λύτρον is potentially “a free translation, or, perhaps better, interpretation of פְּדוּת in Is. 53:10.”

<sup>33</sup> For the ways Matthew has conformed his language more closely to Isaiah (LXX), see Brown, “Isaiah's Servant,” 104.



- Jesus like the servant is mistreated, beaten with “blows” (ράπισματα or ραπίζω) and his “face” “spit upon” (πρόσωπον, ἐμπτύματα, or ἐμπτύω) from Isa 50:6 and Matt 26:67;
- Jesus like the servant remains silent as he is mistreated (Isa 53:7; Matt 26:63a; 27:12, 14);
- Jesus’s death is connected to the (one who is) rich (πλούσιος; Isa 53:9; Matt 27:57).<sup>34</sup>

While none of these echoes may be compelling on their own, “by interpreting Jesus’ ministry and his impending death through the lens of the servant of the Lord figure in earlier chapters, Matthew can be more allusive with these precursor texts in his narration of Jesus’ passion.”<sup>35</sup>

As we consider Matthew’s use of Isaiah 53 (and 50) to inform his reader’s understanding of Jesus’s death, we should keep in mind how the evangelist has framed his use of the servant figure earlier in his Gospel—through the lens of his Israel Christology. Jesus as the one who fits the idyllic vision of the servant (Isa 42:1–4) stands in to represent his people and the nations in his innocent suffering and death. Jesus acts as “Israel within Israel” to enact restoration.<sup>36</sup> His vindication displayed as God raises him from the dead completes the picture from Isa 52:13–53:12 and coheres with Jewish readings of the period that gave more focused attention to the servant’s exaltation in the fourth servant song.

#### IV. THE USE OF THE ISAIANIC SERVANT IN LUKE-ACTS: THE MISSION TO ISRAEL AND THE NATIONS

While Luke shares with Matthew an interest in the fourth servant song, his strategic use of the second song, and more particularly Isa 49:5–6, is distinctive.<sup>37</sup> In this song, Yahweh identifies the scope of the servant’s mission:

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 my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

Luke’s frequent use of this passage is not surprising given its dual emphasis on Israel’s restoration and salvation for the Gentiles.<sup>38</sup> It serves his Gentile mission theme

<sup>34</sup> For more on these echoes, see Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew* (THNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 366.

<sup>35</sup> Brown and Roberts, *Matthew*, 366.

<sup>36</sup> Beers’s language for the interpretation of Isaiah in the LXX in *Followers of Jesus*, 56.

<sup>37</sup> Luke also seems echo Isa 42:1 at Jesus’s baptism (3:22), transfiguration (9:35; “chosen one”), and in the passion narrative (23:35; “chosen one”).

<sup>38</sup> There is debate whether Luke is using the Hebrew or LXX, which are quite distinct at Isa 49:6a (where the restoration of Israel is either “too small a thing” [Heb] or “a great thing” [LXX]). For the argument that Luke is using the LXX and is assuming its context for 49:6a, see Jordan Daniel May, “Is Luke a Reader-Response Critic? Luke’s Aesthetic Trajectory of Isaiah 49.6 in Acts 13.47,” in *Trajectories in the Book of Acts: Essays in Honor of John Wesley Wyckoff* (ed. Paul Alexander, Jordan Daniel May, and

well. And Luke references this text at strategic moments across his two volumes.<sup>39</sup> It first appears in his infancy narrative as Jesus's identity is being clarified. It then forms the basis for Jesus's commissioning of his disciples at Luke 24:47 and, even more clearly, at Acts 1:8. Luke provides a full citation of Isa 49:6 at the beginning of the Gentile mission in Acts 13:47 (in Pisidian Antioch), and he concludes Paul's final defense in Acts (before Agrippa; Acts 26) with another clear allusion to this Isaianic text.

Isaiah 49:6 is clearly alluded to first at Luke 2:32,<sup>40</sup> in the mouth of Simeon who takes the infant Jesus in his arms and praises God (Luke 2:29–32):

Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,  
 you may now dismiss your servant in peace.  
 For my eyes have seen your salvation,<sup>41</sup>  
 which you have prepared in the sight of all nations:  
 a light for revelation to the Gentiles,  
 and the glory of your people Israel. (Luke 2:29–32)

The phrase “light . . . to the Gentiles” comes from Isa 49:6 (represented in both the LXX and Hebrew), along with the reference to “salvation” and to the servant's role in Israel's restoration or return (again, both LXX and Heb). Although Simeon does not refer to Jesus as the servant (in fact, he uses the term for himself in a way similar to other OT deferential uses), the implication of applying the servant's mission to Jesus seems fairly obvious.<sup>42</sup> This allusion sets up Luke's reader to understand Jesus to be the Isaianic servant in his mission to his own people and to the Gentiles.<sup>43</sup>

This mission is confirmed and fully inaugurated at the conclusion of Luke's Gospel and the beginning of Acts, in Jesus's shorter and longer commissions to his followers (Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8):

and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47; introduced by references to “the Scriptures” and “what is written”; Luke 24:45–46).

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Robert G. Reid; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 59–86. For the view that Luke is using the Hebrew, see Darrell L. Bock, *Acts* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 464.

<sup>39</sup> Beers suggests the likelihood that “Luke used Isaiah [not only the Servant Songs] in a subtle intertextual way to *structure* his two-volume work” (*Followers of Jesus*, 88; emphasis original).

<sup>40</sup> Although an echo already occurs at Luke 1:79: “to shine on the ones living in darkness.”

<sup>41</sup> Luke uses the more unusual neuter form for “salvation”—σωτήριον (2:30; also 3:6; Acts 28:28), which is as common as σωτηρία in Isaiah 40–66; Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 96.

<sup>42</sup> Israel is referred to as “servant” (παῖς) in Luke 1:54, paving the way for an Israel Christology to begin emerging in 2:29–32.

<sup>43</sup> For Luke 4:16–30 and its use of Isaiah 61:1–2 (often considered a servant-focused text), see Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 103–5, and Mark L. Strauss, *The Davidic Messiah in Luke-Acts: The Promise and Its Fulfillment in Lukan Christology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), who suggests that Jesus “is the herald of Isa. 61.1–2—a figure Luke almost certainly identifies with the servant” (325).

In Luke 24, the scope of the mission is “to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem,” echoing the dual focus of the servant’s mission in concept though not much in language (“nations” for *ethnē* is the only verbal link with the LXX). Yet Acts 1:8, which mirrors the movement from Jerusalem to the nations in Luke 24:47, includes the particular language from the conclusion of Isa 49:6, as the servant’s mission will reach “to the ends of the earth” (ἕως ἑσχάτου τῆς γῆς; LXX and also reflecting closely the Hebrew).<sup>44</sup>

In Paul’s speech before Agrippa near the conclusion of Acts, an allusion to Isa 49:6 reappears one last time, there in Paul’s description of the Messiah’s mission to “bring the message of light to his own people and to the Gentiles” (φῶς μέλλει καταγγέλλειν τῷ τε λαῷ καὶ τοῖς ἔθνεσιν; Acts 26:23). The emphasis in this clause (in terms of word order) is on the “light” that has begun to be preached upon Jesus’s resurrection to these two groups: the *λαός*—the Jewish people—and to the Gentiles. The linguistic and conceptual connections to Isa 49:6 are clear enough, especially given the paradigmatic use of this second servant song across Luke–Acts.

I have intentionally left the citation of Isa 49:6 in Acts 13:47 to this point, since it is the only citation among these allusions to that Isaianic text and also because it is the single example that does not connect the servant’s mission to Jesus’s mission directly. When Paul and Barnabas have a second opportunity to preach in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch, the antagonism they receive from some of the Jews provides the occasion for their expressed engagement with Gentiles going forward (Acts 13:44–52).<sup>45</sup> At this important juncture in Acts,<sup>46</sup> Luke narrates their rationale for the movement to Gentile mission, drawn from Isa 49:6:

I have made you a light for the Gentiles,  
that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.<sup>47</sup>

The introduction to the citation is important (13:46b–47a): “*we* now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has *commanded us*.” The citation seems to be directed at the mission of Paul and Barnabas; in other words, it is the *apostolic* mission to Jew and Gentile that finds its grounding in Isaiah 49. Many scholars point to the second-person, singular pronouns (σε; “you”) in the citation itself as good reason to see Jesus as the implied servant here as elsewhere. While this is certainly a fair reading, the language of the introduction to the citation is framed as the Lord’s command *to Paul and Barnabas*. The servant’s mission is extended to multiple servants who take up the universal mission to Jew and Gentile. Holly Beers refers to

<sup>44</sup> Pao provides a quite a number of conceptual and linguistic links between Luke’s conclusion and Isaiah (84–91) and concludes that “Isa 49:6 is indeed behind Luke 24:47.” David W. Pao, *Acts and the Isaianic New Exodus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 86.

<sup>45</sup> May notes the chiasmic structure of 13:44–52 and suggests that the Isaiah citation becomes “the focal point” of the passage (“Trajectory of Isaiah 49.6,” 63).

<sup>46</sup> Beers (*Followers of Jesus*, 163) notes that this Isaianic reference defines the mission of Paul and Barnabas and, in its placement, becomes “paradigmatic for their (especially Paul’s) activities in the rest of Acts.”

<sup>47</sup> The citation is clearly Septuagintal, with one key omission (εἰς διαθήκην γένους). Pao, noting the omission of this phrase in the Alexandrian group of the LXX, is cautious about drawing much from its omission in Acts (*Isaianic New Exodus*, 97).

Paul and Barnabas's quotation of Isa 49:6 as "an identity claim: they are embodying the vocation of the servant."<sup>48</sup> This expansion of the servant's mission and so identity is already hinted at in Acts 1:8, where the role of "witness" (an Isaianic servant function) is given to Jesus's followers as they are commissioned to be witnesses "to the ends of the earth."

Luke's thoroughgoing use of Isaiah 49 helps us to decipher the rather unique way he draws on the fourth servant song—the "suffering servant"—in his Gospel. A citation and a few likely allusions to Isaiah 52–53 occur in Luke's passion narrative. The citation derives from Isa 53:12 and comes at the conclusion of the Passover meal Jesus shares with the twelve apostles:

It is written: "And he was numbered with the transgressors"; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment. (Luke 22:37)

The introductory and concluding formulas point to Jesus as the one being "numbered with the transgressors" *as a scriptural fulfillment*,<sup>49</sup> and Luke shows that this is narratively fulfilled when Jesus is crucified with a criminal on either side of him (Luke 23:33), and in Jesus's prayer for God to forgive those who are crucifying him (Luke 23:34; cf. Isa 53:12 with its reference to making intercession for the transgressors).<sup>50</sup> Allusive uses of the fourth servant song appear across the passion narrative:<sup>51</sup>

- passion predictions of Jesus being "handed over" (*παράδιδωμι*; cf. Isa 53:6, 12 with Luke 22:21–22; 24:7; cf. 9:44; 18:32), pointing to reliance on Isaiah;<sup>52</sup>
- identification of Jesus as "righteous" (*δίκαιος*; cf. Isa 53:11 with Luke 23:47),<sup>53</sup> a motif that is carried through in Acts, where Jesus is referred to as "the righteous one" three times (*ὁ δίκαιος*; 3:14; 7:52; 22:14), once in a context that clearly evokes Isaiah 52–53 (Acts 3:13–26);
- identification of Jesus as "exalted" (*δοξάζω* in the header to the fourth song—Isa 52:13; cf. Luke 24:26 [cognate noun]; Acts 3:13).<sup>54</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 163; see Bock, "Isaiah 53," 142; May, "Trajectory of Isaiah 49.6," 72. May notes that "perhaps the ambiguity in Isaiah's designation of the Servant of Yahweh as collective Israel in some cases or as an individual personality in other cases, allows Luke to interpret the Servant's mission polysemously as both Jesus and the disciples" (81).

<sup>49</sup> Strauss (*Davidic Messiah*, 326) notes, "Though the citation is probably traditional, it is given special prominence in Luke's narrative by its long and empathic introductory formula."

<sup>50</sup> Although Jesus's affirmation of forgiveness from the cross is not represented in all manuscripts of Luke, Green argues on internal grounds that it is Lukan. Joel Green, *The Death of Jesus: Tradition and Interpretation in the Passion Narrative* (WUNT 2/33; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1988), 91–92.

<sup>51</sup> Strauss provides a catalog of these, along with a helpful discussion of each (*Davidic Messiah*, 324–33).

<sup>52</sup> For an extended discussion of this and other linguistic connections between Isaiah 50 and 53 in the passion predictions, see Moo, *Passion Narratives*, 86–112.

<sup>53</sup> In place of Mark's *υἱὸς θεοῦ* ("son of God"; 15:39).

<sup>54</sup> This language is also indicative of Dan 7:13–14.

These likely allusions to the fourth servant song along with the expressed citation point in the direction of Vincent Taylor's affirmation that Luke's passion narrative "depicts Jesus as the Servant of the Lord without using the name."<sup>55</sup>

A second and final citation from Isaiah 53 comes in Acts 8, where an Ethiopian eunuch is reading but not understanding Isa 53:7–8:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.  
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.  
Who can speak of his descendants?  
For his life was taken from the earth. (Acts 8:32–34)

Philip enlightens the man by telling him "the good news about Jesus," with Luke clearly implying that Jesus is this one whose "life was taken from the earth" unjustly—the servant of Isaiah 53.<sup>56</sup>

Luke doesn't lead with what we might expect from the fourth servant song—the *suffering* servant. We saw that Matthew first uses Isaiah 53 (v. 4) to show Jesus to be Israel's healer before connecting this text with Jesus's death. Now we see that Luke, though tying Isaiah 52–53 more exclusively to Jesus's death, emphasizes exaltation as much as suffering (e.g. Luke 24:26; Acts 3:13) and accents Jesus as the righteous one *among* transgressors more than *for* transgressors. This has gotten Luke accused of not actually having an atonement theology. Does Luke downplay the vicarious elements of Isaiah 52–53 to such an extent that *his* is an atonement-less Gospel?<sup>57</sup>

Here's what we can affirm. Luke's interest in the fourth servant song is focused on the movement from suffering *to vindication and exaltation*,<sup>58</sup> which fits other Second Temple materials that also focus more on the servant's exaltation than suffering. As Mark Strauss notes, "The atoning significance of [Jesus'] death, though not wholly absent in Luke-Acts, moves to the background."<sup>59</sup> Yet Jesus's death

<sup>55</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Passion Narrative of St. Luke* (SNTSMS 19; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 138. Although some of these terms have much in common with the figure of a righteous one who suffers from the Psalms, Isaiah and Psalms need not be pitted against one another since resonance might go in both directions. There is enough evidence of Isaianic use in Luke to warrant seeing these echoes from that direction at least. For an argument for the Psalms as the relevant intertext, see Joshua W. Jipp, "Luke's Scriptural Suffering Messiah: A Search for Precedent, a Search for Identity," *CBQ* 72 (2010): 255–74.

<sup>56</sup> The citation itself affirms two things about Jesus's death: it was unjust; and, in the process of going to his death, he did not contend (he was silent as a lamb). The latter may be implied in Jesus's silence before Herod (23:9), although Luke does not include the two Markan references to Jesus's silence (Mark 14:61; 15:5). The context of the citation in Acts 8 indicates that it is not the details of Isaiah 53 that are the focus but the servant figure itself (Bock, "Isaiah 53," 139).

<sup>57</sup> E.g. Hans Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke* (trans. Geoffrey Buswell; New York: Harper, 1961), 201.

<sup>58</sup> Strauss, *Davidic Messiah*, 326.

<sup>59</sup> Strauss, *Davidic Messiah*, 326. According to Strauss, Jesus is portrayed across his passion narrative as "a suffering righteous figure, a type well established in Judaism [though] Luke moves beyond this general description to the more specific one of the Isaianic servant, the suffering righteous one *par excellence*" (324).

serves a representative function according Luke 22:20, when Jesus speaks of his blood being “poured out for you.” And we hear an echo and expansion of this idea in Acts 20:28, where Paul refers to the church as “bought with [Jesus] own blood.”

So, why is this motif more “tucked in” for Luke than for Matthew? Beers offers one rationale in her suggestion that Luke is aware of “the atoning nature of Jesus’ work” but doesn’t accent it “so that the servant vocation is open enough to include others.”<sup>60</sup> In this reading, Luke’s use of Isa 49:6 as a central lens for understanding Jesus’s and the church’s mission to Israel and for the nations helps us make sense of why he engages the fourth servant song as he does. Strauss suggests that Luke subsumes soteriology to Christology and ecclesiology, as he is interested in communicating “the fact *that* salvation has arrived in the person and work of Jesus rather than ... the theological basis upon which Jesus saves.”<sup>61</sup>

#### V. THE USE OF THE ISAIANIC SERVANT IN 1 PETER: JESUS AS EXEMPLAR FOR CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL WITNESS

We turn, finally and more briefly, to 1 Pet 2:18–25. The author of this letter includes a household code in its central section, likely because the letter’s recipients are experiencing tension between their Christian allegiance and the religious commitments of other members of their own households. In chapter 2, Peter addresses Christian slaves, at least some of whom are suffering under “harsh” masters (2:18). Like the address to Christian women with husbands “who do not believe the word” (3:1), these slaves are in the precarious position of going against the religious commitments of their householder (2:20; 3:6). Peter calls them to live honorably (2:19; 3:2–6) within the expectations of culture and household, all the while having an intentionally Christological and missional focus (2:21; 3:1).

As the author draws on Christology to help slaves as they “suffer for doing good” (2:20), he finds particularly apropos the figure of the suffering servant from various parts of Isaiah 53.<sup>62</sup> He uses these various allusions to provide an *exemplar*: “Christ suffered on your behalf, leaving you a pattern so you could follow in his footsteps” (2:21).<sup>63</sup> Then, in 2:22–25, the author deftly weaves together lines, phrases, and evocations from Isa 53:4–9 in such a way as to suggest that he knows the Septuagint of Isaiah 53 well and understands Jesus to be a fulfillment of the discreet servant figure described there.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Beers, *Followers of Jesus*, 149.

<sup>61</sup> Strauss, *Davidic Messiah*, 352.

<sup>62</sup> The arrangement of the allusions in 1 Peter 2 does not follow the order of Isaiah 53; instead, the Petrine author “follows roughly the order of the passion of Jesus, with vv. 22–23 reflecting the trial, and v. 24 the crucifixion.” Paul J. Achtemeier, “Suffering Servant and Suffering Christ in 1 Peter,” in *The Future of Christology: Essays in Honor of Leander E. Keck* (ed. Abraham J. Malherbe and Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 180.

<sup>63</sup> All translations of 1 Peter 2 and Isaiah 53 (LXX) are my own.

<sup>64</sup> Evans notes, “There can be little doubt that the Christology of the apostle Peter was deeply influenced by Isaiah 52:13–53:12.” Craig A. Evans, “Isaiah 53 in the Letters of Peter, Paul, Hebrews, and John,” in Bock and Glaser, *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53*, 159.

- 1 Pet 2:22<sup>65</sup> Christ: “who *committed no sin and no deceit was found in his mouth*”  
 Isa 53:9 Servant: “*committed no lawless act and no deceit was found in his mouth*”  
 [ἀμαρτίαν // ἀνομίαν]<sup>66</sup> οὐκ ἐποίησεν οὐδὲ εὐρέθη δόλος ἐν τῷ στόματι αὐτοῦ
- 1 Pet 2:23 Christ: “when he suffered, he made no threats” potentially echoing  
 Isa 53:7 Servant: “did not open his mouth”<sup>67</sup>
- 1 Pet 2:24a Christ: “who himself *bore our sins*”  
 Isa 53:4 Servant: “this one *bore our sins*”  
 (cf. vv. 11–12) τὰς ἀμαρτίας ἡμῶν αὐτὸς [ἀνήνεγκεν // φέρει]
- 1 Pet 2:24c/d Christ on the cross: “so we might die to *sins* and *live* for righteousness”  
 Isa 53:8 Servant: “because his *life* is taken up from the earth, because of the *lawless acts* of my people he was led to death.”  
 [ζήσωμεν // ζωή] [ἀμαρτίαν // ἀνομίαν]
- 1 Pet 2:24e Christ: “of [by] whose *wounds* you *have been healed*.”  
 Isa 53:5 Servant: “by his *wounds* we *are healed*.”  
 τῷ μῶλωπι [ιάθητε // ιάθημεν]
- 1 Pet 2:25 Petrine author/audience: “For *you were as sheep who had strayed* . . .”  
 Isa 53:6 Isaianic author/audience: “All *we like sheep have strayed* . . .”  
 ὡς πρόβατα [πλανώμενοι // ἐπλανήθημεν]

What I want us to notice in this rather densely packed set of allusions to Isaiah 53 is that the focus in the first half of the paragraph is on Jesus’s behavior as a model for the Petrine believers when they encounter unjust suffering and slander (2:22–23).<sup>68</sup> Jesus as exemplar introduced in 2:21 is fleshed out in 2:22–23: Christians are not to retaliate when faced with unjust suffering (cf. 3:9).

<sup>65</sup> Each of his first three allusions are introduced with a relative pronoun going back to Christ in v. 21.

<sup>66</sup> While Peter uses “sin” rather than “lawless act” (Isaiah), these terms are synonyms and both occur across Isaiah 53 (ἀνομία at 53:5, 8, 9; and ἀμαρτία at 53:4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12 (2x); Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 200 n. 152.

<sup>67</sup> Achtemeier (“Suffering Servant,” 179) argues that “the silence of the servant in Isa 53:7 is surely reflected here” (in 1 Pet 2:23).

<sup>68</sup> As Achtemeier (“Suffering Servant,” 177) suggests, “There is ample reason to think that the two groups the author of 1 Peter has selected (slaves, wives of non-Christian husbands) are to serve metaphorically for the status of all Christians who comprise a powerless group within the larger structure of the Roman Empire.”

In the last two verses, however, the focus shifts to Jesus's death and its effects for Peter's audience. Here, Peter gives a nod to the vicarious or representative nature of Jesus's death. He "suffered on your behalf" (2:21) and "bore our sins in his body on the cross," and "by [his] wounds you have been healed" (2:24). As Hooker rightly notes, the focus on the exemplary nature of Christ's sufferings expands into the notion that these sufferings have atoning value—"an idea which, strictly speaking, is not relevant to his argument."<sup>69</sup> Yet the atoning value and so uniqueness of Christ's suffering and death fits well other parts of 1 Peter (see 1:18–19; 3:18). Therefore, we can speak of the author's dual interest in what Craig Evans calls the "soteriological singularity and ethical exemplarity of Christ's suffering."<sup>70</sup>

Even in 2:24–25, however, the focus is on how that death "on behalf of" provides the restoration necessary for living like Jesus. Jesus's death allows believers to "live for righteousness" (2:24). The redemptive emphasis is pointedly on the restoration achieved by Christ's death. Because of his death, believers are able to "live for righteousness"—they are able to follow "in his footsteps" and "do good" even when suffering (2:20).<sup>71</sup> This redemption for restoration is affirmed in 2:25: In spite of having been like wayward sheep, the Petrine Christians have "been turned<sup>72</sup> to the shepherd and guardian of [their] souls." Jesus provides both the pattern and, through his sacrifice, the possibility of living it out.

## VI. SUMMARY OF NEW TESTAMENT EXPLORATIONS

To conclude our exegetical tour and before I provide a final word about Jesus's own self-consciousness as the servant, I offer this summary. Matthew focuses his attention on the first servant song (Isa 42:1–4) to connect Jesus's entire ministry of compassionate healing with the Isaianic servant's mission to restore Israel (as "Israel within Israel") and to bring justice to the nations, a part of Jesus's mission that breaks out in full expanse after his resurrection (28:18–20). Matthew also draws on Isaiah 53 to illuminate Jesus's representative death for his people. He will become "a ransom for many" (20:28) and enact long-awaited restoration through the "forgiveness of sins" (26:28).

Luke also draws on the fourth song to inform Jesus's death and specifically to highlight Jesus as the "righteous one" who will be crucified "among the transgressors" (Luke 22:37) and to accent the unjust nature of his death (Acts 8:32–33). Luke's emphasis lands more so on Jesus's resurrection exaltation than on suffering, especially in Luke 24 and in Acts. We've also seen that Luke, across his two volumes, accents the second servant song (Isaiah 49) to express how the mission to Israel and then to the Gentiles is grounded in the servant's mission, showing Jesus

<sup>69</sup> Hooker, "Use of Isaiah 53," 92.

<sup>70</sup> Evans, "Isaiah 53," 174.

<sup>71</sup> "Because Christ's innocent suffering bears away the sin that separates Jesus's followers from God, they are free to endure similarly innocent suffering, because they know that such suffering, far from being evidence of their rejection by God, is in fact proof that they have been called by him (2:21)" (Achtmeier, *1 Peter*, 203).

<sup>72</sup> Achtmeier, *1 Peter*, 204.



and then his followers to fulfill the role of the Isaianic servant. Luke's focus on a universal mission leads him to Isa 49:5–6.

The author of 1 Peter uses only the fourth song (Isa 52:13–53:12), but in a way that is more explicit, and potentially more developed, than the other NT authors.<sup>73</sup> First Peter highlights Jesus as the servant, who is the model for suffering without retaliation. Jesus's example provides the impetus for believers to follow in his ways through the atonement and restoration that come from his death for them. Even though we have only surveyed three NT authors, we have already seen rich and diverse uses of the Isaianic servant figure grounded in deep reflection upon Jesus as the servant of the Lord.

## VII. WHAT ABOUT JESUS?

I'd like to conclude by addressing the question of whether Jesus understood himself and his mission through the lens of the Isaianic servant. Though my purposes this afternoon have not been to do historical Jesus work, I find the rich diversity of the NT witnesses on this issue to be intriguing and suggestive.

As we've looked at three NT authors who clearly draw upon Isaiah's servant figure, we've seen that each has a different focal text from Isaiah, although all three engage Isaiah 52–53 in some way. We also see different emphases drawn from the same texts, with Luke landing on the theme of exaltation from Isaiah 53 more than Matthew does, and certainly more than 1 Peter. I have also suggested that Matthew uses his servant Christology in close conjunction with his Israel Christology, while Luke extends the servant's mission from Jesus to the church. And Peter in his letter to beleaguered Christians accents servant Jesus as exemplar for faithful witness while enduring unjust suffering.<sup>74</sup>

If Jesus as the Isaianic servant was a creation of the early church, as Hooker and others have suggested, I believe we could expect more continuity among these portraits than we actually see.<sup>75</sup> In other words, if Jesus as servant were an ecclesial creation, we might expect to see a more uniform use of Isaiah's servant texts and themes—Isaiah used across the NT writings in more consistent ways.<sup>76</sup> I'd suggest

<sup>73</sup> Achtemeier's fuller argument in "Suffering Servant" is that it is only because of the more developed hermeneutic of the author of 1 Peter (seen in 1:10–12) that he can employ Isaiah 53 as he does in 2:22–25. That hermeneutic involved "the explicit notion that the Spirit by which Isaiah and the other prophets spoke was in fact the Spirit of Christ" (187).

<sup>74</sup> Litwak notes that the seven NT citations from Isaiah 53 are used for "three distinct though at times overlapping reasons: passion apologetic, justification for preaching to the Gentiles, and more admonition of believers." Kenneth D. Litwak, "The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in the New Testament," *JETS* 26 (1983): 394.

<sup>75</sup> Hooker contends that Jesus understood his death in terms of Daniel 7 (as well as the Psalms) rather than via Isaiah 53 ("Use of Isaiah 53," 100).

<sup>76</sup> Moo (*Passion Narratives*, 169), from a different angle and focusing on Isaiah 53 specifically, suggests something similar: "If ... the Servant concept belonged to a later, soteriological stage of the tradition, it would be expected that allusions and quotations would be fairly evenly divided between sayings of Jesus and narratives and editorial comments on his death." Those who suggest that the early church did invent the connection note Paul as a likely candidate for the earliest theological exploration of "the idea of atoning suffering of Isaiah 53" in Rom 4:25 (Hooker, "Use of Isaiah 53," 103).

what we are seeing is more organic than organized, which is precisely something we might expect if the early church inherited the seed idea of Jesus as servant and then developed that idea in distinctively diverse directions.

What if Jesus intimated to his followers his identity as the servant through ideas and language of “giving his life (or pouring out his blood) for many,” but didn’t explicate it all that much?<sup>77</sup> The seed idea then took hold and invigorated various connections to the Isaianic servant texts and motifs by different NT authors. Matthew, for example, was drawn to both Isa 42:1–4 and 53:4 to frame Jesus’s *public ministry*, using these as fulfillment quotations to provide commentary on Jesus’s ministry of mercy and justice.

This possibility is supported by the few, scattered (and more impressionistic) allusions to Isa 53:11–12 in Mark’s Gospel, which I assume (for the sake of this argument) was the earliest Synoptic Gospel. I think there is both linguistic and conceptual evidence for allusions to Isaiah 53 in Mark—in Jesus’s references to his service of “giv[ing] his life as a ransom for the many” (10:45) and to his blood “poured out for many” (14:24).<sup>78</sup> If we conclude that Mark faithfully passed on Jesus’s own intimations of his role as servant,<sup>79</sup> we also see signs that Mark expanded this portrait ever so modestly in his passion narrative. Mark seems to draw from Isaiah 50 and 53 as commentary on the experience of Jesus during his passion, specifically his treatment by the Sanhedrin and his silence before his accusers (Mark 14:61; 15:5; cf. Isa 53:7).<sup>80</sup>

It becomes clear when we turn to Matthew that he has expanded on Mark when it comes to this theme. As I’ve already noted, Matthew inherits Mark’s Isaianic allusions and magnifies them in a number of ways. The same could be said of the potential echoes from Isa 50:6 at Mark 14:65, where Matthew adjusts the language of the Sanhedrin’s treatment of Jesus to clarify the echo to Isaiah.<sup>81</sup> We could also mention Matthew’s added reference to Jesus’s silence before his accusers to augment Mark’s two such references (Mark 14:61; 15:5; cf. Matt 26:63a; 27:14, with the addition of 27:12), as well as the link he creates between Joseph of Arimathea and Jesus being with the rich in his death (Matt 27:57; cf. Isa 53:9).

<sup>77</sup> Wright suggests that “the allusions to Isaiah 53 [may be] the telltale signs of a vocation which [Jesus] could hardly put into words, that the *mebasser* [bearer of good news] of Isaiah 52:7 (and Isaiah 40:9) would turn out to be himself, the Servant, representing the Israel that was called to be the light of the world but had failed so signally in this vocation.” N. T. Wright, “The Servant and Jesus,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 294.

<sup>78</sup> Contra Hooker (“Use of Isaiah 53,” 94), who argues that “the similarities [of Mark 10:45 to Isaiah 53] are superficial.”

<sup>79</sup> Watts refers to Mark’s “faithful attempt to record the words of Jesus, recognized as crucial to his self-understanding even if not fully understood.” Rikki E. Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Crux Revisited,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 150.

<sup>80</sup> Watts (“Mark 10:45,” 150) suggests something similar but with less intentionality on Mark’s part: “What if Mark was not aware of the precise source of the ideas [of the Servant connection in 10:45], but recorded Jesus’ words just as they had come to him simply because they represented in his tradition one of the few occasions on which Jesus gave some insight into his self-understanding?”

<sup>81</sup> Matthew conforms “face” (*πρόσωπον*) to its usage in Isaiah—the servant (and Jesus) is spit “in the face” (Matt 26:67) rather than having his “face” blindfolded (Mark 14:65).

And on it goes, the seed idea of Jesus as servant of the Lord, especially in his representative suffering and death, moves in different directions among the various NT authors, becoming more developed in differing ways across the NT. Interestingly, we see this development augmented even further in *1 Clement* (c. 96 CE), where a citation of the whole of Isaiah 53 is used as a descriptor of the humility of Jesus as Messiah (*1 Clem.* 16:1–17).

My suggestion, from this evidence, is that Jesus provided the seed for the early church's blossoming servant Christology. Rikki Watts suggests something similar about Isaiah 53 specifically when he writes: "The genesis of this new exegesis of Isaiah 53 lay with Jesus, but as, for example, Mark's Gospel and Acts 1:6ff. make clear, the full implications of his characteristically enigmatic instruction were not appreciated by his uncomprehending disciples until after a period of subsequent reflection."<sup>82</sup>

## VIII. CONCLUSION

To wrap up, I'd like to return to where we began: to the assumption that Isaiah 53 clearly points ahead to Jesus. Our exploration has, first of all, widened the relevant landscape from Isaiah 53 alone to a series of Isaianic texts that paint a picture of the servant of the Lord whose mission is to bring about mercy and justice (Isaiah 42) to Israel and to the nations (Isaiah 49) by enacting a New Exodus of restoration and redemption. Second, we have seen a compelling combination of citation, allusion, and echo from these various texts of Isaiah—signaling that these NT authors have the Isaianic servant in view as one Christological lens. Third, Matthew, Luke, and the author of 1 Peter use these texts and the figure they illuminate in different ways, suggesting that Jesus himself provided the initial, though potentially allusive, impetus for this Christological interpretation.

As scholars continue to probe these issues, they will, I suspect, continue to find, as Jesus and the early church did, inspiration from Isaiah 40–55, where, as Hanson suggests, Isaiah's "poetic creativity perhaps reaches its apex in the image of the Servant of the Lord."<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Watts, "Mark 10:45," 151.

<sup>83</sup> Paul D. Hanson, "The World of the Servant of the Lord in Isaiah 40–55," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant*, 21.