

O Servant, Who Art Thou?:
Identifying the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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Abstract

Several passages in the prophetic book of Isaiah describe a character who is often called the “Suffering Servant.” Isaiah 52:13-53:12 comprises the last of the four so-called “Servant Songs,” mapping out the ministry of this character. Often the question is raised, “Who is the Suffering Servant?” Drawing information from scholarly biblical and topical commentaries and peer-reviewed articles, this research discusses the identity of the Suffering Servant. An overview on the author of Isaiah alone covers a wealth of Israel’s history, while other important contextual issues surface as well. A brief summary of such background material shows how the Last Servant Song was relevant to its original readers. There are some, if not several, interpretive issues surrounding the Servant Songs, a few of which do merit attention. Some key interpretations suggest that the passage is a reference to Israel as a whole or a prophecy of Jesus Christ’s ministry. The essay’s final discussion proposes that the interpreter focus on the fulfillment of the passage rather than the identity.

Keywords: Bible, Isaiah, suffering servant, Messianic prophecy, servant songs

Introduction

Israel lowered her head in shame as she entered exile, just as the prophets had warned. After seventy years, she was desperate for rescue. “From where does my help come?” Israel would ask.¹ The Lord answered through His prophet Isaiah, promising that He would raise up a Servant to deliver His people. Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the “Song of the Servant’s Victory” or “Last Servant Song,” spells out the description of this Servant.² In spite of

the explicit details of the passage (or perhaps because of its explicit details), the identity of this Servant character often comes into question.

Many interpretations seek to answer the question. Probably the most common Christian understanding is that the Servant refers directly to Jesus Christ. This should be no surprise when “the New Testament directly and explicitly uses this passage about the servant of Yahweh as a lens through which to understand Jesus, [but] in doing so makes it hard to read the text for what it says in itself.”³ Yet even the New Testament’s interpretation seems to neglect the context of the passage, for it is not the view with which ancient Israel would have

¹ *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version Study Bible, Lane T. Dennis and Wayne Grudem, eds. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), Psalm 121:1. All Scripture references are taken from this translation unless otherwise stated.

² Page H. Kelley, “Isaiah,” *Proverbs-Isaiah*, The Broadman Bible Commentary, vol. 5, ed. Clifton J. Allen (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 341.

³ John Goldingay, “Isaiah 53 in the Pulpit,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 35.2 (Summer 2008): 147, [database on-line], available at *EBSCOHost*, internet, accessed 29 August 2013.

interpreted the song at the time of its writing. Such is the dilemma behind the Last Servant Song, and so the question remains: who is the Servant?

Other questions prove helpful in finding a plausible answer. How did Isaiah's contemporary readers understand the Last Servant Song? How did writers of the early Church read the Last Servant Song? Lastly, how should the Church interpret this passage today? To help answer these questions, a discussion of the passage's authorial and historical background follows.

Background and Context

Like much of the prophetic literature in the Bible, debate seems to surround the book of Isaiah. Regarding its historical context, questions arise as to the date of its completion, its author (or authors), and topological issues.⁴ Eventually the very unity of the book comes into question. As a key passage in Isaiah, all of these issues ultimately contribute to understanding the Last Servant Song.

Isaiah is typically classified as prophetic literature, the first of the Old Testament's latter prophetic books, both in the Hebrew Bible and in present-day English Bibles.⁵ But even as prophetic literature, the genre of Isaiah, as well as subject, style, and mood, all change constantly and abruptly.⁶ One explanation for such sudden changes is the proposal that Isaiah, like some other prophetic works, is not necessarily one work by one author. Reference to most prophetic books is often to just one "book" bearing the name of one prophet (in this case, "the book of Isaiah"), but it is likely that authors and editors other than Isaiah played major roles in completing the book. There is some plausibility to this proposal, considering that much of the prophetic literature is not simply the first hand witness of the prophet

himself but is a careful organization of the sermons and events of the prophet's life.⁷ It is not a far cry to assume that Isaiah is made up of several works by several authors in like fashion.

Probably the most obvious evidence of separate works is the apparent break between the first half of the book, chapters one through thirty-nine, and the remaining twenty-seven chapters. The first chapters present "the Isaiah who pronounced a verdict of judgment on Judean leadership."⁸ Meanwhile, the "opening statement of [chapters] 40-55, addressed to a prophetic plurality..., assures Jerusalem that its iniquity is now pardoned."⁹ Most of the first section is that of a warning of coming disaster, whereas the "affinities with the Deuteronomic theology" in the chapters following the break call for a return to the Lord as He restores Israel.¹⁰ The titles "First Isaiah" and "Second Isaiah" (or "Deutero-Isaiah") often imply this division in the same way that "First Samuel" and "Second Samuel" refer to the entire work of "Samuel."¹¹

There is then a further division of "Second Isaiah" into "Third Isaiah," referring to chapters 56-66. The difference between Second and Third Isaiah is due less to theme and more to style, a "demonstration of the distinctive linguistic features of [chapters] 56-66 in contrast to 40-55."¹² This second division typically raises fewer questions than the division between chapters thirty-nine and forty, but is worth noting in respect to context.

The three Isaiahs, so to speak, seem to come from three different perspectives. The book introduces itself as "the vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz...concerning Judah and Jerusalem."¹³ This Isaiah presumably started his ministry in the last year of the reign of Judah's king Uzziah, around 742 BC. He continued through Hezekiah's reign, around 715-687 BC.¹⁴ First Isaiah deals mainly with events contemporary to the prophet himself,

⁴ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 18, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 32.

⁵ Kelley, 149.

⁶ Gene M. Tucker, "The Book of Isaiah 1-39," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 45.

⁷ David L. Petersen, "David L. Petersen, 'Introduction to Prophetic Literature,'" *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 6, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 12.

⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, Anchor Bible Commentaries, vol. 19A, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 54.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹¹ Motyer, 28.

¹² Blenkinsopp, 70.

¹³ Isaiah 1:1.

¹⁴ Kelley, 150.

speaking out against Judah's sin and predicting the siege from the Assyrians, which would occur in 722 BC and so inaugurate the exile of Israel. Most likely, First Isaiah originated during the pre-exilic period from this same Isaiah of Jerusalem or at least one of his own witnesses.¹⁵

Second Isaiah seems to assume that the siege has already occurred, that the exilic period has begun, and that Babylon is the ruling power instead of Assyria. As Kelley notes, "nowhere in chapters 40-66 is the Babylonian exile predicted; it is presupposed, and only the release from the exile is predicted," bringing forth two main theories regarding the authorship of Second Isaiah.¹⁶ One thought is that Isaiah son of Amoz, having predicted the exile, went on to predict the release and, being remarkably specific, the rise of Cyrus.¹⁷ The other implication, though not the prevailing view, is that this section had an author other than Isaiah son of Amoz. In this case, the author may have been a disciple of Isaiah or simply knew of his original work.¹⁸ The writer in this second theory would have "lived in the Babylonian captivity...and worked probably about 540 BC."¹⁹ Further thought on authorship is found in the topology of the author's surroundings or at least suggested surroundings.

There are few dealings with the topology evident within Isaiah, but it is certainly important to authorial background. The cypress, myrtle, and olive trees mentioned in Second Isaiah are native to Palestine, not Babylonia.²⁰ Furthermore, the text describes landscapes and climates more akin to Israel than Babylon.²¹ Such evidence could support the argument of just one author, someone writing in the context of the pre-exilic or post-exilic periods, in Israel.²² The surroundings of a writer during the exile would have been Babylon, quite a different landscape from Israel. However, supposing that the writer were part of the exile, he likely knew the topology of his own land and so continued to write from that context.

It should be noted that the attempt to solve the authorial and unity issues is not "calling into question the inspiration of any part of the book."²³ Indeed, throughout Isaiah, Yahweh "continues to be the central figure," but God shifts His "role in administering the strategy of judgment and curses...to becoming comforter for Israel...and restorer of Jerusalem."²⁴ Whether by one author or by many, whether a pre-exilic work or post-exilic, the general consensus is that no part of the book of Isaiah should cease to be a part of the biblical canon.

What, then, is so important about Isaiah's authorship? The so-called fragmentation into the two or three Isaiahs occurred most likely as a result of skepticism towards prophecy. Rationalism during the nineteenth century had no way to explain the supernatural quality of predictions in prophecy, therefore questioning the validity of the book of Isaiah.²⁵ Splitting up the book and proposing multiple authors seemed to easily explain the "accuracy" of predictive prophecy in Isaiah. This proposal neglects the fact that First and Second Isaiah appear on the earliest manuscript available as a seamless work.²⁶ Some criticism claims that chapters 40-66 were added to chapters 1-39 later "simply because there was room on the scroll," but general consensus denies this account.²⁷ More than likely, Second Isaiah was not read in ancient times independently from First Isaiah.²⁸ Whether one or several authors wrote Isaiah, the book was ultimately intended to be a whole, unified work. Keeping these background issues in mind allows for a better understanding of the servant songs.

The Servant Songs

Apart from the debate about Isaiah's origin as a whole, there is further debate regarding the four passages known as the "Servant Songs" in Second Isaiah. Each "song" speaks of a "Servant" whom God will raise up to

¹⁵ Motyer, 28.

¹⁶ Kelley, 160.

¹⁷ Barry G. Webb, *The Message of Isaiah*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, vol. 18, ed. J. A. Motyer (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 36.

¹⁸ Kelley, 160.

¹⁹ Motyer, 28.

²⁰ Isaiah 41:19 and 55:13.

²¹ Motyer, 32.

²² Webb, 35.

²³ Kelley, 159.

²⁴ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, rev. ed., *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 25, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Columbia: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 505.

²⁵ O. T. Allis, *The Unity of Isaiah*, (Tyndale, 1951), quoted in *Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary*, by J. Alec Motyer, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, vol. 18, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 29.

²⁶ Motyer, 27.

²⁷ Blenkinsopp, 42.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

restore Israel.²⁹ The Servant seems to refer to an identifiable party, thus raising the controversy. About whom is Isaiah speaking in reference to a Servant? More specifically, do all four songs identify the Servant as the same person (or party)?

Interestingly, interpretations on the Servant's identity do not always pinpoint just one person. In fact, "the field [of interpretation] may be divided roughly between those who hold to an individual interpretation and those who advocate a collective interpretation" regarding the identity of the Servant.³⁰ The collective interpretation is supported by the Old Testament's rather frequent term "the servant" or "my servant," which almost always refers explicitly to the people of Israel as a whole.³¹ God introduces or "commissions" the Servant in 42:1-4, the first song, though Isaiah has mentioned a "servant" once before. Earlier, 41:8 mentions "Israel, my servant," implying that the people of Israel are collectively the Servant.

The passage in 49:1-6 comprises the second song, supporting an individual interpretation where the speaker appears as the Servant.³² Here, the prophet represents Israel, as the author himself says in 49:3, "And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel.'" Prior to this song, the Lord says of King Cyrus (later ruler of Persia), "He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose."³³ It would then seem that Cyrus might identify with the Servant, but this song also implies that such a position (Yahweh's shepherd) involves "a task that...Cyrus is not prepared to discharge."³⁴

Finally, the third song in 50:4-11 provides a preview for the Last Servant Song. The third song "describes for the first time the servant's suffering and affliction" that will become so prominent in the last song.³⁵ The servant

appears to again be a prophetic figure (not necessarily the speaker), this time accusing Jerusalem rather than representing.³⁶ Thus far, "the prophecies have been explicit in their reference to Jacob-Israel, Babylon, Cyrus, and Zion-Jerusalem, and they have identified both Jacob-Israel and the prophet" with Yahweh's servant.³⁷

Some of these identities seem highly individualistic and therefore specific, but consensus more often accepts a collective identity. In fact, "most Old Testament scholars, Christian as well as Jewish, have rejected the individual approach.... They favor the view that the servant is a collective entity and is to be identified with Israel."³⁸ With such an interpretation, the "individuals" simply become antitypes of God's original purpose for His people as a whole.

Part of why the Servant's identity has become such an issue is because the Servant Songs are often taken without the text that surrounds them. Bernard Duhm's 1892 commentary on Isaiah was the first to isolate the servant passages from the rest of the book.³⁹ Duhm pointed out that the songs seem to abruptly separate the passages surrounding them, suggesting that they were not originally part of the book of Isaiah. Perhaps they were even a complete text by themselves at one time. The last song, however, has definite stylistic differences from the first three songs.⁴⁰

Duhm's singling out of the Servant Songs may have enlightened the reader's understanding to some degree, but it has also caused some confusion. Though Duhm's conclusions are worthy of consideration, no such evidence demonstrates that the author of the Servant Songs or of Isaiah intended them to be separate from the rest of the book.⁴¹ There is arguably no break at all at 52:13 where the Last Servant Song starts. The opening phrase,

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁰ Kelley, 165.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

³² Blenkinsopp, 78.

³³ See Watts, 649; Isaiah 44:28.

³⁴ Blenkinsopp, 78.

³⁵ Seitz, 435.

³⁶ Watts, 753.

³⁷ John Goldingay and David Payne, *Isaiah 40-55*, International Critical Commentary, vol. 2, ed. G. I. Davies and G. N. Stanton (New York: T&T Clark International, 2006), 273.

³⁸ Kelley, 168.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁴⁰ Henning Graf Reventlow, "Basic Issues in the Interpretation of Isaiah 53," *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 25.

⁴¹ R. E. Clements, "Isaiah 53 and the Restoration of Israel," *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 40.

in the original Hebrew, begins with *hinnēh*, which “never marks a wholly new beginning” but suggests a new section that links with the preceding passage.⁴² Given these considerations, it seems inaccurate to interpret the Servant Songs as texts apart from Isaiah. Isolating the Servant Songs creates “the failure properly to appreciate how many distinct concerns and prior contexts [the writer has] creatively merged” in the last passage.⁴³ Again, it is best to see the songs in the context of a unified, rather than fragmented, Isaiah.

The first of these distinct concerns is in First Isaiah (not to be confused with the first song), dealing with the sin of God’s people and God’s sending them to exile as judgment.⁴⁴ Emphasizing the mood change in Second Isaiah, the next concern deals with the people’s return to the Lord and their future return to Israel from the exile. The writer must have seen the desperate need for redemption as he issues a call for comfort for God’s people.⁴⁵ The mood of Second Isaiah comes to a head as that desperation surfaces in the Last Servant Song. Comfort for the people of Israel finally becomes a real hope here.

The Song of the Victorious Servant

Most of Isaiah 52 confirms that the Lord will indeed deliver and comfort His people as the prophet leads up to the Last Servant Song, where this Servant will be the Lord’s mode of deliverance. In most understandings, the song consists of five stanzas, including a prologue and an epilogue.⁴⁶ The first stanza, in 52:13-15, creates the transition to Isaiah’s description of the Servant. A paradox surfaces as Isaiah introduces the Servant: “How can such an exaltation (13) arise out of such suffering (14); and how can such suffering (14) lead to universal benefit and acknowledgement (15)?”⁴⁷ This apparent contradiction actually encompasses the purpose of the song.

Both the speaker and the hearer of the song seem to change in 53:1-3, comprising the second stanza.⁴⁸ Baltzer compares the setting in the first verse to a scene where Yahweh sits as judge speaking with a prosecutor.⁴⁹ A major point of confusion throughout the song is the use of so many personal pronouns, the antecedents for which are, at best, vague but seemingly absent.⁵⁰ The first person plural pronouns (“we” and “our”) likely refer to the prophet’s exiled community, the Judean people, as if they are giving testimony; that is, “the community is not giving it yet.”⁵¹ This section, at least, personifies a Servant who seems to bear human features.

The third stanza, 53:4-6, is in the center of the song. It is flanked by two stanzas on each side: before it is the introduction and a stanza dealing with birth and life; after it is a stanza dealing with suffering and death, followed by the conclusion.⁵² Such a position is probably a literary device, as the third stanza certainly makes up the central theme of the song. Here is the description of the more common reference to a “Suffering Servant.” This Servant, the Lord’s mode of deliverance, is “smitten by God, and afflicted...he was wounded for [the people’s] transgressions; he was crushed for [their] iniquities.”⁵³

This theme echoes the paradox that the first stanza presents, that is, exaltation through suffering. The paradox would have resounded with the original hearers and readers of the song. The Servant suffers as a substitution, a concept that “was not a new thought to the Israelites; it was enshrined in the law of Moses.”⁵⁴ The Servant is essentially the sacrifice for the sins of the people, much like the Levitical scapegoat ritual, “in which one of the two animals is sacrificed as an atoning sin-offering..., and the other carries all the community’s iniquities into a solitary, literally, ‘cut-off land.’”⁵⁵

Then comes the fourth stanza in 53:7-9, where the speaker changes yet again. The Servant, though put to

⁴² Goldingay and Payne, 273.

⁴³ Christopher R. Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40-66,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol. 6, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 459.

⁴⁴ Watts, 505.

⁴⁵ Webb, 160.

⁴⁶ Michael L. Barre, “Textual and Rhetorical-critical Observations on the Last Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12),” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 62.1 (January 2000): 1, [database on-line], available *EBSCOHost*, internet, accessed 29 August, 2013.

⁴⁷ Motyer, 331.

⁴⁸ Goldingay and Payne, 275.

⁴⁹ K. Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, trans. M. Kohl, ed. P. Machinist, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 400 quoted in *Isaiah 34-66* by John D. W. Watts (Columbia: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2005), 786.

⁵⁰ Watts, 782.

⁵¹ Goldingay, 148.

⁵² Motyer, 334.

⁵³ Isaiah 53:4b-5a.

⁵⁴ Webb, 212.

⁵⁵ Blenkinsopp, 351.

death, is innocent. And though he is innocent, he “accept[s] his suffering with a strange silence,” not a silence of ignorance but of deliberate self-submission.⁵⁶ It is as if the Servant recognizes the need for his death to take place. This stanza mirrors the second, emphasizing the Servant’s death and burial where the second stanza emphasizes his life.

The first and last stanzas act like bookends to the song. The first stanza has given a glimpse of the purpose of the song with the Servant’s “surprising success.”⁵⁷ The last concludes with the triumph of the Servant. It shows that “The Servant’s death is not the end of his career.”⁵⁸ Indeed, the Servant must see his descendants and prolong his days. The Lord will renew life, hinting at the Servant’s resurrection from death.⁵⁹

The song’s theme, as the third stanza exemplifies, is that the Servant pays for the sins of the people. The theme is not, however, the same as the song’s purpose. Isaiah 52:13-53:15 may be “The Suffering Servant’s Song,” but it is more importantly “The Song of the Victorious Servant.” The Servant’s death “is not his defeat, but his noblest achievement and the means by which many are reconciled to God.”⁶⁰ The people for which he dies surely deserve his affliction for their own iniquities, but “it was the Lord’s will to crush him” to bring the comfort to His people for which Isaiah called long before.⁶¹ Yet the question of identity still remains.

The second Servant song seems to have ruled out Cyrus as a possibility, but another ruler might still fit the Servant’s role. Part of this passage might be speaking of Darius and his rise to power in Persia; it also might “refer to the challenge to Zerubbabel mentioned [in Ezra],” but neither of these are the prevailing view.⁶² As hinted in the previous songs, the Servant could also be the prophet who is speaking.

The common ancient thought reoccurs, that the Servant is Israel the people, having suffered but soon to be

redeemed; yet the Last Servant Song seems to refer exclusively to an individual. How do the readers and hearers of the song reconcile the collective identity with the individual identity? Are they reconcilable at all? Perhaps the answer is in the idea that the writer “expresses a crucial duality between the people as the instrument of God’s purpose and a prophetic minority...owing allegiance to its martyred leader...and his teachings.”⁶³ To be sure, interpreting a “duality” in the Servant’s identity is valid, but there is yet another interpretation of the Last Servant Song.

The New Testament Servant

In the most common interpretation since the early church (an interpretation upheld by evangelicals), the Last Servant Song describes Israel’s long awaited Messiah. The Servant is almost always seen as “a kingly or Messianic and Mosaic prophetic figure.”⁶⁴ The writers of the New Testament identify that Messianic and Mosaic prophetic figure as Jesus Christ, and they read the Law and Prophets in light of Christ. The “Song of the Victorious Servant” plays a prominent role in the theology of the Gospel writers, of Paul, of Peter, and of the writer of Hebrews.⁶⁵ In fact, “If for some reason the entire song were to disappear from the book of Isaiah, it could be almost completely reconstructed from the quotations borrowed from it by New Testament writers.”⁶⁶ Almost all of the song reappears in places in the New Testament. It seems that Jesus’ innocent suffering, death, and resurrection fits perfectly into the mold of the Servant and his ministry. But was the early church correct in reading the Last Servant Song in a way different from its original readers? It would certainly be inaccurate to say that “the prophet knew about a figure called Jesus Christ who seems to be much more than anything that the prophet ever imagined.”⁶⁷ In the Gospel accounts, Jesus never

⁵⁶ Goldingay and Payne, 310; Motyer, 336.

⁵⁷ Motyer, 332.

⁵⁸ Webb, 212.

⁵⁹ Kelley, 344.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Isaiah 53:10.

⁶² Watts, 787, 788.

⁶³ Blenkinsopp, 356.

⁶⁴ Thomas D. Petter, “The Meaning of Substitutionary Righteousness in Isa 53:11: A Summary of the Evidence,” *Trinity Journal* 32.2 (Fall 2011): 169-170, [database on-line], available at *EBSCOHost*, internet, accessed 29 August, 2013.

⁶⁵ Kelley, 340.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Mark W. Elliot, ed. *Isaiah 40-66*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. 11, ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), xx.

explicitly identifies His ministry with that of the Suffering Servant.⁶⁸ In short, if the New Testament writers interpreted the identity of the Servant to be Jesus Christ, were their claims really valid?

Actually, such an interpretation is not at all how the New Testament writers read Isaiah. They would not have seen the identity of the Servant explicitly as Jesus. Instead, they understood that “Jesus Christ is a remarkable fulfillment of not just one isolated prophetic passage but of many passages,” both within and without the book of Isaiah.⁶⁹

For instance, when someone such as Matthew or Paul refers to Isa 53, they are not trying to prove that Jesus is the Messiah or the Suffering Servant. They speak from faith to faith; they know Jesus is the supreme fulfillment of God’s purpose, the one through whom they are put right with God. They are seeking to fill out what this means by looking at Jesus through these lenses.⁷⁰

The New Testament writers made a profound connection between the Servant and Jesus, but the key is that Jesus was a fulfillment of the prophecy, not the identity. In the same way that Israel was the fulfillment of the Servant role in ancient interpretations, so Jesus was the fulfillment of the Servant role in the New Testament.

Conclusion

Isaiah’s scope broadens from the initial exile to an ultimate deliverance. Meanwhile, the description of the Servant can be seen as narrowing from the nation Israel to Christ.⁷¹ Isaiah foresaw the ultimate redemption of God’s people. God brought comfort through the prophecy of His Servant, though that Servant was not one specific individual whom Isaiah named.

Whether Isaiah spoke before or during the exile, the Last Servant Song spoke in light of the exile having already

taken place. The ancient Israelites who had lived as captives in Assyria and Babylon were desperate for release. The Lord promised release to His people through a Servant. Many antitypes of the Servant would appear, but the Lord would fulfill His promise to His people. Cyrus certainly fell into the Servant role when he became ruler over the Israelites, though he failed to exemplify it. Furthermore, the Lord intended for His own people, ancient Israel, to be another antitype of the Servant. Finally, Jesus Christ assumes the role of the Servant. Though not the exclusive identity of the Servant, Jesus fulfills the prophecy of the Victorious Servant.

⁶⁸ Otto Betz, “Jesus and Isaiah 53,” *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins*, ed. William H. Bellinger and William R. Farmer (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1998), 71.

⁶⁹ Elliot, xx.

⁷⁰ Goldingay, 148.

⁷¹ Kenneth D. Litwak, “The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament,” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 26.4D (1983): 386, [database on-line], available at *EBSCOHost*, internet, accessed 29 August, 2013.