

HOPE FILLED FULL

Echoes of Scripture in the New Testament

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PART TWO: THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE HOPES OF ISAIAH

In this section, I will attempt to do three things. First, I will address the debates surrounding Isaiah 53: Is this passage referring to Israel or Israel's Messiah? As part of that effort, I will also examine more broadly Isaiah's use of themes, including Isaiah 53 but going far beyond that. Second, I will provide an overview of how Luke quotes from Isaiah in his writings, asking whether his use of Isaiah is appropriate and whether anyone else provides a more coherent portrait of how Isaiah's expectations could be fulfilled. Third, I offer some conclusions and suggest some possible directions to skeptics.

I. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53

Much ink has already been spilled on the question of whether or not Isaiah 53 is a prophecy of Jesus. Of course, the New Testament and Christian commentators argue yes. However, many Jewish apologists argue that Isaiah 53 must be applied to Israel as a people. Craig Lyons¹ argues that Isaiah 53:10 should be translated from the Hebrew Masoretic text as, 'if his soul would acknowledge guilt,' thus making the sinless Jesus ineligible to qualify as a fulfillment of the prophecy, but making the language appropriate for Israel's repentance for the sins that led up to Exile. Theodore M. Drange follows Shmuel Golding² by making the unusual argument that it should be applied to Uzziah, seeing in the 'leprous king' a reference to Uzziah with his leprosy. Farrell Till asserts that Isaiah was wrong on multiple levels.³ I will evaluate these positions.

The Dating and Authorship of Isaiah

One question we must immediately confront is that of the authorship and dating of the book of Isaiah. Critical scholars since the late 1800's have attributed the book to various earlier sources. Were there one, two, or three Isaiahs? Or was there a community of Hebrew scholars who followed in the footsteps of the original Isaiah of Jerusalem? Did part, or all, of the book of Isaiah as we know it actually come together after Israel's captivity in Babylon? These questions lurk in the background and they do have some significance to my purpose here. They are material to dating of the book of Isaiah and to interpreting it, for I wish to understand how Second Temple Israelites, Jesus, the Gospel writers, and possibly the later Christian community interacted with the text of Isaiah as a whole.

Let me first summarize how scholars understand the date of the book and what significance this has for this essay. The physical manuscript evidence is the first place to look. The earliest Masoretic (Hebrew) text of the Old Testament we possess dates back to the 6th century AD. The earliest Greek Septuagint versions of the Old Testament are Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, both dating back to the 4th century AD. However, the complete Isaiah scroll found in Cave 1 among the Dead Sea Scrolls (along with the partial copy in Cave 1 and the other 17 partial copies found in the other Caves) dates back to before 100 BC. A team from the University of Arizona 'radiocarbon-dated the famous Book of Isaiah scroll at between 335 BCE and 122 BCE. Paleographers had dated this scroll at between 150 – 125 BCE.'⁴ The Scrolls version of Isaiah has slight linguistic differences with the Masoretic text attributed to subtleties between Hebrew dialects,⁵ but without any significant variation in meaning. Thus, based on physical evidence alone, we find that Isaiah was regarded as a unity by the Israelites at least a full century or two before Jesus. The physical evidence is sufficient for my purposes here, but historical reasoning also presses us a bit earlier. The Septuagint version of the Old Testament was translated just before then, probably in Alexandria, so we can push that date back comfortably to the mid-third century BC. Hence, for my purposes here in discussing Isaiah 53, I do not need to take a conservative view of the text (i.e. that there was one Isaiah who wrote prior to the Babylonian captivity). It is uncontroversial that the book of Isaiah was treated as a unity well before

¹ <http://isaiah53.ifrance.com/isaiah53/craig1.htm>

² http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/theodore_drange/bible.html

³ I have provided an excerpt from Till's paper on prophecy in Appendix A

⁴ <http://www.physics.arizona.edu/physics/public/dead-sea.html> published in 1995

⁵ similar to the differences in English between 'thy' and 'thou' to 'your' and 'you'

Jesus, and that the prophetic passages were (1) yet to be fulfilled and (2) regarded as such, even after the Israelite captives had physically returned from Babylon.

On the most significant level, that of the literary and theological unity of the book, the influence of source-critical scholars has waned dramatically. So has their attempt to undermine the significance of the book of Isaiah for Christian theological apologetics. In numerous books and articles, literary scholars have noted the strong literary and theological links between chs.1 – 39 and chs.40 – 55 and chs.56 – 66, sections that the source-critics once thought were different pieces thrown together as a patchwork. Thus, ‘throughout Old Testament study it is being recognized that, whatever view be taken of the prehistory of a text, it is the task of scholarship to pursue a holistic study. This means wrestling with the text as received, being unwilling to assume that ancient editors ordered their work with scant understanding of what they were doing, and searching out the message that emerges from the totality considered as a unit of Holy Scripture.’⁶ For simplicity’s sake in this essay, I will refer to the entire Isaianic literature as ‘Isaiah.’

The Largest Theme: Jerusalem and World History

Jerusalem is the focal point of Isaiah’s prophecy from the beginning, and the most apparent literary feature of Isaiah is the theme of Jerusalem. Isaiah sees a vision concerning ‘Judah and Jerusalem’ (1:1), and the fate of Judah is bound up and focused on Jerusalem. When Jerusalem falls, it will mean calamity for all of Judah (1:1 – 25). After the first speech concerning Jerusalem’s judgment, Isaiah delivers an oracle of hope (1:26 – 2:22). It includes a visionary speech about Jerusalem being the future center of God’s government of the world (Isa.2:1 – 4, also given by Micah in Mic.4:1 – 4a).

^{2:1} The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

² Now it will come about that in the last days

The mountain of the house of the LORD

Will be established as the chief of the mountains,

And will be raised above the hills;

And all the nations will stream to it.

³ And many peoples will come and say,

‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,

To the house of the God of Jacob;

That He may teach us concerning His ways

And that we may walk in His paths.’

For the law will go forth from Zion

And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

⁴ And He will judge between the nations,

And will render decisions for many peoples;

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares

And their spears into pruning hooks.

Nation will not lift up sword against nation,

And never again will they learn war.

Thus, after God’s judgment on Jerusalem comes hope and honor for the city. The seat of world government will be Jerusalem, and God will express His reign of peace and reconciliation out from Jerusalem. That basic pattern of judgment first and restoration second continues throughout the rest of the book, except that Isaiah expands the repercussions by involving the Gentile nations surrounding Judah. Isaiah ends with celebration for Jerusalem:

‘Arise, shine for your light has come...And they will call you the city of the LORD, the Zion of the Holy One of God.’ (Isa.60:1, 14)

‘For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep quiet.’ (Isa.62:1)

‘Be joyful with Jerusalem and rejoice for her, all you who love her; be exceedingly glad with her, all you who mourn over her...They shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the

⁶ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP: Downers’ Grove, IL), p.13

LORD, on horses, in chariots, in litters, on mules and on camels, to My holy mountain Jerusalem.’
(Isa.66:10, 20)

Structurally, the certainty of judgment on Jerusalem is the topic of chs.1 – 5, with God’s commission of Isaiah in Jerusalem’s Temple placed afterwards in ch.6. The placement of the judgment oracles before Isaiah’s call to preach underscores the inevitability of judgment and was probably arranged with such a purpose. Subsequently, however, Isaiah is organized around historical crises triggered by the kings in Jerusalem. Ahaz triggers the Assyrian threat in chs.7 – 37. In this section, Isaiah says that Jerusalem will fall, and from that epicenter, God’s judgment will ripple outward and envelop Judah, Israel, and the Gentile nations, although God will restore Jerusalem and bring unprecedented blessing and life to the nations as well (especially chs.32 – 35). The immediacy of judgment on Jerusalem, however, is delayed (chs.36 – 37).

God renews His determination to bring judgment on Jerusalem because of Hezekiah’s compromise with Babylon and his self-centeredness (chs.38 – 39). The tragedy will one day pass, though, as Jerusalem will be restored, and from that epicenter of restoration, God’s blessing will ripple outward onto all those who acknowledge Him (chs.40 – 66). Over and over, using multiple images and varied language, Isaiah sees that the scattered ones of Israel and the Gentile nations will look to Jerusalem, acknowledging God. The theme of Jerusalem provides a very basic and straightforward unifying thread throughout the book of Isaiah. Isaiah sees world history pivoting on how God treats Jerusalem.

Jerusalem and the Future King

But Jerusalem, the royal city, of necessity implies a human king from the line of King David. Every heir of David sitting on Israel’s throne reigned from Jerusalem. Jerusalem first appears in the traditions of Israel in Gen.14:18 as the city of Melchizedek, who was both a king and a priest. If A.R. Johnson is correct, then Joshua 10:1 suggests that the Melchizedek/Adonizedek tradition was maintained in Jerusalem for some time.⁷ When David conquered Jerusalem (2 Sam.5:6 – 10) and made it his capital and the site of his throne, he became the successor to Melchizedek. ‘This provides background for the use of the Melchizedek tradition as a vehicle of Messianic hope in Psalm 110.’⁸ I have written about the prophetic expectations of a great king from Judah in the Pentateuch (in Hope Filled Full, Part One) and a Davidic-Messianic king in the Psalms (in Part Three), showing how this theme is not reducible to one isolated verse but is woven throughout the expectation of the Old Testament. Isaiah is therefore not alone nor unusual. His expectation for a kingly figure is firmly consistent with, and literarily dependent on, Genesis, Samuel, and some of the Psalms.

In the Pentateuch, the future king of Israel is prophesied in Jacob’s poem in Genesis 49 and Balaam’s vision in Numbers 24. The prophecy of Jacob over Judah involved a ‘scepter’ – a common symbol for kingly royalty and sovereignty – arising from a descendant of Judah (Gen.49:10). In part, this referred to King David, but it also refers to more than King David because it describes a perpetual dynasty, it would seem, more than an individual human king. Judah as a tribe will possess the kingship, and although the exile would disrupt the manifestation of the kingly rule in Israel, nevertheless from God’s perspective, the divine claim to kingship in Israel belongs to Judah. Significantly, ‘the obedience of the peoples,’ i.e. the nations, will accompany this king.

Similarly, the prophecy of Balaam saw the king of Israel being higher than other kings, in an ‘exalted’ kingdom (Num.24:7 – 9). In this prophecy, Balaam also referred to the ‘scepter’ in Num.24:17 to indicate kingly royalty, and the author/redactor of the Pentateuch retained this word to invoke the prophecy concerning the tribe of Judah; this king of Israel will come from the loins of Judah. The nations, again, will be affected: ‘He will devour the nations who are his adversaries’ (Num.24:8). But he will take other nations as his ‘possession’: ‘Edom shall be his possession; Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession...One from Jacob shall have dominion.’ Apparently ‘the Kenite’ will have an enduring dwelling place but neither Amalek nor Kain would (Num.24:20 – 22). Most interestingly, in Num.24:9, the Abrahamic covenant apparently would re-center on this kingly figure, as he becomes the one that brings ‘blessings’ and ‘curses’ on the nations based on their response, not merely to Abraham and his descendants in general, but to himself in particular. Thus, as the Pentateuch narrative unfolds, Israel’s Scriptures already start to focus on a kingly, messianic figure from within Israel as the focal point of the covenant to Abraham. Integrating these two themes together, as the Pentateuch strongly suggests, yields the logical conclusion that the

⁷ A.R. Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel* (University of Wales Press, 1967).

⁸ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP: Downers’ Grove, IL), p.16

kingly figure from Israel will deliver Israel from exile and bless or curse the nations based on their response to him. He will re-center the Abrahamic covenant around himself.

Like his literary forerunners, Isaiah anticipates a king who is unlike any king before him. Isaiah foresees the Messianic king and the glorious future interrelationship between Jerusalem and the Messiah. In Isaiah's view, it is unquestionably the Messiah who will restore Jerusalem. Some key passages about the Messiah include: 9:1 – 7; 11:1 – 16; 32:1 – 8; 33:17 – 24; 42:1 – 4; 49:1 – 6; 50:4 – 9; 52:13 – 53:12; 59:21; 61:1 – 3; 61:10 – 62:7; 63:1 – 6.⁹ In conjunction with many of these passages are the implications for Jerusalem as well. Hence in the prediction in 2:1 – 4, 'For the law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem,' a Messianic figure is already strongly implied, though not explicitly stated.

The earliest four passages (which I have printed in Appendix B) establish the explicit connection between Jerusalem and the future Messianic King:

1. In 8:14 – 9:7, God will become a new 'sanctuary' that will be a stumbling block to Israel, and the 'child' born with 'authority' that 'rests on his shoulders' will reign with 'authority' growing 'continually' from the 'throne of David' (9:7), i.e. Jerusalem. Among the names this king is called are the stunning titles Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. This prophecy is an outstanding, if stunning, one. It strongly suggests that this king will be immortal and hence an expression or embodiment of the living God of Israel.
2. In 11:1 – 16, the 'stump of Jesse' on whom rests 'the Spirit of the Lord' in all its power will bring about a new creation of peace (11:6 – 8) from 'my holy mountain,' Jerusalem (11:9). The restoration of Diaspora Israel (11:9 – 16) will lead to thanksgiving in and from 'royal Zion' (12:1 – 6). And so on. If Isaiah does not interweave the two themes in the same text, he regularly places a passage about Jerusalem in very close proximity with a passage about the Messiah.
3. In 32:1 – 20, 'a King will reign righteously' (32:1). This is probably in a defense of Jerusalem as discussed in ch.31. Those who see will see rightly, and those who hear will hear rightly (32:3) whereas foolishness and ungodliness will be seen for what they are (32:6 – 8). A desolation will occur (32:9 – 14) 'until the Spirit is poured out from on high' (32:15) in an act of new creation (32:16 – 20).
4. In 33:17 – 24, the 'King in his beauty' will be seen (v.17) who will make Jerusalem's place in God's plan secure (33:20).

As we shall see later, this pattern influences how we understand the 'Servant Songs,' in particular Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. The language of kingship appears in Isaiah 52:13 in the phrase, 'He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.' This follows the 'good news' to Jerusalem of her redemption in Isaiah 52:1 – 12, where Isaiah speaks of the announcement that God has 'redeemed Jerusalem' when he 'bared his holy arm before the eyes of all nations...the ends of the earth' to 'see the salvation of our God' (Isa.52:7 – 12). Then Isaiah immediately turns to this 'servant' who will be 'exalted and lifted up,' whose presence will 'shut the mouths of kings' (52:13 – 15). This coupling of ideas should be very familiar to any reader of Isaiah, for it is quite common in his book.

Who is the 'servant'? It would be very unusual indeed if Isaiah were speaking about 'Israel' collectively at the very point where he turns everywhere else to contemplate the role of the Davidic Messiah in the vindication of Jerusalem. This point tends to be overlooked by both sides in the debates concerning the Suffering Servant. But I am getting ahead of myself. It is to Isaiah's prophecies of this Messianic king that I now turn.

The Messiah: King, Servant, and Conqueror

Underlying Isaiah's deep criticism of the Kings of Judah is the conviction that God will bring out of the Davidic house an heir who will restore Jerusalem, restore Israel as a people, and rule the world. This expectation comes at least from the Pentateuch, 2 Samuel 7, and the Davidic Psalms. Each major section of Isaiah contains 4 portraits of the Messiah. Following Motyer¹⁰ and expanding on him, I assemble the data in this way:

⁹ *ibid*, p.13; Motyer also adds 7:10 – 15; 14:28 – 32; and 24:21 – 23 as texts that do not explicitly mention the Messiah, but illustrate the effect he will have on the world.

¹⁰ Motyer assembled the tables on the Servant and Conqueror; I added the one for the King.

The Messiah as King (Isaiah 7 – 35)

8:14 – 9:7	11:1 – 16	32:1 – 8	33:17 – 24
Biography	Biography	Biography	Biography
The king's reign	The king's reign	The king's reign	The king's reign
	He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the Spirit	He is endowed with the word
The King will be a new sanctuary (8:14 – 18); he will bring new creation (light out of darkness) and rule the world	He will rule the world and bring about a new creation	He will reign righteously, undo the great curse, and pour out the Spirit	He will secure Jerusalem and forgive inhabitants
Tailpiece (9:8 – 10:34)	Tailpiece (12:1 – 6)	Tailpiece (32:9 – 20)	Tailpiece (33:1 – 35:10)

The Messiah as Servant (Isaiah 36 – 55)

42:1 – 4	49:1 – 6	50:4 – 9	52:13 – 53:12
Biography	Autobiography	Autobiography	Biography
The Servant's task	The Servant's task	The Servant's commitment	The Servant's completion of his task
He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the word	He is endowed with the word	
	He experiences dependency	He experiences suffering	He experiences suffering
Tailpiece (42:5 – 9)	Tailpiece (49:7 – 13)	Tailpiece (50:10 – 11)	Tailpiece (54:1 – 55:13)

The Messiah as Anointed Conqueror (Isaiah 56 – 66)

59:15 – 21	61:1 – 3	61:10 – 62:7	63:1 – 6
Biography	Autobiography	Autobiography	Autobiography
The Conqueror's task	The Conqueror's task	The Conqueror's commitment	The Conqueror's completion of his task
He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the Spirit and the word	He is endowed with the word	
He effects vengeance and salvation	He effects vengeance and salvation	He effects vengeance and salvation	He effects vengeance and salvation
Tailpiece (60:1 – 22)	Tailpiece (61:4 – 9)	Tailpiece (62:8 – 12)	Tailpiece (63:7 – 66:24)

The similarities between these sections are fairly straightforward: acknowledged leadership, endowment of Spirit and word that enables him to reign, defeat of enemies, and ultimately, the establishment of a new world order that is put in the language of a 'new creation.' The major question that emerges from this overview is: In what ways does the presentation of this Messianic figure change between sections? And why? What accounts for the changes between the sections? One could simply say that it represents the development of the text of Isaiah over time, whether there was, in effect, one or more 'Isaias'. But I wish to suggest a reason for the changes that are literary and theological, without assuming anything about the formation of the entire text of Isaiah. I believe that each portrayal of the Messiah corresponds with the historical crises brought on by Ahaz and Hezekiah and their diplomatic compromises with Assyria and Babylon, respectively. That is, the Messiah as the faithful, ideal Davidic king serves as a contrast to the other, very fallible kings from David's line.

In Isaiah 7 – 35, the Messiah is a King who stands in contrast to Ahaz. Isaiah comes to warn Ahaz after the invasion of Aram and Israel into Judah, which was victorious, although they did not press their advantage and take

Jerusalem (Isa.7:1 – 2; 2 Chr.28:5 – 8).¹¹ However, the larger looming threat was that of Assyria. Isaiah brought the following word to Ahaz in 7:8 – 9 to warn him. It is unclear whether Ahaz was considering forming an alliance with Aram and/or the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Ephraim) as protection against a second, successful attack against Jerusalem, or with the Assyrian Empire against Aram and Ephraim.¹² In either case, Isaiah says of this alliance of Aram and Israel:

‘It shall not stand, and it [a successful invasion by Aram-Israel into Jerusalem] shall not come to pass.

^{A1} The head of Aram is Damascus

^{B1} And the head of Aram is Rezin

^{C1} And within sixty five years Ephraim will be shattered, no longer a people

^{A2} And the head of Ephraim is Samaria

^{B2} And the head of Samaria is Remaliah’s son

^{C2} If you do not stand by faith, indeed you will not stand at all.’

The A and B lines refer to two national powers, their capitals (A) and their kings (B), who crafted an alliance with each other. ‘The C lines balance the coming dissolution of Ephraim with the possible dissolution of Judah. The general message of warning is plain: Ephraim chose the path of human collective security by its alliance with Aram and thus sealed its doom. It would, therefore, cease to be a nation (C1). To reject the way of faith for the collective security of an alliance with Assyria would likewise spell the end for Judah (C2). The way of faith (C2) stands in contrast with the stress on earthly, human power in the A and B lines. For all their boasted defensive alliance, their strength was, in the last analysis, only whatever Damascus or Samaria could offer in the final Assyrian onslaught (2 Ki.16:9; 17:5) and the wisdom behind their policy was only whatever Rezin and Remaliah’s son could devise! But what Isaiah left unsaid must have shouted as loudly to Ahaz as what he did say: The head of Judah is Jerusalem, and the head of Jerusalem is David’s son. Here was a situation of divine strength and a kingship sustained by divine promises. Hence the call to faith and the warning that to abandon faith is to lose all.’¹³

In 8:4 – 8, Isaiah was not implying that Assyria would be a diplomatic ally to Judah. He was not suggesting that Assyria would prevent an attack by Aram and Israel,¹⁴ and a diplomatic attempt to curry favor with Assyria for that purpose that would eventually backfire on Ahaz (2 Chr.28:16 – 21). Furthermore, in the highly controversial Immanuel passage in 7:14 – 25, *Isaiah was not delivering a ‘sign of reassurance’ to Ahaz.* Instead, Isaiah foresees the onslaught of the king of Assyria. Within the time period of the infancy of his own son, Isaiah traces the march of Assyria through Israel (Isa.8:4 – 8). They will not benefit Judah, however. In short order, Isaiah sees in 8:5 – 10 that Assyria will march all the way into Judah, though God Himself repulsed them in Isa.37:36 – 38. Isaiah’s prediction was correct. In 734 BC, Tiglath-pileser marched down the Israelite sea coast, throughout Philistia, to the Egyptian border, cutting off Egyptian aid. In 733 BC, Israel lost Galilee, Transjordan (2 Ki.15:29), Megiddo and other cities and it was only the hasty submission of King Hoshea of Israel which saved the kingdom for a few years more. Damascus fell to Assyria in 732. Israel was taken captive in 721.

Ahaz was the last reigning Judean king in a fully sovereign house of David. Because of Ahaz, the house of David ceased to be a sovereign, independent dynasty. It became subjected to foreign powers and became a puppet throne of the Gentile empires around Israel: first Assyria, then Babylon, Persia, Greece, and then Rome. ‘Every next king in David’s line was the focus of a longing that he would be the Messiah, and every actual king was guardian of that longing inasmuch as he might be the Messiah’s father. To all this Ahaz played false...When [the Messiah] was born it was to share the poverty of his people, to inherit a non-existent throne and to feel the full weight of the oppressor. The blame for all this rested on Ahaz and his failure to believe the Lord’s word.’¹⁵ In contrast to this, the Messiah not only restores the independent sovereignty of the house of David, he reverses the subjection. He will rule among the Gentiles. This is the clear emphasis of the four Messianic portraits of the Messiah as king (9:1 – 7; 11:1 – 6; 32:1 – 8; 33:17 – 24).

¹¹ Till is mistaken about the chronological sequence of events. He believes Isaiah’s conversation with Ahaz happened *before* the invasion of Aram and Israel, and was to serve the purpose of reassurance. However, the text indicates that the conversation happened *after* the invasion described in 2 Chr.28.

¹² This is more likely because it fits with 2 Chr.28:16 – 21, where Ahaz approaches the king of Assyria for help, and it backfires. In either case, Till is mistaken in assuming that Ahaz was considering a direct military assault on Aram and Israel.

¹³ Motyer, p.82.

¹⁴ Hence Till is mistaken about Isaiah expecting Assyria to be Judah’s ally. Isaiah does not suggest this.

¹⁵ Motyer, p.87

In Isaiah 36 – 55, the Messiah is a Servant in contrast to Hezekiah. There is a double sense in which Hezekiah is not a ‘servant.’ The first is in relation to God, the second in relation to Israel. Hezekiah became the ‘servant’ of Babylon as opposed to the servant of God. Hezekiah feared for his security and listened to Merodoch-Baladan of Babylon. The Servant, however, listens only to YHWH (Isa.50:4 – 9). He says, ‘The Lord GOD has opened My ear; and I was not disobedient; nor did I turn back’ (Isa.50:5). Neither was Hezekiah a ‘servant’ in relation to the people of Israel. He had a strangely self-centered reaction to God’s declaration of exile, caring only about himself and his times, not for his people’s future.

‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left...and some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.’ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, ‘The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good.’ For he thought, ‘For there will be peace and truth in my days.’ (Isa.39:6 – 8)

After Isaiah declares to Hezekiah that as a result of his folly, his offspring and all Israel will be carried off into captivity in Babylon, Hezekiah’s response is puzzling. Hezekiah gave not a whit for those who came after him, caring only that there was ‘peace’ in his own day – such shortsightedness! Throughout Scripture, the most negatively evaluated people are those who do not think about the future and their progeny but only for themselves: Esau in Genesis 25 (who sells his future birthright for stew in the present); Judah in Genesis 38 (who does not give his son to be married to Tamar for the future continuation of that lineage); Elkanah in 1 Samuel 1 (who neglects Hannah’s future by saying to her, ‘Am I not better to you than ten sons?’). Hezekiah’s decision to side with the rising Babylonian power against Assyria shows a lack of faith in God, but his self-centered response to Isaiah’s rebuke reveals utter disdain, stupidity, and spiritual failure. The true Servant, by contrast, gives himself to others for their ultimate good and restoration.

In Isaiah 56 – 66, the Messiah is an Anointed Conqueror superior to both Cyrus and Hezekiah. Although Cyrus the Persian plays a major role in the release of the Israelite captives from Babylon, he is not ultimately the one for whom Jerusalem waits. Jerusalem waits for a king from the Davidic house who will possess the Spirit of God, something already stated in Isa.11:1. The first of the four portraits in this section of Isaiah begins with the LORD as a warrior, girding Himself in His armor (Isa.59:15 – 17, repeating motifs of armor gear from 11:5). Isaiah says that this ‘Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,’ declares the LORD. ‘As for Me, this is My covenant with them,’ says the LORD: ‘My Spirit which is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your offspring, nor from the mouth of your offspring’s offspring,’ says the LORD, ‘from now and forever’ (Isa.59:20 – 21). Isaiah gives a profound word of hope to Jerusalem (Isa.60) and then, repeating mention of Spirit-anointing as in 11:1 (‘the Spirit of the LORD is on me’), describes this warrior’s purpose as ‘to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners’ (Isa.61:1).

In these passages, the Messiah does the opposite of Hezekiah, who opened the treasury of the Temple and permitted the Babylonians to peer inside. Hezekiah therefore set the stage for the Babylonians to plunder Jerusalem and the Temple (Isa.39:2). The Messiah, by contrast, would provide for Jerusalem by drawing the Gentile nations to bring gifts of all kinds: precious metals and stones, ornaments used during peacetime, flocks, trees, spices, etc. (Isa.60:3 – 22). This is another dramatic way the Messiah will be quite unlike Hezekiah.

Also in this section, Isaiah portrays Israel as recounting their history from the Exodus and offering a beautiful and repentant prayer for God to deliver them one more time, this time from Exile (63:7 – 64:12). In response to this plea that God would ‘rend the heavens and come down’ (64:1), the Messianic deliverer apparently does, and does something that provokes two widely different responses within Israel. Throughout Isaiah 65, Isaiah mentions, on the one hand, ‘a rebellious people,’ ‘a people who continually provoke Me to My face,’ who are unclean and yet maintain a ‘holier than thou’ attitude (65:2 – 4). God promises anger and wrath upon them. On the other hand, there are those who God calls ‘new wine in the cluster,’ ‘My servants,’ ‘offspring from Jacob,’ ‘an heir of My mountains from Judah,’ ‘My chosen ones,’ ‘flocks,’ ‘herds,’ and ‘My people who seek Me’ (65:8 – 10). The result will be the promised ‘new creation’:

^{65:17} For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;
And the former things will not be remembered or come to mind.
¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;
For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing
And her people for gladness.
¹⁹ I will also rejoice in Jerusalem and be glad in My people;
And there will no longer be heard in her
The voice of weeping and the sound of crying.

The surprising division within Israel is apparently explained in the last chapter of Isaiah. It is caused by the Messianic conqueror downplaying the Temple itself, along with its sacrifices, and turning to dwell with the one 'who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word' (Isa.66:1 – 3). The result of the Messiah's action is a division of people into either new creation or wrath, apparently based on their responses to him. This reference to the Temple in 66:1 – 2 means that Isaiah once again picks up the motif from Isa.8:14 – 15 of the Messiah being involved in being and/or building a 'new Temple.'

The Exalted Servant Who Suffered (52:1 – 53:12)

At last I will address the question, 'Who is the Servant spoken of in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12?' Any argument about this cannot hang on how Isaiah uses the phrase 'my servant' in his writings as a whole. It is perfectly accurate to say that, in general, Isaiah uses the phrase 'my servant' to denote, at various times, himself, the Messiah, David, Israel as a nation, or even Cyrus the Persian. All such usages are attested in Isaiah. The precise meaning of 'my servant' must be determined by the context of any particular segment of Isaiah.

Theodore M. Drange offers the following reasons for why 'the Servant' should be regarded as 'Israel as a community personified as an individual':

(1) According to Isa 53:3 in the Tanakh, the suffering servant was 'despised [and] shunned by men'. It seems doubtful that that is fulfilled by Jesus just in virtue of the fact that his own people did not accept him, for he apparently was widely accepted by the common people elsewhere. According to Lu 4:15, he taught in the synagogue and everyone praised him. And later, huge crowds supposedly followed him, and he was described as making a 'Triumphal Entry' into Jerusalem (Mt 21:8-11; John 12:12-13,17-19).

(2) Verse 3 in the Tanakh also declares that the suffering servant was 'familiar with disease', and verse 4 says that he was 'stricken by God', where the Hebrew word for 'stricken' is one that is used in the Hebrew Scriptures to stand only for leprosy (as at Le 13:3,9,20 and 2Ki 15:5). But Jesus is not known to have suffered from leprosy or any other disease, so those verses are not applicable to him. It may even be part of some forms of Christian doctrine that Jesus needed to be perfectly healthy in order to adequately play the role of 'sacrificial lamb' (which by law needed to be 'without blemish'). It is clear that the suffering servant of Isa 53 could not adequately play such a role.

(3) As for Jesus being silent before his accusers (thereby satisfying verse 7), that seems not to work either. Verse 7 says (twice): 'He did not open his mouth.' But according to John 18:33-37, 19:11, Jesus said much to Pontius Pilate. In each of the four gospels Jesus opened his mouth and said something before his accusers. Hence, Jesus did not actually fulfill that part of the prophecy.

(4) In verse 9 it says of the suffering servant 'his grave was set among the wicked, and with the rich, in his death.' It is unclear how that applies to Jesus, for there were no other bodies in the tomb in which Jesus' body was placed. The verse definitely does not say that the servant would have a grave provided for him by a rich man, so that part of the alleged prophecy is sheer invention.

(5) According to verse 10, 'the Lord chose to crush him by disease, that if he made himself an offering for guilt, he might see offspring and have long life, ...' That seems totally inapplicable to Jesus, for Jesus was not crushed by disease, nor did he see any offspring, nor did he have a long life.

(6) Isaiah 53 does not actually mention the Messiah. In fact, when we look closely at the chapter, it is hard to find anything in it that is applicable to either the (Jewish) Messiah or to Jesus. Verse 1 does not actually

say that the servant's message would not be believed, but merely asks, 'Who can believe what we have heard?' There seems to be no prophecy there at all. Nor is there any indication that the servant would be arrested as a criminal or scourged or crucified with criminals or make intercession for his persecutors. None of that is in there. Verse 6 does say, 'the Lord visited upon him the guilt of us all,' but there are other interpretations of that than the Christian one.

(7) There is a Judaic interpretation of Isa 53 that seems plausible. The suffering servant is the nation of Israel which is represented by King Uzziah, who was its king in Isaiah's time and who died of leprosy. According to Shmuel Golding, Isaiah's message may have been: 'Here is your leprous king, who is in type suffering under God's hand for you the backslidden servant nation of Israel' (which explains verse 6). Uzziah was taken away from the royal palace because of his affliction as a leper and spent his remaining years in isolation, which fits verse 8. Golding says the following: 'Israel is portrayed as a suffering servant on account of its anointed leader being stricken with leprosy. Israel, like the leper, is a suffering servant of God. Both have suffered humiliation at the hand of their fellowmen: the leper because of his unsightly appearance; Israel through its defeat at the hands of the Babylonians. The gist of the message is that Israel like the leper has suffered, but nevertheless will retain its identity in the form of the exiled Jewish people and that they will prosper in this form.'

This interpretation of Isaiah 53 seems preferable to the Christian one because it does not suffer from drawbacks (1)-(6) mentioned above. It would also better explain the many changes of tense that occur in the chapter. And Israel is indeed referred to as 'God's servant' (e.g., at Isa 49:3). However, the given interpretation does not make the chapter into a prophecy so much as an explanation of Israel's situation at around the time of Isaiah. At the very least, it shows, I think, that Isaiah 53 is not a clear example of a fulfilled prophecy (or set of fulfilled prophecies) in the Bible. So it is not any good support for premise of the Argument from the Bible.

This theory is worth examining from a number of angles, but ultimately it too suffers from several flaws.

(1) Jesus' kingdom-building activity did draw significant crowds at times, but it would be a mistake to confuse this with widespread commitment based on real knowledge of his intentions. It is fine to point out that in Luke 4:15, Jesus teaches in the Nazareth synagogue and receives some praise. But in Luke 4:16 – 30, just a few more words from Jesus about showing grace to the Gentiles send the Nazareth synagogue-goers into a rage. They immediately try to throw him off a cliff to kill him. This incident is part of a larger pattern. When Jesus was obscure and general about 'the kingdom,' the crowds followed. But whenever Jesus was clear about his embrace of the Gentiles in forgiveness and love, his radical ethic concerning money, his upcoming death and resurrection, and the need for others to internalize him (Jn.6), he lost public momentum and drove people away. In the middle of his ministry, even the twelve weren't sure what Jesus meant, but they follow for the time being by asking, in one sense, 'Well, what are our other options?' (Jn.6:68.) Jesus was received in the 'triumphal entry' but all the crowds rejected him at his crucifixion when he did not lead a military coup against Rome. The 'triumphal entry' can hardly be considered a success. By the time of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, even his closest friends and followers had disassociated themselves with him. This objection from Drange lacks quite a bit of substance.

(2) Drange's association of the word 'stricken' with leprosy is a perfectly fair one, but needs to be greatly clarified. When Isaiah uses language that was associated with leprosy, but not the word 'leprosy' itself, it is perfectly reasonable to say that he is making an association. It is clear that leprosy as a disease represents something deeper, namely sin. This association is present even in the Pentateuch, where leprosy is not a result of personal sin, but is an icon of sin. It causes degeneration of the body, a deadening to feeling and stimulus, social ostracism, etc. just like sin does. It is clear to most scholars that Isaiah 53 is offering an explanation for how God will handle Israel's sin, not physical diseases like leprosy.

Jesus was 'familiar with disease' not because he contracted other peoples' diseases but because he healed them. Also, Jesus' miracles possessed a quality of analogy as well, where sight to the blind, life out of death, health to the sick, etc. are all analogies of Jesus' restoration of sinners. Therefore, fundamentally, Jesus was 'familiar with disease' because he entered and became the most deadly 'disease' of all, sin. Matthew's reference of Isa.53:4 in Mt.7:18 is consistent with the understanding that Jesus' healing of disease is an image of Jesus' healing of sin, which is why Matthew returns to the necessity for all the Scriptures being fulfilled in Mt.26:54 – 56 when Jesus is

going to the cross to draw onto himself all the emblems of sin: thorns, curse, scarlet as the color of sin, etc. and finally, death.

(3) Pontius Pilate had to make a determination about Jesus, and failed to have moral courage, but he was not among Jesus' accusers per se. Except for a few statements before his accusers on the Jewish Sanhedrin regarding his identity, linking himself with Daniel's 'Son of Man' prophecy, Jesus was in fact silent about the charges brought against him.

(4) I do not find this to be unclear as Drange does. Taken by itself, Isaiah's prediction admits a certain range of possibilities. Perhaps the Servant would be buried *with* social rejects, or *by* social rejects, or *among* social rejects. Perhaps the Servant in his death would be *with* a dead rich man, *associated* with a rich man, etc. It is perfectly within Isaiah's phrasing that Jesus was crucified with wicked criminals, associated with such people, and buried by a rich person in a tomb originally meant for members of his rich family.

(5) Conceptually, 'offspring' or 'children' regularly refer to association or residence, not simply blood lineage. For example, residents of a city are regularly called 'sons' and 'daughters' of that city (e.g. 'daughters of Jerusalem' and so forth). Jesus' 'long life' refers to his resurrection life on the other side of his death.

(6) Drange's logic on this point is quite weak, bordering on the idea that Isaiah 53 is not even a prophecy, though the rest of the book was clearly understood prophetically. Does he think it already occurred at the time of Isaiah's writing? It is true that Isaiah 53 does not actually mention the title 'Messiah,' but Isaiah is perfectly capable of referring to the Messiah and the Messianic age without using the term. For example, the link between the Servant and the vindication of Jerusalem (52:1 – 12), a running theme throughout Isaiah, makes quite a strong argument for the passage being Messianic. For who else can restore Jerusalem? Moreover, the sustained contrast between 'the Servant' of Isaiah 40 – 55 with Hezekiah of Isaiah 38 – 39 demonstrates a consistency that argues for the Messianic nature of this portrait. In fact, the very reason why he uses the term 'the Servant' may be to make a semantic and conceptual link to 'my servant David' in Isa.37:5. This is one anchor point for how chs.38 – 55 are rooted within chs.7 – 37. The 'Servant' is a Davidic title.

Furthermore, Isaiah here differentiates between Israel as a whole and the Servant in a variety of ways. The rhetorical framework of the passage is such that God is speaking *to* Israel as a whole *about* the Servant, and the two are not synonymous.

52:14 Just as many were astonished at you, **My people**, so **his** appearance was marred...

Subsequent to the reference in 52:14, Israel speaks *about* the Servant, differentiating 'him' from 'we'/'us.'¹⁶

53:2 **He** has no stately form or majesty that **we** should look upon **him**, nor appearance that **we** should be attracted to **him**.

53:3 **He** was despised, and **we** did not esteem **him**.

53:4 Surely **our** griefs **he himself** bore, and **our** sorrows **he** carried; yet **we ourselves** esteemed **him** stricken,

53:5 But **he** was pierced through for **our** transgressions, **he** was crushed for **our** iniquities;

The chastening for **our** well-being fell upon **him**, and by **his** scourging **we** are healed.

53:6 **All of us** like sheep have gone astray, **each of us** has turned to his own way;

But the LORD has caused the iniquity of **us all** to fall on **him**.

53:11 By his knowledge **the Righteous One, My Servant**, will justify **the many**, as **he** will bear **their** iniquities.

53:12 Therefore, I will allot **him** a portion with **the great**, and **he** will divide the booty with **the strong**;
Yet **he** himself bore the sin of **many**, and interceded for **the transgressors**.

¹⁶ Examples of Israel collectively speaking: Isa.1:9, 16:6, 20:6, 22:13, 25:9, 26:1,8,13,17-18, 28:15, 30:16, 33:2, 36:7, 41:22-23,26, 42:24, 56:12, 58:3, 59:9-13, 63:19, and especially 64:3-12, particularly interesting in its parallels to Isaiah 53, where collective Israel is also speaking. This is very common in Isaiah.

If the Servant was alone in his sufferings, then 'we' had no part in them. 'We' stood aloof, originally thinking that 'he' deserved what he suffered. Consistently throughout this passage, this is the sense. The Servant was crushed and wounded, and 'we' were not only spectators but contributors to the fundamental reason for his pain. Israel had little merit of its own (Isa.64:6; 48:11), and suffered for its own sins. The Servant, by contrast, suffers voluntarily for sins not his own.

(7) The assertion that 'the Servant' is Uzziah or Hezekiah suffers from several fatal flaws. First, Hezekiah himself does not demonstrate the attitude of servanthood, making it quite unlikely that he could be considered the Servant; I have already described this above. We know very little from Isaiah or 2 Kings 15 about Uzziah (Ahaziah), except for the implication that he was struck with leprosy for not taking away the idolatrous 'high places' (2 Ki.15), a decision for which he was culpable. He therefore suffered, not unjustly for others but justly for his own failure. Second, the idea that the Hebrew Masoretic version of Isa.53:10 should read, 'If he will acknowledge his guilt' is unsustainable from a manuscript perspective. Even if this is the correct translation of the Hebrew Masoretic (which is quite debatable¹⁷), the Masoretic is interrogated by older manuscripts. The extant Septuagint manuscripts (translated into Greek by Jews, not Christians) are older than the Masoretic manuscripts by 100 – 200 years and are unlikely to have been merely invented by Christians. The Dead Sea Scroll manuscripts are older by 600 – 1000 years. It is much more likely that the Masoretic text, which comes from the non-Christian Jewish community in the early 6th centuries AD, altered Isaiah 53:10 *in response to* the Christian witness to Jesus. The Dead Sea Scrolls in particular are not ambiguous in their treatment of 53:10 and in their witness to a Servant who suffers for others' sins. The Scrolls cannot be said to reflect Christian tampering. Lyons' argument, founded on the Hebrew Masoretic text as it is, fails at this point. Third, Isaiah 53:10 is not the only place where a sense of 'substitution' appears in this passage. Isaiah also says, 'But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him' (53:6), that 'their iniquities he did bear' (53:11), and that the Servant 'bore the sin of many' (53:12). Given the proximity of other verses pointing to the same idea, not to mention the preponderance of instances of 'asham' being translated 'guilt-offering,' it is far more exegetically sound to translate 53:10 as 'guilt-offering.'

Furthermore, there are major themes running through Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 that also course through Isaiah as a whole. These have not even been considered fully by most commentators and apologists.

Jerusalem's Vindication: As I mentioned earlier, in every other Messianic portrait, Jerusalem is vindicated as the capital city from which the Messiah's reign begins to issue forth. Isaiah maintains that pattern here. Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 immediately follows the 'good news' to Jerusalem of her redemption in Isaiah 52:1 – 12, where Isaiah speaks of the announcement that God has 'redeemed Jerusalem' when he 'bared his holy arm before the eyes of all nations...the ends of the earth' to 'see the salvation of our God.' Then Isaiah immediately turns to consider how God bared His 'arm' (53:1) and it is the Servant's self-sacrifice on behalf of the nation and Jerusalem. The fact that the verb tenses in Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 are in the past tense not only expresses how confident Isaiah is that he places it in the past tense (which happens in other places in Isaiah); but it reinforces the sense that the *exalted* Servant vindicates Jerusalem, and his suffering is revealed and contextualized only after the fact of his exaltation. It is quite unlikely that Isaiah would speak everywhere else about the Messiah vindicating Jerusalem as his city, but here in this critical passage of Isaiah 52 – 53, attribute Jerusalem's vindication to Israel collectively, especially when Israel as a community is sharply distinguished from the Servant and is understood to have caused the suffering of both Jerusalem and the Servant. In light of this Isaianic theme concerning Jerusalem and the Messianic King, the Servant of Isaiah 53 must be the Messiah. Later in Isaiah 65 – 66, the Messiah seems to have a divisive impact on Israel and God poses a threat to Jerusalem once again,¹⁸ but this does not have an immediate bearing on deciding the identity of the Servant in Isaiah 52 – 53.

Gentile Acknowledgement: Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, not least of all Isaiah, God anticipates a time when the Gentile nations will begin to acknowledge Him. This would happen when Israel is blessed on the other side of the curse of Exile (e.g. Dt.32:43). Isaiah further ties this to the vindication of Jerusalem when he says, 'Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light and kings to the brightness of your dawn' (Isa.60:1 – 3). Thus, the historical fate of the Jewish people as well as God's

¹⁷ 'Asham' is Strong's Concordance word #817, translated by NASB on the one hand as 'guilt' twice (Gen.26:10; Jer.51:5) but on the other hand, as 'guilt-offering' thirty-eight times (e.g. multiple times in Lev.5 – 7; 14; 19).

¹⁸ Thus, Farrell Till is mistaken about Isaiah predicting 'Jerusalem's to enjoy perpetual security' (p.38).

relation to the Gentiles must be interpreted from within the context of Israel's covenant blessings and curses. God ties the two together. Essentially, when Israel is blessed again, the Gentiles will be blessed as well. As long as Israel is plunged into curses and darkness, the Gentile nations will not recognize Israel's God. The notion that Israel would atone for the Gentile world through her accursed and prolonged suffering reverses this key link established by the Hebrew Scriptures. It makes light of the justice of God and suffers from basic theological and exegetical difficulties. The solution proposed by Jesus – that he is Israel's Messiah, that he brings forth the new creation and the new covenant for Israel anticipated by the prophets, that he blesses those 'in him' by sharing his resurrection life, and that he inaugurates world evangelization by gathering Gentiles under his reign while teaching them his truth – is a much more satisfying solution that accords with the Hebrew Scriptures. It is certainly more satisfying than the view that Uzziah won Gentile acknowledgement, for he most certainly did not! During Paul's ministry, the Gentile Christians' offering to the Jerusalem church for famine relief was a representation of the blessings from the Gentiles that would pour into Jerusalem because of their faith in Jesus as Messiah.

The Parallel to the Levitical Sacrifices: Isaiah 53 uses many terms and words that find predominant use in Israel's sacrificial system. Conceptually, some have argued that the 'Servant' is like a sacrificial animal. In general, the sacrificial system demanded a spotless offering, underscoring minimally that the sinful do not atone for the sinful. The conceptual links to land are very strong as well. In Genesis, the slaying of animals when Adam and Eve were exiled from the land of Eden signified (i) the strange consequence of humanity's sin being related to bloodshed (the first blood being shed), (ii) protection during that exile described as being covered by innocent animals, and (iii) a foreshadowing of how humanity would one day return to paradise (innocent blood will one day be shed for humanity to return). Adam, Eve, and all humanity were thus in exile from the land of Eden with strange tensions inserted into the relationship between humanity and the land. The tensions deepened with Cain's murder of Abel. Cain heightened the association between blood, land, and curse. Abel's blood cried out to God from the land and made it impossible for Cain to settle. Cain linked the face of the land with the face of God (Gen.4:14) describing his alienation from one by his alienation from the other. This episode identifies the general problem between humanity and the land and suggests that human bloodshed is a specific theological difficulty; how could any human community settle in a land when bloodshed occurs on it, as it invariably does? Israel was given the answer: Atonement. One of the functions of Israel's sacrificial system was to maintain their presence on the promised land. It follows that an innocent sacrifice would be needed to bring Israel back to a state of blessing, so that they would ultimately inherit the land. In his final song before Israel, Moses looked far into the future and sang that when God returns Israel from Exile, He 'will atone for His land and His people' (Deut.32:43). Israel could enter the promised land only through the sacrifice of innocent blood, continuing in but inverting the relation between bloodshed and land. This time, God would accept only the blood of the innocent Servant. This informs the Christian claim that the blood of Jesus not only brings about 'forgiveness,' but 'new creation': God's true people will one day inherit a new heavens and new earth.

The Passover Lamb and the Exodus: Israel's sacrificial system, however, was arguably rooted in another event, the Exodus. After all, it was the blood of the Passover Lamb that was involved in bringing Israel out of Egypt and into the promised land. When Israel was in its Exilic period, they looked to theological and historical precedents of deliverance and found, of course, the Exodus. This has been explored in considerable detail by N.T. Wright and others. Isaiah had already used the rich language of Israel's older Exodus to describe the new Exodus from Exile:

^{43:1} But now, thus says the LORD, your Creator, O Jacob,
And He who formed you, O Israel,
'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;
I have called you by name; you are Mine!

² When you **pass through the waters**, I will be with you;
And **through the rivers**, they will not overflow you.
When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched,
Nor will the flame burn you.

³ For I am the LORD your God,
The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;
I have given Egypt as your ransom,
Cush and Seba in your place...

¹⁴ Thus says the LORD your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel,
'For your sake I have sent to Babylon,

And will bring them all down as fugitives,
Even the Chaldeans, into the ships in which they rejoice.

¹⁵ I am the LORD, your Holy One,

The Creator of Israel, your King.’

¹⁶ Thus says the LORD,

Who makes **a way through the sea**

And **a path through the mighty waters,**

¹⁷ Who brings forth the chariot and the horse,

The army and the mighty man

(They will lie down together and not rise again;

They have been quenched and extinguished like a wick):

¹⁸ Do not call to mind the former things,

Or ponder things of the past.

¹⁹ Behold, I will do something new,

Now it will spring forth;

Will you not be aware of it?

I will even make **a roadway in the wilderness,**

Rivers in the desert.

²⁰ The beasts of the field will glorify Me,

The jackals and the ostriches,

Because **I have given waters in the wilderness**

And **rivers in the desert,**

To give drink to My chosen people.

²¹ The people whom I formed for Myself

Will declare My praise.

The repetition of passing through the sea and the wilderness makes this vision quite clearly a parallel to the old Exodus. But just as the first Exodus required a Passover lamb, so the new Exodus needs a new Passover Lamb to complete the picture. This is probably why Isaiah repeatedly makes reference to ‘sheep’ and ‘a lamb led to slaughter’ (53:7). It probably lies behind Isaiah’s language of the Servant ‘sprinkling’ many nations (52:13), for in the old Exodus, the blood of the Passover Lamb was sprinkled on doorframes with a hyssop branch. Isaiah undoubtedly saw the Servant as a new Passover Lamb. This Lamb would have to be sacrificed in order for the new Exodus to occur, an Exodus out of sin itself. And Jesus was certainly aware of this when he celebrated the last supper, observing the symbolism of the Passover meal and drawing onto himself the symbolic language and function of the Passover Lamb. He reoriented the unleavened bread to refer to his broken body, and the wine to refer to his blood, both of which need to be internalized in order to deliver a person from one realm to another. Jesus did this to indicate that he was starting a new Exodus, an Exodus out of the kingdom of darkness into his own kingdom of light (e.g. Col.1:13 – 14)

The History of Rabbinic Opinion: The following is a summary of rabbinic opinion concerning Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12.¹⁹

‘Until Rashi (Rabbi Solomon Yizchaki, 1040-1105) applied it to the Jewish nation, the Messianic interpretation of this chapter was almost universally adopted by Jews, and his view, which we shall examine presently, although received by Ibn Ezra, Kimchi, and others, was rejected as unsatisfactory by many others, one of whom (R. Mosheh Kohen Ibn Crispin, of Cordova, and afterwards Toledo, fourteenth century, who says rightly, of those who for controversial reasons applied this prophecy to Israel, that ‘the doors of literal interpretation of this chapter were shut in their face, and that they wearied themselves to find the entrance, having forsaken the knowledge of our teachers, and inclined after the stubbornness of their

¹⁹ David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah: The Sufferings of the Messiah and the Glory That Should Follow*, <http://www.saltshakers.com/lm/Baron.rtf>. In addition, the Targum (Aramaic commentaries on the Hebrew Scriptures compiled in the 2nd century CE, with material dating back to the 2nd century BCE) explicitly reads the following verses as applying to the Messiah: Isa.4:2, 9:5, 10:27, 11: 1, 11:6, 14:29, 16:1, 28:5, 42:1, 43:10, 52:13 and 60:1. The Talmud (the Jewish legislation made up of 60 treatises in 13 volumes dating back to ~200 CE) comments on the Messianic idea in Isaiah in: *Shabbath* 89b, *Pesachim* 5a, 68a, *Rôsh ha-shanah* 11b, *Mo'ed Katan* 28b, *Yebamoth* 62a and 63b, *Ketuboth* 112b, *Sanhedrin* 38a, 91b, 93b, 94a, 97a, 97b, 98a, 99a and 110b. Source: Risto Santala, <http://www.kolumbus.fi/hjussila/rsja/OT/OT17.html>.

own hearts and of their own opinions.’ According to Ibn Crispin, the interpretation adopted by Rashi ‘distorts the passage from its natural meaning’, and that in truth ‘it was given of God as a description of the Messiah, whereby, when any should claim to be the Messiah, to judge by the resemblance or non-resemblance to it whether he were the Messiah or not.’

‘Another (R. Eliyya de Vidas, c. 1575), says ‘The meaning of ‘He was wounded for our transgressions. . . bruised for our iniquities’, is that since the Messiah bears our iniquities, which produce the effect of him being bruised, it follows that whoever will not admit that the Messiah thus suffers for our iniquities must endure and suffer them for himself.’

‘Before proceeding to an examination of the modern Jewish interpretation of this chapter, let me add two further striking testimonies to its more ancient Messianic interpretation – taken this time, not from any Targum, or Midrash, or Rabbinical Commentary, which might be said to express the individual opinion of this or that Rabbi, but from the Jewish liturgy, which may be said to bear upon it the seal of the authority and usage of the whole synagogue.

‘The first is taken from the liturgy for the Day of Atonement – the most solemn day of the Jewish year – and reads as follows: ‘We are shrunk up in our misery even until now! Our Rock has not come nigh to us; Messiah our righteousness (or, ‘our righteous Messiah’) has departed from us. Horror has seized upon us, and we have none to justify us. He has borne the yoke of our iniquities and transgressions, and is wounded because of our transgression. He bears our sins on his shoulder, that he may find pardon for our iniquities. We shall be healed by his wound at the time the Eternal will create him (Messiah) as a new creature. O bring him up from the circle of the earth, raise him up from Seir to assemble us the second time on Mount Lebanon, by the hand of Yinnon.’ (This forms part of the Musaph service for the Day of Atonement. The author, according to Zunz, was Eleazer ben Kalir, who lived in the ninth century. Yinnon, as will be seen, was one of the names given by the Rabbis to the Messiah, and is derived from Psalm 72:17, which the Talmud renders, ‘Before the sun was, his name...’ a rendering and expression which implies a belief in the pre-existence of at least the name of the Messiah, and perhaps of the Messiah himself.)

‘The other passage is also from the Machsor (Liturgy for the Festival Services), and will be found among the prayers on the Feast of Passover. It is as follows: ‘Flee, my beloved, until the end of the vision shall speak; hasten, and the shadows shall take their flight hence; high and exalted and lofty shall be the despised one; he shall be prudent in judgment, and shall sprinkle many! Lay bare thine arm! Cry out and say, ‘The voice of my beloved; behold he cometh!’’ (David Levy, the English translator of the Machsor, says in a note that this verse referred to ‘the true Messiah’.)

In summary, I believe there is more than compelling evidence to treat Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12 as Messianic, and in particular, as a prophetic glimpse of Jesus. On the basis of external factors such as manuscript evidence and Jewish rabbinical opinion, there is ample weight to dismiss a few other arguments to the contrary, namely any argument based solely on the Hebrew Masoretic text. But just as importantly, the argument is also made on the basis of internal factors. The verse-by-verse exegetical work provided above and in the footnotes is enough to establish the Messianic solution as the most favorable one. As my contribution to the already large body of writings, however, I have also looked at broader Isaianic themes that must be integrated with the Suffering Servant passage, such as the treatment of Jerusalem, the role of the future King, the restoration of Israel by means of its Messianic King, the need for a new Passover Lamb to bring about a new Exodus deliverance, the concept of self-sacrifice by someone who is not Israel as a whole, and the inauguration of the enfolding of the Gentiles into his reign. Of all the possible options, only Jesus satisfies all the conditions.

In a previous Part of this essay, I delineated between four types of prophecy and fulfillment. This is significant to my approach to Isaiah. Isaiah as a whole offers category 1 (details intentionally fulfilled by Jesus) and 2 (details unintentionally fulfilled by Jesus) prophecies integrated into category 4 (larger themes waiting for fulfillment) prophecy. Isaiah as a whole can be treated as a category 3 prophecy in that Isaiah as a literary unit cries out for resolution. Isaiah’s prophecy, therefore, cannot be broken up into little verses and treated only as category 1 and 2 prophecy. The details of the Servant’s death are quite significant, and on their own make a compelling case for Jesus. But it is irresponsible for both Christians and skeptics alike to take a few verses from Isaiah 53 and make a case for or against Jesus on those verses alone. The larger story that Isaiah is a part of, that he wants to see unfold,

makes the case for Jesus all the more powerful. This also needs to be explored and understood. The book of Isaiah cries out for a resolution to a story, the story of Israel, by focusing on some (though of course not all) of its various themes. Those themes emerge from the Pentateuch and are developed and carried forward by Israel's growing body of Scripture. Notice that I am not concerned at this point to define the precise contours of what we now call the Old Testament/the Hebrew Scriptures/the Jewish Bible. It is sufficient for me to simply make a case from the Pentateuch and Isaiah at this point, because we know for certain that these books existed well before Jesus. Isaiah continues to develop and carry forward those same themes, looking forward to a resolution. How does the New Testament claim that Jesus resolved, or inaugurated the resolution of, Isaiah's vision? In order to evaluate that, I will shortly turn to Luke's writings, because Luke uses Isaiah as the literary backbone of his writings.

Excursus: Is Immanuel the Messiah?

But prior to that, I will make a comment on Isaiah's Immanuel prophecy. I have so far argued all this without making a decision about the meaning of the term 'Immanuel' in Isa.7:14. Is 'Immanuel' a truth or a person?²⁰ I believe my conclusions above can easily stand without deciding this issue, so in some ways this section is superfluous to the objective at hand, but a brief digression on the topic is in order.

Skeptics and Jewish rabbinical scholars understandably deny the Messianic interpretation of 'Immanuel.' Their interpretation proceeds as follows: Isaiah says that God is giving Ahaz a sign, so the sign cannot refer to something so far in the future that Ahaz would never actually see it. Isaiah says that the 'alma' (translated *young woman* or *maiden*) 'is' (present tense) currently with child. According to this argument, virginity is not implied about the child's mother because the technical term for virgin is 'betula' and not 'alma.' Isaiah makes two prophecies about Assyria marked against his son's age. The first is in 7:14 – 25. By the time the child is roughly twelve years old, he will eat 'curds and honey,' the food of poverty, because Assyria will invade Judah and wreak havoc on the land. In 7:21 – 23, Isaiah describes the desolation Assyria will cause and explains that people will monotonously eat 'curds and honey.' This is not to be confused with the 'land flowing with milk and honey,' a phrase which speaks of a land that is abundant. As a result, Isaiah says, the child Immanuel 'shall eat curds and honey by the time he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good' (7:15), where the age of moral accountability is generally thought to be around twelve years old. Thus, the child Immanuel will be born sometime *before* the Assyrian attack, and be thrust into a situation of poverty at around the age of twelve. If Isaiah's second son was conceived in roughly 734 BC and born in 733 BC, the time frame works accurately. In 721 BC, twelve years later, before the child knew 'how to refuse the evil and choose the good,' Assyria took the Northern Kingdom of Israel captive.

The second prophecy regarding Assyria and concerning the child occurs in 8:3 – 4, 'So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me, 'Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; for before the boy knows how to cry out 'My father' or 'My mother,' the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away before the king of Assyria.' This prediction, timed against Isaiah's son's being about one year old, concerns Assyria taking land and wealth from Damascus and Israel. If Isaiah's second son was conceived in roughly 734 BC, the time frame works accurately. In 733 BC, before the child knows how to say 'my father, my mother,' Assyria took Galilee, Transjordan, Megiddo, and other cities; and in 732, Assyria captured Damascus. Hence, during the infancy of Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Assyria took 'the wealth of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria.' In 8:18, Isaiah highlights his two sons as prophetically significant by saying, 'Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.'

Two possibilities stand before us. If ultimately this view is correct, it raises questions about why the Septuagint (LXX) translates 7:14 'virgin' and whether Matthew can legitimately attribute Isaiah 7:14 to Jesus' virgin birth. Indeed, intriguing questions can be raised about the LXX. The LXX has notably clear tendencies to heighten the supernatural character of Israel's Messiah in some key places, more than the Hebrew texts originally possess. However, there are reasons for this development in the LXX, and a satisfying explanation can be brought forward for why, and with what understanding, the New Testament would quote the LXX. That topic would merit a separate essay on its own. Suffice to say that, by way of reminder, the LXX translation is not a Christian invention, but a Jewish Exilic one, and is properly understood as a development and clarification of Jewish Exilic theology. Subsequently, since the New Testament engages both the LXX and the Hebrew original lying behind the LXX, it

²⁰ 'Immanuel' does not have to be a name. It could be the significance attributed to a particular person.

could be that the New Testament is engaging all textual streams of Jewish Exilic theology by quoting the Messianic 'virgin birth' expectation of the LXX.

But is it possible to see Isa.7:14 as Messianic as originally intended? I think it can indeed. First, the 'sign' that Isaiah promises Ahaz is not merely the birth of 'Immanuel' in 7:14. Rather, it is the entire judgment upon Israel and Judah in 7:15 – 25. The main 'sign' is the invasion of Assyria. This is particularly appropriate if we observe that Isaiah is not trying to reassure Ahaz. Rather, Isaiah is pointing out to Ahaz the implications of his spiritual and political failure. If the birth of 'Immanuel' alone is intended to be the only sign to Ahaz, surely a child born seven hundred years after Ahaz would not qualify as a sign to him. But the invasion of Assyria would be.

How can we explain the use of the present tense in, 'The 'alma' is with child'? The present tense is acceptable as a statement of certainty of a future event rather than current reality; this rhetorical style is found in Judges 13:3 – 5 regarding Manoah's wife and the coming birth of Samson, and also throughout Isaiah, notably for instance in Isaiah 53, so the use of the present tense need not constrain us to a child being conceived or born in 734 – 733 BC. The language given in v.16 can have the appearance of the child's birth being immanent, but that could also not be the emphasis of this passage. It seems possible to me that Isaiah is less interested in telling Ahaz as precise a time as possible for *when* Immanuel will be born, and more interested in telling Ahaz the *significance* of his lack of faith: 'When Immanuel is born, he will arrive in poverty to inherit a powerless throne and to suffer with his people under a foreign power. This is due to you, Ahaz.'

Second, it is questionable whether Isaiah's wife the prophetess could properly be called an 'alma.' When Isaiah refers to a woman, wife, or pregnant woman, he consistently uses the other terms for 'woman' in Hebrew: 'ishshah,' 'harah,' and 'mala'/'male.' It is probably true that the word 'betula' is the technical term for 'virgin woman,' and although this is disputed,²¹ I am happy to accept that definition, for the arguments concerning 'betula' do not concern me here. The definition of 'alma' is more important. 'Alma' is rare; it occurs only nine times in the Old Testament. The two occurrences in 1 Chronicles 15:20 and the title of Psalm 46 are presumably musical in their reference and are no longer understood. In Psalm 68:25, Proverbs 30:19, and Song of Solomon 1:3 the context throws no decisive light on the meaning of the word, although Song of Solomon 1:3 ('the maidens love you') leans in the direction of 'virgin women.' In Exodus 2:8 the reference is unquestionably to an unmarried girl, but nothing further can be ascertained from this reference.

Genesis 24:43 is significant because Genesis 24 contains a direct comparison of the terms 'alma' and 'betula.' Abraham's servant prays (24:14) to encounter a girl (naera) to marry Isaac. In verse 16, Rebekah is described first as 'very beautiful,' then as 'betula,' and then in a qualifying phrase, as virginal ('no man had ever lain with her'). The qualifying phrase indicates that by itself, 'betula' may not always be specific, although 'no man had ever lain with her' could of course be an explication of 'betula,' a repetition made for emphasis. In light of this accumulated information about Rebekah, Abraham's servant in verse 43 describes her as 'alma.' The fact that Abraham's servant himself is summarizing to Rebekah's family the reason for his journey and his first encounter with Rebekah, desiring to bring honor to her and her family, strongly suggests that 'alma' in 24:43 summarizes the terms describing Rebekah before in 24:16. The argument that Abraham's servant could not have known that Rebekah was a virgin is untenable; such a condition was implicit in Abraham's criteria, and the strong suggestion of the narrator, by sharing

²¹ 'Betula' occurs fifty times in the Old Testament. Twenty of the fifty cases certainly refer to 'virgins' (Ex.22:16, 17; Lev.21:3, 14; Deut.22:19, 23, 28; Jdg.19:14; 2 Sam.13:2, 18; 1 Ki.1:2; Est.2:2 – 3, 17, 19; Ps.78:63; Is.23:4; 62:5; Jer.2:32; Ezk.44:22). Of the other thirty, 'twelve of these references are metaphorical (e.g. Isa.37:22) and, therefore, their evidential value is patchy. Many could refer to the plight of any young woman, whatever her status, violated in war. Fourteen other cases are non-committal, mainly where 'betulot' is linked with 'young men' (always 'bahur') in the general sense of 'young people' (e.g. Deut.32:25; Am.8:13) (Motyer, p.84). Joel 1:8 presents an example of the word 'betulah' in a context which does not convey the usual meaning of virginity: 'Mourn like a 'betulah' in sackcloth, grieving for the husband of her youth.' Some commentators say this refers to a betrothed virgin, thus making the lamentation all the more poignant because the marriage had never been consummated. The use of ba'al (husband) in this verse, however, seems to imply the opposite. The word ba'al is never used in the Hebrew Scriptures of the betrothed state, but only of a married man. Motyer believes that 'it is not the word itself but its context which determines the meaning. According to G.J. Wenham (betula: 'A girl of marriageable age', VT, 22 (1972), 325 – 348), the word has no more reference to virginity than the English word 'girl.' His survey of Akkadian and Ugaritic cognates supports this conclusion. 'It is not until the Christian era that there is clear evidence that 'betula' had become a technical term for 'virgin'...it is not easy to know when this semantic shift took place.' In the three remaining references (Gen.24:16; Lev.21:3; Jdg.11:39) it appears that without a descriptive clause added 'betula' does not convey a precise meaning' (Motyer, p.84-85).

this information, is that Abraham's servant understood it via divine disclosure (Gen.24:21) in response to his prayer (Gen.24:12 – 14). 'Alma' is a summary term meant to honor Rebekah in front of her family as being 'female, marriageable, unmarried' and certainly 'virginal' in order to be desirable for marriage.

In Song of Solomon 6:8 the plural 'alamot' is used in the following statement of praise:

^{6:8} There are sixty queens and eighty concubines, and 'alamot' without number;
⁹ But my dove, my perfect one, is unique:
She is her mother's only daughter; she is the pure child of the one who bore her.
The maidens saw her and called her blessed,
The queens and the concubines also, and they praised her, saying,
¹⁰ 'Who is this that grows like the dawn,
As beautiful as the full moon,
As pure as the sun,
As awesome as an army with banners?'

A number of questions arise: Is Solomon envisioned as already possessing queens and concubines already through inheritance? Or is he being offered queens and concubines by diplomatic dignitaries for political reasons? Or, is the implication that Solomon could have taken women to become his queens and concubines? Or, is Solomon speaking metaphorically about the Shulamite's entourage of female friends? A determination cannot be made here on that question, though I do think that Solomon is portrayed in this Song as monogamous, but it does seem that we can say quite firmly that 'alma' does not simply mean 'young girl.' Key to understanding this poetry is the cultural fact that marrying a sexually experienced woman did not bring honor upon a man. Since Solomon is trying to honor his one beloved woman, he almost certainly wants to contrast her with a group of women who are the most desirable a man could imagine: young, unmarried, virginal, willing, and numerous. The 'alamot' is the pool of such women. It means, at the very least, 'young, single girl' and probably 'young, single, virginal girl.' The force of the poetry in Song of Solomon contrasts the many desirable women that Solomon could have with the one beloved woman that he does desire. Thus, broadening the meaning of 'alamot' to mean 'young, single women whose virginity is unknown' would greatly weaken the force of the poetry, substantially lessening the honor given to the one beloved woman.

Thus, wherever the context allows a judgment, 'alma' is not a general term meaning 'young woman' but a specific one meaning 'unmarried' that includes the meaning 'virgin.' 'Betulah' means 'virgin' without specifying age, marital status (single or betrothed), and attractiveness, whereas 'alma' encompasses them all: a young, single, attractive, virginal woman. Perhaps 'alma' is actually a subset of 'betulah' such that a woman could be a ninety year old 'betulah' – but would that make her an 'alma?' Certainly not. It is very significant that inside and outside the Bible 'alma' was never used of a married woman.²² Therefore, there is no ground for the assertion that Isaiah really should have used 'betula' in Isa.7:14 if he wanted to indicate a virgin birth. Not only does 'alma' seem to come closer to this meaning than 'betula,' but by all appearances, it would be inappropriate for Isaiah to use 'alma' to describe his own wife, with whom he already had one son, Shear-jashub (Isa.7:3). Isaiah's wife was no longer single nor virginal. Even if we propose a meaning of 'alma' without reference to virginity, 'alma' still means 'single.' The mother of Immanuel therefore cannot be Isaiah's wife.

Finally, third, Isaiah links the identity of Immanuel to both courageous hope and the Messianic king in 8:5 – 9:7. The entire passage is worth quoting.

⁵ Again the LORD spoke to me further, saying,
⁶ 'Inasmuch as these people have rejected the gently flowing waters of Shiloah
And rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah;
⁷ Now therefore, behold, the Lord is about to bring on them the strong and abundant waters of the
Euphrates, even the king of Assyria and all his glory;
And it will rise up over all its channels and go over all its banks.
⁸ Then it will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through,
It will reach even to the neck;

²² E.J. Young, *Studies in Isaiah*, (Tyndale Press, 1954), pp.171ff.

And the spread of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.
⁹ Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered;
 And give ear, all remote places of the earth.
 Gird yourselves, yet be shattered;
 Gird yourselves, yet be shattered.
¹⁰ Devise a plan, but it will be thwarted;
 State a proposal, but it will not stand,
 For God is with us.
¹¹ For thus the LORD spoke to me with mighty power and instructed me not to walk in the way of this
 people, saying,
¹² 'You are not to say, 'It is a conspiracy!'
 In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy,
 And you are not to fear what they fear or be in dread of it.
¹³ It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy.
 And He shall be your fear,
 And He shall be your dread.
¹⁴ Then He shall become a sanctuary;
 But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,
 And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
¹⁵ Many will stumble over them,
 Then they will fall and be broken;
 They will even be snared and caught.'
¹⁶ Bind up the testimony,
 Seal the law among my disciples.
¹⁷ And I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob;
 I will even look eagerly for Him.
¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me
 Are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion.
¹⁹ When they say to you, 'Consult the mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter,'
 Should not a people consult their God?
 Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?
²⁰ To the law and to the testimony!
 If they do not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.
²¹ They will pass through the land hard-pressed and famished,
 And it will turn out that when they are hungry, they will be enraged
 And curse their king and their God as they face upward.
²² Then they will look to the earth, and behold, distress and darkness, the gloom of anguish;
 And they will be driven away into darkness.
¹ But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish;
 In earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt,
 But later on He shall make it glorious,
 By the way of the sea,
 On the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.
² The people who walk in darkness
 Will see a great light;
 Those who live in a dark land,
 The light will shine on them.
³ You shall multiply the nation,
 You shall increase their gladness;
 They will be glad in Your presence
 As with the gladness of harvest,
 As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.
⁴ For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders,
 The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.
⁵ For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult,

And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.
⁶ For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
 And the government will rest on His shoulders;
 And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
 Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
⁷ There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace,
 On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
 To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
 From then on and forevermore.
 The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

The following two observations do not rule out the possibility that Isaiah was speaking to his son, but they do make it much less likely. First, 'Immanuel' is addressed by God as a person in Isa.8:8 as the owner of Judah's land: 'Then it [the flood of Assyria] will sweep on into Judah, it will overflow and pass through, it will reach even to the neck [i.e. Jerusalem]; the spread of its [Assyria's] wings will fill the breadth of your land, O Immanuel.' By itself, this could mean that Isaiah was speaking to his own son, but if so, it would be an unusual phrase. As Motyer points out, 'Nowhere else does the Old Testament exemplify 'land' with a possessive pronoun accompanied by the subject of the pronoun in the vocative. Furthermore, the singular possessive is linked with 'land' as a political unit only in the case of kings (e.g. Deut.2:31; 2 Sam.24:13), Israel personified or some other personification (e.g. Jer.2:15; Hos.10:1), or of the Lord (e.g. 1 Ki.8:36; Ezk.36:5).'²³ This data point is not decisive, but it is significant. By calling the land of 'Judah' in 8:8 (and perhaps also the land of the Northern Kingdom of Israel – the 'these people' in 8:6 who rejoice in Rezin and the son of Remaliah) the land of Immanuel, Isaiah seems to associate Immanuel with kingly rule.

Second, in 8:10, Isaiah derives a great deal of courage and faith from the conceptual meaning of the name Immanuel. He speaks of God's judgment of Israel and Judah together ('Be broken, O peoples, and be shattered' in 8:9a) and calls the world to witness ('And give ear, all remote places of the earth' in 8:9b), then he distinguishes himself and his family and followers ('for God is with us' in 8:10) as those who are commanded by God to place their hope in Him (8:11ff.). If this is the correct way to read the passage, Isaiah would be saying, 'God is with *us*' as opposed to being with *you*, Israel-at-large. In effect, Isaiah would be saying, 'He is with *us* as *we* declare the Assyrian onslaught and the beginning of the period of Exile, a period that would come in time for Judah as well, and end only with the appearance of the Messianic king' in 9:1.

Who are the 'children' that 'are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD' mentioned in 8:18 and how do they relate to Isaiah's confidence? On the one hand, Isaiah could be saying, 'My children, in the way they are named, are signs of God's divine judgment on Israel, and my second child in particular is the sign of God's presence with us, Immanuel in concept, we are therefore hoping in God.' Such an interpretation is linguistically possible, but conceptually difficult. If that is the correct way to understand 8:18, then Isaiah derives an unusual amount of confidence from children who were born naturally and who, by themselves, signify only judgment and destruction. After all, how is the meaning of Immanuel manifest in the name of Isaiah's second son, 'Swift is the booty, speedy is the prey'? It makes just as much sense, if not more, to see in 9:1 – 7 the Immanuel child and the basis of Isaiah's confidence. Isaiah would then be saying, 'My children, in the way they are named, are signs of God's divine judgment on Israel, and because of a future Immanuel who will be the Messiah, we are therefore hoping in God.' This interpretation is made more likely by the fact that Isaiah includes himself as a sign and wonder. He says, 'I and my children...are for signs and wonders...' That is, Isaiah also sees *himself and his faith and hope* as a sign to the people in an otherwise despair-ridden situation. His children, too, were apparently nurtured on their father's faith and hope. That is a more natural reading of the text.

The sweep of the whole passage tilts the scales for me. In 8:6, Isaiah uses the term 'Shiloah.' The term probably refers to a fountain in Jerusalem, means 'peace' in this context and stands in contrast to the violence brought on by trusting Aram and the Northern Kingdom of Israel. It may also be a reference to the kingly line from Judah, including the Messianic king in particular in Genesis 49:10. Since the prophecy of 'Shiloh' in Genesis 49 is the earliest description of the Messiah's reign, such a reference fits quite well in the flow of Isaiah's political and spiritual critique. The Southern Kingdom of Judah has given up on the Davidic dynasty and especially on the

²³ Motyer, p.86.

Messianic hope on which the house of David is really founded. The people of Israel will be shattered despite their plans and schemes (8:9 – 10). In fact, although Isaiah and his small group of followers are strengthened by the divine promise of a Davidic Messiah (8:11 – 13), the faith required to trust God to provide such a deliverer runs so roughshod against the world of politics that ‘both the houses of Israel’ and ‘the inhabitants of Jerusalem’ (8:14) will stumble over it. Isaiah, however, will hope in the Messiah and hold out that hope in 9:1 – 7. The Messiah in 9:1 – 2 will undo the ‘gloom, anguish, and darkness’ described in 8:22. He will undo the damage done by Assyria, even in the order Assyria committed its offenses against the people of Israel; since Assyria took Galilee first, so the Messiah will recover ‘Galilee of the Gentiles’ first (9:1). Hence, Isaiah looks forward to a child born out of the house of David who will restore the Davidic dynasty: ‘for a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us’ (Isa.9:6). This child will have the designation ‘Mighty God’ (9:6). He will be Immanuel. If this is so, then God Himself in the person of Israel’s Messiah suffers by entering into and drawing onto Himself Israel’s sins. He is the only one who vindicates Jerusalem as His capital. He is the One who will summon the Gentiles into His reign.

II. Luke’s Narrative and Isaiah’s Prophecy

Talmudic sources and Qumran tell us that Isaiah’s prophecy as a whole was studied and scrutinized by a great many Second Temple Jews, and we can say that the New Testament wholly agrees with this picture. The New Testament also bears historical witness to the fact that interest in Isaiah was very high. When Luke, for instance, tells us that Zacharias, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist, Jesus, Peter and the disciples, Stephen, and Paul quoted Isaiah, this is an entirely plausible situation from an historical standpoint, and possibly required. It would be surprising, and frankly inconceivable, if such people did *not* quote from Isaiah. The Exile, as understood by all Second Temple Jews, was not at an end. The sequence of Gentile powers after Assyria and Babylon, while not explicitly foreseen by Isaiah, nevertheless extended that same period of Gentile dominion discussed by Isaiah. The Messianic Servant king had not yet come. Jerusalem had yet to be vindicated. So whatever else we might say about Luke’s claims that Jesus fulfilled Isaiah, we must agree with Luke that everyone thought Isaiah, in its entirety and in its major themes, was important. Consequently, when we find a heavy literary interdependence between the narrative of Luke and the prophecy of Isaiah as I will show below, I think such a density of quotations cannot be the product or artifice of Luke’s own mind. It is quite reasonable to assume that the historical Jesus, as a Jewish theologian and an aspirant to the Messianic title, was deeply familiar with and informed by Isaiah.

The Whole and the Parts

Luke quotes from Isaiah, directly and indirectly, in the following way:

<i>Luke’s Writings</i>	<i>Isaiah’s Prophecy</i>
The Gospel of Luke	
Zacharias prophecies by the Spirit about John the Baptist. 1:67-79	Quotes ‘to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death’ from Isa.9:2
Simeon in the Temple prophecies by the Spirit about Jesus. 2:28-32	Quotes ‘a light of revelation to the Gentiles’ from Isa.49:6
Anna is looking for ‘the redemption of Jerusalem.’ 2:38	Isa.52:9 concerns the redemption of Jerusalem
John the Baptist begins his ministry and is ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’ from Isa.40:3-5. 3:1-6	This is the beginning of Isaiah’s vision of the ‘return from exile’ and the ‘redemption of Jerusalem’ starting from Isa.40.
Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee. 4:14 – 9:50	Isaiah’s saw the Messiah ministering in Galilee first, bringing light into darkness. Isa. 8:22 – 9:1
Jesus begins his ministry and quotes from Isaiah’s Servant Song from Isa.61:1-2 and Isa.42:1-9. 4:16-19	Isaiah’s vision of the Messiah reaching the Gentiles and vindicating Jerusalem becomes Jesus’ mission statement.
Jesus forgives sins. 5:17-24, 7:36-50, etc.	Echoes Isaiah’s Servant Song from Isa.53
Jesus calls a remnant in Israel, making an analogy to new wine. 5:29-39	Remnant preserved, analogy to new wine. Isa.65:8-9
Jesus looks ahead to when he, as the bridegroom, ‘is taken away from them.’	This is probably a quotation from Isa.53:8, ‘By oppression and judgment he was taken away’

Jesus pronounces beatitudes on his disciples. 6:20-26	Isaiah distinguishes between the faithful remnant and the remainder of Israel in the same terms. Isa.65:13-15
Jesus heals the centurion's slave and praises the centurion for his faith. 7:1-10	Isaiah foresaw a time when foreigners would be fully welcomed into the covenant people's worship, contrary to the Mosaic Law. Contrast Isa.56:1-8 with Dt.23:1-6
Jesus clarifies his identity to John the Baptist. 7:22	By quoting Isaiah's Servant Songs. Isa.61:1-2 and Isa.42:1-9
Jesus offers 'peace' to the sinful woman. 7:50	Probably thinking about the 'peace' God gives to the righteous; Isaiah said that there is no peace for the wicked. Isa.48:22; 57:20-21
Jesus teaches the parable of the soils. 8:4-15	Using 'restoration from exile' motifs from Isa.55 (seed, rain, thorns, word)
Jesus says that the precedent for parables is given by Isaiah 6:10	'Seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand' Isa.6:10
Jesus shepherds and feeds people in the wilderness. 9:10-17	Feeding in a wilderness was prophesied in Isa.65:10-12
Jesus is frustrated with the Pharisees for their holier-than-thou attitude. 11:37-52	Frustration over Israel's holier than thou attitude prophesied in Isa.65:2-5
Jesus announces a long-delayed day of judgment on that attitude. 11:50-51	Prophesied in Isa.65:6-7
Jesus prophesies against Jerusalem. 12:41-13:9; 13:31-35	Isaiah prophesied against Jerusalem in Isa.1; 29:1-4 ; 65:11ff.
Jesus speaks of entering the kingdom of God in terms of a banquet. 14:7-24	Isaiah portrayed the kingdom/restoration in terms of a banquet in Isa.55:1-2
Jesus describes his ministry of restoration from exile in three parables. 15:1-32	Isaiah 40-55 is eminently concerned about restoration from exile
Jesus challenges Israel's historic relation to material wealth. 16:1-13	Isaiah foresaw a time of expanding Israel's traditional land boundaries in Isa.54:2
Jesus heals ten lepers, only one of which, a foreign Samaritan, turns back and gives glory to God. 17:11-19	Isaiah foresaw a time when foreigners would be fully welcomed into the covenant people's worship, contrary to the Mosaic Law. Contrast Isa.56:1-8 with Dt.23:1-6
Jesus challenges Israel's leadership using the parable of the vineyard. 20:9-16	Isaiah challenged Israel's leadership using a parable of the vineyard in Isa.5:1-8
Jesus contrasts the Temple's importance (unfavorably) with a widow. 20:45-21:4	Isaiah contrasted the Temple's importance (unfavorably) with the lowly and humble in Isa.66:1-2
Jesus prophesies Jerusalem's destruction. 21:5-36	Isaiah prophesied Jerusalem's destruction in Isa.1; 29:1-4; 65:11ff.
Jesus' crucifixion is paralleled to the Suffering Servant, restoring humans to paradise. 22:37ff	Isaiah's Suffering Servant restores Israel (and the nations) from exile in Isa.53 (see below)
Jesus' resurrection inaugurates a 'new covenant' where forgiveness of sins is offered to all nations. 24:47	Isaiah prophesied about 'new things' surrounding the Servant's teaching going out to the Gentile coastlands in Isa.42:6 and 49:6
Jesus' message begins from Jerusalem and is offered to the world. 24:47	Isaiah prophesied that the law would go forth from Zion in Isa.2:1-4
The Acts of the Apostles	
The apostles are aware that their responsibility is to the ends of the earth, to those who are afar off. Acts 1:8; 2:39	In fulfillment of Isaiah's vision of the word of the Messiah going forth from Zion from Isa.2, 42, etc.
Jesus sends his disciples into the world testifying to his enthronement	Isaiah saw the Servant addressing the nations from the standpoint of being ascended and enthroned. This is why Isa.52:13 – 53:12 is in the 'past tense,'

	but also why the other Servant Songs assume an enthroned Messiah. Isa.42, 49, 50.
The disciples speak in tongues at Pentecost. 2:1-13	Isaiah foresaw that God would bear witness to Israel through many tongues. Isa.28:11-16
The disciples call Jesus God's 'Servant' 3:26	Isaiah (out of all the prophets) primarily used the title 'Servant' for the Messiah
The disciples call Jesus 'the stone that the builders rejected, the cornerstone.' 4:11	Isaiah used these terms for the Messiah in Isa.8:14-15 and 28:16, as did Psalm 118
Stephen gives the longest speech in Acts, emphasizing Jesus as ruler and judge of Israel, critiquing the Temple in 7:49-50	He quotes Isaiah 66:1-2.
Philip witnesses to the Ethiopian eunuch using Isaiah 53 in 8:32-35	He quotes Isaiah 53:7-8 because the eunuch didn't know to whom it referred
Paul responds to the rejection of diaspora Jews in Pisidian Antioch by turning to the Gentiles in 13:47	He quotes Isaiah 49:6 as applying not only to Jesus (as did Simeon in Lk.2) but to himself and his mission
Paul says in Athens that God does not live in temples made with hands. 17:24	This is probably an echo of Isa.66:1-2, as Stephen quoted
Paul comes to Jerusalem with a financial collection from the Gentiles for the famine-stricken believers in Jerusalem and Judea. 21:17ff., 24:17	This is probably a manifestation of the gifts from the nations that were to stream into Jerusalem in Isa.60:3-22. See also Paul's comments about the collection in Romans 15:8-28 and the references to Isaiah there.
Paul in Rome tells the Roman Jews that God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles. 28:26-27	He quotes from Isaiah 6:10

The following chart compares Luke's narration of Jesus' death and resurrection with Isaiah's vision.

Jesus' Crucifixion According to Luke	The Suffering Servant According to Isaiah
Jesus quotes Isa.53:12 in Lk.22:37, 'and he was numbered with transgressors,' showing his awareness of being the Suffering Servant. This refers first to the sword-bearing disciples, who will be mistaken for revolutionaries, and later to the two criminals. It marks off the beginning of the crucifixion narrative.	And was numbered with the transgressors (Isa.53:12)
I find no guilt in this man. (23:4) I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against him. (23:14) No, nor has Herod, for he sent him back to us, and behold nothing deserving of death has been done by him. (23:15) Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in him no guilt demanding death. I will therefore punish him and release him. (23:22) Certainly this man was innocent (23:47)	He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in his mouth (Isa.53:9)
And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing him vehemently. (23:10) The people stood by, looking on, and even the rulers were sneering at him. (23:35) The soldiers also mocked him. (23:36) And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at him. (23:39)	Yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted (Isa.53:4)
And he questioned him at some length, but he answered him nothing. (24:9)	Like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth (Isa.53:7)
And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals. (23:33)	He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed

<p>But Jesus was saying, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.’ (23:34) Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in paradise. (23:43) The two Emmaus road disciples walk with Jesus and their eyes are opened – a scene that comes from Genesis and the Fall where two people walk with God and their eyes are opened, only this time it is used to describe the return to paradise. Jesus tells his disciples to proclaim the forgiveness of sins (24:47)</p>	<p>for our iniquities; the chastening for our peace fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed (Isa.53:5, 11-12)</p>
<p>And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with him. (23:32) And behold, a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man...and he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. (24:50-53)</p>	<p>His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man in his death (Isa.53:9)</p>
<p>Jesus’ atonement extends forgiveness to all nations (24:47)</p>	<p>Thus he will sprinkle <i>many nations</i>, kings will shut their mouths on account of him, for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand (Isa.52:13)</p>
<p>Jesus’ resurrection inaugurates a new creation (24:13 – 34), a return to the Edenic paradise (23:43)</p>	<p>Isaiah foresaw a new creation (Isa.65:17ff.)</p>
<p>Philip preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-40)</p>	<p>Because the eunuch was reading Isa.53:7-8 in his chariot and didn’t understand to whom it referred</p>

Time and space do not permit me to make an historical argument about the plausibility of each of these incidents being a part of the life of the historical Jesus, although such things have already been written.²⁴ I can, however, examine the totality of Luke’s understanding of Isaiah, and then undertake a brief literary argument.

One major question (which is both historical and theological) at this point is how Jesus could vindicate Jerusalem as his capital and still prophecy its downfall at the hands of the Romans. While this might initially be seen to conflict with Isaiah’s vision concerning Jerusalem, it does not. Rather, Jesus drew together both ideas (vindication and judgment of Jerusalem both occur prophetically in Isaiah²⁵ and the Old Testament) and synthesized them in a concrete political challenge to Israel’s leadership. Essentially, he said that Jerusalem had become the focal point of Israel’s corrupt leadership to undertake a violent resistance movement riding on Israelite nationalist sentiment (Lk.12:35 – 13:5). Judging from the ethical posture that Jesus called his disciples to follow, Jesus argued that this ambition did in fact conflict with the reign of peace predicted by Isaiah, Micah, and others concerning the Messiah, a reign that Israel’s God intended to extend among the Gentiles. How, then, could Jerusalem’s current leadership continue in their trajectory? By rejecting Jesus as prophet and kingly Messiah (Lk.13:33 – 35), they were sealing their commitment to a different theological and political paradigm, and would experience the devastating results of that commitment when they revolted. The Romans would sack Jerusalem and burn it to the ground (Lk.17:11 – 37; 21:5 – 36), bringing so much more devastation than Pilate’s Galilean massacre or the tower of Siloam’s fall (Lk.13:1 – 4).²⁶ Meanwhile, Jerusalem would nevertheless be vindicated as the capital of the Messiah’s reign since it would

²⁴ by e.g. N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* and *The Resurrection of the Son of God*

²⁵ Especially in Isa.65 – 66, see 65:11 – 15 in particular for God’s renewed judgment on the Jerusalem existing at the time of the Messiah. Moreover, Isaiah envisions a new heavens and new earth with a *new* Jerusalem, as Isaiah uses the peculiar phrase, ‘I will create a new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight’ (Isa.65:17ff.). This is probably a major source of the Christian vision of the future, involving a newly created Jerusalem that replaces the old (Rev.21 – 22). Meanwhile the church is called a new ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ in Hebrews 12:22 – 29 since it constitutes the spiritual presence of Jesus’ reign on earth.

²⁶ Because Farrell Till assumes the American fundamentalist interpretation about the ‘coming of the Son of Man’ in one generation referring to the ‘second coming of Christ,’ he is quite mistaken about Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21. Jesus was

become the origin of the Christian movement wherein the city was the epicenter of a missionary movement proclaiming Jesus' lordship over Israel and the world, inviting all to join Jesus' kingdom community where love, reconciliation, and ongoing evangelism were the guiding ethics. But because the Jewish nationalist political leadership in Jerusalem misrepresented and competed with the Messianic reign extending forward from Jerusalem, Jesus pronounced a judgment on it. Jerusalem's destruction would therefore serve to vindicate Jesus as king. Thus, Jerusalem would be both vindicated and judged.

From a literary standpoint, Luke does not 'proof-text' from Isaiah to quote material about the Messiah and then 'apply' it to Jesus. Rather, the very backbone of Luke *is* Isaiah. This is evidenced not only by the fact that Luke quotes Isaiah more than any other Old Testament book, but by the fact that Isaiah's themes are Luke's themes: sight and blindness, Jerusalem, Israel and the nations, restoration from exile, division in Israel, new creation. Arguably Luke's frequent mention of the word 'salvation' finds its strongest connection to Isaiah's use of the word. Luke's claim, therefore, is not simply that 'Jesus is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53,' although that is certainly a part of the overall package. Luke's claim is not even simply that by his resurrection, Jesus emerged out of death into the exalted life of Isa.52:13 – 53:12, or that by sharing his resurrection life, Jesus gives his people the 'long life' poetically spoken of in Isa.65:20, although those are certainly parts of the overall package, too. He is making a much larger claim, namely, that Jesus inaugurated the entire sequence of events foreseen by Isaiah concerning Israel, Israel's Messiah, and the Gentile world. Is there anyone else who makes an opposing claim coherently?

III. An Invitation to Skeptics

This has major implications for an inquiry about Jesus. One strategy among skeptics is to prove that the Bible contains errors or discrepancies so that the entirety of the message can be thrown out. Some jump rather quickly for my tastes from the treatment of a few details, many of them misinterpreted, to claim that the Gospel writers are completely unreliable. That is an irrational jump. It assumes that the Bible is the only source of data – thus, prove it is wrong in one place and the whole endeavor collapses. Yet this posture does not account for many who doubt the reliability of the four Gospels but nevertheless believe that Jesus really existed (like many Jesus Seminar advocates) or who even believe that Jesus might have risen again (like Professor of Sociology Peter Berger). Furthermore, logic demands that we treat the reliability of the four Gospels and belief in the resurrection of Jesus as interrelated but actually separable on some level. For the fact is that Christianity spread rapidly among Jewish and Gentile circles without any of the four Gospels or Paul for some years, so one must account for how people became Christians outside of the development of the New Testament literary corpus. Whatever exegesis or rationale provided by the earliest Christians had to be fairly compelling because of a hostile political environment and Christianity's demand that one put down one's own racial prejudice and materialism. This was prior to the writing of any New Testament documents.

The cheeky reply that 'people became Christians because they didn't get confused by the New Testament' is amusing but not substantial. Early Christians (especially Jewish Christians) nevertheless had to prove from the Old Testament, from whatever facts of the teaching and life of Jesus that was known publicly by Israel, and from current events that their claim was plausible. In other words, the real questions again take us back to a historical-critical methodology involving Second Temple Judaism (along with a literary-theological treatment of the Old Testament), the quest for the historical Jesus, and the quest for the kerygmatic church (with some source-criticism of the New Testament documents as having some historical value but without necessarily believing in their divine inspiration). Simply because one finds details of the Gospels difficult does not mean that the resurrection of Jesus is epistemologically off-limits. Actually, it is still wide open to all. Hence one needs to primarily engage, for example, N.T. Wright's historical methodology and also my literary-theological points. To sum up, for the purposes of this discussion, I maintain that one does not need a 'doctrine of biblical inerrancy' in order to inquire into the historical Jesus and the veracity of his resurrection.

Even without the presupposition of the divine inspiration of the Gospel writers, and even if one feels that concessions need to be made about the Gospel writers being odd, or getting a few details wrong, there is still

not speaking of coming from heaven to earth, from his throne. Jesus was referring to the 'Son of Man' coming from earth to heaven in Daniel 7:13, where the movement is down to up *to receive the throne*. The destruction of Jerusalem vindicated Jesus' claim to be the Son of Man on the throne.

significant weight that the Gospels carry. Therefore, if in effect one wanted to debate Luke in 35 AD (before any New Testament literature was written), claiming that he doesn't know what he's talking about, pulls quotations from Isaiah out of thin air, fabricates Jesus out of nothing, or, at the most, gets some details wrong, one needs to demonstrate some real engagement with both Isaiah and Luke. No skeptic I know has done this. By questioning a Gospel writer on his use of the Old Testament, a skeptic is claiming to know Isaiah better than Luke, for example. Yet Till focuses only on Isaiah 7 – 8, Drange on Isaiah 53. No skeptic I know has demonstrated that they can actually think Isaiah's thoughts after him, or at least do so better than Luke has.

Once again, this holistic literary treatment is significant as a historical and logical consideration. Of course, not all Jews were or are persuaded by the Christian claim; and Luke himself narrates such rejection as an ongoing feature of the Christian mission in the world. But three major categories of questions may be asked. First, is there evidence of Isaiah being truly prophetic? That is, does Isaiah predict the future, and do his predictions bear out in history? The answer to that is yes. Hebrew prophecy is not an imagined phenomenon. Hence we must, at least with Isaiah, continue to regard prophetic activity in ancient Israel with respect.

Second, what happens to Jewish theological reflection and study in the absence of a Messianic option that unites all the themes arising from Israel's story and the Hebrew Scriptures? Is there any option that effectively unites and sums up all the hopes and yearnings of Israel's story? I submit not. The shape of the story arising out of the Old Testament finds a satisfying and compelling climax only in Jesus of Nazareth. Every other option quickly falls apart.

Conversely, however, and third, many Jewish people were and are persuaded. Upon seeing this, one must ask on what grounds is such faith maintained? Could rather large numbers of Second Temple Jews, who were steeped in texts like the Pentateuch and Isaiah, really have been compelled to leave their ancestral lands, to proclaim a Jewish Messianic message among the Gentiles, to embrace them in love, etc. unless the early Christian community had a way of explaining and expositing the Old Testament? Certainly not by selecting a few, interesting but relatively minor verses and systematically ignoring all the major themes of Israel's story. And would exegesis alone have been sufficient? Could such a movement have started if Jesus of Nazareth had not in fact been resurrected in resonance with Jewish hopes for resurrection, becoming the historical inauguration point for the Jewish hope for new creation? I doubt it. I submit that this is one avenue by which one can pursue an historical-critical methodology into Christian origins, simply by asking, 'What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for early Christianity to emerge out of Second Temple Judaism?' In particular, who or what other system of belief better satisfies Isaiah?

Appendix A: Farrell Till's treatment of Isaiah, from Till p.15 – 18

PROPHETIC CHICANERY

More damaging than all of these holes in Matthew's claim, however, is clear textual evidence that Isaiah did not consider his statement in 7:14 to be a prophecy of some distant event. As noted earlier, so that Ahaz would have a sign that the Syrian-Israelite alliance would fail, Isaiah predicted the birth of a child who would be named Immanuel. For this to have been a "sign" in the biblical sense of the word, it would have had to have had some application to contemporary events. Jewish scholars who read the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) in the original language have had no difficulty recognizing that contemporary application. Shmuel Golding, editor of *Biblical Polemics*, published by the Jerusalem Institute of Biblical Polemics, has explained that verb-tense problems alone in this passage make it impossible for people who are knowledgeable in Hebrew to accept it as a prophecy of a distantly future event:

In Hebrew the verse reads in the present tense is with child and not as according to the Christian Bible will conceive and bear a child. In Hebrew it states she is pregnant, not will be pregnant. In fact, the Catholic Bible (Isaiah 7:14) reads as follows: The maiden is with child and will soon give birth to a son. Jesus was not born until seven hundred years after this sign was given, which could not be described as "soon." The text reads "is with child," so how could this woman be pregnant for seven hundred years until Jesus arrived ("Who Changed God's Diapers?" [pam], p. 1)?

That Isaiah did have in mind a child who would be born to a contemporary mother is made plain by a statement that followed on the heels of the birth prediction: "Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings" (vv: 15-16). To say that this statement had reference to a child who would be born 700 years later reduces everything the prophet said to nonsense, for what possible consolation could it have been to Ahaz to know that 700 years after he was dead the land whose two kings he hated (Syria and Israel) would be forsaken?

Furthermore, Isaiah did not say that the birth would be a miraculous event, as Matthew's application of the statement would require it to be. The popular misconception that Isaiah was predicting a virgin birth results from a faulty translation of the Hebrew word *`almah*, which merely meant "maiden" or "unmarried female." *Bethulah* was the Hebrew word that signified a woman who was sexually pure; this was the word used in such passages as Deuteronomy 22:13-24 where sexual purity was obviously under consideration. The other word (*`almah*) was used in such passages as Genesis 24:43 where, although translated virgin in many English versions, reference to the sexual purity of the woman wasn't necessarily intended. If, then, Isaiah had meant to imply that the child in his prophecy would be miraculously conceived, he would have surely used the Hebrew word that unequivocally meant virgin.

Viewed in these linguistic perspectives, the prophecy loses much of the mystique that has traditionally surrounded it, because there would have been nothing particularly amazing about an unmarried female giving birth to a child. It happens all the time. But it loses even more of its resplendence when we consider textual indications that Isaiah intentionally arranged circumstances to guarantee a birth that could be seen as "fulfillment" of his prophecy. Isaiah 8:1-4 tells how Yahweh intended to take "faithful witnesses," Uriah, the priest, and Zechariah, the son of Jeberechiah, to record as Isaiah went in to a prophetess who conceived and bore a son. In effect, he was covering all of his bases. He had predicted the birth of a child to an unmarried female, so now he was making sure that one would be born. And it was in this type of duplicity that Matthew saw divine involvement!

As incredible as it may seem, there is even more to question in this wonderful virgin-birth prophecy. After saying in his prophecy that the child to be born would be called Immanuel, Isaiah named the son borne by the prophetess not Immanuel, as he had predicted, but Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:3). It was as if he wanted both to fulfill and to invalidate the prophecy!

The fact that this child was given a name other than Immanuel has led some Bible apologists to argue that he was not the one predicted in Isaiah's prophecy. But even if they could unequivocally prove this argument true, which they cannot, that would do very little to restore Isaiah's credibility as a prophet, because Jesus, who presumably

fulfilled the prophecy in at least a secondary sense, was not named Immanuel either. No record exists of Jesus ever having been called Immanuel by his contemporaries. Those who in later times applied the name to him, and still continue to, have done so only in labored attempts to make Matthew's statement a valid interpretation of prophecy. So of what value is a "double-sided" prophecy that has been shown to have serious flaws on both sides?

The argument of bibliolaters notwithstanding, there is convincing evidence that Isaiah did intend his son born of the prophetess to be seen as fulfillment of his prophecy. First, Isaiah, although naming his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, did after the child's birth refer to him as Immanuel while warning that the Assyrian king in overthrowing Syria and Samaria would also subdue Judah and "fill the breadth of Your land, O Immanuel" (8:5-8). So at least once the child of that generation was called Immanuel, and, as previously noted, that is once more than Jesus, in his lifetime, was ever called by the name. As a matter of fact, the name was used only three times in the entire Bible, twice (as just noted) in Isaiah and the third time when Matthew quoted Isaiah's "prophecy." This is hardly sterling proof of prophecy fulfillment.

Further proof that Isaiah considered his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz to be the fulfillment of his prophecy is seen in a close examination of context. When he made the prophecy to Ahaz (as a sign that the Syrian-Israelite alliance would not prevail), he also promised that "before the Child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread (Syria and Samaria) will be forsaken by both her kings" (7:16). This same prediction (prophecy, sign, whatever) was repeated after the child Maher-shalal-hash-baz was born: "For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, 'My father,' and, 'My mother,' the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria" (8:4). Both statements are identical in substance; both show also that Isaiah intended his prophecy to apply to a political situation of his day rather than to some event in the far-flung future. And, more important for the moment, the context of the passage gives sufficient reason to believe that the child who was named Maher-shalal-hash-baz instead of Immanuel was contemporarily considered a fulfillment of the prophecy. Why Isaiah did not name the child Immanuel is a mystery, but stranger mysteries than that are recorded in the Bible.

With reference to what was said about the period before the child would know "to refuse the evil and choose the good" (Is. 7:16), inerrantists have another problem. If this was indeed a reference to the son who would one day be born to the virgin Mary, does this mean that there was a time in the childhood of Jesus when he didn't know the difference in good and evil? If not, why not? And if so, then how could this be? Jesus was the incarnate "Word of God" (Jn. 1:1,14), who was in the beginning with God (v:2), who made all things and without whom "nothing was made that was made" (v:3). If all of this is true, how could there have been a time in the life of Jesus when he didn't know "to refuse the evil and choose the good"?

CONTEMPORARY FAILURE

On the subject of strange things, what could be stranger than this? Isaiah made the prophecy to assure King Ahaz that the Syrian-Israelite alliance would not prevail against him, yet the Bible record shows that the alliance not only succeeded but did so overwhelmingly. Second Chronicles 28 reports that Ahaz's idolatrous practices caused "Yahweh his God" to deliver him "into the hand of the king of Syria" (v:5). (This king was the Rezin of Isaiah 7:1.) The Syrians "carried away of his a great multitude of captives" and took them to Damascus (v:5). Simultaneously, the Israelites attacked Judah under the leadership of Pekah (the same Pekah of Isaiah 7:1), and in one day 120,000 "valiant men" in Judah were killed and 200,000 "women, sons, and daughters" were "carried away captive" (vv:6-8). The battle casualties included Maaseiah, Ahaz's son; Azrikam, the governor of the house; and Elkanah, who was "next to the king" (v:7). If these results were Isaiah's idea of Syrian and Samarian failure, one wonders what kind of drubbing the alliance would have inflicted had Isaiah prophesied its success.

Furthermore, Isaiah's assurance that Assyria would be Yahweh's instrument in defeating the alliance (Isaiah 8:4-8) failed to materialize too. When the Edomites (Samaritans) struck Judah a second time and "carried away captives," Ahaz sent "to the kings of Assyria to help him" (2 Chron. 28:16-17). In response, Tilgath-Pilneser, king of Assyria, "came to him, and distressed him, but strengthened him not" (v:20). As a prophet, then, Isaiah seems to have struck out all the way around. In fairness to him, however, it should be noted that Assyria's role in the conflict was reported with different results in 2 Kings 16, where Ahaz also fared a little better than reported in 2 Chronicles 28. Nevertheless, these discrepancies in the two accounts are more of an embarrassment to bibliolaters than a benefit, because such variations in the Bible record place on inerrancy believers the added burden of trying to explain why "inspired writers" would give contradictory reports of the same events.

There is yet a final absurdity to notice in this wonderful Messianic prophecy. With the Syrian-Israelite alliance posing a threat to Judah, Isaiah was sent to Ahaz to prophesy that the alliance would fail. After doing so, he said in his very next breath that Yahweh would bring the king of Assyria against Judah and that he would desolate the land (7:17-25). Imagine, if you can, the absolute absurdity of this. The prophet came, in effect, to say, "Don't worry; Syria and Samaria will not defeat you. Assyria will." What kind of consolation was that supposed to be? It was as if in our day the people of our country, fearing an attack from Russia, should be told by a prophet, "Fear not; Russia will not defeat you. China will." Yet, despite this flaw and the many others noted, millions of people consider this "prophecy" a remarkable example of divine foresight. In reality, the only remarkable thing about it is that so many intelligent people could have been duped into believing that it was remarkable.

Appendix B: The Visions of Messiah the King, in Isaiah 7 – 37

^{8:14} Then He shall become a **sanctuary**;

But to both the houses of Israel, a stone to strike and a rock to stumble over,
And a snare and a trap for the inhabitants of **Jerusalem**.

¹⁵ Many will stumble over them,

Then they will fall and be broken;

They will even be snared and caught.'

¹⁶ Bind up the testimony, seal the law among my disciples. ¹⁷ And I will wait for the LORD who is hiding His face from the house of Jacob; I will even look eagerly for Him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom the LORD has given me are for signs and wonders in Israel from the LORD of hosts, who dwells on **Mount Zion**...

^{9:1} But there will be no more gloom for her who was in anguish; in earlier times He treated the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali with contempt, but later on He shall make it glorious, by the way of the sea, on the other side of Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles.

² The people who walk in darkness

Will see a great light;

Those who live in a dark land,

The light will shine on them.

³ You shall multiply the nation,

You shall increase their gladness;

They will be glad in Your presence

As with the gladness of harvest,

As men rejoice when they divide the spoil.

⁴ For You shall break the yoke of their burden and the staff on their shoulders,

The rod of their oppressor, as at the battle of Midian.

⁵ For every boot of the booted warrior in the battle tumult,

And cloak rolled in blood, will be for burning, fuel for the fire.

⁶ For **a child** will be born to us, **a son** will be given to us;

And the **government will rest on His shoulders**;

And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ There will be **no end to the increase of His government** or of peace,

On the throne of David and over his kingdom,

To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness

From then on and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will accomplish this.

^{11:1} Then a shoot will spring from **the stem of Jesse**,

And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

² The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,

The spirit of wisdom and understanding,

The spirit of counsel and strength,

The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ And He will delight in the fear of the LORD,

And He will not judge by what His eyes see,

Nor make a decision by what His ears hear;

⁴ But **with righteousness He will judge** the poor,

And decide **with fairness for the afflicted** of the earth;

And **He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth**,

And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

⁵ Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins,

And faithfulness the belt about His waist.

⁶ And the wolf will dwell with the lamb,

And the leopard will lie down with the young goat,

And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together;

And a little boy will lead them.

⁷ Also the cow and the bear will graze,
Their young will lie down together,
And the lion will eat straw like the ox.
⁸ The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra,
And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.
⁹ They will not hurt or destroy in **all My holy mountain**,
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
As the waters cover the sea.
¹⁰ Then in that day
The nations will resort to the root of Jesse,
Who will stand as a signal for the peoples;
And His resting place will be glorious.
¹¹ Then it will happen on that day that the Lord
Will again recover the second time with His hand
The remnant of His people, who will remain,
From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath,
And from the islands of the sea.
¹² And He will lift up a standard for the nations
And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
And will gather the dispersed of Judah
From the four corners of the earth.
¹³ Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart,
And those who harass Judah will be cut off;
Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah,
And Judah will not harass Ephraim.
¹⁴ They will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west;
Together they will plunder the sons of the east;
They will possess Edom and Moab,
And the sons of Ammon will be subject to them.
¹⁵ And the LORD will utterly destroy
The tongue of the Sea of Egypt;
And He will wave His hand over the River
With His scorching wind;
And He will strike it into seven streams
And make men walk over dry-shod.
¹⁶ And there will be a highway from Assyria
For the remnant of His people who will be left,
Just as there was for Israel
In the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.
^{12:1} Then you will say on that day,
'I will give thanks to You, O LORD;
For although You were angry with me,
Your anger is turned away,
And You comfort me.
² 'Behold, God is my salvation,
I will trust and not be afraid;
For the LORD GOD is my strength and song,
And He has become my salvation.'
³ Therefore you will joyously draw water
From the springs of salvation.
⁴ And in that day you will say,
'Give thanks to the LORD, call on His name.
Make known His deeds among the peoples;
Make them remember that His name is exalted.'
⁵ Praise the LORD in song, for He has done excellent things;
Let this be known throughout the earth.

⁶ Cry aloud and shout for joy, O inhabitant of **Zion**,
For great in your midst is the Holy One of Israel.

^{32:1} Behold, a **King will reign righteously**

And princes will rule justly.

² Each will be like a refuge from the wind

And a shelter from the storm,

Like streams of water in a dry country,

Like the shade of a huge rock in a parched land.

³ Then the eyes of those who see will not be blinded,

And the ears of those who hear will listen.

⁴ The mind of the hasty will discern the truth,

And the tongue of the stammerers will hasten to speak clearly.

⁵ No longer will the fool be called noble,

Or the rogue be spoken of as generous.

⁶ For a fool speaks nonsense,

And his heart inclines toward wickedness:

To practice ungodliness and to speak error against the LORD,

To keep the hungry person unsatisfied

And to withhold drink from the thirsty.

⁷ As for a rogue, his weapons are evil;

He devises wicked schemes

To destroy the afflicted with slander,

Even though the needy one speaks what is right.

⁸ But the noble man devises noble plans;

And by noble plans he stands.

⁹ Rise up, you women who are at ease,

And hear my voice;

Give ear to my word,

You complacent daughters.

¹⁰ Within a year and a few days

You will be troubled, O complacent daughters;

For the vintage is ended,

And the fruit gathering will not come.

¹¹ Tremble, you women who are at ease;

Be troubled, you complacent daughters;

Strip, undress and put sackcloth on your waist,

¹² Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine,

¹³ For the land of my people in which thorns and briars shall come up;

Yea, for all the joyful houses and for the jubilant city.

¹⁴ Because the palace has been abandoned, the populated city forsaken.

Hill and watch-tower have become caves forever,

A delight for wild donkeys, a pasture for flocks;

¹⁵ **Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high,**

And the wilderness becomes a fertile field,

And the fertile field is considered as a forest.

¹⁶ Then justice will dwell in the wilderness

And righteousness will abide in the fertile field.

¹⁷ And the work of righteousness will be peace,

And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever.

¹⁸ Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation,

And in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places;

¹⁹ And it will hail when the forest comes down,

And the city will be utterly laid low.

²⁰ How blessed will you be, you who sow beside all waters,

Who let out freely the ox and the donkey.

^{33:17} Your eyes will see **the King** in His beauty;
They will behold a far-distant land.
¹⁸ Your heart will meditate on terror:
'Where is he who counts?
Where is he who weighs?
Where is he who counts the towers?'
¹⁹ You will no longer see a fierce people,
A people of unintelligible speech which no one comprehends,
Of a stammering tongue which no one understands.
²⁰ Look upon **Zion, the city** of our appointed feasts;
Your eyes will see **Jerusalem**, an undisturbed habitation,
A tent which will not be folded;
Its stakes will never be pulled up,
Nor any of its cords be torn apart.
²⁰ Look upon Zion, the city of our appointed feasts;
Your eyes will see Jerusalem, an undisturbed habitation,
A tent which will not be folded;
Its stakes will never be pulled up,
Nor any of its cords be torn apart.
²¹ But there the majestic One, the LORD, will be for us
A place of rivers and wide canals
On which no boat with oars will go,
And on which no mighty ship will pass--
²² For the LORD is our judge,
The LORD is our lawgiver,
The LORD is our king;
He will save us--
²³ Your tackle hangs slack;
It cannot hold the base of its mast firmly,
Nor spread out the sail.
Then the prey of an abundant spoil will be divided;
The lame will take the plunder.
²⁴ And no resident will say, 'I am sick';
The people who dwell there will be forgiven their iniquity.