

Assignment Title:

**Examine critically the role of the Suffering Servant within the book of Isaiah and New Testament tradition (with reference to a *selection* of NT texts).**

Word Count: 2987

## 1. Introduction

Isaiah's suffering servant (Is. 52:13-53:12) seems to loom large over the Christian tradition's understanding of Jesus' suffering and death. For example, this passage is read every Easter. However, does this reading respect Deutero-Isaiah's original intentions? Is this even the creation of NT writers? Or is this connection the fruit of the coming together of these two streams within the Christian tradition? This essay will argue that Isaiah's suffering servant was an oracle of comfort that applied to the present situation of exilic or post-exilic Israel. We will observe that there are many "ontological" elements that connect the suffering servant and Jesus because of the theme of suffering. We will see that there are few direct citations of Is. 52:13-53:12 in the NT, and only two of them can be said to be Christological. We will conclude that the connection can only be made through a canonical understanding of the whole Bible.

## 2. The identity of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah

The actual identity of the suffering servant seems to be an enigma, and reaching a definitive answer to his identity seems to be an impossible task. Lessing helpfully draws out four possible categories.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1. An individual

Firstly, Lessing outlines how until the nineteenth century the dominant view in the academy was that the suffering servant was Jesus Christ. He cites Acts 8:32-35 as evidence of early, but post-Gospel era, example of Jesus being shown as the fulfilment of Is. 52:13-53:12. That is not to say that other individual interpretations are not possible. For instance, Schreiber argues in some detail that the suffering servant refers to the prophet Jeremiah.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation has the advantage of closing the case, since, if indeed Is. 52:13-53:12 is a prophecy, then it has been fulfilled. Another example of a contemporary individual interpretation is offered by Maller. Maller draws a complex Messianic matrix and argues that the prophecy of Is. 52:13-53:12 is yet to be fulfilled by *mashiah ben Josef*.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. Reed Lessing, 'Isaiah's Servants in Chapters 40-55: Clearing up the Confusion', *Concordia Journal*, 37.2 (2011), 130–34.

<sup>2</sup> Mordecai Schreiber, 'The Real "Suffering Servant": Decoding a Controversial Passage in the Bible', *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 37.1 (2009), 35–44.

<sup>3</sup> Allen S. Maller, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant: A New View', *Jewish Bible Quarterly*, 37.4 (2009), 243–49.

## 2.2. A collective

Secondly, Lessing describes a school of thought according to which the suffering servant stands for “the empirical Israel (the entire nation), ideal Israel, a righteous remnant within the nation if Israel, the Davidic dynasty, the prophetic order, or the priestly order.”<sup>4</sup> This quote alone illustrates the interpretative possibilities concerning the suffering servant! This collective view, however, can be backed up by the text itself when the servant is referred to on numerous occasions as “Israel” (Is. 41:8; 44:1; 44:21). However, the text does shift towards referring to the servant in a singular form by the time Is. 52:13-53:12 is reached.

## 2.3. Intentional ambiguity

This leads to Lessing’s fourth category (we will mention the third later) which is, following Clines, that the identity of the suffering servant is left deliberately ambiguous by Deutero-Isaiah.<sup>5</sup> This ambiguity is well-illustrated by Brettler and Levine’s stance. Brettler and Levine argue that the suffering servant represents an “oracle of comfort” to the Judean people in exilic (or early post-exilic) times.<sup>6</sup> They “believe” (the choice of words demonstrating the frailty of the ground on which our suffering figure can be evaluated) that the suffering servant at first “referred to an individual living in Babylon, whose vicarious suffering explains why Israel deserves forgiveness for the grievous sins that caused its exile.”<sup>7</sup> If this were the case, it would seem surprising that such a significant character is not named (and even celebrated). Brettler and Levine then add that suffering servant then became a symbol representing the restored nation after the suffering of exile.<sup>8</sup> This is indeed ambiguous.

## 2.4. A cultic/mythological figure

Lessing’s third category, which we present out of sequence, is that of a mythological or cultic figure such as the Sumerian god Tammuz, who would die and rise again. This category is left for last because even its chief promoter, Mowinckel, later abandoned it.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Lessing, ‘Isaiah’s Servants in Chapters 40-55’, pp. 130–31.

<sup>5</sup> Lessing, ‘Isaiah’s Servants in Chapters 40-55’, p. 131.

<sup>6</sup> Marc Brettler and Amy-Jill Levine, ‘Isaiah’s Suffering Servant: Before and After Christianity’, *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible & Theology*, 73.2 (2019), 158–73 (p. 158) <<https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964318820594>>.

<sup>7</sup> Brettler and Levine, ‘Isaiah’s Suffering Servant’, p. 158.

<sup>8</sup> Brettler and Levine, ‘Isaiah’s Suffering Servant’, p. 158.

<sup>9</sup> Lessing, ‘Isaiah’s Servants in Chapters 40-55’, p. 134.

Lessing himself concludes that Isaiah had two servants in mind: in chapters 41-48 the nation of Israel and then in chapters 49-55 an individual.<sup>10</sup> He understands the second servant Christologically, aligning with the traditional view.

Brettler and Levine present the most likely interpretation, if one removes the suggestion that the concept of suffering servant started out with a historic person. Given the Servant Songs' context as a message of comfort ("“Comfort, comfort My people,” says your God.” (Is. 40:1)), it seems that Brettler and Levine's conclusion is correct: the suffering servant stands for Israel, whose punishment is complete, and suffering ended. This grounds the poem in its historical context; as Schreiber states, Isaiah does not refer to future events.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. The suffering servant's similarities with Jesus

From a narrative and textual point of view, there seems to be a great deal of material to connect Isaiah's suffering servant with Jesus.

#### 3.1. Exaltation

Firstly, Isaiah's suffering servant will be exalted (Is. 52:13-15). V. 13 describes the servant as being “exalted and lifted up”. In the context of the whole book of Isaiah, similar language is used in relation to God. The servant then is equal to God in glory.<sup>12</sup> The language of exaltation is commonly applied to Jesus in the New Testament (Mk. 16:19; Luke 22:69; John 12:32; Acts 2:33; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 1:3; 1 Peter 3:22). This is a key theme of John's gospel.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the servant seems to be subjected to great humiliation (v. 14), particularly in relation to rulers. One might say that this is true of Jesus, who was set up to parody a coronation in his passion (Matt. 27:28-31; Mk. 15:17-20; John 19:1-15).

#### 3.2. Rejection

Secondly, Isaiah's suffering servant is despised and rejected (Is. 53:1-3). A great contrast is drawn by the Isaianic author: the recipient of exaltation seems an unlikely choice. From his humble beginnings to his excruciating death, Jesus seemed to be improbable agent of God's

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<sup>10</sup> Lessing, 'Isaiah's Servants in Chapters 40-55', p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Schreiber, 'The Real "Suffering Servant"', p. 35.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Dray, 'Isaiah 52:13-53:12: Isaiah on the Suffering Servant', *Evangel*, 26.2 (2008), 33–36 (p. 33).

<sup>13</sup> Catrin H. Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel', in *Isaiah in the New Testament: The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel*, ed. by Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, First Edition (T&T Clark, 2005) <<https://www.perlego.com/book/804077/>> [accessed 29 July 2023].

work. This is noted even by his closest neighbours (Matt. 13:53-58; Mk 6:1-6; Luke 4:16-30 and John 6:42). Both the suffering servant and Jesus exude a sense of weakness. The apostle Paul seems to make this case particularly strongly in Phil. 2, which may echo Isaiah's Fourth Servant Song.

### **3.3. Punishment**

Thirdly, Isaiah's suffering servant takes the punishment due others (Is. 53:4-6). This is possibly the portion of text that has resonated most strongly in the Christian tradition. The notion of "piercing" reverberates particularly strongly when following Jesus' death his side was pierced (John 19:31-37). Once again, the apostle Paul emphasises that Christ died "for our sins" (most clearly, 1 Cor. 15:3) although any discussion of substitutionary atonement would be anachronistic. Furthermore, it could be said that like the servant, Jesus' suffering and death lead to reconciliation with God.

### **3.4. Willingness to suffer**

Fourthly, Isaiah's suffering servant is undeserving of his punishment, but nonetheless endures his suffering voluntarily (Is. 53:7-9). It must be stressed that, in contrast to Jesus, it is not evident that the suffering servant actually dies, as the figurative lamb is only taken to slaughter (the slaughter does not explicitly take place). Irrespective of this, the lamb imagery may provide an opportunity to connect the suffering servant with Jesus, who, in John 1:29, is likened to a sacrificial lamb. In any case, in HB imagery, a lamb may be seen as an innocent sacrificial offering. Both the suffering servant ("although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth." (Is. 53:9)) and Jesus (Luke 23:41) may be understood as underserving of their punishment. Irrespective of guilt, both the suffering servant (Is. 53:9) and Jesus (Matt. 26:42; Mk. 14:36; Lk. 22:42; John 12:27 and 14:31) seem to accept their fate.

### **3.5. God's plan**

Fifthly and finally, Isaiah's suffering servant endures his ordeal as part of God's plan (Is. 53:10-12). The same could be said of Jesus (John 3:16). The notion of pouring out one's life (Is. 53:12) is reminiscent of the Pauline concept of *kenosis*, found in Philippians 2:7. Whether or not these two iterations are connected in the mind of the apostle Paul is almost irrelevant in as much as a contemporary Christian reader cannot help but draw a line between these two texts.

The principal challenge with regards to the connection between Isaiah's suffering servant and Jesus is establishing whether New Testament writers intended this association to form part of

their portrayal of Jesus' life and ministry, or whether it is entirely coincidental but presenting subsequent readers with many creative Christological possibilities. Brettler and Levine are wise to point out the challenges in identifying allusions.<sup>14</sup>

#### 4. Explicit Suffering servant quotes in the New Testament

Given the fact that allusions are difficult to ascertain and that quotes provide firmer ground, the following section will survey the nine direct quotes from Is. 52:13-53:12 found in the NT.

##### 4.1. Matt. 8:17

The Isaianic quote here serves to cap a chapter busy with healing accounts. Unsurprisingly perhaps, this verse has been interpreted in various ways. Many commentators agree that Matthew's use of his own translation of Is. 53:4 is an example of a fulfilment citation.<sup>15</sup> This interpretation depends on Jesus being the embodiment of the prophesied suffering servant, which this essay has shown to not be the intention of the Isaian author. Huizenga, however, argues that Matthew's use of this quote is "atomistic" and serves to root Jesus' healing abilities in HB scripture.<sup>16</sup>

##### 4.2. Luke 22:37

In this verse, Jesus himself quotes Is. 53:12 (the suffering servant "was numbered with the transgressors") in his final speech to his disciples as part of the last supper. Carroll points out the enigmatic use of an enigmatic quote.<sup>17</sup> Does the quote apply to the disciples' status as "outlaws" because they follow Christ? Do the transgressors refer to the people with whom Jesus and his disciples have been mixing? Those who know the story will perhaps picture Jesus later as crucified between two criminals. Lieu highlights well the challenge of attempting to

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<sup>14</sup> Brettler and Levine, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', p. 166.

<sup>15</sup> O. Wesley Allen, *Matthew*, Fortress Biblical Preaching Commentaries (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2013), p. 92; Herbert Bassler and Marsha B. Cohen, *The Gospel of Matthew and Judaic Traditions: A Relevance-Based Commentary* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2015), p. 220 <<https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004291782>>; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2018); Kenneth D. Litwak, 'The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 26/4 (1983), 385-94 (p. 388).

<sup>16</sup> Leroy Huizenga A., 'The Fate of the Figure of Isaac in The Gospel of Matthew', *Novum Testamentum, Supplements*, 2010, cxxxi, 1-20 (p. 51) <<https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004175693.i-340.7>>.

<sup>17</sup> John T. Carroll, *Luke: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library, First Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012) <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2100966/0>> [accessed 23 August 2023].

understand the use of suffering servant quotes in the gospels. She observes that the Gospels make such scant use of the suffering servant to explain Jesus' death.<sup>18</sup> This seems to be the case here.

#### 4.3. John 12:38

John's gospel is more clearly influenced by the theology of the book of Isaiah.<sup>19</sup> Irrespective of this, this gospel still only contains one direct quote in relation to the Isaianic suffering servant with a reference to Is. 53:1 in Jn. 12:38. Here the Fourth Evangelist appeals to Isaiah to show that Jesus' rejection is part of God's plan.<sup>20</sup> Thompson echoes this.<sup>21</sup> Irrespective of this, the appeal to Isaiah made by the Fourth Evangelist seems to relate to Isaiah's theology in a broad sense rather than to the suffering servant in particular.

#### 4.4. Acts 8:32-33

In Acts 8 (the Isaiah quote is in vv. 32-33) we find an Ethiopian Eunuch reflecting on Is. 53:7&8. Barrett is emphatic: the HB is only understandable is seen through a Christological lens.<sup>22</sup> While Barrett admits that the servant is not to be understood as the Messiah, he recognises that the Eunuch's question could only have one answer (Acts 8:35). Stuhlmacher would agree with this Christological reading.<sup>23</sup> These verses seem to offer the most convincing example of a direct connection between Jesus and the Isaianic suffering servant.

#### 4.5. Rom. 10:16

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<sup>18</sup> Judith Lieu, *The Gospel of Luke* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2012), p. 184 <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/1724447/1>> [accessed 23 August 2023].

<sup>19</sup> Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel'.

<sup>20</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries, 4 (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 357.

<sup>21</sup> Marianne Meye Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library, First Edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015) <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2100818/4>> [accessed 23 August 2023].

<sup>22</sup> Charles K. Barrett, *The Acts of the Apostles. A Shorter Commentary* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002), p. 126 <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/803010/5>> [accessed 23 August 2023].

<sup>23</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, 'Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts', in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*, ed. by Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004), p. 157.

In Rom. 10:16, the suffering servant's experience of not being heard is imputed to Jesus.<sup>24</sup> In this regard, the Isaianic quote is used in a fashion similar to Jn 12:38. Once again, this quote does not seem to connect Jesus with the suffering servant but serves to make the broader point that Jesus fulfils the promises of the Hebrew scriptures.<sup>25</sup>

#### **4.6. Rom. 15:21**

This verse from Romans represents yet another citation of Is. 53:1. Crucially, however, the citation is not applied to Jesus, but rather is applied to Paul's own ministry.<sup>26</sup>

#### **4.7. 1 Peter 2:22**

The context of this citation is the encouragement of Christian slaves as they endure suffering. Christ then becomes their example.<sup>27</sup> Apart from Acts 8:32-33, this citation is the most Christological of all. For Jobes, Peter is not so much explaining that Jesus fulfils the HB prophecy but rather that he is using Is. 52:13-53:12 to make sense of Jesus' death.<sup>28</sup> For Horrell, this passage represents the most explicit and extensive use of Is. 52:12-53:13 in the New Testament.<sup>29</sup> Our brief survey provides evidence to that fact. Furthermore, Horrell notes that the use of the suffering servant material is "surprisingly restricted elsewhere in the New Testament."<sup>30</sup>

### **5. Models from scholarship**

#### **5.1. Brettler and Levine**

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<sup>24</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Publishing, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2018), pt. V.B.2 <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2051130/0>> [accessed 23 August 2023].

<sup>25</sup> Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), pt. 3 <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2100825/4>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

<sup>26</sup> Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), p. III.A.3.a.iii <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2051296/3>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

<sup>27</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, para. III.A.3.a.iii.

<sup>28</sup> Jobes, *1 Peter*, p. III.A.3.a.iii.

<sup>29</sup> David G. Horrell, *1 Peter* (New York: T & T Clark Ltd., 2008), p. 63 <<https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/803854/6>> [accessed 24 August 2023].

<sup>30</sup> Horrell, *1 Peter*, p. 63.

Brettler and Levine's piece entitled *Isaiah's Suffering Servant: Before and After Christianity* has already been referred to in this essay.<sup>31</sup> We return to it because it seeks to take seriously Is. 52:13-53:12 in its context but also recognises the potential of the figure of the suffering servant has for being reinterpreted. Throughout their article, they are adamant that the suffering servant is not a messianic figure. He is not referred to as a Messiah (only the Targum makes this connection<sup>32</sup>) and he lacks a connection to the Davidic line, an essential aspect of messianic expectation. Neither can the reader be certain that the servant dies. He is led to slaughter (Is. 53:7), but no killing is mentioned. Their key contribution to the understanding of the suffering servant in relation to Jesus is that they firmly argue that the suffering servant in its original context does not have a sacrificial role.<sup>33</sup> The debate on this question surrounds the meaning of the word *'āšām*. The NRSV might betray a Christian bias in translating this as "an offering for sin". Brettler and Levine provide a preferred rendering as "compensation from guilt". To summarise, Brettler and Levine do not approach the suffering servant as messianic prophecy. This is important for understanding the text in its own context. All this being said, Brettler and Levine recognise the fact that early Christians reinterpreted the suffering servant in light of Jesus, to explain his death and resurrection, to justify their rejection, and to encourage Christians who were enduring the hardship of slavery. In this regard, we have an excellent example of how a text can take on new meanings as it leaves its original context and encounters new readers. A text that was not Messianic for its originator can become so when it is reappropriated in different circumstances.

## 5.2. Litwak

Litwak presents an interesting crossroads between a traditional Christian view that sees Jesus as the embodiment of the Isaianic suffering servant while at the same time recognising the paucity of New Testament evidence to make this case.<sup>34</sup> Litwak's understanding of the suffering servant is at odds with Brettler and Levine's. While admitting that the suffering servant is not Davidic, he affirms that he is messianic, if only in "undertones".<sup>35</sup> He recognises that dying and rising again did not form part of messianic expectation.<sup>36</sup> For Litwak, it is the experience of suffering that connects the Isaianic figure of Is. 52:13-53:12 with Jesus. And it is suffering

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<sup>31</sup> Brettler and Levine, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant'.

<sup>32</sup> Leroy Andrew Huizenga, 'The Incarnation of the Servant: The "Suffering Servant" and Matthean Christology', *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 27.1 (2005), 25–58 (p. 39) <<https://doi.org/10.1163/187122005X00031>>.

<sup>33</sup> Brettler and Levine, 'Isaiah's Suffering Servant', p. 161.

<sup>34</sup> Litwak, 'The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament'.

<sup>35</sup> Litwak, 'The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament', p. 385.

<sup>36</sup> Litwak, 'The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament', p. 386.

that makes Jesus the Messiah or the Messiah Jesus.<sup>37</sup> Litwak divides the direct citations from Is. 52:13-53:12 into three categories. Rom. 15:21 serves as justification for preaching in non-evangelised areas.<sup>38</sup> 1 Peter 2:22 is “moral admonition” that encourages slaves to follow Jesus’ example.<sup>39</sup> The remainder are named “passion apologetic”. For Litwak, the suffering servant provides a precedent for the early Christians to explain Jesus’ suffering and death. The critique here, however, is that Litwak constantly seems to be convincing himself of the validity of this claim. And he claims that Acts 8:32-33 is the “best example” of passion apologetic, but it could be argued that it is the only example (if we discard 1 Peter 2:22 that Litwak places in another category). Litwak never seems to be entirely convinced by his own claims that Jesus is the suffering servant. He states that New Testament writers are placing Jesus as the fulfilment of Is. 52:13-53:12 or whether they are re-interpreting the text completely afresh. He is right to ask whether the connection between the suffering and servant and Jesus is as strong as it seems given how few citations there actually are. Litwak’s argument gives the impression of confirmation bias: readers find evidence of a strong link between the suffering servant and Jesus because they are looking for it.

### 5.3. Hooker/Huizenga

Writing specifically in relation to Mark’s gospel, Hooker is far more sceptical about the connection between Jesus and the suffering servant.<sup>40</sup> For Hooker, the connections between the two figures is an assumption based on the shared verb *paradidomi* (to hand over in Mk 14:18-21 and Is. 53:6, 12).<sup>41</sup> However for Hooker, it is the general category of suffering that unites the two figures. She writes: “Once alerted to the idea that Jesus’ suffering, death and vindication were the fulfilment of scripture, one becomes aware of words used by Mark which “echo” words in Isaiah.”<sup>42</sup> Hooker here then speaks into the paucity of actual NT citations to the suffering servant but also the potential for “echoes” because of the shared theme. In this she joins Childs, who claims that the link between Jesus and the suffering servant is ontological, ie. The connection exists at the level of substance, in this case suffering.<sup>43</sup> One could say that

<sup>37</sup> Litwak, ‘The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament’, p. 386.

<sup>38</sup> Litwak, ‘The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament’, p. 393.

<sup>39</sup> Litwak, ‘The Use of Quotations from Isaiah 52:13-53:12 in the New Testament’, p. 393.

<sup>40</sup> Morna D. Hooker, ‘Isaiah in Mark’s Gospel’, in *Isaiah in the New Testament: The New Testament and the Scriptures of Israel*, by Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken, First Edition (T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 35–49 <<https://www.perlego.com/book/804077/>> [accessed 29 July 2023].

<sup>41</sup> Hooker, ‘Isaiah in Mark’s Gospel’, p. 47.

<sup>42</sup> Hooker, ‘Isaiah in Mark’s Gospel’, p. 47.

<sup>43</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, The Old Testament Library, 1st ed (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), chap. 53.

the connection between the two figures is not the intention of the Markan author (and perhaps other NT authors too) but rather in the shared material. It is then subsequent readers that make the connection.

Huizenga reaches a similar conclusion. He is adamant that “suffering servant” is a modern construct and as a category was unavailable to the author of Matthew’s gospel.<sup>44</sup> Huizenga argues that “intertextual disposition” of Matthew’s gospel (but this could be true of the others too) that permit “fruitful canonical readings of [...] Jesus as the Isaianic servant”. Huizenga then joins Childs too. It is the theme of suffering generally, rather than a specific appeal to Isaiah’s suffering servant that actually unite the two figures. This seems to imply that it is only after gospel times that this connection can actually be made. Given the fact that Isaiah does not present a prophecy to be fulfilled and the paucity of NT citations, Huizenga provides an attractive model to relate both figures.

## 6. Conclusion

To conclude this essay, we will summarise its main points:

- 6.1. The suffering servant as presented by Deutero-Isaiah is a deeply enigmatic figure, which is open to many interpretations, both collective and individual. This essay has favoured a collective understanding that sees the suffering servant as a representation of exilic or post-exilic Israel. The servant’s hardships represent Israel’s hardships in exile.
- 6.2. It is certainly true that there are many narrative parallels between the experiences of the suffering servant and Jesus’ life and ministry. These parallels are mainly circumstantial and belong to the domain of ontology.<sup>45</sup>
- 6.3. Direct quotations from Is. 52:13-53:12 are on the whole insufficient to prove that the Isaianic suffering servant served as a model for the Gospel accounts of Jesus.
- 6.4. It can hardly be doubted, however, that the similarities between the depiction of the suffering servant in Is. 52:13-53:12 and the portrayal of Jesus’ ministry and particularly his death have offered generations of Christians the possibility to connect the two textual bodies.

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<sup>44</sup> Huizenga, ‘The Incarnation of the Servant’, p. 26.

<sup>45</sup> Childs, *Isaiah*, chap. 53.

It seems that the “precedent” of the Isaianic suffering servant has offered Christians a framework within which to make sense of the “disappointing” career of Jesus Christ and place his surprising demise within the meta-narrative of the whole Bible. Even the worst punishment of death on a cross can lead to exaltation to the right side of the Father.

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