sins. In his wounds we are healed; it is time to create forever a new creation. Send him back from the circles, bring him back from Seir, so that we might hear him in Lebanon a second time through Yinnon. He is our God, our Father, our King, he is our Savior and he will liberate and redeem us for a second time and let us hear of his grace a second time in everyone's sight, as it is said: 'I will save you at the end as at the beginning so that I will be your God.'"

This prayer, which is couched in somewhat enigmatic language, says that the "Messiah our Righteousness" has turned away from his people. Although the person praying is thoroughly shaken, he recognizes that the Messiah has already carried his burdens. Therefore, forgiveness is to be found through the fulfillment of Isaiah 53. In this way a "new creation" is effected. The idea of the "circle" is set out by the prayer book itself as meaning "the circles of the earth." "Seir" is a secret name for Rome, the center of Christianity, in which, according to the Talmud, the Messiah sits "with the poor and the sick." "Lebanon" means the Temple, which "whitens" the people's sins by their sacrifices, as its root laban is the equivalent of "white." The one praying repeats that God will save his people a "second time."

In conclusion, we may say that rabbinc Messianic expectation includes a wider range of thought than commonly accepted. For us, and for all who are despised, it is sufficient to remember this: "Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows"!

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**The Individual Interpretation of the Servant**

By Torleif Elgvin

The aim of this study is twofold: To demonstrate (1) that the Servant of Isaiah 42, 49, 50, and 53 belongs to a biblical tradition of faithful individuals in a unique relationship with God, and (2) that these passages are interpreted in the same way in texts written between the Old and the New Testaments. These points provide a meaningful background for later Jewish interpretations of this Servant as a messianic figure, including the NT interpretation of Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

From the medieval period on the main Jewish interpretation of the Servant is collective: the Servant is the people of Israel. This line of thought has received heavy support in modern critical scholarship. But until the end of the rabbinic period, Isaiah 50 and 53 were understood as referring to an individual figure or a small group of individuals.

In the third servant song the Servant is identified with Israel: "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified" (49:3). In this song, the Servant's role is to bring the people of Israel back to the Lord (vv 4, 6), so it seems strained to identify the servant with the people. Could 'Israel' be a later addition to the original text of the prophet? 'Israel' is indeed lacking in (only) one of the medieval Hebrew manuscripts of Isaiah, and with many interpreters! I have sympathy for this solution. It seems strange that the prophet would call the servant 'Israel,' when this short song twice describes his role as bringing Israel back to the Lord. Further, 'Israel' has no synonym (such as Jacob or Jeshurun) at its side, as would be expected in the style of Second Isaiah (Isa. 40–55).

On the other hand, both the Septuagint translation (made in the early 2nd century BC, our copies are much later) and the great Isaiah scroll from Qumran (from the late 2nd century BC) preserve the word 'Israel' in v 3. So if the word 'Israel' was not there from the beginning, it soon found its way into the texts being copied. Most interpreters do see the word as original in the text; it has been suggested that 'Israel' should be regarded in v 3 as an honorific name conveyed to an individual Servant.2

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It has been noted that the Servant portrayed in these four songs has both collective and individual characteristics. If he is an individual, he encompasses traits ascribed to the people of Israel in other biblical texts. Figures that mediate between the people and God, such as priest, prophet, and (messianic) king represent their people and can be seen as incorporating that people when they stand before the Lord. If the prophet had an individual Servant in mind, this line of tradition explains the “people-of-Israel-trait” in the description. If, however, the prophet really was designating the people as the Servant of YHWH, we understand why later Jewish exegetes take these songs as descriptions of a messianic figure or unique individual.

I am convinced that the four servant songs, even when they are seen only from an OT perspective, are best understood as songs about an individual, called by God into a unique role. If I am wrong (and the prophet indeed had the people in mind), this is no blow against my Christian faith or the NT interpretation. NT writers often consciously ascribe new meanings to OT texts, and at times ascribe double meanings to their base texts.3

If the prophet was thinking collectively, Jesus and NT authors would have good reason to see these songs as describing central traits of the end-time figure sent by God to bring redemption. Such were the terms of Jewish exegesis in this period.

A Prophet and Mediator Like Moses

Gerhard von Rad has provided key insights to the understanding of the servant songs in Second Isaiah (42:1-4/5-7; 49:1-6/7-9; 50:4-9/10-11; S2: 13-53:11).4 The “instructed tongue” and “listening ear” (50:4-5) are characteristics of a prophet, the type of person that receives revelation from God and then passes this word on “to sustain the weary.” But the singer has a more continuous “on-line-connection” with God than other prophets, who often had to wait for a word from the Lord. The sword-like mouth (49:2) belongs to the image of a prophet. The trials of the singer in 50:4-9 and ch 53 remind us of the confessions of Jeremiah, the suffering prophet. In all four songs there are only one or two kingsy predicates, and the ruling role of the king is absent. The main theme of the songs is proclamation, intercession, and suffering, key functions for Israelite prophets. Before Second Isaiah (this anonymous prophet knew Cyrus by name and ministered in Babylon between 550 and 540) there is no tradition in Israel of a suffering king.

Von Rad acknowledges that early on the Servant was understood as the people of Israel, as seen in the addition “Israel” in 49:3 and the Septuagint’s interpretative rendering of 42:1 as “Jacob my servant, whom I receive; Israel my chosen one, my soul delights in him.”5 As the prophet in other verses (41:8; 42:19 - a blind and deaf servant; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48: 20) designates the people God’s servant, this interpretation was close at hand for early interpreters of the Servant in the four songs. But the fact that “the boundaries between the two ideas are fluid at certain points ... must not obscure or veil the fact that the Servant is a person entrusted with a prophetic mission to the whole world.”6

Jeremiah’s suffering and dialogue with God played a part in Second Isaiah’s vision of the prophetic servant. Sentences from one of Jeremiah’s confessions are taken up in Isaiah 53. Jeremiah 11:19, “I had been like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter ... they had plotted against me, saying, ‘Let us destroy the tree and its fruit, let us cut him off from the land of the living.’” recurs in Isaiah 53:7-8. Our anonymous prophet can also have used experiences from his own dialogue with God in his description of the Servant.

But the best perspective gives the understanding of the Servant as a prophet like Moses. In Deuteronomy Moses is repeatedly designated “the servant of the Lord,” and he is the prototype of the prophets (18: 15-18). He acts as mediator and messenger between Israel and God, and between God and Israel. He struggles with God, suffers, and at the last dies vicariously for the sins of his people (Deut 3:23-27; 4:21-12; 5:26-27; 9:7-9). According to Exodus 32:30-35, Moses offers his life as atonement for the people’s sin with the golden calf. Moses is the one who shares out to the tribes their inheritance, and the new servant shall raise up the broken tribes of Jacob and restore the remnant (Isa 49:5-6, 8). “Does not this message actually demand the foretelling – as antitype – of a prophetic mediator who is to be greater than Moses in the same degree as the new Exodus is to outdo the old?”7 To the image of Moses in Exodus 32 and Deuteronomy our prophetic voice adds the significance of the coming mediator for the world. So far von Rad, who had a better perception of these songs than many critical scholars in the generation to follow.

In the Babylonian exile God sends a prophet to his broken and disillusioned people. Through his prophetic word (Isa 40-55) God wants to create history, to change the heart and will of the exiled and send them

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3 As Matthew does in 2:15: as God once called his son Israel from Egypt to the land of Canaan (Exod 11:1; Exod 42), so will he now call his messianic son into a similar exodus, to lead God’s people from bondage to redemption (Isa 43:16-19 Second Isaiah interprets the Exodus in a similar fashion).
4 For the following, see The Message of the Prophets, 218-28.
5 Which demonstrates a collective understanding of the first song, not necessarily of the other three.
6 von Rad, op. cit., 226.
7 von Rad, op. cit., 227.
back to build Zion anew (55:10-13). And then the exilic prophet is given a vision of a coming prophet, a mediator who will fulfill the role and ministry of Moses. For the author or ‘stage producer’ of the vivid scenes in these four songs, the Servant is no kingly messiah. He is a prophet who at one point will be exalted like a king (or like Moses), and he will bring the atonement for the people’s sin that was not (or no longer) realized by the priestly sacrificial service in the temple.

The Leader Who Stands in the Gap Between God’s Wrath and the People

Two post-exilic texts supplement this picture as they build on the tradition of the servant songs. Jeremiah 30:20–22 may be a later addition (by another anonymous interpreter) to Jeremiah’s prophecies of salvation to the exiled and doomed people: a “mighty one, a ruler” will rise from the midst of the people. “And I will bring him near, he will come close to me, for who is he that dare to pawn his heart as he comes close to me? declares the Lord” (translation mine). “To pawn his heart” means to stake one’s life. “I will bring him near” can also be translated (or later interpreted) “I will sacrifice him,” as the root qarab in the causative carries the meaning “bring near” or “sacrifice” (as one approaches God). A leader and ruler is described who is willing to stake his life before God, as Moses once did (Exod. 32). This leader is not called king, perhaps because of the failure of the last kings of Judah. Verse 22 describes the fruit of the deed of this mighty leader, “So you will be my people, and I will be your God” – a renewed covenantal relation between the Lord and his people Israel.

We proceed to Zechariah 13:7–10, one of the last prophetic texts to find its way into the Hebrew Bible, a text that adds new revelatory information to Isaiah 50 and 53 as well as Jeremiah 30. The Lord shouts out, “Awake, sword, against my shepherd, against the man who is my companion! Strike10 the shepherd, so that the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones” (translation mine). The shepherd is best understood as the royal leader of the people, the coming son of David (cf. 2 Sam 5:2; Ezek 34:23–24).11 In biblical imagery the awakening and striking of the sword indicates death for this man who is God’s companion and shepherd of the people. According to this text (as in Jer 30), the fate of the shepherd will lead to a renewed covenantal relationship. After the purification and refinement of the people, “they will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say ‘The Lord is our God.’”

The last verse makes it clear that this passage interprets and adds to Jeremiah 30:20–22. In Jeremiah 30, the leader stakes his life before the face of God, but nothing is said of the outcome (Moses was not allowed to sacrifice himself, Exod. 32:32–34). The Zechariah text adds to what had so far been revealed. In the purification of his people in the last days, a son of David will die by the hand of God. God’s hand will also strike the sheep, the small ones. From all this renewed Israel will rise and be acceptable to their God. According to Mark 14:27/25:31, Jesus says his and his disciples’ destiny as a fulfillment of this scripture (which combines the images of the Servant and the royal messiah).

Jeremiah 30 and Zechariah 13 show how the Servant of Isaiah 50 and 53 could be interpreted by later biblical voices. The servant who takes upon himself the infirmities and sorrows of his people may be no other than the end-time son of David, the mighty one who will stake his life in a clash with God’s burning anger. While the 6th century author of Isaiah 40–55 and his listeners perceived the Servant as a future prophetic figure, later messengers had received more light from above and could use facets from these texts to describe the ordeals of a coming royal servant of God. Targum Pseudo-Jonathan (2nd/3rd century AD) interprets (the first half of) Jeremiah 30:21 as referring to the royal messiah.12

Readings from Qumran:

a Priestly Teacher Who Brings Atonement

Three texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls draw upon the servant songs in their description of an individual priestly figure. In the first we probably encounter the patriarch Levi who “prophesies” to his sons about a future priest. This poetic vision may stem from c.200 BC; it is in Aramaic and was probably authored before the establishment of the Qumran community.

[God will give him wisdom. He will bring atonement for all the children of his generation and will be sent to all the children of his [people].

His word is like a word of the heavens, his teaching according to the will of God.

10 “Strike” is the same verb as in Isa 53:4, “stricken by God.”

11 Without the vowels added by the medieval Masoretes, “my shepherd,” “my companion,” and called “the shepherd.”

12 “a) Their king shall be anointed from them, b) their Messiah shall be revealed from among them; c) and I will bring them near, and they shall assemble to minister to me. d) For he is whose heart delights to draw near to minister to me, says the Lord.” The targumist may have found a royal Messiah with priestly functions too heavy, and therefore interpreted c) and d) as the people. In the Septuagint textual tradition he found support for an plural verb in c) (different from the Masoretic Hebrew text), which leads to a collective interpretation also of d).

13 The first two texts will be discussed more broadly in the next issue of Midrash, a topical issue on Qumran. For these two texts I bring my own translation, while the Thanksgiving Hymns are quoted from Garcia Martinez and Tigchelaar’s Study Edition.
His eternal sun will shine,
its fire spring forth to the all the ends of the earth,
above the darkness it will shine.
Then, darkness will vanish from the earth,
gloom from the dry land.

They will utter many words against him,
and an abundance of lies.
They will invent stories about him,
and utter everything dishonorable against him.
Evil will change his generation [...],
it will support deceit and violence.
In his days the people will go astray and be bewildered.

4Q541 Apocryphon of Levi, frg. 11

The first stanza records the unique teaching role of this servant, which will lead to a renewal of the earth (cf. Isa 42:4; 49:6). As a priest he will bring atoning sacrifices before God (but probably not sacrifice himself). The second stanza describes the persecution and mocking he will experience from his own people (cf. Isa 49:7 and the last two servant songs). This poem envisages a (high?) priest of the last days with a redeeming role for the world. Different from Jeremiah 30 and Zechariah 13, the servant songs here give flavor to a description of a priest, not a royal ruler.

The second text is called the Self-Glorification Hymn.

[The Most High has given me] eternal [honor],
and a mighty throne in the council of the godlike ones.
The kings of the East shall not be seated there,
their princes will not [be allowed to enter].
No one can compare with my glory,
no one is exalted like me.
no one approaches my seat.
For I reside in the heavenly abode,
... I am counted with the godlike ones,
and my dwelling is in the holy congregation.
Fleshly desire is not mine,
[for] all precious things are given to me
by the glory of [God] in the holy dwelling.

Who was despised for my sake?
And who can be compared to my glory?
Who will return like sailors to tell [what they have seen]?
Who has born [all] afflictions like me?
Who has suffered evil like me? – No one.
I have listened to teaching,
it cannot compare [to mine].
Who will counter when I open [my mouth]?

And who can resist the flow of my lips?
Who will confront me
and compare his judgement with mine?

I am the friend of the King
and companion of the holy angels.
With me no one can compare,
for among the godlike ones is my position,
I am glorified among the sons of the King,
the purest and finest gold belongs to me.

4Q491c frg. 1

This song is preserved in three copies of the Qumran community's Thanksgiving Hymns, and slightly differently in this fourth scroll. The text describes a priestly figure with an earthly teaching ministry without parallel. He has borne great affliction, and is symbolically elevated to the heavenly council of God. Perhaps an Essene author described his hope for a priest in the last days, using the priestly founder of his movement, the Teacher of Righteousness, as a model. After the stanzas quoted here, some fragmentary lines refer to the coming of the royal Messiah, which may be related to the priestly ministry of the “friend of the King.”

The psalm reminds us of the NT proclamation that Jesus is elevated to the throne of God. Like the previous text, it casts light on Hebrews' proclamation of Jesus as the ultimate High Priest with a unique ministry before God.

Third we will trace a section of the Thanksgiving Hymns for allusions to the servant songs. The middle section of this large scroll from Cave 1 once existed independently. This section contains a group of “Teacher hymns.” These psalms reflect the experience of a self-conscious teacher who has experienced trials and persecution, but nevertheless conveys illumination from above to his community. The psalms were probably authored by the “founding father” of the community; some of them may later have been ascribed to him. This founder was a Jerusalem priest of the mid-2nd century, who in other texts is called the Teacher of Righteousness. The singer, in his address to God, calls himself “your servant” (XVII 11), and sees his fate in the light of biblical lamentations as well as the servant songs.

[I will proclaim in the assembly of the] simple ones the judgments
of my afflictions (IX 33)
– stricken by God ... and afflicted (Isa 53:4)
I became a trap for offenders, but healing for all who turn away
from offence (X 8-9)
– by his wounds we were healed (Isa 53:5)
You have revealed yourself to me with perfect light (XII 6)
– After the suffering of his soul, he will see light and be satisfied
(Isa 53:11)
I was rejected by them, they did not esteem me (XII 8)
he was rejected by men, we esteemed him not (Isa 53:3)
When I lean on you, I remain resolute and rise above those who scorn me (XII 22)
- my servant will be raised and lifted up (Isa 52:13)
My spirit kept firmly in the face of affliction (XII 36)
- yet we considered him stricken by God ... and afflicted (Isa 53:4)
Through me you have enlightened the face of the many (XII 27)
- by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify the many (Isa 53:11)
You have ... made my tongue like that of your disciples (XV 10)
- The Lord YHWH has given me the tongue of disciples so to straighten my steps ... to walk before you in the region of the living (XV 14)
- for he was cut off from the land of the living (Isa 53:8)
You made me a fountain in dry ground ... the trees of life at the secret fountain ... shall make a shoot grow (XVI 4, 6)
- He grew up before him like a tender shoot, like a root out of dry ground (Isa 53:2)
my residence is with the sick, my heart knows afflictions (XVI 26-27)
- we considered him ... afflicted (Isa 53:4)
My spirit hides with the dead, for my life has gone down to the pit (XVI 29)
- For he was cut off from the land of the living (Isa 53:8)
the voice of my disciple-tongue ... shall sustain the weary with a word (XVI 36)
- has given me the tongue of disciples, to know to sustain the weary with a word (Isa 50:4)

There are cases where second temple authors freely allude to biblical texts without at all seeing a "prophetic connection" to their own times and lives. But the above evidence points to a clear connection: this teacher (and his community after him) saw his life and calling as an embodiment of the image in the servant songs. He read these texts as prophecies of an individual -- a teacher to be sent by God to restore his people, but who would experience suffering and trials from antagonists within the nation. These "teacher hymns" may have inspired a later follower to write the Self-Glorification Hymn, where he used his own Teacher as a prototype of the divinely ordained Priest of the end-times.

We have seen that five Israelite texts (from the 5th-2nd centuries) interpret the Servant as an individual figure with a divinely appointed role leading to renewal and redemption. Among them, two late biblical texts wait for a messianic son of David who will stake his life in his encounter with God. The texts preserved at Qumran read the servant songs into their times as referring to a priest and teacher, not a royal messiah.

These five texts (as well as later rabbinic interpretations) should provide a crux interpretum for modern scholars who deny the individual interpre-
ation of the servant songs. Were all the early interpreters such poor readers?

These texts do not prove that New Testament authors are right in claiming that Jesus is the Suffering Servant. But they show that early Jewish Christian interpreters were in good Jewish company when they proclaimed their conviction that an individual from Nazareth represents the fulfillment of the servant songs, and that he is ordained by God to bring redemption.

In the gospels Jesus is, to a large extent, seen as a prophet. Proclamation, teaching, and miracles belong to the office of the prophet, not to the job description of a royal messiah. This picture fits well with the first interpretation of the servant songs offered above.14

The Hebrew Bible contains a variety of prophecies on the coming redemption. The main figure on the stage is the Lord. As Christian readers, we should acknowledge that only some prophecies refer to a secondary character, a messiah or redemptive figure. In addition, this group of texts has various emphases, so those who waited for the salvation of Israel might have wondered: "How will you fulfil your promises, Lord; which of them will you choose to implement?" Talmudic rabbis have pondered this same question.

(In a discussion on the time of the Messiah) Rabbi Joshua contrasted two scriptures: "See, one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven" (Dan 7:13), while it is written, "See, your king comes to you, righteous and bringing salvation, humble and riding on a donkey" (Zech 9:9). [How could both scriptures apply to the Messiah?] - If the people of Israel is deemed worthy, [he will come] with the clouds of heaven. If not, he has to come humbly, riding on a donkey.

b. Talmud, Sanhedrin 98a