



The Old Testament Biblical Context of Jesus as Ebed Yahweh

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ABSTRACT

Judaism's ideas of Ebed Yahweh and the Messiah are tasked with mending the false connection between Yahweh and his people and guiding them toward the disposition God has given them via his appointment. It's not implausible to think that the Ebed figure Deutero-Isaiah refers to lived up to his ideals and eventually went back to Jerusalem to continue his prophetic work. The qualities of Yahweh, the issue of evil, and theodicy are just a few of the topics covered in the writings of the Old Testament philosopher viewpoints on the entire ancient Israelite religion. To determine if Jesus serves as the Servant of God referred to in Deutero-Isaiah, the paper contextualizes Isaiah chapters 53 and 61. The evolution of Heilsgeschichte alludes to Ebed Yahweh's figure. The researcher concluded that even in Palestine and mainstream crucial element thought could show that such a concept existed, it was, at best, improbable and flimsy. However, this does not change the reality that the Suffering Servant of God and the Suffering Prophet are linked. The Synoptic did apply ideas, death and Ebed's restoration covenant between God and his people to himself.

Keywords: *Biblical Context, Ebed Yahweh, Deutero-Isaiah, Suffering Servant*

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INTRODUCTION

Old Testament theology in the context of ancient Israelite religion is, in fact, one of the advanced fields of study within Old Testament research. Old Testament theologians have written on various topics, such as the attributes of Yahweh, the problem of evil and theodicy, the relationship between religion and history, issues of religious pluralism, the nature of religious language in the Bible, conceptions of revelation in ancient Israel, the problem of evil and theodicy, and the justification of religious experiences among the prophets. Furthermore, the significance of Old Testament theology is heightened by the fact that the New Testament's understanding of Heilsgeschichte as a whole is based on the concept of displaced representation, which forms the foundation of this understanding.

The importance of character in this context has often been a focal point of scholarly research, but its application to Jesus is quite unique. Previously, both Adolf and Ernst approached this issue from a perspective that believed Jesus

was the one called to serve as the "Servant of God" spoken of by Deutero-Isaiah. This model of character personification became instrumental in shaping the early Christians' faith in the person and work of Christ. This discussion will follow the following structure: Early Christianity, Jesus, and Ebed Yahweh.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, we utilized an exegetical technique founded on hermeneutical principles that emphasize biblical and structural analysis. This approach involves interpreting biblical texts by considering the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the time they were written. It also involves delving into the meanings of words, phrases, and verses within the text, and to aid in this process, we made use of both a concordance and a Biblical dictionary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Interpretation of Isaiah 53

The prophet Isaiah narrates a significant moment in global perspective through the beautiful and poetic song found in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, which is one of the four "Servant Songs." In Isaiah 53, we find a prediction of the world's response to Israel's deliverance during the Messianic era. The lyrics in this passage are presented from the viewpoint of international leaders, who express their newfound admiration for Israel's magnificence compared to their earlier contempt for the Jewish people. They will be astonished and rendered speechless when they come to understand how harshly they had treated the Jewish community. While the original Hebrew language refers to the Jewish people, this concept has evolved into a fundamental belief over the years. However, the vocabulary used in the well-known King James Version may present challenges to modern readers, as it lacks a distinctly Jewish foundation and occasionally conflicts with traditional Jewish ideas. Modern translations, though more accessible, can sometimes further deviate from the original meaning of the text.

The Context of Isaiah 53

To comprehend any biblical scripture fully, it must be read within its appropriate context. In earlier passages, the prophet Isaiah explicitly and consistently identifies the nation of Israel as God's Servant. This connection is made nine times, starting in chapter 41, with no mention of any other nation, as the Lord declares, "Israel, you are my servant" (41:8). References can also be found in chapters 49:3, 44:1, 44:2, 44:21, 45:4, and 48:20. Throughout the Bible, the Jewish people are frequently described as God's "servant." This prompts the question: who is the rightful subject of the singular pronoun used in these passages, the entire Jewish people or an individual? It is worth noting that the singular pronoun is consistently employed when referencing the Jewish people.

The answer to this question becomes evident when we recognize that the singular pronoun is regularly employed throughout the Bible. For example, when addressing God's people, they are treated as a singular entity united by a common identity (as seen in Hosea 14:6-7 and Jeremiah 50:19). Numerous reasons support the argument that this chapter cannot be a reference to Jesus. Even within the Christian texts, the disciples did not perceive Jesus as the Suffering Servant.

After Jesus's death, Christians reinterpreted specific biblical passages and "applied" them to Jesus through inaccurate translations and contextual distortions. In the beginning of the "Messages of Consolation," which includes Chapter 53, God prophesies the Jewish people's lengthy and arduous exile, describing Israel's eventual rise to prominence as God's chosen nation. The opening stanza of Chapter 53 asks, "Who would believe what we have heard?" expressing the disbelief of world leaders upon hearing the astonishing news of Israel's redemption. The term "God's

'arm' (זרוע) signifies the deliverance of the Jewish people from physical oppression, a theme recurrent throughout the entire Jewish Bible. The metaphor of a tree struggling to grow in parched soil alludes to the Jewish people's experience of exile. According to the Scripture, the Servant is widely despised and rejected, a recurring theme in Jewish history due to a long list of oppressors who viewed Jews as less than human.

A common example of mistranslation is Isaiah 53:5: The phrase "that may explain attributed missing from trespasses" suggests that the suffering implied in the accurate translation was caused by others' sinfulness, rather than the assertion made by Christians that the Servant's suffering was intended to atone for the sins of others. In this passage, the "Land of Israel" is specifically referred to as the "land of the living," implying that the phrase signifies exile from Israel's native land. The language in this passage makes it evident that the oppressed Servant represents a group of nations rather than an individual. Proficiency in Biblical Hebrew is crucial in understanding this context.

Interpretation of Isaiah 61

This verse in Isaiah presents a multi-voiced narrative involving YHWH, a preacher and healer, and an executive figure. Understanding these three distinct voices is vital in grasping the significance of the Jerusalem Renaissance. Additionally, this passage employs language that is closely connected to the spiritual endowment of the servant, as seen in Isaiah 42:1 and 48:16. In Isaiah 61:1, both Christ and the church are referenced. The verse opens with the words of Christ, elucidating his mission and role. The Messiah announces a dual mission: to bring the message of God's kindness in his first coming and to pronounce judgments on unbelievers and offer consolation to Zion in his second coming. This terminology can also be applied to Isaiah, who, in a secondary manner, provided consolation through his prophecies during the Babylonian exile. Just as God sent Isaiah to proclaim freedom to the Jews in Babylon, Christ was sent to bring a more jubilant jubilee to a lost world. Christ has always allowed God to fully serve as a prophet, offering guidance and courage. The remnant of the people may have had a historical application, but Jesus was truly and fully anointed by the Holy Spirit to preach the gospel.

However, the theological themes within both the Old and New Testaments remain consistent. The contextual freedom retained in interpretation maintains both the literal and the spiritual aspects, leading to profound and planned conclusions. The context also delves into the concept of anointing, which is associated with Isaiah and provides important background for our understanding. This is exemplified by the fact that only the king is specifically described as being anointed by the Lord or God, distinct from the people. Furthermore, the prevalence of this theme supports the idea. Jungling (1993) suggests that the fulfillment of Isaiah 11:2, which prophesies an overflowing of the spirit, is achieved through being in Christ. It is also believed that Isaiah 61:1-3 contains some of the earliest Trito-Isaiah texts (Gregory, 2007).

Context of Isaiah 61

Isaiah 60–62, within this section, contains Old Testament lectionary passages. The majority of Isaiah 56–66 describes a fully redeemed people who have returned to Jerusalem. When the Holy Spirit came upon a speaker, it signified being under the control of the Spirit and that the Holy Spirit had conveyed the speaker's message as the message of God. In this context, the prophet was enabled to fulfill his role within the historical setting. The Hebrew term for "binding" in a healing context is provided by the poet, while another word for "binding" in a political or legal context is used. The message here is to heal wounds and release the people, in other words. Since the word in 1b is often translated as "to open eyes," the Septuagint translator chose to render it as "open the eyes."

The Ebed Yahweh in Judaism

Isaiah 50:4–11 and 52:13–53:12 are the Old Testament passages that shed light on the character of the Ebed Yahweh. Chapter 53 of the Bible is the well-known passage that deals with the submission of Jesus. Deutero-Isaiah employs precise yet mysterious language to describe the Ebed figure. As the scene shifts from Babylon to Judea, these observations occur in chapters 48 and 49, not in chapters 55 and 56. It's not beyond the realm of possibility to consider that this figure might have returned to resume his work. Nevertheless, we still remain uncertain about the identity of this "Servant of Yahweh." The prophet does not specify when or under what circumstances this Servant appears. Aage refers to ideas about wisdom, especially at the beginning of Moses' redivivus. The identical question posed by Isaiah remains a point of interest for Old Testament scholars today: whether the audience would have been familiar with this person, although this is highly unlikely to have been the case. The origins of these chapters fall outside the scope of this commentary. However, it's worth delving deeper into these components as there is an underlying logic that can be discerned in the rhetorical structure, vocabulary, and major themes.

The debatable nature of Bernhard Duhm's theory regarding the organization of these chapters into a coherent whole has been highlighted in current discourse. This theory suggests that distinct writers may have contributed to different portions of the same book. Friedman (2011) examines writing style and word choices, and this approach was applied to the book of Isaiah as a test, confirming the consensus that Isaiah is the work of multiple authors. If we reframe the question in light of its current state, it can be further reduced to an issue of reading personality.

Certain verses within the Ebed Yahweh songs appear to connect the Ebed with all of Israel, expressing ideas like praise. However, in other sections, the Ebed is described as just one part of the population, most likely the "remnant." Once again, specific paragraphs reduce the group to a single individual with a distinct personality. The Hebrew Concept of Corporate Personality, which is the primary concept here, plays an evolving role that aligns with biblical Heilsgeschichte from start to finish. It encompasses the entire character of the entire people, the "remnant," and the One. This development of Heilsgeschichte is suggestive of the Ebed Yahweh serving as a personification of complexity, which reinforces the core idea of representation found in these hymns.

This characteristic, therefore, holds special significance in our understanding of biblical Heilsgeschichte. The most essential quality of the Ebed Yahweh is the indirect portrayal of suffering. The Ebed embodies God's afflicted Servant, taking on the suffering that others should bear, thus renewing his representative role. In Judaism, the key issue surrounding the Ebed lies in his relationship with the Messiah. Judaism's perspective on responsibility aims to mend the false connection between Yahweh and his people, guiding them back to the disposition granted by God through his appointment. These concepts can be illuminated by examining their connection to the notion of kingship. It becomes apparent that the Septuagint seems to interpret Isaiah 52:13–53:12 from various linguistic perspectives, emphasizing a non-Jewish interpretation of Jewish concepts.

Ernst Lohmeyer suggests that the Servant of God is 'anointed' with the spirit. In any case, there is an interaction between the 'Messiah' and the Ebed Yahweh. Engnell posits that by attributing the Ebed Yahweh's attributes to the Messiah, the Books of Enoch, Ezra, and Baruch's Apocalypse indirectly link the Messiah with the Ebed (Jeremias, 1957). This was a common characteristic in Judaism during Jesus's time. However, the Messiah does not inherit the central role of indirect suffering from the Ebed. Judaism detects rather tenuous indications (Davies, 1948). Nevertheless, the Messiah willingly takes on the suffering of the people as an act of atonement, not through intentional suffering. Suffering is part of the prophet's destiny. There might be a reference to a "suffering Messiah" in the sense that the End Times Prophet was occasionally associated with the Messiah.

When we examine how various ideas in Judaism, aimed at defining the role of a unique God-mediator, interact with each other, we might speculate that the concept periodically emerged. Even if the idea of a rescuer could be found in the Targum of Isaiah 53, which has been studied by scholars like Paul Humbert, Gerard Kittel, Peter Seidelin, Harald Hegermann, and Joachim Jeremias, it's evident that the Rabbis had difficulty accepting it in any form. While the Targum identifies the Messiah as Isaiah, it employs a rather peculiar and highly subjective exegesis that overlooks the essence of the Ebed's suffering. For instance, it states, "He had no form or majesty that we should look at, and no beauty that we should desire him" based on exegesis examples of Isa. 53:2b in the Old Testament.

The Targum's interpretation of this passage is as follows: "The Ebed's appearance is extraordinary, and the fear he arouses is extraordinary; his splendor is holy." To align with their perspective, the Rabbi twists the scripture to say exactly what it does not say. The anguish that the respected prophet writes about in Isa. 53:3 is reinterpreted by rabbinical interpretation to suggest that despite being despised by the people, the Ebed will ultimately bring an end to all kingdoms. These kingdoms will become feeble and sorrowful, akin to a suffering man who is accustomed to illness. The people are reviled and despised, as if God has turned His back on them. In essence, the exegete significantly alters the verse's subject in a highly subjective manner. Additionally, the verse that states, "we conceal our faces in front of him because we despise him," is read by the Rabbi as an indication that God has turned His back on them.

These examples illustrate that, in the rabbis' perspective, the central quality of Suffering is fundamentally incompatible with the Messiah's true mission. It's possible that the Targum's interpretation is meant to counter Christian claims that Jesus is the Ebed Yahweh. However, there is no concrete evidence to suggest that this interpretation is anti-Christian in nature. The Rabbi's approach to interpreting Isa. 53 does not necessarily imply the rejection of an alternative theory. Rather, it reflects a genuine interest in the text's messianic applications.

Jesus as the Ebed Yahweh in Early Christianity

It's not Ebed Yahweh's Christology that the Gospel authors primarily adhere to. There are very few passages where the authors directly connect to the idea of the Servant of God. However, the evangelist mentions illness, stating that Jesus had spoken, and this was to fulfill that. The common introduction, "that it might be fulfilled," is followed by an identical quotation from Isa. 53:4 in this instance. Of course, the core concept of Isa. 53, which is the indirect suffering, is not what initially captures the interest of the evangelist in this text. He believes that this prophecy was fulfilled by Jesus' ability to heal the sick, not by his death. Matthew interprets the verse to suggest that the Ebed has 'taken away' diseases, while the prophet envisions the Ebed bearing the diseases of others upon himself through his suffering and death. This argument is accurate to the extent that Jesus' healing work indicates an expectation and the work he will accomplish through his death.

It's worth noting that Matthew does not quote from Isaiah 53 regarding the primary act of salvation that Jesus performed—his atoning death. In the Passion Story of Matthew, which frequently and joyfully references the Old Testament, he does cite a line in Matt. 12:18–21, although he appears to focus on a tangential aspect. The works of scholars like Charles Fox Burney and Joachim Jeremias (1957) have demonstrated that the Greek word "*ἀμνὸς τοῦ Θεοῦ*" likely derives from "*אֶדְבַּיִן אֱלֹהִים*," which often refers to the paschal lamb, suggesting that the author of John may have had the Ebed Yahweh in mind. Given the connected concept, the translation of "*ἀμνός*" is all the more understandable.

While it may be challenging to demonstrate specific passages in a translation as "Jesus the Ebed Yahweh," it does represent a variant of that phrase. Although the difference is slight, it initially appears to have a distinct meaning in 1 Corinthians 1. Jews believe that the sacrifice atones for the nation (Ex. 12). While the idea of sacrifice is included

in the Ebed Yahweh concept, the willing depiction of Passover is passive; it atones for sins by being offered up passively. In contrast, the Ebed Yahweh actively chooses to bear the sins of others, making it unique in this regard. Thus, we are dealing with several closely related concepts, each emphasizing different facets, with the Ebed Yahweh concept placing greater emphasis on the process of attaining the result.

Given the interconnectedness of these concepts, it can be concluded that when the prophet described the Ebed Yahweh in Chapter 53, he was likely thinking of the paschal lamb as well. Therefore, he used the phrase "as a lamb that is carried to the slaughter" in verse 7 to draw this analogy. The use of a phrase that could have both meanings in the Fourth Gospel, such as in John 1:29 and 1:36, can be effectively explained by this close relationship. This interpretation is based on the assumption that this passage in John was either inspired by an Aramaic document or that its author had an understanding of the language. However, it must be acknowledged that another passage in John 19:36 simply refers to the paschal lamb. In contrast to conventional wisdom, the text focuses on the person who was crucified and whose bones were not broken. The evangelist employs passages that are closely related, implying that the concept might have been the dominant one in John 1:29 and 1:36. The evangelist may have testified to both ideas due to their close connection, and he might have even had both in mind when writing the same lines (Dodd, 1953).

As demonstrated, the source effectively recalls facts directly from the opening verses of the songs. The most compelling evidence for the existence of this identity in the earliest days of early Christianity is found in the Acts of the Apostles, which can be more precisely referred to as a "Paidology" or an Ebed Yahweh Christology. It can even be argued that this represents the earliest known Christological solution to the problem. This demonstrates how Jesus was openly associated with the Ebed Yahweh in the first century and how this memory persisted as a fundamental aspect of early Christian beliefs.

Other verses in Acts, although they do not directly quote Isaiah, are nonetheless essential for understanding our topic. The Deuter-Acts are significant because occurrences in other New Testament books use the designation "*Ἰησοῦς τοῦ Θεοῦ*" for Jesus (Bultmann, 1951). The first use of this reference to Jesus alludes to and supports the presence of the ancient nickname "Ebed Yahweh" for Jesus. This particular Christological concept may have faded over time, but the author of Acts has accurately preserved its remnants in the initial section of his work.

CONCLUSION

Jewish Messianism did not adopt the core premise of the Ebed Yahweh hymns, which centered on atoning death and vicarious suffering. Although Jesus did not explicitly label himself as a "Suffering Servant," both the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John claim that he applied the concepts of vicarious suffering and death to himself. Early Christians remembered that Jesus was cognizant of the importance of comprehending the work of Ebed Yahweh. The concept of Ebed Yahweh laid the groundwork for this presupposition. It appears that the Christology of the Apostle Peter held particular significance and may have influenced the development of the oral Gospel tradition, especially the passion narrative.

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