

## THE MISSION OF ISRAEL AND OF THE MESSIAH IN THE PLAN OF GOD<sup>1</sup>

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*God placed human beings, including the Messiah and the people of Israel, in His creation to fulfill a mission. The four Servant Songs of Isaiah (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12) summarize the mission of the Messiah as coming in two phases: a period of lowliness at the end of which He would die for the sins of His people and rise from the dead and a period of exaltation during which He would restore Israel's land and provide salvation to all peoples. Features of the Servant's first phase identify Him clearly as Jesus of Nazareth, with His second phase receiving full development in Daniel 7 as explained in Revelation. The mission of Israel has marked similarities to that of the Messiah, for example, the responsibility of witnessing to the nations. Israel has failed in her mission, however, and awaits a future restoration before she can fulfill her mission. That will come in her future kingdom when the Messiah returns. Israel also has a significant mission during the present age, illustrated by Jewish authorship of all but two of the NT books. Yet she is not presently fulfilling OT prophecies of her future role in the kingdom. The ultimate mission of all peoples will receive fulfillment in the new Jerusalem when they enjoy personal fellowship with God in bringing glory to Him.*

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God has a plan for this world. As a personal Creator of all things, He had a goal in making the universe and planet earth the way He made them. Human beings He put into the world play a vital part in achieving His goal for the world. He has assigned them a mission to execute.

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In particular, it is God's servant who has the task of carrying out the mission of God. Scripture applies the words "My servant"<sup>2</sup> to ten individuals and one corporate body.<sup>3</sup> One of the individuals referred to by this title is God's Servant,<sup>4</sup> the Messiah. His mission is paramount in the fulfillment of God's plan. Another primary participant in God's program is God's corporate servant Israel. The present discussion will focus on the mission of these two in implementing the plan of God.

### THE MISSION OF THE MESSIAH

Of special interest are references to God's Servant in the "Servant Songs" in Isaiah's prophecy. The prophet records the four songs in 42:1-9;<sup>5</sup> 49:1-13;<sup>6</sup> 50:4-

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<sup>2</sup>English translations of biblical expressions and texts in this article come from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>3</sup>The individuals receiving the designation "My servant" include Abraham (Gen 26:24); Moses (Num 12:7, 8; Josh. 1:2, 7; 2 Kgs 21:8; Mal 4:4); Caleb (Num 14:24); David (2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kgs 11:32, 34, 36, 38; 14:8; 2 Kgs 19:34; 20:6; 1 Chr 17:4, 7; Ps 89:3; Isa 37:35; Jer 33:21, 22, 26; Ezek 34:23, 24; 37:24, 25); Job (Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, 8); Eliakim (Isa 22:20); the Servant of the LORD (Isa 42:1; 49:6; 52:13; 53:11; Zech 3:8; Matt 12:18); Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10); Zerubbabel (Hag 2:23); Christ's follower (John 12:26). The people of Israel (or Jacob) compose the corporate body that God calls "My servant" (Isa 41:8, 9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; Jer 30:10; 46:27, 28; Ezek 28:25; 37:25).

<sup>4</sup>This essay will capitalize the first letter—i.e., "Servant"—whenever the term applies to God's Servant, the Messiah, and will leave all other references to a servant in a lower case letters.

<sup>5</sup>Claus Westermann (*Isaiah 40–66, A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969] 92) limits the first Servant Song to 42:1-4. He considers 42:5-9 to be a later addition to the song (101), but does so without convincing evidence.

11;<sup>7</sup> 52:13–53:12.

***The First Servant Song (Isa 42:1-9)***

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<sup>6</sup>Westermann limits the second Servant Song to 49:1-6 (ibid., 206-7). He considers 49:7 ff. to be a later addition to the song (213), but does so without convincing evidence.

<sup>7</sup>Westermann limits the third Servant Song to 50:4-9 (ibid., 225-26). He considers 50:10-11 to be a later addition to the song (233), but does so without convincing evidence.

It is God who speaks in the first song. Westermann points out how Isaiah 42:1 relates to the Servant's God-given mission: "The first words [i.e., 'Behold, My Servant' or 'This is My Servant'] plainly describe a designation. This means that someone with the right so to do designates or appoints someone else to perform a task or to hold an office."<sup>8</sup> He notes three descriptions of the Servant's task in the first song: to bring forth justice to the nations (v. 1c), to bring forth justice in truth (v. 3c), and to establish justice in the earth (v. 4b).<sup>9</sup> To Westermann's list of tasks, the Servant's appointment as a covenant to the people<sup>10</sup> and a light to the nations<sup>11</sup> (6cd) is an additional responsibility. Westermann's three tasks interpret "justice" as having a special meaning in the context of Isaiah's prophecy, that of refuting the claim of Gentile gods that they are deity, because the LORD alone is God.<sup>12</sup> The Servant's task is to spread this message worldwide. That is the illumination He must bring to all mankind. A further mission He is to fulfil comes out in 42:3ab where the figurative language tells of the comfort and encouragement he will bring to the weak and oppressed. In addition, He will during His earthly reign replace Israel's spiritual blindness with clear vision and restore her captives to freedom (42:7; cf. Isa 29:18; 32:3; 35:5; 61:1).

One feature of the first song that renders improbable the identification of the Servant as corporate Israel lies in 42:3-4. The picture of gentleness and patience in v. 3 and of the absence of hesitation or discouragement in v. 4 is inapplicable to the nation as a group in fulfillment of her mission of bringing justice and light to the nations (cf. Isaiah 41).<sup>13</sup>

### ***The Second Servant Song (Isa 49:1-13)***

In the second song, the Servant speaks. That song includes other tasks for the Servant: bringing Jacob back to God (49:5b), restoring the preserved ones of Israel (49:6b), serving as a light to the nations so as to extend the LORD's salvation to earth's extremities (49:6cd), and functioning as a covenant of the people Israel to restore the land (49:8cd) and release the captives (49:9ab). The return of captives will be much more miraculous than the exodus from Egypt under Moses. Though not directly stated, the Servant's task through all this activity is also to glorify the one true God (49:3). Thus the broader scope of the Servant's office extends to the Gentile world as a whole, though its

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 95.

<sup>10</sup>Le., He embodies the blessings of salvation promised to God's people Israel.

<sup>11</sup>Le., the Servant will use Israel to shine and enlighten all nations when He reigns in His kingdom (49:6; cf. Isa 19:24).

<sup>12</sup>Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 95.

<sup>13</sup>Allan A. MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah* (Chicago: Moody, 1977) 69-70.

immediate scope aims at Israel and bringing her back to God.<sup>14</sup> In the accomplishment of these tasks, the Servant must endure humiliating treatment that will for the moment appear to doom His mission to failure (49:4ab, 7bc), but He will eventually reign as the supreme ruler throughout the earth because of the LORD's blessing upon Him (49:4cd, 7efg).

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<sup>14</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 212.

The survey of the Servant Songs has thus far assumed the Servant's identity as an individual person. In the second song, however, that simple identification is insufficient because the prophet specifically identifies "My servant" as Israel (49:3a). Identification of the servant as corporate Israel has strong attestation elsewhere in Isaiah and the OT (e.g., Isa 41:8, 9; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21, 26; 45:4; 48:20; Jer 30:10; 46:27, 28; Ezek 28:25; 37:25).

God affirms His choice of the nation frequently (e.g., Isa 41:8, 9; 43:10; 44:1, 2; 45:4). Yet spiritual blindness and deafness have beset God's servant Israel (Isa 42:19), causing her to turn her back on the LORD. Nevertheless, He will not forget her (Isa 44:21), but will eventually after a period of chastening (Jer 30:11de; 46:28fg) redeem her and install her as the head of all peoples (Isa 44:26; 48:20d; Jer 30:10-11c; 46:27-28e; Ezek 28:25; 37:25<sup>15</sup>).

Identifying the Servant as a single person is also necessary in some passages in the Servant Songs especially.<sup>16</sup> In this connection, Hugenberger comments,

[A]lthough surrounded by texts that refer to corporate Israel as a servant, the servant of the servant songs, who innocently and obediently suffers for the transgression of the people (53:4-12) and who brings salvation to the Gentiles and restores Jacob/Israel to Yahweh (49:5-6), is not to be equated with corporate Israel. By allowing him to share the servant designation of corporate Israel, however, and in one verse even the name 'Israel' (49:3), the prophet may be suggesting that this one is everything Israel should have been as he faithfully fulfills the role to which Israel

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<sup>15</sup>Ezekiel 37:22-25 is also a recognized Messianic text in its reference to "My servant David" and His future reign (cf. Daniel I. Block, "Bringing Back David: Ezekiel's Messianic Hope," in *The Lord's Anointed, Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham, eds. [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995] 177-83). It speaks of the future reign of David's descendent over Israel in fulfillment of the promise to King David in 2 Samuel 7.

<sup>16</sup>The fourth Servant Song (52:13-53:12) in particular must refer to an individual. Various attempts to apply it to Jeremiah, Isaiah himself, Hezekiah, Josiah, and Job have been fruitless because of the many discrepancies between any of these individuals and the Servant described in that song. A generally accepted interpretation among Jewish people applies the song to the Jewish nation, a view dating at least as far back as Origen (David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah: The Sufferings of the Messiah and the Glory That Should Follow, An Exposition of Isaiah LIII* [London: Morgan & Scott, n.d.] 18). Baron suggest three reasons for this interpretation: the repugnancy to Rabbinic Judaism of a suffering, expiatory Messiah, the inability to reconcile this picture of the Messiah with one of His coming in power and glory, and the impression that the Jewish nation through the centuries has been the innocent sufferer for the guilt of the other nations (18-20). According to the figurative interpretation of the fourth song that sees a reference to corporate Israel, the death of the servant is Israel's suffering and captivity which results in benefit to the rest of the world, but that suffering is hardly vicarious and does nothing to mediate between God and man (39; cf. Gordon P. Hugenberger, "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure," in *The Lord's Anointed* 108). That suffering was the penalty for Israel's own sins. Neither has the nation suffered voluntarily or without resistance as this Servant has (Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 42-44). Whenever Isaiah uses the servant in a collective sense, it is always with the addition of "Jacob" or "Israel" (Isa 41:8; 44:1, 2, 21; 45:4; 48:20) or through use of plurals alongside the singular (e.g., 43:10-14; 48:20, 21) to indicate the corporate use (Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 45).

had been called.<sup>17</sup>

Baron suggests essentially the same:

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<sup>17</sup>Hugenberger, "Servant of the Lord" 111.

Here [i.e., in 49:3] God says to him "Thou art My servant, O Israel" (or "Thou art Israel"). He is invested with the name of Israel because He, "as Israel's inmost centre, as Israel's highest head," realizes the idea and carries out the mission to which the nation which had originally been *called* to the task of carrying out God's saving purpose in relation to the world does not respond.<sup>18</sup>

In the second song, several features point to an individual. He will be a human being, conceived in and born from a mother's womb (49:1bc).<sup>19</sup> This distinguishes Him from the personified group of Israel. Other indications of individuality include God's giving effect to the Servant's word (49:2a) and keeping Him safe (42:2b) and the Servant's regard for His work as a failure (42:4ab) with the realization that God nevertheless approves of it (42:4cd).<sup>20</sup> In particular, the individual Servant stands in bold contrast to the corporate servant in that the latter receives the redemption provided by the former (49:6ab).<sup>21</sup> A further distinction lies in the moral perfection always attributed to the individual Servant as opposed to the shortcomings of corporate Israel (e.g., cp. 42:1-9 with 42:18-25).<sup>22</sup>

Other reasons for concluding the Servant of the Servant Songs to be an individual emerge from the fourth song. The words, "He was cut off . . . for the transgression of my people" (53:8cd),<sup>23</sup> distinguish the Servant from

<sup>18</sup>Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 37.

<sup>19</sup>Isaiah has earlier spoken of Immanuel's virgin birth (7:14).

<sup>20</sup>Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 211.

<sup>21</sup>Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 37.

<sup>22</sup>Hugenberger ("Servant of the Lord" 108) contrasts the sinlessness of the Servant (50:5; 53:9) with the sinfulness of Israel (40:2; 42:18-25; 43:22-28; 47:7; 48:18 f.; 50:1; 54:7; 57:17; 59:2 ff.; cf. also 43:22; 46:3, 12; 48:1, 8; 53:6, 8; 55:7; 58:1 ff; 63:17; 64:5-7). He also lists four passages that distinguish the Servant from the repentant remnant of Israel: Isa 42:3, 6; 49:8; 53:8 (109).

<sup>23</sup>According to Zech 3:8-9, "My Servant the Branch . . . will remove the iniquity of that land in one

“my people,” who can hardly be other than the people of Israel.<sup>24</sup> Further, the subject of chapter 53 is an innocent sufferer (v. 9cd) who suffers for the guilt of others (v. 4), He is a *voluntary* sufferer (v. 12), an *unresisting* sufferer (v. 7), and His sufferings ended in death (vv. 8c, 9b, 12c).<sup>25</sup> None of these is applicable to a body of people.

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day.”

<sup>24</sup>MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah* 141.

<sup>25</sup>Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 38.

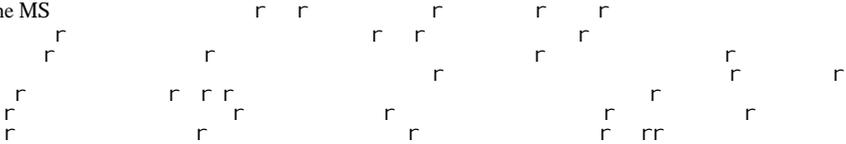
In spite of the differences, however, a unity binds the individual Servant to the corporate servant. That is what emerges in Isa 49:3. Through the Servant's redemptive work on behalf of the nation (cf. Isa 53:6), the nation will eventually be one with Him and thereby glorify the LORD. When the LORD says to the Servant, "You are My Servant, Israel" (Isa 49:3), He views the unification that will eventually occur during the Messiah-Servant's reign upon the earth. The Servant will become a light to all the nations, extending His salvation to all (Isa 49:6cd) and will use the nation to bring the nations to God (cf. Isa 19:24). At that point the mission of the Messiah and that of Israel will coincide.<sup>26</sup>

*The Third Servant Song (Isa 50:4-11)*

The Servant's soliloquy about being perfected through sufferings comprises the third Servant Song (Isa 50:4-11). His task resembles the commission to Jeremiah the prophet, that of listening as a disciple and that of teaching as a disciple (Isa 50:4a, 4d with Jer 15:16; 18:20).<sup>27</sup> Of interest is the absence of the term *ʿebed* ("Servant") from this song. *limmud* ("disciple") replaces it. Everywhere else in the OT *limmud* designates a disciple of some human teacher (e.g., Isa 8:16), but here the Servant is a disciple of God in a direct sense.<sup>28</sup> His mission as a disciple also entails His obedience to God (50:5). "Opening the ear" is a figure of speech to denote obedience as in Psalm 40:6-8 (cf. Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8; 10:5-7).

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<sup>26</sup>The assigning of the name "Israel" to the servant in 49:3 has provoked much discussion. Westermann gives four reasons for suggesting it is a later addition to the text: (1) "Israel" is absent from one MS



<sup>27</sup>Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 227.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 229.

The Servant's unwavering obedience to God's will is an aspect of His moral perfection.

An additional task this song assigns to the Servant one that His obedient spirit necessitates is that of being persecuted, submitting Himself to cruel treatment by His enemies (50:6). Though some might construe v. 6 as implying the attacks, blows, and insults against the Servant as justifiable, with God on the side of His opponents,<sup>29</sup> the ultimate explanation lies in the plan of God for His Servant to experience this type of treatment (cf. Isa 53:10; Acts 2:23).

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 230.

The close of the third Servant Song offers encouragement to those who fear the LORD and obey the voice of His Servant (50:10) and proclaims judgment against perpetrators of injustice (50:11). Of particular help in identifying the Servant in v. 10 is the parallelism of the verse's first two lines. Obeying the voice of God's servant is inseparable from fearing the LORD because the LORD has made His Servant's mouth as a sharp sword (cf. Isa 49:2). This factor renders it difficult to comprehend how the Servant could be the nation Israel or the best part thereof. The Servant stands in an absolutely unique relationship to God,<sup>30</sup> at least raising the possibility, if not requiring that the Servant be deity.

*The Fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13 53:12)*

The fourth Servant Song speaks of the Servant in the third person and divides into three parts (52:13-15; 53:1-9, 10-12), the first and third of which speak of His humiliation and exaltation and the second of His humiliation only. The first section summarizes the whole song by speaking briefly of the Messiah's sufferings and glory. The second is the lament and confession of penitent Israel in the future, and the third tells of the fruit of His sufferings and His subsequent exaltation.<sup>31</sup> The fourth song corresponds to the first song (42:1 ff.) by giving the culmination of the Servant's work as that earlier song shows His work's origin i.e., His appointment to the Servant's office.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 3:303-4.

<sup>31</sup>Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 51-52.

<sup>32</sup>Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 258.

Implied tasks of the Servant in 52:13-15 include prudent dealings<sup>33</sup> as an exalted world ruler (v. 13), enduring inhuman cruelty to the point of disfigurement beyond semblance to a human being (v. 14), and an unprecedented rise to leadership that will amaze all the world (v. 15).<sup>34</sup> In the process of rising to the forefront He will “sprinkle many nations” (v. 15a), i.e., perform the priestly work of cleansing not only Israel, but many outside the nation.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>I.e., He will act wisely in fulfilling the task entrusted to Him (Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 56). This contrasts with servant Israel’s unwise dealings in failing to fulfil her mission.

<sup>34</sup>Edward J. Young unfortunately limits the exaltation of the Servant in 52:13, 15 to Christ’s first coming—His resurrection, His ascension, and His session at the Father’s right hand—and refers the shutting of the mouths of kings to their amazement regarding His saving work (*Isaiah Fifty-Three, A Devotional and Expository Study* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952] 12, 20-21). Yet the earlier context of Isaiah 52 speaks of Israel returning from exile (cf. George A. F. Knight, *Servant Theology, A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40–55*, International Theological Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984] 164-65). This factor locates the scene of the Servant’s exaltation on earth rather than in heaven, necessitating a reference to His second advent rather than His resurrection and ascension. Young’s explanation is typical of covenantalists who are willing to understand prophecies of Messiah’s first advent—i.e., His sufferings and substitutionary death—in a literal way, but back away from a literal interpretation of those related to His earthly rule during a future kingdom.

<sup>35</sup>Young, *Book of Isaiah* 3:338-39.

In the second part of the fourth song (53:1-9), the speakers are those who confess that their guilt has caused the Servant's suffering.<sup>36</sup> The first person plural pronouns represent the prophet speaking on behalf of Israel, and contrasted with the third person singular pronoun, distinguish between the Servant and Israel.<sup>37</sup> Their confession reflects the Servant's suffering as a substitute for themselves and the consequent change in themselves this realization has brought. So the clear mission of the Servant is substitutionary suffering for the sins of others (53:4-6, 8d). His entire life span has the mark of lowliness and suffering, lacking in beauty and outward appeal (53:2-3).<sup>38</sup> The confessors acknowledge their agreement with general public opinion about the Servant's being despised and smitten by God, but emphasize that the suffering of such a one empowers Him to be a substitute and to atone for their iniquities (53:4-6).

Following the confession of vv. 4-6, the report resumes from v. 3 and confirms earlier evidence from the second song that the Servant is an individual, not a corporate entity. Only an individual can be born (v. 3), suffer (v. 7a), die (v. 8c), and be buried (v. 9ab).<sup>39</sup> In particular, His burial with malefactors points to an individual rather than a group.<sup>40</sup> The wording of vv. 7-8a points to suffering at the hands of others in contrast to vv. 4-6

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<sup>36</sup>Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 257, 263-64. The tenses in the second part of the fourth song are "perfects, the future being regarded prophetically as already past" (Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 67).

<sup>37</sup>Hugenberger, "Servant of the Lord" 110.

<sup>38</sup>The inconspicuous beginning of the Servant, the "tender plant," alludes to the decayed stump of Jesse of Isa 11:1. After the "proud cedar" of David's monarchy fell in that earlier Messianic prophecy, a strong vigorous shoot proceeded from the root. In Isaiah 53, however, it is a frail "tender twig" that struggles from the ground. The passage here speaks of His sufferings and rejection while Isaiah 11 tells of His future reign and exaltation (Baron, *Servant of Jehovah* 70-71).

<sup>39</sup>Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 264. Some advocates of a corporate identification of the Servant point out that the prophet speaks of the nation as being born in Isa 44:2, 24, thereby claiming to nullify part of this argument for an individual identity (cf. Hugenberger, "Servant of the Lord" 107-8).

<sup>40</sup>Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66* 266.



*Summary of the Servant Songs*

The following summarizes various facets of the Messiah-Servant's mission as reflected in the Servant Songs' direct and indirect statements about the role He is to fulfil. That mission falls into two rather distinct phases.

*Phase 1.* Lowliness and suffering will mark His entire life, depriving Him of attractiveness and outward appeal (53:2-3). Yet He will bring comfort and encouragement to the weak and oppressed (42:3ab). He will listen as a disciple and teach as a disciple. He will obey God with an unwavering obedience that marks His moral perfection (50:5). Because of His obedience to God, He must endure persecution and cruel treatment at the hands of His enemies (50:6). Humiliating treatment will for the moment appear to doom His mission to failure (49:4ab, 7bc). His persecution will be so violent that it disfigures His outward appearance to the point of making Him unrecognizable as a human being (52:14).

He will die from such ill treatment, not because of any fault of His own (53:9cd), but because of the sins of His people (53:8d). He will die as their substitute to atone for their iniquities (53:4-6, 8d). General opinion of people will be that God despised and struck Him with these harsh measures (53:4cd), but this is not so. It happened because God planned for Him to die thus (53:10abc). Through His death He will accomplish the priestly work of cleansing Israel as well as many other nations (52:15a). But it is also God's plan for Him to rise from the dead, thereby prolonging His days with a life after death that is satisfying (53:10e-11b).

*Phase 2.* The Servant's appointment as a covenant to the people of Israel (42:6c; 49:8c) elaborates on His prolonged life. He will restore Israel's land (49:8d) and release her captives (49:9ab). He will replace her spiritual blindness with clear vision when He gives her captives their freedom (42:7).

His dealings with Israel will be a means toward a further goal, that of bringing light to the nations (42:6d; 49:6c) and sending the LORD's salvation to earth's extremities (49:6d). He will establish justice in truth throughout the earth (42:1c, 3c, 4b), impressing all mankind with the truth that the LORD alone is God. He will reign as supreme ruler over the world because of the LORD's blessing on Him (49:4cd, 7efg). Prudent dealings will mark His reign (52:13), following a rise to leadership that will amaze all people (52:15). He will share a portion with the great and booty with the strong (53:11c-12).

Through all of this, His mission is to glorify the one true God (49:3).

*Identification of the Servant*

The Servant of the Servant Songs possesses characteristics that no individual in OT history can fulfil. Also, it is impossible to identify the Servant of the songs with corporate Israel for reasons already stated.<sup>44</sup> His unique relationship to God poses the possibility of His equality with God (Isa

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<sup>44</sup>Cf. Hugenberger, "Servant of the Lord" 106-19.

50:10), distinguishing Him from every other person who has ever lived. The only possible identification is the promised Messiah of Israel who was in Isaiah's time still to come. The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth perfectly fit Isaiah's portrayal of *Phase 1* of that Servant's mission.

New Testament writers frequently capitalize on the accuracy of that identification. The first gospel notes the fulfillment of Isaiah 42:1a in Christ at His baptism (Matt 3:16-17) and transfiguration (Matt 17:5). All four gospels observe the fulfillment of Isaiah 50:6 in the ill-treatment of Christ during His trial (Matt 26:67; 27:26, 30; Mark 14:65; 15:19; Luke 22:63; John 18:22). Luke speaks of the resoluteness of Christ to complete His mission (Luke 9:51), as does Isaiah 50:7. John 12:38 ties Israel's failure to recognize her Messiah with Isaiah 53:1. Philip identifies Jesus as the one about whom Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 53:7-8 (Acts 8:32-33). All four gospel writers recorded the silence of Jesus throughout His trial (Matt 26:63; 27:12-14; Mark 14:61; 15:5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9; cf. 1 Pet 2:23) just as Isaiah predicted regarding the Servant (Isa 53:7). Several NT writers focus on Jesus' fulfillment of Isaiah 53:7 when they call Him the Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rev 5:6). Nor does the complete innocence of the Servant (Isa 53:9) escape the notice of Peter (1 Pet 2:22). Isaiah's prediction of the Servant's crucifixion with wicked men (Isa 53:12) also matches with Jesus' death according to Luke's description (Luke 22:37).

Such literal fulfillments of prophecies about *Phase 1* of the Servant's mission leads inevitably to the expectation that prophecies about *Phase 2* of His mission will receive that type of fulfillment also. The Servant at His second advent will serve in the precise manner that Isaiah predicted He would.

### *Further Explanation of Phase 2 of the Servant's Mission*

Daniel 7 is a passage that, among others, furnishes specifics regarding *Phase 2* of the Messiah-Servant's mission. Daniel had a vision of a sea stirred up by the four winds of heaven and four large beasts emerging from it, the first resembling a lion with an eagle's wings, the second like a bear with three ribs in its mouth, the third like a leopard with four bird-wings from its back and four heads, and the fourth different from the other three and having ten horns (Dan 7:2-8). As the vision continued, the next scene before him featured a blindingly brilliant picture of the Ancient of Days (i.e., God the Father<sup>45</sup>) upon His throne with His surrounding retinue (Dan 7:9-10).

Daniel next witnessed the slaying of the fourth beast and the divesting of dominion from the rest of the beasts (Dan 7:11-12). At that point the Son of Man<sup>46</sup> came with the clouds of heaven approached the Ancient of Days

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<sup>45</sup>John F. Walvoord, *Daniel, The Key to Prophetic Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1971) 164.

<sup>46</sup>I.e., God the Son. The suggestion of J. A. Montgomery (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel*, ICC [New York: Scribner's, 1927] 319) that the son of man is a personification of the Jewish nation (cf. Dan. 7:7: 22, 27) is untenable, because Dan 7:21-22 distinguishes between the saints and the Son of Man. On earth they suffer defeat at the hands of the horn before receiving the kingdom

and received dominion over all peoples, a kingdom that would never end (Dan 7:13-14). All this troubled Daniel, so he asked for an interpretation of what the vision meant. He learned that the large beasts represented four kings (or kingdoms i.e., Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome<sup>47</sup>) that were to arise from the earth, but that the saints<sup>48</sup> would eventually possess the kingdom forever (Dan 7:15-18). Daniel then asked for further clarification regarding the fourth beast and regarding the ten horns and the horn that came up among them, uprooting three of the horns. He saw that last horn warring against the saints until the arrival of the Ancient of Days to deliver the saints

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(7:21-22), but in heaven the Son receives power to rule the whole earth without any prior warfare (Dan 7:13-14; Archer, "Daniel," in vol 7. of *EBC*, Frank E. Gaebelien, gen. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985] 90). Note also that the followers of the Son of Man are "the saints, the people of the Most High," indicating the equivalence of the Son of Man with the Most High. The plural "saints" compared with the singular "Him" in the final clause of 7:27 further eliminates the possibility of identifying the nation of saints with the Song of Man (ibid., 94-95). Jesus Himself appears to be the one who connected the Son of Man with the Servant of Isaiah's Servant Songs. He did so in such passages as Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus Through the Old Testament* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1992] 154).

<sup>47</sup>Cf. E. J. Young, *The Prophecy of Daniel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949) 143-47, 275-94.

<sup>48</sup>"The saints" can be none other than God-fearing Jews, as Robert D. Culver describes: "The 'saints' I hold to be no different from 'the people of the saints' [Dan. 7:27] in the passage before us. . . . They are the Israelites of the end time who will at last inherit the kingdom of David with Christ Himself reigning as their king" (*Daniel and the Latter Days* [Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1954] 128, cf. 132-34; cf. A. C. Gaebelien, *The Prophet Daniel*, 17th ed. [New York: Our Hope, 1911] 80). Surprisingly, Walvoord sees the saints to be "the saved of all ages as well as the holy angels which may be described as 'the holy ones'" (*Daniel* 172), but this interprets the term anachronistically insofar as its referring to saints of all ages, and in its inclusion of angels, it cannot explain the expression "the people of the saints" in 7:27.

and give them the kingdom (Dan 7:19-22). The continuing explanation to him divulged that the fourth beast would be a fourth kingdom that would subdue the whole earth and that the ten horns would be ten kings within that kingdom. The additional horn would be a king who conquers three others and will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints, being permitted to change things his way for three and a half years (Dan 7:23-25).

But he will have his dominion removed, and control over the world will pass to the people of the saints of the Most High. The kingdom of the Most High will continue forever, with all His subjects serving and obeying Him (Dan 7:26-27).

A convenient way to survey Daniel 7 is through the eyes of John's Apocalypse, the last book of the Bible that alludes to Daniel 7 over thirty times.<sup>49</sup> In fact, the purpose of the entire Apocalypse is to develop a phrase derived from Daniel 2: "things that must happen soon" (Rev 1:1; cf. Dan 2:28[LXX]; cf. also 2:29, 45).<sup>50</sup> Since Daniel 2, like Daniel 7, looks forward to the crushing and displacement of the kingdom of Rome by the kingdom of God, the two chapters speak of the rise and fall of the same four empires and the collapse of the last with the arrival of the Messianic Son of Man.<sup>51</sup>

Revelation as a further detailing of Daniel 7's prophecy, then, provides helpful insights.

Like both Daniel 2 and Daniel 7, the Apocalypse describes the outworking of God's program instituting the everlasting kingdom that will replace other earthly, temporary kingdoms. "The things that must happen" (Rev 1:1) comprise steps in the development of that program. That is part of the mission of the Messiah. Revelation uses the title "Son of Man" from Daniel 7:13 to designate the Messiah (Rev 1:13; 14:14) and describes Him in terms similar to those speaking of the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:9 (Rev 1:14). The numbering of the throngs of angels around the heavenly throne in Revelation 5:11 has its origin in Daniel 7:10. The four winds of the earth

<sup>49</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "Daniel as a Contribution to Kingdom Theology," in *Essays in Honor of J. Dwight Pentecost*, Stanley D. Toussaint and Charles H. Dyer, eds. (Chicago: Moody, 1986) 222-23; cf. G. K. Beale, "The Influence of Daniel upon the Structure and Theology of John's Apocalypse," *JETS* 27, no. 4 (December 1984): 419 n. 31; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22, An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 555 n. 40.

<sup>50</sup>Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7, An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 53.

<sup>51</sup>Merrill, "Daniel as a Contribution" 222-23; Walvoord, *Daniel* 146, 153. Revelation alludes to Daniel 2 over ten times (Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* 553 n. 32). Gleason L. Archer, Jr., writes, "Chapter 7 parallels chapter 2; both set forth the four empires, followed by the complete overthrow of all ungodly resistance, as the final (fifth) kingdom is established on earth to enforce the standards of God's righteousness. The winged lion corresponds to the golden head of the dream image (ch. 2); the ravenous bear to its arms and chest; the swift leopard to its belly and thighs; the fearsome ten-horned beast to its legs and feet. Lastly, the stone cut out without hands that in chapter 2 demolishes the dream image has its counterpart in the glorified Son of Man, who is installed as Lord over all the earth. But chapter 7 tells us something chapter 2 does not—viz., that the Messiah himself will head the final kingdom of righteousness" ("Daniel" 85).

held by angels in Revelation 7:1 derive from the four winds of heaven in Daniel 7:2. The warfare of the beast against the saints and victory over them are subjects in Daniel 7:21 and Revelation 11:7 (cf. also Rev 13:7). Rulership of the Son of Man over a worldwide kingdom in Daniel 7:14, 27 finds further development in Revelation 11:15. Revelation 12:3 refers to ten horns of the beast as do Daniel 7:7, 20, 24 (cf. also Rev 13:1; 17:12). The beast's persecution of the woman in Revelation 12:13 is an elaboration of his wearing down of the saints in Daniel 7:25. The picture of the beast emerging from the sea in Revelation 13:1 traces back to the emergence of beasts from the seas in Daniel 7:3 (cf. also Rev 11:7). The beast arising from the sea of Revelation 13:1 recalls the fourth beast that was different from the other three in Daniel 7:7. Revelation 13:2 likens that beast to a leopard, a bear, and a lion, comparisons that allude to the first three beasts of Daniel 7:4-6. The "mouth speaking great things and blasphemies" of Revelation 13:5 recalls the "mouth uttering great boasts" of Daniel 7:8, the "boastful words" of Daniel 7:11, and the "mouth uttering great boasts" of Daniel 7:20. The blasphemies of the beast in Revelation 13:6 allude to the little horn's speaking out against the Most High in Daniel 7:25. Revelation 19:20 tells of the beast's slaying and his casting into the lake of fire burning with brimstone, adding details to Daniel 7:11. Revelation 20:4 tells of the saints' possessing of the kingdom in following up Daniel 7:9, 22, 27. Daniel 7:10 briefly mentions the seating of the court for judgment, but Revelation 20:12 reveals more about the opening of the books for judgment. Revelation 22:5 tells of the eternal reign of the saints, an allusion to Daniel 7:18, 27.

The alignment of the Apocalypse with Daniel 7 at so many points underscores the fact that the last book of the Bible is a further detailing of *Phase 2* of the mission of the Messiah. First, He will inflict upon a rebellious world unparalleled wrath for seven years, at the beginning of which He delivers the body of Christ from the scene of that wrath. He then will initiate Israel's promised kingdom on earth for a thousand years and follow it with an everlasting kingdom in the new heavens and the new earth.

#### THE MISSION OF ISRAEL

As noted above, the OT refers to corporate Israel also as "My servant." In fact, "Israel" or "Jacob" is the only name given for "My servant" (Isa 41:8; 44:1-2; 45:4), since the text never assigns a name to the Servant individual except in the special occurrence of Isaiah 49:3. Many statements about the Messiah-Servant also apply to Israel as God's servant.

For example, God has chosen both and upheld both with His right hand (Isa 41:10; 42:1, 6; 43:10; 44:1). He has called both to be His witnesses to the nations (42:6; 43:10, 21; 49:3, 6; 60:3).<sup>52</sup> So the Servant and the servant relate closely to each other.

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<sup>52</sup>Wright, *Knowing Jesus* 158-59.

In the context of Isaiah 43:10, corporate Israel receives the charge to witness to the accuracy of God's prophecies. Since the gods of the surrounding nations could not match His predictive feats (43:9, 12), Israel is to bear testimony to this fact (43:12). This she will do in her promised future kingdom under the Messiah's leadership.

The servant Israel is to function as the LORD's messengers proclaiming the bright days ahead for the nation (44:25-26). A further part of Israel's mission is to manifest God's holiness in the sight of the nations (Ezek 28:25).

The international scope of the servant's mission to all peoples is quite clear. That goal is evident from the very beginning of the nation, in God's promise (and commission) to Abraham that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). God's choice of Israel was His way of dealing with mankind as a whole, meaning that as Israel fares, so fares the rest of mankind (cf. Rom 3:19). In a manner of speaking, Israel serves as God's "test-tube" for sampling the whole human race.

In contrast to the Messiah-Servant, however, God's servant Israel has defaulted in her mission. Isaiah 42:18-22, 24, for example, elaborates on the nation's disobedience and failure. This reflects a definite discontinuity and distinction from the Servant whose character and mission are described in vv. 1-9 of the same chapter.<sup>53</sup> Will the servant's ministry go unfulfilled, then?

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 159-61.

No, but Israel must undergo a spiritual restoration before she can resume her mission. How will that spiritual restoration come? It must come through the Messiah-Servant, a part of whose mission is to “bring back Jacob and gather Israel to Himself” (Isa 49:5).<sup>54</sup> The mission of the Servant to the rest of the world does not preclude His restoration of Israel; rather, His restoration of Israel furnishes the channel for bringing salvation to the nations (Isa 49:6). Though the Servant is distinct from Israel in His task of restoring her, He also identifies with Israel in enabling her to fulfil her original mission.<sup>55</sup> “The universal purpose of the election of Israel is to be achieved through the mission of the Servant.”<sup>56</sup> Ultimately, in Israel He will show forth His glory (Isa 49:3; 44:23).

When will the restoration of Israel come? It certainly did not come at the resurrection of Christ as Wright contends,<sup>57</sup> because subsequent to that event, His disciples asked about the yet unfulfilled restoration of Israel’s kingdom (Acts 1:6). Jesus did not deflect the disciples’ question,<sup>58</sup> nor did He correct it. The restoration of Israel was still future at that point. Under the guidance of the Spirit, Peter later invited his Jewish listeners to repent in order to bring about the (future) restoration of Israel (Acts 3:19-21). Later, in Romans 11:26-27 Paul prophesied about the future restoration of Israel.

Clearly, Israel is not fulfilling her mission today because she is still in a state of disobedience. She rejected her Messiah at His first advent and cannot function as His witness until a national repentance applies the benefits of His substitutionary atonement to the nation’s sins.

That repentance will come in conjunction with *Phase 2* of the Servant-Messiah’s mission. The mission of the servant Israel is in abeyance during this period while God is visiting all nations to call out a people for His name (Matt 28:19-20; Acts 15:14). The mission of the church during this interim period is separate from God’s mission for servant Israel.<sup>59</sup> God’s

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 163.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 164, 167.

<sup>58</sup>Contra *ibid.*, 167.

<sup>59</sup>The next section of this article—“The Mission of Israel in the Present Age”—discusses the role of

purposes for the church were undisclosed during OT times (cf. Eph 3:4-7).

So Israel will fulfil her mission in the promised future kingdom. God has not rejected His servant (Isa 41:9). He will yet restore the nation to the role of being His witnesses to the nations (Isa 43:10).

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the faithful remnant of Israel within the body of Christ. That “remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5) plays an important part in the church’s discharge of her mission during the present.

But He will do so in several steps after the church goes to be with the Lord Jesus in heaven. The seventieth week of Daniel 9 will immediately precede that kingdom. During the last three and a half years of that week, 144,000 Israelites will be God's major witnesses to the world.<sup>60</sup> Revelation 7:1-8 introduces these servants of God who are sealed on their foreheads to protect them from God's wrathful visitation against earth's rebels. They will bear the brunt of the dragon's anger while the bulk of believing Israelites find protection from that anger (Rev 12:17).<sup>61</sup> In their faithful witness for Christ they will suffer martyrdom but subsequently will rise from the dead to join Christ on Mount Zion in His kingdom on earth (Rev 14:1-5). At some point near the end of that seventieth week, a great revival will come in Jerusalem (Rev 11:13), perhaps provoking the massive attack on Israel resulting in the battle of Armageddon (cf. Rev 16:16).<sup>62</sup>

Then the King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16) will usher in the millennial kingdom. In that kingdom Jerusalem, "the beloved city" (Rev 20:9), will be the focus of all activity. Christ will rule sitting on David's throne as indicated throughout the Apocalypse (Rev 1:5; 3:7; 5:5; 22:16). Servant Israel will be in the forefront, ruling with Him and shining as a light to all nations.

He will help His people (Isa 44:2), redeem them and wipe away their transgressions (Isa 44:22; 48:20). He will show His glory in redeemed Israel (Isa 44:23). Jerusalem and Judah will again prosper (Isa 44:26). Then the Messiah's salvation will reach to the ends of the earth through the channel of Israel (Isa 49:6). Israel will fulfil God's purpose for her.

#### THE MISSION OF ISRAEL IN THE PRESENT AGE

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<sup>60</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* 472-78; *idem*, *Revelation 8-22* 141-43, 191-92; cf. J. A. Seiss, *The Apocalypse*, 3 vols. (New York: Charles C. Cook, 1909) 2:382, 3:27-28; J. B. Smith, *A Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Scottsdale, Penn.: Herald, 1961) 191-92.

<sup>61</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 8-22* 141-42.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, 98-99, 216-63.

Wright builds a case to prove that Jesus' disciples began implementing the prophesied mission of Israel to the Gentiles immediately after Pentecost.<sup>63</sup> He cites Luke 24:46-48 and Acts 1:8 as fulfillments of Isaiah 43:10, 12 regarding Israel's responsibility as God's witness. He reasons that Peter and others were mistaken in thinking that God could not turn to the Gentiles until the restoration of Israel.<sup>64</sup> He insists that James' words in Acts 15:13-18 prove, however, that the restoration of Israel had already transpired, that the Davidic kingdom was present, and consequently, the light was going to the Gentiles in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy.<sup>65</sup> He sees Paul as concurring with this perspective as evidenced by his writing in Romans 9 11 and his preaching in Acts 13:46-47.<sup>66</sup>

Besides missing the point already cited i.e., that in no sense was the resurrection of Christ a restoration of Israel Wright misses other important aspects of references to the OT in the NT. For instance, he overlooks the different direction the plan of God took in light of Israel's rejection of her Messiah at His first coming. That difference was well known in advance to God, but He did not see fit to reveal it to man in the pages of the OT. The new direction in His dealings with mankind resulted in additional meanings<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Wright, *Knowing Jesus* 165-74.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 167-68.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 169-70.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 170-72.

<sup>67</sup>"Additional meanings" refers to meanings beyond those discerned through grammatical-historical interpretations of the OT passages. Many use the expression *sensus plenior* (i.e., "fuller sense") to refer to those additional meanings.

being assigned to OT passages by authoritative NT writers.<sup>68</sup> For example, Paul's use of Isaiah 42:6 (cf. Isa 49:6) in his speech of Acts 13:47 applies to his own ministry as he preached in Pisidian Antioch God's words to Isaiah's Messiah-Servant. In the Isaianic context, that promised salvation to the ends of the earth was to come in conjunction with repentant Israel's liberation from foreign oppressors. No strict application of grammatical-historical hermeneutics of the Isaiah passage could have interpreted it to refer to a Jewish Christian preacher, himself a fugitive wanted by Israel's authorities, offering international peace and prosperity to a mixed audience of Jews and Gentiles. Israel had not yet repented and still remained under foreign domination. Paul's meaning, inspired by the Holy Spirit, went beyond anything intended for Isaiah's original readers.

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<sup>68</sup>Kaiser's rejection of a reader-response hermeneutic that assigns new meanings by the process of *sensus plenior* is quite valid (Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995] 27-28). What is proposed here, however, is not a reader-response hermeneutic of just any reader. It is an additional meaning provided through inspired NT Scripture. Kaiser's objection to this explanation lies in an alleged loss of apologetic advantages of appeals to OT texts by the apostles and gospel writers (ibid., 23-24). An answer to that objection, however, lies in the fact that the apostles and writers also appealed to direct prophecies of the coming Messiah from the OT, ones that did not depend on meanings added by NT writers. Even Kaiser has prophetic categories that lie outside the "direct prophecy" category (ibid., 33-35), though in his system they are far less numerous. The literal fulfillments of grammatical-historical understandings of OT prophecies were ample to answer the skeptics with whom the earliest Christians had to deal.

That was not a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy; it was an additional meaning furnished through the apostle to the Gentiles during the period of Israel's rejection. Isaiah's original promise will yet see realization after the fullness of the Gentiles has joined the body of Christ (Rom 11:25). Wright is correct in allowing that the restoration of Israel is still future, but he is wrong in contending that it lies in the past also.<sup>69</sup> Fulfillment in the future is the only meaning that consistent grammatical-historical interpretation will yield. NT writers did not always assign additional meanings to OT texts.

They sometimes depicted literal or direct fulfillment of OT prophecies, but any that they used relating to the new program and new people of God, the church, of necessity took on a different nature, simply because OT prophecy did not foresee the NT church.

The new meaning of OT prophecies applied to the church introduced by NT writers did not cancel the original meaning and their promises to Israel. God will yet restore the nation of Abraham's physical descendants as He promised He would.

Failure to realize how the NT uses the OT has led some recent scholars to suggest that interpretation of the OT is not a one-way street, that NT writers' preunderstanding determined the meanings they found in the OT.<sup>70</sup>

This has led them to label the literal understandings about political dimensions of predictions of a restored monarchy as "unfortunate misappropriations of prophecy in our day, with unhappy consequences for Christian consciousness, and conscience, in relation to Palestine."<sup>71</sup> The suggestion is that "a suitable appropriation of even these clearly messianic prophecies still has to pass through a rather subtle theological process."<sup>72</sup> That apparently refers to a removal or alteration of the meaning understood by the original readers of the prophecies.

It is quite true that a remnant in Israel according the election of grace (Rom 11:5) within the body of Christ is currently providing great benefit to the Gentile world.<sup>73</sup> For example, the evident fact that all the books of the NT except two have Jewish authors is a reminder of the immeasurable profit of that remnant to the body of Christ and the world as a whole. God's wisdom in using people of Abraham's lineage as channels of His special revelation to the world has wrought untold spiritual value to countless numbers of the world's inhabitants. Many outstanding Christian

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<sup>69</sup>Cf. Wright, *Knowing Jesus* 171.

<sup>70</sup>E.g., J. Gordon McConville, "Messianic Interpretation of the Old Testament in Modern Context," in *The Lord's Anointed* 12.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid.

<sup>73</sup>The continuing existence and distinctiveness of the Jewish people is in itself a testimony to God's faithfulness to His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Even in her unbelief, corporate Israel stands as a witness to the world. But the witness of the remnant according to the election of grace goes far beyond that because of the remnant's special relationship to God as part of the body of Christ.

leaders of Jewish lineage furnish a further illustration of the benefit of that remnant to the church and thereby to the rest of the world. But the grafting in of the wild olive branches i.e., God's direct dealings with Gentiles has come during the period of corporate Israel's rejection of her Messiah (Rom 11:11). That will not be the manner of Israel's illumination of the Gentiles according to Isaiah. Isaiah's ingathering of Israel will provide that illumination and will come in conjunction with the nation's repentance (cf. Rom 11:12).

Israel in her rejection is currently distinct from the body of Christ, and the nation will remain distinct in the millennial kingdom and in the new heavens and the new earth. The Jewish people are and will always be God's chosen. Neither the church nor any other people will usurp their role of joining with Christ in His millennial rule.<sup>74</sup> Otherwise, Isaiah's OT promises about their future have undergone revision. God promised the land and the rulership to Israel and to Israel alone in the future kingdom.

John in the Apocalypse tells which mortals will inhabit the earth at

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<sup>74</sup>Blaising and Bock appear to merge others with Israel in the nation's future inheritance: "We can illustrate this progressive dispensational view of the church in the case of Jewish Christians. A Jew who becomes a Christian today does not lose his or her relationship to Israel's future promises. Jewish Christians will join the Old Testament remnant of faith in the inheritance of Israel. Gentile Christians will be joined by saved Gentiles of earlier dispensations. All together, Jews and Gentiles, will share the same blessings of the Spirit, as testified to by the relationship of Jew and Gentile in the church of this dispensation. The result will be that all peoples will be reconciled in peace, their ethnic and national differences being no cause for hostility. Earlier forms of dispensationalism, for all their emphasis on the future for Israel, excluded Jewish Christians from that future, postulating the church as a different people-group from Israel and Gentiles" (Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1993] 50). That viewpoint in essence eliminates Israel's uniqueness in God's future program. Yes, the church will join with Christ in His earthly rule too, but in a capacity different from chosen Israel.

the beginning of the millennium. He refers to them as “the nations” (Rev 20:3). Of the possible identification of these nations, the most probable is that they will be the redeemed who have survived the rule of the beast during the last half of Daniel’s seventieth week (Rev 11:13; 12:13-17).<sup>75</sup> They will be largely of Jewish extraction as identification of the woman of Revelation 12 requires, but will also include a significant number of Gentile believers who have befriended the Jewish remnant of those days (cf. Matt 25:31-46). In the millennium, the world’s population will multiply rapidly because of ideal conditions and a relatively low death rate,<sup>76</sup> bringing into existence a new set of nations in a relatively short period. Among these, the Jewish nation will be the leader as the reference to “the beloved city” Jerusalem in Revelation 20:9 reflects. During this time, the church will be present on earth with Christ, but will exist in a resurrected state. God will fulfil the land promises to the generation of mortal Israelites alive at that time, not to immortal people subsequent to their resurrection.

The distinction between Israel and the church will continue into the new creation also. The twelve tribes of Israel will function as city gates in the new creation (Rev 21:12) and the twelve apostles (i.e., the church) as foundation stones (Rev 21:14). Israel’s role differs from that of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. Though finite man may not comprehend precisely the nature of those roles in the new creation, the text is clear that a distinction between the two peoples of God will remain.

#### THE ULTIMATE MISSION

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<sup>75</sup>Thomas, *Revelation 8–22* 410-11; cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966) 302; Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Revelation*, Everyman’s Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 116.

<sup>76</sup>Walter Scott, *Exposition of the Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Swengel, Penn.: Bible Truth Depot, n.d.) 407.

Old Testament Messianic prophecies begin as early as Genesis 3:15, a verse that depicts the Messiah's mission of bruising the serpent's head.<sup>77</sup>

It was some time before revelation of the mission of Israel, however. That awaited the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). From that point on, the mission of Israel paralleled that of the Messiah in many ways. Why did God single out Abraham and his descendants from the rest of mankind. It was His chosen method of dealing with humans as a whole to limit His special attention to one segment of them. He gave this segment a mission to the rest of the world so that the rest of the world could fulfil His ultimate mission for all people. In light of Israel's failings along the way, the Messiah has filled and will fill the gap in redeeming Israel so that Israel can eventually fulfil her responsibility to the rest of the world.

So the mission of Israel and the Messiah in the plan of God is a means to fulfilling the mission of all mankind in God's plan. What is that ultimate mission? Is it a redemptive mission? That is certainly a part of God's plan, but God's plan is far greater in scope than just the redemption of lost men. Is man's mission to rule over God's creation (cf. Gen 1:26)?

That too is definitely part of what God's plan entails, but it is not the ultimate goal. Both of these missions are anthropocentric, not theocentric.

The long sentence of Ephesians 1:3-14 expresses man's ultimate purpose three times: "to the praise of the glory of His grace" (1:6), "to the praise of His glory" (1:12), and "to the praise of His glory" (1:14). The first expression connects with God the Father, the second with God the Son, and the third with God the Spirit. Together they express the ultimate mission of the human race to glorify the Triune God. God receives glory through His grace manifested in the body of Christ. Similarly, God receives glory because of His gracious dealings with Israel. The ultimate mission of Israel (Isa 44:23) and the Messiah (Isa 49:3) is to bring glory to God, because God will not give His glory to anyone or anything else (Isa 42:8). As Israel and the Messiah fulfil their mission, so will the rest of humankind. The new Jerusalem will feature God's glory in the final realization of His plan for all of creation (Rev 21:23-26; 22:5).

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<sup>77</sup>T. Desmond Alexander, "Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis," in *The Lord's Anointed* 27-32; cf. Kaiser, *Messiah in the Old Testament* 37-42.