

Jerry Breen

An Ancient Hope: Matthew's Use of Isaiah to Explicate Christianity's Mission to the Nations

Abstract:

The early church explained their story within the context of the story of Israel contained in the Hebrew scripture. The life and death of Jesus indicated that God was doing something new and amazing, but it could not be understood apart from God's ancient promises of hope delivered through the prophets. Each of the writers of the New Testament quote and allude to the story of Israel in their works, but perhaps none more than Matthew. This paper explicates Matthew's use of Isaiah to demonstrate that Jesus fulfills the promised restoration of Israel so that Israel can be a light to the nations. This study can help the reader understand how Matthew uses Isaiah to achieve his narrative purposes by identifying which significant themes Matthew has applied to his presentation of Jesus.

Keywords: Matthew, Isaiah, mission, restoration, healing

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“This is the apex of the eschatological vision: a day when the people of God can be set free from their own sins and the sins of others, when they can come home to their God and be fully restored to his image, when a lifelong struggle to avoid grief and pain will be ended in their being overwhelmed by gladness and joy. This is the hope of the biblical faith.”- John Oswalt (1998:626)

Introduction

Jesus Christ came into a world that was searching for hope. The Jewish people of Jesus’s day questioned when the elaborate promises of future blessing contained in their holy scriptures would ultimately be accomplished. The book of Isaiah, and especially Isa 40-66, envisions future promises of restoration, health, and witness for the nation of Israel. Isaiah promises that there will come a day when God will raise Israel up and fill her with his glory so that all the nations of the world will be drawn to the sight and worship God. The Gospel of Matthew cites Isaiah to show that in Jesus the promises given by Isaiah and other prophets are realized. Israel will be restored through the coming of Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, and all nations will experience the glory of God through the restoration that Jesus brings.

This paper will examine Matthew’s use of Isaiah to explicate Christianity’s mission to the nations in order to demonstrate that in Matthew Jesus inaugurates the promised restoration of Israel, which enables Israel to be a light to the nations. This realization will illuminate the significance of Isaiah within the narrative scheme of Matthew, particularly pertaining to the restoration of Israel and the Gentile mission. The Gospel of Matthew intentionally interweaves many passages from the Hebrew scriptures into the text in order to advance its narrative agenda, and the focus on Isaiah in this paper is not to suggest that quotations and allusions from other texts are not equally valid. Rather, it should be recognized that Matthew uses a homogeneous mixture of quotations and allusions from a variety of sources to illustrate the continuity of the life and death of Jesus with the Hebrew Bible. Before looking at Matthew’s use of Isaiah, it will be helpful to examine significant themes in Isaiah in order to understand Isaiah in its own context before observing how Matthew has used these themes for his purposes.

Significant Themes in Isaiah

Contemporary scholarship generally envisions Isaiah as a work composed in three or more settings, which span hundreds of years, and was finally brought together by an accomplished editor. Whether this historical reconstruction of the text is accurate or not, and while dissimilarities are observed from one section to another, there is a remarkable coherence of significant themes throughout the book. The book itself claims to be written by one author and the view of a single author for the work has been the predominant view throughout history. If there were later authors and redactors, they were careful not to explicitly reveal their identities, perhaps because they wanted to preserve the flow of the narrative and build upon the themes that had already been established. For example, God's power over the rulers and nations of the world is consistently portrayed as an essential doctrine throughout the work. Similarly, Isaiah details the punishment of Israel through exile because of her sin and her impending restoration through the faithfulness and strength of God. Further, Isaiah illuminates the impact a restored Israel will have on the other nations as she fulfills her role as the servant of God. These themes are important to our understanding of Isaiah and its impact on the Gospel of Matthew.¹ Because of this, we will examine how Isaiah presents the restoration of Israel and Israel's role as a light to the Gentiles.

The Restoration of Israel

Israel's Problem: Sin

Isaiah begins his treatise with a diagnosis of the problem: Israel's sin has made her sick (1:4-6). The people of Israel did not keep the covenant they established with God and turned to idols time and again. According to Isaiah, the exile was the punishment for their unfaithful hearts. Isaiah 1 portrays God's anger with Israel, lists her rebellious acts, and then promises punishment for her sin and future restoration (Childs 2000:17).² In this way the first chapter of Isaiah provides a broad outline for the contents of the book. Throughout Isaiah, Israel is portrayed as a blind and deaf servant who has sinned against her master and has failed in her tasks.³ Because of her sin, God has brought judgment in the form of exile. Despite her sin, God will bring restoration to Israel and bring her back to the land he has promised her (Isa 1:26-27).

Isaiah presents God as the only one able to restore Israel because he alone is the ruler over all gods, rulers, and nations. According to ancient belief, Israel's exile at the hands of the Assyrians and Babylonians proved to Israel and the nations around them that Israel's God was not as powerful as other gods, a point evidenced by his lack of protection for his people. This belief is particularly evident in Isa 36:18–20, where the Assyrian general Rabshakeh argues that Israel's God cannot be trusted to deliver the people because no gods have been able to protect their people against the Assyrians. Isaiah presents a counter-worldview that insists that God is the ruler of all in the heavenly and earthly realms and that all that has occurred has done so at his behest. This theme becomes especially prevalent when Israel's God is compared with Marduk (often called Bel) and Nebû.⁴ Isaiah repeatedly condemns the worship of idols and even mocks the process by which idols are made.⁵

God's sovereignty is developed in detail in Isa 40-55, where God repeatedly asserts that there is no god or idol like him.⁶ He alone is the creator and the savior of Israel.⁷ As such, only God is worthy to be king of Israel (43:15; 44:6). God commissions Cyrus to his task of defeating Babylon and decreeing the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem (44:28-45:4), and commands that a highway be built from Assyria and Babylon to return the faithful remnant to the promised land (11:16; 40:3; 49:11–12; 62:10). Brevard S. Childs observes this developing theme when he states, "Although First Isaiah (6:3) had announced that God's rule as king stretched from eternity, even when not perceived by sinful humanity, Second Isaiah speaks of God's power actually controlling every form of human activity occurring within history" (2000:318). Despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God is determined to restore her to her former glory and make her a light, which shines the glory of God throughout the whole world.

God's Solution: Restoration

Isaiah 40 presents a shift in the tone of the prophecy from one of judgment to one of restoration.⁸ This shift is perceived immediately with declarations of comfort for God's people and acknowledgment that her punishment has been fulfilled through the exile and her sins have been pardoned (40:1-2). This theme of comfort is reiterated throughout Isa 40-66, since the prophet has been commissioned by God to deliver the good news to God's people that God will restore Israel.⁹ There are many facets to restoration, such as forgiving Israel's sin, healing Israel's sickness, redeeming

from captivity, and returning Israel to the Promised Land where they will live in peace and security. For the purposes of this paper, we will examine forgiveness of sins and healing of sickness.

In Isaiah, restoration begins with forgiveness of sin. God's promise of forgiveness is offered to Israel at the outset of the book—there will come a day when her sin will be white as snow and will become like wool (1:18). The promise of forgiveness for the sins of Israel is reiterated by the prophet and is necessary for reconciliation to occur between God and his people.¹⁰ This promise will not exempt Israel from punishment in the immediate future, however, as is evident from the many pronouncements of judgment. Rather, once Israel has endured the punishment for her sins God will forgive and restore her. Isaiah presents a vivid picture of forgiveness with his depiction of the servant of the Lord who “poured out himself to death” and “bore the sins of many” (53:12). Here it appears that sin will be “lifted” or “carried away” (נָשָׂא) through the suffering of the servant.¹¹

In Isaiah, restoration involves healing the sick. Isaiah's diagnosis of the problem with Israel is that her sin has made her sick, but God promises to heal her (30:26; 33:24). Where Israel has proven to be blind and deaf, God will restore her sight and enable her to hear once more.¹² The future healing of Israel is especially prevalent in Isa 35:5-6, where God promises to heal the blind, deaf, lame, and mute. The entire chapter of Isa 35 is important structurally in the book because it is the last prophetic oracle in the first half of Isaiah and, despite the many warnings of judgment contained in the thirty-four chapters that precede it, presents a glorious picture of future restoration for the nation of Israel. Isaiah 35 is closely connected to Isa 34, which reiterates the judgment pronounced on the nations. Like Israel, the nations will be judged for their wrongdoing, but there will come a day when all those who are redeemed and ransomed of the Lord will experience healing and restoration (35:8–10). Isaiah 35 is also significant structurally because of the close linguistic and conceptual connections that it holds with Isa 40. Isaiah 40-66 develops many themes that are presented in Isa 35, one of which is that God will heal Israel's sickness.¹³

Despite what the nations think about the God of Israel, he is the ruler of the world and the savior of Israel.¹⁴ His promise of salvation for Israel undergirds the restoration that he intends for his people. God is in control of the world and the “gods” of other nations are little more than worthless idols (Schaudig 2008:557-572).¹⁵ God puts these idols on trial and demonstrates their impotency and weakness (Isa 41). The people of

Israel may be dispersed and defeated now, but Isaiah promises that a day is coming when they will be restored to their former glory and rejoice with God in the land.

A Light to the Nations

Isaiah is preoccupied with the relationship between God and Israel in Isa 40-66. Israel is recognized as Jacob, Israel, Zion, Jerusalem, my chosen one, and my servant, all of which elucidate the election of the nation of Israel. There are clues sprinkled throughout the text, however, that God views himself as ruler of more than just the nation of Israel. The repeated mention of God as creator and king of the world is one hint that points to this expanded vision. The way the prophet reminds the people of their lineage in Abraham, to whom was promised a multitude of descendants and the legacy of blessing every family on earth, provides another clue (Gen 12:3; cf. Isa 41:8; 51:2-4; 63:16). Isaiah envisions more than just a restored Israel; he imagines Israel reflecting the glory of God so brilliantly that every nation in the world is drawn to her light.¹⁶

Closely interwoven with the themes of the restoration of Israel and the glory of God shining out to the nations is the presentation of God's servant. Scholars have been fascinated with the so called "servant songs" ever since Bernard Duhm excised these four passages from the larger context of Isa 40-55 in his 1892 commentary (Childs 2000:291). Duhm's work was both insightful and unfortunate; insightful for recognizing the uniqueness of these passages and postulating a possible connection between them, but unfortunate because of the way this realization has allowed many to ignore the greater context in which these passages were likely written. The identity of the servant still has no consensus among scholarship (Childs 1998:291).

Context should hold a place of priority among the evidence when considering the identity of the servant in Isa 40-55. In Isa 1-39, the prophet, Eliakim, the people, and David are all referred to as God's servant. In Isa 40-48, "my servant," along with "my chosen one," is reserved for "Jacob" and "Israel," terms that are often used in parallel to speak of the same group. The first mention of Jacob as servant is in Isa 41:8-9, which immediately precedes the first servant song (42:1-4) and appears to supply its referent. The referent, along with the consistency with which the author labels Jacob/Israel as God's servant throughout Isa 40-48, suggests that the identity of the servant in 42:1-4 is Jacob/Israel.¹⁷ The identity of the servant appears to change in Isa 49-55, where the primary addressee is Zion/Jerusalem and

the writer appears to depict himself as the servant.¹⁸ In addition, Israel has failed in her role as a servant in Isa 40-48 and is characterized as blind and deaf, despoiled and plundered, all of which is likely referencing her current spiritual condition (cf. 40:2; 42:18-22). With these contextual clues in hand, John Goldingay and David Payne are likely correct when they conclude that in Isa 49-55 the prophet is embodying the role of Israel as servant on an interim basis because Israel has failed to fulfill her tasks (2014:52-57).

The identity of the servant is important to our topic because the servant himself is tasked with being a light to the nations. The vision of nations streaming to the glory of God is first cast in Isa 2:2-4, which describes God giving his law and judging the nations. Light is again a key feature of the nation of Israel in Isa 9:1-6, where the elevated language and promise to establish the throne of David forever indicate there may have been a future messianic component to the passage (Childs 2000:81). Isaiah 40-66 further develops the theme that one day Israel will shine like a light that will draw nations to the glory of the Lord.¹⁹ The servant, who is endowed with God's Spirit, is tasked with bringing justice to the nations through the law of God (42:1, 3, 4). He will then embody a covenant with the people and a light to the nations (42:6). It should be noted, then, that the purpose of the servant is to reach out to the nations of the world on behalf of Israel's God. If God was not claiming influence over the entire world, he would have no need for his servant.²⁰

The servant's role is reiterated and expanded in Isa 49:1-13, where he is now commissioned with the regathering of Israel as well as being a covenant and light to the nations (Lessing 2011:132).²¹ In Isa 49:6, God commissions his servant to both restore Israel and be a light to the Gentiles through the power of God. Isaiah 49:7-8 then accentuates the power of God to restore Israel in the face of nations and rulers of the world and reiterates the servant's call to be a covenant for the people. The meaning of "covenant for the people" is debated, but the parallel structure at this point probably indicates that the servant will embody a covenant with the nations, which may or may not include Israel (Childs 2000:326; Witherington 2017:202). As Ben Witherington III points out, this would indicate a new covenant rather than a renewal of an old covenant (2017:202). God is not content to simply restore Jerusalem to former glory; he is determined to demonstrate that he is the creator and sustainer of the world and he is ultimately the one who controls the destiny of kings and nations (Isa 44:28-45:4).

Matthew's Use of Isaiah's Significant Themes

The New Testament writers explain the significance of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and the establishment of the Christian church within the story and scriptures of the Jewish people. Each writer consciously weaves quotations and allusions from the Hebrew Bible into their presentations to substantiate their claims and their movement. The author of Matthew arguably has done this more than any other writer and his favorite text to quote and allude to was Isaiah. In addition to the many times Isaiah is incorporated into Matthew's text, Matthew explicitly connects events in Jesus's life to Isaiah at least thirteen times (six of which mention Isaiah by name).²² The reference to ancient scriptures is so pervasive in Matthew that one Matthean scholar, R. T. France, argues that fulfillment is the central theme of the gospel (2007:10). Richard Hays asserts that the inclusion of fulfillment formulas was for apologetic purposes to ground Matthew's Christological claims in the Jewish authoritative text in response to those who contend that Jesus's life and ministry had nothing to do with the Jewish story (2016:107).

Scholars have debated the purpose of these quotations and allusions in the Gospel of Matthew. Morna J. Hooker, for example, contends that references to Isa 53 are used as proof texts by NT writers and argues that the larger context from which those verses were taken should be ignored in interpretation (1998:90-91). Her argumentation, however, does not account for first century Jewish rules of interpretation. Hillel the elder posits seven rules of Midrash, the last of which specifically states that the entire context is implied when a statement is quoted or implied (Evans 1992:544-545). Since this was the expectation of first-century Judaism, it seems likely that Matthew includes quotations and allusions to the Jewish scriptures because he is confident that most of his audience would be aware of the major themes of the works cited and have a general knowledge of the surrounding contexts. One major theme that Matthew derives from the Hebrew scriptures is God's desire to restore Israel.

The Restoration of Israel

Matthew's Presentation of Jesus's Mission to Israel

The Gospel of Matthew clearly portrays Jesus as a Jewish child raised in a Jewish home who is viewed by many as the savior of the Jewish people and who is eventually executed on the charge of being the "king

of the Jews.” Matthew begins his writing by identifying Jesus as the son of Abraham, son of David, and the long-expected Messiah whom the Jews hoped would free them from their present plight. These designations do not make sense within the story of any other nation. The genealogy, birth story, life in Galilee, visits to Jerusalem, and various trips throughout Israel clearly and distinctly describe a person who is intricately tied to the history, culture, and customs of ethnic Israel. Jesus calls twelve disciples, which mirrors the twelve tribes of Israel. He disputes interpretations of Torah and points of Halakah with the Jewish leaders and critiques their effectiveness as one intimately familiar with Jewish laws and customs. While Jesus engages in strident confrontation with the Jewish leaders, he is empowering to all who believe his message and compassionate towards the Jewish crowds who seek him out for healing or a blessing.²³ The story of Jesus in Matthew cannot be divorced from the larger story of the Jewish people.

Jesus’s declared mission to Israel and his commission to make disciples of all nations creates a narrative tension within Matthew. David Bosch, for example, argues that the mission to the Gentiles as epitomized in 28:18-20 is irreconcilable with Jesus’s stated mission to go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel in 10:5-6 and 15:24. He postulates that Matthew included this tension in his narrative for pastoral reasons (2011:61, 83). Other scholars, such as Anthony Saldarini, conclude that the non-Jewish world is presented at the edge of the Jewish world in Matthew (1994:76). Still others, such as David C. Sim, contend that in Matthew, Jesus did not intend to include Gentiles in his mission at all (1995:43-44). Despite these divergent views concerning Gentiles, most scholars recognize that Jesus was intent on ministering to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel.” The Jewish leaders were given the task of shepherding the people, and their failure led to people who were distressed and dispirited (9:36).²⁴ Jesus sent his disciples to the Jewish people rather than to Gentile and Samaritan towns (10:5-6). When confronted by a Gentile woman, Jesus initially rebuffs her request for healing because his mission is to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). In fact, Matthew barely mentions Jesus’s extensive missionary journey through Tyre, Sidon, and the Decapolis that is described in Mark and Luke. Rather, when Matthew gives a summary of healings that alludes to the eschatological healing found in Isa 35:5-6, he first clearly indicates that Jesus has moved from the Gentile region of Tyre and Sidon to the Jewish region around the Sea of Galilee (15:29-31).²⁵ As Donald Senior observes, “Matthew’s concern in these kinds of reconfiguration is consistent

with the overall portrayal of Jesus's mission as one confined to Israel during his earthly ministry" (1999:13).

Jesus's mission to Israel is presented in the Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants (Matt 21:33-44). In this graphic parable, Jesus intimates that the current Jewish leaders are part of a long line of leaders who refused to listen to the prophets of the God of Israel and killed them instead. After abusing and killing many of the owner's servants, the tenants proceed to also kill the owner's son. By referencing the son of the owner of the vineyard, Jesus is recognizing his exalted position as Son of God and predicting his death. As Hays notes, the image of the vineyard comes from Isa 5:7a, "but instead of condemning the vineyard, as in Isaiah, Jesus condemns the tenants (the Jewish leaders), and asserts that the vineyard will be given to different tenants" (2016:138). The history of interpretation of this parable contends that the vineyard will be taken from the Jews and given to Gentiles, but this interpretation is unlikely. Rather, the recipients should be understood as those who follow Jesus, whether Jews or Gentiles (Senior 1999:7).²⁶ The necessity of following Jesus is emphasized throughout the gospel. In addition to calling the disciples to follow him, Jesus exhorts others to come follow him as well (8:22; 16:24; 19:21). Jesus acknowledges that following him will be difficult (10:38; 16:24), but those who do will gain their life (16:28), sit on thrones (19:28), and inherit eternal life (19:29). Just like God in Isaiah, Jesus is concerned for Israel and seeks to restore her to right relationship with God.

Jesus's mission to restore Israel is realized in his ability to forgive sins. Just as God promised to forgive Israel's sins and so restore her to right relationship with him, so Jesus offers forgiveness so people can be made right with God. Matthew foregrounds Jesus's ministry with the promise of the angel to Joseph that Jesus will "save his people from their sins" (1:21), which, as Mark Allen Powell has correctly observed, is programmatic for the entire gospel (1992:196).²⁷ The Gospel of Matthew explains how precisely Jesus saves his people from their sins. It comes as no surprise to the reader, then, when Jesus declares to the paralytic that his sins are forgiven (9:2). In the narrative context of Matthew, however, Jesus's pronouncement does surprise the scribes, who immediately recognize the ramifications of Jesus's proclamation. By declaring that one's sins were forgiven, Jesus was placing himself in the role of God (cf. Isa 43:25).²⁸ Jesus establishes forgiveness as a necessary characteristic of kingdom people since they cannot be reconciled with God if they refuse reconciliation with another (Matt 6:14-15; 18:35).

Toward the end of the gospel, Jesus declares that he will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins, which indicates that his death is necessary to make forgiveness effective (26:28).

While forgiveness of sins is present in both Isaiah and Matthew, it should be noted that Matthew does not directly draw from the text of Isaiah to demonstrate restoration through forgiveness of sins. Rather, Matthew references Isaiah to show that the restoration of Israel is realized in the healing of the people. Jesus told his opponents that he spent time with tax collectors and sinners because it is the sick who need a physician, which indicates that Jesus viewed himself as the answer to the sinner's malady (Matt 9:12). Matthew relates such healings to the mission of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah. It is to that theme that we now turn.

Matthew's Presentation of the Suffering Servant

The presentation of Jesus as the Suffering Servant from the servant passages in Isa 40-55 has been an important image for Christianity through the centuries. The correlation between the suffering and death of Jesus and the suffering of the servant was noticed early in the history of the church. Luke, for example, depicts Jesus quoting from Isa 53:12 in the Garden of Gethsemane (22:37). The same reference was added to the Gospel of Mark at an early stage of transmission, although as a fulfillment of scripture rather than a quotation on the lips of Jesus (15:28).²⁹ In Acts, Luke describes the perplexity of the Ethiopian eunuch as he reads Isa 53:12, and Philip immediately preaches Jesus to him from the scriptures (8:32-35). The author of First Peter boldly applies numerous quotations and allusions of Isa 53 to Jesus that explicitly describe his suffering and death in terms reminiscent of the servant (2:18-22). Hebrews 9:28 may also offer an allusion to Isa 53:12, although one much subtler than Peter's references.

Matthew, however, does not make this specific connection. While he does quote and allude to select servant passages, he does not explicitly relate those passages to the suffering and death of Jesus.³⁰ This is particularly curious considering that Matthew repeatedly indicates that the words and deeds of Jesus fulfill scripture, and particularly Isaiah. In addition, while Luke draws the theme of redemption for the people of Israel from Isaiah, Matthew does not explicitly mention redemption (Cf. Luke 1:68; 2:38; 21:28; 24:21). Instead, Matthew uses Isaiah to illustrate restoration through forgiveness of sins and healing of the sick. In Isaiah, God promised that a day would come when the sin that had made Israel sick would be

forgiven and her sickness would be healed.³¹ Matthew intentionally weaves quotations and allusions that encapsulate significant themes in Isaiah to communicate that the plan and promises of God are being fulfilled in the person and ministry of Jesus.

This is seen, for example, in Matt 8:17. The larger context depicts Jesus performing a particular healing (Peter's mother-in-law), followed by a general statement that Jesus healed all who were ill, and a fulfillment formula from Isaiah, before concluding with a quotation from Isa 53:4 where the servant is said to carry our illnesses (לְהִלָּחֵם) and afflictions (מִכָּאֵב; cf. Exod 3:7) (Köhler et al 1994:2892, 5138). Matthew ignores the translation given in the LXX (which he utilizes in other quotations), and correctly translates this verse as "he takes up our weaknesses/diseases (ἀσθενείας), and carries our distresses/diseases (νόσους)." What is important for Matthew, and consonant with the original Hebrew text, is an emphasis on physical sickness and the emotional trauma that physical sickness has caused. Matthew applies Isa 53:4, which his audience would have recognized as describing God's servant from Isaiah's text, to both the particular healings which precede the quotation, and more importantly, to the general healing for the Jewish people since Jesus healed all who were sick (8:16).³² This portrait of Jesus healing the sick is a theme throughout Matthew. In addition to numerous personal healings, the evangelist includes a plethora of general concluding statements where Jesus healed all the sick.³³ The exclusive scope of the healing rhetorically represents the entire nation. Closely tied to this theme is Jesus's compassion for the people. On three separate occasions Jesus's compassion compels him to heal people (9:35-36; 14:14; 20:34).

Matthew again cites Isaiah in 12:18-21, where we find the same basic narrative pattern that we found in Matt 8:17: Jesus performs a particular healing, which is followed by a general statement that Jesus healed all who were ill, and a fulfillment formula from Isaiah, before concluding with a quotation from Isa 42:1-4. The differences in this passage include the addition of conflict with the Pharisees who were displeased with Jesus healing people on the Sabbath and Jesus's admonition to the people to not tell others who he was. The additions should not distract us from the fact that Matthew is once again asserting that Jesus's healing ministry fulfills what is written in Isaiah.³⁴ In fact, the opposition of the Pharisees serves to heighten the contrast between Jesus, who is the chosen servant that heals God's people, and the religious leaders who have proven to be inadequate shepherds over Israel. Matthew's quotation follows the

MT over the LXX through the first three verses, which is significant because the LXX explicitly identifies the servant as Jacob/Israel in Isa 42:1 whereas the MT leaves the servant unidentified. The ambiguity of the MT may have made that translation more attractive for Matthew's purposes. The final verse, however, follows the LXX nearly verbatim against the MT, which differs greatly. Where in the MT the writer states that the islands will wait for the instruction of the servant, the LXX indicates that the nations will hope in the name of the servant. Matthew presumably chooses to follow the LXX at this point because it forwards his rhetorical narrative that the Gentiles will be invited into the new covenant (28:16-20). As mentioned, the servant in this passage likely refers to the nation of Israel, but Matthew applies this verse to Jesus.³⁵ God had promised to restore Israel to a position of strength where she could faithfully bring justice to the nations as a light that reflects the glory of God. Here Matthew implies that Jesus will fulfill that role as the messianic representative of the nation. His healing ministry is a sign of the healing and restoration that Jesus will bring to the nation of Israel through his death on their behalf, and through that healing Israel will become a light to the nations as God has promised.

Whereas in Isaiah, the servant is commissioned to bring justice to the nations, Matthew portrays Jesus and his disciples as the ones who bring justice to the nations.³⁶ In Matt 19:28, Jesus assures the disciples that they will sit on twelve thrones with the Son of Man and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Later, Jesus describes the Son of Man sitting on a glorious throne and judging all the nations of the world (Matt 25:31-45). By contrast, the application of justice is absent in the leadership of Pharisees and the scribes (Matt 23:23). Only Jesus, and one day his disciples as well, are qualified to bring justice to the nations.

Further, whereas the servant in Isaiah is appointed as a covenant to the nations, so Jesus will establish a new covenant through his sacrifice on the cross.³⁷ Jesus commanded his disciples earlier in the gospel to preach the good news to Israel, but after his death and resurrection Jesus commissions them to make disciples of every nation (Matt 10:7; 28:18). The new covenant that is established in the blood of Jesus is open to many, which, in the context of Matthew, appears to be an intentionally vague term to refer to anyone who follows Jesus (20:28; 26:28). The purpose for this new covenant is the forgiveness of sins, which will restore relationship between God and his people. Matthew, then, strongly connects the person and work of Jesus with God's servant in Isa 40-55 by demonstrating Jesus's

ability to bring forgiveness and healing to Israel, and through Israel, to bring both justice and a new covenant to the nations.

A Light to the Nations

Matthew portrays Jesus as one who will fulfill the mission of a restored Israel to be a light to the Gentiles. The gospel begins by identifying Jesus as the Messiah, son of David, and son of Abraham, titles that serve to indicate his ability to fulfill God's will on earth for both the nation of Israel (Son of David) and the world (Son of Abraham). Just as in Isaiah, God's justice and light would go out to all the nations, so in Matthew the influence of Jesus's disciples will impact the entire world. Those who follow Jesus will be the light of the world and the messengers of the gospel of the kingdom to all the world (5:14; 24:14). Jesus commissions them to make disciples of all nations (28:18).

Future ministry to the Gentiles is foreshadowed throughout the breadth of the Gospel. Senior lists eighteen texts that portray Gentiles as examples of faith or allude to their future involvement in the kingdom (1999:13-16).³⁸ The genealogy, which begins with a formula that is almost identical to in introductory formulas of genealogies in Genesis, "ensures continuity with Israel's story and presents Jesus as the heir of the promises to Abraham" (Hays 2016:110). Matthew establishes Jesus's identification with Israel's story early in the gospel through such stories as the worship of the wise men, the flight to Egypt, Jesus's baptism of repentance, the testing in the wilderness, and the choosing of the twelve disciples.³⁹

The depth of thought concerning the Gentile mission is demonstrated in Matthew 4:14-16, which quotes Isa 9:1-2 to proclaim that in Jesus, the light is coming to those who are in darkness in Galilee of the Gentiles. While the mention of Gentiles could be excused as unimportant to the narrative agenda of Matthew, there are substantial reasons to argue that Matthew intentionally underscores the theme of light to the Gentiles. First, Hays observes that whereas the MT and LXX say the people "walked" in darkness, Matthew diverts from this translation to say the people "sat" in darkness (2016:176). The concept of sitting in darkness is absent from Isa 9:1-2 but present in the LXX translation of Isa 42:7 as part of a passage that, like Isa 9:1-2, contrasts light and darkness and says that the servant of God will be a light to the nations. Hays concludes, "By conflating the wording of the two texts, Matthew's formula quotation hints metaleptically that the 'great light' appearing in Capernaum as Jesus inaugurates his

mission of proclaiming the kingdom of heaven (Matt 4:17) is precisely the 'light to the nations' of Isaiah 42:6" (2016:177-178). Second, following this pronouncement, Matthew gives a general statement of healing and explains that people are coming to Jesus from all over, including Syria and the Decapolis, two places which are highly populated with Gentiles. In fact, Syria is mentioned first and most prominently in the passage (4:24-25). While Israel is the primary missional target in Matthew, there are hints throughout the gospel that Gentiles will be included in God's plan for salvation for the world.

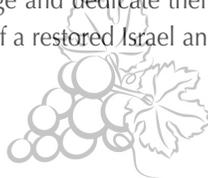
Jesus's connection with Israel continues throughout the gospel as Jesus challenges the major symbols of Judaism, such as the interpretation of Torah, the constitution of the true Temple, the location of the Promised Land, and the identity of the true people of God (Wright 1992:365-68; 384-90).⁴⁰ Matthew illustrates that Jesus is able to fulfill the mission that God has given to Israel and that Jesus's followers rightly become the people of Israel who are commissioned to be a light to the Gentiles. This is seen, for example, when there are exceptions to Jesus' exclusive ministry to Israel and Jesus heals because of the great faith of a particular Gentile (8:13; 15:28).⁴¹ And though the disciples are clearly sent to Israel only, there will come a day when they will give their testimony to the Gentiles, either apologetically or evangelistically (10:18; 28:18). In fact, just as the Servant of God was given the task of declaring justice to the nations in Isaiah, so Jesus and his followers will declare justice to the Gentiles resulting in the Gentiles hoping in the name of Jesus (12:18-21). While these allusions to future ministry to the Gentiles clearly do not comprise the main theme of Matthew, the healing exceptions and repeated mention of ministry to the Gentiles foreshadows the proclamation at the end of Matthew where Jesus commands his disciples make disciples of all the nations (28:18-20). In this way, the vision of Isa 40-66 that God will restore his servant Israel and, through Israel, will become God to all the nations is forecasted in Matthew. Thus, when Jesus calls twelve disciples and commissions them to bring healing and good news to the Jewish people, he is restoring Israel and gathering Israel to himself. When Jesus and his disciples heal and preach good news to the Gentiles, either as a present action or a future commission, they are fulfilling the task given to Israel to be a light to the nations (cf. Isa 49:6) (Hays 2016:175).

Matthew climaxes with Jesus commissioning his disciples to make disciples of every nation (28:18). This universal scope is consistent with

the message of Isaiah, where God was creator and sustainer of the whole world and other gods were impotent and worthless before Him. Because of this, Isaiah envisions the nations of the earth seeing the glory of God and worshipping him (e.g., 60:1-3).⁴² Matthew likewise presents the good news of the kingdom being preached to all nations so that all may glorify and worship God (24:14; 28:16-20). The implicit theme of healing and preaching to the Gentiles that permeated Matthew becomes explicit in the climatic end. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the nation of Israel is restored, the promises given by the prophets are realized, and Israel is now commissioned to be a light to the Gentiles.⁴³

Conclusion

Isaiah tells the story of a God who has punished Israel for her sins and promises a restoration that through forgiveness, healing, redemption, and a return to the Promised Land. Israel's restoration will be so glorious that she will reflect the glory of God to the nations and all people will come to her light. The Gospel of Matthew quotes and alludes to Isaiah pervasively to demonstrate that the promise of eschatological restoration is fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Through Jesus, the Messiah and Son of God, God will forgive Israel's sins and heal her sickness so that Israel can be a light to the nations as envisioned by Isaiah. Matthew illustrates Jesus's purpose by applying such passages as Isa 9:1-2, 42:1-4, 53:4 and 35 to the healing ministry of Jesus. The restoration of Israel is Jesus's primary goal during his earthly ministry (Matt 10:8; 15:24), but after his death and resurrection he commissions his disciples to make disciples of every nation (Matt 20:18). Jesus teaches that he and his disciples will bring justice to the nations (19:28; 25:31-46) and through his sacrifice, Jesus established a new covenant with many (20:28; 26:28). God will then both keep his promise to Israel and establish himself as the God of the whole world. Through the preaching of the gospel the nations will be invited to participate in the restored Israel and experience the glory of God. All who believe that message and dedicate their lives to follow Jesus will embrace the ancient hope of a restored Israel and will themselves become the light of the world.



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End Notes

¹ For the sake of space, this paper will not attempt to present an exhaustive list of the major themes in Isaiah but will instead select the particular themes that are germane to the impact of Isaiah on Matthew.

² Childs rightly notes the theocentric nature of Isa 1 as God expresses his anger at his people.

³ See especially, Isa 6:10; 42:19; 43:8; 56:10; 59:10.

⁴ This occurs explicitly in 46:1-2, but implicitly throughout 40-55.

⁵ Isa 2:8, 18-20; 10:10-11; 19:1-3; 31:7; 40:19-20; 42:17; 44:10-17; 45:16, 20; 48:5; 57:13; 66:3.

⁶ Isa 43:11; 44:6, 8; 45:5-6, 14, 21-22; 46:9; 47:8, 10; 50:8

⁷ Isa 40:28; 43:1, 3, 11, 15, 21; 45:12, 26; 60:16; 63:8. Many scholars argue that these passages present the first realized argument in the Hebrew Bible for monotheism, but this point is contended.

⁸ While the general tone changes at this point, it should be acknowledged that there are promises of restoration in Isa 1-39 and warnings of judgment in Isa 40-66. In Isa 56-66 especially, the prophet is careful to qualify the future promises with the need for Israel to return to God and be faithful to him.

⁹ Cf. Isa 40:1; 51:3, 19; 57:18; 61:2; 66:18.

¹⁰ Isa 22:14; 27:19. According to HALOT, the pual use of כפר in these instances means “to be exempt from punishment” or “to be atoned.” (Köhler et al 1994: 4384). Cf. also Isa 43:25 and 44:22, where God promises to “wipe out” (מחה) Israel’s “transgressions” (פְּשָׁעֵי).

¹¹ In the present context, the use of the verb סבל suggests that idea of “lifted,” but the niphil form of רצה in Isa 40:2 indicates the idea of being “carried away.” Likely both ideas are in view when applied to sin or iniquity. The concept of the removal of sin is also found in Isa 33:24 and 40:2, where the future salvation of God will bring a removal of sin.

¹² Isa 29:18; 35:5-6; 42:7. As Oswalt notes, the repeated reference to Israel’s blindness and deafness applies to both a spiritual condition and a physical one (1998: 627).

¹³ For example, Childs notes that Isa 35:10 is elaborated on in Isa 65 (2000: 258).

¹⁴ Isa 35:4; 43; 45:15-25; 49:25-26; 59:1; 60:16; 63:1-9.

¹⁵ Schaudig discusses the explicit comparison made between Israel’s God and the Babylonian gods in Isa 46:1-2. Especially telling is the

visual of people carrying large statues of the gods while they sway and totter in the yearly processions.

¹⁶ According to N. T. Wright, “Israel believed herself to be the linchpin of what the creator god was doing, and would do, for the world as a whole; when Israel was restored, the whole creation would be restored. (1992:193).

¹⁷ Many scholars argue that Cyrus should be viewed here, which is certainly possible, but it should be noticed that Cyrus is never called God’s servant or his chosen one. Those terms are reserved for Jacob/Israel. Rather, Cyrus is called God’s “shepherd” (44:28) and “anointed” (45:1). The contrast can be seen clearly in 45:1-4.

¹⁸ Notice especially the first-person references in Isa 49:1-6 and 50:4-9.

¹⁹ Isa 45:22; 41:4; 52:7-12; 54:15; 56:3-12; 58:8-10; 60:1-3, 19-20; 66:17-23.

²⁰ According to Childs, Hellenistic Judaism interpreted the servant in Isa 42:1-4 as Israel, but Palestinian Judaism interpreted the passage messianically (2000:327).

²¹ Lessing notes that the literary structure of Isa 49:1-6 corresponds to that of 42:1-4.

²² By comparison, Jeremiah is the only other prophet Matthew mentions by name in fulfillment quotations, and that occurs just twice.

²³ It should be noted that Matthew goes out of his way to portray the Jewish leadership negatively. The two positive examples of Jewish leadership, Jairus and Joseph of Arimathea, are not identified as Jewish leaders in Matthew, in contrast to Mark and Luke (cf. Matt 9:18//Mark 5:22//Luke 8:41; Matt 27:57//Mark 15:43//Luke 23:51).

²⁴ The portrayal of the people as sheep without a shepherd could be contrasted with the portrayals of God as shepherd in the Hebrew scriptures, particularly in Isa 40:10-11.

²⁵ According to Matt 15:30-31, Jesus healed the mute, crippled, lame, and blind in a list that is reminiscent of the afflictions that God promises to heal for a restored Israel in Isa 35:5-6. (The Greek word for “mute” used in these verses, κωφός, can mean either deaf or mute). What makes this allusion even more powerful is that Matthew alludes to Isa 35:5-6 earlier in his gospel. In Matt 10:1 Jesus gives his disciples authority to cast out unclean spirits and heal every kind of sickness and disease and then commissions them to their task in 10:8. In Matt 11:5, when John’s disciples seek proof that Jesus is the expected one, he reiterates that the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the gospel preached to them, which serves as a compilation of promises of healing from Isaiah and reiterates

Jesus's commission to his disciples from Matt 10:8. (Cf. Isa 26:19; 29:18; 35:5-6; 61:1). Matthew is communicating that the promise of healing that accompanies the restoration of Israel in Isaiah has come to the Jews.

²⁶ It should be noted that the Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants is the middle of three parables that Jesus delivers in the Temple to the Chief Priests and elders in which one group refuses to do their allotted task and is replaced by another group.

²⁷ The quotation of Isa 7:14 following this statement substantiates the fact that God is in control and has sent Jesus to bring restoration to Israel.

²⁸ E. P. Sanders has likely overstated how comfortably Jesus's declaration would have been received Judaism. It is unlikely that a common Jew (as opposed to a priest) would proclaim that all of a person's sins are unequivocally forgiven. If Sander's proposal is correct, and the difference between Jesus and the norm is that Jesus pronounced forgiveness before evidence of repentance and the Jewish people would require evidence of repentance before one is pronounced forgiven, then Jesus's proclamation could still be viewed as blasphemous as only God could properly forgive sins without evidence. (1985:204-208).

²⁹ While most manuscripts include this verse in Mark, the earliest witnesses do not.

³⁰ Matthew likely does include subtle allusions to Isa 53 in Matt 26:63 and 27:57-60.

³¹ As France observes, "It thus seems that for Matthew the figure of the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah, which other early Christians looked to for an explanation of Jesus's suffering and death, was a more holistic model for Jesus's ministry as a whole" (2007:322).

³² France notes that some early Jewish interpretations of Isa 53 envisioned a messiah figure (2007:322); Craig S. Keener contends that "The context in Isaiah 53 suggests that the servant's death would heal the nation from its sin" (2009:273).

³³ Matt 4:23; 8:16; 9:35; 11:2-6; 12:15; 14:13-14; 15:29-31; 19:1-2. For a detailed discussion of these statements, see Lidija Novakovic 2003:118-123.

³⁴ Hays does become distracted by the command to secrecy and suggests that the fulfillment applies to both the command to secrecy and to Jesus's healing ministry. Considering the paucity of evidence for the former and the abundance of evidence for the latter, it appears that Matthew's intention is to connect the healing ministry with significant passages in Isa 40-55. (2016:181).death, and resurrection took place "according to the Scriptures" stands at the heart of the New Testament's message. All four canonical Gospels declare that the Torah and the Prophets and the Psalms

mysteriously prefigure Jesus. The author of the Fourth Gospel states this claim succinctly: in his narrative, Jesus declares, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (John 5:46)

³⁵ Matthew likely connects Jesus with this passage at Jesus’s baptism where the Spirit comes upon Jesus and a voice declares that Jesus is the Son of God in whom God is well pleased, which are both mentioned of the servant in Isa 42:1 (3:17). Matthew reiterates the declaration that God is pleased with his son at the transfiguration (17:5). Matthew links these three passages by using the verb εὐδοκέω, meaning, “well pleased,” in each passage. Jesus’s identification as son rather than servant is heightened in the Parable of the Vineyard and the Tenants.

³⁶ Note especially the three mentions of the servant bringing justice to the nations in Isa 42:1–4, a passage which Matthew applies to Jesus in 12:18–21. Cf. Isa 49:6–8; 51:4.

³⁷ Cf. Isa 42:6; 49:6; Matt 20:28; 26:28. Isaiah says the servant will be appointed/given as a covenant for the people and a light to the nations. The parallel structure in these verses indicates that the people in question are the nations.

³⁸ The eighteen references are: 1:1; 1:2–16; 2:1–12; 4:12–16; 4:23–26; 8:5–13; 11:20–24; 12:18–21; 12:38–41; 15:21–28; 20:1–16; 21:43; 22:1–14; 24:14; 25:31–46; 27:19; 27:54; 28:16–20. Senior notes that fourteen of these eighteen examples have no parallel in Mark and twelve are only found in Matthew.

³⁹ For a full treatment of Matthew’s identification of Jesus with Israel, see Hays 2016:110–37; Rollin Gene Grams 2004:238–255. death, and resurrection took place “according to the Scriptures” stands at the heart of the New Testament’s message. All four canonical Gospels declare that the Torah and the Prophets and the Psalms mysteriously prefigure Jesus. The author of the Fourth Gospel states this claim succinctly: in his narrative, Jesus declares, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (John 5:46)

⁴⁰ N. T. Wright argues extensively that Jesus reconstitutes the symbols of Judaism, both as it effected the Christian movement as a whole and its impact on Matthew in particular.

⁴¹ It should be noted that although Jesus initially rebuffed the Canaanite woman for her request for healing for her daughter, he relents because of her great faith.

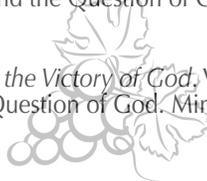
⁴² Jesus is worshipped in Matthew in 2:8; 28:9, 17.

⁴³ The promises of restoration in the prophets are made effective by the death and resurrection of Jesus but may not be fully realized until the eschaton.

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