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CHAPTER 15



The Johannine Messiah and the Isaianic Servant: Identity And Response

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Abstract

The Gospel of John uses the Old Testament in the portrayal of Jesus identity. The role of different elements is debated, with Isaiah as well as Passover often identified as significant. The acclamation of Jesus as ‘Lamb of God’ (1:29) has been a focal point for the debate and will provide an initial focus for this investigation. It will be argued that the Passover connections in the Gospel have been overemphasised. Instead, the role of Isaiah is critical for the Johannine presentation of Jesus identity. The Johannine use of Isaiah contributes to presenting Jesus not only as God’s servant, but as divine himself. The role of Isaiah goes further, for Isaianic language provides some of the key Johannine language for conveying the necessary response to Jesus which the Gospel seeks to evoke (20:31). As the God of Isaiah calls for belief and witness, so too does the Johannine Jesus.

The Gospel of John has a significant focus on the identity of Jesus, as well as on how people ought to respond to Jesus, both of which feature in the statement of purpose in 20:31. Both the identity of Jesus and the response to him are connected to Old Testament language and categories, although this has primarily been considered in terms of identity but not response. Two key influences on the identity of the Johannine

Jesus are those of the Passover lamb, and the Isaianic servant. A focal point for discussing these connections has been the identification of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29).¹ The argument that this refers to Passover is symptomatic of an overemphasis on Passover imagery, and overlooks the central role of Isaiah across the Gospel both for Jesus' identity but also for the intended response to Jesus. The argument that follows will first establish that while Passover imagery has a role in John, its significance for Jesus' identity has been overplayed. Then John 1:29 will be used as a starting point to show the influence of Isaiah in shaping the Johannine presentation of Jesus' identity.² The connections to Isaiah regarding Jesus' identity will lead to a consideration of the role of Isaiah in shaping the Johannine language of responding to Jesus, and in particular the characteristic Johannine emphasis on belief.

1. The Passover Motif in John

The initial point at which Passover may be linked to the identity of Jesus is in John the Baptist's identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God (1:29). The source of the image is most commonly identified as Passover or Isaiah.³ While many identify a Passover reference, that identification is not without problems.⁴ While Jesus is identified with the Passover lamb elsewhere in the New Testament (1 Cor. 5:7), there are no explicit links in John 1:29 or its context. Even the use of *ὁ ἀμνός* is a weak connection, as the LXX usually refers to the Passover victim with *πρόβατον*, and

1 All English quotations of Scripture come from the NIV.

2 John appears to have primarily used a form of the LXX when using the Old Testament, therefore connections will be drawn primarily with the LXX. See Menken, 'Observations', 93.

3 For other possible interpretations see Morris, *John*, 144–147; Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1.58–63.

4 For the view that Passover imagery is primary see Lee, 'Paschal Imagery'; Hoskins, 'Deliverance from Death'; Porter, 'Traditional Exegesis', 396–429. For the view that it is Passover along with one or more other elements see Schneiders, 'Lamb of God'; Nielsen, 'Lamb of God'; Skinner, 'Another Look'; Grigsby, 'The Cross'.

ὁ ἄμνός only appears in Exodus 12:5 in some manuscripts.⁵ In addition, there is a lack of evidence to assert that the Passover sacrifice was understood as expiatory in first-century Judaism.⁶ Thus, while a Passover allusion is possible, it is unlikely to be the primary referent.

Aside from John 1:29, the other passage that may link Passover with Jesus' identity is John 19.⁷ By placing Jesus' death at the time of the Passover sacrifice, in the afternoon of the day of preparation (19:14), it may be that Jesus is to be identified with the Passover lamb.⁸ The differences between the Synoptic and Johannine accounts could be evidence that John has altered the story to facilitate the identification of Jesus with the Passover sacrifice.⁹ Yet a Johannine theological reworking is not certain, as other resolutions of the relative chronologies are possible, and therefore a symbolic significance to the time of Jesus death cannot be assumed.¹⁰ The case for the timing being theologically significant is undermined by the failure to draw the reader's attention to the connection. The Passover sacrifice is not mentioned, while the three references to Passover in connection with Jesus death have no sacrificial

- 5 In Exodus 12:5 B reads ἀρνῶν, while A reads ἄμνων and the Göttingen text follows A here. Wevers argues that שׁכב is consistently translated as ἄμνων in Exodus, and so is the preferred reading. Wevers, *Text History*, 263. Beyond the institution of the Passover, ἄμνός is only used in relation to Passover in 2 Chronicles 35:7–8, which refers to πρόβατα καὶ ἄμνοὺς καὶ ἐρίφους. This three-fold reference to the sacrificial animals does not suggest ὁ ἄμνός as the obvious word to indicate the Passover victim.
- 6 Passover is more closely linked to deliverance from death and release from captivity than dealing with sin, although Grigsby argues for understanding it as expiatory. Yet Nielsen observes that those who make such an argument rely on later evidence. For example, *Exodus Rabbah* which Grigsby relies upon is dated to the tenth-twelfth centuries. Grigsby, 'The Cross', 73–74; Nielsen, 'Lamb of God', 239.
- 7 While John 6 contains mention of the Passover (6:4) along with a discourse that could be linked to the Last Supper, it does not constitute a use of Passover to convey Jesus' identity. The mention of Passover is separated from the symbolic discourse by both the miraculous feeding and the walking on water, reducing the likelihood of a connection. In addition, the symbolic discourse is not primarily a reference to the Last Supper but conveys a metaphor for believing (see further §4 below).
- 8 This is usually understood to be the day before Passover, however Carson suggests that the reference to 'eating the Passover' (18:28) could refer to the rest of the week-long festival, allowing the Passover meal to have taken place the night before. He argues that παρασκευή can often mean Friday, and that if a symbolic reference to the timing of Jesus' death was intended, more dramatic effect would have been gained by inserting this statement after verse 16a. Carson, *John*, 589–90, 603–04.
- 9 Barrett, *John*, 48–51.
- 10 Meier and Matson argue for Johannine precedence in chronology, Carson argues that John follows the same chronology as the Synoptic accounts, and others such as Humphreys propose methods for harmonisation of the Gospel accounts. Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 399; Matson, 'Historical Plausibility'; Carson, *John*, 604; Humphreys, *The Mystery*.

connotations (18:28, 39; 19:14). The final reference, while relating Passover to Jesus' handing over for crucifixion, minimises the symbolism as the association is with Jesus being sentenced rather than with his actual crucifixion or death. The function of this reference may be more to prepare for the necessity of removing the bodies in 19:31–37.¹¹ At the point of Jesus' death, while it is repeated that it was the day of preparation, the next day is the Sabbath, not Passover (19:31). Finally, as it is likely the Gospel was written after the fall of Jerusalem and outside Judea, there is no basis for assuming an audience would be sufficiently familiar to make the connection between the sacrifices in the Temple and the time of Jesus death without the text making that connection clear.¹²

Alongside the timing of Jesus' death there are possible allusions to Passover in the use of hyssop in 19:29, and in the scriptural quotation in 19:36. The use of hyssop contrasts with the Synoptic accounts, and in view of the impracticality of hyssop, an intentional symbolic change is probable.¹³ While it could reflect a Passover image (Exod. 12:12), hyssop is linked with other cleansing and atoning sacrifices (Lev. 14:1–7, Num. 19:17–19) and to forgiveness of sins in Psalm 51. The wider symbolism of hyssop suggests purification and forgiveness are in view rather than specifically evoking Passover.¹⁴ The allusion in John

11 The reason being that it is a great Sabbath (that is a Sabbath falling during the Passover week). Carson, *John*, 604.

12 In terms of date and location of the writing of John: Barrett gives the boundaries of between AD 90–140, and favours Ephesus over Antioch and Alexandria. Barrett, *John*, 128–32. Brown also sees Ephesus most likely, between ad 90–110. Brown, *An Introduction*, 199–215. Bultmann, *John*, 11–12, favours Syria, AD 80–120. Carson, *John*, 82–87, suggests AD 80, and the traditional location of Ephesus as most plausible. Michaels, *John*, 37–38, like many, notes there is little evidence for place other than later tradition that links this Gospel with Ephesus, and notes that Alexandria and Antioch are plausible alternatives. He also states it was likely written after AD 70. John's Gospel also gives indications that it is written for an audience with limited familiarity with Jewish practices (2:6; 4:9; 18:28). This is suggested specifically with regard to Passover by terming it 'Passover, the feast of the Jews' (2:13, 6:4, 11:55).

13 Matthew and Mark both have 'reed' (κάλαμος, Matt. 27:48, Mark 15:36) while Luke omits this detail. Porter, 'Traditional Exegesis', 420; Barrett, *John*, 553.

14 It is even possible that this is an allusion to Isaiah. Outside of Passover, the hyssop is used to sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice. In Isa. 52:15 the servant 'will sprinkle many nations'. This phrase is textually difficult, for while the English here follows the MT, the LXX has instead *θανυμάσσονται*. However, the Hebrew phrase which is initially unclear makes sense when we see the Servant is 'lifted up' (52:13) after his appearance is 'marred beyond human semblance' (52:14). It is then those who 'see' and 'understand' (52:15) who are associated with this sprinkling. When combined with the following references to bearing sin, it evokes the image of sprinkling sacrificial blood upon the people. Gentry, 'Atonement', 29–31.

19:36, meanwhile, is ambiguous in its referent. There are similarities with Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12, and Psalm 34:20 (33:21 LXX), but none provide an exact match.¹⁵ The identification of the source may depend on the degree to which Passover is seen as prominent in John 19.¹⁶ If, as has been argued, the Passover connection has been overplayed, the Psalmic origin may be more likely. If Psalm 34 is the source, the quote may be used as an allusion to the Isaianic servant, as Psalm 34:22 states 'The LORD will rescue his servants'. The ambiguity leaves the interpreter vulnerable to circular reasoning, for we are likely to identify the origin of the quotation based on our overall position on the prominence of either Passover or Isaiah with regard to the identity of Jesus. While there may be connections between Passover and Jesus, it does not appear to be used with the clarity or frequency to argue that the Passover lamb is a primary image for Jesus' identity in John.¹⁷

2. Isaiah and John the Baptist

John the Baptist introduces the Isaianic connection within John's Gospel. In John 1:23 John the Baptist announces his mission using the words of Isaiah 40:3.¹⁸ As John the Baptist presents his role in Isaianic terms, the reader is prepared for coming one to be presented in similarly Isaianic terms. John's initial acclamation of Jesus as *ὁ ἄμνός τοῦ*

15 The word order in John is closer to that in Exodus and Numbers (LXX), along with both the singular *ὁστούν* and singular possessive *αὐτοῦ*. However, each of those includes *ἀπό*, and it is only in Psalm 34:20 that the verb is in the same form. John and Psalm 34 use a singular future passive, while both Exodus and Numbers have a plural future active form.

16 Porter argues that the linguistic features are not decisive, and contextual issues, including the context of Passover in John 19, lead to the view that Exodus/Numbers is the source of the quote. Porter, 'Traditional Exegesis', 404. In contrast, Dodd, *Interpretation*, 233–34, argues based on the role of Psalms within John that the Psalm identification is more likely, following the other quotes from Psalms in 19:24 and 19:28.

17 Passover imagery in John may be interpreted through Isaiah and the new Exodus motif in Isaiah 40–55. This would further subordinate Passover imagery to an Isaianic background with regard to Jesus' identity in John's Gospel. Bauckham, *God Crucified*, 48, argues that allusions to Isaiah and the Servant in the New Testament should be read in the context of the new Exodus motif.

18 The Johannine version differs from the LXX, using 'make straight' rather than 'prepare', while in Isaiah 'make straight' is in following clause (in both LXX and MT). The mixing of the two clauses may be due to the author quoting from memory, although an alternative form of the LXX is possible. Williams identifies possible theological motivations for the alteration. Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel', 103–04.

θεοῦ ὁ αἴρων τὴν ἁμαρτίαν τοῦ κόσμου (1:29) suggests a connection with Isaiah through the use of ὁ ἄμνος (Isa. 53:7). The Servant in Isaiah is described as ‘like’ a lamb, rather than directly called a lamb, but it is evident that John 1:29 is using ‘lamb’ as an analogy, given it is applied to Jesus. Isaiah 53:7 may not use the full expression ‘Lamb of God’, but that term appears in no biblical text outside John. The following statement about the removal of sin also corresponds with Isaiah.¹⁹ It is said of the Servant that, ‘the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all’ (Isa. 53:6, cf. 53:11), that ‘the LORD makes his life an offering for sin’ (Isa. 53:10) and that ‘he bore the sin of many’ (Isa. 53:12). The Servant is the one who will deal with the sins, if not of the world, at least of many within it. Whilst Isaiah speaks in sacrificial language, he goes beyond the image of an animal sacrificed for sin in that he speaks of a person who will deal with sin. Therefore, the Isaianic Servant in Isa. 52:13–53:12 provides the most convincing background to John 1:29.

Having confessed Jesus as the Lamb of God, John the Baptist declares Jesus’ messianic identity (John 1:34). There is a textual issue with this verse, which may read ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ θεοῦ or ὁ ἐκλεκτός τοῦ θεοῦ. Whilst ‘Son of God’ has greater external support, as standard Johannine terminology it is more likely this reading arose as harmonisation with the rest of the Gospel.²⁰ If ‘the Chosen One of God’ is taken as original, it would provide another Isaianic link, here to Isaiah 42:1, which refers to both ‘my servant’ and ‘my chosen one’.²¹ Following this is the declaration that God has placed his Spirit upon his servant, which parallels John 1:32 and Jesus receiving the Spirit. By this combination of the giving of the Spirit and acclamation as God’s chosen one, John is evoking Isaiah 42:1–4 (the first of the Servant Songs) in a declaration of Jesus’ identity. John the Baptist sets an initial picture of Jesus with his identity cast in Isaianic terms, following on from his own Isaianic mission.

19 Even Porter, ‘Traditional Exegesis’, 410–11, who argues that ‘Lamb’ in John 1:29 is a Passover reference, says that the second clause here is an intensification of Isaianic language.

20 According to UBS5, \mathfrak{P}^{66} , \mathfrak{P}^{75} , A and B all read ὁ υἱὸς, along with \mathfrak{N}^2 . However, ὁ ἐκλεκτός has early attestation in both \mathfrak{P}^{106} and \mathfrak{N}^* . Flink, ‘Son and Chosen’, offers an alternative proposal, claiming \mathfrak{P}^{75*} reads ὁ υἱὸς ὁ ἐκλεκτός and this is the original reading. As Flink’s reading includes ὁ ἐκλεκτός his assessment would still provide support for the view argued here.

21 Williams, ‘Isaiah in John’s Gospel’, 105.

3. Isaiah and the Identity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel

Following John the Baptist's Isaianic opening, the Gospel continues to use Isaianic titles to identify Jesus. The next example comes in John 4:42 when the Samaritans confess Jesus as 'Saviour of the World'.²² As with the declarations that Jesus is 'the Lamb of God' and 'the chosen one', we find another expression unrepeated in the Gospel. Whilst it may have roots in an imperial acclamation, there are echoes of Isaiah 49:6, where God says of his servant 'I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth'.²³ As the confession is made by the Samaritans, following Jesus' comments on the harvest in 4:31–38, there is a parallel with Isaiah's context of mission to those who are not Jews in the second Servant Song (Isa. 49:1–6). Whilst this is an allusion rather than a quote, Isaiah provides a connection between the three confessions of Jesus in John 1–4 which do not use typical Johannine language (1:29, 34; 4:42). As each echoes Isaianic ideas, there is a consistent reason for John to include them, which is to convey the identity and mission of Jesus in Isaianic terms.

The Isaianic influence on the Johannine presentation of Jesus is seen in Jesus' self-description, notably in the 'I am' statements. The Isaianic origins of these statements has been established by both Williams and Ball.²⁴ The link is made in particular with Isaiah 43:10, which reads *ἰνα γνῶτε καὶ πιστεύσητε καὶ συνῆτε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι*. For Ball, the Isaianic origin of the term is particularly evident in the absolute statements (John 8:24, 28, 58; 18:5), but Old Testament backgrounds are evident in all of the predicate statements.²⁵ Unlike the previous connections to Isaiah, the connection here is not to the Servant but to God himself, thereby forming an allusion to Jesus' divine identity. Williams takes a broader view to include some 'I am' statements that have often been categorised as self-identification.²⁶ Thus, the appearance of Jesus in John 6:20 can be linked to the command not to fear in Isaiah 41:10 (cf. 43:1). This both

22 Koester draws parallels with Roman imperial titles rather than the Old Testament. Koester, "The Saviour of the World" (John 4:42).

23 Brown, *John*, 1.175, notes that Old Testament passages including Isaiah 12:2 describe God as the salvation of Israel, but asserts that the Messiah is not called a saviour.

24 Ball, *I Am*; Williams, 'Self-Declaratory Pronouncements'. See also Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 44.

25 Ball, *I Am*, 203–204.

26 Williams, 'Self-Declaratory Pronouncements', 346.

makes sense of John 6:19 which says the disciples saw Jesus rather than an unknown figure, and associates a revelation of Jesus' self-identity with the miraculous arrival of the boat at their destination. It also suggests a connection between the identity of Jesus and how one responds to him, for in light of the Isaianic allusion the disciples are not to fear because God is with them in the person of Jesus. The Isaianic connections in the 'I am' statements contribute to presenting Jesus as divine, as well as pointing to the response that such a figure requires.

Another confession connecting to Isaiah is found in John 6:69, where Peter calls Jesus the 'Holy One of God'. Brown suggests a background to this title in references to Samson (Judg. 13:7, 16:17) and Aaron (Ps. 106:16).²⁷ However, there is a significant textual issue with the Judges references.²⁸ These connections are also undermined by the lack of reference in the Gospel to Samson or Judges more generally, nor does John depict an Aaronic priestly Messiah. In light of the already observed connections to Isaiah, and specifically to Isaiah 41 and 43, a more likely origin for this title is the Isaianic 'Holy One of Israel', the title given to God in Isaiah 41:14, 16, 20 and in 43:14. As with the 'I am' statements, John uses Isaianic language to point towards Jesus' divine identity, in both cases drawing on the same sections of Isaiah. In both Isaiah 41:14 and 43:14 the title is connected to God as redeemer, and in 43:15 to God as king as well. In addition to alluding to Jesus' divine identity, the use of 'Holy One of God' points to the role of Jesus as both redeemer and king. This continues to build on the picture of Jesus' identity as drawn from Isaiah.

The influence of Isaiah upon John is evident in the explicit quotations from Isaiah. Aside from the quotation conveyed by John the Baptist (1:23), there are three other quotations from Isaiah. Particular attention is drawn to Isaiah as explaining the mission and identity of Jesus by introducing three of the quotations with the name of Isaiah (1:23; 12:38; 40), the only Scripture quotations in John whose origin is specified. Unlike the titles that have already been considered, the quotations from Isaiah do not explicitly state Jesus' identity. An implicit indication of Jesus' identity is seen in John 6:45, where Jesus quotes Isaiah

27 Brown, *John*, 1.298.

28 LXX A and MT read 'Nazirite', while LXX B has ἄγιος θεοῦ.

54:13, saying 'They will all be taught by God'. Jesus not only sets the quotation in the centre of a discourse on his identity and mission but also he connects learning from God with coming to him (see further §4). By linking himself to the fulfilment of Isaiah's promises, and Jesus thereby closely aligns himself with God.

The other two quotations from Isaiah both occur in John 12:38–40, in response to the narrator's observation of unbelief.²⁹ The first quotation is the declaration in Isaiah 53:1, 'Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?' By applying Isaiah's words to the lack of belief in Jesus, John equates the response Jesus experienced with that associated with the promised Servant. By aligning the rejection of Jesus with that of the servant, the Gospel draws a further connection between the Servant and the Messiah. The final quotation in 12:40 expresses a similar failure to respond rightly, although couched in terms of divine sovereignty (Isa. 6:10).³⁰ This is followed in John 12:41 by the assertion that Isaiah saw Jesus' glory and spoke of him. The author of this Gospel saw Jesus as both the motivation for and the fulfilment of the words of Isaiah, thereby making explicit the identification of Jesus with the Isaianic Servant.³¹

The trajectory of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12 is also reflected in John. A significant movement in this passage is the shift of the servant from humiliated to exalted. 'Lifted up' and 'glorified' (52:13 LXX) both refer to the future vindication of the Lord's servant and the realisation of his identity. This language is strikingly similar to that of the Fourth Gospel, where Jesus is presented as lifted up (John 3:14; 8:28; 12:32, 34) and glorified (7:39; 8:54; 11:4; 12:16, 23, 28; 13:31, 32; 16:14; 17:1, 5, 10).³² The Isaianic parallel is most evident in John 8:28, as Jesus declares it is his 'lifting up' that will reveal who he is. Later in that chapter when questioned about his identity he responds by referring to

29 On these quotations see Brendsel, *Isaiah Saw His Glory*.

30 Painter, 'Eschatological Faith', 46, suggests that the devil is the agent of blindness here, but the devil is not mentioned here, nor is he given a role in bringing about unbelief.

31 Lett, 'Divine Identity', 170; Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel', 114.

32 Lett, 'Divine Identity', 164–65.

his glorification by the Father (8:54).³³ Not only does Jesus' identity and mission align with what is presented in Isaiah, but so too some of John's characteristic language finds its origins in this Servant Song.³⁴ Jesus is the Servant who will be vindicated by being lifted up and glorified.

Finally, some of the images that form the base for extended metaphors in John's Gospel may originate with Isaiah.³⁵ Köstenberger, in his study on John 10, indicates that Isaiah 56 (along with Ezekiel and Zechariah) is part of background for the image of the shepherd.³⁶ This is evident particularly in Isaiah 56:8 with a reference to gathering others as in John 10:16. The parallel continues as Isaiah condemns false shepherds, matching the way Jesus condemns the Jewish leaders by speaking of thieves entering the sheep pen (10:8). There may be a similar connection between the vine image of John 15 and Isaiah 5:1–7 and 27:2–6. However, the vine is frequently used as a metaphor for Israel, so Isaianic origin cannot be asserted here, even if the already observed connections make it likely. These images also build on what was observed with regard to the 'I am' statements, that there is a link between the identity of Jesus and the required response to him. The sheep follow because he is the good shepherd, and the branches abide because he is the true vine. This connection leads us to ask, given Isaiah provides such a significant source regarding the identity of Jesus, whether it also provides a significant source regarding the required response to Jesus.

4. Isaiah and the Response to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel

The consideration of the influence of Isaiah on Johannine Christology has drawn particular attention to Isaiah 43, which may be the source not only for John's distinctive 'I am' language, but also the title 'Holy One

33 John 8 provides numerous other parallels with Isaiah 53, as many do not perceive who Jesus is (8:22–27; cf. Isa. 52:14; 53:1–3), and therefore he is dishonoured (8:49; cf. Isa. 53:3) and even attacked (8:59; cf. Isa. 53:7). The identity of Jesus is seen as one who is from God (8:42; cf. Isa. 52:13), and one who speaks and acts rightly (8:45–46; cf. Isa. 53:9).

34 Williams, 'Isaiah in John's Gospel', 114–15.

35 There are further connections between John and Isaiah that might be drawn, however the focus here remains on those which are significant with regard to the identity of Jesus and the required response to him. For other connections, see Young, 'A Study'; Hamilton, 'Influence'.

36 Köstenberger, 'Jesus the Good Shepherd', 80–81.

of God'. However, the LXX of Isaiah 43 contains another term which is prominent in the Gospel of John, which is πιστεύω.³⁷ The word πιστεύω appears 98 times in John, and its appearance in a passage in Isaiah that is already linked to Johannine thought is suggestive of a connection. Given that there are often connections between the identity of a person and the proper response to them, it may be that John has made use of an interconnected pattern in the Isaianic language of identity and response.

Beginning with the use of πιστεύω in Isaiah 43:10, the intended response to God is described as ἵνα γνῶτε καὶ πιστεύσητε καὶ συνῆτε ὅτι ἐγὼ εἰμι. This can be compared to John 17:8 which says αὐτοὶ ἔλαβον καὶ ἔγνωσαν ἀληθῶς ὅτι παρὰ σοῦ ἐξῆλθον, καὶ ἐπίστευσαν ὅτι σὺ με ἀπέστειλας. The two both use πιστεύω and γινώσκω to describe the response, as well as the use of ὅτι clauses to indicate that the knowing and believing relates to the identity of either God or Jesus (cf. 6:68–69). While the use of Isaiah in John 17:8 is not a direct quote, the connections already established with Isaiah 43 and specifically with verse ten regarding Jesus' identity, strongly support a link between the two. The verb πιστεύω appears fewer times in the entire LXX than in John, which suggests an initial significance as John picks up what is an uncommon term in the LXX for responding to God.³⁸

One of the significant features of these two verses is the use of ὅτι with πιστεύω.³⁹ This expression, which is used to signify propositional belief, is rare in the Graeco-Roman context.⁴⁰ Πιστεύω and cognates are used primarily to indicate personal trust, and while there may be some propositional content entailed, the relational element is more

37 While Lincoln observes that the trial motif is intended to lead to belief, he makes no connection between Isaiah and John in terms of the language of belief. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 47, 59, 177. The centrality of belief within the Gospel of John has been frequently observed and investigated. See Ueberschaer, 'Das Johannesevangelium'; Koester, 'Hearing, Seeing, and Believing'; Schlier, 'Glauben, Erkennen, Lieben'; Hawthorne, 'Concept of Faith'; Decourtray, 'La conception johannique de la foi'.

38 Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 177.

39 While the ὅτι clause follows directly after συνῆτε rather than πιστεύσητε, it is connected to all three verbs, for while πιστεύω can be used absolutely to indicate trust, γινώσκω requires that something be known, and there is no implied object of knowledge supplied by the context. Given πιστεύω is the middle term of the three, it would be grammatically incongruous for the relative clause connect only to the first and third verbs.

40 Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 123, 145.

prominent, even in the New Testament usage.⁴¹ The use of πιστεύω ὅτι is also uncommon in the LXX, appearing only 5 times.⁴² Similarly, πιστεύω ὅτι appears only on one occasion in each of the Synoptics, and each refers to believing that something can or will be done, rather than focusing on the identity of Jesus (Matt. 9:28; Mark 11:23–24; Luke 1:45). Outside the Johannine writings, there are only two instances which are used to convey identity, one about Jesus and the other about God (1 Thess. 4:14; Jas 2:19). Yet John uses the expression 13 times, suggesting that for John the propositional dimension of belief is significant and more so than for other New Testament writers. Isaiah seems to provide a basis for speaking of belief in propositional terms.

Johannine appropriation of the Isaianic language of belief is explicit in John 12:38. The quotations from Isaiah in John 12:38–40 are primarily an explanation of the response to Jesus, the failure of those who observed his signs to then believe in him. The quotation from Isaiah 53:1 uses the language of belief as it says *τίς ἐπίστευσεν τῇ ἀκοῇ ἡμῶν*; The quotation also presents the lack of belief as a failure to trust a ‘report’ — thus there is some propositional content that should be accepted but has instead been rejected. The framing of this verse in the LXX places the statement in the mouth of the Lord’s servant. However, the plural *ἡμῶν* suggests that the message is not merely that of the servant, but the message of God as well. This aligns with the Johannine presentation of Jesus’ message as both his message as the one sent by God, but also a message entirely derived from God himself (John 5:19–47). The use of this quotation from Isaiah strengthens the case that Isaiah is the source of the Johannine language of belief, and that Isaiah contributes to the Johannine concept of propositional belief.

Unlike John, Isaiah also uses the cognate *πείθω*. While this verb often means urge or persuade, in the perfect it has the sense of trust, and Isaiah uses it repeatedly to indicate trust in God (8:17; 12:2; 17:7). If Isaiah is the source of Johannine language of responding to Jesus, the question

41 Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, 30.

42 Three of the instances of πιστεύω ὅτι are in Job, which might raise the possibility that the influence of Job has contributed to the Johannine use of this expression. Such influence is unlikely given the lack of evidence for other connections, either in terms of language or concepts, between Job and John.

is raised as to why John does not also use *πείθω*. The most likely reason is stylistic, for John has evidently used *πιστεύω* as a key term throughout his Gospel, from the prologue (1:12–13) to the purpose statement (20:31).⁴³ *Πιστεύω* has a primary sense of trust, and this personal trust appears to be the main force of the *πιστεύω εἰς* construction in John. Thus, to use *πείθω* to indicate the same sort of trust would detract from the *leitmotif* of *πιστεύω*, without adding to what is conveyed in terms of responding to Jesus. That John made a deliberate choice not to use *πείθω* can be seen by considering the use of *πείθω* in Isaiah 50:10. There Isaiah indicates the idea of trusting in the name of the Lord, which echoes the Johannine idea of trusting in the name of Jesus (John 1:12, 2:23). John parallels the Isaianic idea but presents it with a characteristically Johannine use of *πιστεύω*.

Returning to the key passage of Isaiah 43, a further connection in terms of response is found in the language of witness. Isaiah 43:1–9 declares the redemptive work of God, in terms of gathering the exiles (43:5–7) and giving sight and hearing (43:8). The nations are to gather and hear the witnesses of the work that God has done (43:9). At the culmination of the account of what God has done comes a declaration from God regarding his unique identity (43:10–13). 43:10 begins with the call *γένεσθέ μοι μάρτυρες*, and it is this role of witness that is to lead people to know and believe that ‘I am’. The same group is both the witnesses and those who know, believe, and understand, for Israel collectively is addressed (43:1). The nation has a role together to bear witness to what God has done for them, and thereby enabling the nation to know, believe, and understand (cf. 44:8; 45:23). The role of bearing witness, and specifically witness that leads to belief, is reflected in the Gospel of John. Witness is a central category for John, highlighting in the prologue that witness is to lead to belief (John 1:7–8). While this is initially presented in the context of the role of John the Baptist, it is echoed in the purpose of the written Gospel (20:30–31; 21:24–25). Throughout the Gospel, witness plays a key role, notably in

43 Use of *πείθω* would also place a constraint upon tense-forms, as it only indicates trust in the perfect.

the confrontation in 5:19–47.⁴⁴ The role of witness is also enacted in the characters who bear witness to their faith and tell others (4:28–30, 39; 6:68–9; 11:27). Jesus prays for a future generation of believers who will come to believe through the witness of the disciples (17:20). Both the idea of publicly confessing faith, as well as the language of *μαρτυρία*, connect the response to God in Isaiah with the response to Jesus in John.

The role of Isaiah 43 for John is reinforced by several further parallels which, although not indicating the response people are to make to God or Jesus, nevertheless reflect the status of people in line with their response. The first relates to the status of those who have responded rightly, those who are both the witnesses and those who believe from 43:10, of whom God says οὐκ ἔστιν ὁ ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν μου ἐξαιρούμενος (Isa. 43:13). The Lord asserts that he works and none can turn it back, and in light of the focus on his redemptive work in 43:1–9, the irreversibility of God's redemption is in view. A similar idea of security in God's hand for his people appears in the Johannine assurance that οὐδεὶς δύναται ἀρπάξαι ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ πατρὸς (John 10:29). For those who have failed to respond rightly to God, Isaiah describes their condition as ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις σου καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἀδικίαις σου προέστην σου (Isa. 43:24).⁴⁵ While for John sin is not a prominent theme, he warns that those who fail to respond rightly to him ἀποθανεῖσθε ἐν ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν (8:24). Isaiah provides John with the language for both the security of those who do respond to Jesus, and the dire fate of those who fail to do so.

There is one further connection to explore regarding the metaphorical language of response. In John 6 a distinctive Johannine metaphor occurs where the ideas of eating and drinking are used to flesh out the concept of believing in Jesus.⁴⁶ John 6 is linked to Isaiah through the

44 As well as highlighting the significance of witness and the trial motif in John, Lincoln sees the trial motif in Isaiah 40–55 as a key influence on the narrative of the Fourth Gospel. Lincoln, *Truth on Trial*, 12–13, 22, 38–51.

45 This condemnation, like the call to witness, is addressed to Jacob/Israel (Isa 43:22). The prophetic tradition juxtaposes the call for Israel to fulfil their purpose with condemnation for their failures. While Israel as a nation was called to be God's people, only some responded rightly to God, which does not include those described in 43:24.

46 Menken, 'John 6:51c–58: Eucharist or Christology?', 305; Webster, *Ingesting Jesus*, 3–4. Although there may be a secondary allusion to the Lord's Supper, to read the passage as primarily sacramental overlooks the Isaianic origins of the image, as well as importing later theological ideas. For the sacramental view see Brown, *John*, 1.287; Schnackenburg, *John*, 2.56.

quotation embedded in the middle of the discourse (6:45). The quotation refers to being taught by God (Isa. 54:13), rather than using images of eating or drinking, which suggests that the surrounding imagery is being used to depict a certain quality of relationship with God in the person of Jesus. Isaianic parallels are evident in the imagery, however, as the chapter following after the passage that is quoted begins with a call to come and eat and drink (Isa. 55:1; cf. 44:3). It includes a criticism of those who work for that which does not satisfy (Isa. 55:2), and in the same way Jesus criticises the crowd working for food which perishes (John 6:27). In Isaiah this food is metaphorical, since listening is coordinated with eating (Isa. 55:2). Similarly, in John hearing God is referred to alongside coming to him and so believing (John 6:45). The response conveyed through the imagery of eating and drinking in both instances is to lead to life (Isa. 55:3; John 6:51). Both Isaiah and John use the metaphor of eating and drinking to reflect the life-giving and essential nature of a right response to God or Jesus. Therefore, Isaiah provides a basis not only for the explicit language of response, in believing and witnessing, but also for the Johannine metaphors which illustrate such a response.

While the significance of Isaiah for John, particularly with regard to Christology, has been observed by previous scholars, what has been overlooked is this role of Isaiah in providing language and concepts that John uses to convey how one is to respond to Jesus. There is a nexus of connections in Isaiah 43, which is reflected in the Johannine presentation of Jesus' identity, how to respond to him, and one's status based upon that response. The way that several interrelated areas can all be linked back to Isaiah suggests that an understanding of the Isaianic use of these ideas is vital for a full understanding not only of Johannine Christology, but also of the response for which the Gospel calls. Indeed, the two are intertwined, for the Isaianic language of response which John appropriates is Isaiah's call for response to God, which contributes to the Johannine picture of Jesus as God.

5. The Isaianic Messiah in John

The preceding argument has demonstrated the significance of Isaiah for depicting of Jesus' identity in the Fourth Gospel, as well as for presenting

the required response to him. While the argument began by considering which Old Testament image lies behind John 1:29, the significance of this argument centres on the question of what sort of Messiah Jesus is. The Messiah is a significant concept within John, and notably only John uses *Μεσσίας* alongside the usual *Χριστός* (1:41; 4:25). Whilst on both occasions the terms are equated, there must be a reason for including it. Most likely is that within the early church *Χριστός* rapidly became a proper name for Jesus.⁴⁷ Yet John wants to convey that Jesus is the promised Messiah, and not only that but a particular type of Messiah. This concept would potentially be missed if the reader simply saw *Χριστός* and took it as a name. The reference to *Μεσσίας* makes it clear that *Χριστός* is more than a name. For John intends the reader to believe that Jesus is the *Χριστός*, the Son of God (John 20:31), and he seeks to convey what sort of Messiah Jesus is through this Gospel. Conveying the nature of Jesus' messiahship was necessary as there was a range of messianic conceptions within Second Temple Judaism, as reflected in the Gospel itself.⁴⁸ In this context, John brackets Jesus' public ministry with Isaianic identifiers, beginning with the acclamations of John the Baptist (1:29,34) and closing with the Isaianic quotations in 12:38–40. The wealth and variety of connections between Isaiah and John's Gospel demonstrate the formative role played by Isaiah in John's presentation of Jesus the Messiah. From start to finish Jesus is to be understood in this Isaianic framework, while the nature of Jesus' messiahship shapes the way people are called to respond to him.

5.1 The Messiah as Servant

As John has used Isaiah as the primary framework for understanding and presenting Jesus as Messiah, we must observe what Isaiah contributes to Jesus' identity. While the Messiah in both the Old Testament and other literature is often victorious and reigning, in Isaiah 53 the Servant is not truly apprehended (52:14; 53:1). The Johannine Jesus is similarly misapprehended, and this Isaianic characteristic is linked directly as Isaiah 53:1 is applied to Jesus. The question of who Jesus is pervades

47 Dunn, *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, 338.

48 de Jonge, 'Jewish Expectations'.

this Gospel, yet many misunderstand him (3:1–10, 6:14–15), or reject his claims entirely (7:40–48, 8:59). Isaiah provides the background for a misunderstood Messiah, instead of one who is universally acclaimed.

In Isaiah this lack of recognition leads to suffering for the Servant. He is one who is pierced, crushed and wounded (53:5), oppressed and afflicted (53:7), and cut off from the land of the living (53:8). This final statement indicates the death of the Servant—Motyer points out the violence of the expression ‘cut off’, as well as the way ‘land of the living’ is elsewhere used literally to describe those who are alive (cf. Isa. 38:11).⁴⁹ In light of the cross, Isaiah provided the Gospel writer a theological basis upon which to understand Jesus as suffering and dying, yet vindicated as the Messiah.⁵⁰ John does not stress the suffering of Jesus, but by using figurative language that draws upon Isaiah (lifted up and glorified), the connotations of suffering could be conveyed to an audience familiar with Isaiah.

5.2 The Messiah as God in Person

While the Messianic identity of Jesus in John has been shaped by the figure of the Isaianic Servant, that is not the full extent of Isaianic influence with regard to Jesus’ identity. For while some uses of Isaiah present Jesus as God’s appointed representative, John also appropriates Isaianic language that refers to God himself. The adoption of the Isaianic ‘I am’ as a typical expression of Jesus’ identity carries with it echoes of the God who calls himself ‘I am’. Similarly, the adoption of the title ‘Holy One of God’ co-opts Isaiah’s standard title for God and applies it now to Jesus. Alongside this, Isaianic language of being taught by God, and associated imagery of divine sustenance, attributes a divine role to Jesus. While none of these constitute an explicit claim to divinity, their divine

49 Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 434. While there are other interpretations of this passage, as potentially referring to corporate Israel, or being poetic language describing suffering that does not involve actual death, there are no indications that John understood Isaiah in these ways. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, 171, 177.

50 Linked to the idea of vindication are the connections between the Servant and royal imagery, through the titles he is ascribed. On an identification of the Servant as a royal figure, see Morgenstern, ‘The Suffering Servant’, 411–13; Gentry, ‘The Atonement’: 24; Treat, *The Crucified King*, 70–71. Treat also connects the Servant to a royal figure foreshadowed in Isaiah 1–39. Similar royal imagery is connected with Jesus, notably in John 18–19, further evidence of the alignment of the Isaianic Servant with the Johannine Messiah.

connotations are coherent with Johannine assertions of Jesus' divinity (1:1; 20:28).

5.3 The Messiah in Whom One Must Believe

As more than merely God's appointed servant, but being God himself made flesh, Jesus demands a response. Just as Isaiah has provided the framework for conveying Jesus' identity, so too Isaiah provides the framework for the required response to Jesus. John makes use of Isaianic language that depicts the right response to God himself and applies it to responding to Jesus. In doing so, John confirms Jesus' divine identity, but if Jesus is divine then he also requires a response analogous to the response God requires. The Johannine Messiah seeks propositional belief, the acceptance of the message Jesus brings, which is primarily a declaration of his own identity. Accompanying this is a need for witness, for it is witness that leads to belief. The explicit aim of the Gospel is to evoke belief that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20:31), and for this reason the Gospel itself bears witness. This central concern of John's Gospel is illuminated by understanding the Isaianic origin and significance of both the titles ascribed to Jesus, but also of the language of how one must respond to him.

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