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Williamson, H. G. M.
Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah

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Rather than being content with atomistic approaches to a text, recent scholarship has increasingly seen the value of tracing motifs and their variations as they run through biblical books, and even across book boundaries. Williamson takes up the important but inadequately explored messianic theme, tracing its development and variations through the canonical Isaiah. He sets this unifying thematic study against a counterpoint of redactional analysis, which exploits and builds on his previous work in *The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah's Role in Composition and Redaction* (1994). The current work was composed to serve as the source material for the 1997 Didsbury Lectures at the Nazarene Theological College near Manchester, England.

In his introductory chapter, Williamson sets the foundation of his theme against the broader backdrop of the king, which moves from the minor tones of the human, Davidic king in the earlier chapters of Isaiah to the major key of the divine king later in the book. He goes against much recent scholarship in holding that the former derive most probably from before the exile. Among factors which move interest from the human to the divine realm is the prideful attempt of the former to storm the latter (recalling Genesis 3), and the accompanying anarchy which destroys the exercise of justice and righteousness.

The main body of the book analyzes four thematic variations. The first, "the Ideal King" touches on 9:1-7 (Heb 8:23-9:6, an Isaianic passage in which the royal role to establish equity and righteousness overshadows the importance of the Davidic monarchy in fulfilling the role), 11:1-5 (in which the figure fulfills a judicial role through the critical word, a means more often prophetic than royal), Isaiah 16:4b-5 (a "'maverick' messianic passage" with affinities to 9:7), and 32:1-5 (an Isaianic passage establishing a spectrum of understanding 'righteousness' as both the foundation principle of godly rule and also the goal which it seeks to attain). The passages are seen to be more interested in kingly role than in his identity.

The second variation concerns Immanuel, looking in detail at chapters 6-9. He presents and critiques Buddes' century-old hypothesis that Isaiah 6-8 were an Isaianic

Memoir which originally opened the book. Rather than taking the call narratives of other prophets as a comparison, Williamson finds closer parallels between the calls of Isaiah and of Micaiah (1 Kgs 22) and the literary shape of Amos 7-8. He sees the chief interest in the Immanuel figure being in fulfilling the role of righteous rule within the Davidic dynasty, rather than in identifying any specific individual.

The third variation, the "Servant" is drawn from Deutero-Isaiah. There the original Davidic relationship with God is transferred to the nation of Israel. She will be God's witness and mediator to the world. As a Christian, Williamson brings up the interpretation that Jesus is the servant according to the NT. He defends his view by stating that "Jesus fulfills, but does not thereby exhaust, the prophecy" (p. 53). The theme of justice and righteousness in association with the servant ties his role to that of the king in the first section.

"The one and the many" as found in Third Isaiah is the fourth variation. Here the royal and servant motifs developed earlier are shown to turn the ideals of justice, righteousness and salvation from Israel under the monarchy to the exiled and restored community in its need, and beyond them to the nations. "The prophet applies to the nations the same criteria for entry into God's new community as he does to the people of Israel themselves:... individual faithfulness" (p. 195). The ideal society which is so lacking in the time of Isaiah of Jerusalem and clear through the Exile is thus not abandoned, but still expected and enabled by God's instrument. It is also not chauvinistically restricted to Israel, but will be open to the nations as well.

Williamson has done a great service to students of Scripture. He writes clearly and presents his arguments well. The redaction-critical method which he uses is based on hypothetical reconstructions of the development of the text. This approach will find various degrees of acceptance, and many will make their own proposals. The development of the messianic and royal themes in the book, on the other hand, is not inextricably tied to this reconstruction, and one can appreciate the insight gained from this analysis even if the textual development is questioned. The volume should find its place on the shelves of all theological libraries and should be read by all those who seek to understand the theology of the biblical text.