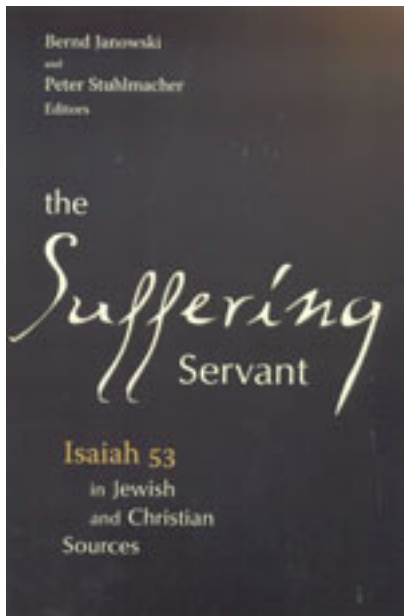


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Janowski, Bernd, and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds.

The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources

Translated by Daniel P. Bailey

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This edited volume arose from a 1991 Tübingen University graduate and faculty seminar under the direction of Martin Hengel. Originally published as *Der leidende Gottesknecht: Jesaja 53 und seine Wirkungsgeschichte mit einer Bibliographie zu Jes 53* (1996), this English translation with updates examines the idea of vicarious suffering in the Fourth Servant Song of Isaiah, 52:13–53:12, according to the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Targumim, patristic, and rabbinic literature.

The book fittingly begins with Hermann Spieckermann’s “The Conception and Prehistory of the Idea of Vicarious Suffering in the Old Testament.” By studying the development of prophet as intercessor, Spieckermann claims that with Isa 53, “Prophetic suffering acquires a new sense” (13). Specifically, the righteous prophet breaks from the notion of individual retribution and prophetic intercession.

The next chapter, Hans-Jürgen Hermisson’s “The Fourth Servant Song in the Context of Second Isaiah,” argues that Isa 53 contains affinity with previous considerations of the prophetic office, but the concept of vicarious punishment of the servant in exchange for salvation qualifies as innovative theology.

In “He Bore Our Sins: Isaiah 53 and the Drama of Taking Another’s Place,” Bernd Janowski addresses the idea of the righteous sufferer as a contradiction of the *Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang*, with the turning point of the passage at Isa 53:11 in the redemptive death of the servant. Janowski finds this act of place-taking as both troubling and liberating for the religious community.

Hengel (with collaboration by the translator, Daniel Bailey), in “The Effective History of Isaiah 53 in the Pre-Christian Period,” studies pre-Christian Jewish treatments of the Fourth Servant Song. After examining the late biblical books of Zechariah and Daniel, pseudepigraphal works, Qumran scrolls, and the LXX, Hengel cautiously summarizes his research by stating, “The expectation of an eschatological suffering savior figure connected with Isaiah 53 cannot therefore be proved to exist with absolute certainty and in a clearly outlined form in pre-Christian Judaism” (140). However, the diversity of texts alluding to a possible Messiah suggests that such an understanding is plausible.

Peter Stuhlmacher’s brief chapter on “Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts” argues that the Christological interpretation of Isa 53 stems from Jesus’ own understanding rather than post-Easter faith. Such a christological understanding is not completely innovative, but it marks a fresh development in early Jewish messianism.

In “The Fourth Servant Song in the New Testament Letters,” Otfried Hofius summarizes the theological appropriation of Isa 53 in a movement from exclusive place-taking within the Hebrew Bible to inclusive place-taking in the New Testament. Hofius describes this change by stating, “Christ takes the place of sinners in such a way that he does not displace them but rather encompasses them as *persons* and affects them in their very being” (173). For Hofius, this inclusive place-taking is the very goal of Christ’s ministry.

Jostein Ådna writes the next chapter on “The Servant of Isaiah 53 as Triumphant and Interceding Messiah: The Reception of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 in the Targum of Isaiah with Special Attention to the Concept of Messiah.” Ådna sees *Targum Jonathan* portray a multifunctioned Messiah as a teacher, temple-builder, and intercessor (but not as a priest). Such a plurality of functions does not arise from a textual pastiche but from a deliberate theological conception of Messiah, somewhat parallel to the New Testament.

Christopher Markschies’s “Jesus Christ as a Man before God: Two Interpretive Models for Isaiah 53 in the Patristic Literature and Their Development” suggests that the church fathers understood Isa 52:13–53:12 as an “exemplary” model, then later as a christological model.

Bailey contributes his own chapter, titled “‘Our Suffering and Crucified Messiah’ (*Dial.* 111.2): Justin Martyr’s Allusions to Isaiah 53 in His *Dialogue with Trypho* with Special Reference to the New Edition of M. Marcovich.” Bailey affirms Marcovich’s analysis of παθητός as an Isaianic allusion, specifically applied to the Χριστός.

In the final chapter, “Isaiah 53 in the *Sefer Hizzuk Emunah* (“Faith Strengthened”) of Rabbi Isaac ben Abraham of Troki,” Stefan Schreiner analyzes Isaac’s polemic against many of the traditional Christian arguments for messianic interpretation, highlighting the impact of religious pluralism that characterizes sixteenth-century Troki. This chapter includes a brief appendix of Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Kimchi on Isa 53.

The book concludes with a classified bibliography, updated to 2004, and indices of primary sources and modern authors.

Overall, the quality of exegesis and attention to text-critical issues is outstanding, though a few of the authors, particularly Hermisson, tend to rely too much on conjectural emendation to smoothen textual difficulties. The chronological sequence from Hebrew Bible to rabbinic literature creates a powerful cumulative effect in reviewing the interpretations of the Fourth Servant Song and the religious communities that have espoused them. Such a diachronic analysis demonstrates the fruitfulness of reception history of a particular passage.

The translation work is excellent, done by an American scholar who studied in Tübingen under some of the very authors of this volume. Bailey includes German glosses for key words that do not translate seamlessly into English. With this noted, the work remains a translation from German, with entire chapters not as focused and direct as one might expect in an original English-language work. This is not so much a criticism but an acknowledgement of the different writing styles.

Unfortunately, the editors devote a disproportionate amount of space to the two essays on patristic interpretation (194 pages, or 42 percent of the total content). Many of the copious footnotes in Markschie’s (added by the translator) are superfluous, and Bailey’s chapter appears too specialized considering the general scope of the book. I suggest that greater attention to early rabbinic interpretation would give a more balanced presentation.

Such a minor criticism does not detract from the quality of the essays in this book. Overall, the work beautifully illustrates that exegesis and understanding develop from a matrix of several factors, including theological presuppositions, religious worldview, and philological sophistication. In compiling this volume, Janowski and Stuhlmacher remind us that biblical scholars of all traditions continue this dialogue of interpretation today.