

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

CULTIC ALLUSIONS IN THE SUFFERING SERVANT POEM: (ISAIAH 52:13–53:12)

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This study investigates the Hebrew cultic allusions in the Suffering Servant Poem (Isa 52:13–53:12) in order to discover the nature or meaning of the suffering of YHWH's Servant. The survey of literature reveals that the background of the Suffering Servant Poem is to be found in the Hebrew cultus. Thus the nature or meaning of the Servant's suffering is determined by a penetrating as well as comprehensive study of the text, specifically from the Hebrew cultic perspective. However, there has never been any careful, comprehensive study of the cultic allusions in the Poem in connection with the Suffering Servant.

This lexical study on the cultic allusions uses lexicographical, text-critical, and contextual investigation, specifically for nine terms and two clauses. The nine terms include מִשְׁחַח, יָהּ, אֱשֶׁם, אֲשָׁם, יִצְדִיק, יִפְגִּיעַ, and the three major sin terms חָטָא, עָוֹן, and פָּשַׁע, and the two clauses עֵוֹן כָּבֵל and נֶשְׂא חָטָא. This study shows that they can be divided into two categories, cultic technical terms and terms that, although not technical cultic terms, can be similarly used in cultic contexts. To the former belong מִשְׁחַח, יָהּ, אֱשֶׁם, אֲשָׁם, two major sin terms חָטָא and עָוֹן, and the two clauses עֵוֹן כָּבֵל and נֶשְׂא חָטָא; to the latter יִצְדִיק, יִפְגִּיעַ, and a major sin term פָּשַׁע.

Not all the terms and clauses in the lexical study will prove to be equally convincing with respect to the main point at issue here. Their cumulative weight, however, must be impressive, especially when all these terms and clauses appear in a single pericope of the Suffering Servant Poem.

Although the sanctuary itself is not explicitly mentioned in the Poem, the Servant of YHWH is portrayed as a cultic sacrificial animal (שָׂה), a cultic expiatory offering (אֲשָׁם), and a cultic priest performing significant cultic activities (יִצְדִיק, יִפְגִּיעַ), to all of which the sin-bearing clauses (עֵוֹן/חָטָא/כָּבֵל עֵוֹן) are closely related.

This lexical study clearly shows: (1) the Hebrew sacrificial cult is the background of the Suffering Servant Poem; (2) the death of the Servant is clearly mentioned, and that as a violent death; and (3) his suffering and death is vicarious and expiatory.

Cultic allusions occur only in the fourth Servant Poem, that is, the Suffering Servant Poem, but not in the other Servant Poems. Although the motif of suffering also appears in the second and third Servant Poems, the suffering there may be considered as part of the mission of the Servant not only as “the covenant of the people” but also as “the light to the nations.” The Suffering Servant Poem clarifies that the suffering is the very means of

the mission of the Servant in world history, which is vividly and intensely portrayed by the cultic allusions, and which is subtly but profoundly described by the term *מִשְׁפָּט* (“justice”) that ironically keeps running throughout the Servant Poems.

This cultic interpretation of the Suffering Servant Poem is supported by the literary analysis of Isaiah 40-55 and especially by the Poem itself, which has a cultic-oriented chiasmic structure. It is thus reasonable to conclude that the author of the Suffering Servant Poem clearly had Hebrew cultic intentions in mind from which he derived the meaning and significance of the Servant’s suffering and death and intended that his readers or hearers employ the vicarious expiatory system of the Hebrew cult as their primary frame of reference. However, we have to recognize that those cultic allusions only provide the means to facilitate a new idea that far transcends all that are cultically alluded to in the great Poem of YHWH’s Suffering Servant. In the Suffering Servant, all the Hebrew cultic images reach their complete transformation and fulfillment in the idea of vicarious expiatory suffering and death.