

**THE IDENTITY AND ROLE OF THE SERVANT
IN ISAIAH 42:1-9: AN EXEGETICAL
AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY**

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Problem

Over the centuries, there has been no consensus among biblical interpreters regarding the meaning of the servant of Isa 42:1-9. This dissertation studies the identity and role of the “servant” together with its relation to the neglected collection of other servant passages in Isaiah.

Method

This study consists of an exegetical and theological analysis of Isa 42. It includes an analysis of those passages in which the servant term is explicitly found in Isa 40-55 as well as other passages (Isa 9, 11, 61, 63) that are linked to the servant motif in Isa 42. Special attention is given to the term “servant” as well as to the structure of Isa 42:1-9 and its relation to the three other servant poems in contrast with the usage of the term “servant” in the rest of Isa 40-55. The dissertation is both exegetical and theological in nature.

Results

Chapter 1 introduces the topic, states the problem of no consensus regarding the identity of the servant in Isa 42:1-9, and provides a literature review of viewpoints regarding the “servant” in Isa 42 and 53. The purpose and justification of this research is given, followed by an outline of the methodology.

Chapter 2 provides an exegesis of Isa 42:1-9, beginning with an overview of various scholars’ structural analyses of chs. 40 to 55 along with my suggested structure of those chapters. A narrower structure focused on Isa 42:1-9 is then provided, again beginning with what various scholars have suggested and then followed by my suggestion of an appropriate structure. Finally, a detailed exegesis of each verse is explored with suggestions of potential interpretations for key words. This chapter reveals two foundational characteristics of the servant: first, he is called (Isa 42:1-4), and second, he is commissioned to save Israel (vv. 5-9).

Chapter 3 explores the intratextual links of Isa 42:1-9 with other texts in the book of Isaiah—particularly with Isa 49:1-13; 50:4-9; and 52:13-53:12 followed by 41:8-9; 42:16-25; 45:1-8; other servant passages in Isa 40-55; and chs. 9, 11, 61, and 63—and how these texts contribute to the interpretation of Isa 42:1-9.

Chapter 4 presents a theological analysis of the main thematic motifs found from the intertextual study: first, the thematic motifs in Isa 42:1-9,

which include servanthood, the character of God revealed in the servant, servant as deliverer, covenant, servant and judgment, God and the future, servant as king and the Exodus motif; second, the thematic motifs in the theology of other Isaianic servant poems; and finally, a theology of the servant in the context of Isa 40-55.

Finally, chapter 5 is the summary and conclusion. It includes application and implications for further study.

Conclusion

In light of the main exegetical investigation of Isa 42:1-9, intratextual analysis with other Isaianic servant poems and additional servant texts in Isaiah, and the examination of theological motifs in the servant texts, it may be stated that the “servant of the Lord” in Isa 42:1-9 is indeed a messianic passage of hope, first to the Israelites, then second, to the people of the NT when the Messiah came, and finally to us as the Messiah will return in the eschaton. The inner-biblical origin of the “servant of the Lord” can be traced back to the Proto-Evangelium (Gen 3:15) and other messianic passages in the OT (Num 24:15-24), and is even seen in the covenant and kingship motifs of king David (2 Sam 7:1-17). Cyrus typologically represents a political deliverer and is a shadow of the Messiah in the period of history shortly after Isaiah (Isa 45:1-6). Isaiah portrays the servant as having characteristics of the Messiah in contrast to the servant as Israel in other Isaianic passages because the prophetic servant brings hope and reveals the ultimate outcome of what the servant is doing for humanity.