

## 5. DOES ISAIAH 9:1-7 SPEAK OF JESUS, AND SO WHAT?

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### Author's Profile

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### Abstract

Isaiah 9:1-7 has been commonly read as referring to Christ till the rise of historical-critical studies. Critical scholars have broadly established that a single historical referent is suggested based on how First Isaiah is structured and its respective context. However, this interpretive strategy has led to little to no progress on reading Isaiah as Christian Scripture and has decidedly opined for an atomistic reading that has scarce attention to Israel's Messiah in the New Testament as alluded in Matt. 4:14-17. This article endeavours to read Isaiah 9:1-7 as Christian Scripture by consolidating the historical and literary significance derived from the Isaianic oeuvre and its allusion(s) in the NT to both identify the referent(s) and its relevance. It will argue that the ultimate referent is Jesus and that its allusion in Matt. 4:14-17 includes and, in part, refers to Christians into the cited Isaianic oracle based on a reader-response approach.



## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Christian interpreters of Isa. 9:1-7<sup>2</sup> (hereafter Isa. 9) have long understood the prophecy as referring only to Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> This interpretation, however, has been challenged since the rise of historical-critical studies, questioning, to state a few, whether such a claim has considered the probability of a historical referent based on the context in which it was written, and how do the surrounding passages in First Isaiah affect the interpretation of Isa. 9. From this approach, however, almost no progress has ensued in reading Isaiah as Christian Scripture albeit with some exceptions by those who struggled.<sup>4</sup> Hence, in this essay, I aim to examine Isa. 9 with an eye on reading it as a Christian in light of how the New Testament (re-)interprets it in Christ while not ignoring historical-critical findings, and ultimately reflect on its implications for Christians today.

This paper proposes that Isa. 9 possesses various possible referents but finds its fulfillment in Christ based on the metalepsis allusion in Matthew 4. However, its fulfillment continues in and through the believers that share, to some extent, the task of the Messiah to bring light in the darkness, which Matthew's gospel unfolds in the teaching sections, in particular, and culminates in the open ending of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was submitted to and modified under the supervision of Dr. Vincent K. H. Ooi with much appreciation. I alone am responsible, however, for my position and errors.

<sup>2</sup> This essay assumes the English verse rendering instead of the Hebrew.

<sup>3</sup> See *Isaiah: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentator*, The Church's Bible, trans. and ed. by Robert Louis Wilken with Angela Russell Christman and Michael J. Hollerich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 120-31.

<sup>4</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *The Struggle to Understand Isaiah as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004). "Christian Scripture" here follows Childs' definition.

the Great Commission. In short, readers are, as Ben Cooper suggests,<sup>5</sup> incorporated into Christ. Undergirding this position is the conviction that the Christian canon and early Christian reading provide more substantive grounds for Christian thinking and living. I will, thus, firstly, investigate the literary context of Isa. 9, and secondly, examine the pericope with a brief discussion on the historical situation alongside a provisional establishment of Christ as the fulfillment of the Isaianic prophecy based on Christopher Seitz's approach. Lastly, I will offer some theological reflections wherein Matt. 4 shall be discussed extensively to prove that Christ is the *chief referent* and how Christian readers are incorporated into the narrative that continues on the similar task of the Messiah, which, to some extent, suggests that Christian readers are *implied referents*.

## Literary Context

The book of Isaiah, in its final form (whether by the author or redactor(s)), is an artistic composition within which congruent motifs cohere.<sup>6</sup> Isa. 9, thus, cannot be treated in isolation from other portions of Isaiah. The structure of the surrounding passages of Isa. 9, however, is disputed, particularly regarding the demarcation of sections. The majority of commentators take Isa. 7:1–9:7 as a section primarily because the narrative of an unfaithful monarch and how God responds

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<sup>5</sup> Ben Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew*, Library of New Testament Studies 490 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Though he does not deal extensively with the targeted passage, its framework will be assumed. For reasons of space, discussing how it is employed here would be impossible.

<sup>6</sup> This paper is aware of the streams of interpretation: one-prophet, three-book and one-book of Isaiah. It assumes the probability of the latter while taking the posture that this will not affect the interpretive task here significantly, and hence any discussion of it is intentionally bypassed. For fuller discussions, see J. Gordon McConville, *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Prophets*, Vol. 4 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 1–10; Rolf Rendtorff, “The Book of Isaiah: A Complex Unity. Synchronic and Diachronic Reading,” in *New Visions of Isaiah*, eds. Roy F. Melugin and Marvin A. Sweeney, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 214 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 32–49.

by promising an ideal monarch is evident.<sup>7</sup> The flow of the preceding pericopes could be organized as such:

- 7:1-9: Isaiah's word to Ahaz regarding the inefficacy of Syria-Ephraim's challenge
- 7:10-25: Isaiah's word to Ahaz regarding the faithlessness of Ahaz
- 8:1-10: Immanuel stands firm against desolation
- 8:11-22: The teaching of Isaiah stands firm amidst persecution<sup>8</sup>

Seitz observes, based on this structure, that one of Isaiah's primary purposes is to contrast Ahaz's failing, faithless kingship with "Immanuel" (because of the parallel structure with 36-39). Admittedly, then, the gloom, distress, and darkness (8:22) that come upon Judah is the result of Ahaz's disobedience. The only hope of Judah's remnant is found in Isa. 9, which is rightly perceived as the climax of this section.<sup>9</sup>

Isa. 9 is a poem<sup>10</sup> that falls into two main parts.<sup>11</sup> The first part focuses on *stating* the "new situation" God will bring about in vv. 1-3;

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<sup>7</sup> See John J. Collins, "The Sign of Immanuel," in *Prophecy and Prophets in Ancient Israel: Proceedings of the Oxford Old Testament Seminar*, ed. John Day (NY: T&T Clark, 2010), 227; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1–39*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 241; Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 81; J. A. Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 80; Christopher R. Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1993), 75; H. G. M. Williamson, *Variations on a Theme: King, Messiah and Servant in the Book of Isaiah*, The Didsbury Lectures 1997 (UK: Paternoster Press, 1998), 30-46. Some earlier proposals argue 6:1-9:6 as an independent section. See Stuart A. Irvine, "The Isaianic *Denkschrift*: Reconsidering an Old Hypothesis," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 104 (1992): 216-31.

<sup>8</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 75-83.

<sup>9</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 241.

<sup>10</sup> Isa. 9:2-6 is where the poetic oracle begins; and v.1 a prose transition. Paul D. Wegner, "What's New in Isaiah 9:1-7?" in *Interpreting Isaiah: Issues and Approaches*, eds. David G. Firth and H. G. M. Williamson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 239.

<sup>11</sup> Adopted from Motyer, *Prophecy*, 98.

and the second centers on *explaining* how God will bring about this new situation in vv.4-7 (based on how each verse begins with י). Although it is more nuanced than described, the two parts could be entitled thus: Creative Deliverance Promised (vv.1-3); Creative Deliverance Explained (vv.4-7). These headings will structure the exegesis below.

## Exegesis of Isaiah 9

### Creative Deliverance Promised

A brief description of the historical situation is in order to elucidate our exegesis. Isa. 9 was situated in the narrative context of the Syro-Ephraimite war (Isa. 7) which threatened the safety of Jerusalem. Ahaz responded to this threat, however, contrary to Isaiah's command to quiet confidence. Nonetheless, God delivers him through the king of Assyria (7:17). Assyria was, however, used by God not only to deliver Jerusalem but also to judge it (7:18-24; 8:8) until God himself intervenes (8:10). Meantime, Israel faces devastating hardships and agony (8:11-22).<sup>12</sup> Although amidst the gloom, glimmers of hope shone in "signs," that is, the names of children (i.e. Shear-jashub, Immanuel, Maher-shalal-hash-baz).<sup>13</sup> But a significant shift comes in 9:1,<sup>14</sup> where God's intervention is starkly luminous.

At the turn of Isa. 9, Judah's judgment ceases to be the looming concern; God's restoration, instead, takes center stage suggesting that the dominant motif is the last word God's grace will

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<sup>12</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 12.

<sup>13</sup> John T. Wills, "Symbolic Names and Theological Themes in the Book of Isaiah," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 23 (2001): 72-92. See also H. G. M. Williamson, "A Sign and a Portent in Isaiah 8.18," in *Studies on the Text and Versions of the Hebrew Bible in Honour of Robert Gordon*, eds. Geoffrey Khan and Diana Lipton, *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 149 (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 77-86.

<sup>14</sup> The controversy regarding verse rendering is complicated beyond the present purpose and does not significantly affect our interpretation. For discussions, see Childs, *Isaiah*, 79; J. A. Emerton, "Some Linguistic and Historical Problems in Isaiah VIII. 23," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 14 (1969): 151-75. The English rendering (following LXX) is valid. Motyer, *Prophecy*, 98.

have in the midst of the darkness. This motif can be observed in the startling modification of names. The former humiliation (cf. 8:22) was to “the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,” but the deliverance in the “latter time” comes upon “the land beyond the Jordon, Galilee of the nations” (ESV).<sup>15</sup> This significant modification is theologically suggestive, highlighting that this salvation brings about a new circumstance in “the land beyond the Jordon, Galilee of the nations,” involving the Gentiles.<sup>16</sup> The contrasting circumstance brought about in the “latter time” furthermore suggests that the “former time” in the context of Isa. 7-8 was the time of Ahaz’s failure, incurring oppression, and the latter time of another king.<sup>17</sup>

Descriptions of what the latter time looks like begin at v.2. Isaiah declares the punctuation of light into the darkness of disobedience of which the people in it will see (אֶת).<sup>18</sup> In Scripture, light denotes God’s presence (42:16; 2 Sam. 22:29)<sup>19</sup>, which so implies here that God’s grace to Judah’s plight is seen in his intervening presence, transforming the totality of Judah’s distress. Instead of humiliation and desolation, God’s salvific work will result in enlarging the nation, “increasing joy for them” (כָּל מִן הַגָּדוֹלָה תִּתְהַנְּהֵרֶת; v.3).<sup>20</sup> In order to help readers engage with this immense joy, the poet likened it to “joy at the harvest” and gladness of victorious soldiers dividing plunder.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> It is discussed whether Isaiah implied historical and geographical instances here. See Hanan Eshel, “Isaiah VIII 23: An Historical-Geographical Analogy,” *Vetus Testamentum* 40 (1990): 104-109.

<sup>16</sup> Motyer, *Prophecy*, 100.

<sup>17</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Although it is in the perfect, Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 242 takes it as “manifestly in the future from the prophet’s point of view;” which he calls, “prophetic perfects.”

<sup>19</sup> Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 242.

<sup>20</sup> How ‘נָ is used is discussed. Most take it to mean “for them” rather than a negation. See Motyer, *Prophecy*, 100; Wegner, “What’s New,” 242; Jan de Waard, *A Handbook on Isaiah*, Textual Criticism and the Translator, Vol. 1 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 42-3.

<sup>21</sup> Wegner, “What’s New,” 242.

## Creative Deliverance Explained

With the new joyous circumstance introduced, the poem unfolds its predication: God's liberation from Assyrian slavery which echoes the language of the exodus ("yoke of his burden," Lev.26:13; Exo.1:11; 2:11; 5:4-5; 6:6-7; "staff for his shoulder," Psa. 81:6; "rod of the oppressor" Exo.3:7; 2 Sam.7:23).<sup>22</sup> Verse 4 combines at least two historical references. In addition to the exodus, it references "the day of Midian" found in Judg. 6-8. Both references are richly significant. The exodus language harkens back to the glorious deliverance while the day of Midian reminds us of Gideon being used to deliver Zebulun and Naphtali, in particular, from oppression (Jdg.6:35). From these references of freedom, the poem brings us to the cessation of war and oppression in v.5 as the second reason for joy. The military boots and garments will be as "fuel for the fire" (ESV; cf. 2:2-4).

God's salvation, however, is no abstract poetic piece; it is realized in a "child," a "son" (cf. Psa. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7),<sup>23</sup> who is given "to us," as v.6 testifies. This son is portrayed as a king who will "create a wondrous new possibility for Judah that is unqualified and unconditional;"<sup>24</sup> one of justice and righteousness (v.7). The name of this son in v.6 has intrigued interpreters with no adequate resolution achieved. The matter is further augmented with the question of prophecy and fulfillment. These issues will be tackled in sequence.

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<sup>22</sup> Matthijs J. de Jong, *Isaiah among the Ancient Near Eastern Prophets: A Comparative Study of the Earliest Stages of the Isaiah Tradition and the Neo-Assyrian Prophecies*, Vetus Testamentum Supplements 117 (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 137. He argues that Isaiah is essentially an anti-Assyrian document. It appears plausible but may be a stretch.

<sup>23</sup> See Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1-39*, Forms of the Old Testament Literature XVI (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 182; J. J. M. Roberts, "Whose Child is This? Reflections on the Speaking Voice in Isaiah 9:5," *Harvard Theological Review* 90 (1997): 115-29.

<sup>24</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 82.

Undergirding the question of the son's name is its background. A stream of scholarship argues that it echoes the form of the coronation of Egyptian kings by attributing them five "throne-names."<sup>25</sup> This stream has been rejected by most<sup>26</sup> but built upon to argue that the name is a "likely ritualized hyperbole." It propounds that "the new king will meet every expectation of the populace and will perform well every responsibility of the royal office."<sup>27</sup> While this view contributes to the discussion, it neglects its significance in Isaiah as a whole. Willis offers a complementary approach, stating that in Isaiah, names are used as symbols to communicate the important themes in the book.<sup>28</sup> Taking the two approaches together offers a way forward towards a more theological reading.<sup>29</sup> The child's name is, thus, not to be interpreted as mere characterization or enthronement, but as the one "inaugurating and maintaining God's ideal for the society of Israel"<sup>30</sup> (cf. 60:17; 62:1-2; 63:18). This can be substantiated, in part, based on how the child's name is to be translated.

Most interpreters divide the name into four pairs, but this is unnecessary. Wegner divides it into "two parallel units, each containing one theophoric element," arguing that it clarifies the "chiastic pattern [that] fits the context well." He renders it as "a wonderful planner (or counselor) [is] the mighty God, the Father of eternity [is] a prince of peace."<sup>31</sup> With this rendering, Wegner implies that the name "*primarily* describe[s] God rather than the human king."<sup>32</sup> This raises the question of whether the name *points to* YHWH or *is* a divine-human king. Choosing between these two options, in my opinion, seems unnecessary. Seitz, for instance, affirms the possibility

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<sup>25</sup> See Oswalt, *Book of Isaiah*, 246.

<sup>26</sup> See Paul D. Wegner, "A Re-Examination of Isaiah IX 1-6," *Vetus Testamentum* 42 (1992): 103-7.

<sup>27</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Willis, "Symbolic Names," 92.

<sup>29</sup> So Childs, *Isaiah*, 80.

<sup>30</sup> Williamson, *Variations*, 35.

<sup>31</sup> Wegner, "What's New," 244-5.

<sup>32</sup> Andrew T. Abernethy and Gregory Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament: Expectations of a Coming King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 91. *Italics mine.*

of Hezekiah as the historical referent of Immanuel and the Davidic king of chapter 9. But he argues that Isaiah intends to set Hezekiah as a “type” which the future king would find his “point of departure.” And “[o]ut of that historical matrix a model for kingship emerges that is filled full in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, Messiah of the nations.”<sup>33</sup> Such Christological epistemology may well lead us to interpret that the Messiah is a human king who possesses the name that points to YHWH *and* attests to his divinity. This position could be further supported based on the meaning of the name and shall be established below.

While Wegner’s approach to see it as one name instead of many is plausible, it beckons an explication that takes each section of the name into consideration. The construction, “Wonderful planner” or “counselor” (צְבָבָלָא), has at least two readings. First, resonances with Isaiah 28:29 can be found, which is used to reference YHWH’s working out his plans wonderfully, disturbing the plans of nations (cf. 8:10; 25:1; 29:14).<sup>34</sup> Second, considering the kingship theme, connections with 11:2 can be observed. The implication derived is that YHWH possesses the ability to counsel good for his nation.<sup>35</sup> As for “mighty God” (רָגְבָוָא), although straightforward, its meaning is elucidated in 10:21, where it tells of God saving a remnant from fierce foes. By way of parallelism, “Father of eternity” (אֵבֶן) portrays YHWH as “the tender, faithful, wise trainer, guardian, and provider of his people”<sup>36</sup> (cf. 63:16; 64:8) that harkens back and adds to the concept of צְבָבָלָא. And, lastly, as Prince of Peace מֶשֶׁרֶשְׁלָוָא, his wonderful plan is to bring about lasting מְשֻׁלָּחָן, one that oppression, injustice and war will be replaced with an abundance of joy and increase of people in justice and righteousness (cf. 9:3-5). Taken together, this name declares God’s creative deliverance from hostile

<sup>33</sup> Seitz, *Isaiah 1–39*, 74-5.

<sup>34</sup> Abernethy and Goswell, 92. צְבָבָלָא is often related to God’s wondrous works, transcending human endeavours. See J. A. Motyer, *Isaiah*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 1999), 102.

<sup>35</sup> C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, Commentary on the Old Testament (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 164.

<sup>36</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 164.

nations, attends to his people with justice, and brings about an unequivocal renewal to the disaster his people inhabit.

A contextual reading, in light of these findings, would affirm the reversal of Israel's plight in the face of their existential enemies and that they need not take up arms since the chosen child will represent God to execute justice and provide peace.<sup>37</sup> A Christian reading, however, as aforementioned, would perceive the layers underlying the density of the name and context. While Seitz's approach provides substantial support to connecting Isaiah 9 with Christ, it is questionable why, in his commentary, he, as far I am aware, does not discuss how the quotation of Isa. 9:1-2 in Matt. 4 establishes the Christological connection (if any). Elsewhere, he asserts that Matthew quotes Isaiah in ways that “pass over or only obliquely draw on seemingly pertinent royal texts,” suggesting that Matthew’s “flirting” with Isa. 9 is insufficient to establish a singular perspective to the Messianic fulfillment.<sup>38</sup> Nonetheless, based on his canonical approach, he is a convinced reader that Isaiah possesses a “reciprocal character between the two testaments” that thus establishes that Christ is the fulfillment of the Isaianic prophecy. That said, though his general take on fulfillment agrees with the church fathers – that the OT requires the NT’s authority of “Newness and finality to complete its own picture of God’s final ways with creation”<sup>39</sup> – I remain baffled at why Seitz does not discuss the significance of the Isaianic quotation in Matt. 4. Hence, to further ground the ultimate referent of Isaiah 9 to Christ and its relevance for Christian readers, it is necessary to engage Matthew 4 extensively, to which I now turn.

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<sup>37</sup> Benjamin Miller, “Is Isaiah an ‘Offensive Liberal’?: International Relations Theory Responds to Isaiah’s Vision of World Order,” in *Isaiah’s Vision of Peace in Biblical and Modern International Relations: Swords into Plowshares*, eds. Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, Culture and Religion in International Relations (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 103-20.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2004), 217.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher R. Seitz, *Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 103-16.

## Theological Reflection

Most NT scholars perceive Matt. 4:14-17 as a transition from a reflection of Israel in the wilderness (4:1-11) to an extensive account of Jesus' ministry. This transition is particularly significant when situated within the historical context. John's arrest by Herod (v.12) sets the stage similar to the condition in Isa. 9, wherein a Gentile ruler oppresses and usurps Israel. Israel's hope was for a Messiah who would deliver them from Gentile occupation. Matthew's reading of Scripture, however, surprises and disturbs common expectations about Israel's Messiah by depicting Jesus' unique kingship. Instead of combating Gentile powers, Israel's Messiah "opens the narrative of God's mercy to embrace the Gentiles."<sup>40</sup> With this link, a provisional claim of Jesus as the fulfillment of Isa. 9 is clear. Matthew, however, does not stop short of simply identifying the Messiah but goes beyond, showing, in part, that the implication lies in how Christ's community is to relate to foreign powers. In his commentary, Brueggemann takes a similar approach and concludes that the way Christians should relate to oppressive powers is by proclaiming the kingdom of heaven like Jesus, thus bringing about the "counterreality" of peace and righteousness.<sup>41</sup> Though insightful, Matthew's quotation and its significance in the gospel are neglected.

Hays observes that Matthew weaves *three* Isaianic quotations together, namely, Isa. 9, 42:1-9, and 60:1. Such interweaving is subtle but significant. In his citation of Isa. 9, Matthew has at least three features that differ from the MT and LXX renderings. First, the MT and LXX read "the people that *walked* in darkness," but Matthew renders "the people that *sat* [καθήμενος] in darkness." This rendering suggests that Matthew is interweaving Isa. 42:7 here wherein this same phrase is used. This can be further substantiated by the catchwords of

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<sup>40</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 175.

<sup>41</sup> Brueggemann, *Isaiah 1-39*, 85.

*light* and *darkness* (cf. Isa. 42:6). Second, in v.16d, Matthew renders, “on them a light ἀνέτειλεν (“has risen”), contrary to the MT and LXX’s rendering – “shine” (ἀνέτειλεν; λάμψει). This same verb (ἀνέτειλεν) is found in Isa. 42:9 as the climactic sentence of the Servant passage. It is clear that in that poem, YHWH purposes to bring about justice through his Servant, which he declares as “new things” (42:9). Interestingly, Isa. 60:1 has this same verb also. The context in Isa. 60 tells of Gentile inclusion into the Messianic kingdom. Third, Matthew describes the people’s condition as “in the region and *shadow of death*” instead of “a land of deep darkness” (MT).<sup>42</sup> Taking this interplay of texts and Matthew’s placement of the quotation into consideration would move us toward a fuller theological interpretation.

The Isaianic prophecies bring together the themes of newness, justice, and Gentile inclusion through a particular agent addressed as “son” or “servant.” Son and servant are frequently used to refer to Israel in relation to YHWH. They denote a relationship of obedience and loyalty. However, Israel’s failure to fulfill its position as son and servant is evident.<sup>43</sup> Matthew’s placement of the Isaianic quotation after Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness asserts that contrary to Israel’s failure in the wilderness, Jesus succeeds as a son and servant in the wilderness as the new Israel. So, although Matthew does not quote at length Isa. 9, 42, or 60, Matthew wants readers to see Christ’s ministry in the whole gospel as fulfilling *these* Isaianic prophecies.<sup>44</sup> Few instances in Matthew will elucidate this point.

The newness Jesus’ ministry brings is *threefold*. Right after the formula quotation, Matthew says that “Jesus began to preach,

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<sup>42</sup> Hays, *Echoes*, 177-9. Resonances to the Psalms are evident. For the present scope, Isaianic prophecies along will be the focus.

<sup>43</sup> Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1–13*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1993), 61-70; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009).

<sup>44</sup> Warren Carter, “Evoking Isaiah: Matthean Soteriology and an Intertextual Reading of Isaiah 7–9 and Matthew 1:23 and 4:15–16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 119 (2000): 503-20.

saying “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (v.17). This phrase has been broadly construed as God coming as king to reign. Since Matthew summarizes Jesus’ proclamation thus, we are to construe that the totality of Jesus’ teaching is about living under God’s reign, which we may pinpoint to justice/peace and Gentile inclusion. The anticipated justice/peace is, however, unlike what oppressed Jews expect (i.e., freedom from foreign rulers) since the kingdom of heaven upsets worldly presuppositions. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, for instance, teaches how justice/peace is to be enacted. Instead of retaliation against evil authorities, Jesus says, “Do not resist the one who is evil” (Matt. 5:39ff) and “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (vv.44). Jesus himself embodied this teaching in his betrayal and crucifixion. The Wonderful Planner and Counsellor here counsels and demonstrates his way of peace.

This peace is, however, more nuanced, extending to include the nations in God’s rule. This theme lends itself to how Isaiah depicted YHWH as the one who counsels/plans peace, who purposed and in his might fulfills, who is from everlasting, and who will inaugurate peace in the nations, and here Matthew shows that Christ embodies them all. This is evident, especially at his resurrection. In Matt. 28:16-20, Jesus declares to now possess “all authority in heaven and on earth,” thus testifying to his divine identity.<sup>45</sup> As a result, Gentiles are included in the peace which God has purposed, to whom the disciples are commissioned to teach (v.19). Those previously excluded from God’s rule would no longer be. Only Christ’s resurrection and his authority could achieve this awesome deed.<sup>46</sup> Reference to the Mighty God (in particular), who delivers his people from their foes as a new exodus, could hardly be missed.

The third aspect of Jesus’ ministry particularly implies an eschatological peace. Hays suggests that Matthew’s purpose in describing the people’s condition as the “*shadow of death*” tells that

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<sup>45</sup> R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 1108.

<sup>46</sup> Richard Beaton, “Isaiah in Matthew’s Gospel,” in *Isaiah in the New Testament*, eds. Steve Moyise and Maarten J. J. Menken (London: T&T Clark, 2005), 68.

Jesus' light "overcomes the power of death" at his resurrection. What Jesus dealt with is not only providing a solution to Israel's oppression but addressing a deeper problem: "bondage to death."<sup>47</sup> These two concerns will be fully dealt with at Christ's second coming, when his reign will know no end, when the Son of David will, as Eusebius states, "consolidate" all the kingdoms under his kingdom.<sup>48</sup> The evil powers of government and death will be eliminated and replaced with the newness Christ realizes at the eschaton.

As for now, Christians are called to participate in enacting God's justice/peace by teaching how to live under God's rule (Matt. 28:19-20) in the face of evil authorities and racial and denominational discords. The open-ended ending of Matthew invites readers to relive the Messiah's story in their own contexts, which could well be described as participating in and carrying on the mission of Jesus.<sup>49</sup> As for the horror of gnawing death and hopelessness which plagues the hearts of many, we are commissioned to comfort them with the coming Son of David, whose might was manifested at his resurrection, will destroy death completely and see to it that a new life under God's rule in peace and righteousness will be actualized (Rev. 21:5). Our rejoicing will then be like victorious soldiers sharing the plunder (Isa. 9:3) at the defeat of Babylon and Death – to use John's words (Rev. 18-21). These, YHWH will do according to his jealousy (קֹנְנָה), contending against everything that touches the object of his love: his people (Deut. 4:23). He will not leave his people under oppressive kings and the power of death; his קֹנְנָה compels him to give his people to the true King and remove all that is adverse.

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<sup>47</sup> Hays, *Echoes*, 179.

<sup>48</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *Commentary on Isaiah*, Ancient Christian Texts, trans. Jonathan J. Armstrong, ed. Joel C. Elowsky (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), 51.

<sup>49</sup> Wendel Sun, "New Testament Theology and World Mission," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, & Current Issues*, eds. Scott N. Callahan & Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019), 33-66.

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