

The Children of God and the Glory That John 1:14 Saw

GORDON D. KIRCHHEVEL
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

After John 1:1-3 described the Word (compare Tg. Isa 45:12) and John 1:4-10 described the light (compare Isa 60:1-2), John 1:11-13 described the unbelievers and believers as perceived in Aramaic tradition related to Isa 53:1-2a, and John 1:14 described the unique and glorious Messiah predicted in the tradition related to Isa 53:2b. He that cometh was identified as Jesus Messiah in John 1:15-17, and v. 18 asserted that the unique Son, the Father's beloved, governed for the unseen God. "Like the sucker" in Isa 53:2a was taken to refer to the believer(s), and the ambiguous simile was interpreted as like a seed sprouting (Mark 4:26-27) and as like a little child (10:15). Aramaic tradition interpreted the sucker as "the righteous," and Rom 1:16-17 argued that God's righteousness is revealed in those who "believe" the "good news," interpreting "faith" in Hab 2:4 in accordance with the faith perceived in Isa 53:1.

Key Words: Isaiah Targum (Aramaic tradition), glory, Messiah, good news (gospel), children of God (believers)

This article briefly compares what John 1:12-13 says about "children of God" with Isa 53:2a and compares the "glory" in v. 2b with the "glory" seen in John 1:14. This is done with the aid of Aramaic tradition, as it is attested in the distinctive Aramaic interpretation (Targum) of Isaiah. The similarities tend to support the hypothesis that John 1:12-14, 18 portrayed the fulfillment of predictions in Aramaic tradition related to Isa 53:1-2. The similes in Isa 53:2a are compared even more briefly with the similes in Mark 10:15; 1 Pet 1:14; 2:2, the metaphors in Mark 9:42; Matt 11:11, 25 and the parables of the kingdom of God in Mark 4:3-8, 26-29.

John 12:38 quoted the Greek version of poetic Isa 53:1.

LXX Isa 53:1

Lord, who believed our testimony (τῆ ἀκοῆ ἡμῶν)?
And to whom was the arm of the Lord revealed?

In this passage John 12:37-38 perceived that people "were not believing" in Jesus, although he had performed so many signs before them. After 12:39–40 quoted Isa 6:10, John 12:41 stated that Isaiah "saw his glory (δόξαν) and spoke about him," raising the question of whether the author perceived Jesus also in Isa 53:2b, which spoke about someone with no "glory" (δόξα in the LXX), and in 52:13.¹ Elements common to John 1:14, 18 and *Tg. Isa 53:2b* (indicated in boldface type) suggest that Jesus was perceived in Isa 53:2b as interpreted in Aramaic tradition. *Tg. Isa 53:2b* raised the possibility of seeing the glory which Isa 52:13 foresaw.

MT Isa 53:2b

(There was) no **form** (רָאָה) to him
and no glory (רָדָה) that we could see
and no **appearance** (רָאָה) that we could desire.²

Phil 2:7-8a

7 but emptied himself, took a servant's **form** (μορφὴν), became in likeness of humans and **in appearance** (σχήματι) was found like a human,
8 humbled himself, became obedient to death, . . .³

1. "He saw his glory" in John 12:41 has been called targumic language by Martin McNamara (*Targum and Testament. Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972] 100). It is not that simple. "Spoke about him" in John 12:41 has been linked to the context of Isa 53:1 by Craig A. Evans (*Word and Glory: On the Exegetical and Theological Background of John's Prologue* [JSNTSup 89; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993] 180). If "the glory of men/humans" in John 12:43 alluded to the "glory" which "men/humans" in Isa 53:2-3 could not see in the person described, that supports Evans' suggestion that "spoke about him" in John 12:41 referred to the words of the Suffering Servant Song in Isa 52:13-53:12. The verb "love" in John 12:43 corresponds in meaning and function to the verb "desire" in Isa 53:2b. "His glory" in John 12:41 has been linked to Isa 6:1; 52:13 in the LXX and vocabulary common to 6:1; 52:13 in both the MT and the LXX has been noted by Evans (*To See and Not Perceive: Isaiah 6.9-10 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* [JSOTSup 64; Sheffield: JSOT, 1989] 133, 215 n. 21). The Targum interpreted the Servant Song messianically, deduced from the similarity of 52:13 to 6:1 that God's glory would be/become the Messiah's glory, and predicted that in 53:2b. When John 8:56 says that Abraham "saw" (εἶδεν) Jesus' day, it means that "he foresaw" it. What 12:41 says Isaiah "foresaw" (εἶδεν), 1:14 says the author saw (εθεασάμεθα, "we saw").

2. The direct object of "see" is either "him" or "it" (masculine "splendor/majesty/glory"), and the direct object of "desire" is either "him" or "it" (masculine "appearance").

3. In Phil 2:6-9 ἀρπαγμόν = שָׁלַל (NRSV: "spoil"), ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν ("he emptied himself") = נִפְשָׁהּ . . . הֵעֲרָהּ (NRSV: "he poured out himself"), μέχρι θανάτου = לְמוֹת ("to death"), and διο = לְכֵן ("therefore") in Isa 53:12. In Phil 2:9 "highly exalted him" (αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν) presumably intended to portray the fulfillment of Isa 52:13. Since Phil 2:6-9 was inspired by the first and last verses of the Servant Song in Hebrew, one can look first to Hebrew Isa 52:13-53:12 to understand the vocabulary in Phil 2:6-9. The

Tg. Isa 53:2b

His appearance (will be) **not** a **common** appearance,
and fear of him (will be) **not** an **ordinary** fear,
and **the glory** (כְּכֹדֵשׁ) **of the Holiness will be/become his glory**,
so that **everyone who sees it** will become wise through him.

John 1:14, 18

14 And the Word **became** flesh and lived among us, and **we saw his glory, glory as of a unique one from Father**, full of grace⁴ and truth.
. . . 18 No one has ever seen God; the **unique** Son, the one in the Father's bosom, he governed.⁵

"My servant" in Isa 52:13 was interpreted as "my anointed servant" (עֲבָדִי מְשִׁיחָא) in the Targum, and *Tg. Isa 53:10* spoke of "the kingdom of their anointed/Messiah." If "the Word was God" (John 1:1) and "the Word became flesh" (Jesus), the glory of the Holiness was/became his glory, in perceived fulfillment of Aramaic tradition. John 1:14, 18 testified that they saw his glory and that Jesus is the Father's unique Son. In 1:11-12 those who received him were those who "believe" in his name.

MT Isa 53:1-2a

1 Who **has believed** our news (לְשִׁמְעֵתָנוּ),⁶
and **on/to** whom **has the arm** of the LORD **been revealed**?

most obvious example is that δούλου (NRSV: "of a slave") in v. 7 corresponds to עֲבָדִי (NRSV "my servant") in Isa 53:11. Less obvious is that the passive participle εὑρεθείς ("was found") in Phil 2:7 corresponds to passive נִמְנָה ("he was numbered") in Isa 53:12. If ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων ("in likeness of humans") interpreted וְאִתּוֹ פְּשָׁעִים ("and with rebels"), then in Phil 2:7a "emptied" and "took" interpreted "poured out" in terms of "form," and in v. 7b "became" and "was found" interpreted "with rebels was numbered" in terms of "appearance." In v. 8 reflexive ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτόν = passive/reflexive נִעְנָה וְהָיָה נִעְנָה ("and he was humbled/humbled himself") in Isa 53:7.

4. "We all" (ἡμεῖς πάντες) in John 1:16-17 may be a clue that the author had in mind the grace perceived in Isa 53:4-6, where "all of us" (כָּלֵנוּ) occurs twice.

5. In the parable of the beloved son the landlord was absent (Mark 12:6), and in John 1:18a; 1 John 4:12 "no one has ever seen God." "The one being in the bosom" in John 1:18b appears to be functionally equivalent to "the beloved" in Mark 1:11; 9:7. A good commentary on John 1:18b is 3:35 ("the Father loves the Son and has put all things in his power").

6. The singular noun translated here as "our news" has the form of a passive participle of the verb "hear" (שָׁמַע). The active participle can denote a "witness," and John 3:11 portrayed Jesus as a witness ("and our testimony you do not receive"). According to 1:6-8 John came for testimony, so that all "might believe" through him.

2 And **he went up** (וַיַּעַל) **like the sucker** (כִּיּוֹנֵק) **before him**⁷
and like the root from dry land.

Mark 10:14-16

14 . . . Let **the little children come to me** . . .

15 I assure you, whoever **does not receive** the kingdom of God⁸
like a little child (ὡς παιδίου = LXX) never enters it.

16 . . . he **took them in his arms** . . . put his hands on them.

Matt 11:25

. . . you hid these things from wise and intelligent (people)
and **you revealed them to infants** (νηπίοις).⁹

Tg. Isa 53:1-2a

1 Who **has believed** this good news of ours, and on/to whom has the
power of the arm/seed (דַּרְעָה) of the might of **the LORD** like this been
revealed? 2 And the righteous will be raised before him, behold, like
sprouts that grow; and like a tree that extends its roots on/to courses
of water, so will **the generations of the Holiness** (תּוֹלְדֵי קוֹדְשׁ)¹⁰ in-
crease in the land that was needing him.

7. Isa 52:14-15 may have likened to an unsightly *person* in v. 14 ("like someone at whom many were astonished . . .") the *nation* (that served the LORD) in v. 15a (compare 2 Chr 29:8). The Targum interpreted the plant-metaphors/similes of Isa 37:31; 53:2a in accordance with 44:1-4 (compare John 3:3-5; 7:37-39). The putative *person*-simile continued in Isa 53:2b. "Like the sucker" is ambiguous, and from that simile 1 Pet 2:2 may have deduced that in order to "grow" believers should desire metaphoric milk "like newborn babies" (ὡς ἀρτιγέννητα βρέφη). Compare "like obedient children" in 1:14.

8. Receiving the kingdom of God in Mark 10:15 is presumably equivalent to hearing and accepting (as correct) "the word" in the parable of the kingdom of God (4:20). In 4:20 "hear" (ἀκούουσιν) and "accept/receive" (παραδέχονται) correspond to "what we heard" (לְשִׁמְעֵתֵנוּ) and "has believed" (הִאֱמִין) in Isa 53:1a.

9. Compare the "little ones" in Matt 18:6, 10, 14. The believers in Mark 9:38-41 were called "little ones" in v. 42 (parallel to Matt 18:6). "Like the little children" in Matt 18:3 corresponds to the interpretation of "like the sucker" from Isa 53:2a as "like a little child" in the Septuagint and in Mark 10:15. According to Matt 11:11 "the littler one in the kingdom of heaven is greater" than anyone who "has been raised (ἐγῆγερται) among those born of women." Matt 11:12 alludes to Isa 42:22 (the Targum mentions "young men" in prisons), and in parallel Luke 16:16 πᾶς εἰς αὐτήν presumably means "everyone in it."

10. "The expression קוֹדְשׁ, referring to person, applies to God, especially when qualified," according to Samson H. Levey (*The Messiah: an Aramaic Interpretation. The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum* [Monographs of the Hebrew Union College 2; New York: Hebrew Union College, 1974] 155 n. 68). It seemed to him in this instance to apply to the Messiah, but that seems unnecessary, if the Targum intended the "generations" to mean something like "crops."

John 1:12-13

12 But as many as received him, he gave **to them power** (ἐξουσίαν) to become **children** (τέκνα) **of God, the ones believing** in his name,
 13 who not from bloods nor from will of flesh nor from will of man but **from God were generated** (ἐκ θεοῦ ἐγεννήθησαν).

The Targum may have perceived in Isa 53:2a the positive answer to the question in v. 1 ("Who has believed our news?"): the believer(s).¹¹ Anyone who interpreted "the generations of the Holiness" in Aramaic tradition as a *subjective* genitive equated the believers to "children of God" (John 1:12-13; 1 John 5:1-2). Believers were generated from the Spirit (John 3:3-8) and were to believe in "the unique Son" (vv. 16-18) perceived in Isa 53:2b.

Since all believers were "begotten/born/produced/generated from God" according to John 1:13, μονογενής in the very next verse can hardly mean "only begotten." It coheres with "not common" and "not ordinary" in *Tg. Isa 53:2b* and may mean "unique." Without this distinctive coherence the similarity of John 1:12-14, 18 to Isa 53:1-2 and related Aramaic tradition might not have been noticed.

Isa 53:1b could be interpreted as implying that God's arm was revealed to some but not others, and according to Mark 4:10-11 Jesus said to the believers, "To you the secret of the kingdom of God has been given, but to those outside all the things come in parables." Mark 4:11-12 has an implicit association of Isa 53:1 and 6:9-10 similar to the explicit one in John 12:38-40. Like the Targum the parable about having "root" and "coming up" (ἀναβαίνοντα) from "good land" (Mark 4:3-8) perceived Isa 53:2a as answering the questions in v. 1 (Mark 4:20). In Mark 4:26-28 "like . . . the seed sprouts" (ὡς . . . ὁ σπόρος βλαστᾷ) interpreted "like the sucker/shoot," and v. 29 predicted that the harvest which had already been predicted in Joel 4:13 (English 3:13) would come "when the grain is ripe" (NRSV).¹²

11. On the date of "the righteous" in *Tg. Isa 53:2* see the work of Bruce D. Chilton (*The Glory of Israel: The Theology and Provenience of the Isaiah Targum* [JSOTSup 23; Sheffield: JSOT, 1982] 93). On the association between the righteous and the Messiah see p. 82.

12. Mark 9:1 and 13:30 may have deduced from Isa 53:1-2 and Joel 4:13 that the harvest would come when the crop which Jesus himself sowed was ripe. Mark 9:1 (Matt 16:28) predicted the coming in Mark 8:38 (Matt 16:27), and Mark 13:30 predicted the coming in 13:26 and the harvest in v. 27. Mark 9:1 predicted that "some" would see what *Tg. Isa 53:10* predicted "the remnant" would see: the kingdom of their anointed/Messiah (compare "his kingdom" in Matt 16:28). In Mark 9:1 "standing" can mean "alive" (compare Aramaic ܩܘܝܢܐ). That Aramaic word occurs in the plural, for example, in *Tg. Isa 26:10*. For an English translation of the Isaiah Targum see the recent one by Bruce D. Chilton (*The Isaiah Targum: Introduction, Translation, Apparatus and Notes* [The Aramaic Bible 11; Wilmington: Glazier, 1987]).

Believers were perceived in Isa 53:1 already by Rom 10:14-17 and possibly by 1:16.

Isa 53:1 (NRSV)

Who **has believed** what we have heard?

And to (ל) whom **has** the arm of the **LORD** been revealed?

Tg. Isa 53:1-2a

1 Who **has believed** this **good news** of ours (ל בסוררתנא דא), and on/to whom **has the power** of the arm of the might of the **LORD** like this **been revealed**? 2 And the righteous will be raised before him, behold, like sprouts that grow;

Rom 1:16-17a

16 For I am not ashamed of **the good news** (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον), for it is **the power of God** for salvation to everyone **believing**, both Jew first and Greek. 17 For God's righteousness in **the believer is revealed** by more and more faith (ἐκ πίστεως εἰς πίστιν);

Mark 1:15

and saying, "The time is fulfilled,

and the kingdom of God has come near;

repent, and **believe the good news** (ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ)."

Rom 10:16 quoted Isa 53:1a in the LXX. Rom 10:15-16 and the Targum perceived the good news of Isa 52:7 in 53:1. Someone who interpreted poetic Isa 53:1 as synonymous parallelism might say that the good news is the power of God to everyone who believes the good news, and that is the core of Rom 1:16. Rom 10:16-17 perceived in Isa 53:1 those who "heard" the gospel/good news which Paul himself was proclaiming among the Gentiles after God revealed his Son in/to him (Gal 1:16). *Tg. Isa 53:2* can be interpreted as calling the believer(s) "the righteous/just," and Occam's razor suggests that Rom 1:17a perceived as growing (in Isa 53:2a?) the same "faith" which Rom 10:16-17 (and 1:16?) perceived in Isa 53:1.

Mark has two accounts of explicit revelation, and both fit Isa 53:1. According to Mark 1:11 Jesus heard a voice revealing that he is the "beloved" Son. According to 9:7 three disciples heard a voice revealing to them that Jesus is the beloved Son. What is common to Mark 1:11 and John 1:33 is that Jesus and John the Baptist *heard revelation* in literal fulfillment of what could be perceived in Isa 53:1. What recipients of the revelation saw according to Mark 9:2-4 was that Jesus

"was transformed" (μετεμορφώθη) from a form that could be perceived as fulfilling Isa 53:2b to one that could be perceived as fulfilling the prediction in related Aramaic tradition, complete with the fear in Mark 9:6. According to parallel Luke 9:32 "they saw his glory." Mark 8:38 predicted that Jesus would come in his Father's glory as the Son who was perceived in Isa 5:26-30.¹³ Mark 10:37 may have expected Jesus to sit/rest in the glory (ܟܝܘܢܐ) predicted in Isa 11:10 ("and his resting-place shall be glory"). In Isa 52:15b Mark 8:27-30 presumably perceived Jesus' disciples receiving and concealing a revelation (compare Matt 16:17), and Mark portrayed Peter as ashamed of what "the LORD desired" in Isa 53:10a (Mark 8:31-33) and advised imitating the one perceived to have poured out himself/his life (יָצַק = ἑαυτὸν/τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ) to death in Isa 53:12 (Mark 8:34-37).¹⁴

The author of John 12:37–43 believed that Isaiah had foreseen Jesus' glory and foretold about him. Evidence offered in this article supports the hypothesis that John 1:14, 18 portrayed Jesus as the glorious person predicted in Aramaic tradition related to Isa 53:2. No claim is made here that a *written* Isaiah Targum existed when John 1:12-14, 18 was written. But "the glory of God" in 12:43 and "his glory" in 1:14; 2:11; 12:41 have more in common with "the glory of the Holiness" and "his glory" predicted in *Tg. Isa* 53:2b than with anything in the MT and/or the LXX. The glorious one was called "anointed/Messiah" in *Tg. Isa* 52:13; 53:10 and "Christ/Messiah/Anointed" in John 1:17. The author of John 1:1-18 did not have historical sources for the prehistorical Word but did have prophetic sources (Isaiah and Aramaic tradition). Even without the helpful Isaiah Targum it is ascertainable that the author of Phil 2:5-9 perceived a metamorphosis of "Christ/Messiah Jesus" from God to servant in Isa 52:13-53:12.

13. G. D. Kirchhevel, "He That Cometh in Mark 1:7 and Matt 24:30," *BBR* 4 (1994) 105-11. *Barn.* 4:3b calls the one who will hasten to come (Isa 5:26) the Lord's "beloved" (5:1). The "inheritance" (κληρονομία) in the parable of the beloved son (Mark 12:7) and in *Barn.* 4:3b coheres dictionally with the "inheritance" (ܟܠܝܢܐ) in *Tg. Isa* 5:1. "The Beloved" in Mark 9:7 (NRSV) corresponds to Isa 5:1 in the LXX, and "my Beloved" in 2 Pet 1:17 (NRSV) corresponds to the MT. There may be allusions to Isa 5:26-30 in 2 Pet 1:10 ("you will never stumble"); 2:1 (the "swift" destruction), 3 ("is not asleep"). The prediction of scoffers in 2 Pet 3:3-4 may have been deduced from the scoffers in Isa 5:18-19. The promise in 2 Pet 3:4, 9 may have been the promise perceived in Isa 5:26-30. *Tg. Isa* 5:1 was apparently thinking of 41:8 when it identified "my beloved" as Israel.

14. The Greek verb "be ashamed of" in Mark 8:38 may have been inspired by the Hebrew idiom "hide face from" in Isa 50:6-7 (compare Mark 8:31-32a) and in Isa 53:3 (compare Mark 8:32b-33).