Isaiah’s Offspring:
Paul’s Isaiah 54:1 Quotation in Galatians 4:27

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Paul’s Isaiah quotation in Gal 4 is ground well worked. Another scholarly contribution is warranted, however, because aspects of Isaianic research over the past several decades, research largely unexamined within Pauline scholarship, may shed light on Paul’s deployment of Isa 54:1 within his allegorical appeal to the Sarah/Hagar narrative. Moreover, Paul’s larger “offspring” theology within Gal 3 and 4 may find its substantial location within the broader cross-currents of Isaiah’s theologizing on the self-same subject matter. In particular, the identification of the “servants” of the Lord as a theme, if not the major theme, of Isaiah 54–66 opens up a dialogue between Isaiah and Paul concerning a theological problem they both share, namely, “Who are the true offspring of Abraham/Zion?” Isaiah recalibrates Abraham’s promised offspring via the emerging figure of the servant of the Lord in the redemptive dynamic of Isa 40–53, and this recalibration leans into the unfolding of the servants as the progeny of the servant’s work. In summary, within an Isaianic frame, Abraham’s offspring are the servant’s offspring.

Key Words: Isaiah, Paul, Galatians, offspring, servant(s), OT in NT, intertextuality

INTRODUCTION

Another investigation of Paul’s Isaiah quotation in Gal 4 makes for a crowded scholarly corner. Over the past two decades, several important and fruitful contributions to this subject have surfaced. These various interlocutors will be engaged in due course, though most of this interaction

is relegated to the footnotes. A pressing question remains then in light of the towering literature on the subject. “Why one more?”

In J. L. Martyn’s magisterial commentary on Galatians, he makes the following programmatic claim: “[Paul’s] own interpretation of this text [Isa 54:1] can be seen only after we have briefly considered it in its original setting.” 2 Implicit within Martyn’s interpretive advice is an understanding that Paul goes his own way with this text, and if readers of Galatians wish to gain a bead on his “going his way” then a hard look at Isaiah’s own contextual sense will make matters clearer. 3 One might reply to Martyn, if Paul does go beyond the letter of his Scriptures, a fact that is difficult to deny despite apologetic attempts to fit Paul into modern, hermeneutical dress, then it is neither here nor there. That Paul is hermeneutically hard-wired in a certain direction when it comes to his Hebrew Bible reading is no new news. 4 Every reader of the Hebrew Scriptures in the first-century world was hermeneutically hard-wired in a certain interpretive direction. 5 Nevertheless, Paul’s understanding of the shared subject matter between the Hebrew Bible and the revelation of God in Jesus Christ makes his particular ontological understanding of the text sui generis when brought into conversation with contemporary voices who also looked for an actualized text. I will return to this matter toward the end of the article.

Martyn’s interpretive advice remains valid. For the contextual location of Isa 54:1 within the prophetic corpus of Isaiah may shed interpretive light on Paul, especially as this pertains to the prophetic shaped lens of Paul’s Torah reading. As Brevard Childs observed some time ago, “In a real sense,

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4. Watson claims, “Isaiah needs Paul as Paul needs Isaiah; yet Isaiah is not subsumed into Paul, for the prophet and the apostle need one another precisely as partners in dialogue” (Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith, 21–22).

Paul is projecting back into the period of Abraham the later theology of the prophets who have begun to depict God’s relationship with Israel as one of sheer grace.6 The one-sided nature of God’s grace on offer in the prophets, for example, Hos 2 and Jer 31:31ff., functions hermeneutically for Paul such that his reading of the Law and Prophets is in communicative and associative cross-referentiality without the localized, hermetically sealed readings typical of modern practice. It is the suggestion of this article that despite very good attempts at following Martyn’s interpretive advice, work is left for a proper hearing of Isa 54:1 in the theological and literary context of Isaiah’s prophetic corpus. This article suggests that Paul’s reading of the Sarah/Hagar narrative through the lens of Isa 54:1 provides a if not the substantial key for understanding the larger “offspring” theology Paul offers in the surrounding context.7 Who are Abraham’s offspring? Such is the pressing question Paul seeks to answer. Isa 54:1 provides Scriptural warrant for Paul’s answer to this question and a hermeneutical key to unlocking Paul’s allegory.

The structure of this article’s argument is straightforward. First, I will examine the canonical location and theological significance of Isa 54:1 within the larger complex of Isaiah’s expansive scope. Special attention will be given to the servant/servants motif so central to the book’s prophetic deposit. The importance of this motif in Isaiah and its neglect in the existing literature on Paul’s use of Isa 54:1 justify this exploration. Second, the article will turn to Paul’s deployment of the text in the context of his larger concern regarding the identity of Abraham’s offspring. These two sections of the structure are not proportionally related to each other. The


7. Paul’s reading of the Genesis narrative through the Isaiah quote is the interpretive direction taken in Willits’ fine work on the subject. Willits’ instincts are affirmed while questions remain about the nodal points of contact both in Isa 54:1’s contextual sense and the theological rationale for Paul’s deployment of it in the allegory. Willits’ eschatological reading of Isa 54:1 again is to be affirmed, but the particular connection between chaps. 54 and 53 are relegated to a footnote (n. 25). In my estimation, the literary and thematic connections between chaps. 54 and 53 and the later servants motif of the rest of the book are crucial for a fuller understanding of the nature of the eschatological anticipation of 54:1 (Willits, “Isa 54,1”). In this regard, Jobes’s comments are on target: “Notice that the verse immediately following Isa 53:2–12 is Isa 54:1. The suffering of the Lord’s servant is followed immediately in Isaiah by the call for the barren one to rejoice. Paul’s citation of Isa 54:1 sets up waves of resonances with Isaiah’s proclamation of the suffering servant and Jerusalem’s future that ripple through the entire probatio of Gal 3:1–431” (“Jerusalem, Our Mother,” 313). Similarly, Douglas J. Moo, Galatians (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013) 308. A fuller exploration of these “waves of resonances” is on offer in this article.
heavy lifting of the article is dedicated to understanding Isa 54:1 within the literary context of Isaiah's final form: the form Paul would have read.8

ISAIAH 54:1 IN ISAIAHIC FRAME: REJOICING WOMEN, PROMISED SEED, AND THE SERVANT'S PROGENY

One of the more promising avenues of Isaianic research is the identification of the נְבֵעִים as central to the thematic development of Isaiah after chap. 53. W. A. M. Beuken's targeted studies on this theme provide the lion's share of exegetical work establishing such.9 The first mention of the plural נְבֵעִים in contrast to the singular נֵבֶעַ of chaps. 40–53 is Isa 54:17. After this first mention, the term is found solely in plural form (Isa 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–15; 66:14). It cannot be said, however, that the term נְבֵעִים is found at every turn in the corpus known as Trito-Isaiah.10 How then can Beuken claim that the נְבֵעִים are the main theme of Trito-Isaiah?11

Beuken's search for a thematic thread is not limited to a concordance approach to linguistic and intertextual phenomena hemmed in by the particularity of one lexeme.12 Two other linguistic terms relate to the same


10. The term Trito-Isaiah is anachronistic given the subject of this study. Nevertheless, the term can be deployed for the sake of a literary marker without the adjoining critical theories of the book’s compositional history.


12. Leonard specifies shared language and lexical markers as the most important feature for identifying intertextual allusions. J. M. Leonard, “Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions:
semantic notion as the עזר and righteousness (קדצ), namely, “seed” (זרע) and “righteous(ness)” (的各种 forms of קדצ). By means of apsioiopsis, a rhetorical device where the absence of a term creates its louder presence, Beuken demonstrates the thematic centrality of the “servants” to 56:9–59:21 and 60:1–63:6, despite the term’s absence in these literary locations. Beuken makes his case for the servants as the main theme of chaps. 56–66 by means of a careful analysis of the other two “accompanying notions.”13 Our attention will return in due course to the semantic interdependence of seed, righteous(ness), and servants, for the main point of the exegetical argument rests here. By way of anticipation, however, the servant sees his seed (זרע) in Isa 53:10, a seed made righteous (קדצ) by the work of the servant (53:11). The righteous offspring of 53:10 is properly identified in the literary unfolding of the book as the עזר.

A full rehearsal of Beuken’s exegetical arguments will take us too far afield. Nevertheless, a few of his more salient insights are worth rehearsing. In the first section, 56:9–63:6, the עזר bears a resemblance to the רבד of Isa 53 in that the servants are righteous (57:1–2), and they suffer under the hand of the wicked. Again, the shared semantic field of righteous(ness), seed, and servants bears materially on the identification of this coherent thematic element in the latter part of Isaiah. The description of the wicked standing against the righteous is noteworthy. In Isa 57:3–4, the metaphor of children and offspring provides a stark counterbalance to the offspring language predicated on the servants. The wicked are הים התשע (57:3), and they are הים התשע (57:4—a thematic link to the introductory and concluding theme of the book in Isa 1 and 66), and הים התשע (57:4).

The wicked offspring of the adulterous woman of 57:3–10 is juxtaposed to the righteous offspring of the servant promised in 53:10. Though most often translated as “vindication,” it is worth observing the use of כד in Isa 54:17, which has its source in YHWH. When the question arises, “Who exactly are these servants?” the confluence of the seed/righteous(ness) motifs again makes its presence known. In anticipation of a contextual hearing of Isa 54:1 for the sake of engaging Paul more fully, Goldingay raises and answers this question: “Who are these servants? Insofar as v. 17b follows on 54:1–17a, they might be the children of the woman that chapter addresses, the disciples of v. 13.”14 The significance of this matter will be returned to in due course. At this point in the argument, it is important to keep before the reader the critical interface of the servants of Isa 54:17, seed/offspring, and righteous(ness), especially as these impinge on the child/offspring motif so central to chap. 54 as a whole.


The contrast between the righteous and the godless presents itself in chap. 59 as well. Iniquity (נאה) and sin (חטא) have separated YHWH from his people (59:1–8). The result of this covenantal fissure is the absence of peace (שלום; 59:8). In the midst of the iniquitous scene emerge those who recognize themselves as such, acknowledge their lack of righteousness, and respond to the prophetic call to repentance (59:9–20). The promised redeemer (נוא) of 59:20 comes to those in Jacob who turn (בוש) from their rebellion (פשמ). The shared imagery of chaps. 40–53’s servant and these righteous figures who emerge as the repentant faithful forges a literary connection between the two.

Beuken observes two of these connections. The third of the so-called “servant songs” ends with a call to obedience to the voice of the servant (50:10). The imagery deployed is the contrast of light and darkness. Light and darkness form the focal point for the lack of righteousness observed by the servants of 59:9 as well. In addition to Beuken’s analysis, one observes light (אור) and justice (צדק) as ingredient terms within the second “servant song,” that is, Isa 49:1–6. On the far side of the servants’ turning from rebellion (59:20) toward the righteousness of YHWH, a covenant is made with these servants that alludes back to the first “servant song” (Isa 42:1). One observes both in 59:21 and 42:1 the Spirit of YHWH (רוחו) placed on the servant (42:1) and the servants (59:21). Moreover, the promise of the covenant made with these servants is a promise whose substance is located in the enduring character of YHWH’s word, a word placed on their mouths and their offspring: יחלש יירבדו ימיו יחלש ימו יחלש ימיו יחלש ימיו יחלש ימיו יחלש ימיו יחלש (Isa 59:21). The promise to servant Jacob and his seed in Isa 44:1–5—“I will pour my spirit upon your offspring”—is actualized in the offspring more properly identified as the servants in the book’s literary development (cf. 43:5; 45:19, 25).

15. Janowski provides three characterizations of the “we” speakers in Isa 53. In paraphrastic form, they are as follows: (1) The consequences of the “we” speakers which they should have borne are placed onto another. (2) The “we” recognize this place-taking and acknowledge their guilt is borne by the servant as their own. (3) In retrospect, the “we” recognize their own guilt and the servant’s innocence. See Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources (trans. Daniel P. Bailey; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 69–70. In his commentary on Isa 40–66, Christopher Seitz identifies the “we” voice as the נידבע who are the ones responding in obedience to the call of the servant (Isa 50:10) and who act as heralds of his work. See Christopher R. Seitz, “The Book of Isaiah 40–66: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in The New Interpreter’s Bible (vol. 6; Nashville: Abingdon, 2001) 465.


18. Koole leans against earlier arguments identifying the addressee as the prophet himself and newer arguments, e.g., Watts, identifying the figure as Cyrus. For Koole, the lexical sharing between this section and the servant songs presses for an understanding of the figure as the servant. Jan L. Koole, Isaiah: Part 3 (Historical Commentary on the Old Testament; Kampen:
What begins to emerge is the unmistakable centrality of the “offspring” theme in Isa 40–66. This literary dynamic trades on the organic relationship between the servant (chaps. 40–53) and the servants (chaps. 54–66). The righteous servant is promised offspring (ֶּרֶז) made righteous by his own work. Spieckermann clarifies, “It is this Suffering Servant of whom God says in the closing part of the song (53:11a–12) . . . will, through his vicarious act as the righteous one (זָכָר), effect righteousness (זָכָר הֵיפִּיל) for the many (םְבּר).” 19 The latter within the literary movement from 53:10–11 are to be identified with the righteous offspring seen by the servant: וַרְעַז רָבִים and link וַרְעַז רָבִים to 53:10–11.

A critical juncture exists between Isa 48 and 49. Isaiah 40–47 focuses on the promise of redemption for Israel, a redemption related to God’s new work through his servant Cyrus (Isa 45). Isaiah 48, on the other hand, addresses the perennial problem of Israel’s history witnessed to in the cyclical patterns of the Deuteronomistic History. Israel’s faithless response to God’s gracious acts of redemption comes to the fore. And questions concerning the servant’s identity become more acute.

Of particular import for the “offspring” theme addressed herein is Isa 48:17–19. YHWH laments the faithlessness and disobedience of the people. If they had listened to his commandments then peace (שלום) and righteousness (זָכָר) would have been theirs. Their offspring would have been as numerous as specks of sand (תֵּאָה וּרְעַז). The echo of Gen 22:17 resonates loudly at this point. Abraham is promised on the far side of his testing that his offspring (וֹרֵעַז) would be like the sand (כָּלַע) on the seashore. Within Isa 40–48, the connection of וּרְעַז to Abraham and his progeny lends support to the Abrahamic referent as is observed in Isa 41:8–10. In this text the prophet identifies Israel/Jacob as the (יִבְרָאֵל עָרֵז) the offspring of Abraham my friend”). The prophetic word of hope in Isa 41:8–10 is to the surety of Abraham’s election both for himself and his offspring, namely, his servant Israel. Nevertheless, Isa 48 leaves the question open regarding the making good on the promise to Abraham concerning his offspring.

The “critical juncture” in chap. 48 referred to above has to do with the “new things” (Isa 48:6–8) YHWH is doing within his redemptive economy to fulfill his promises to Abraham, namely, securing for Abraham and his offspring the blessings promised to Israel yet falsified in Israel’s long and tortured history of covenantal failure. The identity of the servant in Isa 40–55 plays an important role in this redemptive development. To repeat, the servant of Isa 40–48 is Israel/Jacob full stop (41:8–9; 44:1–2; 44:21–22; 45:4; 48:20). In chap. 49, a shift occurs within the literary construal of the servant

Kok Pharos, 1998) 211–14. In light of Beuken’s analysis, the ambiguity between the servant and the servants (his offspring) should not take us by surprise, so much so that pressing for a clear identification of servant or servants is beside the point. The latter are the extension of the former, distinct yet overlapping in identity.

figure to one who is identified with Israel (Isa 49:3) and at the same time has a call to Israel (49:6). YHWH’s covenantal promises to provide a posterity for Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 22) meet resistance in the sinful patterns of God’s elect. Nevertheless, the servant figure emerges after Isa 48 as one who takes on Israel’s identity and mission for the sake of making good on the Abrahamic promises for an offspring properly understood as righteous, an offspring inclusive of foreigners who join themselves to YHWH (56:6).

Isaiah 53:10 is central to the matter at hand. On the far side of the servant’s vicarious work, he is assured that he will see his offspring: יְהֵשׁ אָדָם (וֹתֵן בְּעַדְמוֹ הָאָדָם) (Isa 53:10). The final instance of the singular דבע within the whole of Isaiah is in 53:11. Here the many are made righteous by the knowledge of him: יְהֵשׁ אָדָם (וֹתֵן בְּעַדְמוֹ הָאָדָם). Within the literary context, the offspring of the servant are those made righteous by his knowledge. The Abrahamic promises are reconfigured and actualized via the person and work of Isa 53’s servant figure. The offspring of the servant are set in contradistinction to the offspring of the wicked (Isa 57). The pressing question remains, who are Abraham’s true offspring? Isaiah answers with no clearing of the throat. Abraham’s true progeny are the servant’s offspring.

The semantic connection of seed, righteousness, and servants comes together with force in the fourth “servant song.” But the question remains open at this moment in the prophetic discourse regarding the identity of these offspring. The remainder of the book of Isaiah (chaps. 54–66) has as one of its main concerns to answer this question. As adumbrated already in the work of Beuken, the recurring of the seed and righteousness motifs along with the particular places where דבע is found leaves little room for doubt regarding their identity. Abraham’s offspring are the servants of the servant.


22. Beuk’s clarifies, “In the last text involving the Servant, he is promised that ‘he shall see offspring’ (53:10), but when and how this will happen remains open” (W. A. M. Beuk, “Main Theme,” 67).

23. Paul Hanson observes, “no longer are ‘my servants’ and ‘my chosen’ applied to the entire nation, but they are narrowed to a small circle of faithful in the midst of an Israel whose leaders oppress them; hence the change from collective singular to the plural form of these words” (The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1975] 153; cited in Stromberg, Isaiah after Exile, 81). Hanson and Blenkinsopp (Isaiah 56–66, ad loc) both offer social-historical reconstructions of these figures within Yehud’s postexilic community. While there is much to commend in their work, Beuken’s literary analysis is a more fruitful enterprise for coming to terms with Paul’s reading. Paul
When our attention returns to Isa 54:1 with the “offspring” theology of Isa 40–66 now somewhat before us, its own contribution to and location within this theological nexus is more readily available. At first glance, the shift in imagery from the servant of Isa 53 to the barren woman/wife (Zion) of chap. 54 is stark. Bernard Duhm’s logic for the form-critical independence of the “servant songs” of Isa 40–55 is seemingly upheld by the rough transition from chap. 53 to chap. 54. In fact, Duhm argued, if one lifts Isa 53 from its current location and sets it to the side, then the reader does not experience the contextual whiplash of the current form. For one finds in Isa 52 a thematic emphasis on Zion that flows smoothly into the discourse of Isa 54. Duhm’s reading does not hold up to critical scrutiny, however, because parallel themes are shared between chap. 54 and chap. 53 as well: seed, 53:10, 54:3; the many, 52:14–15, 53:11–12, 54:1; righteousness, 53:11, 54:14; and peace, 53:5, 54:10.24

The shift in imagery between chap. 54 and chap. 53 does not necessitate a shift in subject matter. The barren woman (whose nominal form is seen only here in the latter prophets) is called on to rejoice (54:1). The second colon in this line follows Kugel’s “what is more B” understanding of poetic parallelism and heightens the imagery for poetic effect—from rejoice (colon A) to break forth into singing and cry aloud (colon B).25 The use of metaphor here, as in much of Isaiah, increases the emotional content of the idea under discussion.26 In Isa 54:1–3, the image is the barren woman. In a Western cultural context, barrenness is typically a private malady suffered in isolation and within the confines of one’s family and friends. Within the world of the OT, barrenness carried with it a public, social stigma that was enough to push Sarah to find a remedial route to her barrenness through Hagar. It drove Hannah to the temple to plead with the Lord in a manner that to the uninformed observer seemed like a drunken stupor. Klaus Baltzer claims, “Barrenness is a hard fate in a society where a woman’s dignity is bound up with children.”27 The metaphor of barrenness in 54:1 connotes Zion’s desolation. If Paul Ricoeur is right—metaphors tell

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us something new about reality and are more than rhetorical ornaments—
then the metaphor of the barren woman in Isa 54:1–3 provides fuller insight
into YHWH’s full-orbed and complex self-determination to be God for his
people and to secure a righteous offspring.28 Zion is barren, but YHWH
will provide her with children. The literary contextual location of Isa 54:1
reveals the means by which YHWH will accomplish this.

The cause of the barren woman’s rejoicing is indicated with a com-
parative clause: מְרֹםָּו בְּנֵי שׁוֹפְלָה מְשֻׁפָּלָה אֱלֹהֵי יְרוּשָׁלָיִם
(54:1). The messenger
or oracle formula, “says the Lord,” ends the first verse and likely identifies
54:1 as the thematic head of the entire chapter. The cause of the barren
woman’s rejoicing is the promise of children which beforehand were not
possible. The children of desolation (feminine participle שִׁמְחָה) will be more
than the children of the husbanded. The intertextual link here to Isa 6:11
with its use of the nominal form of the same root is significant. Isaiah’s pro-
phetic commissioning in chap. 6 entails within it the negative promise that
his word will function as the means of deafening and blinding the people
of God (6:9–10).29 His words are the agents by which YHWH will make his
judgment effective on his people. Isaiah asks understandably, “How long,
oh Lord,” after the prophetic bait and switch occurs (6:11). The answer is:
until the cities have no inhabitants, there is no people, and the land lies
waste. The nominal form (שִׁמְחָה) is used here as an adverbial modifier of
the verb “to lie waste.”

יוֹרֵץ קְרָשׁ שִׁמְחָה. In the redemptive development of Isaiah’s larger prophetic corpus,
the faint hope of 6:13b is now actualized in YHWH’s redemptive economy.
There is holy seed. There is new growth. Zion does have children. The
promised destruction of Isa 6 is not allowed the final word. The barren
woman, the children of desolation, those who have fallen under the mighty
hand of God’s judgment are now receiving the gracious promise that their
barrenness is no more. Her single-person tent must give way to a larger
tent able to house an abundance of children, which, once thought lost, are
now promised to her (54:2).

The question of the woman’s identity is rightly asked at this point. The
answer seems straightforward. The women of Isa 54, along with all the
mixed metaphors therein, are Lady Zion or personified Jerusalem.30 This

28. Paul Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning (Fort Worth:

29. Isaiah 6 plays a leading role in the final shape of Isaiah’s canonical form. Williamson
states, “The influence of Isaiah 6 on the rest of the book in all of its main historical and redac-
tional layers was pervasive” (“Isaiah 6,13 and 1,29–31,” in Studies in the Book of Isaiah: Festschrift
Willem A. M. Beuken [ed. J. Van Rutton and M. Vervenne; Leuven: Leuven University Press,
1997] 127); cf. idem, The Book Called Isaiah: Deutero-Isaiah’s Role in Composition and Redaction [Ox-
(Howard: Westminster John Knox, 1996); Rolf Rendtorff, Canon and Theology: Overtures to an

30. Beuken states, “The sequence mother-wife may be illogical but is inspired by Israel’s
history and traditions, by the images that have come to typify the two earliest phases of her
existence, the time of the wandering patriarchs and that of the life in the land” (“Isaiah LIV,” 39).
identification fits well within the thematic context of Isa 40–55, and its detailed attention to Zion and Jerusalem. But it would also seem incumbent on the reader to press beyond this facile identification of Lady Zion as personified Jerusalem to a more concrete identity in light of Isa 54’s literary context. This entails an engagement with the identity of Zion as now understood within the framework of the servant motif in Isa 40–55: the linguistic links between chap. 54 and chap. 53 are observed above. Again, the rejoicing called for in v. 1 is antecedently related to the work of the servant in the previous chapter. To state the matter succinctly, the person and work of the servant makes Lady Zion’s rejoicing possible.

The identification of “your seed” (ךערז) in Isa 54:3 is a crux in this matter. As observed above, in Isa 53:10 the servant is made a promise. He will see his seed and prolong his days.31 It is the vicarious nature of the servant’s work on behalf of Israel that actualizes the forgiveness of God for his people. By the knowledge of him, he will make righteous “the many” (53:11). The term “many” (רומ) is also used in the comparison of 54:1: many more are the sons of destruction. The seed promised to the servant is literally and, more important for Paul’s reading, ontologically related to the seed of the barren woman in Isa 54:1–3. She is given a seed; she is given offspring that were not naturally hers but have been provided for her on the basis of the person and work of another, a surrogate mother, if you will. Zion has children because the servant of the Lord has provided them for Zion by his offering of himself as an אש.32 Zion asked the question in Isa 49:21, “Who has borne me these? I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; from where have these come?” The answer given by the literary association of 54:1–3 with chap. 53 is, “Your children have been given you by the servant.”

An Abrahamic connection appears in Isa 54:3. The language deployed in the patriarchal promises in Gen 28:14 overlaps with Isa 54:3.33 Jacob is promised that his seed will spread out to the north and south and to the east and west and by his seed the whole earth will be blessed. The same verb, ירפ, is used to describe the centrifugal motion of God’s blessing to Abraham and then Jacob’s seed. In Isa 51:1–3, Israel’s election entails within it the purview of the nations and the need for election to move missionally to the nations.34 Election for mission is the means by which forfeited blessings caused by rebellion are overcome. And it is the servant

34. Von Rad claims, “Above all, however, it is impossible to identify the lack of faith and unwillingness of Deutero-Isaiah’s Israel with the willingness, complete self-surrender, and strength of faith of the Servant of the songs” (Old Testament Theology, 2:260). On the missional
in Isa 53:11–12 who is numbered among the rebellious, who bears their transgressions, and makes intercession on their account. From the beginning of Isaiah’s corpus, Israel is identified as a rebellious child who has forfeited her covenantal blessings and denied the vocation her election demanded of her, namely, be a blessing to the nations. In the midst of this dynamic, the servant is identified both as Israel, unquestionably, and an entity other than empirical Israel who embodies for Israel and the nations what Israel could not, or would not, do or be.35

In his act of faithfulness, even unto death, the servant makes the promise to Abraham and Jacob’s seed an actuality in the divine economy.36 Zion, who could not have legitimate children of her own because like Sarah she is barren, is now given children—the many, the seed—as a gift on the basis of the servant’s person and work. But key to this fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchs in Isaiah is the central role the servant plays in reorienting the identity of Lady Zion’s children. Lady Zion’s children, the servants of the servant, are those who have identified themselves in obedience to the identity and vocation of him. As Childs clarifies, “The suffering innocent one of Isa 53 is seen as having his life, in some way, extended and incorporated through his suffering by those who are now designated ‘the servants.’” 37 These servant followers of the servant have recognized in retrospect the redemptive significance of the servant; they act as his heralds and live into the righteousness given to them as gift while they negotiate their existence in the eschatological tension.38

Lady Zion has children now, a righteous offspring, the fulfillment of the patriarchal promises recalibrated through a prophetic lens. This recalibration is of some import as we recognize the servants as the actualization of the promised זרע: an offspring emerging from within the community of Israel yet not identified with Israel simpliciter. Moreover, as observed in 56:1–8, foreigners are included within the servants as an ingredient as aspect of the promised זרע. Stromberg identifies an intertextual link between Isa 54:1 and 66:10–14 having to do with character of Zion’s children. He observes on the basis of this intertextual link, “The promises made to Zion are limited to the servants through their identification as her children in character of the prophets, see Christopher R. Seitz, Figured Out: Typology and Providence in Christian Scripture (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001) 145–58.

36. See Baltzer, Deutero-Isaiah, 437. Childs recognizes the theme of barrenness as an “essential trait” of the patriarchal period but does not want to limit it to this. The theme appears elsewhere outside this period as well (Judg 13:2; 1 Sam 7:5; Childs, Isaiah, 428). Childs’s point is taken, though he does not take into account the importance of the זרע within the Isaianic context and how this relates to the Abrahamic promises, for example, Isa 41:8–10 and 48:17–19.
37. Childs, Isaiah, 430.
The servant's self-offering provides the promised offspring for Lady Zion. These offspring are an extension of the servant's own identity. As we are told in Isa 53:10, they are the "סָוִים הַמְּדָם הַיְּשׁוּב"). This is the positive effect. At the same time, within the literary unfolding of Isaiah's redemptive drama the promises made to Lady Zion are limited to the righteous offspring the servant sees from his own suffering (53:10). In summary, Abraham's offspring are the servant's offspring.

**Paul and Abraham's Offspring: The Hermeneutical Significance of the Isaiah Quotation**

Paul's allegory in Gal 4 is a sore spot within some quarters of the Christian hermeneutical tradition. One can sense from Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians his unstated wish that this pericope, or at least Paul's use of the term *allegory*, would not have been included in the letter. Luther views Paul's allegory as ornamental language that only follows once the substance of the argument has been made on other grounds. If, however, the rhetorical understanding of Galatians has any remaining merit, as expressed in the classic work of Hans Dieter Betz, then the structure of Paul's argument in Galatians places his allegory at a critical juncture, to wit, the final appeal of the letter's *probatio*. For Paul, his allegory is the cymbal crash of his argument, not a melodic bridge moving us from one section of the concerto to the next.

The burden of this article is to take up Martyn's challenge to read Isa 54:1 in its Isaianic context for the sake of illuminating Paul's quotation in Gal 4:27. In other words, the aim of this article is modest and is not targeted at a sweeping account of Paul and the OT or Paul and Isaiah, for that matter. Nevertheless, a few clarifying matters should be stated about method taking into account the mountains of literature on the subject of Paul and the OT. First, I still find Hans Hübner's insistence convincing that Paul's, and for that matter, the whole of the NT's reading of the OT is sui generis when brought into conversation with the social/religious context of Paul and the

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40. Martin Luther comments, "Allegories do not provide solid proof in theology; but, like pictures, they adorn and illustrate a subject. For if Paul had not proved the righteousness of faith against the righteousness of works by more substantial arguments, he would not have accomplished anything with this allegory. But because he has already fortified his case with more solid arguments . . . now, at the end of the argument, he adds allegory as a kind of ornament" (Lectures on Galatians 1535: Chapters 1–4 [LW 26; St. Louis: Concordia, 1963] 435–36).
41. Martyn, who does indeed affirm the letter's reflection of Paul's rhetorical training, warns against placing the letter into a "rhetorical straitjacket." He states, "If we assume, however, that Galatians must conform essentially to the recommendations of the ancient rhetoricians, we will put the letter into a straitjacket, concluding that it is either forensic, deliberative, or epideictic, whereas strong arguments have been advanced that it is none of these" (Galatians, 21). See Starling's helpful summary of the matter and concern to avoid the dominance of one particular rhetorical strategy (*Not My People*, 25).
42. Again, see the collection of essays in Porter and Stanley, eds., *As It Is Written*. 
first century world. There may be formal overlap between, say, Paul and the Midrashim or Paul and the Pesharim (the latter perhaps more than the former). But materially, Paul's reading must be taken as a first-order intellectual activity because of the theological grounds of his hermeneutic. Second, Paul reads the OT in a multitude of fashions ranging from the technical to the ad hoc and illustrative: don't muzzle the ox. A case-by-case approach is better than a one-size-fits-all. This article offers no pan-hermeneutic but does draw attention to interpretive instincts in Paul to read the Law and the Prophets in a reciprocal relationship of mutual interpretation: an interpretive instinct present in the OT itself as has been observed in Isaiah's deployment of the seed theology of Genesis.

Third, I remain unconvinced by various detractors of Paul's "thick" reading of the OT on the basis of limitations in the knowledge of the original readers. The depth of the reader's appreciation of echoes, allusions, and the contextual/associative breadth and depth of Paul's OT reading

43. Commenting on formal comparisons between vetus testamentum in novo receptum and Jewish interlocutors of the Second Temple period, Hans Hübnner concludes, "The conclusion to be drawn from this is that mere comparison of terms, motives, methods of interpretation, etc., in the field of history of religion proves little in the face of content differences, because these differences—and everything depends on this!—are theological differences" ("New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament," in Hebrew Bible/Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation, vol. 1: From Beginnings to the Middle Ages (ed. Magne Sæbø; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996) 237.

44. Ellis's classic work is noteworthy for the attempts at formal comparisons. E. Earle Ellis, Paul's Use of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

45. Watson furthers the point: "Scriptural interpretation does not, therefore, constitute the common field on which Pauline Christianity and non-Christian Jewish theological construction takes place [sic]. Paul's allegiance to Christ displaces him into a different field" (Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith, 529). Watson continues, again helpfully to my mind, to clarify that Paul's hermeneutical starting point does not mean Paul proclaims Christ and not Torah. Rather, Paul is proclaiming Christ by means of proclaiming the Law and the Prophets. The movement between text and Christ is not a shift in subject matter for Paul. Watson's reflections on this subject deserve continued reflection, despite reservations about his reading of particular texts (ibid., 528–29).

46. Moyise's call for a "thick" description of Paul's reading practices heads in the right direction, though, again, Paul's sui generis hermeneutical foundation provides the parameters and expectations regarding the scope of this thickness. Paul is theologically hardwired in a two-way conversation between Scripture and the revelation of God in Christ. Steve Moyise, "Quotations," in As It Is Written: Studying Paul's Use of Scripture (ed. S. E. Porter and C. D. Stanley; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008) 28. See Watsoi's thoughts in the previous note.

47. On the Law and the Prophets as the fundamental grammar of the Hebrew Bible/OT's governing theologic, see Christopher R. Seitz, The Goodly Fellowship of the Prophets: The Achievement of Association in Canon Formation (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009). Seitz, with Stephen Chapman, understands the compositional history of the OT canon not in terms of successive movements, that is, Law then Prophets, but as mutually informing one another in their respective compositional histories, that is, Law and Prophets. On the Hebrew Bible / OT's inner-biblical exegesis, see Bernard M. Levinson, Legal Revision and Religious Renewal in Ancient Israel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); chapter six of Levinson's work contains a valuable annotated bibliography on relevant literature pertaining to inner-biblical exegesis.

48. Starling's otherwise fine work is limited by his reticence to allow Paul's engagement with Scripture to go beyond the purview of his original hearers (Not My People, 38). Starling is following de Boer's criticism of Jobes at this point ("Paul's Quotation," 375).
strike me as largely beside the point. The reasoned and imaginative projection of the religious/social-historical phenomenon of Galatia (Northern/Southern?) or Rome or Corinth is an interesting project in its own right. But to collapse Paul's theological acumen with the rhetorical effects on the hearers is to blur an important distinction between related matters. As Christopher Stanley states, "Their presence reveals the literary capabilities not of the audience, but of Paul himself, whose engagement with the Jewish Scriptures was such that his thinking and mode of expression were shaped and reshaped by the symbolic universe of the Bible and the language of specific passages. Such expressions came so naturally to Paul's mind that he might never have stopped to think about how well they might be understood by his audience."Stanley's comments are on target at this point.

R. T. France made a distinction between "surface meanings" and "bonus meanings" in an article on Matthew's OT reading. The "surface meaning" of the quotation is available to "any intelligent reader," while the "bonus meaning" is accessible to those whose eyes are sharper. France then turns to several quotations in Matthew to demonstrate both the availability of the "surface meaning" and the potential of "bonus meanings" when the Scripture citations invite the reader to what Ehud Ben Zvi in another context calls "re-reading." The "sharper eyes" France speaks of should not be limited to original recipients or the first century world for that matter. The enduring character of the Pauline collection invites continued sharpening of the eyes in dialogue with Paul's primary interlocutor: the OT.

When our attention turns back to Isa 54:1 in Gal 4:27, the "surface" meaning within Paul's allegorical reading is apparent. Sarah and Hagar's offspring represent two distinct Jerusalems. The latter is marked by slavery and is identified with the current Jerusalem (νῦν Ἰερουσαλήμ). The former is free and is the eschatological Jerusalem (ἀνω Ἰερουσαλήμ), the true offspring of Abraham. The two Jerusalems represent the eschatological overlap of the ages. The Isaiah quotation, on this "surface" read, is a prophetic/eschatological affirmation of YHWH's promise to provide barren Sarah with children, the rejoicing this promise elicits, and the contextual identification of this offspring as those marked by faith of/in Jesus Christ. From


50. Stanley, Arguing with Scripture, 48. I will resist the historicist instinct to highlight the importance of the ars memoriae within the Greco-Roman world but will as an aside draw attention to the assumed role memory played in oratorical/rhetorical training, for example, Cicero and Quintilian. In fact, Quintilian identifies aptitude for memory as the "principal sign" teachers are to look for in pupil's with promise: *Ingenii signum in parvis praecipuum memoria est* (Quintilian, *Instituto Oratoria*, 1.3); cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, and Forgetting* (trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 56-92.


an ad sensum perspective, this “surface meaning” is enough for intelligent readers/hearers to appreciate Paul’s appeal to Isaiah and its contextual significance.

The bonus meaning, wherever one might locate this meaning presses the subject matter further. As has been demonstrated in the previous section, the Isaiah quotation itself is caught in the larger cross-current of the prophetic book’s recalibration of the identity of Abraham’s offspring. Missing from the secondary literature on the Isaiah quotation is an attendance to the centrality of the צדקה within the book’s latter quarter, chaps. 54–66.53 What appears on the surface as a loose connection between the Sarah/Hagar narrative of Genesis and the Isaiah quotation is, in fact, a connection present within Isaiah’s own discrete voice on the subject.54 The image of barrenness provides a metaphoric link with Sarah and elevates the evocative character of the matter at hand. But the primary point of contact is not barrenness per se but the identity of Zion’s/Abraham’s (Isa 41) true offspring. Paul is bringing his argument regarding the offspring of Abraham to a close with his allegorical reading of Sarah/Hagar and is pressing the question, “Will the real Zion/Jerusalem and its inhabitants please stand up?” 55

Likewise, Isaiah is concerned to answer the same question regarding Lady Zion and her offspring and does so by developing the organic

53. Di Mattei’s reading of the Isaiah quotation within Paul’s allegory has much to commend it. He notes the connection between Isa 54:1 and Isa 51:1–3 and the promise regarding Abraham’s offspring. Insightfully, he claims, “The author of Deutero-Isaiah, therefore, clearly links the Zion tradition and its eschatological fulfillment to the promises made to the patriarch Abraham! Is this not what the apostle himself has done in his allegorical exposition of Genesis 16–17?” (“Paul’s Allegory,” 117–18). And while di Mattei’s instincts are affirmed, his textured reading of the “offspring” theology of Isaiah does not address Isaiah’s own distinctive understanding of how this “offspring” for Zion and the rejoicing elicited because of it takes place within the divine economy. Isaiah’s own servant/servants development is at the core of this “actualization” of the Abrahamic promises, something this article seeks to address.

54. This prophetic reading of Gen 16 with Isa 54:1 anticipates the later Haftarah liturgical association of these two texts. The evidence is scant, but there is some suggestion that the later Haftarah practices were indebted to a liturgical tradition located before the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. See ibid., 114.

55. I came to N. T. Wright’s handling of this corpus late. A full-fledged engagement with his Atlantic Ocean of a project is beyond my reach at this point. Briefly and cautiously, however, a few comments are in order. Wright does understand Paul’s theological outlook in this section as the reworking of the people of God around the Messiah. “The boundaries of God’s people now consist of the Messiah and his death and resurrection” (N. T. Wright, Paul and the Faithfulness of God (vol. 2; Christian Origins and the Question of God 4; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 851–79, esp. pp. 858. The differences in our handling of the material centers on the material role the OT played for Paul’s “redefinition” of the people of God. While “narrative” or “salvation-history” may be aspects of Paul’s thought, the more basic and central observation seems to be as follows: Paul is seeking to come to terms with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ by coming to terms with his Scriptures, the Scriptures of Israel. Without minimizing the significance of Christ’s unveiling or its hermeneutical significance, Paul’s “redefinition” is a “redefinition” already taking place in the discrete voice of the OT itself. Brevard Childs makes a similar point about the tensions present in Paul’s understanding of the law. These tensions are already felt in the OT itself. Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 544–45.
relationship between the servant (Isa 53) and his righteous offspring (יַעַר), the servants. Abraham's offspring are the servant's offspring within the redemptive development of Isa 40–66. In fact, this particular movement from Israel to servant to servants is part and parcel of the “new thing” announced in Isa 48. That Paul is reading Isaiah eschatologically is no surprise. The particular character of this eschatological reading—the Genesis narrative and the prophetic outlook of Isaiah read in reciprocating fashion around a shared subject matter—clarifies the substance of his eschatological reading. Moreover, this “shared subject matter” is both narrowly and broadly located within the nexus of identifying Zion's true offspring.

Paul is reading Torah through the lens of the Prophets. The Isaiah quotation is a tipping of Paul’s hat in this hermeneutical direction. Though Paul is not quoting Isaiah in Gal 3, this Isaianic frame does perhaps shed light on Paul’s, to say the least, interesting lexical arguments surrounding his distinction or lack thereof between the dative singular σπέρματι and the dative plural σπέρμασιν. If Paul’s arguments are first and foremost linguistic, that is, the singular over against the plural referent of σπέρματος, then problems occur. For the Greek σπέρμα and the Hebrew יַעַר in their singular forms can have a collective referent. Surely, Paul knew and understood this. But his arguments are not first and foremost linguistic but theological and rhetorical. This becomes apparent as Gal 3 progresses and the singular σπέρμα is predicated of those who have identified themselves with Christ: ἀρα τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα ἐστέ (Gal 3:29). A linear movement is present in the logic of Paul from promised seed (3:14) to Christ (3:16) to those incorporated in Christ (3:29).

Paul’s logic is informed by his own hermeneutical posture. This observation is neither denied nor attenuated. Again, we recall the back and forth

56. Wright dismisses exegetes who quickly claim Paul’s reading here is “strange,” exhibit A of the NT’s mishandling of the OT. Wright argues for an “incorporative” understanding of Paul’s linguistic play in 3:19 (Paul and the Faithfulness of God, 869). An incorporative or participationist element works within the larger contextual frame because 3:29 understands the Christian’s identity in Christ as Abraham’s “offspring.” Wright does not engage here the various uses of σπέρμα in chap. 3, opting for the explanatory force of his incorporative reading of 3:19. The logic of Paul, in concert with Isaiah’s “seed” theology, perhaps resists introducing too hastily the incorporative understanding in 3:19. Our incorporation into the offspring of Abraham (3:29) is a derivative of Christ’s identity as Abraham’s singular offspring, the true Israelite. In other words, Paul’s linguistic play in 3:19 remains theological and cannot, on my reading, be remedied by a connotative plural notion of incorporation. At the same time, Paul’s theological reading, again as refracted through an Isaianic frame, is by no means a misreading. Paul simply does not distinguish between the verbal character of the text and its theological referent. Douglas Moo’s engagement of this issue is helpful (Galatians, 229–30).

57. De Boer’s engagement of the linguistic and rhetorical play in this section is useful. Martinus C. de Boer, Galatians: A Commentary (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011) 222–25. Martyn’s suggestion that Paul’s polemical language in this section reveals his intention to deny the teachers their reading of this text is suggestive, though not persuasive (Martyn, Galatians, 346–47).

58. Martyn comments, “It follows, as Paul will say in vv 26–29, that plural offspring of Abraham come into existence only when the human beings are incorporated into Abraham’s singular seed, Christ” (ibid., 340).
dialectic of Scripture and subject matter in Paul's OT reading. Nonetheless, the significant movement within Isaiah of Israel (promise to Abraham's offspring; Isa 41:8–10) to servant (Isa 49:1–6; chap. 53) to servants (53:10–66) overlaps substantially with Paul's own "offspring" theology in Gal 3–4. The singular seed (the servant who is both Israel and distinct from Israel) produces a righteous seed who flow from the righteous effects of the servant's vicarious work.

**CONCLUSION**

No elaborate hermeneutical theory is on offer in this article. This article deals primarily with a scriptural quotation, so the knotty problem of identifying allusions/echoes does not labor the argument: except perhaps with the comments on Gal 3. The hermeneutical matter, then, is straightforward. One, Paul reads the Law from the vantage point of the Prophets in reciprocal and mutually interpreting fashion. Two, Paul reads Isa 54:1 within the framework of the larger "offspring" theology of Isa 40–66 as defined in particular in the relationship of the servant and his righteous offspring, the servants. Three, Paul reads the words of the text in dialectical relationship with his Christian understanding of Scripture's shared subject matter, namely, God's revelation of himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Here is a theological framework of reading much like the early church's appeal to a *regula fidei*.60 Paul's ruled reading is not exhaustive of Isaiah's theological potential, nor does his ruled reading stack the deck, so to speak, so that attention to the text itself becomes superfluous in light of a prefabricated exegetical and theological outcome. Paul is, however, a finely tuned reader of Isa 54:1 and this regardless of whether one accepts Paul's interpretive outcomes.

Can one be sure such an elaborate Isaianic scheme is present in Paul's historical mind? Perhaps not, though his deep familiarity with the Scriptures should not be underestimated and as a historical possibility cannot be ruled out.61 But maybe on final analysis, the location of such a shared and mutually informed reading between Isaiah and Paul is not found in the historical Paul's mind but with the canonical Paul whose writings have been treasured and received as an enduring apostolic word. This apostolic

59. Starling, following Watson, makes the case for Paul's bringing something to Scripture as well as arguing something from Scripture. On this account, Christology/eschatology and the Scriptures themselves are “mutually constitutive” of each other (Starling, *Not My People*, 44–46). Whether or not Paul’s hermeneutic is “story-shaped” or infused by a narrative substructure is another matter. Watson’s reading is more persuasive on this account with his tendency to see Paul engaging Scripture, full stop. The OT history is a narrative, but Paul’s reading of this “narrative” is canonical in nature, the divine word continuing to exert its force on God’s people as a true and exhortative word (Rom 15:3; 1 Cor 10; Watson, *Paul and the Hermeneutics of Faith*, 209 n. 53).


61. See p. page 219 n. 50.
word is not hemmed in by the limitations of religious-historical phenomena or even the limits of a reconstructed historical Paul. Rather, the apostolic word’s kerygmatic force is felt and appreciated when its word is brought into conversation with Israel’s Scriptures, the very Scriptures that gave rise to Paul’s basic theological instincts. But this biblical theological line of inquiry must await another project.