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## The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources

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## REVIEW

Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher, eds., Daniel P. Bailey, trans.,  
*The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), paper, 520 pp.

Reviewed by Edward Kessler, Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian Relations, Cambridge

Most the essays in this collection were delivered as lectures in Tübingen in the 1990s and were translated in 2004, thereby making the volume widely accessible to the English-speaking world. The essays are generally fine examples of German biblical scholarship, each with copious footnotes. The volume tends towards the technical, requiring detailed knowledge of the field, and consequently will be of more interest to the specialist rather than general reader. Nevertheless, because of the popular nature of the theme, a book on the Suffering Servant is likely to result in a wide audience.

Some of the contributions are particularly relevant to the study of Jewish-Christian Relations. Stefan Schreiner, for example, examines the Jewish apologetic response to Christian interpretations in an insightful study of Isaac ben Abraham of Troki's *sefer hizzuk emunah*. Although a Karaite, Isaac's interpretations illustrate the rabbinic emphasis on the Suffering Servant as representing the people of Israel. Schreiner shows that Isaac, a Karaite, had knowledge not only of rabbinic interpretations of Scripture but also a detailed grasp of Christian interpretations of Isaiah 53. A remarkable feature of *sefer hizzuk emunah* is its lack of polemic. Schreiner uncovers not a polemical exchange in 16<sup>th</sup> Poland-Lithuania but rather an intensive and also respectful debate.

Another noteworthy contribution is the paper by eminent scholar, Martin Hengel, who examines pre-Christian interpretations of Isaiah 53. Hengel examines a variety of Greek and Hebrew sources and disagrees with the assumption, common among scholars today, that the passage was unimportant in pre-Christian Jewish interpretation. He makes the convincing argument Jewish interpreters developed the view of a suffering and atoning eschatological messianic figure on the basis of interpretations of Isaiah 53. This, he suggests, provided the context for the Jewish followers of Jesus to appeal to Jewish tradition in their reflection on his atoning death.

Hengel's argument is implicitly opposed by another contributor, Jostein Adna who examines the well-known Targum of Isaiah and suggests, not wholly convincingly in the opinion of this reviewer, that the interpretation offers no evidence of Jewish reaction to Christian exegesis. The contributor acknowledges that the Targum emphasises the theme of a triumphant messiah in the Aramaic translation/interpretation rather than a suffering figure we find in the biblical text. However, Adna cannot find any evidence to suggest this can be traced to an anti-Christian motive.

It is also worth mentioning two essays on patristic interpretations of the Suffering Servant. The first, by Christoph Marksches, looks at a variety of christological and typological interpretations noting that in the early centuries a Jewish framework is maintained by Christian interpretations, with examples taken from Justin Martyr and Aphrahat, but in later centuries the commentators wholly reject the idea that the divine nature of Christ could have suffered. According to

Markschies, this demonstrates that Christian interpreters had become distant from the Jewish environment. The second study by Daniel Bailey examines the role of Isaiah 53 in Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*. Bailey's study provides further evidence in support of Markschies' argument. Justin states that it was largely "Gentiles who believe in the suffering messiah" indicating, in Bailey's view, a historical reality. This not only sheds light on the diversity of Christianity in the second century but also impacts on early Christian-Jewish relations.

A notable feature of both essays on patristic interpretations is the authors' willingness to take seriously the encounter with contemporary Judaism. Whilst it is commonplace for New Testament scholars to take seriously the encounter with Judaism – note the scholarly work on 'Jesus the Jew' and the 'New Perspective on Paul' in the last couple of decades, for example – this is a less common in patristic scholarship. Both Bailey and Markschies are to be commended for taking seriously Jewish exegesis alongside the Christian avoiding the temptation to use Jewish sources as a foil. In the words of Markschies, "Today we can interpret the text properly only by having both Jewish and patristic exegesis as conversation partners..."

In sum, this volume analyses Isaiah 53 in tremendous detail. Since the Suffering Servant plays a unique role in Christian theology, readers should be grateful to the editors.