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THE SUREST LOVE FOR DAVID AND THE NATIONS: ISAIAH 55:3 AND ITS USE IN
ACTS 13:34

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Introduction

Towards the beginning of his first missionary journey, as part of the progressive movement of the gospel to go to the ends of earth (Acts 1:8), the Apostle Paul delivers an impassioned speech to a synagogue at Pisidian (Acts 13:13-41). This address proclaims the person and work of Christ, namely his resurrection from the dead. Instead of declaring a new story, Paul fixes his message to an older one (13:33-35). Amidst two other Old Testament (OT) quotations, Paul declares, “And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.”” (13:34; ESV). Paul is drawing on the prophecy of Isaiah from the LXX (Isa 55:3b).

To properly consider this citation of Isa 55:3b by Paul as recorded in Acts by Luke, this paper will primarily focus on its meaning in Isa 55:1-5. As any exegesis of Isaiah will be affected by one’s view of its compositional unity, I will first attempt to answer the question of its authorship. Next, I will exegete Isa 55:1-5 in the broader framework of the whole work. Considerable attention will be given to interpretive challenges found in vv. 3b-5, namely whose steadfast love is promised in v. 3b, how these promises are applied, and the instrument by which these promises are realized. I will then analyze its usage by Paul in Acts 13:34. I argue that YHWH’s extends life-giving blessings through eternal promises, patterned after the Davidic covenant, to all who come to him by the instrument of the Servant Messiah. Paul, in quoting from Isa 53:1-5, explicitly applies this text to the person and work of Christ, who through his resurrection, fulfills the promises made for David and the nations.

Authorship of Isaiah

The traditional view of Isaianic authorship from both Jewish and Christian interpreters until the last two centuries is that Isaiah, son of Amoz (Isa 1:1), the eighth-century prophet, is the author of the entire book.¹ This Isaiah lived in Jerusalem until at least the death of Sennacherib (37:37-38).² However, starting in the late-eighteenth century, the multi-authorship view of the book of Isaiah gained majority acceptance among critical biblical scholars, including many evangelicals.³ This post-Enlightenment critical methodology “identified distinct sections composed at different times and by different authors.”⁴ The scholarship of Johann Christoph Döderlein, though perhaps influenced by various medieval Jewish scholars, is often recognized as first identifying the supposed distinct origins of Isa 40-66.⁵ The further step of making chs. 56-66, the so-called “Third Isaiah”, a separate composition was taken by Bernhard Duhm in his commentary *Das Buch Jesaia* (1892).⁶ According to modern critical scholars, the Proto-Isaiah of Jerusalem (c. 700 BC) was mostly responsible for chapters 1-39; Deutero-Isaiah, who lived in the Babylonian captivity (586-538 BC) was behind chapters 40-55; and finally, Trito-Isaiah ministered to the post-exilic

¹ Tremper Longman, “Isaiah,” in *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, by Tremper Longman, 2. ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2007), 303.

² John N. Oswalt, “The Implications of an Evangelical View of Scripture for the Authorship of the Book of Isaiah,” in *Bind up the Testimony: Explorations in the Genesis of the Book of Isaiah*, ed. Daniel I. Block and Richard L. Schultz (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2015), 284.

³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 17.

⁴ Joseph Blenkinsopp, ed., *Isaiah 40-55: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 1st ed., AB vol. 19A (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 42.

⁵ Döderlein’s proposal was widely accepted and proliferated by Wilhelm Gesenius’s three-volume commentary, *Der Prophet Jesaia* (1821). Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 42. However, the medieval Jewish scholar Abraham Ibn Ezra, is thought to have hinted at these disparate origins of chapters 40-66 centuries before Döderlein. Yet, Tremper Longman III argues that Ibn Ezra’s commentary on 54:4-5 shows that he considered the book the product of only a single author. Longman, “Isaiah,” 303n1.

⁶ Duhm was also the first to isolate as a separate composition the four Servant Songs in the second half of the book (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12).

community from 538 BC onwards and is accountable for chapters 56-66.⁷ Isaiah's prophecy is then left to be a composite of several authors over a long period of time.

Analysis of Composition

To begin with, with respect to external data, there is no manuscript evidence for anything but a *united* Isaiah. The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa^a) from the second century, recovered at Qumran, contains all sixty-six chapters of the book in one single manuscript and shows no apparent break between chapters 39 and 40 as well as 55 and 56.⁸ Further still, there is no extant mss. suggesting that Isaiah was anything beyond a unified, single work. As such, this section will focus on two internal issues related to its authorship: questions of unity, and New Testament usage.

⁷ It should be noted that there is wide diversity in respect to how many authors, and to what degree the genius of its composition is to be understood as *chronological* or *anthological*. On the first point, what is genuinely considered to be the work of Isaiah the prophet is thought in modern scholarship to be much smaller than chs. 1-39. For instance, chs. 34 and 35 are thought to be the work of Deutero-Isaiah, given stylistic similarities. Additionally, chs. 24-27 are believed to be dated to 500 BC given an apocalyptic style. Otto Kaiser follows this framework and therefore, conclusively states that Proto-Isaiah is not even "an original literary unit." See Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, trans. John Bowden, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Pr, 1983), 1. As such, the titles of "First Isaiah" (Proto-Isaiah), "Second Isaiah" (Deutero-Isaiah), and "Third Isaiah" (Trito-Isaiah), are still held more for convenience versus current assumption by scholarship of distinct authorship and date. In agreement, Baltzer asserts "the tripartite division of the book of Isaiah ... is no longer unquestionably accepted in research." Klaus Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, ed. Peter Machinist, trans. Margaret Kohl, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 1. On the second point, contrary to the traditional chronological view of multi-authorship, the anthological view, which is currently more popular, suggests an original core of Isaiah that has been present at all stages, receiving editorial adjustments, reflecting, and extending the original spirit of the historic prophet of Isaiah. For a summary of differing views, see J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Nottingham, England: IVP Academic, 2009), 32; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 23-28; Longman, "Isaiah," 303-11.

⁸ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 31; G. K. Beale, "A Specific Problem Confronting the Authority of the Bible: Should the New Testament's Claim That the Prophet Isaiah Wrote the Whole Book of Isaiah Be Taken at Face Value?," in *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority*, by G.K. Beale, 1. pr. (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 2008), 125; Longman, "Isaiah," 307; H. G. M. Williamson, "Isaiah," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012), 364-78.

Questions of Unity

What is one to make of the unity of Isaiah or lack thereof? Critics point often to the differences in their vocabulary and style, theological emphases, and historical situation as precluding any possibility of authorial unity between the two broad sections.⁹ Therefore, it is valuable to briefly examine each issue in kind, giving additional attention to the topic of prophecy under the historic situation.

First, there appears to be distinct literary styles between chs. 1-39 and 40-66, with the second half of the book often described as more poetic and impassioned, especially the pericope of our concern, Isa 55:1-5.¹⁰ Furthermore, others point to vocabulary that only occurs after chapter 40.¹¹ However, though certainly the varied sections of Isaiah contain their own emphases and vocabulary, including even in the first section of Isaiah, there is a broad degree of intertextual unity. As one example, the phrase “the Holy One of Israel” (קִדּוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל) is repeated in both sections of the book (13 times in 1-39; 16 times in 40-66).¹²

Second, there is some difficulty surrounding theological and thematic differences between the sections. For example, Isaiah 1-39 is said to focus on God’s glory while Isaiah 40-66 emphasizes his universal dominion. As another instance, the messianic king in the first section is

⁹ Richard L. Schultz, “How Many Isaiahs Were There and What Does It Matter?: Prophetic Inspiration in Recent Evangelical Scholarship,” in *Evangelicals and Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguélez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 161.

¹⁰ For instance, Isaiah 40-66 often repeats various words such as “awake” (cf. 51:9), “I, even I” (cf. 51:12), and “comfort” (cf. 40:1).

¹¹ See as an example for someone who argues against unity, S.R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 238–42. The main thrust of Driver’s analysis is to show that Isa 40-66 is “very different from that of [proto-]Isaiah.”

¹² This phrase is used 34 times in the OT but is used only 7 other times outside of the book of Isaiah (2 Kgs 19:22; Pss 71:22; 78:41; 89:18; Jer 50:29; 51:5; Ezk 39:7). As other examples, Israel is described as “blind” (29:18; 42:16; 43:8; 56:10) and “deaf” (29:18; 42:18-19). For an extensive treatment of the similarities between the two sections, see Jewish Scholar Rachel Margalioth’s definitive work, *The Indivisible Isaiah: Evidence for the Single Authorship of the Prophetic Book* (New York: Yeshiva University, 1964). Summarizing Margalioth’s findings, Longman identifies fifteen different words or phrases unique to Isaiah that occur in both halves of the book, Longman, “Isaiah,” 306.

replaced by the servant of the Lord (cf. 9:6-7; 49:1-6).¹³ In some respects, this view is correct in that different sections carry with it different emphases and thematic threads. Nevertheless, there is still broad theological and thematic unity knitted throughout Isaiah. For example, one commentator sees the central theme of the book relates to the *nature and destiny of the people of God*, observed clearly in the following exposition of Isa 55:1-5.¹⁴

Finally, in respect to historical context or setting, one of the main arguments for reconsidering authorship is that chapters 40-66 address an audience already in exile in Babylon (48:20), rather than his original audience in Israel.¹⁵ A subsection of this argument is the nature of prophecy within Isaiah. Scholars argue that the introduction of prophecy concerning Cyrus, the Persian king, in the second half of the book (44:28; 45:1) is wholly indicative of the later historical setting of Deutero-Isaiah, and therefore, the separation of authorship between “First” and “Second” Isaiah. The prophecy then must be *vaticinium ex eventu* (“prophecy after the event”). For some, this view is buttressed by underlying naturalistic presuppositions that deny the possibility of *predictive* prophecy given the necessity for supernatural orchestration. Yet for others, the question rather revolves around the *purpose* of the prophecy, arguing that prophets “never made specific predictions so far in advance.”¹⁶ That is, the mention of Cyrus would have no relevance to an

¹³ Longman, “Isaiah,” 304.

¹⁴ Oswalt makes much of this theme showing how it unites the various sections of the book. For instance, he sees the guiding question of the book as “how can a sinful, corrupt people become the servants of God?” Chs. 1-6 therefore set forth the problem, chs 7-39 show the inaction of the people, chs 40-48 answer the problem of motivation showing the love of YHWH for the people, chs.49-55 show how Israel’s servanthood will be achieved, and finally, chs. 56-66 climax with the revelation of God’s glory through the people. As such, there is one unified thematic thread knitted throughout all the supposed disparate sections. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 21. See also Christopher R. Seitz, “Isaiah 1-66: Making Sense of the Whole,” in *Reading and Preaching the Book of Isaiah* (Fortress Press, 1988), 105–26. Seitz who does not make a determination on the source of this unity argues for a similar theme: “the drama of God and Zion unfolds as we walk through the chapters, all sixty-six, of the Book of Isaiah.” (122)

¹⁵ Robert B. Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets*, Paperback ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2009), 14.

¹⁶ Schultz, “How Many Isaiahs,” 162. However, name-prediction is not unknown in the Bible (1 Kings 13:2; Acts 9:12).

eighth century audience and therefore Isaiah should not be portrayed as “a clairvoyant of the future.”¹⁷ Therefore, the prediction must be made to a contemporary exilic audience by Deutero-Isaiah or so the argument goes.

In response to these final assertions, several things can be said. (1) It can be maintained that the Cyrus poem in Isa 44:24-28 is to be understood as foretelling events.¹⁸ (2) Even more, to understand the broad thematic unity of the book, Isaiah necessarily brings to his contemporary audience the fuller story, relevant to both them and future exiles. The message is that no matter the dire nature of their forthcoming circumstances, including that of exile, YHWH is still sovereign over history. The very nature of the message found in Isa 1-39 then “demands the materials found in chs. 40-66 be included for the sake of completeness and validity of Isaiah’s message.”¹⁹ This is especially evident in this prediction of Cyrus. The purpose of the chapters surrounding Isaiah 44 and 45 is to show YHWH is greater than human idols and is the only God.²⁰ Hence the prediction of Cyrus’s conquest of Babylon “would serve as a powerful example” of this polemic which would otherwise be offset if the predication occurred *vaticinium ex eventu*.²¹ (3) Finally, it is difficult to understand why a contemporary exilic Deutero-Isaiah would mention only the name Cyrus, without also revealing “more detailed descriptions of Babylon if he would want his historiography to have credibility.”²²

¹⁷ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, OTL (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 3–4. Contrary to Childs, though the occurrence of addressing a non-contemporary audience is unusual, it is not unheard of, even in the biblical witness (cf. Ezk 37-48; Dan 7-11; Zech 8-13).

¹⁸ See John Halsey Wood, “Oswald T. Allis and the Question of Isaianic Authorship,” *JETS* 48.2 (2005): 254. This can be seen as the poem is situated in a context that is trying to assert the character of YHWH over other gods. There is movement within the poem from the past to the present and even the future event of Cyrus.

¹⁹ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 27.

²⁰ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 321.

²¹ Schultz, “How Many Isaiahs,” 163.

²² Ronald E. Manahan, “The Cyrus Notations of Deutero-Isaiah,” *Grace Journal* 11.3 (1970): 32.

As a result of this evident unity between the sections, over the last few decades, the “pendulum of specialist opinion [has swung] rapidly away from the older emphasis on differences within the Isaianic literature and more towards the great unities that bind it all together.”²³ This newfound approach is known as “canonical interpretation.”²⁴ Though this shift is in many respects welcomed as it recognizes that Isaiah’s writings are not accidental or incoherent, it still fails to accept or even satisfactorily explain an underlying compositional unity.²⁵ Accordingly, the most striking argument for the unity of its composition is the *present form of the book*.²⁶ Despite the many theories describing multiple authors and the untold number of editors and redactors, there is still no clear hypothesis to how the book came to exist in the present form with such literary coherence. Based on the above, this paper recognizes a literary unity naturally borne out of a single author.

Attestation in the New Testament

The final compositional issue this paper will explore is the use of Isaiah in the New Testament. According to G.K. Beale, the New Testament evidence emphatically attests to the single authorship of the person of Isaiah.²⁷ Beale convincingly shows that the NT witness does not

²³ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 20.

²⁴ Childs, *Isaiah*, 3. Childs defines *canon* not to mean merely addressing its formal scope, but “including the quality of the theological testimony identified with the prophet Isaiah.”

²⁵ See for an attempt to explain the present form of the book, William Lee Holladay, *Isaiah, Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1987). Holladay, a self-professed Christian, makes an attempt to reconcile an orthodox view of Scripture with a multi-author perspective, though importantly, arguing for a *broad unity* in Scripture.

²⁶ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 19.

²⁷ Beale, “A Specific Problem,” 125–33. Beale analyzes Isaianic quotes in the NT (cf. Matt 3:3, quoting Isa 40:3; Matt 8:17, quoting Isa 53:4; Matt 12:17, introducing a quotation of Isa 42:1–4), and concludes that references in the NT (in addition to extra-biblical literature) are attributed to a *personal* prophet Isaiah (i.e., not just prophecies). Longman notes that Isaiah is cited by name about twenty times in the New Testament. See Longman, “Isaiah,” 307.

only quote Isaiah prophecy but make references to Isaiah the *person*.²⁸ Even more, these references often contain value judgements to God's authority as contained in Isaiah's work. For instance, Jesus quotes Isaiah in Matt 15:17 to condemn the Pharisees, stating, "*Well* did Isaiah prophecy of you, when he said" (emphasis mine; see also Mark 7:6). Therefore, the authority of the message is tied by Jesus (and other NT witnesses), to the authority of the messenger, in this case, the eighth century prophet Isaiah.²⁹

Authorship Conclusion

As such, the following two deductions can be made. First, given the evidence of literary and compositional unity found in Isaiah, and on its undivided NT attestation, a multi-authorial view of Isaiah's composition cannot be maintained without severely undermining biblical authority. For evangelicals, the destabilizing effect of such a view would not only threaten the academic towers of biblical scholarship but the pews of local churches. Compositional unity is more than just an academic or theoretical issue but has large bearing for how Christians at large approach and trust in God's word. Second, for the purposes of this paper, any exposition of Isa 55:1-5 must be understood not only in the context of chs. 40-66, but the whole book – in its themes, motifs, and biblical theology. Failure to do so would constitute a failure to exegete. Therefore, this paper will proceed placing this pericope in the larger context of the prophecy of Isaiah, "the son of Amoz." (Isa 1:1)

²⁸ Beale, "A Specific Problem," 133–34. For instance, "Isaiah son of Amoz"; "what was spoke through Isaiah the prophet"; [he] accurately knew all future events", etc.

²⁹ For more examples, see Beale, "A Specific Problem," 135. Additionally, according to Beale's examination of the contention that there existed a stylistic convention in Ancient Hellenism or Judaism to which a literary work would attribute to authors what they did not write, he finds no support for this practice.

Exposition of Isaiah 55:1-5

As a fitting conclusion to Isaiah 40-55, Isaiah 55 invites all to participate in the blessings of a covenant that is patterned after a life-giving feast. Previously, YHWH had announced his intention to restore Zion through the work of Cyrus (Isa 44:23-45:8) and his special servant (Isa 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). Where Israel as God's servant had previously failed (41:8; 42:19; 43:10; 44:1-2; 44:21-22), YHWH now calls his people to return.³⁰ Isaiah 55:1-5 is then aptly depicted as a joyful response to what has come before, especially considering the "suffering servant's substitutionary suffering (instead of the people, excluding them) and representative vindication (including the people)."³¹ In our text, the speaker issues a series of great invitations in the form of imperatives. Still, whether this is a voice of the Near Eastern water vendor or the invitation of Lady Wisdom (Prov 9:1-6) makes no large difference to the invitation, as the underlying call of Isa 55:1-5 is from YHWH.³² Further still, whether the audience is primarily a future remnant, the *telos* of Isaiah is the restoration of Zion that is good news for all nations (Isa 55:5).

³⁰ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 124.

³¹ Knut Heim, "The (God-) Forsaken King of Psalm 89," in *King and Messiah in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John Day, JSOTSup 270 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 310n43. Heim points out how few scholars ever consider the contextual relationship between Isa. 54-55 to the rest of the book, namely because Isa 52:12-53:12 has been identified as a servant song, and following critics like the aforementioned B. Duhm, has been excluded from consideration.

³² There is some ambiguity for who is speaking – whether the prophet speaks for YHWH or whether YHWH speaks directly. Yet in v.3 the speaker is clearly YHWH. For more discussion, see John E. Goldingay and David Frank Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, ICC (London: T & T Clark, 2006), 367. See also for various interpretations of a (1) market vender in Proverbs 9:1-6, (2) an Ugaritic call to a banquet, or even a (3) king's call to a banquet at the new year, Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*. NICOT. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans 1984, 574; Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 364; Simone Paganini, "Who Speaks in Isaiah 55.1? Notes on the Communicative Structure in Isaiah 55," *JSOT* 30.1 (2005): 83–92.

A Great Invitation

Turning to our text, v. 1 opens with the Hebrew interjection וָהִי, which can elsewhere be translated as “woe!”. Though some commentators suggest that this word contains a sense of grief, as seen in other parts of Isaiah (cf. Isa 28:1; 31:1), in the immediate context of this section and the imperatives, this word is better understood as an introductory injective particle - “Listen up!”³³ There is a sense of urgency and importance with what follows. First, for the one who is thirsts (צָמָא), God calls them to *come* to the waters (לָכֹךְ לַמַּיִם). Considering this encouragement in the placement of Isaiah as a whole, we see the Spirit of God associated with the *quenching* of the land (32:15; 44:3).³⁴ So too with his people. This water here is also to be understood as primarily spiritual. For those who have “no money,” the prophet calls in consecutive imperatives the hearers to “come” (לָכֹךְ), “buy” (שָׁכַרְו), and “eat” (וְאָכְלוּ). This is in a sense a paradoxical call – how can you buy something for which you have no money? In the next statement, the writer answers the question by repeating the call to “come” (וּלְכֹךְ) and “buy” (שָׁכַרְו) but now with the clarification, “without price”. Not only necessities like *water* but luxuries like “wine” (יַיִן) and “milk” (חֶלֶב). The freeness of the invitation is not indicative of its quality – this spiritual gift is especially *rich*.

The spiritual riches offered “without price” in v. 1 are amplified by the question in v. 2 – “why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” The first part could be translated “weight out silver” (תִּשְׁקֹלוּ כֶסֶף), This is paralleled in the second part of the verse with “your labor” (וְיִגְעֵכֶם) which could be translated as *toil*. There is a heightened incredulity – why spend your money on *nothing* and why would you work for *nothing*? The answer: you would *not*. Scholars who follow the hypothesis of “Deutero-Isaiah” are “hard-

³³ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 435; Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 374.

³⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, 435.

pressed to make this passage fit into the supposed historical setting of the exile.”³⁵ The writer counters the human condition to slave away at futility (“labor for that which does not satisfy”) by the paralleling calls of “listen” (שִׁמְעוּ), “eat” (וְאָכְלוּ), and “delight” (וְתִתְעַנְּגוּ). The soul used here and v. 3 is נַפְשִׁי, is used not to refer to some Platonic category, distinguishing between a lesser material body and elevated immaterial spirit, but rather speaks to the spiritual reality of life that is to the whole person. The whole person is to *delight* in “rich food.” (Isa 55:2b) There is a necessary attitudinal response.

The heightening call of participation via consecutive imperatives, to “incline your ear” (הִטְאָה אָזְנוֹכֶם), “come to me” (אֵלַי וּלְכוּ), and “hear” (שִׁמְעוּ), culminates in v. 3a with the reason, “so that your soul shall live” (וְתִחְיֶה נַפְשְׁכֶם). The feast imagery that began the first verse, slowly transforms into a personal relationship with YHWH which involves feasting on his word (cf. Isa 55:10-11). The invitation is then to be understood as a call to be in the presence of YHWH, as evident by the modifier אֵלַי (to me, 55:2-3 [2x]).

The Content of the Invitation

The verse transitions to a new proclamation, which is the object of the invitation of vv. 1-3a, and what the people have been called to hear in vv. 2 and 3a.³⁶ After the series of imperatives, in verse 3b, YHWH tells what he will *do*, and promises to make an everlasting covenant for them:

וְאֶכְרְתָה לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם
חֲסִידֵי דָוִד הַנֶּאֱמָנִים

And I will make with you (pl.) an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David

³⁵ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, 436. The critical view that this text is imploring exiles to not invest in the material riches of Babylon but instead, inviting them to wait until they return home for greater spiritual satisfaction is too limited. Though Isaiah is imagining the exile, Isaiah is also speaking to the “perennial condition of the human heart in all historical settings.”

³⁶ Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1969), 283.

The only mention of David in Isa 40-66 occurs here in which many of the themes are recapitulated, but the house of David is a large concern of Isa 1-39.³⁷ YHWH offers “to cut” (כָּרַת) an everlasting covenant “with you (pl.)”. Unlike Jeremiah, Isaiah does not speak explicitly of a *new* covenant but rather an eternal covenant that is related to the Davidic covenant.³⁸ This covenant is most likely the same “covenant of peace” found in 54:10.³⁹ The difference in name is due to its difference in context. David is mentioned in 55:3b, causing one to make a connection to the Davidic covenant found in 2 Sam 7:13. This covenant in Isaiah 55:3b can be described as at least typologically related to the Davidic covenant.

There are however three key interpretative issues that this paper will consider in succession, which are important to determining the meaning of Isa 55:3b and the passage: (1) the identity of דָּוִד as an objective genitive or subjective genitive, (2) to what extent is the Davidic covenant democratized, (3) and, finally, the identities of David, the witness, and you in vv. 4-5.

Objective Genitive or Subjective Genitive: חסדי דָּוִד

The first interpretative challenge centers on the ambiguity of the expression *hasdê dawid*, “steadfast love of/for David”.⁴⁰ Prior to an article by André Caquot in 1965, the unanimous

³⁷ This will be subject to greater exploration below.

³⁸ David V. Christensen, “The Lamblike Servant: Exodus Typology and the Death of Jesus in the Gospel of John” PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2021): 74. The phrase “everlasting covenant” or “eternal covenant” occurs six times in the OT (Isa 55:3; 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5; Ezek 16:60; 37:26). G.K. Beale argues that it refers to the “new, eternal relationship that God will have with his eschatological people at the end-time exodus and final restoration of sin’s captivity” G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2011), 321n11.

³⁹ Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40-66 : An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, NAC (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), “Invitation To Participate in God’s Provisions in Covenant”; Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God’s Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT 23 (Downers Grove, Ill: Apollos/InterVarsity Press, 2007), 161. Williamson notes that the “covenant of peace” (וְבְרִית שְׁלוֹמִי) is mentioned in several other OT texts (Num 25:12; Ezek 34:25; 37:26-27) and all have the common motif of the cessation of divine wrath. But positively, it can be understood as the sum and introduction of covenant blessings.

⁴⁰ The construct phrase חֲסֵדֵי דָּוִד appears only twice in the Hebrew Bible – here in Isa 55:3 and 2 Chron 6:42 (לְחֲסֵדֵי דָּוִד).

scholarly opinion was that the construct form Isa 55:3 was an *objective genitive* – “my steadfast, sure love *for* David”.⁴¹ David would then be the recipient of this covenantal love, rather than the subject of the acts of covenant kindness and love. Caquot was the first to suggest it ought to be parsed as a *subjective genitive* – “David’s steadfast, sure love.”⁴² In other words, the faithful kindnesses that were performed *by* him, the subject.

Which rendering is correct? In respect to external evidence, the ancient versions of this text outside the Hebrew Bible offer no definitive evidence.⁴³ The exegetical choice from a grammatical perspective is also multifaceted.⁴⁴ In the broader biblical witness, when the word חֶסֶד “steadfast love of” is in a construct relationship with another noun it is “usually the agent or subject of the action.”⁴⁵ For instance in Ps. 89:1, חֶסֶד יְהוָה, “steadfast love of YHWH”, with YHWH being the noun, follows this pattern. With respect to חֶסֶד, though the plural of *hesed* occurs eighteen times in the Hebrew Bible, only two are considered objective. Moreover, out of 228 occurrences of the singular of *hesed*, only six can be read as objective (Ps 5:8; Ezra 7:28; 9:9; Neh 13:22b; Ps 144:2; Jonah 2:9). Based on the statistical force of this grammatical data, many opt for the subjective

⁴¹ For those who hold the objective genitive view, see Walter C Jr Kaiser, “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David: Isaiah 55:3,” *JSOT* 14.45 (1989): 91; H. G. M. Williamson, “The Sure Mercies of David’: Subjective or Objective Genitive?,” *JSS* 23.1 (1978): 31–49; Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 372; Baltzer, *Deutero-Isaiah*, 470; Motyer, *Isaiah*, 388; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 370. Note the diversity between critical and conservative scholars along this issue.

⁴² For those who hold the subjective genitive view, see André Caquot, “Les ‘Graces de David’: A Propos d’Isaie 55/3b,” *Sem* 15 (1965): 45–59; W. A. M. Beuken, “Isa. 55, 3–5: The Reinterpretation of David,” *Bijdragen* 35.1 (1974): 49–64; Peter J. Gentry, “Rethinking the ‘Sure Mercies of David’ in Isaiah 55:3,” *WTJ* 69 (2007): 279–304. In his argument, Caquot specifically appealed to (1) various ancient versions by which he argued that out of the Vulgate, Septuagint, Peshitta, and Targum, only the Vulgate was ambiguous to a subjective understanding and (2), the grammar as we will discuss.

⁴³ Caquot’s original contention is that the subjective translation of חֶסֶד דָּוִד is absolute in the LXX, Peshitta, and Targum, and only ambiguous in the Vulgate. However, H. G. M. Williamson shows that the LXX probably supports the objective genitive, while the Vulgate and Targum reflect the ambiguity of the original Hebrew, with only the Peshitta possibly being interpreted as subjective genitive. Gentry, “Rethinking the ‘Sure Mercies of David’ in Isaiah 55:3,” 280; Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 372.

⁴⁴ The parallel passage of 2 Chr. 6:42 (לְחֶסֶד דָּוִד) provides no guidance as it can be used to support both depictions.

⁴⁵ Smith, *Isaiah 40-66 : An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, “Invitation to Participate in God’s Provisions and Covenant.”

genitive rendering of Isa 55:3b.⁴⁶ However, as demonstrated, even if it is less common, both the singular and plural can still plausibly support *both* positions.⁴⁷ Williamson further observes that “in every text which precedes Isa. lv. 3 in date, the one who exercises *hsdym* is God, and not man.”⁴⁸ As such, there is legitimate grammatical reasoning for an objective genitive parsing. Therefore, in evaluating whether the genitive should be understood subjectively or objectively, we agree with one scholar who concluded “the context of Isa 55:3 must be decisive.”⁴⁹

To that end, Walter Kaiser Jr., a proponent for the objective genitive interpretation, bases much of his position not only in the context of Isaiah but also in the broader biblical witness, namely in Deuteronomic theology and the Psalms. Kaiser incorporates the work of Walter Brueggemann, who argues that the text of Isaiah “has a clear movement from beginning to end” in four sections in Isaiah 55 that show a cohesion of YHWH’s faithful work.⁵⁰ These sections contain themes that are likely informed by Deuteronomic motifs: (1) life comes through YHWH’s loyalty to David (cf. 2 Sam 7:15-16)⁵¹, (2) human response to this invitation is to repent (cf. 1 Sam 7:3, 1 Kgs 8:33)⁵², (3) reliability of the divine word in history, and (4) blessings replace curses

⁴⁶ See Gentry, “Rethinking the ‘Sure Mercies of David’ in Isaiah 55:3,” 281. He writes, “linguistic usage demands, then, that the first notion to enter the mind of the native reader is to construe the free member as subject. That the free member in Isa 55:3 and 2 Chr 6:42 is human and not divine is an interesting point that does not necessarily support construing the free member as object.”

⁴⁷ See for further examples, Williamson, “‘The Sure Mercies of David,’” 37–40.

⁴⁸ Williamson, “‘The Sure Mercies of David,’” 36. See also David J. A. Clines, ed., “דָּחַן,” in *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 277–81. Most instances of דָּחַן are in the context of YHWH to humans (cf. Ex 15:13; Num 14:18; Isa 63:7; Jer 31:3).

⁴⁹ Johnathan F. Harris, “‘I Will Give You’ What? And Whose? A Christological Interpretation of Isaiah 55:3 in Acts 13:34,” *BBR* 31.3 (2021): 371.

⁵⁰ For instance, Brueggemann sees Isaiah as outlined: (1) vv. 1-5, A Divine Invitation to Spiritual Life, (2) vv. 6-9, The Response of the People to Return to the LORD, (3) vv. 10-11, The Reliability of the Divine Word, and (4) vv. 12-13, The Transformation of Nature from that same life-giving Word. See Walter Brueggemann, “Isaiah 55 and Deuteronomic Theology,” *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 80.2 (1968): 193-194; Kaiser, “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 92.

⁵¹ Kaiser, “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 92. As Kaiser writes, these promises were “sure”, not only in Isa 55:3b and 2 Sam 7:16, but also in 1 Kgs 8:26, 1 Chron 17:23, and 2 Chron 1:9.

⁵² Debra T. Dyk, “Isaiah 55:1-5: Participation in the Davidic Promises through Identification with New Servant Israel” PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary (2020): 62. As Dyk points, the prayer of David in 2 Sam 7:18-19 in response to what God has done, further signifies that David knows his weaknesses and imperfections

(Lev 26; Deut 28).⁵³ These intertextual links between Isaiah 55 and Deuteronomic verses, showing YHWH's work in history, can also be seen in Psalm 89 which contains paralleled themes and the significant words of חֶסֶד, דָּוִד, and בְּרִית.⁵⁴ Psalm 89 is in fact the “key text” in explaining the expression of God's love seen in his covenant with David.⁵⁵ God's promises to David are central to both the history of God's people, Psalm 89, and here in Isaiah 55:3b.⁵⁶

The syntactical arrangement of the two phrases in Isa 55:3b in apposition, with vv. 4-5 explication, further support that is God's חֶסֶד to David in view. YHWH, who has exercised steadfast love to his servant David, will also exercise steadfast love to all who participate in the “everlasting covenant.” Given this emphasis on God's *action* in Isa 55:1-5, we therefore settle on the traditional view of an objective genitive parsing, though we value the cogent biblical arguments of Caquot and Gentry.⁵⁷ We do especially well to take seriously the contention that objective genitive reading may lessen the potential messianic thrust of this pericope as some who hold to a

with the question – “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?” The oracle is not focused on David's faithfulness, at least from his point of view, but God's faithfulness (2 Sam 7:24-29).

⁵³ Kaiser, “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 92–93.

⁵⁴ Kaiser points out that in addition to 2 Sam 7, Ps 89 and Isa 55 employ many of the same words, at the very least pulling from similar tradition: “repeatedly Psalm 89 affirms the promise of grace to David with such words as: *hasdê* YHWH, 'Yahweh's promises of grace' (v. 2); *emunah* 'your faithfulness' (v. 3); *berît* 'covenant' (v. 4); *nišba* 'tî, 'I have sworn' (v. 4); *we'emūnātî wehasdî*, 'my faithfulness and my grace' (v. 25); *hasdî ûberîtî*, 'my grace and my covenant' (v. 29); *hasdî*, 'my grace' (v. 34); *be'emūnātî*, 'my faithfulness' (v. 34); *berîtî*, 'my covenant' (v. 35); *nišba* 'tî, 'I have sworn' (v. 36); *berît*, 'covenant' (v. 40); *ḥāsādekā ḥārīṣōnīm*, 'your former promises of grace' (v. 50); and *nišba* 'tā leḏāwīd be'emūnāteḳā 'which you have sworn to David in your faithfulness' (v. 50).” See Kaiser, “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 93–94. Additionally, according to Heim, “The (God-) Forsaken King of Psalm 89,” 307, both texts (1) deal with the same theme of the restoration of the Davidic covenant, both support petitions for YHWH's saving intervention (cf. Ps 89:7-14; Isa 55:9-11), (3) both texts employ like words that are elsewhere as demonstrated above, (4) both speaking of the “steadfast and sure love to David”, as it is echoed in Ps 89, 2, 25, and 50, and is central to both, finally (5) both speak of an everlasting covenant.

⁵⁵ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 388.

⁵⁶ This is true even with the absence of the expressed Davidic promise of heir in Isa 55:1-5. See Heim, “The (God-) Forsaken King of Psalm 89,” 309. Heim summarizes this argument: the lack of reference that “the divine promises that a Davidic representative should always sit upon the Jerusalem throne and rule over the other nations” means that these promises no longer apply to the Davidic dynasty. Against this argument, Heim helpfully dismisses in pp. 306-316. To summarize, just because the heir for the Davidic dynasty is absent, does not mean the Davidic dynasty is excluded given reasons we will explore below.

⁵⁷ For a helpful explanation of how 2 Sam 7 could be used as arguing for a subjective genitive understanding of Isa 55:3b, against our expressed view, see Gentry, “Rethinking the ‘Sure Mercies of David’ in Isaiah 55:3,” 282–92.

subjective genitive rendering caution.⁵⁸ Therefore, it is important when responding to the next interpretive test, to be able to explain how our objective rendering does not *democratize* God’s faithful actions in a sense that would *misappropriate* the Davidic covenant or even worse, exclude the Davidic dynasty from the future of God’s people.

Democratization of the Davidic Covenant

As such, a second interpretative challenge relates to how the everlasting covenant of David is applied to the plural “you” (אַתָּה) in 55:3b. Starting with the OT theology of Gerhard von Rad, and Otto Eissfeldt soon after, a consensus view developed on *how* the objective genitive, “sure love for David”, is applied in its context. Gerhard von Rad emphasizes that Isaiah 55:1-5 does not explicitly sustain the Davidic promises that there will always be a son of David on the throne of Jerusalem (it is notably absent).⁵⁹ According to von Rad, this is because a dramatic shift has occurred. It is now for “Israel that the promises made to David are to be realized.”⁶⁰ The steadfast love which “the prophecy of Nathan conferred on David and his house are now promised to Israel.”⁶¹ It is therefore a democratization of the “old David tradition” which involves a *bold* reinterpretation.⁶² Or as Claus Westermann observes, “this is a *radical* change on the prophecy of

⁵⁸ Harris, “‘I Will Give You’ What?,” 371–72. Harris writes: “Since in Isa 55:3 the eternal covenant—which is set in apposition to ‘the faithful, steadfast love of David’—is being made ‘with you’ (אַתָּה), that is, with all who hear and come, there seem to be only two options: either ‘the faithful, steadfast love of David’ is understood subjectively as David’s own covenant-fulfilling actions that are in some way related to the eternal covenant, or it is read objectively as God’s faithful actions to David that have in some sense now been democratized from David to the people as a whole.”

⁵⁹ Jaap Dekker, “What Does David Have to Do with It? The Promise of a New Covenant in the Book of Isaiah,” in *Covenant: A Vital Element of Reformed Theology: Biblical, Historical and Systematic-Theological Perspectives*, ed. Hans Burger, Gert Kwakkel, and M. C. Mulder, Studies in Reformed Theology volume 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 104. See this paper’s footnote 56 for further related comments.

⁶⁰ Gerhard Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 2:240. Von Rad’s interpretation is asserted rather than proved, at least in this volume, and will be further argued against below.

⁶¹ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 283.

⁶² Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:240.

Nathan or the covenant with David.”⁶³ Deutero-Isaiah thus robs the covenant of its content and any Messianic hope within his tradition.⁶⁴ The invitation of Isaiah 55 *transfers* (*Übertragung*) the Davidic Covenant to the remnant nation.⁶⁵ In respect to vv. 4-5, it follows that Israel is to become the sovereign ruler of the peoples. After Von Rad’s original research, a vast majority of OT scholars have taken to view Isaiah 55 as democratizing the Davidic covenant found in 2 Sam 7 through wholesale transfer.⁶⁶

However, there are several difficulties with this type of *democratizing* interpretation. First, in Isaiah itself (9:1-7; 11:1-4, 10-12; 16:5) and later prophetic books (Jer 23:5; 30:9; 33:15, 17, 2; Ezek 34:23-24) the covenant is not *democratized* to all Israel through wholesale transfer. There is still a strong hope for a Davidic messianic ruler whose work will bring God’s blessing upon Israel.⁶⁷ Second, this view fails to appreciate the way in which the original promises were “sure” (הַנֶּאֱמָרִים).⁶⁸ If the author of Deutero-Isaiah hijacked the fundamental content of these promises through his “radical” reinterpretation, due to the perceived failure of the Davidic line, how much confidence should the exilic people have in the surety of these promises? The promises for David are *certain* and *unfailing* (2 Sam 7:15; Ps 89:37) and, therefore, cannot be transferred to the remnant without wholly diluting their content beyond use. Third, YHWH’s purpose in blessing David, by promising him a throne, dynasty, and kingdom, was never meant to be only for David

⁶³ Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, 283. Emphasis mine.

⁶⁴ Kaiser, “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 96.

⁶⁵ Heim, “The (God-) Forsaken King of Psalm 89,” 310. The term *Übertragung* is used by German scholars to describe this transferral of the original promises from the Davidic dynasty to Israel.

⁶⁶ Dekker, “What Does David Have to Do with It? The Promise of a New Covenant in the Book of Isaiah,” 104; Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry*, Harvard Semitic Monographs 17 (Missoula, Mont: Scholars Press, 1978), 203; Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 40-55*, 370.

⁶⁷ Smith, *Isaiah 40-66 : An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, “Invitation to Participate in God’s Provisions and Covenant.” Heim, “The (God-) Forsaken King of Psalm 89,” 311. Heim also makes the point one would expect a more dramatic and detailed description of the blessings arising from the new promise to the people in vv. 4-5, but we find nothing but the alleged transference in v. 3b.

⁶⁸ Kaiser, “The Unfailing Kindnesses Promised to David,” 96.

or even Israel but was always intended for all mankind (2 Sam 7:19). Kaiser argues that David had a *conscious awareness* of an already extant global scope in God's promises to him. The global scope in the Davidic covenant is also true with other biblical covenants such as with Noah and Abraham. The blessings were never meant to be for these men, but for the earth, Israel, and all the nations (cf. Gen 9; 12:1-3). These men were to be the *conduits* of God's blessing, that had a global *telos*. It follows then that the "ancient promise of blessing to all mankind would continue; only now it would involve David's dynasty, throne and kingdom."⁶⁹ Therefore, there is already an understanding of corporate solidarity with believers from all nations who participate by faith in the promises given to David, rendering this "radical" interpretation wholly unnecessary. Fourth, "I will make an everlasting covenant with *you* (pl.)" in 55:3b refers to the many recipients who will be brought *by* God into covenant blessings. Against the contention that an objective genitive rendering of *לְךָ יְהוָה* would necessitate the people as redefined dynastic *heirs* of the covenant, we now see this need not be the case. In other words, the undying promises associated with the Davidic covenant are now extended to all *who come to God* through this new covenant. While Jeremiah foretold of a "new covenant" that would surpass the Sinai covenant (Jer 31:31-34), Isaiah describes here an "everlasting covenant" that would have its basis in the Davidic covenant.⁷⁰ This is not a transferral of the original promises from David to Israel but rather *an extension* (*Ausweitung*) in a new way that by no means excludes the Davidic dynasty.⁷¹ It is its natural *fulfillment*, in keeping with "the overarching message of hope in Isaiah."⁷² Democratizing without a king in the end is not

⁶⁹ Walter C Jr Kaiser, "The Blessing of David: The Charter For Humanity," in *The Law and the Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, ed. John H. Skilton (Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1974), 315.

⁷⁰ Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 162.

⁷¹ See especially Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 161n54; Heim, "The (God-) Forsaken King of Psalm 89," 306–14. Heim gives the other term *Ausweitung* used by German scholars to clarify its separation from *Übertragung* view (i.e., not transferral but extension).

⁷² Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 161n54.

a satisfying solution. Therefore, it is now imperative for the exegete to understand the *instrument* by which the people will be brought to God as especially seen in vv. 4-5.

The Identities of David, the Witness, and You

In the broader context of Isaiah, all occurrences to דָּוִד (David), outside of Isa 55:3b, include the additional reference to his house or his city. One inference from this is the house of David is of central *thematic* importance in the book of Isaiah. The house of David is at one level shown as corrupt (7:2), fearful (7:13), and doomed to serve a Babylonian king (39:7). However, the house of David is also described as a child (8:8-10), the stump of Jesse (11:1-10), through whom God's kingdom will be established forever (9:1-7; 16:5; 32:1-5). With the events of exile in view by the author of Isaiah, how can both be true? The answer is found in our pericope: by the work of the servant in the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant. A covenant that is described as everlasting and rooted in the *hesed* of God. Given the poetic nature of Isa 55:1-5, it may be possible to have a multivalent view of this Davidic figure – both the historical and future.⁷³

In reference to v.4, in the 3ms pronominal suffix of the verb נָתַן, appears to be that of the historical David – given especially the presence of the *qatal* verbs of v.4 (לְאַמִּים; נִתְּתִיו), typically translated in a past sense.⁷⁴ With this understanding, the historical David is given a three-fold description as a “witness to the peoples”, “a leader”, and “commander for the peoples.” The use of witness (עֵד) is somewhat surprising as the historical books never refer to David as *a witness*.⁷⁵ However, in prior passages, Israel, functioning as a servant of YHWH, is referred to as a witness

⁷³ Heim, “The (God-) Forsaken King of Psalm 89,” 296–322. Heim observe that “Isa 55:3-5, like other passages in Isaiah, expresses hope in a new and different king.” Additionally, this reference to the Davidic dynasty of the future as a witness may parallel well with the messianic poem of Isa 11:1-9.

⁷⁴ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, 439; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Second edition. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 66–67.

⁷⁵ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, 440.

(43:10, 12; 44:6). As such, David as the leader (נָגִיד; cf. Sam 5:2) and commander of Israel, a servant of YHWH, functioned as a *witness* to God’s power.

The referent “you” (sg.) in v. 5 is less certain. Given the introduction of *yiqtol* verbs (יִקְטֹל), combined with the use of “behold” in both verses which invites comparison, there seems to be a syntactic contrast from v. 4, which dealt with YHWH’s past work in the historical David, to the future work of a coming David.⁷⁶ Some, especially those who hold a *transfer* (*Übertragung*) view of the Davidic covenant, take this designation to be Israel which is possible given that Isaiah elsewhere describes that the glory of Israel will call nations (60:1-3). However, clear references to Israel in vv. 1-3a appear in the plural while here it is *singular*, so this is not the most natural suggestion.⁷⁷ If there has been a change in address from David to another referent, it may be that God is addressing here the servant as a type of Davidic messiah, which fits well with the broader schema of Isaiah.⁷⁸ If this view is correct then the rest of v. 5 is given higher status. The everlasting covenant is then inseparably linked to messianic hope, conjoining the two broader themes of the work of the servant (Isa 38-55) with the Davidic house (Isa 1-37).⁷⁹ God’s promise to David that he would *never* lack for a descendant means that the world will continue to

⁷⁶ The use of the *yiqtol* by no means necessitates a future tense translation but nevertheless allows for its possibility. The contention is based on the contrast between the two aspects. For other possibilities, see Arnold and Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 69–70.

⁷⁷ See, however, Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 374. They opt for the community being addressed throughout vv.3-5 as they argue the movement from plural to singular is not unusual.

⁷⁸ This position however is a minority report within broader critical scholarship. Still, there are good reasons to believe there exists at least a deliberate connection. For one, both the king and the servant are described as possessing the Spirit of Yahweh and bringing about justice (11:2-3; 42:1, 3). Additionally, there is a connection between the Servant Songs with covenant language (42:6; 49:8; 54:10). Furthermore, there are several passages that speak of the servant bringing *light* to the nations to God (11:10; 42:4; 51:4-5; 66:18). Finally, there are other passages where the righteous are called to listen to the voice of the servant (cf. 50:10). At the very least, the servant of Isaiah 40-55 can be understood as a “complementary portrait of Yahweh’s agent, which corresponds to the king of Isaiah 1-39.” For more see, Richard L. Schultz, “The King in the Book of Isaiah,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite (Wipf and Stock, 2012), 154–59. Additionally, see Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 162; Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, 439.

⁷⁹ Motyer, *Isaiah*, 388–89.

experience the “steadfast love” of YHWH. This descendant is the *instrument* of YHWH’s power. David’s calling to be a “witness to the peoples” (55:4) would now be mediated by the servant.⁸⁰ If understood correctly, the servant and Davidic messiah are to be effectively one and the same. He will call the nations (55:5a) and God will glorify himself through him (55:5b).

In summary, according to the text, the life and work of the Servant Messiah is the *instrument* by which God will achieve this covenant of life-giving blessings. As God has made an irrevocable promise to David, giving him steadfast love, so Israel, and by extension, all people, will participate in this steadfast love through their response to the Servant Messiah.⁸¹ It is this figure who becomes the focal point in v. 5 of any “subsequent witness to the surrounding nations.”⁸²

New Testament Use of Isaiah 55:1-5

The context of Isa 55:3b usage is found in Acts 13:16-41, where Luke narrates an address given by Paul to the synagogue at Pisidian.⁸³ His audience is evidently “brothers, sons of the family of Abraham” (ἀδελφοί, υἱοὶ γένους Ἀβραάμ) as well as God-fearers (οἱ ἐν ὑμῖν φοβούμενοι τὸν Θεόν; 13:26). After already rehearsing Christ’s death and resurrection, confirmed through witnesses (13:27-31), Paul sets out to *show* that Scripture also testifies to the resurrection, including by his usage of the prophet Isaiah. Luke consistently grounds Jesus’ story (13:23-37) in

⁸⁰ Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 162.

⁸¹ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 40-66*, 440. For others who hold the position like Oswalt, see the summary by Dyk, “Isaiah 55:1-5: Participation in the Davidic Promises through Identification with New Servant Israel,” 53.

⁸² Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 162.

⁸³ Harris, “‘I Will Give You’ What?,” 377. In specific quotations of Isaiah in Luke-Acts (cf., Luke 3:4, quoting Isa 40:3; Luke 4:17 quoting Isa 61:1-2; Acts 8:28-35, quoting Isa 53:7-8; Acts 28:25, quoting Isa 6:9-10), prominent themes in Isaiah 40-55 become the “organizing principles for both volumes of the Lukan writings”, Williamson, “Isaiah,” 383.

Israel's story (13:17-22), "as its proper fulfillment."⁸⁴ As such, the argument of Paul to the Jews begins with shared premises about God's election of Israel to be his people and for David to be their king. The new aspect of this message is that Christ is the fulfillment of God's promises to David and as such, is the lynchpin to Israel's future.⁸⁵ The promises of God through Jesus are made plain in vv. 33-35 through three OT citations: Ps 2:7; Isa 55:3; and Ps 16:10.

In the first citation, Ps 2:7, this royal psalm is shown to be ultimately about the Messiah. The same God who had raised up David to be their king, now raised up the Son of David. Jesus now is appointed to carry out his divinely appointed role.⁸⁶ Christ's sonship was "vindicated and made evident by resurrection."⁸⁷ Paul, in v. 34, now appeals to the promises in Isa 55:3, grounding the claim that the Messiah would "no more ... return to corruption" through the quotation of the LXX – "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David." (δώσω ὑμῖν τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά).

We briefly note here any deviations between Luke's citation, the LXX, and the MT⁸⁸:

<i>Acts 13:34 (NA 28)</i>	<i>Isa 55:3b (LXX)</i>	<i>Isa 55:3b (MT)</i>
δώσω ὑμῖν τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά	διαθήσομαι ὑμῖν διαθήκην αἰώνιον τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά	וְאֶכְרַתָּהּ לָכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם קְדוֹתִי וְלֶךְ הַנֶּאֱמָנִים
I will give you the holy and sure [blessings] of David"	I will make with you an everlasting covenant, the holy and sure [blessings] of David"	I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David.

We can see though Paul cites from the LXX, he simplifies "I will make" (διαθήσομαι) to "I shall give" (δώσω). Additionally, Luke's version lacks a reference to the covenant (διαθήκην), but

⁸⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 2069.

⁸⁵ David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2009), 248.

⁸⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2007), 456.

⁸⁷ Bock, *Acts*, 456.

⁸⁸ Note for both Acts and the Isa 55:3b (MT), I am using the ESV translation.

according to Bock, any Jew would be aware that the “holy and sure blessings of David” alludes to the covenant.⁸⁹ We can also note that the LXX uses τὰ ὅσια “holy things” instead of a Hebrew term meaning “steadfast love” (יְהוָה). This discrepancy can be owed to the more paraphrastic rendering of the LXX, though nevertheless understood as the divine promises.⁹⁰ Finally, returning to the debate with respect to the objective genitive rendering of Isa 55:3b, does the LXX declare it subjective – “holy and sure [blessings] *of* David”? According to Goldingay and Payne, like the Hebrew Bible, the LXX’s context allows it to be understood objectively or at the very least as God’s gift *to* David.⁹¹

Why does Paul use this quotation? First, by using Isa 55:3b, we see Paul make central the restoration of the Davidic kingdom in relation to the work of Christ. The reference to David is common to Luke-Acts and is seen in the surrounding passages, namely Acts 15:16, which quotes Amos 9:11-12 – pointing to both the restoration of the Davidic kingship as well as the restoration of a people of God under the rule of this David.⁹² The point that Paul makes is that the promises made to David and his offspring cannot be realized apart from the resurrection of Christ – the everlasting character of Isa 55:3b requires an everlasting Son. This is further shown in that Paul links Isa 55:3 to Ps 16:10 (LXX 15:10) using a rabbinic technique though the repeated term “holy” (ὅσια) in v. 34 and v. 35, showing how these promises to David could not personally refer to David

⁸⁹ Bock, *Acts*, 457.

⁹⁰ L. Scott Kellum, *Acts*, EGGNT (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2020), 162.

⁹¹ Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 372; Martin M. Culy and Mikeal Carl Parsons, *Acts: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, 1st ed., BHGNT (Waco, Tex: Baylor University Press, 2003), 262. Culy and Parsons understand Δαυὶδ as “probably genitive” but Kellum helpfully clarifies that well “morphologically other cases are possible, there is little doubt that David is the *recipient* of the promises whatever the case.” See further Kellum, *Acts*, 162.

⁹² Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke’s Account of God’s Unfolding Plan*, NSBT 27 (Nottingham, England: Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity Press, 2011), 122–23. In addition to this above citation, references in Luke-Acts to the Davidic king and kingdom can be seen in Lk 1:32-33, 68-69; Acts 2:30-36; Acts 8:12.

as he “died, was buried, and underwent bodily decomposition.”⁹³ Jesus’ resurrection was different, when he was “raised” (ἀνέστησεν), as he was given an incorruptible, everlasting life which is “the prerequisite for his being the Savior of the present generation of Israelites, God-fearers, and Gentiles for all time.”⁹⁴ Resurrection and kingdom establishment are therefore closely linked.⁹⁵ The ultimate fulfillment of the future promises *for* David are achieved by the person and work of Christ.

Second, implicit in Paul’s writing, is the fact that Jesus is now a witness to the *nations* for what God has done to glorify him. Luke most likely has the broader context of Isa 55:3b in view. As we rehearsed in the above, Isa 55:1-5 shows how God’s gracious promises are still available to his people, even in exile (55:1-3a). Furthermore, God will give his people (ὕμῃν) “the holy blessings made of David” (τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ), which are “sure” (τὰ πιστά) as the people of Israel are invited to receive God’s gifts and live according to an eternal covenant (55:3b). As David was a witness and leader to nations (55:4), so also will the Servant be glorified and call the nations in his permanent kingdom dominion (55:5). The resurrection shows how God ultimately distributes “the promised blessings that were given to David and for the people.”⁹⁶ Though there is no *explicit* mention of a covenant found in this passage, through Paul’s allusion to Isa 55:1-5, Jesus is nevertheless presented here as the fulfillment of the Old Testament’s messianic hope as well as a witness to the nations. In its broader situation in Acts, the saving promises of God is for both the Jew and the Gentile (Acts 1:8; 13:26). The narrative context of Acts 13-14 shows how the requirement of both peoples is to “believe” (Acts 13:39, 46, 48; 14:1). The use of Isa 55:3b in Acts

⁹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, Rev. ed., NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2009), “Acts 13”; Keener, *Acts*, 2072. According to Keener, this term ὅσια is exceedingly rare, used on eight times in the NT, and only three in Luke-Acts. Keener describes the *gezerah shevah* as a standard exegetical technique. It is one of Hillel’s rabbinic rules of interpretation, where two texts can be expounded together if they share a term or related form of the word.

⁹⁴ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT 5 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2012), 582.

⁹⁵ Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 240.

⁹⁶ Bock, *Acts*, 456.

13:34 shows the *extension* (*Ausweitung*) of God's blessing is not only for the believing Jews but for Gentiles, reflecting the *telos* of Isaiah's global mission in the mission of Acts.

Taken together, what had been promised in Isa 55:1-5 is brought to full fulfillment in Jesus, and that which has begun in Christ, shall never end for his people. The person and work of Christ, attested by his resurrection, are the focal point of God's mission and blessings to the nations. The great invitation of YHWH to "come, everyone who thirsts" (Isa 55:1) is met by the true living water of the resurrected and everlasting Christ – to drink of his salvation is to never be thirsty again (John 4:7-15).

Appendix A: Isaiah 55:1-5 in the ESV, BHS, and LXX

ESV (55:1-5)

- ¹ “Come, everyone who thirsts,
come to the waters;
and he who has no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without price.
² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good,
and delight yourselves in rich food.
³ Incline your ear, and come to me;
hear, that your soul may live;
and I will make with you an everlasting covenant,
my steadfast, sure love for David.
⁴ Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples,
a leader and commander for the peoples.
⁵ Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know,
and a nation that did not know you shall run to you,
because of the Lord your God, and of the Holy One of Israel,
for he has glorified you.

BHS (55:1-5)⁹⁷

- ¹ הָיִי כְּלִצְמָא לְכוּ לַמַּיִם וְאַשְׁרֵי אֵין-לֹו כֶּסֶף לְכוּ שִׁבְרוּ וְאַחֲלוּ וּלְכוּ שִׁבְרוּ בְּלוֹא-כֶּסֶף וּבְלוֹא מְחִיר גֵּין וְחֶלֶב
² לֶמָּה תִשְׁקְלוּ-כֶּסֶף בְּלוֹא-לֶחֶם וַיִּגִּיעַכֶּם בְּלוֹא לְשִׁבְעָה שְׂמֵעוּ שְׂמֵעוּ אֵלַי וְאַחֲלוּ-טוֹב וְתִתְעַנֵּג בְּדָשָׁן נִפְשְׁכֶם
³ הִטּוּ אָזְנוֹכֶם וּלְכוּ אֵלַי שְׂמֵעוּ וְתִחִי נִפְשְׁכֶם וְאַכְרַתָּה לְכֶם בְּרִית עוֹלָם חֶסֶדִי דָוִד הַנְּאֻמָּנִים
⁴ הִנֵּה עֵד לְאוֹמִים גִּמְתִּיו נִגִּיד וּמִצְוָה לְאֻמִּים
⁵ הִנֵּה גֹי לֹא-תִדְעַתְּ תִקְרָא וְגֹי לֹא-יִדְעוּךָ אֲלֵיךָ יִרְצוּ לְמַעַן יִהְיֶה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּלְקִדּוּשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי פָאֲרָךְ: ס

LXX (55:1-5)

- ¹ οἱ διψῶντες πορεύεσθε ἐφ' ὕδωρ καὶ ὅσοι μὴ ἔχετε ἀργύριον βαδίσαντες ἀγοράσατε καὶ πίνετε
ἄνευ ἀργυρίου καὶ τιμῆς οἴνου καὶ στέαρ ² ἵνα τί τιμᾶσθε ἀργυρίου καὶ τὸν μόχθον ὑμῶν οὐκ εἰς
πλησμονὴν ἀκούσατέ μου καὶ φάγεσθε ἀγαθὰ καὶ ἐντρυφήσει ἐν ἀγαθοῖς ἡ ψυχὴ ὑμῶν ³ προσέχετε
τοῖς ὁπίοις ὑμῶν καὶ ἐπακολουθήσατε ταῖς ὁδοῖς μου ἐπακούσατέ μου καὶ ζήσεται ἐν ἀγαθοῖς ἡ
ψυχὴ ὑμῶν καὶ διαθήσομαι ὑμῖν διαθήκην αἰώνιον τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά ⁴ ἰδοὺ μαρτύριον ἐν
ἔθνεσιν δέδωκα αὐτόν ἄρχοντα καὶ προστάσσοντα ἔθνεσιν ⁵ ἔθνη ἃ οὐκ ᾔδεισαν σε ἐπικαλέσονται
σε καὶ λαοὶ οἳ οὐκ ἐπίστανται σε ἐπὶ σὲ καταφεύξονται ἕνεκεν τοῦ θεοῦ σου τοῦ ἁγίου Ἰσραὴλ ὅτι
ἐδόξασέν σε

⁹⁷ This translation follows the BHS rendering. Though there are slight variants with the pericope, none of the variants impact the meaning of the text in relation to the purpose of this study. For a summary of pertinent issues, see Goldingay and Payne, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Isaiah 40-55*, 372–73.

Appendix B: New Testament Citation of Isaiah 55:3b in Acts 13:34

ESV (13:34)

³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

“‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

NA28 (13:34)

³⁴ ὅτι δὲ ἀνέστησεν αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν μηκέτι μέλλοντα ὑποστρέφειν εἰς διαφθοράν, οὕτως εἶρηκεν ὅτι

δώσω ὑμῖν τὰ ὅσια Δαυὶδ τὰ πιστά.

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