

The Soteriological Development of the “Arm of the LORD” Motif

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A quarter of a century ago James Hoffmeier published his groundbreaking Biblica article “The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives.” The same year, Manfred Görg released his study “Der starke Arm Pharaos” in the Festschrift honoring François Daumas. Both men demonstrated that the OT seizes Egyptian victory language and applies it to the God of Israel in order to portray him as the conqueror of Pharaoh. This paper builds upon these important works, arguing that the OT authors, particularly in the prophetic period, employed the theme to express several important theological concepts. The author of this paper explores a number of OT passages that depict the arm of the LORD as the deliverer of post-Conquest Israel and the redeemer of the entire world.

KEYWORDS: *Deliverance, Soteriology, Theology, Prophets, Messiah*

INTRODUCTION

As OT scholars of the past several centuries have analyzed and assimilated countless archaeological discoveries, they have directed their areas of expertise along avenues that previous generations were unable to travel. Perhaps no branch of OT scholarship has progressed more rapidly than the study of the Hebrew language. These appreciable advancements serve the purpose of better illuminating critical concepts such as OT figures of speech and their theological significance. Once such phrase that is worthy of examination is the expression the “arm of the LORD.”¹

1. Although the phrase זרוע יהוה (“arm of the LORD”) occurs only a handful of times in the OT, numerous texts associate the arm with God. In this study, the “arm of the LORD” will serve as shorthand for the miscellaneous descriptive terms that the OT writers applied to God (e.g., “holy arm,” “outstretched arm,” “powerful arm,” etc.). Also of importance is the phrase the “hand of the LORD.” While in Exod 6:6–7 God

The first biblical reference to the arm of the LORD appears in Exod 6:6 in the context of a divine speech that God addressed to Moses. Previous to this encounter, God had sent Moses and his brother Aaron to petition Pharaoh so that he might allow the people of Israel to celebrate a feast dedicated to the LORD in the wilderness (Exod 5:1–3). When the ruler of Egypt refused to make this allowance (Exod 5:2–5), and instead increased the workload of his slaves (Exod 5:6–9), the God of Israel proceeded to punish the Egyptians.

Before striking Egypt with the ten plagues and delivering his people from slavery, God expressed his intentions to liberate the Israelites:

Say, therefore, to the children of Israel, “I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the compulsory servitude of Egypt, and I will deliver you from their slavery and redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great punishments. I will also take you for My people, and I will be your God; and you will know that I am the LORD your God who brought you out from under the compulsory servitude of the Egyptians.” (Exod 6:6-7)²

This reference to the arm of the LORD serves as the foundation for a series of little studied theological revelations concerning God. This article will examine OT passages that develop the phrase soteriologically.

A SUMMARY OF HOFFMEIER’S FINDINGS

In his groundbreaking article “The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives,” James Hoffmeier was one of the first scholars to write extensively on the Egyptian foundation of the OT arm motif.³ He observed that arm iconography was one of the most enduring images of Egyptian culture, reaching its height during the Eighteenth Dynasty.

promised to redeem his people with his *arm*, in Exod 7:5 he assured the sons of Israel that he would punish Egypt with his *hand*. This study also will consider instances in which the “hand of the LORD” appears alongside soteric usages of the “arm of the LORD” motif (e.g., Pss 44:1–3; 98; Isa 59).

2. All Scripture translations are original to the author unless otherwise noted.

3. James K. Hoffmeier, “The Arm of God Versus the Arm of Pharaoh in the Exodus Narratives,” *Bib* 67 (1986): 378–87.

The arm of the LORD is not an OT image employed haphazardly; the phrase is replete with significance that would not be lost on the original audience. Essentially, the God of the Israelite slaves appropriated the victory language of the Egyptians and demonstrated that the terminology rightly belonged to him. When the people of Israel heard the message that is recorded in Exod 6, they would have understood the reference to be a declaration of the supremacy of the LORD over the gods of Egypt as well as the Pharaoh, who considered himself to be divine. The Egyptians were accustomed to hearing of the mighty deeds that the arm of their king accomplished, but soon they would realize by means of the ten plagues that the deeds of the LORD could not be superseded.

On the one hand, Pharaoh and his subjects would understand Exod 6 and the subsequent mighty acts of the arm of the LORD as challenges to the king and their gods. On the other hand, the people of Israel who had sojourned in Egypt for centuries (and subsequently were familiar with Egyptian religion) would have recognized the expression as divine warfare. Although at first the slaves refused to "listen to Moses on account of their despondency and cruel bondage" (Exod 6:9), they would begin to believe the message when the arm of the LORD acted with great signs and wonders, humbling the greatest contemporary power in the process.

The height of the humiliation occurred when the people of Israel sang of the defeat of Pharaoh and his army at the Red Sea:

Let me sing to the LORD, for He is greatly exalted;
 He has thrown the horse and his rider into the sea
 Who is like You among the gods, LORD?
 Who is like You, glorious in holiness,
 Honored in praises, performing wonders? (Exod 15:1, 11)

Interestingly, the victory hymn in Exod 15 is similar to the ones previously sung in honor of the conquered Egyptian king.⁴ The arm of the LORD, therefore, had proven victorious in the military campaign against Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt as he had promised beforehand (Exod 12:12). Further, the exodus event would not be the last time that the OT employs the phrase "arm of the LORD," but instead it goes on to serve as the foundation for an important theological motif.

4. Ibid., 387. Here Hoffmeier captured the irony of Egypt's humiliation: "What better way for the exodus traditions to describe God's victory over Pharaoh, and as a result his superiority, than to use Hebrew derivations or counterparts to Egyptian expressions that symbolised Egyptian royal power."

A SUMMARY OF GÖRG'S FINDINGS

The same year that Hoffmeier published his findings, Manfred Görg's article "Der starke Arm Pharaos" appeared in a Festschrift honoring François Daumas.⁵ Görg noted that scholars had not given proper attention to comparative studies that focused on the imagery of Egypt, the ancient Near East (ANE), and the OT. He desired to help remedy this oversight by analyzing the phrase "the strong arm of Pharaoh" because the terminology exists in Egyptian documents, in Syro-Palestinian correspondence, and the OT.

Görg first surveyed the examples of this motif in the pre-Conquest Amarna Letters. In his correspondence with the Egyptian royal court, Jerusalem's mayor 'Abdi-Ḥeba referred to "the strong arm of the king [of Egypt]" (EA 286.13; cf. EA 287.27; 288.15, 34). Because Görg saw in these letters a distinctive metaphorical expression, he speculated that Jerusalem may be the place where the idiom originated.⁶

Next, Görg considered God's declaration that he had "shattered the arm of Pharaoh, king of Egypt" (Ezek 30:21; cf. vv. 22–25). Whereas the Amarna Letters spoke of Pharaoh's strength, the book of Ezekiel contains what one might consider the result of a gradual modification of an established word picture. The resulting metaphor reverses the pharaonic image of power in order to demonstrate that Egypt's militaristic dominance had been broken.

Finally, Görg examined hieroglyphic references to "the strong arm of Pharaoh" in writings that pertain to Thutmosis IV, Haremhab, and Ramses II. Egyptian allusions to the king's mighty arm tend to celebrate his ability to defeat his enemies. This detail prompted Görg to conclude that the most likely explanation for the origin of the OT usage of the arm motif is a cross-pollination of the Egyptian and Canaanite uses of the metaphor. In other words, while Egypt was responsible for originating the symbolism, the alteration of the concept to suit Canaan's purposes also left a mark on OT writers.

Although Görg limited his discussion of the OT arm motif to a single biblical text, his contribution is valuable for two reasons. First, his article emphasizes the role of comparative linguistic and metaphoric studies in expanding scholars' understanding of the richness of OT allusions. Second, Görg's research established that arm imagery was a

5. Manfred Görg, "Der starke Arm Pharaos: Beobachtungen zum Belegpektrum einer Metapher in Palästina und Ägypten," in *Hommages à François Daumas* (Montpellier: Université de Montpellier, 1986), 323–30.

6. *Ibid.*, 326.

significant ANE theme, so OT examples of the metaphor deserve more special attention.

A SELECT SURVEY OF THE SOTERIOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT “ARM OF THE LORD” MOTIF

An examination of the arm motif would be incomplete without considering how OT authors developed the theme theologically. The OT uses the arm of the LORD motif to depict God as Creator (Ps 89:11–13; Jer 27:5; 32:17), Deliverer (Pss 44:1–3; 77:11–20; 98:1–9; Isa 51:4–8; 52:10; 53:1; 59:1–21; 63:4–5, 7–14), Divine Warrior (Ps 89:5–10; Isa 30:27–33; Isa 51:9–11), King (Pss 44:4–8; 89:1–4, 19–29; Isa 40:10–11; Ezek 20:33–38), and Judge (Deut 2:14–16; Ps 98:9; Isa 51:5; 63:1–4a, 5b–6; Jer 21:5; 27:5). Space limitations prevent a thorough examination of each of these five theological assertions, so the remainder of this paper will focus solely on the soteriological development of the arm of the LORD motif.

The Arm of the LORD as Israel’s Deliverer

The OT addresses the redemptory role of the arm of the LORD more often than any other branch of the arm motif. This aspect of the theme is comprised of two ideas: (1) The role of the arm of the LORD in the liberation of the Israelites from their enemies; and (2) the role of the arm of the LORD in the soteric deliverance of both Israelites and Gentiles. Since the release of the sons of Israel from Egypt already has been mentioned, it need not be reconsidered here.

Several OT writers employed the image of the exodus from Egypt as an archetype for victory.⁷ The typical formula for this aspect of

7. Occasionally, however, the Lord’s arm and hand (an additional metaphor sometimes paired with the arm of the LORD) punished his own people rather than delivering them (e.g., Deut 2:14–16; 1 Sam 12:15; Jer 21:5). The reason for the intermittent inversion of this motif is twofold. First, when Israel acted like the surrounding nations by rebelling and serving false gods, the Lord reproved his covenant people in much the same manner that he punished the pagan countries. Second, much as a shepherd used his rod and staff to defend and discipline his sheep (cf. Ps 23:4), the Lord’s arm and hand defended his people when they were under attack and disciplined them when they strayed from his path. For more information on what some scholars refer to as the “anti-Exodus theme,” see W. L. Moran, “The End of the Unholy War and the Anti-Exodus,” *Bib* 44 (1963): 333–42; David Rolph Seely, “The Image of the Hand of God in the Exodus Traditions” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1990), 193–95; Matthew R. Akers, “The Employment of *zeroa*’ as a Messianic Motif with Particular Emphasis on the Origin of the Concept as Well as its First Usage in Exodus 6:1–8” (Ph.D. diss., Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 2005), 25–26.

the motif begins with a summary of the origin of the nation before expressing confidence that the founder of Israel once more will work in the present life of Israel as he did at the nation's establishment. This "Vergangenheit und . . . gegenwärtige Bekenntnis zur Zuversicht"⁸ structure appears in Pss 44 and 77. The confidence that Israel places in God appears in the context of community laments that bemoan present national tragedies. Such a pairing of tragedy and trust is not contradictory, but petitions God to remedy national disasters through his arm.

Psalm 44:1–3

Psalm 44:1 begins with a rehearsal of ancient events that the present generation has learned from its fathers: "God, we heard with our ears, our fathers recounted to us the deeds that You did in their days, in the days of old." This statement demonstrates Israel's faithfulness to adhere to God's command to teach future generations, for the author of Exod 13:14–16 and Deut 6:20–25 instructs the people that the transmission of "God's mighty deeds . . . was a religious duty incumbent on all parents."⁹ The audience, who never experienced such an act of redemption, bemoans the fact that "what they have heard with their ears is tacitly contrasted with the very different things which they have seen with their eyes."¹⁰

Scholarship is divided on which events are mentioned in Ps 44. While David C. Mitchell argued that the passage speaks of the Exodus event,¹¹ Uriel Simon held that the psalm instead celebrates "the expulsion

8. T. Hieke, "Der Exodus in Psalm 80: Geschichtstopik in den Psalmen," in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction, Reception, Interpretation* (ed. Marc Vervenne; BETL 126; Leuven: Peeters, 1996) 556. An English translation of Hieke's quotation reads: "past . . . and present confession of confidence."

9. J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 1–50* (CBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 207.

10. Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms: Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids, MI: 1977), 195. This observation of the psalmist's present situation is not an accusation against God, suggesting either an inability to work or an apathetic attitude, but instead reflects the desire to see God's arm at work once more.

11. David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms* (JSOTSup 252; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 250.

of the Canaanites" during the conquest.¹² The pericope, however, most likely offers a comprehensive portrait of God's workings during both the exodus and the conquest.

The Israelites could credit their birth as a nation not to their vigor (cf. Ps 44:3[Heb. 4]), but to God's might: "For they did not take possession of the land with their own sword, nor did their arm save them, but Your right hand and Your arm and the light of Your face, for You took pleasure in them." This citation is not merely a quotation from the Torah. Whereas Exod 6:6 pertains solely to the liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt,¹³ the psalmist attributes the favorable outcome of the conquest to the arm of the LORD as well (Ps 44:3). In the promised land God's hand eradicated the inhabitants of Canaan while at the same time his arm once more delivered his covenant people.

When examined in context, Ps 44:1–3 serves as the basis by which Israel beseeches God so that he "may graciously again intervene so powerfully" as he had done in the past.¹⁴ Since the arm of the LORD had rescued their ancestors from servitude in Egypt and firmly planted them in Canaanite territory, his people could expect a similar work of deliverance in the present. Thus, Israel gained from "der Vergangenheit neue Hoffnung" where none was visible to the naked eye.¹⁵

Psalm 77:11–20¹⁶

Several aspects of Ps 77:11–20 are noteworthy. First, the psalmist recalls the inaugural event of Israel's history at a time when many felt that the end of the nation may be near. In Ps 77:14–16 (which contains 39

12. Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms from Saadiah Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra* (trans. L. J. Schramm; New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 60.

13. This statement also is true of every other allusion to the arm of the LORD in the Torah (Exod 4:34; 5:15; 7:19; 9:29; 11:2; 15:16; 26:8).

14. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalm 1-59* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 447.

15. Hieke, "Der Exodus in Psalm 80," 556. The gist of Hieke's quotation is that Israel gained new hope as they recalled God's past workings.

16. Readers of the NASB may be surprised to find this passage categorized as an arm of the LORD text because no mention of God's arm appears in this translation of Ps 77. Verse 15 reads "You have by Your power redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph." The word "power" actually is "arm" in the Masoretic text, and many other well-known translations use the word "arm" in v. 15. E.g., KJV, NJKV, RSV, NRSV, NIV, TNIV, ESV.

percent of the vocabulary found in the victory hymn of Exod 15:11–13),¹⁷ Asaph encouraged the nation to place their faith in the God of their ancestors. If God, through his arm, overcame seemingly impossible situations in bygone days, he could do so once more.

Second, at the Red Sea God led his “people like a flock” (Ps 77:20), thus combining the concept of the arm of the LORD with shepherding imagery.¹⁸ Although this theme often is synonymous with kingship, the terminology also carried the notion of redemption in the culture of the ANE.¹⁹ In effect, the LORD, who is king, ensures this perpetual deliverance of the covenant nation by means of his arm.

Third, another facet of the text (which occurs only here and in Obad 18),²⁰ is the pairing of the names “Jacob and Joseph” (Ps 77:15). Scholarship has variously interpreted this coupling as (1) an indication of a northern origin of the psalm,²¹ (2) an allusion to the fact that both personages insisted that they be buried in the promised land rather than Egypt,²² or (3) a “link between the patriarchs and the exodus.”²³ Although “Joseph” does appear occasionally as a reference to northern Israel in the prophetic corpus (e.g., Amos 5:6, 15; 6:6),²⁴ J. W. Rogerson and J. W. McKay correctly maintained that “more likely the verse refers to the redemption of the whole Israelite nation in the exodus”²⁵ as opposed to only a portion of the population.

17. Helen G. Jefferson, “Psalm 77,” *VT* 13 (1963): 89.

18. Inherent in this allusion is the portrayal of God leading his people out of Egypt by means of his arm, much as a shepherd leads his flock with his staff in hand.

19. “God, why have You continuously rejected us? Why does Your anger smoke against the flock of Your pasture? Remember Your congregation, You purchased it long ago, You redeemed the tribe of Your inheritance. This Mount Zion, You dwelled on it.” (Ps 74:1–2)

20. Woodrow Michael Kroll, *Psalms: The Poetry of Palestine* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 218.

21. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60-150* (trans. Hilton C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 116. Although Kraus mentioned this position as an option, he did not hold this view of the passage.

22. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary of Books III-V of the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1975), 280.

23. John S. Kselman, “Psalm 77 and the Book of Exodus,” *JANES* 15 (1983): 52.

24. A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (NCB 2; Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1992), 560.

25. Rogerson and McKay, *Psalms 51-100*, 138.

The Arm of the LORD as Deliverer

Physical deliverance was always a major concern of the Israelites, but the OT looks forward to a complete, spiritual redemption as well. Not only did the arm of the LORD birth the nation and continue to sustain it throughout the centuries, the arm also proved to be the means by which the people might obtain eternal hope. Israel’s redemption from Egypt, therefore, served as the model for the deliverance that God’s people anticipated.

Psalm 98

Scholars often classify Psalm 98 as “a Divine Warrior victory song.”²⁶ Aspects of this motif certainly are present in the passage, particularly in the reference to God’s punitive hand working in conjunction with his emancipatory arm to secure victory (Ps 98:1). Also present in the text are elements that emphasize divine kingship.²⁷ The main thrust of the psalm, however, is God’s redemption as evidenced by the triple usage of “salvation” (יְשׁוּעָה) in verses 1–3. Unlike Pss 44 and 77, which begin with laments, the author of Ps 98 immediately displays “eine Äußerung der Freude.”²⁸

The passage, which serves as the “prophetic counterpart of” Isa 52:7–10,²⁹ contains the only title to be found among Pss 93–99. Since the psalmist calls upon the people to sing a new song, it is reasonable to suggest that “the presence of this title in Ps 98 likely serves to emphasize the ‘new start’ (for a song) mentioned within the psalm itself.”³⁰ The

26. Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC 20; Dallas: Word, 1990), 524. Tate accurately classifies Ps. 98 as a soteric “hymn of triumph” that clearly emphasizes the dual purposes of the LORD’s “saving works, which have revealed his ‘righteousness’ to the nations and his enduring love and faithfulness toward his own people in Israel.”

27. Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms* (trans. K. Crim; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 86.

28. B. Maarsingh, “Das Schwertlied in Ez. 21:13–22 und das Erra-Gedicht,” in *Ezekiel and His Book: Textual and Literary Criticism and Their Interrelation* (ed. J. Lust; BETL 74; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1986), 351. The phrase “eine Äußerung der Freude” means “a statement of joy.”

29. James Luther Mays, *Psalms in Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 313.

30. David M. Howard Jr., “A Contextual Reading of Psalms 90–94,” in *The Shape and Shaping of the Psalter* (ed. J. Clinton McCann; JSOTSup 159; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), 120.

phrase שִׁיר הַדָּשׁ (“new song”), which occurs only seven times in the OT,³¹ always finds association with the theme of deliverance.³² The “new song” apparently serves the purpose of “celebrating the accomplishment” of the revelation of God’s salvation to the entire earth.³³

Psalm 98:1 explains the reason why it is appropriate for the audience to sing a new song. The Israelites could rejoice because of God’s נִפְלְאוֹת עֲשָׂה (“marvelous works”). Kidner observed that the verb translated “extraordinary” (cf. Jer 32:17) is more than a superlative, but a way in which to formulate “the miraculous interventions of God.”³⁴ In short, the works that the arm of the LORD performs are incomparable.

The word “salvation” is paralleled with God’s “extraordinary deeds” in Ps 98:1, indicating that redemption indeed is the focus of this pericope. Unlike Pss 44 and 77, though, Ps 98 is not a description of nationalistic deliverance. Rather, the text declares that “all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Ps 98:3), thus affirming the psalm’s soteric focus. Consequently, verse 1 attributes the consummation of God’s soteriological plan for Israel and the Gentile nations to the arm of the LORD.

A Note on the Significance of Arm Imagery in Isa 40–55

The theme of a “new exodus” permeates Isa 40–55.³⁵ Prior to this segment of the book, the prophet Isaiah focuses on imminent judgment (Isa 1–39), but after this he turns his attention to the future hope that the Lord would effect. By means of his Messiah, God will bring about a spiritual liberation that will rival the deliverance of the sons of Israel from Egypt. The four Servant Songs appear within the context of Isa 40–55,³⁶ but the arm of the LORD also figures prominently within this section.

31. Tremper Longman III, “Psalm 98: A Divine Warrior Victory Song,” *JETS* 27 (1984): 269. The phrase שִׁיר הַדָּשׁ appears in Pss 33:3; 40:3(4); 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isa 42:10.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Ellen F. Davis, “Psalm 98,” *Int* 46 (1992): 172.

34. Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 352.

35. Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 79–84.

36. Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12.

Isa 40–55 contains a total of 26 rhetorical questions.³⁷ Interestingly, the questions begin directly after a reference to the arm of the LORD in Isa 40:11 and terminate with another reference to the arm of the LORD in the final Servant Song (Isa 53:1). The thrust of this stylistic device is that the unveiling of the messianic Servant provides the answer to all of the prophet's inquiries in Isa 40–53. Given this fact, an understanding of the soteric usages of the arm of the LORD in the book of Isaiah is necessary in order to understand the prophetic aspect of the corpus correctly.³⁸

Isaiah 51:4–8

In Isa 51:1–3 the prophet introduces the theme of 51:4–8 by referring to the birth pains of Sarah (v. 2) as well as to a future time when the deserts of Zion would be made fertile like the garden of Eden (v. 3). Gerald Janzen perceived that the birth of Isaac often is tied to Zion themes of fertility,³⁹ so the pairing of these two topics is fitting. These twin images of fruitfulness prefigure the soteric deliverance of the arm of the LORD.

Isaiah 51:4 begins by announcing that a law (תורה) would go forth from God. The verse parallels משפט תורה with משפט, which the LORD would set “for a light of the peoples.” Although “judgment” is the general translation of משפט, the idea in this context is “deliverance” or “justice.”⁴⁰ The purpose for this rendering is threefold.

First, the term “light” is an OT metaphor for salvation.⁴¹ Second, the number of soteric terms in Isa 51:4–8 validates this observation. “Righteousness” appears in four consecutive verses (vv. 5–8), while “salvation” occurs three times (vv. 5, 6, 8). Third, Isa 51:1–11 is chiasmic,

37. Kenneth J. Kuntz, “Rhetorical Questions in Deutero-Isaiah,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; VTSup70.1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 126. Kuntz provided a beneficial list of all passage between Isa 40:12 and 53:1 which employ interrogative texts: Isa 40:12–14, 18, 21, 25, 28; 41:2, 4, 26; 42:19, 24; 43:13; 44:7–8; 45:9, 11, 21; 46:5; 48:14; 49:15, 24; 50:1–2, 9; and 53:1.

38. Since the reference in Isa 40:10–11 focuses on the kingly qualities of the arm of the LORD, the author will not elaborate on the text within the confines of this paper.

39. Gerald J. Janzen, “Rivers in the Desert of Abraham and Sarah and Zion (Isaiah 51:1–3),” *HAR* 10 (1986): 139.

40. D. W. van Winkle, “The Relationship of the Nations of Yahweh and to Israel in Isaiah 40–55,” *VT* 35 (1985): 457.

41. *Ibid.*, 453.

and 51:5b–c, replete with salvific overtones, is the center of the pericope.⁴² For these reasons, and due to its coupling with “salvation,” “righteousness” means here “salvation, or deliverance.”⁴³

According to Isa 51:5, deliverance emanates from the arm of the LORD: “The coastlands will wait for Me, even for My arm will they wait.” Whereas only Israel benefited from the nationalistic deliverance accomplished by God’s arm, this new redemption would extend to every point of the compass (Isa 51:4). To be sure, verse 5 contends that the arm also would “judge the peoples,” but this tribunal appears to be limited only to those who reject God’s benevolence.

In Isa 51:6–8, the prophet underscores the eternal nature of this nation-encompassing redemption. At some point “the heavens will be dissipated like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment and those who dwell on it will die like gnats” (v. 6), but God’s salvation never would wane. Likewise, the works of men would deteriorate, but God’s arm would ensure that spiritual liberation would last “to all generations” (v. 8).

J. Ridderbos associated the redeemer of Isa 51:4–8 with Cyrus⁴⁴ since earlier chapters in Isaiah name him as God’s servant. No passage in Isaiah, however, ever calls Cyrus the arm of the LORD, for the expression always serves as “una designación de la persona divina.”⁴⁵ Rather, Cyrus the messiah prefigures the work of *the* Messiah, whose mission would be to “deliver the world from the clutches of sin, just as Cyrus was to deliver the Israelites from the clutches of Babylon.”⁴⁶

42. Frederick C. Holmgren, “Chiastic Structure in Isaiah 51:5–11,” *VT* 19 (1969): 197–98.

43. John N. Oswalt, “Righteousness in Isaiah: Chapters 55–66,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; VTSup70.1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 186.

44. J. Ridderbos, *Isaiah* (trans. J. Vriend; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 455.

45. Enrique Farfan Navarro, *El Desierto Transformado: Una Imagen Deuterocanónica de Regeneración* (AnBib 130; Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1992), 188. Navarro’s quotation notes that the arm of the LORD always serves as “a designation for a divine [rather than a merely human] person.”

46. John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980), 336.

Isaiah 52:10

Isaiah 52:10 belongs to an anticipatory poem (vv. 7–10) that bears much in common with Ps 98.⁴⁷ The passage speaks of a messenger “qui s’adresse à la population de Jérusalem pour lui annoncer le salut imminent apporté par Dieu.”⁴⁸ The Qumran community seems to have regarded this “‘herald’ of Isa 52:7 . . . [as] a messianic figure”⁴⁹ (cf. 11QMelch).

The first verse of the pericope (v. 7) delineates two aspects of the message. First, the verse connects the concept of מְבֹשֵׁר (“good news”), with peace. Second, מְבֹשֵׁר appears once more in v. 7 alongside the adjective “good,” which intensifies the force of the word. The result is that “aboundingly joyous news” flows from the lips of the herald. In the LXX εὐαγγέλιον, the NT word for “gospel,” is the translation of מְבֹשֵׁר because the terms are semantic cognates.

The watchmen appear for the first time in Isaiah in verse 8, jubilantly lifting up their voices because they will see with their own eyes the restoration of Zion. Not only will Jerusalem experience redemption (v. 9), for “all the nations” will see the salvation of God (v. 10). According to Isa 51:10, the means by which God will manifest this salvation is through the baring of his holy arm. Many scholars assume that this intriguing phrase signifies “doing battle, for in battle the soldier threw back his cloak from his right arm”⁵⁰ for the purpose of “us[ing] his sword.”⁵¹ Military activity, however, is not the purpose of Isa 52:10.

The baring of the arm of the LORD to the nations is soteric rather than militaristic because warrior language is absent from vv. 7–10. The sense of the passage, further, is that God’s redemption would not be limited to the descendants of Jacob. J. Ross Wagner said:

47. Trygve N. D. Mettinger, “In Search of the Hidden Structure,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; VTSup70.1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 151.

48. Philippe de Robert, “Esaie 52:1–12,” *ETR* 52 (1977): 537. De Robert’s quotation makes reference to a messenger “who addresses the population of Jerusalem in order to announce the imminent salvation provided by God.”

49. John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (ABR; New York: Doubleday, 1995), 11. The Qumran Community added מְשִׁיחַ (“Messiah”) to their rendering of Isa 52:7 in 11QMelch.

50. Ridderbos, *Isaiah*, 466.

51. R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66* (NCB; Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1975), 168.

Isaiah 52:10 functions both as a summary of the first major section of Isaiah 51–55 (51:1–52:12) and as a pivotal link with the following section (52:13–53:12). The LXX reads, “And the Lord will reveal (ἀποκαλύπτω) his holy arm before all the Gentiles, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of God.” The Arm of the LORD has been an important term for God’s saving activity [in Isa 40:10–11; 51:5, 9]. . . . The revelation of God’s saving work to the Gentiles and to the “ends of the earth” in 52:10 restates the important theme of 51:4–5 that the Gentiles and “the islands” will hope in the arm of the Lord. The reference to the Gentiles also points back to the previous mention of Gentiles in 52:5, “because of you my name continually is blasphemed among the Gentiles.” In 52:10, the Gentiles now see God’s vindication of his name as he saves his people. It also points ahead to the statement that “many Gentiles” will marvel at the Lord’s Servant (52:15) and that “proselytes” will be included among the people of God.⁵²

Isaiah 52:10, therefore, hearkens back to God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 22:18.⁵³

A careful reading of Isa 49:6 confirms that the arm of the LORD is not an abstract concept, but a messianic title: “[God] says, ‘It is too small a thing for You to be My Servant in order to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to cause the preserved of Israel to return; I will also make You a light to the nations in order to be My salvation to the end of the earth.’” Isaiah 49:1 supports this connection, for the Servant addresses the “islands” and the “peoples from afar,” while God bares his arm to “all the nations” and “all the ends of the earth” in 52:10. The Arm of the LORD, then, becomes an alternate title for the messianic Servant of the LORD.

A difference does surface, however, when one compares Isa 49 and 52. Whereas previously the Servant explained, “In the shadow of His hand [God] has hidden Me” (Isa 49:2), the prophet declares in 52:10 that in the future God would reveal the Arm of the LORD to the entire world.

52. J. Ross Wagner, “The Heralds of Isaiah and the Mission of Paul: An Investigation of Paul’s Use of Isaiah 51–55 in Romans,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant* (ed. William H. Bellinger Jr., and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), 217–18.

53. “By means of your seed all of the nations will be blessed, because you obeyed My voice” (Gen 22:18). Both the apostles Peter (Acts 3:25–26) and Paul (Gal 3:16) recognized Abraham’s seed as none other than Christ.

In other words, the one the LORD had hidden in past times ultimately would be revealed as God's Messiah.

For this reason, both Isa 49:13 and 52:9 contain a command to rejoice. In 49:13 the heavens, earth, and mountains break into joy because God's people are comforted, while in 52:8–9 the "waste places of Jerusalem" celebrate the fact that God "has redeemed Jerusalem." According to Isa 49, therefore, "the servant himself will be the Lord's salvation to the ends of the earth,"⁵⁴ an attribute applied to the arm of the LORD in Isa 52:10. Just as one rolls up his sleeve in order to reveal his bare arm, God would reveal his Messiah in due time.

Isaiah 53:1

In order to appreciate the full significance of Isa 53:1, one must remember the overarching message of chapters 49–52: "God has promised to deliver his people from their alienation from him so that they can indeed become his servants to the world. Now [in Isa 52:13–53:12] he tells the means by which he proposes to effect that deliverance."⁵⁵ This redemption is made possible through the Servant of God.

In Isa 52:13 God claims the Servant as his own, and this preparatory statement introduces a pericope that describes aspects of both the Servant's ministry and the response of those who witness his work. The pronouns "he," "his," and "him" appear regularly through 52:13–15,⁵⁶ directing the reader back to their antecedent, the Servant. In this section of Isaiah, the enigmatic nature of this messianic figure once again comes to the attention of the audience.

The prophet declares in verse 15 that a mystery will be revealed to the nations that will cause the kings to "shut their mouths." This theme appeared earlier in Isaiah in passages such as 49:2 as well as 50:6, in which "images of the servant are linked with the themes of hiddenness

54. E. R. Ekblad Jr., *Isaiah's Servant Poems According to the Septuagint: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (CBET 23; Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 277.

55. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 382.

56. According to the pericope: (1) "He will be exalted and lifted up"; (2) "His appearance was disfigured more than any man"; (3) "His form [was disfigured] more than the sons of man"; (4) "He will sprinkle many nations"; and (5) "Kings will shut their mouths because of Him." The prophet Isaiah employed multiple masculine pronouns throughout this section so that his audience immediately would realize that he was continuing his discussion regarding the Servant. This deliberate device ensured that there would be no question that Isa 53 refers to the kingly, yet suffering Messiah whom the LORD promised to send in order to provide atonement for the people's sin.

and seeing.”⁵⁷ The verse at hand explains that the Arm of the LORD *is* the revelation to be disclosed. No masculine pronouns appear in 53:1 because the Arm of the LORD is substituted for the pronoun “him,”⁵⁸ but thereafter pronouns occur with great frequency once more (vv. 2–12). This stylistic element indicates afresh that the Arm of the LORD is God’s Servant, and his mission is the soteric redemption of Jews and Gentiles alike.

The implication, then, is that “the message of Isa 52:7–12 is put into effect” in 53:1.⁵⁹ David J. A. Clines rightly noted that verse 1b, like verse 1a, contains “a rhetorical question expecting a negative answer.”⁶⁰ This stylistic feature indicates that not only must the messianic Arm of the LORD be revealed, but that he also would be disclosed in an unexpected way that would startle observers.⁶¹

The surprise of the audience stems from two factors. The Israelites, first, were cognizant that the arm of the LORD was the instrument by which God expressed his militaristic might. The working of God’s arm against the Egyptians at the Red Sea (e.g., Exod 15:16; Deut 4:34; 5:15) had left a lasting impression on the people of God.

57. R. P. Carroll, “Blindsight and the Vision Thing,” in *Writing and Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; VTSup70.1; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 88.

58. The word זרוע is a feminine noun, but the gender of the term does not mean that the arm is feminine. In languages such as Hebrew, the gender of the noun is not always a case of masculinity or femininity: “It is important to understand that feminine nouns (grammatical gender) do not refer only to feminine things (natural gender) or masculine nouns only to masculine things. . . . What the gender of a Hebrew noun indicates is the pattern of inflection it will usually follow.” Gary D. Pratico and Miles van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 29. זרוע is a good example of this pattern, for although it is feminine in Hebrew, its Greek equivalent (βραχίον) is masculine. The Bible recognizes both זרוע and βραχίον (cf. John 12:38) as messianic, demonstrating that זרוע possesses a grammatical rather than a natural gender.

59. N. T. Wright, “The Servant and Jesus: The Relevance of the Colloquy for the Current Quest for Jesus,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. William H. Bellinger Jr., and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), 293. “The arm of [the LORD] . . . is revealed according to Isa, 53:1, in and through the work of [his] Servant”.

60. David J. A. Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah 53* (JSOTSup 1; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1976), 15.

61. The fulfillment of this prophecy appears in John 12:37–39a: “But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: ‘LORD, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For this reason they could not believe. . . .’” (NASB)

Second, in chapters previous to Isa 51:4–8 the prophet employs the arm as the conqueror of Israel’s enemies.⁶² To Israel’s astonishment, therefore, the Arm of the LORD “would [not] rend the heathen,”⁶³ but would seek to redeem them (cf. Isa 52:10–53:15).

Isaiah 59

The first section of Isa 59 begins with a charge against God’s people (Isa 59:1–8). Isaiah explains that their sundry problems did not stem from any failure on God’s part—the LORD’s hand was not short when it came to deliverance (Isa 59:1). Rather, the people’s hands were defiled with blood and their fingers with iniquity (Isa 59:3). The prophet Isaiah then numbers himself among the guilty (vv. 9–11) by employing the pronoun “we.” After the confession of national sin (v. 12), Isaiah describes the situation in which the people find themselves because of their iniquity (vv. 13–15a): “The absence of justice . . . gives evidence of the completeness of the breach between Israel and God.”⁶⁴

In the following section (vv. 15b–16) the text declares that God’s “arm delivered salvation to Him, and [His arm’s] own righteousness upheld Him” (v. 16b). Odil Hannes Steck observed that “die eschatologische Wende Jahwes unwiderstehlich schnell kommt—man beachte schon die präteritale Formulierung der Heilsinitiative Jahwes.”⁶⁵ The preterite tense of the verbs suggests that at the point at which the prophet wrote the chapter that God already had begun to take the initiative in acting to bring about redemption.

In Isa 59:17–19 the prophet described the ramification of God’s work in the world, emphasizing that it would “be done with exact justice.”⁶⁶ Further, God’s covenant with Israel is the heart of Isa 59:20–

62. In Isa 30:30 the LORD strikes at Assyria with his arm; the target at which God directs his arm in Isa 48:14 is the Chaldeans.

63. George A. F. Knight, *Servant Theology: A Commentary on the Book of Isaiah 40–55* (ITC; Edinburgh: Handsel, 1984), 169.

64. Daniel Kendall, “The Use of ‘Mispat’ in Isaiah 59,” *ZAW* 96 (1984): 399.

65. Odil Hannes Steck, “Jahwes Feinde in Jesaja 59,” *BN* 36 (1987): 54. An English translation of Steck’s quotation reads: “The eschatological turn of Yahweh comes irresistibly fast—note already the preterite formulation of Yahweh’s salvation initiative.”

66. J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 369.

21. This discussion anticipates the new covenant that Jeremiah and Ezekiel would foretell a century later.⁶⁷

Isaiah 59 functions in much the same way as chapter 53, which also deals with the concepts of guilt and forgiveness. Oswalt explained: “Here, as in Isa 53, God must intervene on his people’s behalf. There, they were helpless before the guilt and alienation that their sin produced, and God’s *arm* intervened on their behalf, submitting to the death that was rightfully theirs and ours.”⁶⁸ The authors of *Sanhedrin* 98a counted Isa 59:16 as a prophecy that would find fulfillment at the advent of the Messiah⁶⁹ because they understood the Arm of the LORD to be the righteous messianic figure that God would send at the end of time.

The point of the passage is not to suggest that “salvation had to be postponed until such time as God chose to intervene on behalf of those who turned to him,”⁷⁰ but that humans are incapable of manufacturing the salvation that they so desperately need.⁷¹ This theological point is demonstrated by the past tense of the verbs in Isa 59:16–17, one of which asserts that God could find no human to intercede.⁷² For this reason the LORD purposed that his own arm would stand in the gap between his righteousness and mankind’s wickedness. Although the triumph of the Arm of the LORD had not yet transpired when the prophet composed the chapter, the past tense of תושע (“the [arm] brought victory”) in v. 16 serves the purpose of “express[ing] what the Lord has determined upon.”⁷³ The redemption was as good as finished in the mind of God.

67. John C. Whitcomb, “Christ’s Atonement and Animal Sacrifices in Israel,” *GTJ* 6 (1985): 205.

68. Oswalt, *Isaiah 40–66*, 528.

69. Rikki E. Watts, “Jesus’ Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Crux Revisited,” in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. William H. Bellinger Jr., and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1998), 147.

70. Robert P. Carroll, “Eschatological Delay in the Prophetic Tradition,” *ZAW* 94 (1982): 56.

71. Kendall, “The Use of ‘Mispat’ in Isaiah 59,” 399.

72. See Victor P. Hamilton, “פָּנַע” *TWOT* II, 715. Of the forty-four times that פָּנַע occurs in the OT, four of these occurrences appear in the *hip’il* stem, denoting the act of intercession. Two of these instances (Isa 53:12; 59:16) depict the Arm of the LORD as interceding for transgressors, a function which the NT attributes to Christ (cf. Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

73. Motyer, *Isaiah*, 368.

The chapter reveals another important quality of the arm of the LORD. “Righteousness” is a major factor in the passage,⁷⁴ occurring five times (Isa 59:4, 9, 14, 16, 17). In one instance the term is parallel with the arm of the LORD (cf. Isa 59:16) in order to contrast God’s righteous arm with unrighteous humanity. The chapter further intimates that somehow the righteousness of the Arm of the LORD would cancel out the iniquities of mankind, for “a Redeemer (לֹאֵל, cf. Exod 6:6) would come to Zion, and to those who would turn from transgression in Jacob” (Isa 59:20).

Isaiah 63:4–5, 7–14

Isaiah 63:1–6 undoubtedly is related to Isaiah 59:15–17 as evidenced by the “strong connections of vocabulary between [the two].”⁷⁵ Whereas the declaration of 59:15–17a sprang from the lips of the prophet, 63:4–8 records a direct address made by God. The chapter reinforces the importance of the previous text as well as the part that God’s arm plays in soteric redemption.

Although Isa 63 begins with a reference to the vengeance of God (v. 4), the focus of verses 4–5, 7–14 is soteric. God searched for a redeemer among the people of the earth who could bring salvation and thus satisfy his vengeance, but was astonished that no one could fill the position (v. 5b). Verses 7–14 cite the exodus redemption, as well as the people’s rebellion, in order to remind the audience that God did not work on their behalf because of Israel’s righteousness, but because “of His compassion” (v. 7). In both the past and the future, the Arm of the LORD emerges as “the solitary provision of a just salvation” because redemption could be secured by no other means.⁷⁶

CONCLUSION

The first part of our study demonstrated that Exod 6:1–8 is of primary importance for a number of reasons. Not only does the pericope provide the blueprint for the LORD’s future dealings with Israel, Exod 6:6 is the

74. John W. Olley, “Righteousness,” *The Septuagint of Isaiah: A Contextual Study* (SCS 8; Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1979), 72.

75. P. A. Smith, *Rhetoric and Redaction in Trito-Isaiah: The Structure, Growth and Authorship of Isaiah 56–66* (VTSup 62; Leiden: Brill 1995), 124.

76. Robert H. O’Connell, *Concentricity and Continuity: The Literary Structure of Isaiah* (JSOTSup 188; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 226.

first instance in which the OT associates the word “arm” with God. In this context, the arm of the LORD delivers and redeems the people of Israel. Since this exact formula appears at least 124 times in the Hebrew text, and the phrase “arm of the LORD” occurs in numerous passages, one must regard the theme as one of the key OT theological motifs.

The final part of the study examined soteriological texts from the prophetic era that make use of “arm of the LORD” terminology. The liberation of the people of Israel from Egypt by means of God’s arm served as a guarantee of their continued national deliverance in the post-Conquest era. Furthermore, the idea of physical deliverance provided the underpinning for the prophets’ discussion of soteriological deliverance. Interestingly, a number of texts in the book of Isaiah identified the Arm of the LORD as none other than the LORD’s anointed Servant and hence function as a messianic appellation.

This theological examination of the development of the arm of the LORD motif has not exhausted the theme. Space does not allow for an analysis of the arm as Creator, Divine Warrior, King, and Judge. For the time being, the contribution of these important texts to the arm of the LORD motif must remain the purview of a future study.