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THE PROPHETIC SERVANT

THE IDEOLOGY OF SPIRIT-EMPOWERED LEADERS

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Abstract

The study examines two groups of Spirit-empowered leaders, David in his final words, and the Servant figures, to develop the ideal of the Spirit-empowered leader as understood by the Old Testament. One of the findings is the “prophetic” feature emerging as the most significant characteristic of the ideal leader.

Introduction

After the publication of “Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered Leaders,”¹ many expressed their expectation to see a pair-study dealing with the “good” cases of Spirit-empowerment. Therefore, this study examines “good” Old Testament figures whose life and leadership is characterized by the presence and empowerment of God’s Spirit. The earlier study selected Samson and Saul as the epitome of the “bad” cases.

Similarly, this study will select several biblical figures by examining relevant passages. Two groups have been selected: one from the historical figure, King David, and the other from the future leader in the restored age of Israel. The discussion of the two figures will benefit from the examination of relevant passages. This study concludes with a series of observable lessons for today’s believers, contributing to the profile of Spirit-empowered leadership.

David’s Last Words (2 Samuel 23:1–4)

Portraying David as the epitome of the ideal king can be problematic as he committed serious sins, particularly his adultery and murder surrounding

Bathsheba (2 Sam 11) and the census of fighting men he took (2 Sam 24:1–17). Both resulted in harsh reprimands of the prophets and severe punishments. The latter offense is ironic as the incident is recorded right after the present passage of David's self-claim of the Spirit's presence and his righteous rule. Yet, the overall testimony of David's life and rule is presented in a positive light, partly due to his sincere repentance (recorded in 2 Sam 11:13 and 24:17–25 respectively). The later kings have been regularly compared to David. For example, Jeroboam is judged: "I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes" (2 Kgs 14:8). God also promises his protection of the nation "for the sake of my servant David" (e.g., 2 Kgs 20:6). Thus, David is presented as the historical royal figure closest to the ideal king.

These "last words" of David (2 Sam 23:1–4) serve as a summary of the king's life and accomplishments as well as an admonition to future kings.

Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, son of Jesse, the oracle of the man whom God exalted, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the favorite of the Strong One of Israel: The Spirit of the Lord speaks through me, his word is upon my tongue. The God of Israel has spoken, the Rock of Israel has said to me: One who rules over people justly, ruling in the fear of God, is like the light of morning, like the sun rising on a cloudless morning, gleaming from the rain on the grassy land.²

Almost all commentators agree that this "testament" of David presents the king as a prophet and a righteous ruler.³ The prophetic aspect is readily observable by the two claims: the introductory phrase, "the oracle of David," and the triple repetition that God speaks through him (v. 2). The royal feature is overwhelming, which reflects Israel's kingship ideology. A close look at the royal epithets reveals a strong wisdom motif, such as the "fear of God" and ruling in "justice." In Isaiah 11, another relevant passage expressing the kingship ideology, the influence of the wisdom tradition abounds: the king equipped with "wisdom," "understanding," and the "fear of the Lord" (11:2–3), and judging in "righteousness," "equity," and "faithfulness" (11:4–5). Therefore, the last words of David take all three major traditions of Israel into the portrait of, and hope for, an ideal king.⁴ The passage, therefore, serves two functions: first, praising David for his accomplishments; and secondly, presenting the blessing of an ideal king (v. 5) and the curse of the "godless" one (vv. 6–7) for the subsequent kings.

The Spirit of God

In this profile of a model king, as in Isaiah 11, the Spirit of God plays an important role. Indeed, David's rule "is bracketed by references to the Spirit" and anointing beginning with 1 Samuel 16:13.⁵ The first observation is that the Spirit equips the king with desirable qualities. It is true that in this passage, the Spirit is directly linked to the prophetic oracle and experience of the king (as "the Spirit . . . speaks through me"). Only indirectly can one establish a link between the Spirit and the kingly virtues: ruling justly and in the fear of God (v. 3b). It is the Isaiah 11 passage that presents the direct link between the Spirit and the royal virtues, thus, establishing the equipping role of the Spirit:

The Spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and might,
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord (v. 2).

These God-given characteristics would allow the king to bring about the righteous rule by judging wisely, protecting the weak, and judging the wicked (vv. 3b–4). The Spirit endows the king with abilities and virtues to fulfill his "mission." Indeed, the empowerment of the Spirit is an essential feature of the ideal king. This equipping or empowering function is in line with the long-established Spirit tradition: empowering selected leaders to undertake a specific task, such as removing the threat of an enemy (e.g., Gideon in Judg 6:34). The second is the moral and spiritual characteristics of the Spirit's endowment. This is one distinctive feature of the ideology of Spirit-empowerment, sharply compared to the "tragic" cases such as Samson and Saul. The ideal king still performs the domestic and administrative functions such as "judging" (often as the final judiciary authority, e.g., Isa 11:3–4), and, the effect of the Spirit's presence conspicuously lacks any physical or emotional behaviors such as "prophesying" (e.g., 1 Sam 10:5, 10), or the demonstration of physical, political, or military prowess (e.g., Judg 14:19). As the "fear of the Lord/God" sums the characteristics of the ideal king, the Spirit's endowment is predominantly moral and spiritual. The third is the "internalization" of the Spirit's endowment. The Spirit of God works through the recipient's heart and character, resulting in the qualities desired for the ideal king. In both passages, this quality is summarized as the "fear of the Lord/God." His righteous and just rule, therefore, is the manifestation of his inner disposition endowed by the Spirit.

This priority of the inner-working of the Spirit in the recipient's character and attitude is what God intends to occur. When Samuel anointed Saul, he predicted that turning "into a different person" (1 Sam 10:6) was to accompany the rushing of the Spirit. Indeed, when Saul left Samuel, "God gave him another heart" (v. 9), suggesting the priority of the inner change at least conceptually if not chronologically. This internalization is perhaps the most distinguishing aspect of the ideal king from the unfortunate cases. Despite the Spirit's intention, Samson and Saul may have ignored this priority and process. On the other hand, although David lacks any drastic military accomplishments directly attributed to the Spirit, his consistent reliance upon God, particularly for military campaigns, and the deep repentance of his sins mark the Spirit's impact on his attitude toward God, his life, call, and the nation.

Prophetic Features

Then, why is the strong prophetic feature in Israel's kingship ideology? Several scholars have observed in Israel's kingship ideology this reduced reference to the traditional royal roles such as military and political functions.⁶ This "non-royal" feature may reflect the sophistication of the leadership structure groups in society. For example, the book of Micah reveals the rise of a new social class as urbanization accelerated in Judah and Israel in the prosperous eighth century B.C.E. (e.g., 2:1–2). The new merchant class now joins the traditional ruling social class: the social leadership (the "heads" and "rulers") who would bring justice (3:1–3) and the prophets or religious leaders who bring God's demands to the leaders and the nation (3:5–8). In such a setting, kingship became more "professional," gradually moving away from the idea that God is the ultimate king of Israel and human kings are only his regents. King Ahaz, for example, refused to ask for God's sign (Isa 7:11–12). His decline is an indirect denial of God's role in protecting Judah from the Syro-Ephromite threat. In this degradation of kingship ideology, the role of the prophets as a counterbalance grew in prominence. The fact that every king in Israel and Judah was judged according to the prophetic standards proves this development. (That is why the histories of God's people are called the Former Prophets).

This ideology of kingship was also motivated by the pre-monarchical theocracy, and Moses served as an example. Despite his military and political role, he remains in Scripture as a prophet, a human figure standing between God and his people, acting as God's spokesperson. He experienced God's rare presence and "saw

his face but did not perish” (Exod 33:20). It is, therefore, not unexpected that king David is now remembered as a prophet who ruled justly with God’s word in his mouth through the presence of the Spirit.

Then to which particular aspect(s) of prophetism does the king refer? The passage identifies the inspired speech: “oracle” (2 Sam 23:1), the Spirit speaking through him, “his word” upon his tongue (v. 2). Verse 3 is more specific, “God . . . has spoken” [and] “has said to me.” More specifically, the passage refers to the king receiving God’s message through the Spirit and relaying it to the nation. Is this oracular role all about his prophetic claim? A clue to this inquiry may be found in the close relationship between the Spirit-empowered leaders and their prophetic experiences. We will revisit this inquiry toward the close of this study.

The Servant

Duhm first identified four passages (Isa 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–7; 52:13–53:12) as the “Servant Songs,” and argued that they imply the single identity of the Servant.⁷ His lasting contribution is the recognition that the Servant figure occupies the central place in Isaiah 40–55, and even beyond. Since then, debates have continued on the legitimacy of the grouping of the four Servant Songs and the identity of the Servant. The current discussion takes the literary reading in the canonical context and includes other similar passages, particularly Isaiah 61. For the identity of the Servant, the New Testament hindsight would settle the matter relatively quickly: the Servant is the Messiah (e.g., Matt 3:16–17) fulfilling the promise in Isaiah 42:1–4. However, this inquiry is to ask, “How did the ancient people of God understand it?” All the suggested identities are categorized as either an individual or a corporate group (that is, Israel), or even both. The first two chapters of Second Isaiah use the designation both to individual and corporate figures. Would then the Servant Israel sometimes be described in individual terms? God calls Israel “my servant . . . whom I have chosen” (41:8, also 9). As the “victor” is to crush the nations, so does he make Israel “a threshing sledge, sharp, new, and having teeth” to judge the nations (41:15–16). The most serious challenge to this interpretation is Israel’s projected servant role. Yes, that it will rise to crush the nations is hard enough to take. Is it going to carry out a suffering Servant’s role to benefit others, as described in Isaiah 53:1–10? Anticipating Israel to be “crushed in pain” by God and “his life” becoming “an offering for sin” (v. 10) is hard to imagine. For this reason, some identify the Servant as “purified Israel.”⁸ If the Servant is an individual(s), then we have more than one Servant, as Israel is frequently identified

as God's servant. There are plenty of propositions to name the Servant: from Moses, Jeremiah, the prophet, to the future ideal ruler. Would the Servant be more than one? The traditional Jewish expectation of two messiahs, one royal and the other religious after the pattern of Zerubbabel and the high priest Joshua (e.g., Hag 1:1, 11, 14), attest to this historical interpretation. Still, the Servant may refer both to Israel and an individual, and the two are organically connected, in the manner that Christ and the church are separate entities and yet intimately connected. Thus, the identity of the Servant may have been left fluid and ambiguous to the ancient people of God. Despite his identity being constantly clouded and therefore debated, the leader, whether an individual or a community or both, will rise to carry out God's bidding, fulfilling God's design for faithful leadership. Three passages will be the basis of this discussion: Isaiah 42:1–4; 61:1–3; and 44:1–5. In the course of exposition, I will include other relevant passages.

(Re)Calling and the Spirit of God

In Isaiah 42:1, the Servant is presented as an individual. God introduces his Servant to the unknown audience with elaborate credentials: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights" (1a).⁹ Then God's equipping follows: "I have put my Spirit upon him." The manner in which the Servant receives God's Spirit (נתן, "to give") markedly compares to the old customary expression (נצח, "to rush" by NRSV or "come powerfully" by NIV) when the Spirit comes, for example, upon Saul (1 Sam 10:6; 11:6) and Samson (Judg 14:6). The Spirit's coming upon selected leaders serves two functions: authentication with "prophesying" as a sign and empowerment for specific tasks. The Spirit's presence upon this Servant may serve both purposes: as part of this endorsement to the unknown audience and, primarily, preparing him to fulfill a specific task. The close link between the Spirit and mission is unmistakable. The giving of the Spirit is directly linked to the mission of the Servant: "he will bring forth justice to the nations" (1b). Now, is he a royal or prophetic figure? With the shrouded identity of the Servant, it is difficult to determine. However, as a specific designation of an appointed person by the master or king, the term often carries a secular notion without excluding the religious. For example, the Epilogue of the Code of Hammurabi includes "servant" as one of many designations for the king: "As the shepherd of my people, a servant whose deeds were acceptable to gis-dar."¹⁰ One biblical example is the use of the term by Abraham's emissary when he introduces himself: "He said, 'I am Abraham's servant'" (Gen 24:34). Moses is explicitly called

“God’s servant” by himself, God, people, and Joshua (Exod 14:31; Num 12:7, 8). Later, the kings are called God’s servants as in “your servant my father David” (1 Kgs 8:24). Also, the verbs used to describe the Servant’s actions suggest more than just proclaiming: “to bring justice” and “to accomplish justice.” Nonetheless, the royal feature is not explicit, particularly considering his attitude and manner in fulfilling the task.

In Isaiah 61, the prophetic figure (not explicitly calling himself a “servant”) introduces himself to the audience claiming God’s unique call: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me” (1a). This claim is similar to what we find in Ezekiel, “Then the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me, and he said to me, ‘Say, Thus says the Lord’” (Ezek 11:5). The single credential he claims for his authority is the Spirit coming through “anointing.” Although the word is used here figuratively, it is based on the old connection between the two.¹¹ This is found in Samuel’s anointing of Saul into kingship (1 Sam 10:1 and 6) and another anointing of David (1 Sam 16:13). This term may also point toward a royal nature of the call as the kings and priests were initially anointed. As in ch. 42, the giving of the Spirit through anointing is linked to the empowerment for a specific mission. The act of anointing is for the consecration of an object or individual for a specific use. Besides, it signifies God’s provision of abilities or power to fulfill the task.¹²

The passage singles out the marginalized and suffering members of the community: “poor,” “brokenhearted,” “captives,” and “prisoners.” The care for the weak and powerless in society is the first act of justice and righteousness. What is implicitly referred to in Isaiah 42 as “a bruised reed” and the “smoldering wick” is now elaborated in the passage. The presence of hardship and disparity among the post-exilic people of God is well attested (e.g., the problem of debt-slavery, Neh 5:1–19).

This prophetic call continues the long prophetic tradition in which the Spirit of the Lord is the source of the prophetic vocation.¹³ However, we rarely see any reference to the Spirit in the prophetic call and commissioning, let alone the single appearance of “the Spirit of the Lord God” throughout the Old Testament.¹⁴ Indeed, except for several call narratives, the Scripture tells little about the emergence of the non-institutional “true” prophets. Their rising is almost like that of the judges. If we apply the parallel to the prophets from the emergence of pre-monarchic leaders (e.g., the seventy elders), the Spirit’s presence is part of their call and commissioning. Indeed, the presence of the Spirit upon two celebrated prophets is simply assumed and also extends to its continual presence. Samuel has a

group of follower-prophets (or “sons of the prophet,” 1 Sam 10:10) who prophesy (presumably under the presence of the Spirit). When Saul meets them, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon him mightily and also prophesies. The same pattern appears in 1 Samuel 19:20: “When they saw the company of the prophets in a frenzy, with Samuel standing in charge of them, the Spirit of God came upon the messengers of Saul, and they also fell into a prophetic frenzy.” Similarly, the presence of the Spirit upon Elijah is simply assumed through Elisha’s request, “Please let me inherit a double share of your spirit” (2 Kgs 2:9). The “your spirit” is taken by many as referring to the Spirit of God, which has been with Elijah.¹⁵ The self-claim of this prophetic figure, therefore, is in accordance with the well-established prophetic tradition of the Spirit.

In Isaiah 44, Israel is called God’s “Servant” as in 41:8. The oracle is neither a call nor commissioning; it is an affirmation of the old call with an admonition and promise. However, this passage is included in this discussion because of the designation of the “Servant” and the giving of the Spirit. The old call was to make Israel God’s own possession and his priest kingdom to the nations (Exod 19:5–6).

I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness (Isa 42:6–7).

However, this Servant of the Lord has failed miserably: instead of opening blind eyes, they themselves became blind. God moans over his people: “Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like my dedicated one, or blind like the servant of the Lord?” (Isa 42:19). Now God calls his people, affirming his election of Israel (“chosen” appearing twice, and “servant” twice), and his commitment of help: “But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen! Thus says the Lord who made you, who formed you in the womb and will help you: Do not fear, O Jacob my servant, Jeshurun whom I have chosen” (vs 1-2).

To restore their status as God’s people and servant to the covenant relationship,¹⁶ God takes his initiative. In this process, his Spirit is often the agent. The Spirit brings life to the dry bones in God’s army (Ezek 37:1–11), the pouring out of the Spirit ushers in the new era (Isa 32:15), and God places a new heart and his Spirit to restore his people (Ezek 11:19; 36:26; Jer 31:33). In the same way, God

is going to revive his people through the life-giving Spirit: “For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my Spirit upon your descendants, and my blessing on your offspring” (44:3). The parallelism between the “water” and the “Spirit” is unmistakable: what the life-giving water is to the desert, the Spirit is to God’s people, both of the present and the future. God’s people will indeed prosper, increase, and flourish “like a green tamarisk, like willows by flowing streams” (v. 4).

In all three passages, the Spirit of God plays a vital role in the calling of his Servant. Therefore, the election of his Servant is God’s sovereign work. For Israel, although this calling is a renewed one, it is still God’s monergism: he is acting alone. Also explicit is the presence of the Spirit, signifying a special relationship between God and his Servant. For the individual Servant figure, the qualifiers such as “chosen,” “pleased,” “uphold,” and “anointing,” point to the intimate closeness between God and the Servant. In the same way, Israel has been presented in similar terms to denote intimacy with God (e.g., “my treasured possession out of all the people” as part of the covenant description, Exod 19:5).

Mission and the Spirit

In Isaiah 42, the presence of the Spirit is tied to the specific task for the Servant to perform. After the impressive array of endorsing words, God declares, “I have put my [S]pirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isa 42:1). The reception of the Spirit and his God-given mission shapes his life, attitude, and resolution. His mission is to the nations (or the “coastland”), beyond God’s people. Three times in the passage, his mission is described to “bring justice to the nations” as “the coastlands wait for his teaching.” The understanding of “justice” (טִפְסֻד, or “judgment”) is critical. The administration of justice has traditionally been reserved to the king as the ultimate judicator of any dispute (e.g., Solomon in 1 Kgs 3:16–28). Based on the king’s loyalty to God as the true king of Israel, the administration of justice (and righteousness) among the people is his primary function. Maintaining a just nation also includes the purging of evil and the protection of the weak (e.g., Isa 11:1–5).¹⁷ However, in this passage, it is not clear what it means that the Servant brings justice to the nations, and how he is going to do it. If Israelite kings generally struggled to administer justice in their territory, the Servant mission to the nations is an audacious prospect. Nowhere in the passage is the sign of royal, that is, political or military, activities. Instead, the manner in which he is going to fulfill this mission is by his faithfulness, perseverance, and resolve. This

description points more to a prophetic than a royal approach. Then, the Servant is going to proclaim God's justice to the nations. The reference to *torah* ("teaching," v. 4) augments the interpretation that the Servant has a prophetic task, this time, beyond his people.

Isaiah 61 elaborates the task that the Servant figure is commissioned to fulfill:

. . . to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn; to provide for those who mourn in Zion—to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit (vv. 1b–3a).

All seven activities are linked to the verb "sent." As in ch. 42, the direct link between the endowment of the Spirit and the tasks suggests the equipping or empowering role of the Spirit for the recipients to fulfill successfully the God-given mission. Most commentators agree that the passage supports the identity of the called recipient to be a prophetic rather than a royal figure.¹⁸ Most infinitives agree with this conclusion: "To bring good news," "to bind up the brokenhearted," "to proclaim liberty," and "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," "to comfort" and "[to] provide for those who mourn," and "to give them a garland." They are either verbal or pastoral activities. On the other hand, others point out that some terms refer to royal duties: the "release of the prisoners" and the "day of vengeance."¹⁹ It is a king, not a prophet, who would be able to perform these functions. However, "release" and "vengeance" are not actions but the objects of "to proclaim." Therefore, all the tasks of this Servant figure can be said to be prophetic.

The established tradition positions the Spirit of God as the source of the prophetic message. Strangely, the earliest report is found in Balaam's experience with God's Spirit: "Then the Spirit of God came upon him [Balaam], and he uttered his oracle" (Num 24:2b–3a). The self-description of his experience includes hearing "the words of God," seeing "the vision of the Almighty," "falling down," etc. (v. 4). His oracle of blessing upon Israel, against the wish of Balak, who hired him, and even of himself, is the sure sign that God's Spirit inspired the message. Likewise, the encounter of Micaiah and Ahab's four-hundred prophets (1 Kgs 22) reveals the claim and counterclaim of the Spirit as the source of the prophetic message. The lone provincial and anti-establishment prophet predicts the demise of

the king in the war with Aram, claiming his knowledge in the heavenly court experience. In the course of his prophecy, he reveals that the lying spirit from God is in the mouth of Ahab's prophets (vv. 19–23). In his fury, Zedekiah, the leader of the prophets, confronts him by asking, "Which way did the Spirit of the Lord pass from me to speak to you?" (v. 24). This episode reveals that the prophets regularly claim the Spirit of God as the source of their messages. The current passage continues this tradition: the prophetic figure claims the authenticity of the message by claiming the Spirit as the source.

In contrast, Isaiah 44 is entirely different in the "task" that renewed Israel is expected to perform. While the two Servant figures have their tasks for them to perform actively, that of God's people is a passive one. The coming of the Spirit has a different role: to renew the life of God's people. The effect of the life-giving or revising work of the Spirit may be considered as the task for new Israel to "perform": "This one will say, 'I am the Lord's,' another will be called by the name of Jacob, yet another will write on the hand, 'The Lord's,' and adopt the name of Israel" (v. 5).

As in ch. 42, the scope of new Israel's transformation by the Spirit is the nations. The restoration of God's people through the Spirit prompts the voluntary acceptance of Israelite identity by "this," "another," and still "another." They are outside of God's own: the nations. The piling of different entities gives an impression of a continuous move of the nations toward God as envisioned in Micah 4:2–3: ". . . and many nations shall come and say: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

In the absence of any reference to Israel's response or action, it is the sole work of God's grace. Israel is not only the beneficiary of God's monergistic act of grace, it fulfills the very purpose of God's call (to become God's priestly kingdom, Exod 19:6) just by being God's people renewed by his Spirit.

In all three passages, the coming or presence of God's Spirit is linked to their call. The Spirit is to equip the Servant to fulfill faithfully the mission. Even for renewed Israel, the life-reviving Spirit ultimately empowers the nation to bring the surrounding peoples to the reign of Yahweh. This is an age-old tradition that the Spirit supernaturally equips selected leaders of God's people.

Life in the Spirit

Isaiah 42 has an extraordinary description of the Servant's attitude and life under the Spirit's empowering presence. This elaborate description is a stark contrast to the demonstration of superhuman prowess as the outcome of the Spirit's endowment. The first effect is his manner in carrying out God-given tasks and also his response to the seeming hardship he is to face: "He will not cry or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street" (v. 2). This may reflect the more internalizing tendency of the Spirit's presence that is prevalent in the later stage. In addition to this developmental perspective, it may still be said that the Servant consciously takes the Spirit to the personal level. Earlier, I argued that the first experience of Samson with the Spirit (Judg 13:25) was intended for internal working.²⁰ Also, Samuel predicted that, as a result of the Spirit's coming upon Saul, he would "be turned into a different person" (1 Sam 10:6, or "God gave him another heart," v. 9). This experience is intended for the internal working of the Spirit, or "a radical transformation of the personality."²¹ The second effect is his tender care for the hurting: "a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench" (v. 3). The care for the weak is an essential part of "justice." The literary sense is such that he identifies himself with the powerless in society, which is a radical departure from traditional Spirit-empowerment, frequently expressed in physical (e.g., Samson in Judg 14: 6, 19; 15:14) or military (such as Saul, 1 Sam 11:6) prowess. The third effect is his persevering resolve to accomplish his mission: "he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be crushed until he has established justice in the earth" (vv. 3b–4a). The fulfillment of the God-given task is the ultimate goal of the Servant's life, despite adversaries and obstacles. The empowerment of the Spirit is completely internalized by the Servant and expressed in his obedient life.

In a different way, the renewed people of God embodies the life-giving work of the Spirit. In their seeming passivity, their active obedient and faithful living in God's covenant is elsewhere found:

I will give you [new Israel] a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. You will live in the land I gave your forefathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God (Ezek 36:26–28).

The giving of the Spirit is to cause God's people to follow God's law. Along with the heart of flesh (instead of "stone"), the Spirit has a strong internalizing effect for new Israel. As a result, they are fully restored as God's covenant people, as seen in the covenant language: the "land," "my people," and "your God." Isaiah 61 calls this restored nation "oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, to display his glory" (v. 3b). In Isaiah 44, this restored nation will become the most effective witness to God's supremacy and grace so that the nations would be drawn to Yahweh.

Conclusion

The closing part of the study consists of two components: a summary reflection of the ideal portrait of the Spirit-empowered leader and a list of practical lessons we can learn from this study.

"Prophetic"

The most frequently recurring theme through the study is "prophetic" as the descriptor of the ideal Spirit-empowered leader, both of the past and the future. Let us explore why "prophetic" is so crucial, and what it means.

When the monarchy came into being, the Israelite leadership system entered a professionalization: the kings were in charge of administrative and political function, with the prophets conveying God's direction for the nation. Thus, the prophets are positioned between God and the kings as God's messengers diligently checking on the kings' (in)fidelity to God's demands. For example, before a war, the king was to hear from the Lord through the prophet. When this rule is violated, the king crosses the "red line," resulting in severe punishment. Saul, in his fight against the Philistines, is pressed to offer the burnt offering due to Samuel's delay (1 Sam 13:9). The prophet not only reprimands him for not keeping God's command (v. 13), but also declares that the kingship would no longer belong to Saul's family (v. 14). When Israel's next king was anointed, "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him" (1 Sam 16:14). The rest of his life and kingship was plagued by defeats, jealousy, mental torment, and eventual downfall. It all began when he crossed into the prohibited religious boundary set by the Lord. Similarly, the Judean king Uzziah, after many accomplishments, "had become strong, and he grew proud, to his destruction. For he was false to the Lord his God, and entered the temple of the Lord to make offering on the altar of

incense” (2 Chr 26:16). As God’s punishment, he lived the rest of his life as a leper (vv. 19–21). It appears that Israel could survive without a king, but not without a prophet.

At the same time, the kings have a paramount influence on the fate of the people and the nation. And their success and failure are strictly measured by their spiritual and moral performances, set and reminded by the prophets. For this reason, the books of the Former Prophets (Joshua to 2 Kings) record how each leader has performed according to the prophetic standards. For each king, in particular, receives his final “grade sheet” based on his (dis)loyalty to Yahweh, set by the prophets. For example, the prophet Elijah continually charged king Ahab of Israel for his Baal worship. In the end, his twenty-year reign is summarized: “[H]e clung to the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he caused Israel to commit; he did not depart from it” (1 Kgs 3:3). In contrast, the prophetic tradition endorses another king: “Asa did what was right in the sight of the Lord, as his father David had done” (1 Kgs 15:11). During the pre-monarchic period, Moses, Joshua, and Samuel combined the prophetic function with their leadership. Except for Joshua, upon whom the Spirit of wisdom rested (Deut 34:9), the Spirit’s presence in Moses and Samuel was simply “assumed,” as discussed above. They were successful in their leading of the nation and it was the rebellion of the people that frustrated God’s plan and their fate. This is in stark contrast to the monarchic period, where no case is found when the people behave faithfully to God even if the king is not. Bad kings have to be corrected by the prophets.

Then what is the core of this prophetic significance in these Spirit-empowered leaders? It is the prophet’s close affinity with God. An early Israelite illustration may help: “See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet. You shall speak all that I command you, and your brother Aaron shall tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his land” (Exod 7:1–2).

The process is never mechanical: the close relationship between God and his prophets is “organic.” They are invited to the heavenly court proceedings (Isa 6; 1 Kgs 22), hear from the Lord (Ezek 1:3), see visions (Ezek 1:1), eat a scroll (Ezek 3:1), and to participate in God’s pain in his redemptive plan (Hos 1:2). They are arrested, beaten, imprisoned, and even killed to stand by the truth they preach (e.g., Jer 37:13–16). They all point to the whole inner orientation toward God and God-given mission. Their attitude, life, and ministry are the outgrowth of their continuing internal communion with God. Indeed, the coming of the Spirit symbolizes the overwhelming and continual presence of God, or the “extension of God’s personality”²² graciously placed in them. It is the precise reason why some

recipients of God’s Spirit prophesy, a clear sign that God has now full and ongoing control over their physical and emotional faculties (such as the seventy elders and Saul).²³ Among the prophets, unlike ancient leaders, nowhere is the emphasis on the radical or even violent manner in which the Spirit “rushed” upon them. For this reason, Moses expresses his desire that all the Israelites become prophets: “Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” (Num 11:29). This is further predicted by Joel (2:28–29) and fulfilled in the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1–4). They are to become prophets not in a vocation but in their spiritual and behavioral affinity with God. Thus, the new people of God would have God’s Spirit, which would provide motivation and delight to observe God’s law (Ezek 36:27). This internalized quality and unrelenting resolve to fulfill the God-given mission characterize the “prophetic” layer in future Spirit-empowered leaders, both individual and corporate.

Lessons from The Study

As a summary with contemporary implications, the following lessons may be gleaned from this study:

- God’s Spirit is not just required for faithful leaders of the Lord; it is all they need;
- The Spirit validates and empowers God-chosen leaders;
- The true mark of the Spirit’s presence and empowerment is the alignment of the recipient’s heart, life, and mission (as characterized by “prophetic”) to God’s;
- Thus, the Spirit of God as the “extension of Yahweh’s personality” is intended to transform the recipient’s heart before undertaking the task;
- Samson and Saul may have failed to respond appropriately for the Spirit to bring about its transformative intent and potential to their inner being;²⁴
- The attitude of meekness (as the Servant) is indeed the sign of Spirit-endowed strength (as in Christ, Phil 2:5–8);
- The Spirit-empowered leader would bring the community and nations closer to the Lord;
- The leader would also empower others; and
- Ultimately, the Spirit-empowered leaders will bring the fullness of life to God’s people, nations, and God’s creation (or *shalom*).²⁵

Thus, the New Testament presents Jesus as God’s Spirit-empowered prophetic Servant who is “in the Father, and the Father is in me [him]” (John 14:10, 11). Through the Spirit, he also has the mind of God: “For who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). Indeed, the confusion in the identity of the Servant, particularly between individual and corporate nature, is perfectly realized in the life of Jesus and the church, his body!



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Notes

¹ Wonsuk Ma, “Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered Heroes: A Close Look at Samson and Saul,” *Spiritus: ORU Journal of Theology* 2 (2017), 23–28.

² All scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), but I capitalize the word “Spirit” if it is deemed to be of God.

³ For example, A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary 11 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 269.

⁴ Willen VanGemenen and Andrew Abernethy, “The Spirit and the Future: A Canonical Approach,” in *Presence, Power, and Promise: The Role of the Holy Spirit of God in the Old Testament*, eds. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 330.

⁵ David Firth, “The Historical Books,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and Keith Warrington (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

⁶ For example, Walter Harrelson, “Nonroyal Motifs in the Royal Eschatology,” in *Israel’s Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, eds. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter Harrelson (New York: Harper & Bros., 1962), 147–65.

⁷ Bernhard Duhm, *Das Buch Jesaja: Übersetzt und Erklärt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1902).

⁸ H. H. Rowley, *The Servant of the Lord and Other Essays on the Old Testament* (London: Lutterworth, 1952), 49.

⁹ J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 304, points out that this is the only passage among the Servant songs where the Spirit is mentioned.

¹⁰ Claude Hermann Walter Johns, *Babylonian and Assyrian Laws, Contracts and Letters* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904), ch. 2, the text of which differs slightly from the version found in James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 165.

¹¹ By this time, the “anointing” is broadly used in connection with a “chosen” one for a specific task such as the Messiah: e.g., Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1969), 366.

¹² William L. Lyons, “Anointed by the Spirit of the Lord God: An Ancient Biblical Concept and Ministry to the Poor,” a paper presented at the Scholars Consultation of Empowered21, Bogota, Colombia, June 2019, 4. The study is to appear in Wonsuk Ma, Opoku Onyinah, and Rebekah Bled, eds., *Good News to the Poor: Spirit-Empowered Responses to Poverty* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, forthcoming 2021).

¹³ George T. Montague, *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition* (New York: Paulist, 1976), 53.

¹⁴ Mary J. Obiorah and Favour C. Uroko, “‘The Spirit of the Lord God Is Upon Me’ (Is 61:1): The Use of Isaiah 61:1–2 in Luke 4:18–18,” *HTS Theologise Studies/Theological Studies* 74:1 (2018), 1, referenced in Lyons, “Anointed by the Spirit of the Lord God,” 2.

¹⁵ Rick Wadholm, Jr., *A Theology of the Spirit in the Former Prophets: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2018), 177; D. I. Block, “Empowered by the Spirit of God: The Holy Spirit in the Heterographic Writings of the Old Testament,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 1:1 (1997), 49–50. However, a caution is also voiced, e.g., by Robert B. Christolm, Jr. “The ‘Spirit of the Lord’ in 2 Kings 2:16,” in *Presence, Power, and Promise*, 308.

¹⁶ Daniel I. Block, “The View from the Top: The Holy Spirit in the Prophets,” in *Presence, Power, and Promise*, 202, argues for a strong covenantal context.

¹⁷ For more discussion, see Wonsuk Ma, “Justice and Righteousness, Israel’s Kingship Ideology, and the Spirit of God,” in *Celebrating Life in Community: Social Ethics in Global Perspective, Essays in Honor of Murray W. Dempster* (forthcoming).

¹⁸ E.g., John L. McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, Anchor Bible 20 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), 181.

¹⁹ For example, Trygve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1976), 25–26.

²⁰ Ma, “Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered Heroes,” 27.

²¹ Ma, “Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered Heroes,” 31, 32.

²² Aubrey Rodway Johnson, *Sacral Kingship in Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 13–14.

²³ David G. Firth, “The Spirit and Leadership: Testimony, Empowerment and Purpose,” in *Presence, Power, and Promise*, 280.

²⁴ Ma, “Tragedy of Spirit-Empowered Heroes,” 35–36.

²⁵ Wonsuk Ma, “Isaiah,” in *A Biblical Theology of the Holy Spirit*, 44–45.

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