

The Identity of The Shoot of Jesse: An Exegesis of Isaiah 11:1-5

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Abstract

As much as a lot of work has been done on the Messianic messages of the book of Isaiah, not much has been written about Isaiah 11. Isaiah 11:1-5 is a text that looks forward to a king who would rise from the lineage of Jesse here referred to as the shoot and branch. As much as Israel kept waiting for a king to arise from David's lineage, their expectations were distorted by the challenges they encountered and thus kept waiting for a deliver who would redeem them from their present circumstances. Isaiah describes the shoot of Jesse as one who will be full of the Spirit of the Lord and would rule in righteousness and justice. The study will seek to clarify the meaning of the passage as it now exists by analysing the text, outlining, and developing the theme of the text, and interacting with other material relevant to the text. The goal is to understand the original meaning the author intended for his audience to subsequently and appropriately apply it to the current context.

Keywords: *Shoot of Jesse, Spirit of the Lord, judge, righteousness, and justice*

INTRODUCTION

The one desire that God has for humanity is that they may establish a good relationship with Him. This is the same desire God had when He established a covenant with the Israelites. In Exodus 19:5, He communicates His desire that they are 'to obey Him and keep His covenant' and when they do that, then they will be 'a treasured possession, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' In addition to this, in Deuteronomy 17 Moses writes of a time when the Israelites would desire a king and YHWH gave them His expectation of that king. Among many things that the king was to observe, he was to 'fear God by keeping His commandment' (v. 19). In doing so, 'his heart will not turn away from his brothers as well as not turn away from God's commandment' (v. 20). In contrast, as we see in the kings who ruled Israel, most of them did not keep this covenant with the Lord; rather, they pushed people away from YHWH.

The book of Isaiah is centred around punishment and restoration for the nation of Israel. In Isaiah 11:1-5, the Israelites were looking forward to a king who would liberate them from all the trouble around them, and one who would take them back to YHWH. It is in this period that the Prophet Isaiah writes about 'the shoot of Jesse' and Isaiah gives a strong description of the king. As the Israelites await a political king who would liberate them from their current predicament with the nations around them, their hope is revived by the words of Isaiah. However, they may have missed their understanding and therefore kept waiting for the fulfillment of this prophecy in one of the kings. It is clear from Isaiah's words that he is talking about a different king compared to what the people were expecting. It is based on this issue

that this paper will seek to understand who is being referred to in Isaiah 11 and what YHWH will enable him to achieve. It will also evaluate the fulfillment of this prophecy in the kings who came after David to determine if this prophecy was temporary or Messianic.

Statement of the Problem

This study will aim to examine who the root refers to and what he does. In addition, many have divided the Spirit in v. 2 into seven aspects thus giving the understanding that these are seven different spirits. The paper will evaluate whether the spirit is one or is divided into seven spirits. Lastly, the paper will illuminate the theological implication if Isaiah 11:1-5 to its original audience and the significance to believers today.

Exegesis of Isaiah 11:1-5

Author, Date, and Place

The title of the book 'Isaiah' implies that the book's author is Isaiah who was a prophet. This has been supported by the Jewish practice of entitling the book based on a word in the book's first sentence.¹ 2 Kings corroborates much of Isaiah's work since he is recorded as the Prophet who responded to the issues of that day. Prophet Isaiah preached during the reign of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1) giving a possible dating of between 740-700BC in the 8th Century. The call of Isaiah as recorded in Chapter 6 of the book in first person language points to the likelihood of his authorship of the first part of the entire book. It is thought that Isaiah was a court prophet, primarily domiciled in the King's court, due to the numerous recorded face-to-face interactions with the kings (Is. 7:1)². Thus, Isaiah's ministry centred around Jerusalem, and there is no record of him traveling to a different place.

Literary Context

The book of Isaiah contains the Messianic theme outlined by different prophets in the Old Testament especially in Isaiah. This can be defined as a ray of hope in another king of Jerusalem whom the people expect to lead them with uprightness and justice.³ Chapter 11 fully develops the messianic theme introduced in chapter 7. It highlights how the king will rule and the kingdom he will establish. The message of Isaiah 11:1-5 comes as a message of hope after the pronouncement of the Assyrian invasion in chapter 8. The portion between chapters 8-12 is considered a prophetic announcement of a righteous king arising from the house of Jesse. The form taken in the Ancient Near East when announcing the inauguration of a king has its focus on describing the attributes of the new king with an emphasis on his just decisions and the peaceful kingdom that he will establish during his reign.⁴

¹George Buchanan Gray and Arthur S. Peake, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Isaiah. 1: Introduction, and Commentary on I - XXVII*, Latest impression (Edinburgh: Clark, 1980), xxx.

²J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament: From Its Origins to the Closing of the Alexandrian Canon* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 300–301, <http://site.ebrary.com/id/11016182>.

³P. E. Satterthwaite et al., eds., "Messianism and Messianic Prophecy in Isaiah 1-12 and 28-33," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, Tyndale House Studies (Carlisle, U.K. : Grand Rapids, Mich: Paternoster Press ; Baker Books, 1995), 89.

⁴Marvin A. Sweeney, *Isaiah 1 - 39: With an Introduction to Prophetic Literature*, The Forms of the Old Testament Literature / Rolf Knierim ..., Ed 16 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 203.

Detailed Exegetical Analysis of the Passage

V. 1- The Ancestry of the King

V. 1a - The shoot of Jesse

The text starts with a weqatal which shows a logical or temporal flow of thought. This should be best translated as ‘then...’ as the NASB takes it. Towards the end of chapter 10, the Lord speaks about the deliverance he will give to his people. The weqatal also functions to introduce the promise that follows which looks forward to the future prophetically. Thus, the weqatal verb *שׁוֹרֵץ*, here used to show something in the future can be translated as 'shall come out' as used in ESV, KJV, and NIV or 'has come out' as used in YLT. The former reflects the future, while the latter reflects a completed action – the shoot is already here. “Has come out” as used in YLT reflects the complete perfect which shows that the action has already been completed from the speaker's view.⁵ On the other hand, “will come out” can be taken as a rhetorical future, which addresses the coming out of this shoot in the future, but the prophet Isaiah speaks with certainty. The prophet having received a personal call to his ministry is confident that God will certainly bring this to pass.

The prophet uses a metaphor of a shoot and stump to relate to an individual and his background. In the plant language, when a tree is cut down to remain with a stump, often we see no life in that tree, it is termed completely dead. However, new life springs forth from this stump in terms of different shoots. A king here referred to as the shoot will come out from his family which is compared to the stem. As the stump exists after a tree has been cut down, the family of this king was there, but due to different circumstances, it was cut down, and now will rise again (2 Sam. 7:8-16). For the Israelites, all circumstances around them did not speak any hope to them. Isaiah 11:1 begins with an assurance that even though the season was not so promising for David's kingdom, there was hope for a future king. Even though God would punish Israel and her kings, He promised to raise somebody from the remaining stump.

It is of interest that while the promise of a kingly heir was made to David,⁶ the reference here is made to Jesse, David's father. The choice of Jesse shows that the functioning and success of this offspring will not be based on what David did as it was with the other kings of Judah.⁷ The choice of Jesse's offspring signals a sure continuity of Israel's past in them being the elect of the Lord. Even though Israel had walked away from God, He still established an everlasting covenant with them. The prophet goes back to Jesse to show that the king will not emerge from David's dynasty which had been exalted but a reminder of David's younger days when he had

⁵ Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (New York, N.Y.: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55.

⁶ 2 Samuel 7:5-17 – prophet Nathan makes the promise to David as given by the Lord. David received the assurance that his kingdom would know no end and that he would always have somebody in power.

⁷ Stephen T Sumner, “The Genealogy and Theology of Isaiah 11:1,” *Vetus Testamentum* 68, no. 4 (2018): 652, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685330-12341334>.

no potential of being king but was elected by God.⁸ Additionally, this reflects God's faithfulness in keeping His promises as had been spoken to David about his dynasty. It is in God's nature to affirm His promises, which is demonstrated in His faithfulness.⁹

The word *רָחַץ*(shoot) is found here and in Proverbs 14:3. In Proverbs 14:3, it has been used figuratively to show that a fool is punished by the words they speak. Here in Isaiah 11:1, it is not only used to refer to a new and young life that will spring forth from a fallen tree in the lineage of Jesse but also to convey the idea that the shoot will judge and discipline those who disobey God.

The verb *אָצַק* has mainly been used in relation to a person's 'coming forth' or 'going forth'.¹⁰ Whereas most of its occurrences refer to proceeding from a physical place, it may also be used figuratively. Among the figurative uses, it means being born of a father as in Genesis 35:11 as well as a woman appearing or coming out of a basket as in Zechariah 5:5,6, 9. In this case, the verb is used to refer to the child born from a father's loins. In addition, Beuken in his article argues that despite David's house failing to meet expectations, there is a need for a revolutionary leader.¹¹ I agree with Beuken's thoughts, the state of the Davidic dynasty and that of the Israelites left them hopeless, and were looking forward to the coming of this new shoot.

The plant language used here is striking in its vividness. It portrays a new and young life that will spring forth from a fallen tree in the lineage of Jesse.¹² The use of this language to demonstrate what will happen shows how deep the kingdom of David had sunk, such that there was a great need for a fresh beginning.¹³ It is important to note that the roots of the tree stump provide support and anchor the new growth. Naturally, when a tree is cut to remain only with the stump shows an almost impossible situation of the tree growing again. However, even if the kingdom was in trouble, the prophet Isaiah wrote with confidence about the deliverance of the Lord. This points to the continuity of the work of God with the nation of Israel, despite its sinful rebellious nature. From this same Israel, the promised ruler shall come forth, God will establish this king and his reign. This is emphasized by Job's use of this language of a tree sprouting again even after being cut, Job points more to hope than impossibility (Job 14:7).

⁸ Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, 1st ed, The Old Testament Library (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 102.

⁹ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 122.

¹⁰ "אָצַק - To Come Out," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, by H.D Preuss, G. Johannes Botterweck, and Ringereh, Helmer, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1974), 227–28.

¹¹ Wim Beuken, "The Emergence of the Shoot of Jesse: An Eschatological or a Now Event?," *Calvin Theological Journal* 39, no. 1 (April 2004): 95.

¹² Fouts, M David. "Messianismus Im Alten Testament 'חָטָר,'" in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis. 2: Lexical Dictionary 2459 - 5525*, vol. 2, Theology (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1997), 106.

¹³ Edward Joseph Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes. Vol. 1, Vol. 1*, (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 379.

1b – The branch shall bear fruit

Here, the king is referred to as a branch that will bear fruit. The word רֹאשׁ is used three times in Isaiah (11:1, 14:19, and 60:21) and once in Daniel (11:7), whose meaning is 'a shoot/sprout' but translated as 'branch' in English translations.¹⁴

In Isaiah 14:19, the destruction of Babylon and her kings is compared to that of hated branches which are thrown away for they are of no use. In Isaiah 60:21, the people are referred to as “the branch of my planting” and the imagery is that of a seed that has been planted, germinated, and shot forth into a plant that can be seen. Specifically, it is a work of God and for his glory. Here, Isaiah speaks in the context of a time when the Lord brings peace upon Israel, He will save them from all forms of battle and establish them as a nation. Additionally, the prophet writes about a people that will trust in the Lord as their light, they will cease looking up to the sun and the moon but will look up to God. At this time, the Lord will establish a race for himself that will be righteous and a result of His work so that He is glorified. In Daniel 11:7, רֹאשׁ has been used to refer to an offspring of the daughter of the king of the south who will arise and fight for their kingdom against the Northern kingdom. All these instances give the meaning of a descendant that will be born and here in Isaiah 11:1b, it refers to one who will be born from the lineage of Jesse with a kingly mission.

This language is used to emphasize and paint a picture of the state of the Davidic kingdom at the time. As 1a used stem, now 1b uses root to show that the threat faced by this kingdom will lead to destruction leaving them no hope to rise again. However, even with their present predicament, the Lord gives them hope that He is the only one able to raise an heir from Jesse's house. The use of both stem in 1a and root in 1b of Jesse reflects that the one who will rise will not be just another king but another David.¹⁵ The king is specified to rise from Jesse's roots to signify that even though David failed, this king will exceed David and will lead the nation back to Yahweh.

According to Young, רֹאשׁ is used to refer to “growth from the tree that is despised in the eyes of man”.¹⁶ Therefore, a new hope will come from the threatened tree of the Davidic kingdom that was despised in the eyes of men. The fruitfulness of this branch, as outlined in vv. 2-5, depicts one that is spiritual and not physical. It will be made possible by the branch's submission to Yahweh, enabling him to be fruitful. The fruitfulness of this branch will depend on its connection to the stem and the root. This suggests that the dynasty will not continue to fall but will truly prosper. Young suggests that “life is in the roots, and that life, in God's own time, will manifest itself”.¹⁷ This means that it is not a total stranger that will rise from Jesse's lineage and rule;- but one whose life is deeply rooted in this lineage and will rise in God's appointed time.

¹⁴ The words shoot, stem and branch are often confusing as they are often used interchangeably. Botanically speaking, however, a shoot, a branch, and a stem are different structurally and functionally.

¹⁵ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 121.

¹⁶ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 379.

¹⁷ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 379.

V. 2-3a – The Anointing of the King

V. 2a begins with a weqatal וַיָּשֶׁבֶט that marks the continuation from v. 1 and further explains the nature of this king. Though this king will be from the lineage of David, he will have the Spirit of the Lord dwelling in him. The verb here is used in the imperfect form and thus translated as a futuristic message. It is best translated as “and the spirit of the Lord will rest upon him”. The phrase רוּחַ יְהוָה which refers to the ‘spirit of the Lord’ is an objective genitive which means that the Spirit proceeds from the Lord Himself and then rests on this king.

The Old Testament has numerous examples of people who were empowered by the Spirit of God before starting their God given assignment. In many of these instances, it refers to an empowering by God’ Spirit to fulfil a specific task.¹⁸ Other instances include the elders of Israel in Numbers 11:25, judges such as Othniel (Judges 3:10), Samson (Judges 14:6; 19; 15:14), Gideon (Judges 6:34) and kings such as Saul (1 Sam.10:10; 11:6) and David (1 Sam.16:13). In these instances, only Numbers 11:25 uses the verb נָחַם which means ‘to rest’. In this context, some of the Spirit of God upon Moses also rested on the elders enabling them prophecy. For Saul, David, and Samson the verb used is רָחַץ which means ‘to rush or to prosper’ which means they were empowered by the Spirit of the Lord to serve in their different offices giving them the skills to serve as kings and judges. For the sake of Gideon, the verb used is שָׂבַע which means ‘to be clothed with’, a figurative use that means he was dressed in the Spirit of the Lord which enabled him to judge effectively.

The clause ‘the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him’ has only been used in Isaiah 11:2 which means the Spirit of the Lord will dwell in him and enable him to execute his leadership in justice and righteousness. This Spirit is not a mere influence but one that belongs to Yahweh which will bestow the gifts on the king.¹⁹ These gifts were seen individually in kings, but they will all be bestowed on this branch. The unique endowment given by the Spirit is subsequently described in seven different ways, outlining the king’s special endowments that will enable him to work. The work of the Spirit in this king will be completely different from the role of the Holy Spirit as seen in the New Testament on Pentecost (Acts 2) and the events that follow in the early church.

2 b – The Spirit of Wisdom and Understanding

Wisdom is defined as the ability to make the right decisions at the opportune time, while understanding is the perception of the correct identity of things, especially concerning the human heart.²⁰ חָכְמָה is used in many instances in Old Testament as an abstract noun.²¹ In Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, the root חָכַם is used to refer to acting in line with or contrary to an

¹⁸ Examples of those who were equipped for work by the Spirit of God include: craftsmen (Exo.31:3;35:31).

¹⁹ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 380.

²⁰ Young, 382.

²¹ חָכְמָה has been used to refer to a personal skill given to an individual for different purposes which include construction of the temple (Exo.28-36), for battle (Isa. 10:13), court and political judging (Isa. 47:10, Jer. 49:7).

expected order.²² Moreover, the emphasis is used in relation to Yahweh to show that this kind of wisdom is only applicable to an individual with the help of the Lord.²³ Proverbs 9:10 instructs that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the holy is understanding”. Thus, for the king to have wisdom, he must fear the Lord, and for him to gain understanding, he must know the Lord. By this obedience to the law of the Lord (Deut. 6:6), Yahweh will empower the king with wisdom and understanding. In Deuteronomy 17:18-19, the success of the king is based on his keeping the law of the Lord. Joshua was also commanded to keep God’s law which will ensure his success in leading the Israelites to conquer the promised land.

The word *יָדָע* which means ‘to understand’ on the other hand has been used theologically in the Old Testament with God as the subject.²⁴ Some uses include Yahweh’s ability to know people’s thoughts (Psa. 94:7) and observing the works of the people (Psa. 33:15). The understanding of God is also bestowed on kings to rule (1 Kings 5:7, 2 Chronicles 2:11 and Isaiah 11:2). Wisdom and understanding as attributes of God given to this king are judicial attributes that will enable him to judge wisely with the help of Yahweh’s spirit. For a king to arbitrate in integrity and harmony, he needs these gifts.²⁵ Motyer suggests that these two are attributes helpful for rendering judgments. In his book, he says,

“Wisdom and understanding are judicial attributes. When used together, wisdom is the more general characteristic while ‘understanding’ is more particularly the power to see to the heart issues, the former is the reservoir, the latter the judiciously directed outflow.”²⁶

Therefore, he will not rule by himself but will rely on Yahweh’s wisdom and understanding so that he can execute justice for his people.

2c – the Spirit of counsel and Might

Counsel is seen as the emotional ability to prepare for battle, while might is the military strength required to win a battle.²⁷ The word *גִּבּוֹרִים* is from the root *gbr* and has been used to signify military might and strength, especially in the book of Joshua, Kings, and Chronicles; to signify God’s strength mostly in Psalm (Psa. 65:7, 66:7, 89:14, and 145:11) while in the prophets, it is

²² Saebo M, “Hkm - to Be Wise,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Westermann, Claus (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 423.

²³ Saebo M, “Hkm - to Be Wise,” 423.

²⁴ H.H Schmid, “Bin - to Understand,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Westermann, Claus, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 231.

²⁵ Otto Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., completely rewritten, The Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1983), 255.

²⁶ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 122.

²⁷ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 122.

used in relation to God's might that executes judgment upon the people (Isa. 33:13 and Jer.16:21).²⁸ It is a personal attribute of God whose might is manifested in creation and cannot be compared to any other mighty man or king. "It is often connected with God's spirit, used together with wisdom and understanding as well as righteousness and justice".²⁹

According to Motyer, both attributes will help this king implement the right direction, coupled with the distinctive expertise to see the action through.³⁰ For the prosperous reign of this branch, he will require intellect and might, which will enable him to plan, prepare for action and execute the plans with strength. These two attributes have to do with the practical outworking of the leadership role. In governing they are utilized in emphatically binding the immoral and skilfully determining both the upright and the corruption of mortal society.³¹ This counsel will give this branch the capacity needed for sagacious diplomacy among the people and is joined with the power needed to achieve a goal.

2d – The Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord

Knowledge is seen as the truth grasped and applied to life; it is the practical acknowledgment of God which is implemented in thought and action.³² On one side, this could be the knowing of the Lord whereby the object 'Lord' applies to both the knowledge and the fear. This means that the branch will possess knowledge and fear of the Lord. On the other hand, this can be general knowledge as an attribute acquired alongside wisdom, understanding, counsel, and might. Either of these thoughts is rightly demonstrated here.

Seeing this as the knowledge of the Lord involves the king knowing the Lord personally and properly behaving according to what is termed right in the eyes of the Lord.³³ This language is used with the boy Samuel who had not yet known the Lord (1 Sam. 3:17). It is having a relationship with the Lord and living a God-fearing and virtuous life that matches up to him.³⁴ Child suggests that the knowledge of the Lord "is based on love and devotion that can recognize the works of God in the world, constant with his glory and the welfare of humanity".³⁵ Taking this as an attribute will have knowledge added to the other attributes that this king will have.

²⁸ J. Kuhlewein, Ernst Jenni, and Westermann, Claus, eds., "Gbr - to Be Superior," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 300–301.

²⁹ Kosmala, "Gbr - to Be Superior," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, by Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and John Thomas Willis, Rev. ed, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids (Mich.): W. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 370.

³⁰ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 122.

³¹ Childs, *Isaiah*, 103.

³² Kaiser, *Isaiah 1-12*, 256.

³³ W. Schottroff, "Yada - to Know," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Clause Westermann, vol. 2 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 517.

³⁴ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 122.

³⁵ Childs, *Isaiah*, 103.

In this case, knowledge is seen as the ability to apply the truths gained in a person's life enabling the king to judge rightly.

Knowledge and fear are taken as subordinates to the Lord, which means true knowledge will show itself in a life of reverence. The king needs the support of the Spirit of Yahweh to enable him to lead and act. Proverbs 1:7 further illustrates this in that there is no knowledge without the fear of the Lord since 'the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge'. In the king's acknowledgment of Yahweh and walking in his ways, he will be able to execute judgment guided by knowledge from Yahweh. Young describes this further by saying, "The fear of the Lord is the heart of biblical religion, which involves a recognition of the absolute holiness of God and coupled with full reverence before Him."³⁶ Therefore, the king will be guided by his reverence for Yahweh.

These do not reflect seven different kinds of spirits describing each attribute; rather, this is one Spirit that enables the king to execute his mandate. Similar language is alluded to in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 12, which teaches about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Calvin says that it is essential that these gifts are mentioned; otherwise, the Jews would have thought of a canal kingdom with a messiah who is poor and devoid of any blessings.³⁷ In line with other giftings added throughout the scriptures, Prophet Isaiah's emphasis is that he will be full of the Spirit of God, and this will be the foundation for which he rules.

3 a – The fear of the Lord is His delight

V. 3 starts with a waw consecutive, which expresses a temporal sequence that describes an action that follows the previous one. This carries on from v. 2, which gives the spiritual endowment of the king, and now shifts to what the king will do.

The root word of the verb *וַיִּשְׁמַע* as used here as a hiphil infinitive construct, means 'to smell/perceive'.³⁸ The question is whether the root of this word is *שָׁמַע* which refers to 'spirit or wind' or *שָׁמַע* which means to 'smell or perceive'. The former only applies as a noun while the latter can be used both as a noun or a verb. The meaning 'to smell' is considered because of the following clauses that use the sense of seeing and hearing to bring out the attributes of this branch.

However, when considered "to smell," the translation is difficult to adopt, for it is impossible to smell the fear of the Lord. It is often employed in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament where the Lord would smell the sweet fragrance produced, and the sacrifice was termed acceptable since the smell pleased the Lord (for example Genesis 8:21).³⁹ However, when this is taken metaphorically it means "to delight in," which means that the branch will find his pleasure in the fear of the Lord. He will acknowledge the Lord and live out a life that recognizes

³⁶ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 383.

³⁷ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, vol. 1 (Michigan: Grand Rapids, n.d.), 375.

³⁸ Kronholm, "וַיִּשְׁמַע - to Smell," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Green, David E., vol. 13 (Grand Rapids (Mich.): W. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 362.

³⁹ Kronholm, 363.

Yahweh in who he is and how he judges. Many of the Jews had taken this verse literally that they were expecting a messiah who would both smell and judge⁴⁰. In his article, Ritchie quotes one of the sixth-century writings of a rabbi who referred to himself as the Messiah but was rejected for he could not smell; thus, he could not judge the people according to their expectations.⁴¹

This fear, directed towards YHWH, may also mean reverence towards YHWH. It is a genuine recognition of and submission to the sovereignty of Yahweh that guides the life of this branch both in his lifestyle and his reign. What he will do will not be under coercion or any other force, but it shall be driven by the devotion he has for and the commendation he will receive both from God and man.⁴² As earthly kings look for wise and mighty men to keep them secure, this branch will delight in the Lord, who will keep him secure and cause him to succeed in all he does.⁴³

In this clause, Isaiah singles out ‘the fear of the Lord’ from the six attributes mentioned in v.2 in a way that places special emphasis on this attribute. In other instances, this term has been used to refer to ‘the law of the Lord’ (Psa. 112:1), to those who keep the law (Psa. 119:63), or to those who walk in the Lord’s path (Psa. 128:1).⁴⁴ In wisdom literature it parallels wisdom and knowledge (Pro. 1-9). On one hand, the emphasis on ‘fear of the Lord’ may be a summation of the six attributes mentioned earlier. When delighting in the fear of the Lord the king will inevitably apply wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, and the knowledge of the Lord as given by the Spirit. On the other hand, it may be a literary way in which the author reflects as a way of referring to the law of the Lord as a guide for this king, thus he will delight in observing the law of the Lord. Psalm 19:7-9 connects delighting in God’s word with fearing the Lord. Deuteronomy 17:18-20 summarises the requirements for a king in Israel which is keeping the law of the Lord all the days of his life (v.18-19), which in turn ensured that his kingdom lasted (v.20). Oswalt affirms that the many kings from David’s house failed in this one requirement of observing the law and obeying Yahweh which will be the singular attribute that sets this king apart from all others.⁴⁵ He will not only observe the law but also delight in it.

Vv. 3b-4a – The King’s Judicial Reign

⁴⁰ Jeremiah Unterman, “The (Non)Sense of Smell in Isaiah 11:3,” *Hebrew Studies* 33, no. 1 (1992): 18, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hbr.1992.0008>.

⁴¹ Ian D Ritchie, “The Nose Knows: Bodily Knowing in Isaiah 11.3,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 25, no. 87 (March 2000): 66.

⁴² Homer Hailey, *A Commentary on Isaiah: With Emphasis on the Messianic Hope* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1985), 121.

⁴³ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 383.

⁴⁴ H.P Stahl, “Yr - to Fear,” in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, vol. 2 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 577.

⁴⁵ John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 187.

Multiple Hebrew manuscripts and others including the Targum and the Septuagint have omitted the ך and have taken 3b as an independent phrase from 3a. The ESV and NIV translations have taken this approach, while the YLT and NASB have included the conjunction. The latter connects 3b with 3a concluding that this branch will be able to judge rightly since he will be guided by the fear of the Lord in which he delights. The former has 3a as the conclusion for the spiritual endowments given by the Lord, while 3b introduces the kind of kingdom the branch will establish. I took 3a as a summary of v.2 to show that this king will have the six attributes as described but he will live a life of pleasing and obeying the Lord in all he does.

Human beings are generally swayed in their judgment of matters based on what they hear and see. In terms of seeing, human beings are enticed by outward appearance, people's strengths and the different circumstances that favour their preferences. This is alluded to in 1 Samuel 16 when Samuel went to anoint David as the king of Israel. By his eyes, he decided who was meant to be king, but the Lord rejected Samuel's choice. Samuel was instructed that "man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (v. 7). However, because of the attribute of wisdom and understanding given to him by the Lord, this king will not be swayed by this most natural of human biases in the way he judges. He will penetrate beyond people's impressions and be different compared to the present kinship.⁴⁶ In addition, the spiritual endowments that the branch will have will also help him in leadership. Guided by wisdom and the fear of the Lord, he will not use mere observation and hearing to make his judgment. "For absolute justice, there must be absolute knowledge".⁴⁷ His human nature is not only miraculous, but he is also a divine person who will judge as guided by Yahweh.

The verb כָּזַב which means 'to show or to determine what is right' appears in the Old Testament 54 times in the hiphil.⁴⁸ It has been used concerning judgment where one is charged with the offense of disobeying the law and consequences follow as justice is established. The branch will be led by the spirit in his judgment enabling him to decide, and judge based on God's standards and not based on what he sees or hears.

The conjunction in v.4 ׀ has been used as an adversative conjunction that contrasts what was earlier said. V. 3 introduces how this branch will lead, not by what he sees or hears while v. 4 emphasizes the kind of judgment this branch will execute. The branch will be guided by righteousness and justice, and he will execute this on the earth's poor and meek. The poor lacked political power, while the favour rested on the rich. However, according to custom, a king who did not accept the poor in his kingship had no hope of surviving longer.⁴⁹ For this to be a reality, this branch will not rule with political power but with spiritual power.

⁴⁶ John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1986), 281.

⁴⁷ Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 384.

⁴⁸ G. Mayer Fabry, "כָּזַב - to Show What Is Right," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and David E. Green, vol. 6 (Grand Rapids (Mich.) Cambridge: W. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 65.

⁴⁹ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 123.

Righteousness is used with measures and government; for measures, it means having the right or just measures as required while for the government, it means establishing the right leadership that is just and fair.⁵⁰ The two words are parallel to each other to emphasize that this king will establish a different kind of kingdom that is beyond man's ability. It will be a just and fair kingdom for all the people where everyone is considered and receives what is due to them.

The phrase used in the clause refers to the 'poor and the afflicted of the earth' which specifies the group as those considered poor, afflicted, and hopeless. Among the several uses of the word 'poor' in the Old Testament, it was used broadly to refer to those who lacked materially and were dependent on support from other people.⁵¹ They were downcast and discouraged because of their condition. The present kingdom did not consider the cause of the poor in any way (Isa. 1:17; 3:14-15); thus, they had a need. This righteous branch of Jesse will ensure their cause is taken care of, and that they receive what is due them. Justice and righteousness were required by a king or leader in Israel, as recorded in Deuteronomy 16:18-20. By doing this, the leader was honouring the law and the Lord. However, this was not completely seen in any of the kings of Israel because of their human weakness.

V. 4b – The King's Military Reign

As part of the branch's kingship, he would execute judgment on the earth and the wicked. The verb 'to strike' and 'to kill' have a parallelism of echo and have been used to emphasize how the branch will deal with the wicked. He will not only strike them, but he will kill them and end their pride. The verb נָקַח has frequently been used in the Old Testament with the hiphil meaning "to smite or to strike" with an intention to harm or injure.⁵² In this case, the word has been used to show a judicial punishment that will be executed by this righteous king.

The earth here refers to the inhabitants of the earth and not generally to the land. He will use the rod of his mouth to strike it. The imagery used shows that this king does not need physical strength to deal with the wicked but has such power and authority that he strikes by mere utterance. A possessive genitive has been used here to show that the rod he will use belongs to his mouth. Only a king who is not answerable to any earthly group can strike the earth with the rod of his mouth.⁵³ The earth is parallel to the wicked and thus is the subject of the king's punishment. The earth is depicted as wicked by itself.

The verb מָוֶת which means 'to kill or have someone executed' has often been used in the hiphil to give a direct threat, especially with the prophets.⁵⁴ This means that Isaiah is proclaiming a

⁵⁰ Seifrid M.A., "Righteousness, Justice and Justification.," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Rosner, Brian S. (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press; InterVarsity Press, 2000), 740.

⁵¹ Kvalbein H., "Poor/ Poverty," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Brian S. Rosner and Alexander, T. Desmond (Leicester, England: Downers Grove, Ill: Inter-Varsity Press; InterVarsity Press, 2000), 687.

⁵² Conrad, "נָקַח - To Smite," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. Gerhard Johannes Botterweck et al., vol. 9 (Grand Rapids (Mich.): W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 416.

⁵³ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 281.

⁵⁴ Gerhard Johannes Botterweck et al., eds., "מָוֶת - to Kill or to Die," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids (Mich.): W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 200.

threat upon the wicked. Those referred to as the wicked are guilty of being hostile toward God or his people. He will kill them using the rod of his mouth. The rod of his mouth and the breath of his lips are evidence that he needs no other display of power and no other weapon of enforcement except for the words he speaks from his mouth. This branch will speak the truth, which will be his weapon against all who dwell in the land. Breath or Spirit is an invisible force, and when made in reference to the Lord's Spirit, there is the suggestion of the potential to transform and establish the divine decree and sequence.⁵⁵

4a and 4b show parallelism of echo whereby the second line emphasizes the first line. The first line emphasizes God's function of judging the earth, while the second line emphasizes that the wicked will be judged. All the endowments he will receive will converge in helping him rule and act justly to the meek and oppressed of the earth. The reign of this king will be different from the other leaders of Israel who oppressed the poor and were involved in senseless acts of violence. It is not presumed to be divine pleasantness and radiance; contrary, the attributes are employed in holding down sin and to help determine what is acceptable or not in society.⁵⁶

This branch will not only woo the hearts of the wicked that they may turn towards him, but he will also destroy wickedness itself. This goes beyond the persons considered wicked, to the state of wickedness itself. This is alluded to by Paul in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 that 'the wicked will be revealed whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth'.

V.5 – The King's Governance

Isaiah uses metaphors to illustrate and paint a picture to the reader. Righteousness and faithfulness are described in terms of a belt. As a belt on a man holds the clothes together and in shape, so will this branch hold tightly to righteousness and faithfulness. According to Motyer, righteousness, and faithfulness as apparels demonstrate the intrinsic attributes and aptitude that the king will have as a person and to which he commits himself.⁵⁷

Scholars have suggested that רָצַף should have an article like the parallel word רָצַף־מִן־הַיָּד . Wegner argues that both words are used in relation to moral attributes and thus do not need an article.⁵⁸ In addition, רָצַף־מִן־הַיָּד has been used 49 times in the Old Testament without an article except for Jeremiah 7:28 whose context is God's voice which corresponds to the truth.⁵⁹ Moreover, רָצַף does not appear anywhere in the 119 times with an article.

Oswalt defines righteousness as the ability to do the right thing in all circumstances which involves keeping a person's promises, while faithfulness deals with someone who can be depended on or true.⁶⁰ The fundamentals of righteousness and faithfulness are consistency or

⁵⁵ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 123.

⁵⁶ Childs, *Isaiah*, 103.

⁵⁷ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 123.

⁵⁸ Paul D. Wegner, *An Examination of Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah 1-35* (Lewiston, N.Y., USA: Mellen Biblical Press, 1992), 221.

⁵⁹ Wegner, *An Examination of Kingship and Messianic Expectation in Isaiah*, 221.

⁶⁰ Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah. Chapters 1-39*, 282.

integrity, which results in one being dependable completely. According to Motyer, “Righteousness is that which follows the inviolable norm of the divine will, while faithfulness is that which holds immovably to the cause divinely appointed”.⁶¹ Righteousness and faithfulness are the traits the Israelites looked for in a human king. Thus, Prophet Isaiah paints a picture of a king who has divine attributes but will have a human presence.

The word *ḥiṣ* translated as 'waistcloth' or 'belt' has two meanings. It can be used to refer to the belt used to gather the outer robe and into which the garments were tucked before engaging in strenuous activities (Job 38:3, Isa.8:9, 5:27). If this is the case, then these are the characteristics that bring the other attributes together, thus giving them dignity and force. The other meaning of the waistcloth means a loin garment customarily worn under the outer garment (Job 12:18, Jer.13:11). This has righteousness and faithfulness as the fundamental qualities compared to the others listed. Both meanings apply and are essential for the success of this king. While v. 3 describes the king's emotions, v. 5 describes what is observable, this branch will constantly purpose to act in the cause of righteousness and faithfulness.

Conclusion

Out of the assignment given to this king, none was achieved by the kings who reigned after Isaiah's time. King Hezekiah and Manasseh would meet half of the description given; however, they failed in their reign and did not fulfill all that was spoken concerning this branch of Jesse. Jesus Christ was described as one full of wisdom in the work he did (Matthew 7:29; 13:54; Mark 1:22). In Revelation, John uses similar language to that of Isaiah in describing the judgment that will be rendered by Jesus Christ (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:11-15).

In Ephesians 1:18-19, Paul prays that the believers at Ephesus may be filled with the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. This can only be fulfilled if Christ Jesus has the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge and is thus able to fill the believers with the same. Part of the prophecy by Isaiah is eschatological. 2 Thessalonians 2:8b records that the Lord Jesus will kill the lawless one with the breath of his lips. In Revelation 19:15, John sees a vision of one who is seated on a white horse who strikes the earth with a sharp sword in his mouth and rules them with a rod of iron. John writes about what will happen in the second coming of Christ Jesus.

Relation to believers and the church today

Partly, believers enjoy God's kingdom as established through His son Jesus Christ. However, Christians are charged to look up to the new heaven where all evil and wickedness will be destroyed. Christ assures eternal justice and restoration for all humankind and creation.

The following are key applications of this text to believers today:

- a. God's nature as a Holy God – this stands out in the text bearing that this branch will be endowed with God's spirit and will rule as a righteous and just king.
- b. The need to trust God even with the impossible – the growth of Jesse's stump was only made possible by the Lord himself. The church should trust God and His ways even when things appear impossible in their eyes.
- c. God's word is enough to deal with every form of injustice in the world.

⁶¹ Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 123–24.

Recommendations for further studies

There were certain areas of study that were encountered in this article that lie outside the scope of what the researcher was able to do and would serve a greater purpose in helping interpret and understand the text at hand. Further study should be done on the meaning of social justice and judgment especially to the poor of the earth as used by Prophet Isaiah. Moreover, there is a need for a further study of v. 3a to help understand the text. More analysis of the Hebrew manuscripts and translations will determine the exact meaning of the word in use.

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