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Who is the servant in Isa 42:1–4 and what is his brief from God? This question is relevant both to Isaiah studies and to New Testament exegetes as well, since the author of Matthew quotes the passage in full (and nearly word for word) with regard to Jesus in Matt 12:15–21. A range of possible candidates have been proposed by various interpreters: Cyrus, the prophet himself, the Messiah, the Israelite nation, Jesus. H. G. M. Williamson devotes a number of pages to this passage in his volume Variation on a Theme, before concluding that Israel is the referent of the passage. If this is the case, how is a New Testament exegete to make sense of the claim that Jesus’ actions in Matt 12:9–14 (his healing actions on the Sabbath and his subsequent withdrawing from the Pharisees) are meant to fulfill Isa 42:1–4? This essay will review the evidence using a conceptual blending approach to the interrelated questions surrounding the identity of the servant, the role of the servant and the claim that Jesus is the fulfillment of the passage.

I. VITAL RELATIONS: ROLES AND VALUES

Conceptual blending provides a fresh approach to understanding quotations and allusions in biblical text, as both quotations and allusions represent complex conceptual blends involving the shifting of vital relations

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1 Westermann observes that this section is clearly written but is difficult to interpret precisely because of the ambiguity surrounding the identity of the servant and the nature of his task. Claus Westermann, Isaiah 40–66, (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), 99.

2 Benjamin Sommer acknowledges that the identity of the servant in Isa 42:1 is “hotly debated.” Rabbinic sources are not in agreement: Saadia Gaon claims that Cyrus is the servant. For ibn Ezra the prophet himself is the servant. The Targums and Radak agree that the servant is the Messiah, while the Septuagint and Rashi identify the servant as the Israelite nation. See the note to Isa 42:1–4 in Adele Berlin and Marc Zvi Brettler, eds., The Jewish Study Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 867.

between contexts that are often widely separated in time, space and culture. In their landmark volume *The Way We Think*, Fauconnier and Turner explain a number of ways that blended mental spaces are created as we think and talk.\(^4\) Elsewhere, it has been argued that similar mental-space construction also occurs during the writing and reading processes.\(^5\)

According to Fauconnier and Turner, one way that blended spaces are structured and linked is by ‘vital relations,’ such as identity, role, analogy, disanalogy, property, similarity, category, intentionality and uniqueness.\(^6\) Thus, questions regarding the identity and role of the Servant in Isa 42:1–4 and Matthew’s use of this quotation in conjunction with Jesus centre upon vital relations that are fundamental to human conceptualization.

Leaving the vital relation *identity* aside for the moment, it is notable that Fauconnier and Turner state, “Role is a ubiquitous vital relation.”\(^7\) They cite examples of role such as *president* and *queen*. Additionally, they claim that roles have *values*. At present, Elizabeth is a value for *queen*, while president is a value for *head of state*. Finally, elements or entities are roles and values in relation to other elements. They state, “*President* is both a role for the value *Lincoln* and a value for the role *head of state*.”\(^8\) Hence, differentiating between *role* and *value* is one way to differentiate between the identity of the servant and the role that the servant is to play in establishing God’s intentions for the people. Williamson makes just this point in *Variations on a Theme*, where he notes that the role of the servant in Isa 42:1–4 is that of one who “...will bring forth justice to the nations.”\(^9\)


\(^7\) Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 98.

\(^8\) Ibid., 99.

\(^9\) The term מַשָּׁמַר proves only slightly less problematical for translators than the identity of the Servant. Temba Mafico notes that uses of the term exhibit a tendency to be “multifarious in meaning.” Mafico mentions terms such as justice, judgment, rights, vindication, deliverance, custom and norm before explaining that originally the substantive