THE PREDICTIVE NATURE OF TYPOLOGY
IN JOHN 12:37-43

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Typology is defined in Leonhard Goppelt’s seminal study, Typos, as the study of “historical facts—persons, actions, events, and institutions” which are “considered to be divinely ordained representations or types of future realities that will be even greater and more complete.”1 Goppelt’s definition represents an aspect of the traditional view of typology, namely, that it is not only analogical, but also predictive or prophetic. Thus, typology is not in consideration if “the interpreter does not view the connection between the two as being foreordained in some way, but as being accidental or deliberately contrived. . . .”2 An alternative, modern view of typology denies the prophetic element, leaving only the analogical correspondence between type and antitype.3 This position may deny or recognize the escalation inherent within the antitype, but in either case the prophetic element is denied.4

2 Ibid., 18.
4 Baker denies both the prophetic element and escalation (“Typology,” 324). France denies the prophetic element, but clearly notes escalation in his exposition and conclusion of Jesus’ typological use of the OT: “Jesus is superior to the Old Testament types” (Jesus and the Old Testament, 78). Von Rad also seems to note the escalation involved, but more in terms of the linear progression of the OT storyline as it works toward its consummation in Jesus Christ (Theology, 321, 373). For the centrality of escalation involved in typology, see Goppelt, Typos, 199; E. Earle Ellis, Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2003), 169.

Richard M. Davidson has surveyed the history of typological interpretation from the Apostolic Fathers through the 1970s. Although the manifold views Davidson summarizes differ in many
To posit a “predictive nature” for typology assumes an intentionality of God to foreshadow future events by his sovereign guidance of former events. It may also suggest that the OT author was aware of a forward-looking element inherent within the passage itself. If this is true, then the NT writers did not retrospectively label an OT counterpart as a “type” solely because of its analogical similarity to the “anti-type.” The NT authors not only believed God had guided history in an ever-increasingly climactic manner so that “fulfillment” in Christ is perfectly appropriate. They also believed that, along this climactic progress of salvation history, God sovereignly prefigured future persons, actions, events, and institutions by their corresponding types. If true, the intentionality of God thus necessitates the fulfillment of the type, meaning types are predictive by nature.

This article intends to argue that John viewed typology as predictive by nature, which is most evident in 12:37-43 of his Gospel. In order to explain the Jewish rejection of Jesus’ ministry, John argues that the rejection of Jesus’ ministry is the fulfillment (i.e., antitype) of the rejection of Isaiah’s ministry. We will argue first that the best grammatical understanding of John 12:37-40 is that the Jewish rejection of Jesus was something that must occur in order to fulfill the Scriptures, and secondly that the fulfillment John envisages is typological rather than directly prophetic. The conclusion drawn must then necessarily be that John views typology as a kind of predictive prophecy. Yet, we will argue that, in 12:41, John refers to the direct prophecy of the Servant of the Lord to further corroborate his claim that Jesus had to be rejected. This allows us to make suggestions about John’s understanding of the relationship between typology and direct prophecy, a relationship which could use more clarity in biblical studies.

I. John 12:37-43 in Context

John 12:37-43 is situated at the end of what is commonly called the “Book of Signs” (1:19–12:50). The Book of Signs records Jesus’ teachings as well as his signs (σημεῖα) and is characterized by a lack of wholehearted Jewish acceptance of Jesus. It was despite all these signs in chs. 1–12 which Jesus performed before
them that Israel was not believing in him (12:37). Even the resuscitation of Lazarus was not enough to evoke belief from the majority of Jews. The reader is not surprised, however, since Jesus was first rejected by Israel in the temple clearing scene, a passage surrounded by accounts of acceptance in Galilee (2:11; 4:54). Thus, the stage has been set for Jewish rejection en masse of Jesus’ ministry from the beginning. Moreover, the situation did not improve from Jesus’ day to the time in which John composed his Gospel. Israel’s hearts were still hard and their eyes still blind, a problem which was rather troublesome for the early church. The reader of John’s Gospel also would be troubled by Israel’s rejection of Jesus, their long-awaited Messiah, especially a Jewish reader or a Gentile reader who knew the promises of God to Israel in the OT. John’s concern in 12:37-43 is therefore apologetic by nature. He explains by appeal to Scripture that Israel’s rejection of the Messiah was not a deviation from God’s plan, but was rather the fulfillment of Scripture. It is within this apologetic context that John evidences his understanding of typology as predictive.

We shall see how he first establishes Isaiah’s rejected ministry as a type which necessitated a fulfillment in the future. If he could convince Jews of his day that the massive Jewish rejection of Jesus was the fulfillment of a previous scriptural typological pattern, he could perhaps enable them to overcome their objections to believing in a crucified Messiah. John seems to have the same intent throughout the Gospel, utilizing typology continuously to prove that Scripture foretold what would happen to Jesus in order to make it palatable, perhaps even acceptable to Jews. Hence, Moses’ serpent in the wilderness foreshadowed Jesus’ work on the cross (John 3:14), as did the suffering of Israel’s righteous king (13:18; 15:25; 19:24) and the Passover lamb which delivered from death (19:36). We hope to show that John’s argument in 12:37-43 does not hold any weight if typology is not understood as predictive by nature.


8 See Paul’s wrestling with the issue in Rom 9–11.

9 John 12:38 is the first use of πληρόω to refer to the fulfillment of Scripture. Every subsequent introduction formula uses πληρόω, excluding the other two using introductory formulas, which simply compound a second quotation to the first (12:39 after 12:38; 19:37 after 19:36).

10 D. A. Carson notes that typology is the dominant use of the OT in the Gospel (“John and the Johannine Epistles,” in It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture; Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars [ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1988], 249). Even in the second century, Justin Martyr in his Dialogue with Trypho continued to utilize John’s typological apologetic, although he was less convincing due to his occasional slip into allegory.

11 Some colleagues at Westminster Seminary asked whether John’s audience would have been able to understand his typological argument. While this is more a question for rhetorical criticism, it is a valid (and interesting) question, and the thesis of this article holds more weight if John’s audience was able to understand his argument. I believe Jews of John’s day would have been
II. Israel “Could Not Believe” or “Would Not Believe”?

The first contentious issue is the cause of Israel’s unbelief. John states that Israel was not believing in Jesus “that \( \text{ἵνα} \) the word of Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled \( \text{πληρωθῇ} \)” (12:38). The Scripture John quotes is Isa 53:1: “Lord, who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” John continues to claim in 12:39 they “could not believe, because \( \text{ὅτι} \) again Isaiah said,” quoting Isa 6:10, “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, in order that they may not see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn, and I heal them” (John 12:40).

As far back as John Chrysostom and St. Augustine, commentators have found these sayings overly harsh. It could not be, so they say, that God would purpose the people’s unbelief as an inescapable fate. Chrysostom, Augustine, and those who follow them state that Israel “could not” believe because they “would not.” This interpretation holds that Israel’s continual rebellion, idolatry, and unbelief led to a continually hardened heart, whereby the Israelites came to a condition in which they could no longer believe. The Septuagint had already in Isaiah shifted responsibility for Israel’s unbelief from God to Israel by translating the Hebrew imperatives of Isa 6:9 with future indicatives. This translation erased God’s command to Isaiah to tell Israel not to understand or perceive and replaced it with the predictive statement that Israel would not understand or perceive. Proponents of this “could not because they would not” interpretation of John 12:38-39 are obviously concerned with the systematic implications for divine sovereignty and human freedom. This concern is evident with Arno Gaebelein, who argues strongly against the “fatalists, ultra-Calvinists.”

quite familiar with typological thinking and could have been convinced by John’s attempt to demonstrate a crucified Messiah prefigured in OT history. Typology is evident within the OT itself (e.g., the New Exodus theme in Isa 40–66 and in Hosea) and thus would be recognized by those who studied the OT carefully (see esp. Francis Foulkes’s full-length treatment, The Acts of God: A Study of the Basis of Typology in the Old Testament [London: Tyndale, 1958]). This is particularly true for first-century Jews who were still awaiting the fulfillment of so many OT promises amidst such abysmal socio-political circumstances.

If Gentiles were to read John’s Gospel, they probably would not have understood the typological reasoning (unless they were studious God-fearers), but they would still have understood John’s point that Jesus’ vicarious death was predicted by the Scriptures. Just as many Christians today read an asserted typological fulfillment and think the NT author is citing an NT directly prophetic prediction, so John’s Gentile readers would have thought the same. They would therefore have understood John’s point in appealing to predictive prophecy, even if they did not understand that John was referring to typological prophecies. Thus, I believe John thought his audience would understand his arguments, and I believe John was correct. How effective John’s method of argumentation was we cannot know.

12 St. Augustine, Tract. Ev. Jo. 53 (NPNF 1 7:292-93). Chrysostom inverts the causal relationship, explaining that they were not unbelieving because Isaiah spoke thus, but that Isaiah spoke thus “because they were not about to believe” (Hom. Jo. 68 [NPNF 1 14:250]). Raymond Brown notes this softening of “could not” to “would not” was “a tendency among the Greek patristic commentators” (The Gospel According to John [AB 29; 2 vols.; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966], 1:483).
He follows Chrysostom explicitly and states, “The next statement appears more difficult: ‘Therefore they could not believe, because that Isaiah said again.’ It does not mean that the Jews were unable to believe, though willing, because Isaiah had spoken these words seven hundred years before.”

The resistance to the grammar for one reason or another—in this case, in reaction against “fatalists, ultra-Calvinists”—is understandable, but both unwarranted and disingenuous. When John says “x happened because of y” and one says “it does not mean that x happened because of y,” eisegesis is evident. Gaebelinein’s explanation is that “Isaiah in the Spirit foresaw the unbelief of the nation” and that the Jews had hardened their own hearts long before Jesus’ ministry, this being the cause of their inability to believe. To use mathematical terms, if “x” is equivalent to Isaiah’s words and “y” is equivalent to Jewish unbelief, Gaebelinein and Chrysostom have altered John’s equation “x caused y” into “y caused y.” The variable “x” is relegated to the function of foreseeing that “y caused y” and so declaring it.

Another attempt to soften the statement is to take the conjunction ἵνα as resultant (“so that”) rather than telic (“in order that”). This interpretation asserts that the unbelief merely resulted in the fulfillment of Isa 6:10. This approach fails for two reasons. First, grammatically, it is extremely dubious. Daniel Wallace says ἵνα in this passage may be acting as a purpose-result clause, arguing that sometimes the NT writers do not clearly distinguish between the two concepts. Yet, if a resultant force is detectable here, it is probably latent within the telic force, that is, the results occur because it was purposive. In any case, the resultant sense of ἵνα may not have been able to stand on its own in Koine Greek. Samuel Green states that, although the resultant (or ecbatic) sense of ἵνα evolved in later periods of Greek, during the Koine period the telic force is “generally discernible.” Green says the resultant interpretation “so that” is inadmissible here. Commentators since F. L. Godet in 1893 generally agree with Green’s conclusion.

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14 Ibid.

15 Note also the ἵνα within the quotation of Isa 6:10, which some also try to read as resultant: “he has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, ἵνα they may not see with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn, and I heal them.” James M. Boice understands the Jewish rejection of Jesus as the fulfillment of predictive prophecy. Yet, seeking to avoid blaming God for the Jewish unbelief, he weakens the ἵνα to a ὥστε, saying, “John’s point is not that God made them disbelieve, but rather . . . we should not be surprised by their disbelief in that God had prophesied it even before it happened” (*The Gospel of John: An Expositional Commentary* [5 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985], 3:368).


18 Ibid., 322.

19 Godet in 1893 noted that “scarcely any one seeks any longer to weaken the sense of ἵνα, in order that, by making it a ὥστε, so that” (John, 2:232). Similarly, Raymond Brown states, “The basic
Second, the context and purpose of the passage requires a telic force. “They could not believe” in 12:39 shows that there is clearly a force ensuring that they could not believe.²⁰ That force is the same as in Isa 6:10 (MT), namely, God. Moreover, the telic force fits the apologetic purpose of the passage, whereas a resultant force does not.

The cause that John attributes to Israel’s unbelief is therefore not Israel’s stubbornness, but the necessity of the fulfillment of Scripture.²¹ Part of John’s apologetic interest here could have been evangelistic, to win over unbelieving Jews by demonstrating that their rejection of Jesus was unwarranted but also a part of God’s redemptive plan. This evangelistic purpose comports with John’s purpose statement for the Gospel, that he wrote it “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:31).²²

III. Typological Fulfillment or Directly Prophetic Fulfillment?

In what manner did the Scripture predict that Israel of Jesus’ day must reject him? John quotes Isa 53:1, then 6:10, and then mentions that “Isaiah said these things because he saw his glory and spoke concerning him.” Is John’s point that Isaiah predicted Israel would reject Jesus, and so it happened (direct prophecy)? Or is John’s point that Isaiah’s rejected ministry typologically fore-shadowed Jesus’ ministry, and so it happened? One view holds that the entire passage asserts directly prophetic proof of Jesus’ rejection.²³ Another view is that the passage focuses only on Isaiah’s ministry and its rejection as a type of


²¹ It is important to note that in 12:43 some individuals believe, which demonstrates that God judicially hardened corporate Israel, not every individual Israelite. Yet even these individuals were not confessing, because they feared being expelled from the synagogue by the Pharisees, which meant they loved the glory of man more than the glory of God (12:43).


Jesus' rejection. Our view is that both quotations focus on Isaiah as a type of Jesus in order to explain Israel's mass rejection of Jesus, but also refer to direct prophecy about the Servant of the Lord to prove that Jesus was the intended antitype of Isaiah. In this way, John hopes to explain to readers of his Gospel why Jesus was rejected by Israel en masse, and so win them over to believe. It is by tracing John's apologetic train of thought that we may extract his implied understanding of typology as predictive.

1. Isaiah 53:1 Used Typologically to Explain Jesus' Rejection

John 12:37 says, “Although [Jesus] had done so many signs (σημεῖα) before them, [the Jews] were not believing in him.” John is almost certainly alluding to Deut 29:2-4, which itself is probably alluded to in Isa 6:9-10. In Deut 29:2-4, Moses tells the people that, although they had seen all that God did in Egypt—the trials, signs (σημεῖα), and great wonders—God still had not given them a heart to know (ידע), nor eyes to see (ראה), nor ears to hear (מעש). In Isa 6:10, God tells Isaiah, “Make hard the heart of this people, and make dull their ears, and blind their eyes, lest they see (ראה) with their eyes and hear (מעש) with their ears and understand (בין) with their hearts, and turn and be healed.” Thus, in Isaiah's day, God is continuing to respond to Israel as he did in Moses' day.

John's allusion to Deut 29:2-4 serves two purposes. First, this serves his apologetic interest by introducing the theme of Israel's consistent obduracy from Moses' day until John's. Israel should not be surprised that Jesus was rejected, since God's prophets have consistently been rejected throughout history. John is certainly indicting Israel with this same obduracy. Second, this introduces the theme of prophetic rejection, which strengthens the possibility that the following two quotations will be concerned with the same theme. The OT seems to portray Moses as a prototypical prophet against whose guidance Israel constantly rebels because of their stubbornness and idolatry, and Isaiah finds himself called into the same position. Perhaps this is evidence of a typological portrayal of God's rejected prophets within the OT itself, a theme that is noted several times in the NT (Luke 11:47; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15; cf. Neh 9:26). It would thus not be surprising if, in the following verses, John continued to develop this motif of prophetic rejection.

John's quotation of Isa 53:1 in v. 38 follows the LXX, which in turn follows the MT. The point of John's quotation seems to be that, just as Isaiah brought good
news to Israel (Isa 52:7) but cried out in despair after being rejected by Israel (53:1), so Jesus brought good news, confirmed by many signs, but was similarly rejected by Israel. Typological escalation is involved as well since Jesus was rejected even to the point of death. This typological reading advances John’s apologetic interest by showing that Isaiah’s ministry was a divine foreshadowing of what was to come in Jesus’ day, so the Jews should not be surprised.

An alternative view is that John is proof-texting a direct prophecy about the Servant in Isa 53, showing that Jesus had to be rejected because Isaiah foretold it. This seems less likely for the following three reasons. First, the allusion to Deut 29, as we have noted, suggests a typological framework for the passage.

Second, it is unlikely that John’s primary intention in quoting Isa 53:1 is to refer to the Servant of the Lord (note that the quotation says nothing about the Servant). It is true that the NT authors often quote verses as “pointers to the whole context [rather] than as constituting testimonies in and for themselves,” and it is surely true that one effect of John’s quotation of Isa 53:1 is to evoke the wider context of the fourth Servant Song (Isa 52:13–53:12). Indeed, we will see in 12:41 that John does have in mind the identification of Jesus and the Servant. But, that John quotes a cry of rejection by Isaiah rather than a proof-text about the Servant (e.g., 53:3, “he was despised and rejected by men”) suggests that John is focusing on the relationship between the ministries of Isaiah and Jesus. Jesus, a preacher of repentance to Israel, rejected by his kindred, could take up the cry of despair from Isaiah’s lips as he lived out the very experience of the prophet who came centuries before. Even the message proclaimed by Isaiah and Jesus was the same; both preached the impending substitutionary death of God’s Servant. The verse that John chose to quote therefore suggests a typological relationship rather than a directly prophetic relationship, although the Servant is probably evoked from the OT context and brought up again in 12:41.

27 “Who has believed our message” in Isa 53:1 could refer to either the message “we” (Israel) have received, or the message “we” (prophets) have proclaimed. The former option sees a repentant Israel proclaiming joyfully their amazement at the prophetic message (see NET Bible). The latter sees a lamenting and despairing group of prophets, presumably led by Isaiah (Isa 8:16), who declare that no one has believed their prophetic message. Whichever interpretation OT commentators choose, it is clear that John uses the verse with the latter meaning (so Westcott, St. John, 134; Godet and Dwight, John, 2:222).

28 Most commentators identify “our report” with Jesus’ teaching and “the arm of the Lord” with Jesus’ signs, which is a major theme in John’s Gospel, e.g., George R. Beasley-Murray, John (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1999), 216; Lightfoot, St. John’s Gospel, 253; Barrett, St. John, 431.


30 So also Rudolf Schnackenburg: “The fact that the passage is part of the last Servant Song, which talks about the Servant’s expiatory suffering, does not justify the conclusion that Is 53 had a strong influence on John. The remark is only an aside on the part of the prophet, and does not bring in the Servant. John’s only interest is in the fact of unbelief, to which scripture bears witness” (The Gospel According to St. John [3 vols.; New York: Seabury, 1980], 2:414).
Third, John is unique in combining Isa 53:1 with 6:10. If he had quoted only Isa 53:1, it would be more likely that he intended a directly prophetic proof-text. But Isa 6:9-10 is used by Jesus in Mark 4:12 (Matt 13:13-15) to relate his own mission to Isaiah’s mission, either typologically or at least analogically. Paul uses the passage similarly in Acts 28:26-27. Jesus’ use of Isa 6:9-10 has nothing to do with the Servant, and it is also certainly not a direct prophecy about Jesus’ day, but rather one for Isaiah’s day. It seems likely that John would have remained true to Jesus’ use of Isa 6:9-10, which increases the likelihood that John’s quotation of Isa 53:1 is meant also to relate the rejected ministries of Jesus and Isaiah.

For these three reasons, it is likely that John quotes Isa 53:1 not to proof-text direct prophecy, but to assert that Jesus was rejected “in order that [the typological pattern recorded in] the word of Isaiah might be fulfilled” (John 12:38). John defends Jesus’ death to the Jews by attempting to prove to them that God had prefigured it long ago, and so it must have come to pass.

2. God’s Sovereignty and Israel’s Obduracy

If John has established a typological relationship between Isaiah and Jesus by quoting Isa 53:1, why does he also feel the need to quote Isa 6:10 to corroborate his claim? The answer is probably that the first quotation raises some questions, such as, first of all, what ensured that this scripture would be fulfilled? What was the means? Second, how is it fair that Israel would be destined by the scriptures to reject their messiah? If the messiah is from Israel and for Israel, why would the Scriptures necessitate that they reject him?

John 12:39 says, “Because of this (διὰ τοῦτο) they are not able to believe, because (ὅτι) again Isaiah said . . .” The antecedent of τοῦτο is the following phrase, “because again Isaiah said,” rather than the preceding quotation of Isa 53:1. John’s language here is stronger than in 12:38; it was because of what Isa 6:10 said that the Jews could not believe. John’s quotation of Isa 6:10 is a free adaptation, drawing from both the MT and the LXX as well as rearranging

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31 This unfortunate prophetic commission is clearly a command to Isaiah and carried out in Isaiah’s ministry (Isa 29:10-18; 44:9-19; 53:1). For further possible developments of the themes of blindness and deafness in Isa 6:9-10, see G. K. Beale, We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2008), 48 n. 17.
33 While Isaiah did speak the words of Isa 53:1, he did not speak the words of 6:10 (God did). It seems John is using a fixed citation formula where “said” is equivalent to “recorded.” So also John Painter, “Monotheism and Dualism: Reconsidering Predestination in John 12:40,” in Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings in the New Testament in Honor of Francis J. Moloney (ed. Rekha M. Chennatu and Mary L. Coloe; Rome: LAS, 2005), 132. Regarding the words of Isa 6:9, Matthew calls these the “prophecy of Isaiah” (13:14), Luke records Paul saying the Spirit spoke the words through Isaiah (Acts 28:25), while Mark (4:12) and Luke (8:10) make no authorial comment.
the word order of the MT. John changes the imperatives of the Hebrew to aorist- and perfect-tense verbs to signal the fulfillment of this Scripture in Jesus’ ministry. Yet he retains the first-person singular ἰάσομαι (“I will heal”) from the LXX. This creates an ambiguity; it seems there is one entity who has blinded and hardened Israel, and another who would otherwise heal them. Most commentators take the healer to be Jesus, while they are split on whether the one who blinds and hardens is God or Jesus.

It is most likely, however, that John intends the subject of both to be God. The resultant reading is grammatically awkward, but anyone who knew the context of Isa 6:9-10 knew that God would be the one to harden Israel’s hearts through Isaiah’s preaching and that God was the agent of the Hebrew passive verb “be healed” (יהיה [Isa 6:10]). Indeed, throughout Isaiah, the verb יהיה is only used in connection with God, not the Messiah/Servant. The LXX's translation of the passive “be healed” with the active ἰάσομαι correctly interpreted God as the implicit subject of the verb. Although Jesus does have a large healing role in the Gospels, it seems that in this passage John wanted to preserve as much as possible the actual words of Scripture, while making clear that God was the subject of both the hardening and the healing. This resulted in a constructio ad sensum which remains quite clear if one only keeps in mind the context of Isa 6:9-10. Moreover, this sort of grammatical shift in person (here from third person to first person) occurs frequently in the OT, even in Isa 5:1-7, the chapter prior to Isa 6. John’s thorough acquaintance with the OT suggests he saw no problem with his constructio ad sensum. Thus, the question of the means of ensuring the fulfillment of this typological pattern is answered by showing from Isa 6 that God has the power to harden and to heal Israel. And God has, in this case, hardened Israel to fulfill his divinely ordained type.

But, to re-state the second question, how is this just? Isaiah 6:10 also serves to answer this objection by bringing the obduracy motif, already introduced

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34 Placing the blinding of their eyes at the beginning of the quotation emphasizes the spiritual sight needed to rightly perceive Jesus’ words and deeds and connects with the healing of the blind man in John 9.


36 Painter’s argument, that men are blinded not by God, but by the devil and their attraction to darkness (“Monotheism and Dualism”), is unconvincing and rightfully criticized by Carson, John, 448 n. 1.

37 Painter’s article is helpful in explaining the exegetical and interpretive difficulties in positing two different agents for the two different actions (e.g., how John understood Isa 6). Concluding that God is the intended subject of both actions eliminates this multitude of problems.

38 Isa 6:10; 19:22; 30:26; 53:5; 57:18-19. Even in 53:5, the healing comes through the wounds of the Servant, not from the Servant himself.

39 See esp. John 9, where Jesus heals the blind man, but the Jews remain blind. See Luke 4:18; cf. Isa 61:1 LXX, which uses ἰάομαι to translate the Hebrew’s “bind up (the brokenhearted).”

40 And, as mentioned already, the use of the perfect τετύφλωκεν and the aorist ἐπώρωσεν emphasizes the decisive fulfillment of Isaiah’s words in Jesus’ ministry.
in John 12:37, more clearly into the picture. The Scripture’s determination that corporate Israel would reject Jesus’ ministry was not arbitrary, but was predicated upon their predisposition to idolatry and rejection of the living God, even though he had already shown them “so many signs” (cf. Deut 29:2-4; John 12:37) in Egypt and in the wilderness (cf. Exod 6:6; Neh 9:10). Indeed, so treacherous was their idolatry that, when rebuked by God’s prophets, they killed them (Neh 9:26; Luke 11:47; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15). This prophetic rejection is decreed to occur by God in Isaiah’s case in Isa 6:10, the fulfillment of which is evident in Isaiah’s desperate cry in 53:1. Thus, in order to answer the question of justice provoked by the ἵνα clause in 12:38, John refers to Isa 6:10. The quotation therefore answers two possible questions which might arise from John’s quotation of Isa 53:1, namely, (1) the means by which Scripture is fulfilled and (2) the justice of God in hardening Israel.

IV. The Relationship between Typological and Direct Prophecy

John continues in 12:41 in a manner that, in conjunction with our typological reading and due to asyndeton, seems rather abrupt and random: “These things (ποιήσας) Isaiah said because (ὅτι) he saw [Jesus’] glory and spoke concerning him.” This verse has commonly been taken to mean that Isaiah saw the pre-incarnate Christ at the right hand of the Father during his heavenly vision in Isa 6. Some then take this to mean that anywhere God’s glory is seen in the OT, there the pre-existent Christ is seen also. But this interpretation does not fit into John’s apologetic purpose or the flow of thought. In fact, it would alienate any Jewish reader since nowhere does Isa 6 say this. How could a randomly inserted christological statement advance John’s argument? Another interpretation fails for the same reason, namely, that John equates the glory of the Father with that of the Son (John 17:5) and so understands retrospectively that Isaiah, seeing God’s glory, was also seeing the Son’s glory. Once again, if this were John’s meaning, it would serve no purpose in its context and would only alienate his readers who would fail to see this in the Isa 6 text.

A more contextually appropriate reading, and one supported by linguistic connections, is that the purpose of this comment is apologetic; it explains the

41 Almost an equal number of manuscripts have ὅτε instead of ὅτι, but the support for ὅτι is greater. Godet and KJV prefer ὅτε (John, 2:235), while the majority prefer ὅτι. Ridderbos (John, 445 n. 217) and Schnackenburg (John, 2:531 n. 19) both note that ὅτι is the better reading because of its superior manuscript support and because ὅτε is the easier reading.

42 It seems most likely that both instances of αὐτοῦ refer to the same person. The second referent is surely Jesus, since Isaiah speaking about the Father would not fit the context of Jesus’ rejection. The αὐτοῦ in whom some were believing (12:42) is also clearly Jesus.


44 Contra Ridderbos, John, 445.
validity of applying these passages to Jesus. Up to this point in John’s argument, his Jewish readers could perhaps have agreed that a typological pattern was established from Moses to Isaiah that foretold the rejection of a future prophet. Furthermore, after John’s quotation of Isa 6:10, his Jewish readers perhaps could even have agreed that God is just in ensuring the fulfillment of this typological pattern. But, having granted these points, they may have asked John, “Who is this future prophet to be rejected? Does Isaiah tell us anything about the identification of this prophet?” To this question, John responds, “Yes, Isaiah did say something about his identity; in fact, ‘he saw his glory and spoke concerning him.’”

When John says that Isaiah “saw his glory,” he is most likely referring to Isaiah’s prophetically “seeing” the mission of the Servant of the Lord. This is supported by multiple links between the fourth Servant Song and John 12, which suggest that John had the fourth Servant Song in mind when writing the chapter. Isaiah 52:13 LXX says the Lord’s Servant will be exalted (ὑψόω) and glorified (δοξάζω) exceedingly. Isaiah 52:14 LXX then says that many men will fail to glorify (ἀδοξέω) his appearance. John uses δοξάζω in 12:16, 23, 41, 43 and ὑψόω in 12:32, 34. These linguistic links, as well as the mention of sin, are also found between the fourth Servant Song and Isa 6 (6:1, 3, 7; 53:12). This evidence suggests that, when John says Isaiah saw “his glory,” he is referring to the glory of the Servant of the Lord, who would be exalted (ὑψόω) and glorified (δοξάζω). Of course, John can say that Isaiah saw Jesus’ glory because he knows that Jesus is the Servant, so when Isaiah spoke about the servant he really spoke about Jesus. This interpretation still understands that Isaiah “saw” Jesus, but that he saw him in his functional nature as the Servant rather than in his ontological nature as the eternal Son of God.

Therefore, John’s response to the possible question from his readers is to say, “Yes, Isaiah identified the Servant as the great future prophet to be rejected.” But while Isaiah spoke about the Servant’s rejection, did Isaiah provide any clues that the Servant would be the climactic antitype of the typological pattern that he has evoked in 12:37-40? Much evidence suggests that Isaiah does present the Servant as the climactic, rejected prophet. He does so by presenting the Servant’s mission as antitypical of his own rejected mission.

46 In other words, 12:41 can be seen as John’s preemptive answer to a possible question or objection that his readers may have raised after reading 12:37-40.
48 This evokes the question of what the biblical authors knew and when they knew it. All that is important here is that, whether or not Isaiah knew the Servant would be Jesus of Nazareth, John certainly knew this. Thus, when John reads that Isaiah speaks of the Servant, he can say correctly that Isaiah spoke of Jesus, even if Isaiah was not fully aware of which specific human being would fulfill the vocation of the Servant.
Isaiah definitely casts the Servant in terms of a prophetic figure. His mission involves returning Israel back to God (49:5), and even more, being a light to the nations (49:6). The Servant is one who is taught (50:4), just like the prophetic disciples of Isaiah (8:16).\(^49\) The Servant’s vocation was chosen “from the womb” (49:1) just as Jeremiah’s (Jer 1:5).\(^50\) Moreover, the following six parallels suggest that Isaiah presents the Servant not only as prophetic, but as typologically antithetical to Isaiah in both his character and in the scope and effect of his mission.\(^51\)

1. When Isaiah preaches, they will see (ראה; βλέπω) but not perceive (ידע; ὁράω) (6:9, 10). When the Servant carries out his mission, it will not even be recounted (ספר; ἀναγγέλω) to many nations and kings but they will perceive (ראה; ὁράω) (52:15).\(^52\)

2. When Isaiah preaches, they will hear (שמע; ἀκούω) and not understand (בין; συνίημι) (6:9), but regarding the Servant’s mission they will not even hear (שמע; ἀκούω) and yet will understand (בין; συνίημι) (52:15).

3. While Isaiah’s preaching will blind (שעע; καμμύω) Israel’s eyes, the Servant will open (פקח; ἀνοίγω) the eyes of the blind (42:7).

4. While Isaiah stood lowly and woeful before the Lord (6:5), the Servant would be exceedingly high and lifted up and exalted (דודו ומדבב ועלו ממעל ועלו בירום) (52:13), just as the Lord himself was high and lifted up (דודו ומדבב [6:1]).\(^53\)

5. While Isaiah’s sin must be atoned for before he can be commissioned by God (6:7), the Servant is sinless (53:9) and will sprinkle\(^54\) many nations (52:15) to atone for sin (53:5-6, 10-12).

6. While Isaiah would be rejected and persecuted, the Servant would be rejected to the point of death (53:4-8). But while other prophets would be persecuted, some even to their death, the Servant’s death is vicarious and atoning. His work will amaze nations and even kings (52:15).\(^55\)

This evidence suggests that the Servant is not only a prophetic figure, but that he is the rejected prophet _par excellence_ in the OT. Many were persecuted

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\(^49\) This was suggested to me in personal communication by Christopher Fantuzzo.

\(^50\) Goppelt, _Typos_, 40. Goppelt states that the Servant is cast as “primarily a prophetic figure.”

\(^51\) By “typologically antithetical,” we mean that a divinely ordained historical correspondence and escalation will exist between the missions of Isaiah and the Servant, but that the Servant’s mission will have the opposite effect of Isaiah’s mission. The most well-known antithetical typology in Scripture is the Adam-Christ typology in Rom 5. Whereas Adam brought death, Christ brings life.

\(^52\) This antithetical parallel is brought out more by the LXX than the MT; Isaiah’s audience would not perceive (δράω) but many kings and nations would perceive (δράω) the work of the Servant.

\(^53\) The LXX misses this linguistic connection which the MT makes, translating ψυχλού και ἐπηρμένου in 6:1 and ψυχλέπτεται και δεξασθήσεται σφόδρα in 52:13. Other LXX versions (Lucianic recensions) added καὶ μετεωρισθήσεται (“and will be raised high”) since the presumably original translation omitted translating the third Hebrew verb (either נזה or רון).

\(^54\) Of the 24 uses of נזה (“to sprinkle”) in the OT, almost all refer to ceremonial sprinkling of blood or water for cleansing (e.g., Exod 29:21; Lev 4:6, 17; 5:9).

\(^55\) Here is the escalation inherent within typology. Isaiah’s work was bound to the nation of Israel, whereas the Servant’s work is universal in scope.
before him, but the prophetic Servant will be persecuted to the point of death for the atonement of “us all” (53:6). In this way, the Servant is seen as the directly prophesied climactic fulfillment of the typological pattern of prophetic rejection, so that typology and direct prophecy here coalesce into one fluid stream which runs toward its telos.

Thus, John’s apologetic argument, proven from the OT Scriptures themselves, is threefold: (1) the Scripture necessitated the rejection of Jesus because of the established typological pattern of prophetic rejection; (2) God’s ensuring this rejection is righteous because of Israel’s consistent obduracy; (3) Isaiah prophesied that the Servant (who is Jesus) would be the intended antitype of this typological pattern. John hopes that this argument will alleviate Jewish skepticism and offense at the idea that Israel’s Messiah experienced a horrific death.

V. Conclusion

We have argued that John, in defending the legitimacy of Jesus as Israel’s crucified Messiah, argues that the Jewish rejection of Jesus’ ministry was the typological fulfillment of Isaiah’s rejected ministry (and of Moses’ before him). Isaiah’s ministry was designed by God to point forward to the rejection of Israel’s prophet par excellence, Jesus, who is the Servant of the Lord. Thus, “although [Jesus] had done so many signs before them, they were not believing in him” (John 12:37), indeed, they “could not” (12:39), because the typological pattern established by Isaiah must be fulfilled by the intended antitype, or the Scriptures would be broken. This demonstrates John’s understanding that typology is predictive by nature. Divinely ordained types were just as prophetically authoritative as direct prophecies, and both were equally demanding of a future fulfillment. This is why John could say the Jews “could not believe” “in order that the word of Isaiah might be fulfilled.”

To round off his argument, John asserts Jesus was the intended antitype by noting that Isaiah not only served as the type of Jesus, but also prophesied about his future glory and exaltation which would come through his substitutionary, atoning death. Jesus’ life, death, and vindication fits the description of the Servant, so Israel should recognize their obduracy and Jesus’ true identity, repent, and believe. This interesting interweaving of typology and direct

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56 The fact that Jesus is indeed the Servant is hinted at as early as 1:29 in the Gospel (cf. Isa 53:7), probably alluded to in 1 John 3:5, and fits the description of what occurs to Jesus in John’s crucifixion narrative.

57 At least this is true according to John, following Jesus, and traditional Christian interpretation. Of course the issue of how Judaism has interpreted Isa 53 is difficult (see Michael L. Brown, “Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” in The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology [ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012]), but John would have seen the “correct” interpretation quite clearly in light of Jesus’ teaching and fulfillment.
prophecy suggests that John sees the two as closely related. In fact, his connection of a typological fulfillment and a directly prophetic fulfillment in John 19:36, 37, using πληρόω for both quotations, suggests that he distinguished less starkly between the two types of prophecy than modern scholars do, if even at all. This all suggests that the traditional view of typology may be the correct position with regard to the predictive element. More studies could seek to demonstrate this from thorough exegesis of other NT typological passages, and more work could be done to clarify the relationship between direct prophecy and typology, since these are still open questions.

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58 On this observation of John 19:36-37, I am indebted to my former professor, Paul Hoskins, who made this observation in class lecture. The same point is made independently by Beale, *Handbook*, 58-59.