

recognized how the glory of the Messiah is something that He shared with His Disciples (John 17:22-24). *Is it fair to conclude that there can be some differentiations or specific applications of the concept of “glory”?*

In Isaiah 42:8 glory is associated with the exclusive praise due to the One God of Creation. In John 17:5 glory is associated with the pre-existent origins and disposition of the Messiah, concurrent with what is seen in Isaiah 42:8. But in John 17:22, the Father’s glory present in the Son and given to the Disciples, is rightly taken to involve the dimensions of His humiliation and death, something to be surely replicated in the Disciples’ experience of ministry service. No one, who holds to either a high Christology or low Christology, would honestly argue that the “glory” shared and given to the Disciples, involved the worship and praise noted by Isaiah 42:8.

## Isaiah 44:5-8

### “God as the First and the Last, the Only God”

“This one will say, “I am the LORD’s”; and that one will call on the name of Jacob; and another will write on his hand, “Belonging to the LORD,” and will name Israel’s name with honor. Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: “I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me. Who is like Me? Let him proclaim and declare it; yes, let him recount it to Me in order, from the time that I established the ancient nation. And let them declare to them the things that are coming and the events that are going to take place. Do not tremble and do not be afraid; have I not long since announced it to you and declared it? And you are My witnesses. Is there any God besides Me, or is there any other Rock? I know of none.””

Isaiah 44:1-8 details some of the significant blessings that the God of Israel has intended for His chosen people, followed in Isaiah 44:9-20 about the futility of idols, particularly how the wood that is carved for idols is the same which is used for a fire to cook food (Isaiah 44:13-16). Isaiah 44:6 is not the only place in the Book of Isaiah, where it is detailed that the LORD God of Israel is to be regarded as “the first and the last” (also: Isaiah 41:1; 48:12-13), but Isaiah 44:6 does make a significant statement of exclusivity: *ani rishon v’ani acharon u’m’bal’adai ein elohim* (אֱלֹהִים אֲנִי רִשׁוֹן וְאֲנִי אַחֲרֹן וּמִבְּלָעֲדַי אֵין אֱלֹהִים), “I am the first and I am the last, and aside from Me there is no God” (ATS). The statement of Isaiah 44:8 continuing, asserts, *hayeish eloah m’bal’adai v’ein tzur balyada’ti* (הַיֵּשׁ אֱלֹהִים מִבְּלָעֲדַי וְאֵין צֹר בַּלְיָדָעַתִּי), “Is there any god, then, but Me? ‘There is no other rock; I know none” (NJPS).

I.W. Slotki states, in the Soncino volume on Isaiah, “It is a cardinal belief of Judaism that ‘He is One, and there is no second to compare to Him.’”<sup>145</sup> **That Isaiah 44:6, 8 depicts the God of Israel as the Only True God is sure.** Reflecting on the nature of God here, and drawing a connection to Exodus 3, John Goldingay makes the useful conclusion,

“Yahweh is indeed First and Last. The statement recalls that in Exodus 3, where Yahweh tells Moses that the very name ‘Yahweh’ suggests ‘I am who I am’ or ‘I will be what I will be.’ It is not a statement about abstract being, but rather a promise that Yahweh will be there with the people acting in whatever way is needed. And there is no one else who is in a position to make that claim.”<sup>146</sup>

Motyer goes even further in his evaluation of Isaiah 44:6 asserting that God alone is “the first and the last,” noting the difference between *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים), and later *eloah* (אֱלֹהִים) employed in Isaiah 44:8:

<sup>145</sup> Slotki, *Isaiah*, 213.

<sup>146</sup> Goldingay, *Isaiah*, 254.

## Approaching the Nature of Yeshua from the Tanach

“[T]he whole statement, *I am the first and I am the last*, concerns the nature of God. As *first* he does not derive his life from elsewhere (contrast the idols; verses 10-17) but is self-existing and self-sufficient; as *last* he remains at the end, supreme, totally fulfilled. *‘lōhîm* is the common noun for *God* but in light of a different word in the matching phrase in verse 8 we should probably give it a distinctive flavour as a plural of amplitude: ‘God in the fulness or totality of divine attributes.’”<sup>147</sup>

When a reader of the Hebrew Tanach encounters the explicit, exclusive claim of Isaiah 44:8, 8—“I am the first, and I am the last, and there is no GOD but Me...Is there a god besides Me? There is no rock of strength that I did not know [of its strength]” (Keter Crown Bible)—it is fairly obvious that this is the One True God talking. **Only the God of Israel can be regarded as “the first and the last.”**

Much later in the Holy Scriptures, in the Book of Revelation, Yeshua the Messiah explicitly states to be “the first and the last.” What is this to mean? In his commentary on Isaiah, Oswalt indicates, “That this language (*first and last*) is applied to Christ not once but four times in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13) is some indication of the force of the early church’s conviction that Jesus Christ was Yahweh incarnate.”<sup>148</sup> Indeed, as Bible readers are forced to recognize, the exclusive claim of Isaiah 44:6, 8 of the God of Israel being the only True Deity, is applied to Yeshua the Messiah. In their book *Putting Jesus in His Place*, Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski further explain,

“...The title *the first and the last* clearly originates at least in part from Isaiah, in which the Lord insists that he is the only God...In the context of Isaiah’s prophecies, the Lord is asserting these statements that he is the one in control of Israel’s future and that God’s people have a sure hope of restoration.

“Beyond controversy, Revelation applies the title *the first and the last* to Jesus, who explicitly claims it for himself...{quoting Revelation 1:17b-18; 2:8}...In the context of John’s visions, Jesus is asserting in these statements that by his death and resurrection he has conquered death, and is assuring his people of their future resurrection in the age to come. Thus, the title *the first and the last* has a religious significance in Revelation that is parallel to that in Isaiah.”<sup>149</sup>

Recognizing the Tanach background (Isaiah 41:1; 44:6-8; 48:12-13) behind the title “the first and the last,” and its being employed to describe Yeshua the Messiah (Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 21:6; 22:13), can mean one of only two things for the Bible reader. (1) Either the author of Revelation has committed blasphemy against the God of Israel, in claiming that Yeshua of Nazareth can possess the same titles of the One who said “I am the first and I am the last,” immediately qualified with, “And there is no God besides Me.” Or, (2) with Yeshua the Messiah possessing the titles of “the first and the last,” the author of Revelation, the Apostle John, genuinely regarded Him to be uncreated and integrated into the Divine Identity. In other words, the Apostle John, a First Century Jewish monotheist, could not have called Yeshua the Messiah “the first and the last,” unless He was God (discussed further).

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<sup>147</sup> Motyer, *Isaiah*, 344.

<sup>148</sup> John N. Oswalt, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 171.

<sup>149</sup> Robert M. Bowman, Jr. and J. Ed Komoszewski, *Putting Jesus in His Place: The Case for the Deity of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), pp 178-179.