

POW Lesson 23: Isaiah 52:13-53:12

March 21, 2013

This is a powerful Messianic passage in the prophet's scroll. We know this because it is quoted often in the New Testament. It is so powerfully Messianic, that I wondered how most Jews in the world do not believe that Jesus fulfilled this amazingly accurate prophecy. Here is what I discovered:

In Tel Aviv, Israel, Jews for Jesus asked 100 people to read Isaiah 53, and then asked them, "Who do you think this describes?" Most conceded they did not know to whom it referred.

Some thought it was Jesus! But because it was in the Hebrew Scriptures—the *Tenach*—they were put off. Some repeated what they had heard from other religious Jews, that the suffering servant referred to the Jewish people, or perhaps even the gentile nations. It is a fact still that Isaiah 53 does NOT appear in the regular synagogue calendar readings. **I wonder why that is?**

One Jewish scholar, Claude Montefiore, explained, "Because of the Christological interpretation given to the chapter by Christians, it is omitted in the series of prophetic lessons for the Sabbaths...the omission is deliberate and striking."

Do you think there is some spiritual warfare going on here?

From Jews for Jesus article, "What Proof Do You Have That Jesus Is Messiah?"

It is important to begin by saying that for one who has already made up his or her mind that Jesus is not the Messiah, no amount of evidence will be convincing. But for those who are honest in asking, the evidence speaks for itself.

When sincerely asked, this question is a good one. After all, there have been false Messiahs in Jewish history. Among the most prominent were Bar Kochba and Shabbetai Zevi. Bar Kochba led a revolt against Rome in the years 132-135 AD. During this revolt, one of the most famous figures in Jewish history, Rabbi Akiva, proclaimed him to be "King Messiah." Unfortunately, Bar Kochba, Akiva and thousands of Jews were killed in 135 AD. when the Romans stormed the stronghold of Betar. Shabbetai Zevi, on the other hand, was a self-proclaimed Messiah.

We have been tragically wrong before, so it is not surprising that hard evidence should be sought for believing in Jesus.

The idea of a Messiah is one that is found throughout the Hebrew Bible. There, the Messiah's "I.D." is given to us. Imagine looking up a friend by first locating his country. That would not be enough information, so you would need to ascertain his city, street, and specific number on that street. It would also help if you had a phone number and knew the time at which he would be home.

Similarly, the Bible tells us the "I.D." of the Messiah. His ethnic background, place of birth, time frame of his arrival and other identifying characteristics are given. These "credentials" enable us to identify the Messiah, and to recognize imposters.

Of course it might be objected that if these "credentials" are so clear, why didn't most Jewish people believe in Jesus, and why were they so taken in by false Messiahs like Bar Kochba?

To understand this, one must realize that by the time of Jesus, the Messianic hope had become greatly politicized in the minds of the people. They were seeking deliverance from the tyranny of Rome. Although the Scripture spoke both of the sufferings and of the victories of the Messiah, the victorious aspect had become uppermost in the minds of the common people because of the Roman domination.

This "lopsided" view of the Messiah has stuck with Jewish people, and the politicization of the Messianic hope has continued. Thus the hope of a political rather than a spiritual Messiah contributes to both the acceptance of people such as Bar Kochba, and the rejection of Jesus in his role as a Messiah.

Let's look at the beginning of this week's Bible study text together:

The Suffering and Glory of the Servant

¹³ See, **my servant**-will act wisely;

he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

¹⁴ Just as there were many who were appalled at **him**—

his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being
and his form marred beyond human likeness—

¹⁵ so **he** will sprinkle-many nations,

and kings will shut their mouths-because of him.

For what they were not told, they will see,

and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Vs. 15—“**So he will sprinkle many nations...**” The imagery here is rich! When Moses was ratifying the covenant between God and the Israelite people,

“He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he splashed against the altar. ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”

⁸ Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:4-8)

Silas—or whoever the true author of Hebrews is, responds with “Christ is the mediator of a new covenant”...that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.” (Hebrews 9:15).

And the second part of Isaiah 52:15?

In Paul's letter to the Romans, in chapter 15, the Apostle writes,

²⁰ It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. ²¹ Rather, as it is written:

“Those who were not told about him will see,

and those who have not heard will understand.” That is quoting Isaiah 52:15!

53 “Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm-of the LORD been revealed?”

² **He** grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

*nothing in his appearance that we should desire **him**.*

³ *He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.*

⁴ *Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.*
⁵ *But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wound we are healed."*

One question in Bible interpretation is: How do we know how to properly interpret all these Old Testament prophecies? How do we know what they mean?

Answer: We interpret prophecies *the same way the Apostles of Christ interpreted them!*

For example: vs. 1 "Who has believed our message?" John the Apostle quotes this in his Gospel in chapter 12, to talk about the unbelief of the Jews, who predominantly rejected Jesus as Messiah.

³⁷ *Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.*

³⁸ *This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:*

***"Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"***

The Apostle Paul also quotes this passage in his letter to the Romans in chapter 10: *"But not the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who have believed our message?" vs.16*

How about Isaiah 53:4?

Matthew writes in his gospel, just after Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, ¹⁶ *"When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases." (Isaiah 53:4).*

How about the next section, verses 6-9:

⁶ *We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.*

⁷ *He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;*

*he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

At Jesus' Trial Before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate--Matthew 27:12-13: *"And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He made no answer. Then Pilate said to Him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly." Fulfilled Isaiah 53:7; "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth."*

⁸ *By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.
⁹ He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

How did the New Testament writers interpret this passage?

We see Phillip the Evangelist, on the road to Gaza with the Ethiopian Eunuch. You remember, the man who traveled all the way to Jerusalem seeking God, but all he found was religion. But he did manage to purchase a copy of the prophet Isaiah. And guess which section the man was reading when Phillip showed up? Isaiah, chapter 53!

³⁰ *"Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.*

³¹ *"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.*

³² *This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:*

***"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.***

³³ ***In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.***

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth." (Isaiah 53-7-8)

³⁴ *The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."*

And for Isaiah 53:9? **Matthew 27:57-60:** *"There came a man from Arimathea, named Joseph...and asked for the body of Jesus...And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb." Isaiah 53:9—"His grave was assigned to be with wicked men, yet with a rich man in His death."*

Isaiah 53:10-12:

¹⁰ Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

¹¹ After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.

¹² Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors."

Isaiah points out so poetically, that though Messiah dies, as an offering for sin, death isn't the end of the story. Jesus didn't stay dead in the tomb! He will live, and divide the spoils of redeemed humanity with the strong! It reminds me of Paul's great poetry in his letter to the Philippians, Chapter 2, in which Paul talks about the Jesus voluntarily emptying himself and taking on the limitations of becoming a human being. And then how he humbled himself and became a servant, all the way to becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross. And then, how God the Father highly exalted Jesus and gave Him the name that is above every name!

Friends, we have this amazing witness in Scripture, studying this powerful prophecy of Isaiah 52-53, and seeing how the Apostles of Christ, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declare so emphatically that Jesus fulfilled every one of these predictions. Jesus is the Messiah! The Suffering Servant has come, taught, healed, and identified Himself! To the woman at the well, when she said, "I know that Messiah is coming. When he comes, he will teach us all things—he will explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, I who speak to you and he" (John 4:25-26).

Conclusion: Peter, speaking to Cornelius and his household, declared, "***Of Him [Jesus] all the prophets bear witness that through His name every one who believes in Him has received forgiveness of sins.***" Acts 10:43

That sermon declared by Peter opened the door to heaven for Gentiles, as well as for Jews. It opened the door for us when we responded in faith to this good news. And it will continually open the door to those who hear. Jesus will "see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53:10). In the suffering servant Jesus, Messiah comes and fulfills all the prophecies about Him! "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

We return to the beginning of Isaiah 53: "Who has believed our message?" Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ. Your family and friends and neighbors—many of the will come to faith in Jesus, when they hear the good news! How shall they hear without someone sharing with them.

We have a wonderful Messiah, detailed in this supernatural, prophecy-fulfilling book! Let's get our community to a place where they can hear and respond, so that "by Jesus' stripes, they are healed." Amen? Let's pray...