

JESUS WAS NOT “THE SUFFERING SERVANT” OF ISAIAH CHAPTER 53 ¹

ISSUES: Christian missionaries are very attracted to the 53rd chapter of Isaiah’s book because it refers to the “affliction, oppression, and persecution of a suffering servant who submitted to his grave.” Superficially, Isaiah’s description sounds enticingly like the Christian view of Jesus. However, chapter 53 is part of Isaiah’s fourth servant song, which does not refer to the Messiah ben David; it refers to a “suffering servant of God.” There are at least five major problems with their interpretation that these verses in Isaiah refer to Jesus:

First, Christian missionaries use the 53rd chapter of Isaiah as a proof-text for the Christian belief that Jesus died for the sins of others. However, people may have seen Jesus die, but it is not conceptually possible to see someone die as atonement for the sins of others. It is merely a theological assertion by the writers of the New Testament intended to give meaning to Jesus’ death. Only if one first accepts the New Testament teaching that Jesus’ death had this non-visible, spiritual significance is it logically possible to assert that Isaiah confirmed Christian beliefs. Therefore, Isaiah 53 is in reality no “proof” at all but rather circular reasoning and a contrived confirmation for someone who has already chosen Christianity.

Second, virtually all of the “proofs” used by missionaries are from rabbinic texts and commentaries such as the Talmud, the Targum and the Zohar. Missionaries use these rabbinic texts to support their assertion that Jesus is Isaiah’s “servant.” The problem with their argument requires an understanding of the nature of “psat” and “midrash.” “Psat” is the plain meaning of a text. All the authors of the Talmud, Targum and Zohar agree that the “psat” of “servant” is Jacob/Israel which means the Jewish People. **Midrash never contradicts psat.** Midrash is a poetic overlay of meaning designed to teach **Jewish theology**, not the plain meaning of the text. These rabbinic texts refer to Isaiah’s “servant” as Moses, the soul, an angel, the righteous of Israel, and the messiah ben Joseph (a descendent of Joseph who is prophesized to die before messiah ben David appears to fulfill all the messianic prophecies). Missionaries falsify their analysis of these texts by ignoring all of these non-messianic references and by pretending that messiah ben Joseph is really messiah ben David. They play these name games to shoehorn Jesus into Isaiah’s text. Problematically, Christian theologians universally reject these texts because they contradict or reject the fundamental Christian faith claims about Jesus. It is the height of disingenuousness to use isolated out-of-context verses from Jewish texts to “prove” what the texts themselves reject! Missionaries intentionally misapply these verses to falsify “proofs” to further the Christian missionary agenda.

Third, it is very important to note that while missionaries are grasping at Talmudic straws to support their forced interpretation of Isaiah 53, the Christian Bible contradicts them. It is obvious from the Gospel accounts that Jesus’ handpicked disciples didn’t view Isaiah 53 as a messianic prophecy. After the disciple Peter (a pillar of the Church and supposedly the first Pope) identified Jesus as “the Messiah” (Matthew 16:16) Peter is informed that Jesus will be killed. (Matthew 16:21) Peter’s response is most telling: “God forbid it, lord! This shall never happen to you.” (Matthew 16:22 and also Matthew 17:23, Mark 9:31-32; Mark 16:10-11; Luke

¹ Source: *Lets Get Biblical* by Rabbi Tovia Singer

18:32, John 20:9). Peter didn't joyfully exclaim: "Praise God, you are the suffering servant of Isaiah 53!" Clearly, the disciples did not know that the Messiah was supposed to suffer and die nor did they view Jesus' impending death as "good news." Their reaction makes it abundantly clear that they had no concept that their messiah's suffering and death was prophesized by Isaiah 53.

Fourth, Jesus' enemies such as King Herod certainly didn't think that the Messiah was supposed to be killed. Otherwise, why would Herod help Jesus' cause by trying to kill him? (Matthew 2).

Fifth, Jesus himself obviously didn't see Isaiah 53 as relevant to his messianic claims. According to the Gospel of Mark, "And he (Jesus) went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. And he said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me." (Mark 14:35-36). By asking God to "take away this cup from me" Jesus clearly wanted God to allow him to live and not be killed. This creates a monumental problem for today's missionaries. Didn't Jesus know that if God listened to him and "removed the cup" Jesus would not be able to fulfill (the current missionary interpretation of) Isaiah 53? Obviously, until Jesus suffered and died there was no need for Christian missionaries to re-interpret Isaiah 53 to explain his death. Parenthetically, since Jesus was supposedly "god" as a member of the trinity, was Jesus speaking to himself when he asked God to "remove this cup?" Does any of this really make sense?

It is important to note that there is no scriptural basis in Isaiah 53, the Torah or the Jewish Bible to support the Christian faith claim that it is necessary to "believe in the Messiah" for personal salvation. God gave the Jewish People a detailed instruction manual (the Torah) containing 613 commandments /tools to make moral choices. According to Jewish theology, each person determines their own personal salvation based upon their own moral choices. Therefore, even if Jesus were the messiah there would be no need to "believe" in him for personal salvation.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The speakers throughout chapter fifty-three are the Gentile kings who are introduced at the end of Chapter 52 who remark in shock and astonishment at the sudden elevation of the Jewish People. The Christian Church has always taught that the Jews have suffered for the past 2000 years as a punishment for rejecting Jesus, but in Chapter 52 God reveals and these **Gentile kings** admit that the **Gentiles** caused the Jews to suffer for their own sins:

ISAIAH 52: "Behold, My [God's] servant [Israel] will succeed; he [Israel] will be exalted and become high and exceedingly lofty. Just as multitudes were astonished over you [Israel] ...so will the **many nations** [exclaim about him [Israel] and [Gentile] **kings will shut their mouths** [in amazement] for **they** [Gentiles] will see that which had never been told to **them** [Gentiles], and will perceive things **they** (Gentiles) had never heard." (Isaiah 52:15)

CONCLUSION: In Isaiah 52, the Gentile kings "shut their mouths" when they realize that they sinned by persecuting the Jews for their own benefit. They are the speaker in chapter 53. Once this is understood, Isaiah's 53rd chapter becomes clear. Remember that in Chapter 53, the "we"

are these Gentiles and the “he” is Israel (the Jewish People). This is the correct translation from the Hebrew:

ISAIAH 53: “Who would believe what we [**Gentiles**] have heard! For whom has the arm of Hashem been revealed! Formerly he [**Israel**] grew like a sapling or like a root from arid ground; he had neither form nor grandeur; we saw him but without such visage that we could desire him. He was despised and isolated from men, a man of pains and accustomed to illness. As one from whom we would hide our faces; he was despised, and we had no regard for him. But in truth, it was our ills that he bore, and our pains that he carried – but we had regarded him diseased, stricken by God, and afflicted. He was pained because of our rebellious sins and oppressed through our iniquities; the chastisement upon him was for our benefit, and through his wounds, we were healed. We have all strayed like sheep, each of us turning his own way, and Hashem inflicted upon him the iniquity of us all. He was persecuted and afflicted, but he did not open his mouth; like a sheep being led to the slaughter or a ewe that is silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth. Now that he has been released from captivity and judgment, who could have imagined such a generation? For he had been removed from the land of the living, an affliction upon **them** [lamo in Hebrew] that was my people’s sin. He submitted himself to his grave like wicked men; and the wealthy [submitted] to his execution, for committing no crime and with no deceit in his mouth.

Hashem desired to oppress him and He afflicted him; if his soul would acknowledge guilt, he would see offspring and live long days and the desire of Hashem would succeed in his hand. He would see (the purpose) and be satisfied with his soul’s distress. With his knowledge My servant will vindicate the Righteous One to multitudes; it is their iniquities that he will carry. Therefore, I will assign him a portion from the multitudes and he will divide the mighty as spoils – in return for having poured out his soul for death and being counted among the wicked, for he bore the sin of the multitudes, and prayed for the wicked.”

These verses will be analyzed in detail below.

JACOB AND ISRAEL ARE REFERENCES TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE: According to Genesis, the Jewish patriarch Jacob’s name was changed to Israel. Collectively, Jacob and Israel refer to the Jewish People:

GENESIS: “He [an angel] said, “No longer will it be said that your name is Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome.” (Genesis 32:29)

ISRAEL IS GOD’S SERVANT NATION: Isaiah identified the “servant” as Jacob and Israel (the Jewish People) many times in the twelve chapters preceding his 53rd chapter:

1. “But you, Israel, are my **servant, Jacob** whom I have chosen.” (Isaiah 41:8-9)
2. “Yet hear now, O **Jacob My servant and Israel** whom I have chosen.” (Isaiah 44:1)

3. “Remember these, **O Jacob, And Israel, for you are My servant**, I have formed you, you are My servant.” (Isaiah 44:21)
4. “...for **Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel My elect**.” (Isaiah 45:4)
5. “The Lord has redeemed His **servant Jacob**.” (Isaiah 48:20)
6. “You are My **servant, O Israel**, in whom I will be glorified.” (Isaiah 49:3)

ANALYSIS: The idea that the servant is the Jewish people in Chapters 41 through 49, and that Isaiah would suddenly turn the servant into the messiah in Chapter 53 without warning defies logic. Missionaries attempt to benefit from the fact that Isaiah had explained who the “servant” was so many times by the times he reached Chapter 53 he did not bother to do so again.

FURTHER PROOF: In the Jewish Bible Israel and Jacob are often referred to as God’s “servant.”

1. “A heritage to **Israel His servant**, for His mercy endures forever.” (Psalm 136:22)
2. “But do not fear, O **My servant Jacob**, and do not be dismayed, **O Israel!** (Jeremiah 46:27)
3. “Do not fear, **O’ Jacob My servant**, says the Lord, for I am with you for I will make a complete end of all the nations.” (Jeremiah 76: 28)
4. “Therefore do not fear, O **My servant Jacob**, says the Lord, nor be dismayed, **O Israel**, for behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed [zera] from the land of their captivity, Jacob shall return, have rest and be quiet.” (Jeremiah 30:10)

Israel is also referred to as God’s servant in the **Christian Bible**:

5. “He [God] has helped **His servant Israel** in remembrance of His mercy.” (Luke 1:54)

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW REQUIRES GOD TO BE HIS OWN SERVANT: The Christian view is that the suffering servant of God described in Isaiah 53 is Jesus. However, Christians also assert that Jesus is a part of the “trinity,” one of the three persons in the Christian triune godhead, and therefore is God Himself. Therefore, according to the Christian view, God sent Himself as His own “suffering servant.” This does not make sense logically and is contrary to the plain meaning of the text. Logically and in context, a servant and the servant’s master are not the same person.

CAN “HE” REFER TO ISRAEL? Christian missionaries claim that since the "servant" is referred to as "he" (singular, masculine) Chapter 53 cannot refer to Israel. However, the verses below demonstrate that the Jewish Bible specifically refers to Israel as “he, him, his servant and God’s son,” in the singular, masculine.

1. **EXODUS:** “You shall say to Pharaoh, ‘So said Hashem, My **firstborn son is Israel**. So I say to you, send out **My son** that **he** may serve Me – but you have refused to send **him** out: behold, I shall kill your firstborn son.” (Exodus 4:22) Israel is referred to as God’s “**son**” and “**he**” in the collective.
2. **HOSEA:** The prophet Hosea said, “When Israel was a lad I loved **him**, and since Egypt I have been calling out to **My son**.” (Hosea 11:1)
3. **HOSEA:** Hosea confirmed that in exile, Israel struggled as a young tree growing on parched land, “I will be as the dew unto **Israel**; **he** shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. **His** branches shall spread, **his** beauty shall be as the olive tree, and **his** smell as Lebanon.” (Hosea 14:6-8)

ANALYSIS: This confirms the verse in Isaiah 53:2 which says “**he** came up like a sapling before it, and like a root from dry ground, **he** had neither form nor comeliness; and we saw **him** that he had no appearance that we should have desired **him**.”

ISAIAH SHIFTED TO THE PLURAL: Isaiah himself proves the Jewish understanding is correct by switching back from the masculine singular (**he**) to the plural form (**them**) when referring to the Jewish People in verse 53:8. Isaiah said:

“Now that **he** [Israel] has been released from captivity and judgment, who could have imagined such a generation? For **he** had been removed from the land of the living, an affliction upon **them** [lamo in Hebrew] that was my people’s sin.” (Isaiah 53:8, Jewish Bible, Stone Edition)

ANALYSIS: Isaiah’s switch from **him** to **them** (lamo) is a fatal problem for the Christian claim that it applies to one man, Jesus. Christian missionaries can plausibly claim that “he” applies to Jesus but they cannot plausibly claim that “them” applies to Jesus. The New King James and the NIV versions of the Christian Bible dealt with this monumental problem by merely mistranslating “lamo” as him, fraudulently translating the plural as the singular.

The prophet Hosea also described the Jewish People as “**lad**,” “**him**,” and “**son**” (singular masculine) and then switched to the plural **them** (lamo) in exactly the same way:

“When Israel was a **lad**, I loved **him**, and since Egypt I have been calling out to My **son**. [As much as] they called to **them**, [Israel] so did they [Ephraim] turn away from **them** [Israel]...” (Hosea 11:1-2)

ANALYSIS: Like the prophet Isaiah, the prophet Hosea also referred to Israel in the first person masculine as God’s child and God’s son. Hosea then switched to the plural, “them.” This confirms the Jewish understanding that the “he” in Isaiah 53 describes the Jewish People, God’s suffering servant.

THEOLOGY BY BIBLE TAMPERING: The New King James (NKJ) Christian translation of Isaiah 53 further manipulated the text in Isaiah 53:3-5 by changing the tense from past to present and by strategically mistranslating key words and phrases in order to force Jesus into the text. The Jewish Bible correctly translates the Hebrew. The reader can compare this to the Christian translation:

THE JEWISH BIBLE: "...he had neither form nor grandeur...he was despised and isolated from men, a man of pains and accustomed to illness. As one from whom we would hide our faces; he was despised, and we had no regard for him. But in truth, it was our ills that he bore, and our pains that he carried-but we had regarded him diseased, stricken by God, and afflicted. He was pained because of our rebellious sins and oppressed through our iniquities..." (Isaiah 53:2-5)

THE CHRISTIAN OLD TESTAMENT (NKJ): "He has [instead of had] no form or comeliness...He is [instead of was] despised and rejected [instead of isolated] by men. A man of sorrows [instead of pains] and acquainted with grief [instead of accustomed to illness]. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him. Surely he has borne our griefs [instead of ills] and carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed him stricken, [instead of diseased] smitten by God, and afflicted, but he was wounded for our transgressions. (Isaiah 53:2-5)

ANALYSIS: Isaiah referred to an event that had already occurred and therefore used the past tense. Christian translators manipulated the text by changing the tense to the present tense to apply it to Jesus. Christian translators avoided the problem that Jesus never was reported to have suffered from "illness or disease" by mistranslating these words as "sorrows and grief." This manipulation of the text shifted the meaning of Isaiah's words to support Christian theology.

ANALYSIS OF KEY VERSES:

ISAIAH 53:3: "He [Israel] was despised and isolated from men, a man of pains and accustomed to illness [not grief]. As one from whom we would hide our faces; he was despised, and we had no regard for him."

ANALYSIS: "He" [the Jewish People] was subjected to 2000 years of anti-Semitism, "despised," and forced to live in walled ghettos in Europe "isolated from men" and "we" [Gentiles] had no regard for "him" [the Jewish People].

ISAIAH 53:4: "But in truth, it was our ills that he bore, and our pains that he carried-but we had regarded him diseased, [not sorrows] stricken by God, and afflicted!"

ANALYSIS: The Gentiles admit that it was "our" [the Gentiles] "ills and pains" that "he" [the Jews] bore. The Gentiles regarded the Jews cursed by God and "diseased, stricken, and afflicted." Clearly, Jesus was not "accustomed to illness, diseased, stricken or afflicted."

ISAIAH 53:5: “He was pained because of our rebellious sins and oppressed through our iniquities; the chastisement upon him was for our benefit and through his wounds, we were healed.”

ANALYSIS: “He” [the Jewish People] “was pained” [suffered] because of “our” [the Gentiles] rebellious sins and “he” [the Jewish People] was “oppressed” by “our” [the Gentiles] “iniquities” [sins]. The Gentiles believed that the suffering of the Jewish People was deserved because the Jews rejected and killed Jesus but his death redeemed their sins. “We” [the Gentiles] believed that they were “healed” [justified] “through his [the Jewish People’s] wounds” that the Gentiles inflicted upon the Jewish People.

ISAIAH 53:6: “We have all strayed like sheep, each of us turning his own way, and Hashem inflicted upon him the iniquity of us all.”

ANALYSIS: “We” [Gentiles] “strayed [from God] like sheep,” [by persecuting the Jewish People], and Hashem “inflicted upon him” [God’s servant nation] “the iniquity of us all” [that the Gentiles deserved].

ISAIAH 53:7: “He was persecuted and afflicted, but he did not open his mouth; like a sheep being led to the slaughter or a ewe that is silent before her shearers, he did not open his mouth.”

ANALYSIS: This verse refers to the many hardships that “he” [the Jewish People] endured in their exiles. For example, in the eleventh century, the Jewish People was “persecuted and afflicted” by crusaders who brutally tortured and killed Jews in the name of their lord Jesus. In this century the Nazis murdered millions of Jews in the death camps, “like a sheep being led to slaughter...like an ewe that is silent before her shearers.” This verse cannot be about Jesus who “opened his mouth” on the cross to complain that God had forsaken him.²

ISAIAH 53: 8: “Now that he has been released from captivity and judgment, who could have imagined such a generation? For he had been removed from the land of the living, an affliction upon them that was my people’s sin.”

ANALYSIS: “He” [the Jews] had been "removed" [exiled] from the "land of the living" [Israel]. The Jews were afflicted and exiled to Babylonia. The Jews were afflicted and exiled from Spain. The Jews were afflicted and removed from Germany in boxcars and taken to death camps.

ISAIAH 53:9: “He submitted himself to his grave like wicked men; and the wealthy [submitted] to his executions, for committing no crime [NKJ and NIV Christian Bibles translates crime as violence] and with no deceit in his mouth.”

² Mark 15:34, Matthew 27:46

ANALYSIS: For one thousand years, European Christians killed wealthy Jews to steal their money who “submitted to execution, committing no crime” [although they were innocent]. “With no deceit in his [the Jewish People’s] mouth” [without pretending to accept Jesus] “he” [the Jewish People] submitted themselves to their grave.”

THE SUFFERING SERVANT “HAD DONE NO VIOLENCE” According to Isaiah the servant “**had done no violence.**”³ This verse cannot possibly be about Jesus. With whip in hand Jesus attacked the merchants in the Temple area, overturning tables and seats.⁴ He destroyed a fig tree for not having fruit out of season.⁵ He caused the death, by drowning, of a herd of swine by allowing demons to purposely enter their bodies.⁶ Attacking merchants, cursing and killing a fig tree, and permitting demons to enter the swineherd and causing their death is violent behavior. Whether Jesus was justified in this violence is irrelevant. Therefore, Jesus could not have been the subject of Isaiah 53:9.

THE SERVANT HAD PHYSICAL DESCENDANTS: Properly translated Isaiah 53:10 says, “**He** [the suffering servant] **would see offspring.**”⁷ The Hebrew word for “offspring” (**zera**) literally means **sperm**. As one would expect, “zera” is always used in the Jewish Bible to denote **physical** descendants. There is no indication in the Christian Bible that Jesus left physical descendants, (offspring) and therefore, Isaiah 53 cannot possibly be about him. In the Jewish Bible when spiritual descendants are intended, the Hebrew word “ben,” which means “sons” is always used.

THE SERVANT HAD A PROLONGED LIFE: Isaiah said the servant “...[would] **live long days...**”⁸ According to the Christian NKJ and the NIV translations [God] will “**prolong his days.**” “Prolonged days” means a long life, which cannot possibly apply to Jesus. Jesus allegedly died at about 30 years of age, which is not a “prolonged” life. Also, if Jesus was “god” as Christians claim, he was in essence an eternal (not mortal) being whose life could not have been “prolonged.” Although this description cannot fit Jesus, it does fit the Jewish People perfectly, whose physical survival notwithstanding millenniums of persecution is legendary in the face of overwhelming odds against survival. Significantly, the Jewish People are the **only** biblical people that have survived to the modern era as a distinct people. The days of the **physical descendants** of the Jewish People have truly and miraculously been “**prolonged**” for 3200 years and have fulfilled this prophecy and every other prophecy in Isaiah 53.

CONCLUSION: God’s servant nation was referred to as Jacob/Israel many times in the twelve chapters preceding Chapter fifty-three of Isaiah. The Christian Bible also refers to Israel as God’s servant. The Jewish servant nation is referred to in the singular as “he” in Isaiah, Exodus, and Hosea. According to the Christian theory of the trinity, Jesus was God. Logically, God cannot be His own servant. The Christian Bible changed tense, mistranslated the plural (lamo) as

³ Isaiah 53:9 New King James and NIV translations

⁴ Matthew 21:12, Mark 11:15-16, Luke 19:45, John 2:15

⁵ Matthew 21:18-21, Mark 11:13-14

⁶ Matthew 8:32, Mark 5:13, Luke 8:33

⁷ Isaiah 53:10, Jewish Bible, Stone Edition

⁸ Ibid

singular and falsely capitalized pronouns. The suffering servant “did no violence” and Jesus committed several acts of violence. Isaiah’s servant had physical descendants and a prolonged life, which cannot apply to Jesus. If the reader is interested further analysis, please go to my website; www.26reasons.com. You can order my book, “Twenty-Six Reasons Why Jews Don’t Believe In Jesus” at my website or on Amazon.com.

Asher Norman