

"USE THE SOURCE, LUKE!"^{1,2}

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of whether Jesus, Christianity's Messiah, was properly anointed in order to qualify as Messiah was addressed, and resolved, in another essay.³ It is, however, important to also deal with related claims, particularly when they invoke passages from the Hebrew Bible which allegedly support such claims.

A case-in-point is the passage Luke 4:16-21, which includes two verses, Luke 4:18-19, claimed to be quotes of Isaiah 61:1-2. In the original passage from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet declares that God has selected (anointed) him to prophesy about the future of Israel. The "parallel" passage in the Gospel of Luke has Jesus claiming to have fulfilled the role described by Isaiah, and Christian missionaries use this passage as evidence to support their claim that Jesus was duly anointed for his ministry as the Messiah.⁴

In this essay, the relevant texts from the New Testament and the Hebrew Bible are compared and analyzed to help determine the validity of this claim.

II. THE TEXTS AND THE CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE ON THEM

The following account describes the scenario from which the claim originates (the portion allegedly quoted from the Book of Isaiah is highlighted):

Luke 4:16-21(KJV) – (16) And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

¹ This is a pun on Obi-Wan Kenobi's line "Use the Force, Luke!" in the movie "Star Wars". "Use the Source, Luke!" is a common idiom from the field of computer software development and testing where it is used to suggest that one needs to read the source code that supports an application that is causing a problem. In this essay, the "Source" is a metaphorical reference to the Hebrew Bible.

² Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in **SMALL CAPS** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
 - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
 - A vocalized letter י is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
 - The letter ה is transliterated as "h"
 - The letter ח is transliterated as "ch"
 - The letter כ is transliterated as "k"
 - The letter ק is transliterated as "q"
 - A vocalized **SHVA** (וְ נִיּוּ) is transliterated as a superscripted "e" following the consonant
 - There is no "doubling" of letters in the transliterations to reflect the **daGESH** (emphasis)

³ [True Messiah - Properly Anointed; False Messiah - Smearred with Ointment - http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Anointed.pdf](http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Anointed.pdf)

⁴ For example, [Why Jesus/Yeshua Is the Messiah - http://www.menorah.org/whyjim.html](http://www.menorah.org/whyjim.html)

(17) And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, (18) The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because HE HATH ANOINTED ME to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, (19) To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. (20) And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. (21) And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

The author describes how Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth on Shabbat, and there the “book” of Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the “book”, read a certain short passage from it, then closed it, returned the “book” to the person who gave it to him, and declared the Scripture to have been fulfilled in him.

Luke 4:16-21 is part of a larger passage that speaks of Jesus' ministry in the Galilee, which also includes an account of his rejection in Nazareth. Christian commentators generally view Isaiah 61:1-2 as having been spoken by the Messiah, though some attribute these words to the "divine pre-incarnated Messiah" speaking through his prophet Isaiah. In the text, this figure gives an account of his present commission, his ministry to bring gospel mercy – his so-called "first coming", and also points to his future commission, to bring judgment on non-believers and comfort to Zion – his so-called "second coming", where the time span between the two advents is called the "acceptable year".

III. ANALYSIS OF THE TEXTS

The fact that Luke 4:18-19 is a representation of Isaiah 61:1-2 is not at issue. What needs to be determined is how accurately this representation reflects the Hebrew text of Isaiah 61:1-2, as well as whether the context of Luke 4 is consistent with the context of Isaiah 61.

A. Comparing the texts

Table III.A-1 shows side-by-side English renditions of Luke 4:18-19 in the KJV New Testament, of Isaiah 61:1-2 in the KJV "Old Testament" and in the Hebrew Bible, and the corresponding passage from the Hebrew Bible (the Masoretic Text [MT]). The (hand-annotated) parallel passage from *The Great Isaiah Scroll* that was discovered in Cave 1 at Qumran is displayed at the top of the table.⁵

⁵ Taken from Page 49 of *The Great Isaiah Scroll* website (<http://www.ao.net/~fmoeller/qumdir.htm>), where images of the complete *Isaiah A Scroll* from Qumran Cave 1 (1QIsa^a) are displayed.

Table III.A-1 – Comparing the texts

Hebrew Text from The Great Isaiah Scroll (1QIsa ^a)				
King James Version Translation from the Greek	King James Version Translation	Jewish Translation from the Hebrew	Hebrew Text	
Luke 4	Isaiah 61		ישעיה סא	
18	The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because HE HATH ANOINTED ME to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,	1 The spirit of the Lord God was upon me, since the Lord anointed me to bring tidings to the humble, He sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to declare freedom for the captives, and for the prisoners to free from captivity.	א	רוח אדני יהוה עלי יען משח יהוה אתי לבשר עניים שלחני לחבש לנשברי לב לקרא לשבויים דרור ולאסורים פקח-קוח:
19	To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.	2 To declare a year of acceptance for the Lord and a day of vengeance for our God, to console all mourners.	ב	לקרא שנת-רצון ליהוה ויום נקם לאלהינו לנחם כל-אבלים:

1. The Hebrew texts

A comparison of the Masoretic Text of Isaiah 61:1-2 with the text from the parallel passage in *The Great Isaiah Scroll* reveals only one difference, where the MT has the extra word אדני (*A-donai*), **the Lord**.⁶ The Hebrew word and its renditions in the other texts are highlighted in Table III.A-1.

Dead Sea Scroll (DSS) scholars have found variant manuscripts among the discoveries, two of which were scrolls of the Book of Isaiah (Isaiah A and Isaiah B), both found in Cave 1. The *Isaiah A Scroll* (1QIsa^a), dated by radio-carbon analysis to 335-327 B.C.E. and by paleographic analysis to 202-107

⁶ It should be noted that in the Masoretic Text, the Tetragrammaton, יהוה, has vowel markings to have it pronounced as “*elohim*” in this verse, a title for the Creator normally translated as “God”. The Targum Yonathan has the actual word אלהים (*E-lohim*) in that place.

B.C.E.,⁷ is an almost completely preserved scroll, while the *Isaiah B Scroll* (*1QIsa^b*), dated to the Herodian period, 30 B.C.E.- 70 C.E.,⁸ contains preserved portions of Chapters 10-66, but unlike the former, is an incomplete scroll with some chapters missing, leaving only fragmentary remains. Regarding the variations between the two Isaiah scrolls, a prominent DSS scholar writes:⁹

Looking at the two texts, we immediately recognize the coexistence of different versions. *Isaiah B* represents a proto-Masoretic text, with only minor variations from the traditional Hebrew text as we now know it. On the other hand, *Isaiah A* represents the sectarian type, for it uses Qumran linguistic forms and, therefore, was most probably copied by members of the group.

In addition to these unique forms, this text also has many linguistic "modernizations" – forms and words common when it was copied (rather than when it was composed) – as well as simplifications. Some scholars have concluded, therefore, that the *Isaiah A Scroll* was intended for study and not for worship and that it represents a sort of common text, often termed "vulgar." The Book of Isaiah was so popular that eighteen fragmentary manuscripts of this book have been identified in the collection from cave 4.

Consequently, it is not surprising that virtually all translations available today follow the MT in the opening verse, Isaiah 61:1, with the phrase "the Lord God" that includes the "extra" phrase "the Lord" for יהוה. Exceptions to this pattern are two ancient Christian translations, the *LXX* and Jerome's *Latin Vulgate*, both of which follow the *Isaiah A Scroll* and have "God". The *Targum Yonathan*, which pre-dates the Masoretic era, has "the Lord God".¹⁰

2. Comparing the texts

The KJV and Jewish translations of Isaiah 61:1-2 are reasonably similar. On the other hand, the texts of Luke 4:18-19 and its alleged source, Isaiah 61:1-2, are considerably different and require further analysis. When these two passages are compared, it becomes evident that the author of the Gospel of Luke modified Isaiah's words as he placed them on the lips of Jesus. To help demonstrate the incongruence of these passages, their two component verses are compared below.

a. Luke 4:18 vs. Isaiah 61:1

The verse Luke 4:18 is divided into the six phrases that are separated by commas and each phrase is placed in a separate row in Table III.A.2-1. Within a given row, under each phrase from Luke 4:18 in the KJV New Testament (NT) are placed the corresponding phrases from the KJV "Old Testament" (OT) translation of Isaiah 61:1 and from the Jewish translation

⁷ Geza Vermes, *An Introduction to the Complete Dead Sea Scrolls*, p. 24, Fortress Press (1999)

⁸ Ibid, p. 29

⁹ Lawrence H. Schiffman, *Reclaiming the Dead Sea Scrolls*, pp. 173-174, ABRL Doubleday (1995).

¹⁰ See, e.g., <http://www.ucalgary.ca/~elsegal/TalmudMap/MG/MGYonatan.html>

of Isaiah 61:1 in the Hebrew Bible (HB), respectively. NT Portions that require special attention are shown in **darker highlight**.

Table III.A.2-1 – Luke 4:18 vs. the KJV and Jewish translations of Isaiah 61:1

Row	Source*	Text		
1	NT	The Spirit of the Lord		is upon me,
	OT	The Spirit of the Lord	GOD	is upon me;
	HB	The spirit of the Lord	God	was upon me,
2	NT	because	he	hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor;
	OT	because	the LORD	hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek;
	HB	since	the Lord	anointed me to bring tidings to the humble,
3	NT	he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted,		
	OT	he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,		
	HB	He sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,		
4	NT	to preach deliverance to the captives,		
	OT	to proclaim liberty to the captives,		
	HB	to declare freedom for the captives,		
5	NT	and recovering of sight to the blind,		
	OT			
	HB			
6	NT	to set at liberty them that are bruised,		
	OT	and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;		
	HB	and for the prisoners to free from captivity.		

* NT=KJV New Testament; OT=KJV Old Testament; HB=Hebrew Bible

This information reveals the following significant discrepancies between Luke 4:18 and the corresponding Isaiah 61:1 translations (remember, according to the account in Luke 4:16-20, Jesus was reading from the "Book" of Isaiah):

- ⊙ In Row #1, the word **GOD** is missing in the NT and is present in the OT [the HB has **God**].
- ⊙ In Row #1, both the NT and KJV cast the last phrase in the present tense, via the verb **is**, whereas the HB has it in the past tense, via the verb **was**.
- ⊙ In Row #2, the NT has the word **he** where the OT has **the LORD** [the HB has **the Lord**].
- ⊙ In Row #2, the NT has the phrase **to preach the gospel to the poor** where the OT has **to preach good tidings unto the meek** [the HB has **to bring tidings to the humble**].
- ⊙ In Row #5, the NT has the phrase **and recovering of sight to the blind**, yet neither the OT nor the HB has a corresponding phrase.
- ⊙ In Row #6, the NT tells of setting at **liberty** those who are **bruised**, while the OT tells of releasing from **prison** those who are **bound**, and the HB tells of releasing from **captivity** those who are **prisoners**.

b. Luke 4:19 vs. Isaiah 61:2

The verse Luke 4:19 (NT) is shown in Table III.A.2-2, with the corresponding portions from the KJV "Old Testament" (OT) translation of Isaiah 61:2 and the Jewish translation of Isaiah 61:2 in the Hebrew Bible (HB) placed below it. The highlighted NT portion requires special attention.

Table III.A.2-2 – Comparing Luke 4:19 with KJV & Jewish renditions of Isaiah 61:2

Row	Source	Text
1	NT	To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.
	OT	To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,
	HB	To declare a year of acceptance for the Lord
2	NT	
	OT	and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;
	HB	and a day of vengeance for our God, to console all mourners.

* NT=New Testament; OT=Old Testament; HB=Hebrew Bible

This information reveals the following significant discrepancy between Luke 4:19 and the corresponding Isaiah 61:2 translations [remember, according to the context of Luke 4:16-20, Jesus was reading from Isaiah]:

- ⊙ In Row #1 both the NT and OT use a phraseology that implies the preaching of a specific year (using the definite article **the**) understood to be **the year of Jubilee**, whereas the phraseology in the HB (using the indefinite article **a**) implies the declaration of **a year of redemption from exile**.
- ⊙ In Row #2, **the NT has no corresponding text**, i.e., the entire verse, Luke 4:19, corresponds to only the first portion of the verse Isaiah 61:2 in both the OT and the HB.

Conclusion: Either Jesus changed the words of Isaiah as he read from the scroll, or the Gospel of Luke is of questionable credibility, or both.

Another passage from the same chapter in the Gospel of Luke gives even more reason to question its credibility.

Following the statements by Jesus about his ministry and the fulfillment of Scripture through his presence at this synagogue in Nazareth, he declares that the congregants were unworthy to see him perform miracles. According to the account, these statements enraged the crowd to such a degree that they wanted to kill him:

Luke 4:28-31(KJV) – (28) And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, (29) And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. (30) But he passing through the midst of them went his way, (31) And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days.

The highlighted portion describes the geographical terrain near the city limits of Nazareth. There is, however, a problem with that particular description, since Nazareth is situated on a plain that is surrounded by the rolling hills of the Galilee. Though the Nazareth of today has expanded to the tops of the hills that surround it, in former times it was situated in the lower part, on the slope of a hill, and was surrounded by gentle rises. The entire region is noted for its plains and smoothly contoured land elevation, and there are no sharp peaks or steep cliffs nearby. Therefore, contrary to the description in Luke 4:29, there is neither any "brow of the hill" nor any steep cliff from which "they might cast him down headlong" in the immediate vicinity of the city Nazareth, particularly around the area of the city that is considered by Christian tradition to be the village of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus.

It is also worth noting that archaeological remains of a synagogue from the Second Temple period have not been found in the intensely explored area in and around Nazareth. On the other hand, archaeological remnants of such a synagogue were discovered in the village of *Gamla*, which is located on the top of a hill overlooking the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, which also has dangerous cliffs close by. This is the western edge of the region known today as the Golan Heights. *Could it be that the author of the Gospel of Luke changed the geographical description to suit the story in his narrative?*

B. Comparing context

As was noted earlier, Christians attribute the words in Isaiah 61:1-2, thus also Luke 4:18-19, to the Messiah, or the "pre-incarnated Messiah" (God, according to them) speaking through his prophet Isaiah, where he describes the mission of his ministry. This is inconsistent with the Jewish perspective on Isaiah 61:1-2.

There are, of course, no specific clues in Isaiah 61:1-2 to positively identify Jesus as the speaker. According to the immediate context in the Hebrew Bible, it is the prophet, not the promised Messiah, who is speaking in Isaiah 61:1-2. Isaiah speaks of himself and the nature of his mission, as an appointed messenger of God. The term מָשַׁח (*mashah*), commonly translated as **[he] has anointed**, is to be understood in the context of **[he] has appointed** or **[he] has chosen**, since only kings and high priests of Israel, but not prophets, were anointed via the special process described in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹

As was the case with all true prophets of Israel, who set the standard for the entire community as role models of holiness, scholarship, and closeness to God, the Divine Presence (שְׁכִינָה [*sh'chinah*]) came to rest upon Isaiah and endowed him with the gift of prophecy as he reached this level of spiritual and ethical achievement. Here Isaiah is a herald of joy, telling his people that God will yet free them from their captivity and exile. The spirit he is talking of is the spirit of

¹¹ The essay referenced in footnote 3 contains a detailed description of the process. The same language is used in 1Kings 19:16, where Elijah the Prophet is told to appoint his successor, Elisha the Prophet.

prophecy. Through this gift, Isaiah was able to convey to the people of Israel the divine message of promise that is developed throughout this and the following chapter, a vivid picture of Israel and Jerusalem in the messianic era.

By placing Isaiah's words in the mouth of Jesus, the author of the Gospel of Luke actually has Jesus admitting, contrary to mainline Christian beliefs, that he is, at best, only a prophet and not God. Moreover, the New Testament offers no evidence that Jesus fulfilled the actions described in Isaiah 61:1-2. *Did he free any captives or prisoners? Against whom did he come in vengeance?*

Sidebar Note: The custom of reading from the Prophets on Shabbat, Holy Days, and other special occasions on the Jewish calendar was established during the second century B.C.E., when the Syrian-Greek King Antiochus, whose forces occupied the Holy Land, prohibited the reading of the Torah at those times because of its "legal" nature. On the other hand, reading the Prophets and Writings was not banned since these were considered by the Syrian-Greeks as literature. As a way to get around this prohibition, which carried the death penalty, the Rabbis selected readings from the Prophets, each containing a minimum of 21 verses and with a theme that tied into the designated Torah portion for the particular occasion, and which were read instead – a custom that continued even after the successful revolt by the Maccabees, and is still in practice today. It is interesting to note that the tradition of reading from the Prophets is acknowledged in Luke 4:16-17, as well as in the Book of Acts (Acts 13:14-15,27).

Alas! Not only did the reading by Jesus of one and a half verses out of Isaiah 61 not meet the minimum requirement of a 21 verse passage, Isaiah 61:1-2 was never included in any of the designated readings from the Prophets on the various occasions.

Perhaps the crowd that heard Jesus read in the synagogue on that Sabbath realized what he was doing, which could have been one reason for their anger.

C. Christian missionary counter argument and the Jewish response

The textual differences between Luke 4:18-19 and Isaiah 61:1-2 cannot be denied and, therefore, the options available to Christian missionaries are rather limited, leaving one common argument vis-à-vis the irrefutable evidence.

† **Christian missionary argument:** Christians acknowledge and accept the doctrine of the divinity of Jesus. As God, they claim he had the right and the authority to paraphrase, in any way that suited him, Isaiah's inspired words.

☆ **The Jewish response:** The Hebrew Bible does not support the Christian belief that Jesus is a son that God fathered, who was "God in the flesh" on earth, and who, as part of the triune godhead, was divine.

Moreover, to suggest that God can and will do as he pleases and even violate the rules and laws He gave to Israel, would be analogous to parents, as role models, teaching their children to "do as I say but not as I do". The Hebrew Bible is replete with examples in which Israel is asked to emulate and follow God's ways. *Are they to also follow the example where God violates his own*

rules? What sense would it then make to have faith, and what would be the point of having the Bible?

Finally, it is ludicrous to suggest that God had to appoint (anoint) Himself to carry out a mission. The Christian view of Psalms 22:1, according to which Jesus complains to God about having been forsaken by him, is another example of such incongruous logic.¹²

IV. SUMMARY

According to the New Testament and, thus, the Christian perspective, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61:1-2 in Luke 4:18-19, modulo some changes he made to the source, which he, being "God incarnate", was entitled to do, as he was reading from it. When he was done, he told the crowd that these Scriptures were fulfilled in him at that time.

Christian missionaries defend their doctrines by claiming that the advent of Jesus and of the New Testament are elements of a new revelation, one that the Jews who lived prior to the Christian era did not receive. *Can this be true? Were doctrines of such importance hidden from the Jewish people for some 1,300 years after the Revelation at Mount Sinai? Were all the Jews who lived before the time of Jesus deceived or tricked?*

As DSS research has demonstrated, the text of the Hebrew Bible did not change in any significant manner from the period of the Qumran texts to the time of preparation of the Masoretic Text that is in use today, a span of well over 1,000 years. A Jew who read Isaiah 61 before the birth of Jesus still read essentially the same text as a Jew who reads it today and, clearly, the message remains unchanged as well. No, there were no secret revelations planned and, according to the prophets, Israel received all that was to be revealed, and this cannot be stated in any clearer way than in the Hebrew Bible itself:

Amos 3:7 - For the Lord God does nothing unless He has revealed His secret to His servants, the prophets.

Conclusion: Someone tampered with Isaiah's words (the "Source"). Either "Dr. Luke" saw it fit to "operate" on the text in order to create a better fit with other passages in the Gospel of Luke, or Jesus decided to change them in order to proclaim himself as the one appointed for the mission. You decide!

Copyright © Uri Yosef, PhD, 2001-2010 for the Messiah Truth Project, Inc.
All rights reserved

¹² See the essay, *Nailing An Alleged Crucifixion Scenario* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Psa22.pdf>