

Our (The Jewish People's) Clean Little Secret

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Taught 2-10-07

YESHAYAHU/ISAIAH 53 1-12-Who is this chapter speaking about?

The words are clear -- the passage tells of an outstanding Servant of YHWH whose visage is marred and is afflicted and stricken. He has not deserved any pain or wounds, but was wounded through *our* transgressions, bruised through *our* iniquities, and with his wounds we are healed. The text presents the suffering Servant of YHWH who dies as a *korban*, a recompense for guilt. He is then buried with the rich and wicked, but is gloriously resurrected to life. YHWH permits His afflicted and, at the end, exalted Servant to endure this suffering in order to remove the sins of many.

Yet modern Judaism insists that the Jewish people NEVER believed this spoke of the Moshiach/Messiah, but rather the nation of Israel. Well let's look at what the ancient rabbis really did believe before the recent anti-missionary spin.

Rabbi Mosheh Kohen Ibn Crispin: This rabbi described those who interpret Isaiah 53 as referring to Israel as those: "having forsaken the knowledge of our Teachers, and inclined after the `stubbornness of their own hearts,' and of their own opinion, I am pleased to interpret it, in accordance with the teaching of our Rabbis, of the King Messiah....This prophecy was delivered by Isaiah at the divine command for the purpose of making known to us something about the nature of the future Messiah, who is to come and deliver Israel, and his life from the day when he arrives at discretion until his advent as a redeemer, in order that if anyone should arise claiming to be himself the Messiah, we may reflect, and look to see whether we can observe in him any resemblance to the traits described here; if there is any such resemblance, then we may believe that he is the Messiah our righteousness; but if not, we cannot do so." (From his commentary on Isaiah, quoted in The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters, Ktav Publishing House, 1969, Volume 2, pages 99-114.)

Rabbi Moses Maimonides: "What is the manner of Messiah's advent....there shall rise up one of whom none have known before, and signs and wonders which they shall see performed by him will be the proofs of his true origin; for the Almighty, where he declares to us his mind upon this matter, says, `Behold a man whose name is the Branch, and he shall branch forth out of his place' (Zech. 6:12). And Isaiah speaks similarly of the time when he shall appear, without father or mother or family being known, *He came up as a sucker before him, and as a root out of dry*

*earth, etc...*in the words of Isaiah, when describing the manner in which kings will harken to him, *At him kings will shut their mouth; for that which had not been told them have they seen, and that which they had not heard they have perceived.*" (From the Letter to the South (Yemen), quoted in The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters, Ktav Publishing House, 1969, Volume 2, pages 374-5)

But who is this Servant? Our ancient commentators with one accord noted that the context clearly speaks of YHWH's Anointed One, the Messiah. The Aramaic translation of this chapter, ascribed to Rabbi Jonathan ben Uzziel, a disciple of Hillel who lived early in the second century C.E., begins with the simple and worthy words:

Behold my servant Messiah shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase, and be exceeding strong: as the house of Israel looked to him through many days, because their countenance was darkened among the peoples, and their complexion beyond the sons of men. (Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 53, *ad locum*)

We find the same interpretation in the Babylonian Talmud:

The Messiah -- what is his name? . . . The Rabbis say, the leprous one; those of the house of Rabbi say, the sick one, as it is said, "Surely he hath borne our sicknesses." (Sanhedrin 98b)

Similarly, in the Midrash Rabbah, in an explanation of Ruth 2:14:

He is speaking of the King Messiah: "Come hither" draw near to the throne "and dip thy morsel in the vinegar," this refers to the chastisements, as it is said, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities."

In the same manner also in a later midrash, the Midrash Tanhuma, parasha Toldot, end of section, it says:

"Who art thou, O great mountain?" (Zechariah 4:7) This refers to the King Messiah. And why does he call him the "great mountain?" Because he is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said, "My servant shall be high, and lifted up, and lofty exceedingly." He will be higher than Abraham who said, "I raise high my hand unto YHWH" (Gen. 14:22), lifted up above Moses, to whom it is said, "Lift it up into thy bosom" (Numbers 11:12), loftier than the ministering angels, of whom it is written, "Their

wheels were lofty and terrible" (Ezekiel 1:18). And out of whom does he come forth? Out of David.

These are a few of the ancient interpretations attributing this chapter to the suffering and exalted Messiah.

Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Itzhaki, 1040-1105) and some of the later rabbis, though, began to interpret the passage as referring to Israel. They knew that the older interpretations referred it to Messiah. However, Rashi lived at a time when a degenerate medieval distortion of Christianity was practiced. He wanted to *preserve* the Jewish people from accepting such a faith and, although his intentions were sincere, other prominent Jewish rabbis and leaders realized the inconsistencies of Rashi's interpretation. They presented a threefold objection to his innovation. First, they showed the consensus of ancient opinion. Secondly, they pointed out that the text is in the singular. Thirdly, they noted verse eight. This verse presented an insurmountable difficulty to those who interpreted this passage as referring to Israel. It reads:

He was taken away from rule and from judgment; and his life who shall recount? *for he was cut off out of the land of the living*; through the transgressions of my people was he stricken.

Were the Jewish people, YHWH forbid, ever cut off out of the land of the living? No! In Jeremiah 31:35-37, YHWH promised that we will exist forever. We are proud that *Am Israel Chai* -- "The people of Israel are much alive." Likewise, it is impossible to say that Israel suffered for the transgressions of "my people," which clearly means *Isaiah's people*. Surely Isaiah's people are not the Gentiles, but the Jews.

Moshe Kohen, a 15th-century rabbi in Spain, explains the section:

This passage, the commentators explain, speaks of the captivity of Israel, although the singular number is used in it throughout. Others have supposed it to mean the just in this present world, who are crushed and oppressed now...but these too, for the same reason, by altering the number, distort the verses from their natural meaning. And then it seemed to me that... having forsaken the knowledge of our Teachers, and inclined "after the stubbornness of their own hearts," and of their own opinion, I

am pleased to interpret it, in accordance with the teaching of our Rabbis, of the King Messiah.

For the same reason, Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh, Rabbi of Safed, late 16th century, points out this fact saying:

I may remark, then, that our Rabbis with one voice accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of the King Messiah.

Much to the point is the commentary of the great Jewish educator, Herz Homberg (1749-1841), who says:

According to the opinion of Rashi and Ibn Ezra, it relates to Israel at the end of their captivity. But if so, what can be the meaning of the passage, "He was wounded for our transgressions"? Who was wounded? Who are the transgressors? Who carried out the sickness and bare the pain? The fact is that it refers to the King Messiah.

One of our greatest Jewish religious poets, Eliezer HaKalir, paraphrased this chapter in the 9th century into rhyme and metric poetry. It is recited in the Yom Kippur prayer of Kether:

Messiah, our righteousness, hath turned from us: we are in terror and there is none to justify us! Our iniquities and the yoke of our transgressions He did bear for He was wounded for our transgressions: He carries our sins upon His shoulders that we may find forgiveness for our iniquities and by His stripes we are healed. O eternal One the time is come to make a new creation: from the vault of heaven bring Him up, out of Seir draw Him forth, that He may make His voice heard to us in Lebanon, a second time by the hand of Yinnon. One of Messiah's names will be Yinnon according to rabbinic interpretation of Psalm 72:19.

Abrabanel (1437-1508) said earlier:

"This is also the opinion of our own learned men in the majority of their Midrashim." (That is speaks of Messiah)

Rabbi Yafeth Ben Ali (second half of the 10th Century):

"As for myself, I am inclined to regard it as alluding to the Messiah."

Abraham Farissol (1451- 1526) says:

"In this chapter there seem to be considerable resemblances and allusions to the work of the Christian Messiah and to the events which are asserted to have happened to Him, so that no other prophecy is to be found the gist and subject of which can be so immediately applied to Him."

Gersonides (1288-1344) on Deut. 18:18:

"In fact Messiah is such a prophet, as it is stated in the Midrasch on the verse, 'Behold, my servant shall prosper...' (Isa. 52:13)."

Midrash Tanchuma:

"He (Messiah) was more exalted than Abraham, more extolled than Moses, higher than the archangels" (Isa.52:13).

Yalkut Schimeon (ascribed to Rabbi Simeon Kara, 12th Century) says on Zech.4: 7: "He (The king Messiah) is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said, 'My servant shall be high, and lifted up, and lofty exceedingly' (Isa. 52:13)."

Tanchuma:

"Rabbi Nachman says: ,The Word MAN in the passage, 'Every man a head of the house of his father' (Num.1,4), refers to the Messiah, the son of David, as it is written, 'Behold the man whose name is Zemach'(the Branch) where Jonathan interprets,'Behold the man Messiah' (Zech.6:12); and so it is said,' A man of

pains and known to sickness' (Isa.53:3)."

Talmud Sanhedrin (98b):

"Messiah ...what is his name? The Rabbis say, 'The leprous one'; those of the house of the Rabbi (Jehuda Hanassi, the author of the Mishna, 135-200) say: 'Cholaja' (The sickly), for it says, 'Surely he has borne our sicknesses' etc. (Isa.53, 4)."

Pesiqta Rabbati (ca.845) on Isa. 61,10:

"The world-fathers (patriarchs) will one day in the month of Nisan/Aviv arise and say to (the Messiah): 'Ephraim, our righteous Anointed, although we are your grandparents, yet you are greater than we, for you have borne the sins of our children, as it says: 'But surely he has borne our sicknesses and carried our pains; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of YHWH and afflicted. But he was pierced because of our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was laid upon him and through his wounds we are healed' (Isa.53, 4-5)."

Rabbi Simeon Ben Jochai (2.Century), Zohar, part II, page 212a and III, page 218a, Amsterdam Ed.):

"There is in the garden of Eden a palace called : 'The palace of the sons of sickness, <, this palace the Messiah enters, and summons every sickness, every pain, and every chastisement of Israel: they all come and rest upon Him. And were it not that He had thus lightened them off Israel, and taken them upon Himself, there had been no man able to bear Israel's chastisement for the transgression of the law; this is that which is written, 'Surely our sicknesses he has carried' Isa.53, 4). - As they tell Him (the Messiah) of the misery of Israel in their captivity, and of those wicked ones among them who are not attentive to know their YHWH, He lifts up His voice and weeps for their wickedness; and so

it is written, 'He was wounded for our transgressions' (Isa.53, 5). Midrash (on Ruth 2,14): "He is speaking of the King Messiah - 'Come hither', i.e.">Draw near to the throne<; 'eat of the bread', i.e.>, The bread of the kingdom.' This refers to the chastisements<, as it is said, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities' (Isa.53, 5).

Rabbi Elijah de Vidas (16.Century):

"The meaning of 'He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities' is, that since the Messiah bears our iniquities which produce the effect of His being bruised, it follows that whoever will not admit that Messiah thus suffers for our iniquities must endure and suffer for them himself."

Siphre:

"Rabbi Jose the Galilean said, 'Come and learn the merits of the King Messiah and the reward of the Just - from the first man who received but one commandment, a prohibition, and transgressed it. Consider how many deaths were inflicted upon himself, upon his own generation, and upon those who followed them, till the end of all generations. Which attribute is greater, the attribute of goodness, or the attribute of vengeance?'- He answered, 'The attribute of goodness is greater, and the attribute of vengeance is the less.' - 'How much more then, will the King Messiah, who endures affliction and pains for the transgressions (as it is written, 'He was wounded,'etc.), justify all generations. This is the meaning of the word, 'And the LORD made the iniquity of us all to meet upon Him' (Isa.53: 6)."

Rabbi Moses, 'The Preacher'(11. Century) wrote in his commentary on Genesis (page 660):

"From the beginning YHWH has made a covenant with the Messiah and told

Him,' My righteous Messiah, those who are entrusted to you, their sins will bring you into a heavy yoke'. And He answered, 'I gladly accept all these agonies in order that not one of Israel should be lost.' Immediately, the Messiah accepted all agonies with love, as it is written: 'He was oppressed and he was afflicted'."

Brit Chadasha (The New Testament) gives the following TEN references to Isaiah 53; one for each tribe of Efrayim who would PROCLAIM this message of the Suffering Servant:

Re: Isaiah 53:1

- "Even after he had done so many miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. 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?'" (John 12:37 & 38).

Re: Isaiah 53:1

- "But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "LORD, who has believed our message?" - Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of YHWH" (Rom. 10:16 & 17).

Re: Isaiah 53:4

- "He healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our infirmities' and carried our diseases' (Matt. 8:16 & 17)."

Re: Isaiah 53:5-6

- "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and

Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:24 & 25).

Re: Isaiah 53:7-8

- "The passage of the Scripture which he reads was this: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth". The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus." (Acts 8:32-35).

Re: Isaiah 53:9

- "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

Re: Isaiah 53:7-8

- "The passage of the Scripture which he read was this: He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.' The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus" (Acts 8:32-35).

Re: Isaiah 53:9

- "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

Re: Isaiah 53:12

- "It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching fulfillment" (Luke 22:37).

Re: Isaiah 53:12

- "They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. And the Scripture was fulfilled, which says: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'" (Mark 15:27 & 28)