

“Who Hath Believed Our Report?” Prophecies of the Messiah

1) Isaiah saw “the big picture.” The Lord showed Him all of His works and all that would happen to this world upon which we live. That vision contains prophecies that are fulfilled on myriads of levels. One can look at them with purely “temporal” eyes and see them fulfilled with the Babylonian conquest of Israel, the return of the Jews under the Persian king Cyrus, and the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel. Or, one can look at the same prophecies through “spiritual” eyes and see them all as symbols of a larger-scale work and restoration of the entire family of God, which includes bringing all within the covenant fold.

2) We can classify the prophecies of Isaiah into six basic categories: a) the apostasy and subsequent scattering of Israel, b) the mission and atonement of the Savior, c) the restoration of the gospel and the gathering of Israel, d) the Second Coming of the Savior, e) the Millennial conditions that will exist when He comes, and the f) covenant promises that weave all together.

3) Playing center stage ALWAYS is the Savior and His Temple. Studying Isaiah helps us to understand temple ordinances today. Isaiah’s own relationship with the Savior shines through every word. He wants us to comprehend the personality and characteristics of the Savior, as well as His divine mission. The Lord speaks through Isaiah in first-person; explaining His great plan and the nature of His commitment to the covenants He has made with Israel, and all that He will do to bring Israel to the point where she is ready to join Him in the Holy City of the Millennial Day.

Many have looked to the writings of Isaiah to learn of the Messiah. Prophecies of the Savior are woven throughout the text; look in the Topical Guide under “Jesus Christ,” and note the many references found in Isaiah. Scan through the footnotes of Isaiah and discover how many “Jesus Christ, Prophecies about” references there are. Handel used Isaiah as the basis of His great work, *The Messiah*:

*For unto us a child is born,
unto us a son is given:
and the government shall be upon his shoulder:
and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor,
The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).*

Isaiah’s writings about Jesus Christ have caused some confusion, however. To begin with, they are not written in a linear or chronological order. Secondly, they are not written in a block with a heading stating: “This is the Messiah!” – But they are scattered in such a way that they could have various interpretations (and often do). We who read after the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth can have “20-20 hindsight” when reading about the child born of the virgin:

*Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign;
Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,
and shall call his name Immanuel (Isa. 7:14).*

But that verse also has application to the birth of Isaiah’s own son, given as a sign to King Ahaz, who had asked for proof of Isaiah’s prophecies regarding the coming scourge of Assyria (see Isa. 7:10-20; Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, p. 72-3)

To make things even more challenging, the prophecies of the Messiah pertain to His coming as the babe, but also to His coming in power and might at the beginning of the Millennium:

*Who is this that cometh from Edom,
with dyed garments from Bozrah?
This that is glorious in his apparel,
Traveling in the greatness of his strength?
I that speak in righteousness,
Mighty to save.*

*Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel,
And thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?*

*I have trodden the winepress alone;
And of the people there was none with me:
For I will tread them in mine anger,
And trample them in my fury;
And their blood shall be in sprinkled upon my garments,
And I will stain all my raiment.*

*For the day of vengeance is in mine heart,
And the year of my redeemed is come (Isa. 63:1-4).*

Those prophecies of the Holy One, who in fury would trample the nations, have long been appealing to the oppressed, particularly to the Jewish people who have cherished the promises of Isaiah. There are more verses that seem to speak particularly to the Jewish heart, promises about the King who would sit upon the throne of David:

*Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end,
upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom,
to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice
from henceforth even for ever (Isa. 9:7).*

*And in mercy shall the throne be established:
and he shall sit upon it in truth in the tabernacle of David,
judging, and seeking judgment, and hasting righteousness (Isa. 16:5).*

To sit upon the throne of David implies a united and peaceful Israel; a state that will not occur until the Messiah takes His proper place to rule the nations. But, there is another prophecy that seems to begin in the same manner: the Messiah upon the throne of David, but ends with confusing wording that only Christian (and especially LDS) perspective could interpret:

*And I will clothe him with thy robe,
and strengthen him with thy girdle,
and I will commit thy government into his hand:
and he shall be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.
And the key of the house of David will I lay upon his shoulder;
So he shall open, and none shall shut;
And he shall shut, and none shall open.*

*And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place;
and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house.
And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house,
The offspring and the issue,
All vessels of small quantity, from the vessels of cups,
Even to all the vessels of flagons.
In that day, saith the Lord of hosts,
Shall the nail that is fastened in the sure place be removed,
And be cut down, and fall;
And the burden that was upon it shall be cut off:
For the Lord hath spoken it (Isa. 22:21-25).*

The Messiah was to be clothed in the royal robes and given priesthood authority and government. The "key of David" is the key to heaven and the heavenly temple (see Rev. 3:7, Matt. 16:19; see also Parry, *Understanding Isaiah*, p. 202). Only the Messiah could have the power to open or shut those doors, and this powerful description was amenable to the Jewish ideal of the Messiah, but, what of the "nail in a sure place"? That part of the description does not seem as glorious. Consider the symbolic wording of "they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue ..." The vessels of varying size must surely represent all people, great and small, that hung upon the shoulders and the heart of Jesus, even as the names of each of the tribes of Israel had hung upon the high priest in symbolic prefiguring of Jesus' mission. Eventually, the burden would be "cut off" of both the Savior and those He redeemed because He had been "fastened by the nails" of His own determination to perform the atonement. These verses only *hint* at the suffering that would be experienced by the powerful Messiah. There are many more verses that allude to the atonement of the Messiah, but perhaps no passage from Isaiah has caused more consternation than Isaiah 53, the "Song of the Suffering Servant." That chapter leaves no doubt as to the anguish that the Messiah would experience in behalf of His people, nor of the fact that He would suffer unto death . . . this is not the Messiah the Jews had looked for, nor is it the Messiah that they can accept today. No wonder Isaiah began the prophecy with the words:

*Who hath believed our report?
And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?*

*For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant,
And as a root out of dry ground:
He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him
There is no beauty that we should desire him.*

*He is despised
and rejected of men;
a man of sorrows,
and acquainted with grief:
and we hid as it were our faces from him;
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

*Surely he hath borne our griefs,
and carried our sorrows:
yet we did esteem him stricken,*

smitten of God, and afflicted.

*But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities:
the chastisement of our peace was upon him;
and with his stripes we are healed.*

*All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

*He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*

*He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation?
For he was cut off out of the land of the living:
for the transgression of my people was he stricken.
And he made his grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death;
because he had done no violence (evil),
neither was any deceit in his mouth.*

*Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him;
he hath put him to grief:*

*when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed,
he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:
by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many;
for he shall bear their iniquities.*

*Therefore will I divide him portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;*

*because he hath poured out his soul unto death:
and he was numbered with the transgressors;
and he bare the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors (Isaiah 53:1-12).*

As a “root out of dry ground,” Jesus was born in the worst of circumstances, in a country that had nearly lost all hope under the cruel dictatorship of Rome. Jesus is also the “root” in the sense that He explained to His apostles that He was “the vine, [they] the branches” (John 15:5). In another verse, He explained “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman” (John 15:1). He was a “tender plant,” meaning that He began His life as all mortals do: as a babe, and a child, subject to his parents, and reliant on their guidance and protection.

Although He was the “Son of David,” a Messianic title, He would not be like *their* David; a glorious man who was known for his skills in battle as well as for his loving and tender heart. David had earned the attention of all of the world by his feats of prowess, his wisdom, and his beautiful music, but Isaiah

prophesied that the Messiah would not stand out amongst other men in outward appearance; there would be nothing that would distinguish Him in appearance. Finding *this* King would take a strong desire of the heart to find truth, and a willingness to leave the admiration of society behind.

The Law of Moses asserted that anyone who “hung on a tree until dead” was cursed, and therefore, God had judged him guilty of his crime (see Deut. 21:23). Jesus was crucified on “a tree,” or a cross constructed from a tree, and therefore the people judged Him “smitten of God.” Paul referred to this when he taught: Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree” (Gal. 3:13).

Isaiah asks: “Who shall declare his generation?” because He was “cut off out of the land of the living. Abinadi addressed this question, and answered “Behold, I say unto you, that when his soul has been made an offering for sin he shall see his seed. And now what say ye? And who shall be his seed? Behold I say unto you, that whosoever has heard the words of the prophets, yea, all the hoy prophets who’ve prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord — I say unto you, that all those who have hearkened unto their words, and believed that the Lord would redeem his people, and have looked forward to that day for a remission of their sins, I say unto you, that these are his seed, or they are the heirs of the kingdom of God” (Mos. 15:10-11).

Abinadi is one of the best commentators on chapter 53: he quoted the whole of it to Noah and his priests after his arrest. The introduction to his sermon is important to note: the priests had tried to trip him up by quoting Isaiah to him. they asked “What meaneth the words which are written, and which have been taught by our fathers, saying: How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth?” (Mosiah 12:20-21). They were trying to entrap Abinadi, because they felt he wasn’t bringing them “good tidings” as he called them to repentance.

Abinadi turned the tables on the priests by quoting the Ten Commandments to them, and then quoting all of Isaiah 53. Think of all the scriptural prophecies available to him, and he chose Isaiah 53! He then gave a masterful discourse on the meaning of Isaiah’s prophecy in Mosiah, chapters 15-16. Isaiah 53 testifies of Jesus’ atonement, and surely there are no better “tidings of good” than the testimony of the Plan of Salvation, and the Savior’s atoning sacrifice, which makes it possible for all who will repent to return to the presence of the Father.

Abinadi echoed Isaiah’s “who shall believe our report?” when he testified before King Noah and his priests. “Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men, and take upon him the form of man, and go forth in mighty power upon the face of the earth? Yea, and have they not said also that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted? ... [He] suffereth himself to be mocked, and scourged, and cast out, and disowned by his people ...Yea, even so he shall be led, crucified, and slain, the flesh becoming subject even unto death, the will of the Son being swallowed up in the will of the Father” (Mosiah 13:34-35; 15:5,8).

This teaching was the very cause and accusation that Noah and the priests used to put Abinadi to death: “For thou hast said that God himself should come down among the children of men; and now, for this cause thou shalt be put to death” (Mosiah 17:8).

Isaiah 53 continues to cause anger and contention today! Many Christians believe that it is the quintessential passage on the atonement and redemption of Jesus Christ. Knowing that the Jews honor and revere the writings of Isaiah, they wonder why they do not see Jesus in the passage. I thought it

might be interesting to include some writings of the Jewish people on the Isaiah 53 chapter. Note that while most of Isaiah is read chronologically in Jewish synagogue worship, Isaiah 53 is not read. Isaiah 53 is not the only chapter excluded, however; chapters 3, 13, 23 and 33 are not read either, but many rabbis assert that that is not because of the desire to escape the Christian assertion that the suffering servant of chapter 53 is Jesus. The following resources may be helpful to our understanding of this custom:

From Outreach Judaism: “The particular Sabbath portion of the Prophets was carefully selected for one of two reasons. Either because the theme of a segment of the Prophets closely correlated to the portion of the Torah read that week, or because that section of the Prophets thematically corresponded to a festival or a historical circumstance during that Sabbath. *It is therefore easy to understand why Isaiah 53 is never read in the synagogue. Isaiah 53 bears no relationship to any of the chapters of the Pentateuch and is unrelated to any holiday or historical circumstance on the Jewish calendar and therefore it was never included in any Haftorah portion.*” <https://outreachjudaism.org/are-the-jews-hiding-something/>

From Jews For Judaism: “Before engaging in an examination of Isaiah 53 itself, some preliminary issues must be considered. First is the issue of circular reasoning. Even if we interpret the chapter as the Christians do (forgetting for a minute the mistranslations and distortions of context which will be noted below), the most that could be said is this: Isaiah 53 is about someone who dies for the sins of others. *People may have seen Jesus die, but did anyone see him die as an atonement for the sins of others? Of course not*; this is simply the meaning which the New Testament gives to his death. Only if you already accept the New Testament teaching that his death had a non-visible, spiritual significance can you then go back to Isaiah and say, “see - the Prophet predicted what I already believe.” Isaiah 53, then, is in reality no “proof” at all, but rather a contrived confirmation for someone who has already chosen Christianity.” Jews for Judaism has numerous posts addressing the Isaiah 53 issue. They see the Christian belief that Jesus is the “Suffering Servant” of Isaiah 53 as ludicrous and insulting. See some of their posts at <http://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/answers/jewish-polemics/suffering-servant/how-does-isaiah-538-show-that-the-death-of-jesus-should-not-be-considered-as-atonement-for-all/>

A third source, Hope of Israel, has an entirely different view. It is authored by an Orthodox Jew who became a Christian (as a result of reading Isaiah!). This source sheds light upon the fact that ancient Jewish teachings did say that Isaiah 53 was about the Messiah; but interpretations had been changed because of the fear of the corrupt form of Christianity then upon the earth. Rabbis began to give the interpretation that the Suffering Servant was Israel, but our author helps to point out some inconsistencies there:

“Who is this chapter speaking about? The words are clear--the passage tells of an outstanding Servant of the Lord whose visage is marred and is afflicted and stricken. He has not deserved any pain or wounds, but was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities, and with his wounds we are healed. The text presents the suffering Servant of the Lord who dies as a korban, a recompense for guilt. He is then buried with the rich and wicked, but is gloriously resurrected to life. God permits His afflicted and, at the end, exalted Servant to endure this suffering in order to remove the sins of many. *“But who is this Servant? Our ancient commentators with one accord noted that the context clearly speaks of God's Anointed One, the Messiah.*”

“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)

“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.”

“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*.’

“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*.

“The words of the prophet Isaiah are words of hope. We have a glorious future and an abundant present if we appropriate the salvation made possible by the One who ‘was wounded through *our* transgressions and bruised through *our* iniquities.’” See <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/m.sion/frydis53.htm>; and <http://oneinmessiah.net/suffServ.htm>

Isaiah prophesied that the Lord would be “for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense” also (Isa. 8:14; see also 1 Peter 2:7). As Paul wrote: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). Indeed, to many throughout the centuries, it has been considered pure foolishness to believe that a God would allow Himself to suffer and die at the hands of mortals.

While Herod’s wise men were quickly able to lay hands on the prophecy that the Messiah should be born in Bethlehem, other aspects about the Messiah were not as evident to them. Perhaps it is just that they could not conceive of a suffering and dying Messiah. Jesus had to remind His own disciples AFTER His death and resurrection that the prophecies concerning Him had also included the painful predictions of his suffering and death: “Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:25-27). How many of the scriptures He quoted were from Isaiah?

Of Isaiah chapter 53, Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote: “As our New Testament now stands, we find Matthew (Matt. 8:17), Philip (Acts 8:27-35), Paul (Rom. 4:25), and Peter (1 Pet. 2:24-25) all quoting, paraphrasing, enlarging upon, and applying to the Lord Jesus various of the verses in this great 53rd chapter of Isaiah. How many sermons have been preached, how many lessons have been taught, how many testimonies have been borne — both in ancient Israel and in the meridian of time — using the utterances of this chapter as the text, we can scarcely imagine” (*Premortal Messiah*, 235).

As Nephi wrote: “but that I might more fully persuade them to believe in the Lord their Redeemer I did read unto them that which was written by the prophet Isaiah” (1 Ne. 19:23). Elder Bruce R. McConkie has stated: “It just may be that my salvation (and yours also!) does in fact depend upon our ability to understand the writings of Isaiah as fully and truly as Nephi understood them” (*Ten Keys to Understanding Isaiah*, p. 78).