

- I. Biblical Reasons for Accepting Isaiah 53 as speaking of Messiah
  - Jesus so applied it (Luke 22:37)
  - Philip was so led of the Holy Spirit to use it (Acts 8:27-35)
  - It is quoted 8 times in the New Testament and is always applied to the Messiah
  
- II. The rabbinical position is: The suffering servant is the nation of Israel. This idea was originally suggested by Rashi in the 11<sup>th</sup> century and summarily dismissed by most rabbis of his day.

The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel (2<sup>nd</sup> Century), reprinted by Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1953 – titles “The Targum of Isaiah” edited with a translation by J.F. Stenning renders Isaiah 52:13 “Behold my servant, the Messiah, shall prosper; he shall be exalted, and increase, and be very strong.

The Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 98b (codified in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century) regarding Isaiah 53 states: “The Messiah – what is his name?...The rabbis say, ‘the leprous one’: Those of the house of the Rabbi say, ‘the sick one’, as it is said, ‘surely he hath borne our sickness’.”

Rabbi Mosheh el Sheikh, commonly known as Alshech, chief rabbi of Safed in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, in his Commentaries on the Earlier Prophets says of Isaiah 53: “Our Rabbis with one voice accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of the King Messiah, and we ourselves shall also adhere to the same view.”

Rabbi Joseph ben Kaspi (1280-1340 A.D.) warned the rabbis that “those who expound this section of the Messiah give occasion to the heretics (Christians) to interpret it of Jesus.” In response to this Rabbi Saadia ibn Danan observed: “May God forgive him for not having spoken the truth.”

S.R. Driver & Adolf Neubauer The Suffering Servant of Isaiah According to Jewish Tradition, p.203

A Musaf Service prayer for the Day of Atonement

(David Levy, Prayers for the Day of Atonement, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, London, 1807, vol. III, p.37) reads: “Messiah our righteousness has departed from us. We shudder; for there is none to justify us. He bears our load of transgression and the burden of our guilt and is verily pierced for our rebellions. He carries our guilt on His

shoulder, to effect forgiveness of our sins. He bled for our salvation. O, Eternal One, the time has come that Thou shouldst create Him anew! O bring him up from the terrestrial sphere. Raise Him up from the land of Seir, to assemble us on Mt. Lebabon, a second time, by the power of Yinnon!"

#### Reasons why Israel cannot be "the Suffering Servant"

- The argument of contrasting (opposing) pronouns. If the suffering servant is Israel, who is the "we" of verse 3 and the "our" of verses 4 and 5?
- In verse 11 the servant is called "righteous." In Isaiah 1:4-6, Israel is called "unrighteous."
- According to verse 7 the suffering servant does not fight back. Israel has always fought back.

#### Reasons why Israel cannot be "the Suffering Servant"

- According to verses 10 and 12, in his suffering, the suffering servant bears the sins of others. When did Israel ever bear the sins of others?
- According to verse 9 the suffering servant is without deceit. When has Israel ever been without deceit?
- According to verse 8, the suffering servant is cut off from the land of the living. When did Israel die?

#### Biblical Exposition of Isaiah 53

Verse 1	The Challenge to Believe
Verse 2	The Birth of the Messiah
Verse 3	The Reception of the Messiah
Verse 4	The Ministry of the Messiah
Verse 5	The Ministry of the Messiah and its Purpose
Verse 6	The Cause of the Messiah's Sufferings
Verse 7	The Trial of the Messiah
Verse 8	The Death of the Messiah
Verse 9	The Burial of the Messiah
Verse 10	The Resurrection of the Messiah
Verse 11	The Personal Acceptance of the Messiah
Verse 12	The Second Coming of the Messiah

#### The Messianic Interpretation of Isaiah 53

##### A. The Presentation of the Servant (52:13-15)

1. The emphasis is upon the Servant's future exaltation (52:13 cf. 49:7)
2. His physical features would be so disfigured that He would no longer resemble a man. (52:14)
3. This was fulfilled by His scourging (John 19:1-5)

4. Through His disfigurement the Servant would bring cleansing to many Gentiles (52:15a cf. Romans 11) (The purpose of sprinkling was to attain ritual purity cf. Hebrews 9:19-26).
  5. There will be a moment of truth for those who see the exalted Servant and realize in silent awe that He was the One who was disfigured (52:15b).
- B. The Rejection of the Servant (53:1-3)
1. The emphasis is on Israel's unbelief. Only a remnant would believe (v.1).
  2. The reason the Servant is rejected is because He is not what they expected. They were looking for a tall tree (king) not a tender plant (servant) v.2
  3. They were looking for just a man, not a God (a supernatural man).
  4. His life would be characterized by suffering, not royalty (v.3).
- C. The Substitution of the Servant (53:4-6)
1. They viewed His suffering as His due punishment from God, not the payment for their sins.
  2. They do however recognize that it was they who were guilty of sin, and not the Servant (v.5).
  3. Israel laments her former blindness and straying (v.6a).
  4. His suffering was vicarious and substitutionary in nature (v.6b).
- D. The Execution of the Servant (53:7-9)
1. The Servant would utter no defense during His affliction (v.7).
  2. The death of the Servant (v.8)
    - a. He undergoes a legal trial.
    - b. He is condemned to death by legal execution. This is the first time that the Scripture clearly states that the Messiah will die.
    - c. Messiah suffers the legal penalty of the Law (death) instead of Isaiah's people who deserve it because of their transgressions.
  3. The Burial of the Servant (v.9)
    - a. Normally a criminal's death warrants a criminal's grave.
    - b. God intervenes and honors the Servant because His death was purely substitutionary and His life totally without sin.
    - c. This was fulfilled in Matthew 27:57-60 when Jesus was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimethea.
- E. The Satisfaction of the Servant (53:10-12)
1. The Lord was responsible for the Servant's death. (v.10), not the Romans or the Jews (cf. Acts 2:23).
  2. Through the Servant God provided the ultimate and final sacrifice for sin (v.10c) Animal sacrifices simply covered sin. God's divine plan was to remove sin (cf. Lev. 17:11; Heb. 10:22-28)

3. The resurrection of the Servant (v.10d,e).
4. Justification is only applied to those who personally receive the Justification of the Servant (v.11). He died for all, but His death is only applied to those who believe and thus receive.
5. The Servant will inherit the right to rule (v.12); (cf. Psa. 2:6-8; Psa. 110; Rev. 19:11-16).
  - a. Because He willingly poured out His soul unto death.
  - b. Because He was humble enough to be numbered with the transgressors.