

Fort Bend Christian Academy – Honors Apologetics

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The Suffering Servant Parable

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INTRODUCTION

Every major religion has a collection of sacred texts that they look to for wisdom and understanding, and Christianity is no different. Christians see the Bible, which is composed of the thirty-nine Old Testament books and 27 New Testament books, as their divine source of information. Interestingly enough, the Christian Scriptures have a deep rooted history and a strong connection to another religion, that of Judaism. The entire collection of Jewish sacred works, the Tanakh, is included in the Christian's Old Testament portion of the Bible. The Jews believe that only the Old Testament books are authoritative, whereas the Christians assert that the Bible can only be understood if both the Old and New Testament books are read together, as connected parts of the same story. This is significant because the Christians use the New Testament, informed by the Old Testament, to make claims about God and His role in the world. An example of where this interconnectedness between the Jewish and Christian Scriptures produces different interpretations is seen with Isaiah 53.

Isaiah 53 is a heavily debated passage by Jews and Christians alike. Over the years, numerous interpretations have been offered to explain what Isaiah was writing about in the later part of his book. As years pass and more information comes to light, many of the various different interpretations have been either ignored or simply disregarded because they do not accurately portray Isaiah in his proper context or his mission in prophesying. However, two schools of thought concerning interpretation have withstood the test of time and are still widely accepted, the general interpretation by modern Jews and the Christian's claim that it is connected to the New Testament. According to the Jews, Isaiah 53 is a discussion of Israel as a whole and the nation's multiple grievances and struggles. In contrast, the Christians believe Isaiah 53 to be a chapter full of Messianic prophecies depicting what people should expect of the Messiah. As

these two interpretations clash in modern scholarly work, it is important to discover the true meaning of the passage. By evaluating the original, understanding of the passage, the modern Jewish understanding and the Christian viewpoint over time, the identity of Isaiah's Suffering Servant will be revealed. Therefore, in light of the text's history and implications, the Suffering Servant parable, found in Isaiah 53, is best interpreted within the Christian paradigm.

ISAIAH 53 TRANSLATION

¹ Who has believed ^a our report ^{b?}
And to whom has the Arm ^c of YHWH been revealed?

² For He ^d grew up before Jehovah ^e like a tender plant, ^f
^g and like a root out of dry ground ^h;
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him,
nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him. ⁱ

³ He was despised and rejected ^j by men; ^k
a man of suffering, and acquainted ^l with grief. ^m
Like one from whom people hide their faces
He was despised, and we did not value Him.

⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs ⁿ
And carried our sorrows; ^o
But we considered Him punished by God, ^p
Smitten ^q by God and afflicted. ^r

⁵ He was wounded ^s because of our transgressions, ^t
Bruised ^u because of our iniquities; ^v
Upon him ^w were beatings ^x that brought us peace. ^y
He was whipped ^z so we could be healed. ^{aa}

⁶^{bb} All of us like sheep ^{cc} stray away. ^{dd}
We leave God's paths to follow our own.
But YHWH laid on Him the iniquity of us all. ^{ee}

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted, ^{ff}
yet he did not open his mouth; ^{gg}
like a lamb led to slaughter, ^{hh}
like a sheep silent before its shearers,
he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By prosecution and judgment he was
unjustly condemned and taken away. ⁱⁱ
Yet who of his generation protested his misfortunes? ^{jj}
He was cut off ^{kk} out of the land of the living, and
for the transgressions of my ^{ll} people he was punished.

^{9 mm} He had done no wrong,
And there was no deceit ⁿⁿ in his mouth,
But He was condemned like a criminal. ^{oo}
He was treated like the wicked,
but placed in a rich man's grave. ^{pp}

^{10 qq} Yet it was YHWH's will to crush Him
and cause Him to suffer ^{rr}
and though the Servant made his life an offering for sin, ^{ss}
he will see his offspring ^{tt} and prolong his days, ^{uu}
and the will of YHWH will prosper in his hand. ^{vv}

¹¹ When the Servant sees ^{ww} all that is accomplished
by the hardship of his soul, ^{xx} he will be satisfied. ^{yy}
By his knowledge ^{zz} the righteous one, My Servant, ^{aaa}
will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, ^{bbb}
for he will take on their iniquities. ^{ccc}

¹² Therefore, I ^{ddd} will divide the Servant a portion with the great,
And he will divide the spoils with the strong, ^{eee}
Because he poured out his soul even to death,
And being counted among the sinners
But he carried the sin of many and intervened for the transgressors. ^{fff}

TRANSLATION NOTES

- a. Most translations have this verse written in past tense since it is discussing a report that has already been told. (NKJV, NLT, NIV, NASB, and ESV) This verse is being spoken by messengers or a prophet to the people that identified with the Jews.¹
- b. Report literally means- “the things heard,” typically an announcement
- c. Arm- power, referenced earlier in Is. 40:10, 51:9, and 62:8 showing God’s power in action as in performing miracles and saving men. Throughout the Bible, “arm” speaks of God’s physical redemption of His people from those who were oppressing the Jews. This same idea is seen in Deut. 7:19 and Ps. 44:3 which both discuss how nothing could save the people but God’s arm.²
- d. This verse has numerous pronouns without antecedents making it hard to understand who is being spoken about and who they are speaking to. This translation takes this verse to be the messenger from the first verse speaking about the servant.
- e. Replaced an ambiguous “he” with who the verse is talking about, Jehovah, making it clearer.
- f. Relates the Servant to a sapling that is weak and struggling to live. Saplings must be carefully looked after and cared for to make sure that they grow properly, like a mother would constantly watch and help a sick child. In the same way, God provided the Servant with this constant observance to ensure that the Servant was receiving proper growth.³
- g. Portrays that the Servant would be raised in a poor family. The phrase “a root from dry ground” relates the Servant back to the line of David. By the time the Servant would be born, David’s line would no longer be royalty, but instead poor, common people and this would be the Servant’s lineage. This idea relates back to Is. 11:1 when it is said that “Christ would come from the stump of Jesse.”⁴
- h. The dry ground concept comes from the idea that Christ was not coming from a line of royalty. Instead, He was coming from a “dry,” “unused” normal line.⁵
- i. All that the servant was lacking in appearances helps to show that he was the least likely candidate to be chosen for anything important, let alone the Messiah.

¹ John Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*. Nashville: Tenn. Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005. 779

² Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1209.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ John Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*. Nashville: Tenn. Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005. 779

- j. The Servant was not regarded as a man in the people's opinion. He was completely ignored and rejected which lines right up with what is going on to the Jews at this time. Relates to Is. 52:14, Is. 60:15, and Ps. 44:13-14.⁶
- k. This is a further reference to Is. 49:7, when it is said by the LORD that the redeemer of Israel would be "deeply despised, abhorred by the nation." This verse also has a parallel to Psalm 22:6 when David writes how he is "despised by the people."⁷
- l. Through using the term "acquainted with" it shows that the Servant was used to this kind of treatment. He was familiar with it because he had constant contact with this horrible treatment. Acquainted could be replaced with knowing because they would have the same meaning in this context.⁸
- m. The literal definition of grief is disease or sickness. In context though, it could mean any type of sickness. Many times in the Old Testament, Israel's troubles and adversities are likened to disease: Is. 1:5-6, Jer. 10:19, and Jer. 30:12.
- n. The literal definition of griefs is physical sickness. (Is. 63:9- in all our afflictions He was afflicted) The Servant was experiencing the same pain that the people were enduring.
- o. Sorrows refer to pains. More specifically to pains of the mind. Therefore, the Servant took on all of the sins and wrongdoings of mankind so that the world could be wiped clean of all that they had done and were yet to do. This relates to Psalm 103:3 and Is. 33:24 showing how "sin and sickness are ethically connected as cause and effect" therefore, necessary of receiving redemption.⁹
- p. The Servant had taken on all of the sins of the people which caused him to receive judgment from God.
- q. The literal definition of smitten is divine judgments. The servant was receiving divine judgment from God for the sins of other people.
- r. The servant did endure suffering, but it was not for His own actions, but instead for those around Him. The Servant was plagued with suffering in order to provide atonement whether for Israel as a whole or for each person's sins. This idea of atonement is seen in Ps. 69:26.

⁶ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1209.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Hebrew-OT-Transliteration. qBible, 1996.

⁹ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1210.

- s. This wound is both a physical wound and a mental wound.¹⁰
- t. Transgressions parallels with rebellion or revolt. This rebellion was not from the Servant, but instead caused by the people of Israel, and the Servant was simply bearing the consequences.¹¹
- u. Bruised means an inward and outward crushing and suffering.¹² The Servant was receiving physical pain due to the people of Israel's actions and decisions.
- v. Iniquities literally mean sins or evil. Initially the people of Israel would state that this verse points to the Servant's divine judgment from verse four being the cause of his pain, but in context it is obvious to see that it is the people's sins that are causing the Servant pain.¹³
- w. Upon him refers to a burden; a parallel to "borne" and "carried" used earlier in the text.¹⁴
- x. Most translations use chastisement in this verse instead of beaten. The definitions are very similar, but beaten depicts more of what is being experienced by the Servant. Chastisement means "pain inflicted for punishment and correction; discipline; correction."¹⁵ In addition, chastisement is based on punishment which can only take place if there is some form of guilt. The Servant had no guilt because as stated earlier in this verse, he was wounded for others transgressions. Therefore, beaten provides a more accurate definition for the situation of the Servant.¹⁶
- y. Peace means "to be complete or whole" or "to live well." This comes from the Hebrew word shalom which shows that the Servant's suffering was going to bring health and safety to the people of Israel.¹⁷
- z. More commonly, translations of this passage use stripes instead of whipped. Changing the word provides more contexts for what is going on and further expresses the situation. The

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Hebrew-OT-Transliteration. qBible, 1996.

¹² Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1210.

¹³ Isaiah 53-Jewish Perspective, Jews for Judaism. 2015, January 1.

¹⁴ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1210.

¹⁵ Topical Bible: Isaiah 53. Bible Hub, 2010, August 9.

¹⁶ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1210.

¹⁷ Hebrew-OT-Transliteration. qBible, 1996.

same definition of stripes, a welt or black and blue mark, is still understood in a more simplistic way.¹⁸

- aa. Refers to a spiritual healing and relates back to peace. Same idea is referenced in Ps. 41:4 and Jer. 8:22.¹⁹
- bb. A detailed description of what is later referenced in Zec. 12:10, when the people of Israel are discussing the Servant.
- cc. Often times in the Old Testament, God's people are considered sheep and God the shepherd. This same idea is seen in Ps. 119:176 when a specific example is given of the people of Israel straying from God's path. Sheep are known for being dumb and helpless therefore, the comparison of sheep to the people of Israel expresses how the Servant is necessary.
- dd. Israel in the Old Testament often strayed and did not follow what God had instructed them to do. (Eze 34:5-6, Zec. 10:2, Eze 34:23-24, and Jer. 23:4)²⁰
- ee. This verse further explains why it is necessary for the Servant to endure all that he did in verse 4. "The language has changed from political rebellion to the religious and moral sense of iniquity, and an understanding of substitutionary atonement is born."²¹ This idea had previously been seen in Jewish culture through the scapegoat (Lev. 16:20-22), but in Isaiah it is used in a new sense.²²
- ff. Another reference to what the Servant experienced in verse 4. This same idea of being oppressed with no cause is seen in the previous chapter Is. 52:4-5, when Israel is being oppressed by the Assyrians. As well as Ps. 44: 17-18, when David describes Israel's faithfulness despite gentle oppression.
- gg. This same idea of not opening one's mouth is seen in Jer. 11:19 and Ps. 38:13-14.
- hh. The tone at this point in the chapter has changed. What is being stated is "more factual, expressing wonder that the punishment was accepted in silence."²³
- ii. The Servant was treated as in the same manner as a horrible criminal in that he was denied the right to a fair trial. Through the use of "prosecution and judgment" the typical nature of the execution by the governor and his men at this time in Israel is understood.²⁴

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1210.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ John Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*. Nashville: Tenn. Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005. 788.

²² Ibid.

²³ John Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*. Nashville: Tenn. Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005. 788.

- jj. The people, generation, surrounding the Servant did not like or value him and were wicked at their hearts. Therefore, they were not concerned that the Servant was being treated unjustly.²⁵ The generation is discussed in Is. 57:1.
- kk. “Cut off” literally means a violent death.²⁶ The same idea is seen in Dan. 9:26.
- ll. Isaiah is including himself in regards to the people through the use of “my.”
- mm. The order of verse 9 in this translation has been slightly altered to help with logical flow. Instead of talking about the Servant’s lack of deceit and wrong doings second, this translation has them placed first so the second half of the verse about burial can be better understood.
- nn. Deceit in this context is implying that the Servant had not become a fraud in saying that a pagan god was the real god and he refused to give in to paganism.²⁷
- oo. The Servant received the treatment and death of a horrible criminal.
- pp. The Servant had done nothing that warranted his death, but he was still killed. Another paradox within the Servant’s story is that after his death he was placed in the grave of a rich man despite how he had previously been treated.²⁸
- qq. Verse 10 provides a transition from the Servant’s humiliation to his exaltation for following through on what God had asked.²⁹
- rr. God had a plan from the beginning for the Servant to follow and it included the pain and the suffering that the Servant endured. Everything that the Servant endured served as a way for God to fulfill His plan.
- ss. The Servant’s death was a way for him to compensate for the world’s sins through setting people free from their guilt before God. The Servant became the ultimate fulfillment of Lev. 5:15-16.³⁰

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1211.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Kazen, R. Yeshayahu - Chapter 53 - Tanakh Online - Torah – Bible. Chabad-Lubavitch Media Center. 1993, May 16.

²⁸ John Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*. Nashville: Tenn. Nelson Reference & Electronic, 2005. 789.

²⁹ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1212.

³⁰ *ESV: Study Bible : English standard version*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles. 2007. 1339.

- tt. Relates back to verse 6 when the Servant's offspring are being described as having strayed from God's path. In this verse though, the offspring has come back to the Servant. This same idea is seen in Gen. 48:11, and Ps. 128:6.
- uu. There is an underlining message that death is not the Servant's end. It is not specifically stated what is the Servant's end, but Isaiah does make sure to point out that his days will be "prolonged." (Ho. 6:2 and Ps. 128:16) This idea of prolonged days was regarded as a blessing among the Jews.³¹
- vv. Through what the Servant endured he has become the executor of God's will and plan. The same idea of prosper is seen in Is. 52:13.
- ww. The Servant is not necessarily seeing with his eyes. Instead this verse is explaining that when the Servant grasps a full understanding he will be satisfied.
- xx. The Servant will be able to see blessed fruits that come directly from his suffering as almost a way of repayment. This same idea is earlier referenced in Is. 49:4.³²
- yy. The satisfaction referenced will come when the Servant recognizes that the conversion of Israel and the world will be understood in the last days. (Is. 2:2-4)³³
- zz. "The Jewish mission is to serve as a "light to the nations" which will ultimately lead the world to a knowledge of the one true God, this both by example (Deut. 4:5-8; Zech. 8:23) and by instructing the nations in God's Law (Isa. 2:3-4; Micah 4:2-3)."³⁴
- aaa. This is the reoccurring title given to the Servant throughout Isaiah. (Is. 42:1 and Is. 52:13)³⁵
- bbb. It is only because the Servant has been made righteous that he is able to justify, make others righteous.
- ccc. The Servant throughout this whole passage has been taking on and caring the sins and wrongdoings of all of the people of Israel. This verse simply explains why this action was necessary for him to carry out.
- ddd. God is talking about what the Servant accomplished.
- eee. Provides a picture of a conquer sharing his victory with his allies. The Servants reward is not limited to only the strong and mighty, but instead to everyone including weak.³⁶

³¹ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1212.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Isaiah 53-Jewish Perspective, Jews for Judaism. 2015, January 1.

³⁵ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1212.

fff. The whole last part of verse 12 emphasizes the point that the Servant was not guilty in any way, but he voluntary took the place of all who were guilty even to the point of death removing the idea that he was actually a criminal. The Servant was not one of the sinners and opposed what they had done, but he still took on their sins so they could no longer be sinners.

³⁶ Ibid.

BACKGROUND OF ISAIAH

Isaiah, the first of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, has been considered a foundational book in understanding Israel's history. The book consists of oracles, reports, and prophecies with one central theme of "Yahweh is salvation," which is the translation of the word Isaiah.³⁷ A continual debate that has existed about Isaiah is who officially wrote the book. The widely accepted conclusion by most scholars is that Isaiah was written by three different authors, therefore separating Isaiah into three different sections labelled Proto-Isaiah, Deutero-Isaiah, and Trito-Isaiah. More commonly, the three different sections are referred to as First Isaiah, Second Isaiah, and Third Isaiah.³⁸ Each section is thought to have been written by a different person at a separate time in Israel's history. It is believed that First Isaiah consists of chapters one to thirty nine, written by Isaiah of Jerusalem during the late 18th century. Second Isaiah consists of chapters forty to fifty-five and is believed to have been written by an anonymous prophet during the middle of the 6th century often called the Isaiah of Babylon. The final section, chapters fifty-six to sixty-six makes up Third Isaiah and is thought to have been written by yet another anonymous prophet sometime in the 5th century and also likely an Isaiah of Babylon.³⁹

As far as the structure of the book of Isaiah, the First Isaiah seems to be a prophet living in Jerusalem, warning the Israelites that if they do not change their behavior and return to fulfilling the covenant, they will lose the land Yahweh promised them. Second Isaiah, an exile prophet, is understood to be preaching during the Babylonian exile. At this point, the Israelites have already lost the land because they have not followed the covenant. Therefore, Second Isaiah

³⁷ *ESV: Study Bible : English standard version*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles. 2007. 1234.

³⁸ Christian E. Hauer and William A. Young, "The Prophetic Books." In *An Introduction to the Bible: A Journey into Three Worlds*. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, 2012.)134.

³⁹ *ESV: Study Bible : English standard version*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles. 2007. 1234.

is writing to both encourage the Israelites that Yahweh is not weak⁴⁰ and to introduce a new aspect, that Yahweh is both the only God and is universal. Second Isaiah is the first person to introduce monotheism⁴¹ to the nation of Israel. Because of this twofold message in the Second Isaiah writings, Isaiah 53 takes on an entirely new meaning.

Over the years, there have been multiple interpretations of Isaiah 53. Some of these interpretations evaluate Isaiah 53 as a single chapter, others consider it within the context of the four Servant passages,⁴² while some extend it to all of Isaiah, suggesting that each writer used the previous author's work to inform their own. Finally, many Christians interpret Isaiah 53 as a prophecy concerning the Messiah that as fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With this understanding, it is important to evaluate the various interpretations of the Servant, including both the ancient and modern Jewish interpretation and contrasting it with the Christian tradition, because of the great disparity between the two religion's interpretations. By comparing the two religion's understating of Isaiah 53, it will become evident that the Christian interpretation is the more complete and correction understanding of the Second Isaiah's message.

⁴⁰ During this time of history, the notion of Holy War was central to a nation's success. The actions of various nations and peoples were understood to be direct tied to the state of the gods. If two nations were getting along, it was because the respective gods of those nations were getting along. Furthermore, when two nations were at war, the nation that won, succeeded because their god was stronger than the god of the other nation. Therefore, when Babylon conquered Israel, destroyed the temple, and took many of the citizens of Israel back to Babylon with them, the Babylonian exile should have caused the Israelite religion to disappear and dissolve into the Babylonian religion. According to their understanding, clearly Marduk (the Babylonian god) was stronger than Yahweh. Thus it is interesting that the Hebrews did not disappear as a people after the center of their worship, the temple was destroyed. This was due to the teachings of Second Isaiah.

Ackroyd, P. R. *Studies in the Religious Tradition of the Old Testament*. London: Brill, 1972. 170.

Frankfort, H. *Kingship and the Gods*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1971. 241.

⁴¹ Contrary to the popular modern understanding, the ancient Israelites were not always monotheists. Initially there were only two types of worship concerning the gods, monolatry and polytheism. Monolatry is the worship of one god as the supreme and universal deity but does not exclude the existence of other gods. Polytheism was the belief in the existence of several gods and their power in the world. It was not until the preaching of Second Isaiah, that monotheism, the worship of one deity as the only God and creator which implies the negation of the existence of all other deities, was introduced to the Hebrew people.

Tharekadavil, Antony. *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. v.

Coogan, M. D. *Ancient Israelite Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987. 118.

⁴² The notion of the four Suffering Servant passages was first introduced by Bernhard Duhm in his book, *Das Buch Jesaja*, however this singling out of specific passages is contested by various other scholars.

Tharekadavil, Antony. *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 9.

JEWISH INTERPATIION OF ISAIAH 53

In order to understand the ancient and modern interpretations of this passage, it must be evaluated by looking at a variety of sources. One must consider specific Old Testament writings, some passages in the Apocrypha⁴³, and finally some specific emphases that modern writers have placed on Isaiah 53, in order to understand what an ancient Israelite might have thought when they heard Isaiah preach about the Suffering Servant. All of these interpretations in turn shed light on the modern Jew's understanding, because they form the tradition from which modern Judaism was developed.

Old Testament Understanding

To begin, the scholarly debate around this text varies concerning whether the Servant is a single individual, or whether it refers to a group of people. Furthermore, some passages may contribute to one interpretation more than another. For example, verses in Isaiah 43 and 49 appear to be later insertions into the text that “were intended to change what were originally passages about Israel into passages about the Servant.”⁴⁴ This suggests that the ancient glossator saw the Servant as an individual. However, Daniel 12 uses phrases directly out of Isaiah, and seems to suggest that the Servant had one of two different interpretations. One view suggests the Servant is the ‘wise’ men, or Jewish loyalists which Daniel often speaks about.⁴⁵ This theory was widely accepted by medieval Jewish writers based on the similarity between the texts; they considered the similarity to be due to intertextuality⁴⁶ by the author of Daniel.⁴⁷ These are the

⁴³ Although some Christians and most modern Jews do not view the writings of the Apocrypha as canonical, many of the writings are still read and studied by modern Jews as ancient historical texts and therefore given more value than in most modern Protestant Christian circles.

⁴⁴ North, Christopher R. *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963. 6.

⁴⁵ Tharekadavil, Antony. *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 4.

⁴⁶ Intertextuality defined as an author's intentional allusion to previous texts, through direct quotation or specific word choice, in order to remind the reader of specific themes or traditions of thought from the original text.

⁴⁷ North, Christopher R. *The Suffering Servant in Deutero-Isaiah*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1963. 7.

only true attempts at the identification of the Servant from within the Old Testament texts, however some of the Apocryphal writings have offered additional insight.

Apocryphal Understanding

There are similar intertextual ties between the description of the Servant in Isaiah and the Son of Man in the Parables of Enoch. The author of Enoch⁴⁸ appears to have identified the Servant with the Son of Man in the parables of Enoch when he is described as the elect one, the righteous one, and as light to the gentiles.⁴⁹ Furthermore, “the righteous man in the Wisdom of Solomon is a copy of Isaiah 52:13-53:12.”⁵⁰ Once again, there are only a few writings that attempt to identify the Servant in the Apocryphal texts, however both the Old Testament, Apocryphal writings, and similarities to the Servant passages in Isaiah contributed to the Israelites’ understanding of who the Servant represents.

Other Emphases

Because of the significance of Isaiah’s teachings to the ancient Hebrew people, many scholars are still wrestling with the identification of the Servant in modern contexts. Multiple theories have been postulated over the years and a few will be analyzed here, however the number of different theories is too great to offer a presentation of each one.

That being said, one scholar, Antony Tharekadavil, draws attention to the significance of Isaiah using the word “Servant,” which necessarily points to someone whom the servant must serve, i.e. a master or lord. He is writing to “emphasize that the Isaianic account of the Servant is not presenting an isolated and abstract concept of a “servant” but is speaking about the Servant

⁴⁸ Both the Book of Enoch and Book of Wisdom are ancient religious works in the Jewish tradition, however neither are included in the Jewish Tanakh.

⁴⁹ Some of these similarities in Enoch and Wisdom are not from Isaiah 53 specifically, however they are all from Deutero-Isaiah and from Servant passages surrounding chapter 53.

⁵⁰ Tharekadavil, Antony. *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 5.

of Yahweh.”⁵¹ Based on this connection, he evaluates the ancient understanding of the Servant by focusing on specific texts that present Yahweh as the Lord in relation to the Second Isaiah’s Servant.⁵² Furthermore, because of the wide variety of interpretations, Tharekadavil suggests that the four Servant passages cannot be separated from the rest of the Second Isaiah passages; he says, “We must read the four Servant songs as integral parts of all of Second Isaiah.”⁵³ He therefore suggests that a total of twelve passages be evaluated when studying the Servant, because of the presence of the Hebrew noun, *‘ebed*, which means servant, found in each of these passages.⁵⁴ With this understanding, Tharekadavil posits that the servant represents the exiled nation of Israel. He says, “The Isaianic idea of the Servant appears to be the result of the exilic reinterpretation of the traditional Servant of Yahweh concept.”⁵⁵

In a similar vein, Fredrik Haggund also interprets Second Isaiah with a holistic approach, understanding all of the Second Isaiah passages as a story which shed light on how the Third Isaiah wrote in chapters fifty-six through sixty-six. In his study he presents, “an interpretation based on a hypothesis that conflicts emerged between the people in the land of Israel and those who returned from exile.”⁵⁶ Using studies of contemporary refugees as well as other passages of the Old Testament, he evaluates the hope that the people whom were deported to Israel had concerning seeing Jerusalem rebuilt and flourishing again. However, as time passed and they realized that Jerusalem would likely never return to its former glory, conflicts arose as those returning and those whom were already there began to dispute over land rights and space.⁵⁷ He suggests that Isaiah 40 to 52 is a reflection of the prophet seeking to understand and explain what

⁵¹ Ibid. 12.

⁵² Ibid. 15.

⁵³ Ibid. 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid. 9.

⁵⁵ Ibid. 132.

⁵⁶ Haggund, Fredrik. Ed. Mark S. Smith. *Isaiah 53 in the Light of Homecoming after Exile*. New York: Laupp & Gobel. 52.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 96.

went wrong from the Israelite high hopes to dashed dreams. Finally Hagglund suggests that Isaiah 53 was written to explain how the people living in the land of Israel should have received the returning exiles, i.e. the Servant.⁵⁸ “If this embrace had taken place, Mother Zion would have rejoiced, as described in Isa 54. Instead of these pictures painted for us in Isa 53 and 54” the writings of the Third Isaiah explain the conflicts and struggles that arose in chapters fifty-five to sixty-six.⁵⁹

Modern Understanding

In conclusion, it is important to realize that Isaiah 53 was likely only considered theologically important to the ancient Jews. If one asked a modern, practicing Jew their interpretation of Isaiah 53 today, excluding rabbis or scholars on ancient Judaism, they would likely ask, two questions: What does Isaiah 53 say and why do you care what I think? This is because modern Jews view many of the Old Testament prophetic texts as historical accounts and a testimony to Yahweh’s character, but nothing more.⁶⁰ The specific interpretation of Isaiah 53 is insignificant in the modern Jew’s life because it does not inform them on how to obey or fulfill the Law. Modern Jews are still awaiting the fulfillment of this passage; they are still waiting for the promised Messiah. Therefore, their interpretation of Isaiah 53 is lacking because they do not accept the premise of this thesis, that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and is the fulfillment of Isaiah 53.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 163.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 172.

⁶⁰ In addition, many modern Jews stray away from this passage specifically because Christians have “claimed” it is speaking about the Messiah. Since they do not believe Jesus was the true Messiah, it is easier to stay away from this particularly charged passage of Isaiah in every day life.

Tharekadavil, Antony. *Servant of Yahweh in Second Isaiah*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 9.

CHRISTIAN VERSE BY VERSE FULFILLMENT

The majority of Christians have understood Isaiah 53 to be a prophecy depicting the coming of Christ and His death to atone for the sins of everyone in the world. This idea is believed to have fulfillment all throughout the New Testament in various books and in great detail in the Gospels where there are direct copies of Old Testament passages. To help further prove the Christian mindset of how this passage should be interpreted, looking at each verse in Isaiah 53 and references of fulfillment in the New Testament proves to be incredibly beneficial in understanding Christ's fulfillment.⁶¹

Isaiah 53:1

Who has believed our report?

And to whom has the Arm of YHWH been revealed?

This verse is fulfilled through Christ's life in Matthew, Mark, and John:

Matthew 13:53-58; Matthew 26:65; Mark 14:63-64; John 5:37-40; John 10:33;

John 12: 37-38

Christ was accused numerous times of committing blasphemy for calling himself the Son of God. He always stated what was required for others to come to their own conclusion that Christ is the Messiah. Grasping an understanding on their own that He had come to save the people of the world and remove sin allowed a further understanding than Christ directly stating what He had come to do. Unfortunately, no one believed what Christ was saying and considered Him a fool. Most of what He professed or proclaimed was met with unbelief and condemnation. In each of these references Christ performed miracles and stated that He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets' prophecies, but no one believed what He said. Every action that Christ

⁶¹ All of the Isaiah 53 references come from the translation included earlier in the passage.

took was to help lead people to the conclusion that He is the Messiah, but each time he was met with unbelief.⁶²

Isaiah 53:2a

*For He grew up before Jehovah like a tender plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Luke, and 2 Corinthians:

Matthew 8:20; Luke 2: 7; 2Corinthians 8:9

Scattered throughout the New Testament are references that Christ would be born into a poor family based. One phrase that this is mainly pulled from is the phrase “root out of dry ground” from Isaiah 53:2. Dry ground implies that it is a completely normal lineage and there is not royalty scattered throughout the family tree. By the time Christ was born, the line of David was no longer royal, instead they would be reduced to poor, unknown, and common people. While it was prophesied that Christ was going to be born into the line of David, he was not born into royalty. Instead, he was born into a family consisting of a poor carpenter, and they lived in a little unknown town, Nazareth.⁶³

Isaiah 53:2b

*He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to Him,
nothing in His appearance that we should desire Him.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Luke, and Philippians:

Matthew 13:54-57; Luke 4:28-30; Philippians 2:7-8

Christ was born into an unknown family with his father being a carpenter in a small little town. All of the Jews had established a mindset that the Messiah was going to be a magnificent

⁶² "Messiah Revealed: Isaiah." Messiah Revealed. September 15, 1990. <http://www.messiahrevealed.org/isaiah52-53.html>.

⁶³ Ibid.

on powerful king that would come in Israel, destroy Rome, and take back over Israel. The Jewish belief was that there was going to be pomp and circumstance surrounding the Messiah, and that is how they would recognize the true Messiah. No one without power and royalty could be the Messiah, because they would not be able to accomplish anything. Therefore, the Jews did not believe that a man who had the appearance of an ordinary man would in any way be the Messiah.⁶⁴ They were under the opinion that Christ was an excellent prophet, but in no way did they believe He could be the Messiah for he was too ordinary.

Isaiah 53:3a

*He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of suffering, and acquainted with grief.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
He was despised, and we did not value Him.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

Matthew 27:22; Mark 6:3; Luke 4:28-2; Luke 6:11; John 5:16; John 7:7; John 10:20

Christ came to earth, and did not fulfill the expectations that the Jews had originally set for the Messiah. He did not come in and completely destroy Rome's power, once again allowing the Jews to be in charge of their own affairs. Because He did not have the power the people expected of Him, yet still proclaimed to be the Messiah, He was despised. Instead of fighting against the Roman oppression, he was fighting against the evil existing in the world. He was showing them that they held too closely to the original laws that had been established. He wanted the people to understand that He was coming to establish a new law.⁶⁵ Christ came to show the Jews that He was the new law and was providing an alternate route of forgiveness. The

⁶⁴ Guthrie, D. (1981). Servant. In *New Testament Theology* (pp. 258-268). Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press. 258

⁶⁵ "Messiah Revealed: Isaiah." Messiah Revealed. September 15, 1990. <http://www.messiahrevealed.org/isaiah52-53.html>.

Jews did not believe what He was saying. Instead, they despised Him, ultimately leading to His death and crucifixion.

Isaiah 53:3b

*He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of suffering, and acquainted with grief.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
He was despised, and we did not value Him.*

This passage is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts:

Matthew 27:21-23; Mark 6:3; Mark 15:9-15; Luke 23:18; John 1:11; John 5:43; John 7:5; John 18:40; Acts 3:14-15

Christ left his place next to the right hand of the Father to come down and save all of the people of the world from their own sin through His own death. Despite His willingness to serve, the people rejected Him and refused to accept what He had to say. In fact, they had so much resentment and hatred towards Him, they desired for Him to be put to death rather than listen to what He was preaching. They would have preferred to set free a known criminal, Barabbas, than allow Christ to continue living and preaching. The Jewish people had missed Christ's whole purposed in coming. He had come for them and was speaking and preaching the truth to them on a daily basis. In their minds, releasing a murder, thief, and criminal was better for them than letting Christ live and them having to continue to listen to what He had to say. They had rejected what He had come to say and His claim that He was God.

Isaiah 53:3c

*He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of suffering, and acquainted with grief.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
He was despised, and we did not value Him.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

*Matthew 23:37; Matthew 26:37-38; Matthew 27:46; Mark 8:12; Mark 14:33;
 Luke 19:41-42; Luke 22:44; John 12:27; John 13:21*

Jesus had come to earth for the sole purpose of showing the people what they were doing wrong and how He was the only way they would be able to overcome their sin. His love for all the people was pouring out from Him, but no one was accepting what He had to say. Because of this, He became troubled with sorrow and grief over the people's inability to see the reason that He had come. Jesus was weeping over the people's failure to turn from their wicked ways and accomplish what was required of them by God. He had also become aware of what God's ultimate plan was for Him on earth, a plan that greatly troubled Christ. Jesus knew He was going to be betrayed by someone He thought loved Him and then would have to endure one of the most painful deaths possible. He approaches the throne of His father completely distressed over his future, but He understands why this action must take place.

Isaiah 53:3d

*He was despised and rejected by men;
 a man of suffering, and acquainted with grief.
 Like one from whom people hide their faces
 He was despised, and we did not value Him.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

*Matthew 26:31; Matthew 26:56; Matthew 26:73-74; Mark 14:50-52; Luke 22:55-62;
 John 16:32; John 18:15-18; John 18:25-27*

Due to the work that Christ had been doing He had attracted numerous followers, including His group of twelve that He had specifically chosen to be His disciples. This group of twelve had helped Him in his ministry, listen to His preaching, and been with Him during His whole ministry. Despite all that they had done for Jesus, in the one time He needed them most, they were overcome with fear and ran so that nothing would happen to them like what was

happening to Christ. Simon Peter especially was afraid of what would happen if people found out that he was connected to Christ. Peter had put together that Christ was the Son of God just a few days earlier, but when the time came to fully trust in Christ, Peter denied even knowing Him. When Christ was enduring every kind of pain and struggle, the people He had always counted on went and hid out of fear for their own safety.⁶⁶

Isaiah 53:4a

*Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
But we considered Him punished by God,
Smitten by God and afflicted.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, and Luke:

Matthew 4:23; Matthew 8:16-17; Matthew 9:35; Mark 6:56; Luke 5:15; Luke 6:17-19

Ultimately, the Messiah had come to fulfill the will of the Heavenly Father, but this did not come to completion until after the majority of His ministry was completed. Initially, the Messiah's ministry consisted of healing. He would travel from one city to another preaching and healing all of those who came to see Him. Through this form of ministry, He was able to gain large amounts of followers. People were interested in His ability to heal those who had recently become sick, but they were even more interested in His ability to heal people who had some sort of ailment since their birth. Christ would not require His followers to do anything to receive His healing. Instead, He would show them love through simply healing them. Through this form of ministry, people became astonished at all that He was capable of doing. Christ would take on the pains and the burdens of the people around Him because of the unending love He had for

⁶⁶ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1212.

each person. He wanted them to realize who He was and the best way to go about this was to show them the heart of God through his actions.⁶⁷

Isaiah 53:4b

*Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
But we considered Him punished by God,
Smitten by God and afflicted.*

This verse is fulfilled in John, Galatians, Ephesians, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1 John:

*John 15:13; Galatians 1:3-4; Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24; 1 Peter 3:18;
1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:5*

Christ's whole reason in coming to earth was to be the ultimate sacrifice for the entire world's sins. He would bear and carry upon Himself the sins of the world so that everyone would have their sins forgiven and be offered a clean slate in front of their Heavenly Father. Through His death on the cross, Christ had become the world's atonement for every sin they had committed and were going to commit. After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, there was no way that people were going to be able to have a relationship with God because He cannot be in contact of sin. Therefore, Christ came to take on the world's sins so that the world could once again have a relationship with God. Christ came and died so that no longer would people have to constantly offer a sacrifice to receive forgiveness. Instead they would be able to ask God directly for forgiveness.⁶⁸

Isaiah 53:4c

*Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;*

⁶⁷ "Messiah Revealed: Isaiah." Messiah Revealed. September 15, 1990. <http://www.messiahrevealed.org/isaiah52-53.html>.

⁶⁸ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1213.

*But we considered Him punished by God,
Smitten by God and afflicted.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, and Luke:

Matthew 27:41-43; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-41

Christ had come to earth to accomplish what God had sent Him to do, stand in as the final sacrifice for everyone's sins. In the process of Him accomplishing God's will, people did not believe that He was truly the Son of God. Instead they were under the impression that Jesus was committing blasphemy against God and was punishable through death. The people did not put together all that Christ was accomplishing and all that He was saying. Instead they mocked Him and considered Him cursed by God. While on the cross they felt that if He was truly God He would be able to get Himself down. When He did not accomplish that task they mocked Him, automatically assuming that He had been lying about the entire ordeal instead of putting together all that He was doing.⁶⁹

Isaiah 53:5a

*He was wounded because of our transgressions,
Bruised because of our iniquities;
Upon him were beatings that brought us peace.
He was whipped so we could be healed.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Luke, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Titus, Hebrews, and 1Peter:

Matthew 26:27-28; Luke 23:33; Romans 4:24-25; 1 Corinthians 15:3; Galatians 1:4;

Titus 2:13-14; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 3:18

The world was full of sin because each and every person was born with a sinful nature and could not help but sinning. Therefore, there was a need for a way for people's sins to be

⁶⁹ "Messiah Revealed: Isaiah." Messiah Revealed. September 15, 1990.

forgiven and forgotten. Christ became the solution for this problem. He came down to earth, lived a sinless life, but was punished for the world's sins. He did not do anything to deserve any kind of penalty, but He would bear the penalty for mankind's transgressions. He would come to suffer and die for the world's sin because it was the will of His Father and He was going to obey.

Isaiah 53:5b

*He was wounded because of our transgressions,
Bruised because of our iniquities;
Upon him were beatings that brought us peace.
He was whipped so we could be healed.*

This verse is fulfilled in Acts, Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians:

Acts 10:36-40; Romans 5:1; Ephesians 2:13-18; Colossians 1:20

Before Christ came down to earth and died for the world's sins there was a disconnect between God and man. Men were born with a sinful nature and, because of this, God could not interact with man. Therefore, Christ's death became an avenue through which peace would be provided between man and God. Christ came and died as the final sacrifice to forgive all sins committed and those that are yet to be committed. Through his blood, He was washing everyone white, allowing God to once again have a relationship with and communicate with His people. Now, instead of only being able to reach God through the priest in the Temple, each and every person could directly communicate to God whenever and wherever they desired. Christ came and stood in between the sinful people and God, allowing the two to once again communicate.

Isaiah 53:5c

*He was wounded because of our transgressions,
Bruised because of our iniquities;
Upon him were beatings that brought us peace.
He was whipped so we could be healed.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, John, and 1 Peter:

Matthew 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:1; 1 Peter 2:24

After Jesus had been arrested, He went before the Jewish council, then was taken before Pilate, who released him to the people. Pilate did not want the blood of an innocent man on his hands, but he did not refuse to grant the people their wish of killing Jesus. As soon as Pilate washed his hands of Jesus, the crowd became ecstatic and wanted Christ to be beaten and hung. They did not care that Jesus was innocent of wrong. Therefore, Christ was given a Roman flogging, a horrifically cruel punishment. “He would have been tied to a post and beaten with a leather whip that was interwoven with pieces of bone and metal, which tore through skin and tissues, often exposing bones and intestines. In many cases, the flogging itself was fatal. The Romans scourged Jesus nearly to death so that He would not remain alive on the cross after sundown.”⁷⁰ Not only was Christ condemned to death, but before that could even happen He was beaten almost to death, despite his lack of sins committed.

Isaiah 53:6a

*All of us like sheep stray away.
We leave God's paths to follow our own.
But YHWH laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

This verse is fulfilled in John, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and 1 John:

John 1:29; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 1:3-4; Hebrews 9:28; 1 Peter 2:24;

1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:2; 1 John 3:5

Man is born with a sinful nature, causing him not to be able to communicate with and have a relationship with God. Therefore, there was a need for forgiveness so that each person could have a relationship with God because their sins had been forgiven. Christ became this

⁷⁰ *ESV: Study Bible : English standard version.* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles. 2007. 1885.

means through His death on the cross. He became the sin-bearer for all of mankind. Through Christ's death, when God looked at His people He only saw them washed white through Christ's blood instead of covered in the sins they had committed or were going to commit. Christ became the ultimate sacrifice for the world's sins.

Isaiah 53:6b

*All of us like sheep stray away.
We leave God's paths to follow our own.
But YHWH laid on Him the iniquity of us all.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Galatians, 1Thessalonians, and 1 John:

Matthew 26:42; Mark 14:36 Luke 22:42; John 6:38; John 18:11; Acts 2:23;

Romans 3:23-26; Romans 8:3-4; Romans 8:32; Galatians 1:3-4; 1Thessalonians 5:9-10;

1 John 4:10

After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God knew that He was going to have to find a way to talk to and have a relationship with His people. Because each and every person is born with a sinful nature, God knew there was no way that they would be able to overcome their sin on their own. Therefore, He came up with the plan of sending His son to die for the whole world's sins. It was God's will that Christ would be the sin-bearer for all of mankind. He would come, live a completely sinless life, die the death of a criminal, and then raise from the dead so that everyone could be forgiven of their sins. Nothing that anyone could do would allow them to have a relationship with God, Christ was a necessity in order for the world's sins to be forgiven.⁷¹

⁷¹ Ibid.

Isaiah 53:7a

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb led to slaughter,
like a sheep silent before its shearers,
he did not open his mouth.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, and John:

Matthew 26:67-68; Matthew 27:27-31; Mark 15:16-20; John 19:1-3

Christ had developed a successful ministry and had large crowds that would follow Him to hear what He had to say and see what miracle He was going to perform. Despite His popularity, He had to follow through with God's will which consisted of Him being oppressed and afflicted. He would have both physical pain and emotional pain. He was beaten, hit, spat upon, and then crucified. While all of this was going on, people were mocking him and telling him that He should save Himself now if he really was the Messiah. In addition they treated Him as if He was a pawn in a game. The Roman soldiers dressed Him as if He was a king, blindfolded Him, and then hit Him and spat upon Him making Him guess who had just touched Him. They mocked Him and treated Him horribly because they did not believe that He was the son of God.⁷²

Isaiah 53:7b-

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb led to slaughter,
like a sheep silent before its shearers,
he did not open his mouth.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

Matthew 26:62-63; Matthew 27:12-14; Mark 14:61; Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:9; John 8:6;

John 19:9

⁷² Ibid.

After Christ had been arrested, He was taken before the Jewish council and Pilate being accused of numerous accusations, none of which He had actually done. Numerous times He was questioned and given the opportunity to speak up and defend himself, but He never took those chances. Instead, He stood silent before His accusers. He did not deny or confess to anything that was being put up against Him. He accepted whatever people said about Him and did not try to express to them that they were wrong and misunderstanding what He had come to show them. Not once did Christ speak up for Himself, despite what was thrown against Him. In addition, people mocked Him and abused Him physically but never did He speak out to them asking them to stop or expressing that they were hurting Him. Christ simply accepted whatever people said and did to Him without uttering a single word.

Isaiah 53:7c

*He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
like a lamb led to slaughter,
like a sheep silent before its shearers,
he did not open his mouth.*

This verse is fulfilled in John, Ephesians, Hebrews, and 1 Peter:

John 1:29; John 1:36; John 19:14-18; Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 7:27; Hebrews 9:28;

1 Peter 1:19

It was a Jewish custom to sacrifice a perfect spotless lamb every Passover in order to receive atonement for one's sins. Therefore, Christ came to be the ultimate spotless lamb providing forgiveness and atonement for the entire world forever. After His death, there would no longer be a need to offer a lamb because He was the final sacrifice. He left His throne in Heaven to come to earth and live a sinless life so that He could offer forgiveness for the entire world's sins. His blood would cover every person's sin and allow God to see the blood of His

son rather than each person's sin. No longer would a temporary sacrifice be necessary because Christ came as the ultimate sacrifice.⁷³

Isaiah 53:8a

*By prosecution and judgment he was
unjustly condemned and taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested his misfortunes?
He was cut off out of the land of the living, and
for the transgressions of my people he was punished.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

Matthew 26:47-27:31; Mark 14:43-15:20; Luke 22:47-23:25; John 18:1-19:16

In order to follow the desires of His Father, Christ had to endure great amounts of persecution and judgment. He had been unjustly arrested and taken before various people to determine how He would be punished for sins that He did not actually commit. He was treated as a horrible criminal despite the fact that He had not done anything except heal people and tell them the truth and how to receive forgiveness. He had not confined to all of the known Jewish rules which made the Jewish rulers angry and they determined that He needed to be punished for His actions.

Isaiah 53:8b

*By prosecution and judgment he was
unjustly condemned and taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested his misfortunes?
He was cut off out of the land of the living, and
for the transgressions of my people he was punished.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

Matthew 26:57-27:22; Mark 14:53-15:15; Luke 22:54-23:25; John 18:13-19:16;

⁷³ Ibid.

John 18:13-14, 19-22; Matthew 26:57-66; Matthew 27:1; Matthew 27:2, 11; Luke 23:11; Matthew 27:22

Christ was judged by both Jewish and Roman authorities for a total of six different trials: Trial 1 before Annas, Trial 2 before Caiaphas, Trial 3 before Sanhedrin, Trial 4 before Pilate, Trail 5 before Herod, and Trial 6 before Pilate. There was no actual evidence to convict Christ with because He had done nothing wrong. He had come to earth and lived a sinless life, but the Jewish authorities did not appreciate that He did not follow the Jewish law and that He proclaimed that He was the Son of God so they wanted Him to be put to death. Christ was treated like a criminal, accused of wrongdoings and traveled from one trial to the next despite His lack of wrongdoings. Ultimately, these six trials led to Pilate allowing the people to choose Christ's fate which led to His death on a cross.⁷⁴

Isaiah 53:8c

*By prosecution and judgment he was
unjustly condemned and taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested his misfortunes?
He was cut off out of the land of the living, and
for the transgressions of my people he was punished.*

This verse is fulfilled in John, Acts, Romans, Galatians, 1 Peter, and 1 John:

*John 3:16; John 10:11; Acts 8:30-35; Romans 5:8; Romans 6:9-10; Galatians 1:3-4;
1 Peter 3:18; 1John 2:2; 1 John 4:10*

Christ had come to earth to obey his Father's will and die for the sins of the world. Through His perfect sinless life, the rest of the world's sins would be able to be forgiven. Through His death, no longer would sacrifices be needed. Each person could directly talk to God and ask Him to forgive them of their sins because they understood what Christ had done for

⁷⁴ Robert Jamieson, *In Commentary, practical and explanatory, on the whole Bible*, Grand Rapids, Mich. Zondervan, 1961. 1213.

them. No longer was a middle man needed to communicate to God because Jesus' death covered each person's sins allowing them directly contact to God.⁷⁵

Isaiah 53:9a

*He had done no wrong,
And there was no deceit in his mouth,
But He was condemned like a criminal.
He was treated like the wicked,
but placed in a rich man's grave.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

Matthew 27:57-60; Mark 15:42-47; Luke 23:50-53; John 19:38-42

While Christ was tried and put to death like a criminal, He received a burial in a rich man's grave. This seems opposite to the way He had previously been treated, but was the ultimate outcome. While most people desired to have Christ put to death, there were still a few people that believed what Christ had said and did not feel that He deserved death. Joseph of Arimathea was one of the people. He did not want Christ to receive the typical burial. Instead, He allowed his own tomb to be used for Christ's burial.⁷⁶

Isaiah 53:9b

*He had done no wrong,
And there was no deceit in his mouth,
But He was condemned like a criminal.
He was treated like the wicked,
but placed in a rich man's grave.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and 2 Corinthians:

Matthew 27: 23-24; Mark 15:14; Luke 23:13-15; John 18:38; 2 Corinthians 5:21

Despite the six different trials with various Jewish and Roman authorities, no one could find fault in Christ. They had reasons why they felt that He should be put to death, but Pilate

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

who had the ultimate say in Christ's future could find nothing wrong with Him. Ultimately he washed his hands of Christ and let the people decide what they wanted to do with Christ. Christ was innocent and had done no violence, but He would still be condemned to the one of the most painful and humiliating deaths of all time. Every action that Christ had taken throughout His ministry was for others and to help others better understand God. All of His efforts and popularity amongst the people did not ultimately matter, they would rather release a convicted criminal then allow Christ, a perfect sinless man, continue living.⁷⁷

Isaiah 53:9c

*He had done no wrong,
And there was no deceit in his mouth,
But He was condemned like a criminal.
He was treated like the wicked,
but placed in a rich man's grave.*

This verse is fulfilled in Mark, Luke, and 1 Peter:

Mark 15:3-5; Luke 23:33-34; 1 Peter 2:21-22

Numerous lies were being told by the authorities about supposed actions that Christ had taken and sins that He had committed. In all of this though, no deceit was found in His mouth. He simply accepted what everyone was saying about Him and did not even deem them with a response. He understood what the Father had called Him to do, and He did not try to correct the lies that people were spreading about Him. He would rather obey His Father and complete the task He had been given than maintain his reputation.⁷⁸

Isaiah 53:10a

*Yet it was YHWH's will to crush Him
and cause Him to suffer
and though the Servant made his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,*

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

and the will of YHWH will prosper in his hand.

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Acts, Romans, Galatians, 1 Thessalonians, and 1 John:

Matthew 26:42; Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42; John 6:38; John 18:11; Acts 2:23;

Romans 3:23-26; Romans 8:3-4; Romans 8:32; Galatians 1:3-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10;

1 John 4:10

Christ came to earth and was willing to die the death of a criminal because He wanted to fulfill the will of His Father. As a direct result, all of mankind was saved because Christ died. Before Christ's final sacrifice, each person would have to continually offer sacrifices to receive short term atonement. Through Christ's death this was no longer required because He had died for all of mankind as the final sacrifice. God knew after Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden that He was going to have to establish a new plan to save His people. His plan became sending His son to die for all of mankind.⁷⁹

Isaiah 53: 10b

*Yet it was YHWH's will to crush Him
and cause Him to suffer
and though the Servant made his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of YHWH will prosper in his hand.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Luke, John, Romans, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Hebrews, and 1 John:

Matthew 20:28; Luke 23:46; John 1:29; John 10:17-18; Romans 3:25; 2 Corinthians 5:21;

Ephesians 5:2; Hebrews 10:7-10; 1 John 4:10

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Christ came to earth to be the final offering for sin. No longer would the Jewish people have to go to the temple with a spotless lamb to sacrifice for atonement for their sins. Instead, Christ served as the final sacrifice fulfilling all of the requirements of a lamb and allowing people to put their trust in Jesus and receive atonement. This system served the people better because it allowed them direct contact with God, and a more personal approach to receiving forgiveness. God sent His Son to serve as the final offering for sin.⁸⁰

Isaiah 53:10c

*Yet it was YHWH's will to crush Him
and cause Him to suffer
and though the Servant made his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of YHWH will prosper in his hand.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Romans, Philippians, 1 Peter, and Revelation:

Matthew 28:18; Philippians 2:7-11; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 5:12; Revelation 19:16

Christ had come to earth and fulfilled everything that His Father had asked of Him. Because of His obedience, God was going to make Christ prosper. God gave Jesus a name above all other names and allowed Him to sit at the right hand of Himself. He placed Christ in a position where everyone else would bow and worship Christ because of the suffering that He had endured for all of us. He came to earth and took the punishment that we should be receiving; therefore God placed Him in a place of high honor. God put Christ in a place where He would be honored by each every man and through Christ alone could they receive true salvation.⁸¹

Isaiah 53:11a

*When the Servant sees all that is accomplished
by the travail of his soul, he will be satisfied.*

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

*By his knowledge the righteous one, My Servant,
will make it possible for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear their iniquities.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John:

Matthew 26:37-38; Matthew 27:46; Mark 14:33; Mark 15:34; Luke 22:44; John 12:27;

John 19:30

In Christ coming to earth, He was to take on the sins of the whole world and atone for them through His innocent death. In doing this though, He would have to experience large amounts of suffering. Ultimately, it would get to the point where He could no longer talk to God because He was so covered in sin. It is at this point that Christ feels that He has been forsaken by God, because in reality He had been. God could no longer look on Him when He was completely covered in sin. Therefore, Christ coming and suffering provided the atonement that would satisfy God.⁸²

Isaiah 53:11b

*When the Servant sees all that is accomplished
by the travail of his soul, he will be satisfied.
By his knowledge the righteous one, My Servant,
will make it possible for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear their iniquities.*

This verse is fulfilled in John and Romans:

John 4:34; John 6:38; John 8:29; John 9:4; John 12:49-50; John 14:31; John 17:4;

Romans 5:18-19

Christ had come so that everyone else in the world would be able to receive forgiveness and redemption. He was simply following through with what God had asked of Him. Coming down to earth, living a sinless life, and then dying a criminals death was not what Christ had

⁸² Ibid.

originally planned for Himself. The sole reason He was willing to do all of this was because He was God's servant and that was what God had asked of Him. Every action Christ took was done as a way to bring Christ glory. On his own Christ did not plan to come to earth to die a painful death, instead He was obeying everything that God had asked of him since He was God's servant.⁸³

Isaiah 53:11c

*When the Servant sees all that is accomplished
by the travail of his soul, he will be satisfied.
By his knowledge the righteous one, My Servant,
will make it possible for many to be counted righteous,
for he will bear their iniquities.*

This verse is fulfilled in Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Peter:

Acts 13:39; Romans 5:8-9; Romans 5:18; 1 Corinthians 6:11; 1 Peter 3:18

There was a necessity for Christ to come. Without His death and resurrection there is no way that people would be able to have a relationship with God. Christ came so that man could be justified before God. Because of His suffering, people were now able to receive forgiveness directly from God instead of through a middle man or a priest. The original system that God had established for people to receive atonement and forgiveness was no longer necessary because Christ provided a direct and personal route. Christ's death allows the world a pathway through which they can receive justification.⁸⁴

Isaiah 53:12a

*Therefore, I will divide the Servant a portion with the great,
And he will divide the spoils with the strong,
Because he poured out his soul even to death,
And being counted among the sinners*

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors.

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Acts, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Peter, and Revelation:

Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36; Acts 5:31; Ephesians 1:20-22; 1Peter 3:22;

Revelation 5:9-12

Because of Christ's sacrifice, the Messiah would be greatly exalted by God. No longer would it be necessary for Christ to understand everything that is happening in the world because He came to earth with one mission, to fulfill God's will. Christ came to earth and went above and beyond what was expected. He preached on the love of the Father as well as God's different characteristics. From His obedience came the ability for Christ to be given a great reward in Heaven. He received a name above all other names and a seat next to the right hand of the Father. The fact that large amounts of people came to believe in God while Christ was on earth was a reward in itself.

Isaiah 53:12b

*Therefore, I will divide the Servant a portion with the great,
And he will divide the spoils with the strong,
Because he poured out his soul even to death,
And being counted among the sinners
Yet he bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors.*

This verse is fulfilled in Matthew, Mark, and Luke:

Matthew 27:38; Mark 15:27; Luke 23:32

Christ had not done anything to deserve the death of a criminal, but He still accepted this punishment. He was both flogged and hung on a cross, two of the most humiliating and painful experiences of the time during Roman history. Christ never once spoke out about the punishment He was receiving. Instead He just accepted what was given to Him without saying a single word.

He ended up being crucified, a horribly humiliating death of criminals, between two men that had actually been condemned as criminals.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Ibid.

CREDIBILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION

Since it was written, this passage has been debated and discussed concerning the various different translations. The debate has covered almost every aspect of the chapter, the author, the time when it was written, and most importantly, the identity of the servant. The fact that the text is debated by such a wide variety of scholars and is still debated after this many years the text is saying “itself that it consists of an astounding report.”⁸⁶ In order to understand how the passage should be interpreted the original context of which it was written must be taken into account. “There is no other passage in the Bible which so clearly reveals both the common root of Judaism and Christianity and also the decisive difference which separates them.”⁸⁷ Therefore, an analysis of how this passage should be interpreted is necessary to better understand the Christian faith.

Originally both Jews and the Christians interpreted Isaiah 53 as a prophecy about the coming Messiah and a description of what he was going to accomplish in his lifetime. While both of these religions claim similar origins, they shifted over the years and today their interpretations no longer align in any capacity. The Jews believe that this passage is referring to the coming Messiah because no one yet has fulfilled the four main requirements: build the third temple, gather all Jews back to the Land of Israel, instill an era of world peace removing all hatred, oppression, suffering, and diseases, and universally spread the knowledge of the God of Israel ultimately uniting humanity as one.⁸⁸ In contrast, Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Isaiah 53 passage in multiple different ways. Unless Isaiah 53 is seen as God’s

⁸⁶ Isaiah 52:13-53:12 Commentary. (2001). In *The new interpreter's Bible: General articles & introduction, commentary, & reflections for each book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books : In twelve volumes.* (Vol. 6, pp. 468). Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon.

⁸⁷ Bellinger, W. H. *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins.* Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009. 73.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 80

sovereign plan it is simply another unjust story of the time, another death, another case of the picking on the weak, and another good man murdered for no known reason.⁸⁹ In order to draw an informed decision about which religion is correct in their interpretation, an understanding of how the vast amount of similarities and differences surfaced must first be explained.

In order to understand Christ's death in its fullest purpose, the original background in which it was written must be understood "The grasping of what is going on in Jesus' death, or in the servant's death before him, does not require [people] to be first witnesses, to be there on the spot. Indeed, had [people] been there, [they] likely would have gotten it wrong."⁹⁰ The disciples spent a number of years following Christ, listening to him preach, seeing him heal others, and simply observing how he lived his life. They were able to have a firsthand understanding of who Christ truly was and what his purpose was on earth. The disciples account of what happened during Jesus' life which is recorded in the Gospels can be counted as credible and authoritative.⁹¹ According to Christian tradition, the disciples later wrote the Gospels through the power of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, they were raised in the Jewish culture and were familiar with the Isaiah 53 passage when they finally sat down to record the history of Jesus's life. Therefore, through the Holy Spirit they were able to understand some of Christ's peculiar statements after He had left. Once they understood what Jesus had been trying to teach them while He was on earth, they drew upon their Jewish history to write an account that would explain Jesus's mission and purpose on earth. Thus, it is likely that as Old Testament writers had already used the

⁸⁹ Isaiah 52:13-53:12 Commentary. (2001). In *The new interpreter's Bible: General articles & introduction, commentary, & reflections for each book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books : In twelve volumes.* (Vol. 6, pp. 468). Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon.

⁹⁰ Isaiah 52:13-53:12 Commentary. (2001). In *The new interpreter's Bible: General articles & introduction, commentary, & reflections for each book of the Bible, including the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical books : In twelve volumes.* (Vol. 6, pp. 468). Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon.

⁹¹ The purpose of this paper is not to debate the authority of the New Testament books, for more on that topic additional sources will have to be consulted.

concept of intertextuality, the disciples choose to align Jesus' life with the Isaiah 53 passage in order to better explain and present the message of the Gospel to future readers.

Often times, Christ would say peculiar statements that caused people to think and question the laws that they had grown up learning and believing. Christ constantly repeated ideas from the Old Testament that the Jews considered laws using the same wording and context as the original ideas, but He would be implying a different meaning. He would say statements that were direct quotes from the Old Testament, and although these did not make sense at the time, the disciples later understood through the Holy Spirit allowing His message to be understood.

Through Christ's constant references and remarks to Him being the Son of God, the Messiah, the Suffering Servant, the disciples slowly realized, through the power of the Holy Spirit, that Jesus was telling the truth and had come to save the world from their sins. The statements He was proclaiming and the new ideas He was presenting were not being blasphemous like the rest of the world had believed. He was telling the truth and presenting ideas that were necessary for the world's salvation, but without the Holy Spirit, no one was able to understand Jesus' teaching. With the help of the Holy Spirit the disciples were able to put together that Jesus was the Suffering Servant, and understand that ultimately Jesus was the true Messiah. While Christ did not come with all of the pomp and circumstance that they had expected, He really was the fulfillment. They realized that that passage was not talking about Israel as a whole despite what the authorities attempted to persuade everyone to believe. Christ had come and was continually quoting this passage and the other Servant passages because He was their fulfillment.

Because of the disciples understanding of who Christ truly was, they intentionally began to write books that would later make up the Bible using direct quotes and references to Isaiah. They used the aid of intertextuality to explicitly point to Isaiah 53 in hopes of helping the Jews understand the conclusion they had been able to draw through their experiences with Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Jews were incredibly familiar with the Old Testament. So much so that they could quote large portions when asked and could rattle out all of the laws that they were supposed to uphold at all times. The disciples used this Biblical knowledge to their benefit in the style that they wrote the New Testament. Through constantly paralleling the prophecies from the Old Testament to Christ's life in the New Testament, the disciples were hoping that the Jews would be able to understand that Christ truly was the fulfillment of all of Messianic prophecies.

Another fact that is often forgotten in regards to the early Christians is that they too were Jews. These Jews simply had a more complete view of who Christ is and how they were to receive salvation and forgiveness for their sins. Initially and still now, there is no difference between a Jew and a Christian minus the fact that one does not believe that the Messiah has come and the other believes that the Messiah has come and is Jesus Christ. It was not until many years later that there became a distinction between Jews and Christians, originally they believed the same ideas and rules. The Jews began to believe that all of the prophecies for the Messiah had not been met through Jesus Christ so there was no way that He could be the true Messiah. Instead, they took up the belief that they were still waiting on the Messiah to come. The Christians though believed that Christ was the fulfillment of all of the Messianic prophecies and should be worshiped as such.

It is with this understanding that the Suffering Servant finally makes sense. Only when the disciples use of intertextuality is seen as inspired by the Holy Spirit and intentional in order

to teach the Jewish people, can Isaiah 53 be interpreted correctly. Isaiah 53 must be viewed with a twofold lens. An initial understanding that the ancient interpretation, from the Old Testament was that the Servant was either a metaphor for the nation of Israel itself or was an allusion to a future Messiah to come. Then when evaluating the disciples' accounts of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection the passage can be newly interpreted as referring to Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, Second Isaiah was able to write a passage describing the nation of Israel's current state and use such powerful language that Jesus would later use this same passage to announce His identity. A proper understanding of Isaiah 53 reveals presence and work of God throughout the history of the Jewish people and the Christian church.

CONCLUSION

Isaiah 53 demands analysis, simply because it has been debated so often. Its importance is affirmed every time a new angle, interpretation or piece of information is offered in order to help one's understanding. If Isaiah 53 did not have any implications on modern life, this discussion would have been neglected and only discussed by people interested in ancient texts in their original context. However, this passage has been the center of a great debate for years because its message is pivotal to understanding God's role in the world and His future plan for humanity.

As this paper has illustrated, the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53 implies that the Jewish God of the Old Testament, not only knew of the current suffering of His people, but was also preparing a much greater solution to end this suffering eternally. The structure and style of the Servant Song not only emphasize the passage's importance, but the theme presents an idea that is in stark contrast to anything previously told to the Hebrew people. The book of Isaiah introduced two new ideas concerning the Hebrew God. He asserted that Yahweh was the only God, not the most supreme of all the gods, but the only existing God and He began teaching that Yahweh is universal. In light of the Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53, it is clear that Isaiah was preaching in order to show the Jewish people the nature and heart of God as well as set the scene for the coming Messiah.

Although Jews and Christians share a collection of holy texts and a similar history, the message of Isaiah 53 is one of the first times one can begin to see a separation between the two religions. In the Old Testament, God's message to His people was one of hope for a future Messiah who will save the children of God. Isaiah 53 is a description of this Savior and His

purpose. The Christian identification of the Suffering Servant as Jesus Christ is the only correct interpretation of Isaiah 53.

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