

Waiting for the Messiah: *Good News or Fake News?*

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Introduction: *Judaism, Waiting for ‘Guffman?’*

In the 1996 ‘mockumentary’ *Waiting for Guffman*,¹ the residents of Blaine, Missouri² are excited about the debut of their original musical production, "Red, White, and Blaine," anticipating the presence of ‘Mort Guffman’ in the audience on opening night, because they believe that Guffman’s favorable review will be their ticket to Broadway. Blaine comes together despite significant (often hilarious) interpersonal challenges to put on an amazing show, but, spoiler alert: Guffman never shows. The man in the audience they think is Guffman is a nobody.

Judaism presents a sort of inverse *Guffman* situation. The Jewish savior, Jesus Christ, did arrive, but most Jews believed him to be a nobody. Despite the explosion of Christianity around them, Jews’ opinions of Jesus Christ have hardly changed from the time of His crucifixion.

In this paper, I argue that Christianity was born of Judaism and the relationship between these two revolutionary monotheistic religions is as between parent and child, but that modern-day Jews have nonetheless been left ‘waiting for Guffman’ by the willful ignorance of the good news by Jewish religious authorities, measures perhaps justified by the Jews’ predominating need to maintain an ethnoreligious identity in the face of nearly three millennia of persecution.

Judaism is to Christianity as Mother is to Child

Judaism and Christianity are almost eschatologically indistinguishable. Both Judaism and Christianity assert the existence of one God who, in the hereafter, will judge the dead based on their actions in life, wherein some will be resurrected to enjoy a new life in peace and happiness. Significantly, both Judaism and Christianity anticipate the arrival of a *messiah*, a divinely appointed leader who will restore the world to its original ideal state.³ The only distinguishing feature is in the identity of this messiah as the historical Jesus Christ. Both religions acknowledge that He existed. Jews deny that He is the Messiah.

¹ Christopher Guest, “Waiting for Guffman Trailer,” YouTube, September 30, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B6YZEkZ6qtw>.

² The fictional Blaine residents claim their town to be the ‘stool’ capital of the world (not *that* kind) and that it beat Roswell New Mexico to the punch in hosting the first UFO landing.

³ For a description of paradise familiar to both Christians and Jews, see Genesis 2–3 (New Revised Standard Version) (hereinafter “NSV”).

The Jewish *Torah* is comprised of the Old Testament books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The greater Jewish canon also includes other Old Testament works that bind Judaism inexorably to Christianity, most significantly the Book of Isaiah, wherein Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection are clearly prophesized.

Jesus as *Suffering Servant: The Good News of Isaiah*

Isaiah,⁴ the first of the latter prophets of the Jewish *Nevi'im*,⁵ speaks of a savior who will deliver the nation of Israel from exile.⁶ Believed to have been written during the Babylonian exile, a central theme of Isaiah is the *suffering servant*, a figure who will endure hardship and pain to redeem his people.⁷

Isaiah speaks of the Jewish messiah as the Mighty God,⁸ the Salvation of Jehovah,⁹ the Servant of Jehovah, the Covenant of the People, and the Light of the Gentiles.¹⁰ Described as a servant who is simultaneously priest, sacrifice, conqueror, sufferer, intercessor, and the channel of

⁴ Scholars generally agree that the prophet Isaiah wrote at least part of the book, but other authors also contributed. Some theories suggest that the book was written by three authors: Isaiah wrote chapters 1–39, an anonymous author wrote chapters 40–55, and another anonymous author wrote chapters 56–66. See L. LaMar Adams, “A Scientific Analysis of Isaiah Authorship | Religious Studies Center,” Byu.edu, 2022, <https://rsc.byu.edu/isaiah-prophets/scientific-analysis-isaiah-authorship>.

⁵ “The Hebrew canon of the section of the Old Testament known as the *Nevi'im*, or the Prophets, is divided into two sections: the Former Prophets and the Latter Prophets. The Former Prophets contains four historical books—Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings. The Latter Prophets includes four prophetic works—the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve (Minor) Prophets. The Twelve Prophets, formerly written on a single scroll, includes the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. Thus, in the Hebrew canon of the Prophets there are, in effect, eight books.” David Flusser and Frederick Fyvie Bruce, “Biblical Literature | Definition, Types, Significance, Survey, & Development,” Encyclopedia Britannica, October 19, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/biblical-literature/The-Nevi-im-Prophets>.

⁶ Isaiah 49-57.

⁷ Zondervan Academic, “Who Is the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53?,” Zondervan Academic, March 7, 2019, <https://zondervanacademic.com/blog/suffering-servant-isaiah-53>.

⁸ Isaiah 9:2-7 (NIV).

⁹ Isaiah 11:1-12:6 (NIV).

¹⁰ Isaiah 42:1-25 (NIV).

God's grace to sinners,¹¹ this wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace,¹² is, according to Isaiah *both Son and Father*.

Christians recognize the person thus described by Isaiah as the promised Messiah: Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the Son of God.¹³ The Prophet even anticipates Jesus' virgin birth by Mary seven centuries later.¹⁴

There are myriad additional references to Jesus or the Resurrection in the *Tanakh* or in the *Ketuvim*,¹⁵ of which the scripturally-interested Jew should be aware: Daniel 12:2 ("Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt."); Daniel 9:24–27 (the angel Gabriel speaks of an anointed one using the same Hebrew word (מָשִׁיחַ)¹⁶ from which *messiah* is derived; this figure will arrive and soon be "put to death"); and Micah 5:2 (a new king will be born in Bethlehem to rule Israel and restore ancient promises).

Finally, Isaiah Chapter 53 clearly prophesied God's atonement for humanity's sins through Jesus' suffering, rejection, and death.¹⁷ The chapter must be read in its entirety to fully appreciate the clarity of its prophecy later fulfilled by Jesus Christ.¹⁸

Jews: Good News is Fake News

Given the undeniable genetic relationship between Judaism and Christianity, their corresponding eschatological similarity, and the abundance and accuracy of the prophecies of Jesus' birth, life, death, and resurrection in the *Tanakh* and elsewhere in the Jewish canon, the

¹¹ Isaiah 52:13–53:12 (NIV).

¹² Isaiah 9:6 (NIV).

¹³ Isaiah 11 (NIV).

¹⁴ Isaiah 49:1 (NIV) ("Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.").

¹⁵ The *Ketuvim* (כְּתוּבִים) (writings), is the third and final section of the Hebrew Bible, after the *Torah* (תּוֹרָה) (teaching, doctrine, instruction, law, statute) and the *Nevi'im* (נְבִיאִים) (prophets). See Contributors, "Ketuvim," Wikipedia.org, June 28, 2003, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ketuvim>.

¹⁶ Meaning "anointed one" or "chosen to rule." See Contributors, "Messiah," Wikipedia.org (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., October 5, 2001), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messiah>.

¹⁷ Isaiah 53 (NIV).

¹⁸ See Appendix.

question naturally arises as to why Jews are...well, Jews (and not saved). Rabbi Louis Jacobs notes that:

[s]ome Jews believe that Judaism and Christianity have so much in common that it is permissible to speak of a Jewish-Christian tradition. But there is the strongest opposition on the part of all Jews, Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, to the attempts by Christian missionary groups to convert Jews to Christianity.¹⁹

This attitude has led to the suppression of the good news by Jewish authorities. Rabbis once read Isaiah Chapter 53 but removed it from the *Haftarah*²⁰ after it caused “confusion and arguments.”²¹ Additionally, unlike Christians, Jews are not necessarily *religious* and may consequently lack the incentive to investigate the clear messianic prophecies of the Hebrew Bible.

When theologically curious Jews are confronted with the ‘forbidden chapter’ of Isaiah, they appear first shocked and then profoundly moved.²² Unfortunately, while most Jews (73%) identify as ‘Jewish by religion,’²³ a significant portion are not highly observant, with only a small percentage practicing Judaism regularly and strictly.²⁴

This is not surprising where, as Winfried Courdan suggests, “[b]eing Jewish is (usually) not a choice, but a tradition one is born into.”²⁵

¹⁹ Rabbi Louis Jacobs, “Historic Jewish Views on Christianity,” My Jewish Learning, September 2, 2003, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-views-on-christianity>.

²⁰ The *Haftarah* is a reading from the Old Testament prophets recited in Jewish synagogues during the morning service on the sabbath and on festivals. See Rabbi Peretz Rodman, “What Is the Haftarah, and Why Do We Read It?,” My Jewish Learning, October 12, 2007, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/haftarah>.

²¹ Jonathan Bemis, “Forbidden Chapter of the Tanakh | Jewish Voice,” JewishVoice.org, 2016, <https://www.jewishvoice.org/read/blog/forbidden-chapter-tanakh>.

²² Jonathan Bemis, “The Forbidden Chapter: Isaiah 53 in the Hebrew Bible,” YouTube, September 25, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cGz9BVJ_k6s.

²³ Jeff Diamant, “Jews in U.S. Are Far Less Religious than Christians and Americans Overall, at Least by Traditional Measures,” Pew Research Center, May 13, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/05/13/jews-in-u-s-are-far-less-religious-than-christians-and-americans-overall-at-least-by-traditional-measures>.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, Second Edition. (InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012), [88](#).

Moreover, as Courduan aptly notes, the three millennia of persecution suffered by the Jews, including the “extermination of six million people in the Holocaust,”²⁶ are still at the fore of the Jewish cultural memory.²⁷ For many Jews, Judaism is not about theology or scripture but about community and, indeed, survival, both literal and cultural.

Rabbi Samuel Yolen of Keshet Israel Congregation in West Chester, Pennsylvania, urges that “Judaism is profoundly about life, about preserving it at all costs, about communal obligation and loving thy neighbor, and about “*ahavat Yisrael*,” the love of Israel and the Jewish people.”²⁸ When Rabbi Yolen is unavailable, congregants step up and lead, which was the case when I joined them for *Shabbat* morning services.

My first impression was of the armed security guard at the entrance and the message in the *Lech-Lecha*²⁹ services handout about using the “intruder alert system.” Jews are a people always on their guard, and for good reason. Israel has only been a nation since 1948³⁰ and has been under constant threat since its inception, with attacks by Arabs in 1948–49, 1956, 1967, 1973, 1982, 2006, and *from 2023 to the present*.

Living under constant threat has created a Judaic system without hierarchy. Although there were two rabbis attending *Shabbat*, they did not lead the services. One did give the *derasha*,³¹ explaining that Jews must be constantly on the move, advancing in their faith and their personal

²⁶ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions*, Second Edition. (InterVarsity Press Academic, 2012), [89](#).

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Rabbi Samuel Yolen, “Welcome to Keshet Israel Congregation,” Keshet-israel.org, 2016, <https://www.keshet-israel.org/about-us/welcome-messages>.

²⁹ *Lech-Lecha* is the third weekly Torah portion in the Jewish cycle of Torah reading. It's made up of Genesis 12:1–17:27 and tells the story of Abraham and Sarah's journey to a new land and faith. The phrase “Lech-Lecha” is Hebrew for “go!” or “leave!” See Contributors, “Lech-Lecha,” Wikipedia.org (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 2018), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lech-Lecha>.

³⁰ The State of Israel was created in 1948 in response to the Zionist movement to provide a homeland for the Jewish people, who had faced persecution and instability for thousands of years. See American Experience, “Declaration of Israel’s Independence, 1948,” Pbs.org (American Experience, January 22, 2019), <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/truman-israel>.

³¹ *Derasha* (דְּרָשָׁה) means “discourse” or “homily.” The word *derasha* comes from the Hebrew word *lidrosh*, which means “to seek.” In biblical literature, *derash* means “interpretation” and was used to derive religious or social morals from the text. See Editors., “Derasha | Hebrew Bible, Talmud, Torah,” Encyclopedia Britannica, July 20, 1998, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/derasha>.

lives, an obvious vestige of the Jewish history of being uprooted from almost every place they have called home.

After joining the congregation for *kiddush*³² and *ha'Motzi*³³, the rabbi who gave the *derasha* answered my observation of Judaism's relatively 'flat' structure by explaining that a person has only two lines: one directly to God and one directly to his fellow faithful.

Conclusion: Total Evangelization?

Jews are understandably resistant to conversion because it would mean abandoning a family group that traces its lineage back to Abraham—one that has survived three millennia of persecution and attempted annihilation. For Jews, being Jewish is not a matter of theology or hermeneutics but a matter of survival—an applied existentialism forged in the Holocaust,³⁴ by enslavement under Pharaoh, and by suicide bombers, mass shooters, and an Arab population in the Middle East that has sworn to destroy the State of Israel.

One would expect such people to view outsiders (*goyim*) with skepticism and even suspicion. But the congregation of Keshet Israel warmly welcomed me, sharing their sacred practices—even breaking bread. When I entered the synagogue, I was a *goy*, but when I left, enlightened, happy, and profoundly changed, I was something else. What that was, I'm not quite certain, but I felt that I newly *belonged* to something great and powerful.

It was then that I realized that there was likely no argument under the sun that would draw these resilient, deeply spiritual people to a belief in Jesus Christ because that would mean leaving

³² The *Kiddush* (קידוש) or 'sanctification' is a blessing recited over wine or grape juice to sanctify the Shabbat and Jewish holidays. See Contributors, "Kiddush," Wikipedia.org (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., June 2004), <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiddush>.

³³ The *ha'Motzi* (המוצ'א) is a brief prayer recited before consuming bread. See Lawrence A Hoffman, "Hamotzi: The Deeper Significance of the Blessing over Bread," My Jewish Learning, September 30, 2003, <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/hamotzi-the-deeper-significance-of-the-blessing-over-bread>.

³⁴ The word "holocaust" originally derived from the Koine Greek word *holokauston*, meaning "a completely (*holos*) burnt (*kaustos*) sacrificial offering," or "a burnt sacrifice offered to a god":

In Hellenistic religion, gods of the earth and underworld received dark animals, which were offered by night and burnt in full. The word holocaust was later adopted in Greek translations of the Torah to refer to the olah, standard communal and individual sacrificial burnt offerings that Jews were required to make in the times of the Temple in Jerusalem. In its Latin form, *holocaustum*, the term was first used with specific reference to a massacre of Jewish people by the chroniclers Roger of Howden^[4] and Richard of Devizes in England in the 1190s.

Contributors, "Names of the Holocaust," Wikipedia.org (Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., December 11, 2005), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_the_Holocaust.

friends—really family—behind. I left Keshet Israel convinced that the Jewish people will accept Christ only as a *people* because that is how they face *everything*.³⁵

³⁵ If the Jews are to accept Christ, the work of Jewish organizations like The Jewish Voice will be instrumental. They are Jewish “believers in Jesus committed to showing His love and sharing the life-changing message of the Messiah with Jewish people.” Jonathan Bernis, “About | Jewish Voice,” JewishVoice.org, 2014, <https://www.jewishvoice.org/about>.

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Appendix

Isaiah 53 (NIV)

Who has believed our message^(A)
 and to whom has the arm^(B) of the Lord been revealed?^(C)
 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,^(D)
 and like a root^(E) out of dry ground.
 He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
 nothing in his appearance^(F) that we should desire him.
 He was despised and rejected by mankind,
 a man of suffering,^(G) and familiar with pain.^(H)
 Like one from whom people hide^(I) their faces
 he was despised,^(J) and we held him in low esteem.
 Surely he took up our pain
 and bore our suffering,^(K)
 yet we considered him punished by God,^(L)
 stricken by him, and afflicted.^(M)
 But he was pierced^(N) for our transgressions,^(O)
 he was crushed^(P) for our iniquities;
 the punishment^(Q) that brought us peace^(R) was on him,
 and by his wounds^(S) we are healed.^(T)
 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,^(U)
 each of us has turned to our own way;^(V)
 and the Lord has laid on him
 the iniquity^(W) of us all.
 He was oppressed^(X) and afflicted,
 yet he did not open his mouth;^(Y)
 he was led like a lamb^(Z) to the slaughter,^(AA)
 and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
 so he did not open his mouth.
 By oppression^(a) and judgment^(AB) he was taken away.
 Yet who of his generation protested?
 For he was cut off from the land of the living;^(AC)
 for the transgression^(AD) of my people he was punished.^(b)
 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,^(AE)
 and with the rich^(AF) in his death,

though he had done no violence,^(AG)
 nor was any deceit in his mouth.^(AH)
 Yet it was the Lord's will^(AI) to crush^(AJ) him and cause him to suffer,^(AK)
 and though the Lord makes^[c] his life an offering for sin,^(AL)
 he will see his offspring^(AM) and prolong his days,
 and the will of the Lord will prosper^(AN) in his hand.
 After he has suffered,^(AO)
 he will see the light^(AP) of life^[d] and be satisfied^[e];
 by his knowledge^[f] my righteous servant^(AQ) will justify^(AR) many,
 and he will bear their iniquities.^(AS)
 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,^{[g](AT)}
 and he will divide the spoils^(AU) with the strong,^[h]
 because he poured out his life unto death,^(AV)
 and was numbered with the transgressors.^(AW)
 For he bore^(AX) the sin of many,^(AY)
 and made intercession^(AZ) for the transgressors.

Footnotes:

- a. Isaiah 53:8 Or From arrest.
- b. Isaiah 53:8 Or generation considered / that he was cut off from the land of the living, / that he was punished for the transgression of my people?
- c. Isaiah 53:10 Hebrew though you make.
- d. Isaiah 53:11 Dead Sea Scrolls (see also Septuagint); Masoretic Text does not have the light of life.
- e. Isaiah 53:11 Or (with Masoretic Text) He will see the fruit of his suffering / and will be satisfied.
- f. Isaiah 53:11 Or by knowledge of him.
- g. Isaiah 53:12 Or many.
- h. Isaiah 53:12 Or numerous.

Cross references:

- A. Isaiah 53:1 : S Isa 28:9; Ro 10:16*.
- B. Isaiah 53:1 : S Ps 98:1; S Isa 30:30.
- C. Isaiah 53:1 : Jn 12:38*.
- D. Isaiah 53:2 : S 2Ki 19:26; S Job 14:7; S Isa 4:2.
- E. Isaiah 53:2 : S Isa 11:10.
- F. Isaiah 53:2 : Isa 52:14.
- G. Isaiah 53:3 : Ps 69:29.
- H. Isaiah 53:3 : ver 4, 10; S Ex 1:10; S Mt 16:21; Lk 18:31-33; Heb 5:8.

- I. Isaiah 53:3 : S Dt 31:17; Isa 1:15.
- J. Isaiah 53:3 : S 1Sa 2:30; S Ps 22:6; Mt 27:29; Jn 1:10-11.
- K. Isaiah 53:4 : Mt 8:17*.
- L. Isaiah 53:4 : S Dt 5:24; S Job 4:5; Jer 23:5-6; 25:34; Eze 34:23-24; Mic 5:2-4; Zec 13:7; Jn 19:7.
- M. Isaiah 53:4 : S ver 3; S Ge 12:17; S Ru 1:21.
- N. Isaiah 53:5 : S Ps 22:16.
- O. Isaiah 53:5 : S Ex 28:38; S Ps 39:8; S Jn 3:17; Ro 4:25; 1Co 15:3; Heb 9:28.
- P. Isaiah 53:5 : Ps 34:18.
- Q. Isaiah 53:5 : S Isa 50:6.
- R. Isaiah 53:5 : S Isa 9:6; Ro 5:1.
- S. Isaiah 53:5 : Isa 1:6; Mt 27:26; Jn 19:1.
- T. Isaiah 53:5 : S Dt 32:39; S 2Ch 7:14; 1Pe 2:24-25.
- U. Isaiah 53:6 : S Ps 95:10; 1Pe 2:24-25.
- V. Isaiah 53:6 : S 1Sa 8:3; Isa 56:11; 57:17; Mic 3:5.
- W. Isaiah 53:6 : ver 12; S Ex 28:38; Ro 4:25.
- X. Isaiah 53:7 : Isa 49:26.
- Y. Isaiah 53:7 : S Mk 14:61; 1Pe 2:23.
- Z. Isaiah 53:7 : Mt 27:31; S Jn 1:29.
- AA. Isaiah 53:7 : S Ps 44:22.
- BB. Isaiah 53:8 : Mk 14:49.
- CC. Isaiah 53:8 : Ps 88:5; Da 9:26; Ac 8:32-33*.
- DD. Isaiah 53:8 : ver 12; S Ps 39:8.
- EE. Isaiah 53:9 : Mt 27:38; Mk 15:27; Lk 23:32; Jn 19:18.
- FF. Isaiah 53:9 : Mt 27:57-60; Mk 15:43-46; Lk 23:50-53; Jn 19:38-41.
- GG. Isaiah 53:9 : Isa 42:1-3.
- HH. Isaiah 53:9 : S Job 16:17; 1Pe 2:22*; 1Jn 3:5; Rev 14:5.
- II. Isaiah 53:10 : Isa 46:10; 55:11; Ac 2:23.
- JJ. Isaiah 53:10 : ver 5.
- KK. Isaiah 53:10 : S ver 3; S Ge 12:17.
- LL. Isaiah 53:10 : S Lev 5:15; Jn 3:17.
- MM. Isaiah 53:10 : S Ps 22:30.
- NN. Isaiah 53:10 : S Jos 1:8; S Isa 49:4.
- OO. Isaiah 53:11 : Jn 10:14-18.
- PP. Isaiah 53:11 : S Job 33:30.
- QQ. Isaiah 53:11 : S Isa 20:3; Ac 7:52.
- RR. Isaiah 53:11 : S Isa 6:7; Jn 1:29; Ac 10:43; S Ro 4:25.
- SS. Isaiah 53:11 : S Ex 28:38.
- TT. Isaiah 53:12 : S Isa 6:1; S Php 2:9.
- UU. Isaiah 53:12 : S Ex 15:9; S Ps 119:162; Lk 11:22.

- VV. Isaiah 53:12 : Mt 26:28, 38, 39, 42.
- WW. Isaiah 53:12 : Mt 27:38; Mk 15:27*; Lk 22:37*; 23:32.
- XX. Isaiah 53:12 : S ver 6; 1Pe 2:24.
- YY. Isaiah 53:12 : Heb 9:28.
- ZZ. Isaiah 53:12 : Isa 59:16; S Ro 8:34.