The Prophecies of Jesus

Isaiah 53

Lesson 9

1. Hello. My name is Ken Samuel, and this is the ninth part of an eleven-part series on the prophecies of Jesus that was originally created by Stephen Katz of Jews for Jesus. Today, we are going to look at what many missionaries consider to be the most important prophecy in the whole Bible for witnessing to Jews. It is commonly known as “Isaiah 53,” but the prophesy actually begins three verses earlier. Remember that the chapter breaks were added less than 1,000 years ago, and they are not generally considered by most to be inerrant divinely-inspired scripture, so we’re free to argue that there are better places to put chapter breaks. <click>
2. So, in this lesson, we’ll focus on the passage that begins at Isaiah 52:13 and ends at the end of chapter 53, Isaiah 53:12. And if you’re not sure that’s appropriate, <click> look at this Isaiah scroll. <click> Do you see that gap? The verse that follows it is chapter 54, verse 1. (Remember that Hebrew is read from right to left.) <click> And this other gap is followed by chapter 52, verse 13. I’m not sure why the first gap wasn’t chosen as a chapter boundary, but, for brevity, I’ll refer to this entire passage, from Isaiah 52:13 to Isaiah 53:12 as “Isiah 53” for the rest of this lesson. <click>
3. So, let’s read it. “See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him — his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness — so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand. Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.” So here is the missionaries’ interpretation. <click> At the beginning of the passage, the speaker is God almighty. <click> And, unsurprisingly, the missionaries believe that the servant is Jesus Christ. <click> And when was Jesus raised and lifted up and highly exalted? This is when “he was taken up into heaven and he sat at the right hand of God.” (Mark 16:19) <click> The kings are the representatives of all of the people who don’t believe in Jesus. <click> And they will be surprised when they see Jesus return in all his glory in the future. <click> He was despised by the Jewish leaders who had him arrested, tried, convicted, and executed. I’m not going to go through the whole passage verse by verse. I’m just showing you the highlights. <click>
4. Isaiah 53 continues: “Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.” <click> So, the word “pierced” is referring to Jesus’ crucifixion, which, as we said last week, involved his hands and feet being pierced. <click> And now, the speakers are us, all of humankind, <click> and it was our sins that caused the death of Jesus. <click> And, as a result of his death, our sins have been forgiven. We have been healed from to the potential punishment we rightly deserved. <click> In the Bible, “cut off” either means killed or exiled. <click> In the case, we see that it means killed, because it says he was cut off from the land of the living, cut off from life. <click> And the wicked people who Jesus was killed with were the two thieves who were crucified on either side of him. <click> And then a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea, buried Jesus in his tomb. <click>
5. And our passage ends in the following way: “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” <click> Jesus truly suffered, <click> since he was beaten, flogged, mocked, and crucified. And then, Isaiah 53 makes the greatest prediction of all, <click> Jesus rose again. <click>
6. So, to summarize the missionaries’ interpretation of Isaiah 53, <click> they say that the suffering servant was Jesus. <click> This prophesy describes his crucifixion, his death, his resurrection, and the glory he will have when he comes again, riding on the clouds of Heaven. <click> Isaiah 53 states the gospel message, that Jesus died to atone for the sins of all mankind, and it states that clearly, concisely, and repeatedly. There are eleven places in Isaiah 53 where this message can be found. Verse four says it four times: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed.” It can also be found in verse 6, “The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” verse 7, “For the transgression of my people he was punished.” verse 10, “The Lord makes his life an offering for sin,” twice in verse 11, “My righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.” and twice in verse 12, “he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.” This seems like overkill, but the point is surely made. <click>
7. Now it’s the anti-missionaries’ turn. <click> They agree that the speaker at the beginning of the passage is God, but the servant is not Jesus. <click> It’s the Jews. <click> The Jews will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted when the true Messiah comes, saves them from their enemies, and sets up his glorious kingdom for them to live in. <click> The kings are the Gentile leaders who represent all of their people. <click> And they will be surprised when the Jewish Messiah comes, and it’s not Jesus. <click> And the Jews have been despised by the Gentiles throughout the centuries. <click>
8. Now, the Gentiles *thought* that <click> God wanted them to persecute the Jews, to punish them for rejecting Jesus. But they were wrong. <click> The only reason the Jews were persecuted was because <click> the Gentiles were sinning against them. <click> The missionaries were right when they said that “cut off” can mean killed or exiled, but they were wrong to say that it means killed in this case. <click> It actually means exiled. <click> And “the land of the living” is a code phrase that refers to the land of Israel numerous times in the Bible. <click>
9. Again, <click> the Jews suffered when they were persecuted. But this prophesy predicts their return to the promised land in 1948, <click> when the state of Israel was born. <click>
10. So, in the anti-missionaries’ interpretation, <click> the suffering servant is the Jews. <click> When did the Gentiles cause the Jews to suffer? Well let’s start with the three exiles, <click> courtesy of the Assyrians in the 8th century BC, the Babylonians in the following century, and the Romans in 70AD. <click> Then, there were the crusades, <click> the inquisition, <click> numerous pogroms, and as if that wasn’t enough, <click> six and a half million Jews were murdered in the holocaust. <click> The prophesy says that the Jewish people died to the land when they were exiled, and then they returned to metaphorically rise again. <click> When the true Messiah comes, the Jews will be exalted, and the Gentiles will be completely surprised. <click> The prophesy tells us how the Gentiles believed they were doing God’s work by punishing Jews for rejecting Jesus, but they will discover that God still loves the Jews, and by persecuting them, the Gentiles were sinning. <click> Here’s what Rabbi Tovia Singer, who hosted a radio show in Israel, said: “… the prevailing rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 53 ascribes the ‘servant’ to the nation of Israel [the Jews] who silently endured unimaginable suffering at the hands of its gentile oppressors. The speakers, in this most-debated chapter, are the stunned kings of nations who will bear witness to the messianic age and the final vindication of the Jewish people following their long and bitter exile.” <click>
11. So, are you surprised that God’s servant could be the Jews? Well if we look throughout the book of Isaiah, we can find nine places where the Jews are called God’s servant. <click> In chapter 41, Isaiah wrote, “‘But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you.’” When the Bible says “Jacob” or “Israel,” it’s sometimes referring to the man named Jacob, son of Isaac, son of Abraham, whose name God changed to Israel. But other times, these names refer to all of that man’s descendants, the nation of Israel, which we now call “the Jews.” <click> So, these verses explicitly say that the servant in this chapter is Israel, Jacob, and his descendants, the Jews. <click> In chapter 44, verse 1, “‘But now listen, Jacob, my servant, Israel, whom I have chosen...’” <click> This verse explicitly states that the servant is Jacob, Israel, the Jews. <click> The following verse says, “‘Do not be afraid, Jacob, my servant, Jeshurun [upright one] whom I have chosen.’” <click> Again, Jacob is God’s servant. <click> And later in that chapter, we read, “‘Remember these things, Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you, you are my servant...’” <click> Jacob, aka Israel, is God’s servant. <click> In the next chapter, Isaiah says, “‘For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen...’” <click> My servant is Jacob/Israel. <click> And Chapter 48, verse 20, says, “‘The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob.’” <click> And there are two other places <click> that explicitly state that God’s servant is Jacob or Israel. <click> So, from the surrounding context of other mentions of God’s servant in the book of Isaiah, it is clear that God’s servant in Isaiah 53 is also Jacob, Israel, the Jews. <click>`
12. Anyway, Jesus couldn’t possibly be the suffering servant, because he didn’t fulfill the entire prophesy in Isaiah 53. There are at least three things in the prophesy that Jesus didn’t do. <click> “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” <click> Well Jesus was not silent. The gospel writers recorded seven things that Jesus said while he was hanging on the cross. <click> Also, the prophesy says, “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death...” But Jesus did the opposite. <click> He was buried in a rich man’s tomb, not wicked people’s graves, and he died with wicked people, hanging on crosses. <click> Another thing that Jesus didn’t do: “... he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.” <click> But according to most people Jesus never had any children. Christians were in an uproar when Dan Brown said that he did. <click>
13. Now let’s look at how the Christians mistranslated the Bible to twist it for their purposes. <click> Let’s start with verse 6. The NIV says, “... and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.” <click> But Moshe Shulman said that translation is incorrect, and a correct translation is, “... and the Lord accepted his prayer for our iniquities.” <click> Shulman goes on to say, “In fact. there is a prayer said in many synagogues, TO THIS DAY, for the well being of the government.” Jews pray for the Gentiles and their governments in the same way that Christians pray for the governments of the world. <click> So, what this verse is saying is that the Jews prayed for the Gentiles, and God accepted their prayers and forgave the Gentiles for their sins. <click>
14. Here’s another Christian mistranslation. The NIV says, “But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities...” But “for” is incorrect in both places. The Hebrew word means “because of”. <click> The JPS (Jewish Publication Society) version translates it correctly as, “But he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities...” Now we can see what it really means. <click> The Gentiles were sinning against the Jews by persecuting them, and that’s why the Jews suffered. <click> The Jews were wounded, they suffered, because of the Gentiles’ transgressions, persecuting the Jews. The Jews were crushed, they were persecuted, because of the Gentiles’ iniquities, they sinned against the Jews. <click>
15. Here’s another Christian mistranslation. Verse 8, according to the NIV, says, “For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished.” The second “he was” is incorrect. <click> That pronoun and verb are plural, not singular. The original Hebrew word is plural. It should be “they were.” The first “he was” is correct. That instance is singular. But the other one should be plural. <click> Now, it’s not unusual for Israel to be referred to in the plural in the Bible, since the Jews are many people. And the singular pronoun can be used too, since they are one nation. <click> Here’s an interesting verse in chapter 43 of Isaiah: “‘You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord, “and my servant whom I have chosen...’” <click> Notice that is Israel is referred to in the plural, witnesses, and the singular, servant — in the same verse. That’s how flexible Isaiah is when referencing Israel. <click> Anyway, this proves that the servant isn’t Jesus, since he’s only one man, singular. The Christian translators hid the fact from you that the servant is plural too. <click>
16. We’ve got another mistranslation, this time in verse 11. The NIV says, “… by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.” But that’s not correct. <click> This verse is correctly translated in the Darby Bible: “... by his knowledge shall my righteous servant instruct many in righteousness; and \*he\* shall bear their iniquities.” (The asterisks are from the Darby Bible.) If you’re not sure what the Darby Bible is, <click> this is what Bible.com says about it: “The Darby Bible is a fairly literal, word-for-word translation, which adheres closely to the original Hebrew and Greek in tense and structure.” So, with the correct translation, we see that this is saying that <click> the Jews will teach the Gentiles about God. And, as you may know, the Jews are commanded to do that. <click> One place where we see that command is Isaiah 49:6, which says, “‘I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.’” <click>
17. And here's yet another mistranslation. “Yet it was the Lord’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin...” <click> So, the NIV says, “... the Lord makes his life an offering for sin...” <click> That makes it sound like the servant is a sin sacrifice, an offering for sin. <click> But the Jewish Publication Society gives us the correct translation: “... he made himself an offering for guilt...” So here, we see that the servant isn't the sin sacrifice. <click> He's made a sin sacrifice for himself to atone for his own sins. <click> It's like saying, “He made himself a sandwich.” That's not saying he is the sandwich. It means that he made the sandwich for himself. He made the sin offering for himself, to atone for his own sins. <click>
18. So, the missionaries have a lot of explaining to do. We'll start with the question of who god’s servant is. The anti-missionaries listed eight places in Isaiah where the servant is the Jews. But the missionaries have a concordance too. <click> Let’s look at some other places where we find the phrase “my servant,” <click> starting with Isaiah 20:3. “Then the Lord said, ‘Just as my servant Isaiah...’” <click> So, in this verse, God’s servant is the prophet, Isaiah. <click> And in chapter 22, “‘In that day I will summon my servant, Eliakim son of Hilkiah.’” <click> Here, the servant is Eliakim. <click> And look at Isaiah 37:35. “‘... for the sake of David my servant!’” <click> So here, God’s servant is King David. <click> “And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants...” <click> So, God’s servants can even be foreigners. <click> There are places where the Bible mentions God’s servant but doesn’t explicitly tell us who that is. For example, <click> “‘Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight...’” <click> This is the first verse of Isaiah 41, and this chapter boundary does mark a change of subject. So, there’s no preceding context to tell us who the servant is. <click> Here are some other occurrences of “my servant” with no explicit referent. <click> So, the conclusion of this analysis is that the servant in chapter 53 could be Israel, or it could be somebody else. It might even be Jesus. <click> And anyway, verse 3 makes it abundantly clear that the servant isn't Israel. <click> It says, “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.” So, the servant is a man. How can Israel be thought of a single man? <click>
19. So, the anti-missionaries showed us three parts of the prophesy that, according to them, Jesus didn’t fulfill. <click> The first one says that the servant was silent, and Jesus wasn’t silent on the cross. That’s true. <click> But he was silent during his trail when witnesses were flinging false accusations at him left and right. <click> The anti-missionaries say that Jesus fulfilled the opposite of verse 9. Let’s take a look at that verse again. <click> “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death...” The anti-missionaries misunderstand this verse. <click> What it’s saying is that the Roman soldiers originally intended to bury Jesus with the two thieves. That was his original grave assignment. But then when he died, in his death, his grave assignment changed. That’s when Jesus was buried in a rich man’s tomb. <click> And as for the claim that Jesus never had any children, well he never had any literal children. <click> But the church is his spiritual offspring. <click>
20. Now let’s see how the missionaries respond to the anti-missionaries’ mistranslation arguments. Moshe Shulman says verse 6 should be translated as “... and the Lord accepted his prayer for our iniquities.” Well, let’s look at the original Hebrew. <click> The first word, “va-ah-doe-nye,” means “the Lord.” The second word is “hif-gee-ah,” which means “he intercedes.” Next, “boe” means “in him,” and “own ate” means “depravity of,” and “koo-la-noo” means “all of us.” That’s the literal word-for-word translation. Do you see the word “prayer” anywhere in there? Nope. It seems Shulman made it up. Anyone can post anything on the internet, you know. There is the word “intercedes,” but that’s okay with the missionaries, because Jesus interceded between us and God by taking God’s punishment for our sins. <click> And the JPS translation, which the anti-missionaries seem to like, doesn’t have the word “prayer” either. <click>
21. So, the anti-missionaries say the word “for” should be changed to “because of” in two places in verse 5. Well, that’s arguable, but it doesn’t matter, <click> because the latter translation still allows for the missionaries’ interpretation. The NIV translation works for the missionaries’ interpretation but not the anti-missionaries’ interpretation, but “because of” makes both interpretations possible. <click>
22. So, verse 8 uses a plural pronoun to refer to the servant. The missionaries don’t dispute that point. But what they do dispute is the argument that Jesus cannot be plural. <click> The doctrine of the trinity says that there is one God in three persons, so, since Jesus is God, he is both one and three. He is singular and plural at the same time. <click>
23. And the anti-missionaries showed us that the Darby Bible has the word “instruct” in verse 11, which is problematic for the missionaries. <click> However, biblegateway.com provides us with 56 English translations of the Bible, and the only one that has the word “instruct” is Darby. So maybe that’s a mistake. <click> And the original Hebrew word is “yatz-deek,” which, according to Google Translate, means “will be justified” or “would be righteous,” not “instruct.” <click>
24. Now remember that, for verse 10, the anti-missionaries said “he made his life an offering” is like “he made himself a sandwich.” <click> Well, the word-for-word translation of the original Hebrew is “you will put guilt his soul.” So which translation is correct? Well, the answer is... <click> I don’t know. Sometimes the Bible is unclear, leaving a lot of room for translators’ interpretations. <click>
25. Now there is one verse that, it seems, the anti-missionaries can’t handle. I’ve read many, heard many, and watched many things the anti-missionaries said, and they always skip the latter part of verse 5. <click> “… the punishment that brought us peace was on the suffering servant, and by his wounds we are healed.” <click> So, anti-missionaries, when the Gentiles persecuted the Jews, please tell me how they were healed? I think the word “healed” is a problem for the anti-missionaries. <click> I mean, in what way were the Gentiles injured or sick? <click> And if you hit a person, how can that heal your injury or sickness? <click> And, the JPS translation also has the word “healed.” <click> And the Hebrew word, “neer-pah,” means “healed” or “cured,” according to Google Translate. <click>
26. So, in the end, you get to decide who to believe, the missionaries or the anti-missionaries. <click>