

A Comparison Between Jewish and Christian Interpretations of Messianic Prophecies in Isaiah 53

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ABSTRACT: In this research, the author will raise one of the problems in the book of Isaiah which has become a debate regarding the Messiah in Judaism and Christianity. The prophecy regarding the coming of the Jewish Messiah in the Tanakh is found in the book of Isaiah chapter 53 which Christians understand as Jesus Christ. This section is entitled "The Suffering Servant," which was long understood by the leaders of Judaism as a prophecy of the Redeemer who would come to Zion. Rabbinic interpretations of Isaiah 53 ascribe the "slave" to the nation of Israel who silently endured unimaginable suffering at the hands of gentile oppressors. The method used in this research is a qualitative approach, namely a descriptive research method by analyzing the text of Isaiah 53 from various literary sources. This research aims to discover the hermeneutical studies hidden by Judaism in Isaiah 53:4-53:10 and to explain the form of hermeneutical apologetics of the Messianic Prophecy Based on Isaiah 53:4-53:10 towards the View of Judaism.

KEYWORDS: Hermeneutics, Messianic, Isaiah, Apologetics, Judaism, Christianity

I. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most comprehensive prophecy of the coming Jewish Messiah in the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) is found in Isaiah chapter 53. This passage, titled "The Suffering Servant," has long been understood by Judaism's leaders as a prophecy of the Redeemer coming to Zion. The following is an example of the traditional Jewish belief regarding the identity of the "Suffering Servant of the Lord" in Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Despite strong objections from conservative Christian apologists, the prevailing rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 53 ascribes the "servant" to the nation of Israel who silently endures unimaginable suffering at the hands of Gentile oppressors. The stimulus for the world's bewildered response contained in this famous group of chapters at the end of Isaiah is the unexpected salvation of Israel. The redemption of God's people is the central theme in the previous verse (52:12) where "you" signifies the Jews protected and delivered by God. In addition, the "suffering barren woman" in the following chapter is protected and saved by God, and is also universally recognized as the nation of Israel (54:1) (Rabbah, n.d., p. 88).

The outdated claim by Christian apologists that the famous Jewish commentator Rashi (1040 CE-1105 CE) was the first to identify the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 with the nation of Israel is inaccurate and misleading. In fact, Origenes, a prominent and influential church father, admitted in 248 CE - eight centuries before Rashi was born that the consensus among the Jews of his time was that Isaiah 53 "refers to the entire Jewish people", considered as one individual, and was in a state of dispersion and suffering, in order that many proselytes could be obtained, due to the dispersion of the Jews among the many gentiles (Chadwick, 1980, p. 50). In the Babylonian Talmud it says, "The Messiah, what is his name? The Rabbis answered, his name is He Who Was Stricken with Leprosy, as it says, 'but in truth, it was our sickness that he bore, and our affliction that he bore, whereas we thought he was stricken with a plague (leprosy), smitten and afflicted by God...' (Sanhedrin 98b) (Rodkinson, 1918, pp. 120-121). In the Targum Jonathan ben Uzziel states, "Behold, my servant the Messiah will prosper, he will be exalted and elevated and will be exceedingly strong." (Isaiah, n.d.).

The Book of Zohar states, "But he was pierced for our transgressions,' etc. In the Garden of Eden there was a palace called the Palace of the Sons of Sickness; the Messiah will enter into this palace and gather every sickness, every affliction and every torment that Israel has experienced; they will come and be borne by Him. If it is not he who relieves them from Israel and bears them, then no one else is able to bear the punishment upon Israel for their rebellion against the law: as it is written, "But behold, it is our sickness that he bears." (Yohai et al., n.d.). Modern Jewish rabbis like Tovia Singer consider the Suffering Servant of the Lord referred to in Isaiah chapter 53 to refer to Bamsga Israel, Israel's warriors, Isaiah himself, or even Moses or other prophets. However, Isaiah is clearly speaking of the Messiah, in accordance with the conclusions of many ancient rabbis. The second verse of Isaiah chapter 53 confirms this. This figure grows as "a stump, and as a shoot out of dry ground.

"The shoot that emerges undoubtedly refers to the Messiah, which is actually a common Messianic reference in Isaiah and other books. David's descendants will be cut down on the day of judgment like a felled tree, but Israel has been promised that there will be a new shoot growing from the stump of the tree. King Messiah is that shoot. Undoubtedly, the "Suffering Servant of the Lord" in Isaiah chapter 53 refers to the Messiah. He is the one who is highly exalted. Kings will shut their mouths when they see Him. The Messiah is the shoot that grew out of David's fallen seed. He becomes the King of kings. He is the one who atones for the sins of all mankind. The astonished reaction of the nations of the world to the unexpected vindication and redemption of the Jewish people in the messianic age is a recurring theme throughout the Hebrew Scriptures.⁴ Israel's neighbors will be amazed when their ancient judgment of the Jews is finally proven wrong. Throughout Israel's long and bitter exile, the nations mistakenly attributed the Jews' miserable predicament to a stubborn rejection of world religions. In the End Times, however, the gentiles will discover what was until then unimaginable - the unwavering Jews were, in fact, all along faithful to the one true God. On the other hand, "We despised and did not consider him" (53:3).

II. RESEARCH METHODS

The method used in this research is a qualitative approach, which is a descriptive research method that processes and analyzes research to draw conclusions. In other words, ongoing research is research that emphasizes the analysis of data processed using this research method, and a meaningful relationship between the variables studied will be obtained. Descriptive method is a method used to explain or analyze the findings of a study, but not to draw broader conclusions (Jason & Glenwick, n.d., p. 77). The author will analyze and compare Jewish and Christian interpretations of Isaiah 53 from various literature sources.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Jewish Rabbinic Interpretation of Isaiah 53 : According to Rabbi Tovia Singer, Isaiah 53 is the fourth of the four "Servant Songs". (The others are found in Isaiah chapters 42, 49 and 50) Although the "servant" in Isaiah 53 is not overtly identified - these verses only refer to "My servant" (52:13, 53:11) - the "servant" in each of the previous Servant Songs is clearly and repeatedly identified as the Jewish nation. Beginning with chapter 41, the equation of the Servant of the Lord with the nation of Israel is made nine times by the prophet Isaiah, and no one other than Israel is identified as the "servant": "You are my servant, Israel" (41:8); "You are my servant, Israel" (49:3); and there are several other verses, Isaiah 44:1, 44:2, 44:21, 45:4, 48:20. The Bible is filled with other references to the Jewish people as God's "servants"; see Jeremiah 30:10, 46:27-28; Psalm 136:22. There is no reason that the "servants" in Isaiah 53 should suddenly switch and refer to anyone other than the Jews (Singer, 2014, pp. 83-84).

(Sanhedrin 98), p.2 : "Rabbi Yochanan said, Messiah-what is his name? and our rabbi said. "The pale one"... was his name, as it is written "Surely he took our weakness and brought our sorrow-but we considered him stricken by God, struck by him and afflicted." (Rodkinson, 1918).

Midrash Ruth Rabbah: 2:14 : "Quoted from Ruth ii.14): Hillel explains that He is speaking of the Messiah-king; 'Come hither,' drawing near to the throne; and eat bread,' that is, royal bread; 'and dip your part in vinegar,' this refers to his punishment, as it says, 'But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.'" (Neusner, 2001).

Rabbi Mosheh Kohen Ibn Crispin : This rabbi described those who interpret Isaiah 53 in reference to Israel as: "have forsaken the knowledge of our Master, and are inclined to follow 'the hardness of their own hearts,' and according to their own opinion, I am pleased to interpret it, according to the teaching of our rabbis, concerning the King Messiah This prophecy was delivered by Isaiah by divine command for the purpose of telling us something of the nature of the coming Messiah, who was to come and deliver Israel, and his life from the day when he arrived at wisdom until his coming as redeemer, in order that if anyone should appear claiming to be the Messiah, we might ponder, and look to see if we could observe in him any resemblance to the traits here described; if there were such a resemblance, then we might believe that he was the Messiah of our righteousness; but if not, we could not do so." (From his commentary on Isaiah. (From his commentary on Isaiah, quoted in The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Translator, Ktav Publishing House, 1969, Volume 2, pages 99-114.) (Driver & Neubauer, 1969, pp. 99-114).

Rabbi Moses Maimonides: (1135-1204) : "In the manner of the coming of the Messiah there will appear one who has never been known before, and the signs and wonders which they will see performed by him will be proofs of his true origin, for the Almighty, in which he reveals to us his thoughts on this subject, said, 'Behold a

man whose name is Branch, and he will branch out from his place' (Zech. 6:12). speaking similarly of the time when he will appear, without father or mother or family known, He appears as a sucker before him, and as a root out of dry ground, etc...in the words of Isaiah, when describing the way kings will listen to him, to him kings will shut their mouths; for that which was not told they have seen, and that which they did not hear they have tasted." (From the Letter to the South (Yemen), quoted in The Fifty-third Chapter of Isaiah According to the Jewish Translators (Driver & Neubauer, 1969, pp. 374–375).

Rabbi Moses, 'The Preacher : Writing in his commentary on Genesis (page 660): "From the beginning God had made a covenant with the Messiah and told Him, 'My righteous Messiah, the people entrusted to you, their sins will bring you under a heavy yoke'. And He replied, 'I accept all this gladly (Smolar et al., n.d., p. 21). suffering so that not one of Israel will be lost.' Immediately, the Messiah accepted all suffering with love, as it is written: 'He was oppressed and he suffered'."

Targum Jonathan : The Aramaic translation of Isaiah 53, ascribed to Rabbi Jonathan ben Uzziel, a disciple of Hillel, begins with simple and precious words: "Behold, my servant, the Messiah, shall prosper; he shall be high, and increase in stature, and become exceedingly strong: as the house of Israel looks upon him for many days, for their faces are darkened among the nations, and their complexion surpasses the sons of men. (Targum Jonathan on Isaiah 53)

Zohar: Rabbi Simeon Ben Jochai 200 M "There was in the garden of Eden a palace called: 'The palace of the children of diseases, this palace the Messiah entered, and called every disease, every pain, and every doom of Israel: they all came and rested upon Him. And if it were not that He had relieved them from Israel, and taken them upon Himself, no one could have borne Israel's punishment for lawlessness; this is what is written, 'Surely our sicknesses he has brought' Isa.53,4).- When they told Him (Al Masih) about the afflictions of Israel in their captivity, and about the wicked among them who did not pay attention to know their God, He raised His voice and wept for their wickedness; and it is written, 'He was wounded for our transgressions' (Isa.53,5) (Yohai et al., n.d., pp. 212–218).

Isaiah 53:4: "Indeed, he bore our sicknesses and carried our pains but we regarded him as one who is sick, stricken by God and afflicted."

אָבן קָלִינוּ הוּא נָשָׂא וּמַכָּאֲבֵינוּ סְבָלָם וְאַנְחֵנוּ חֲשָׁבָנָהּ נֹגַע מִכָּה אֱלֹהִים וְיַעֲנָה : During Israel's centuries of exile, many nations persecuted the Jews on the grounds that it was God's way of "punishing" the "accursed" Jews for stubbornly rejecting new religions. In these verses, until the end of the chapter, the nations confess how they used the Jews as scapegoats, not for the "noble" reasons they had long claimed. Indeed, the nations selfishly persecuted the Jews as a distraction from their own corrupt regimes: "Surely our affliction he bore, and our affliction he bore..." (53:4)

Isaiah 53:5: "He was wounded for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment inflicted on him was for our benefit; and through his wounds we are healed."

וְהוּא מְחַלֵּל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּכָא מַעֲוֹנֵתֵינוּ מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבְחֻבְרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא-לָנוּ : In Jewish tradition, some interpreters attribute this verse to the collective suffering of the Israelites amidst the lighting. However, this verse instead implies that the nations were wrong in their outlook. They did not realize that the suffering of the Jewish people was not only the result of punishment, but also the result of their own actions. "He is wounded for our transgressions, and crushed for our iniquities..." (53:5)

Christian interpretation of Isaiah 53 : In Christianity, Isaiah 53 is seen as one of the clearest Old Testament prophecies of the coming, suffering and sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In the book of Isaiah, the prophecy of Christ's crucifixion, suffering, tribulation and the event of the cross are very clearly depicted. Isaiah 53:5: "He was wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities. The punishment inflicted on him was for our profit; and through his wounds we are healed."

וְהוּא מְחַלֵּל מִפְּשָׁעֵנוּ מִדָּכָא מַעֲוֹנֵתֵינוּ מוֹסֵר שְׁלוֹמֵנוּ עָלָיו וּבְחֻבְרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא-לָנוּ Transliteration: Vehu mechalal mipesha'enu, meduka me'avonotenu, musar shelomenu alav, uvahavurato nirpa-lanu. In this verse we have the word "מְחַלֵּל" This word comes from the root חָלַל (chalal), "stabbed", "wounded", or "pierced". And this is exactly what happened in the crucifixion of Jesus (Hebrew Bible, n.d.).

Fausset makes it clear in her writing that the wound in question is physical, not just mental suffering. The word mekhola (pierced) is derived from the word khalal, which literally means "to be pierced." This aptly describes what the Messiah experienced, where His hands, feet and stomach were pierced, as prophesied in Psalm 22:17 (Fausset, 1961, p. 730).

Martin writes about Isaiah 52:13-53:12, quoted in the New Testament Bible, which refers to the person of Christ Jesus. In his article, Martin explains that Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the most famous passage in the Book of Isaiah, given that several passages from it are quoted in the New Testament, among which are Isaiah 52:15 quoted in Romans 15:21; Isaiah 53:1 in John 12:38 and Romans 10:16; Isaiah 53:4 in Matthew 8:17; Isaiah 53:7-8 in Acts 8:32-33; Isaiah 53:9 in 1 Peter 2:22; and Isaiah 53:12 in Luke 22:37 (Wijaya, 2018).

New Testament Interpretation of Isaiah 53

In Jesus Own Words : "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). With these words Jesus equates himself with the "Servant" who serves and gives his life as a ransom for many; Jesus acts as the son of man who will enter Daniel's vision called "son of man" (7:13-14) is the glory that God will give to His servant (Barth, 1994, p. 326). That Jesus serves as the Messiah means that "the Son of Man will suffer many things and be humiliated" (Mk.9:12b), "for I tell you that this scripture must be fulfilled in Me : He will be numbered with the transgressors" (Lk.22:37). Here Jesus directly quoted Isaiah 52:3. Although he still had to face suffering and death, he knew the victory that God had given him "whose blood is shed" (for the Jews the soul was in the blood; shedding blood was the same as shedding one's life) "for many" (Mk.14:24//.). Jesus gave himself in bread and wine to his disciples as a servant of God (Barth, 1994, p. 326).

If we trace the events that Jesus went through, then this is clearly related to Isaiah 53, the fact that Jesus had to undergo the punishment of the cross with torture and persecution. The crucifixion that took place should have been reserved for rebels and criminals who were punished by crucifixion, but Jesus had to fulfill all the prophecies of the Old Testament book who had to die among rebels (Isa. 53: 12), and fulfill the death of Jesus who had to be pierced with His feet and hands, (Ps. 22: 17) (Arifianto, 2020). Indeed, Jesus' crucifixion was the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy, that God's promise of salvation was revealed through the person of a suffering servant of the Lord (Isa 53:1-7) (Lingga, n.d.).

Messianic Typology of the Lamb : In Exodus 12:1-26, we share an event that foreshadows what is still to come for Israel as God's people. Some refer to this event as "God's instituting" of the Passover feast (Prasetyo & Adiatma, 2023). This celebration centered on the "lamb" which was later used by Joahnes to characterize Jesus Christ as "the Lamb of God, who will suffer and take away the sins of men" (John 1:29). Interestingly, in the New Testament, the criteria in Isaiah 53 are then centralized to Jesus. The New Testament writers highlighted important Old Testament events with a Messianic lens. At the time of Jesus' presentation to the crowd, John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." (Jn 1:29). (John 1:29)." Then the Christological hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 presents a profound theological elaboration of Christ's self-emptying kenosis. The apostle Paul articulates how Jesus, who was "in the form of God," voluntarily chose to take on "the form of a servant." (Sijabat, 2024).

This connection between the Old and New Testaments shows the connection between Jesus and one of the elements in the institutionalization of Passover in the Judaic tradition. By the New Testament writers, Jesus fulfills the criteria as the fulfillment of the lamb typology in Isaiah. As said, the New Testament writers highlighted the key events in Isaiah in the OT with a Messianic lens.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In the research it is clear that the dominant Jewish rabbinical interpretation of Isaiah 53 is about the Messiah who is described as suffering as an atoning sacrifice for Israel, and in the Christian hermeneutical perspective of the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 as Isaiah's prophecy of Christ's suffering as the atoning servant. Many modern Jewish interpreters interpret Isaiah 53 as a description of the nation of Israel which, when compared to Christian interpretations, Isaiah himself describes this servant in the third person singular and Israel is described in the third person plural. Christian perspectives generally view the Messiah as the suffering servant and not the nation of Israel. This comparison shows the richness of understanding the science of hermeneutics.

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