

# **Yahweh's Suffering Servant**

By Rabbi Edward Levi Nydle/Levi bar Ido

## **B'nai Avraham**

**“See, My Servant whom I uphold, My Chosen One My being has delighted in! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He brings forth right-ruling to the nations. Yeshayahu 42:1**

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The prophet Yeshayahu prophesied concerning both Houses of Yisrael. According to Vayiqqra 26:14-39 YHWH declares how He will deal with all Yisrael if they are sent into exile for their sins.

40‘But if they confess their crookedness and the crookedness of their fathers, with their trespass in which they trespassed against Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, 41and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies – if their uncircumcised heart is then humbled, and they accept the punishment of their crookedness, 42then I shall remember My covenant with Ya’akov, and also My covenant with Yitschak, and also remember My covenant with Avraham, and remember the land. Wayyiqra 26:40-42

Virtually the Covenant would be RENEWED with all Yisrael as expressed in Yeshayahu 40:1

“Comfort, comfort My people!” says your Elohim.

The comfort that Yisrael would receive from Elohim is a renewal of the Covenant with those whom He had cast out of the Land for their disobedience to Torah. This prophetic word was to be a fulfillment of Wayyiqra 26:40-45.

In Yeshayahu 42:1 we have the Servant of YHWH in Whom His being delights. At His coming the messengers of YHWH would declare to Tzion:

7 How pleasant upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who proclaims peace, who brings good news, who proclaims deliverance, who says to Tzion, “Your Elohim reigns!” Yeshayahu 52:7

### **From the Hebrew**

Yeshayahu 43 holds a key to the mystery concerning this Servant of YHWH:

10“You are My witnesses,” declares YHWH, “And My servant whom I have chosen, so that you know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no El formed, nor after Me there is none.11 “I, I am YHWH, and besides Me there is no saviour... 14Thus said YHWH, your Redeemer, the Set-apart One of Yisra’el, “For your sake I shall send to Bavel, and bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, who rejoice in their ships. 15“I am YHWH, your Set-apart One, Creator of Yisra’el, your Sovereign.”...

- 24 “You have not bought Me sweet cane with silver, nor have you satisfied Me with the fat of your slaughterings. You have only burdened Me with your sins; you have **wearied Me** with your crookednesses. 25 “I, I am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake, and remember your sins no more.
- **Wearied:** *yaga* # 3021-“to grow weary, to toil, to be put into servitude” This verse could read: “You have caused Me to be put into **servitude- to serve** by your sins.”

We have proof from the Hebrew that the redemption was effected by One who “being in the form of Elohim ...took upon him the form of a servant.”

6 [*Moshiach*]who, being in the form of Elohim, did not regard equality (*esos*-like, similar to, equal to)with Elohim a matter to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form (*morphe*- adjustment of the parts, form) of a servant (*doulos*- a bond-servant), and came to be in the likeness of men. **Phil.2:6-7**

This work would seem impossible to mankind according to **Yeshayahu 53:1**:

Who has believed our report<sup>[1]</sup>? And to whom was the arm of YHWH revealed? **Yeshayahu 53:1**

The Servant’s appearance would appear to be “Smitten of Elohim” and in reality “bore our sicknesses... and by His stripes we are healed.”

4 Truly, He has borne our **sicknesses** and carried our pains. Yet we reckoned Him stricken, **smitten** by Elohim, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our crookednesses. The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by **His stripes we are healed**. **Yeshayahu 53:4-5**

- 5 Why should you be **beaten (smitten)** any more? You continue in apostasy! All the head is sick, and all the heart faints. **Yeshayahu 1:5**
- 10 “Make the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and shall turn and be **healed.**” **Yeshayahu 6:10**
- **Smitten:** H5221-na□ka□h A primitive root; to *strike* (lightly or severely, literally or figuratively): - beat, cast forth, clap, give [wounds], go forward, indeed, kill, make [slaughter], murderer, punish, slaughter, slay (-er, -ing), smite (-r, -ing), strike, be stricken, (give) stripes, surely, wound.
- **Healed:** H7495-ra□pha□’ ra□pha□h-A primitive root; properly to *mend* (by stitching), that is, (figuratively) to *cure*: - cure, (cause to) heal, physician, repair, thoroughly, make whole. See H7503.

We see from the Hebrew that Yisrael had been smitten by Elohim and needed healing. Thus, it becomes possible for Elohim to heal those whom He has smitten!

17 “For the crookedness of his unfair gain I was wroth and I smote him. **I hid Myself** and was wroth, and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. 18 “I have seen his ways, but *now* I heal him, and I lead him, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners, 19 creating the fruit of the lips: peace, peace to him who is **far off** and to **him who is near,**” said YHWH, “and I shall heal him.” **Yeshayahu 57:17-18,**

- 46 And about the ninth hour Yahshua cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lemah shebaqtani?” that is, “My El, My El, why have You **forsaken Me?**” **Matt. 27:46**
- 17 And having come, He brought as Good News peace to you who were **far off, and peace to those near.** **Eph.2 :17**

In this second half of the book of Yeshayahu we have the King and Priest united into One as signified in **Yeshayahu 6:1** and **52:13:[2]**

1 In the year that Sovereign Uzziyahu died, I saw YHWH sitting on a throne, high and **lifted up**, and the train of His robe filled the Hekal.

- 13 See My Servant shall work wisely; He shall be **exalted** and lifted up and very high.
- **Lifted up & exalted-H5375-na□śa□' na□sa□h-** A primitive root; to *lift*, in a great variety of applications, literally and figuratively, absolutely and relatively: - accept, advance, arise, (able to, [armour], suffer to) bear (-er, up), bring (forth), burn, carry (away), cast, contain, desire, ease, exact, exalt (self), extol, fetch, forgive, furnish, further, give, go on, help, high, hold up, honourable (+ man), lade, lay, lift (self) up, lofty, marry, magnify, X needs, obtain, pardon, raise (up), receive, regard, respect, set (up), spare, stir up, + swear, take (away, up), utterly, wear, yield.

The Hebrew language bears out the proof that this Suffering Servant is YHWH and would bear the sins of all Yisrael and then be exalted to the throne of Elohim. The Yehudim have a hard time grasping the concept of a suffering Messiah in Yeshayahu 53. To them a suffering Servant and a Messiah that would deliver them from all their enemies were humanly incapable in the same person. Let us examine some of the more ancient writings of thought of the early sages of Yisrael to determine how Judaism originally viewed Yeshayahu 53.

“Behold my servant **Messiah** shall prosper: he shall be high, and increase, and be exceeding strong: as the House of Yisrael looked upon him through many days. Because their countenance was darkened among the peoples, and their complexion beyond the sons of men.” **Targum Jonathan on Yeshayahu 53**

- "Who art thou, O great mountain?" (Zechariah 4:7) This refers to the King Messiah. And why does he call him the "great mountain?" Because he is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said, "My servant shall be high, and lifted up and lofty exceedingly." He will be higher than Abraham who said, "I raise high my hand unto the YHWH" (Gen. 14:22), lifted up above Moses, to whom it is said, "Lift it up into thy bosom" (Numbers 11:12), loftier than the ministering angels, of whom it is written, "Their wheels were lofty and terrible" (Ezekiel 1:18). And out of whom does he come forth? Out of David. **Midrash Tanhuma**
- “The Messiah-what is his name? The rabbis say, the leprous one: those of the house of the rabbi say, the sick one, as it is said, ‘Surely he has borne our sicknesses.’ The identification of the suffering, leprous one as the Messiah was not merely the opinion of one of the sages but by many of the Tannaim. **Sanhedrin 98b Bab.Talmud**
- “ He is speaking of King Messiah: ‘Come hither’ draw near to the throne ‘and dip thy morsel in the vinegar’, this refers to chastisements, as it is said, ‘But he was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.’” **Midrash Rabbah Ruth 2:14**
- “See, My Servant whom I uphold, My Chosen One My being has delighted in! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He brings forth right-ruling to the nations. **Yeshayahu 42:1**

- “Behold My Servant, the Messiah, I will draw him near, my chosen one on whom My *Memra* (Word) is well pleased.”[\[3\]](#)
- 16 And having been immersed, Yahshua went up immediately from the water and see, the heavens were opened, and He saw the Spirit of Elohim descending like a dove and coming upon Him, 17 and see, a voice out of the heavens, saying, “This is My Son, the Beloved, in whom I did delight.” **Matt.3:16-17**
- **9 And He was appointed a grave with the wrong, and with the rich at His death (Hebrew -singular-mavet), because He had done no violence, nor was deceit in His mouth. Yeshayahu 53:9**

The rabbis claim the word death is in the plural in this passage, thus it cannot mean one person but the nation of Yisrael. But in the Masoretic text and the LXX, the word is written in the singular. The Persian and Tataric texts say, “How the messiah will resign himself to die”. The Saadiah has “in his dying”; Yepheth b. Ali, “in his death”. It requires a twisting and denial of the Hebrew text to arrive at the conclusion that it is in the plural.

### **Ancient Sages Interpretations**

The ancient rabbis interpreted Yeshayahu 53 as speaking of the Messiah. Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki 1040-1105) and the later rabbis interpreted Yeshayahu 53 as speaking of Yisrael. They knew that the earlier sages had already interpreted Yeshayahu 53 as speaking of the Messiah. But, as we know, Rashi lived in an era when the pagan Medieval Roman Religion was practiced. Rashi was trying to stop the Jewish people from assimilating into that faith so he interpreted this chapter as speaking of Yisrael, despite the fact that other rabbis realized his inconsistencies in his interpretations. The biggest problem they had with his interpretation is verse eight. It reads:

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment. And as for His generation, who considered that He shall be cut off from the land of the living? For the transgression of My people He was stricken. **Yeshayahu 53:8**

The question that puzzled the rabbis is, “When were the Yisraelites ever cut off from the land of the living?” According to Yirmeyahu 31:35-37, YHWH promised they would always exist.

36 “If these laws vanish from before Me,” declares YHWH, “then the seed of Yisra’el shall also cease from being a nation before Me forever.” 37 Thus said YHWH, “If the heavens above could be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I would also cast off all the seed of Yisra’el for all that they have done,” declares YHWH.

Also, the rabbis noted that when had Yisrael as a nation suffered for the transgressions of Yeshayahu’s people? His people was Yisrael not the nations!

Some commentators have said that this “cutting off” means the captivity of Yisrael, even though in the Hebrew the text is singular! Others have written that it means the righteous of this present world are the ones being crushed and bruised. But, to be honest to the text, they had to manipulate the singular to distort the meaning of the text. Rabbi Moshe Kohen, a 15<sup>th</sup> Century Spanish rabbi wrote:

“..I am pleased to interpret it, in accordance with the teaching of our rabbis, the King Messiah.”

Others wrote:

“I may remark, then that our rabbis with one voice, accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet is speaking of King Messiah.” **Rabbi Moshe Alsheikh, 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Sefed**

- “According to Rashi and Ibn Ezra, it relates to Yisrael at the end of their captivity. But if so, what can the meaning of the passage, ‘He was wounded for our transgressions’? Who was wounded? Who are the transgressors? Who carried out the sickness and bare the pain? That fact is that it refers to King Messiah.” **Hertz Homberg(1749-1841)[4]**
- **Yeshayahu 53:5**: והוא מחלל מפשענו מדכא מעונותינו מוסר שלומנו עליו ובחברתו נרפא־לנו:
- **Isa 53:5** But He was wounded for our transgressions; *He was* bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His wounds we ourselves are healed. *LIT*
- **Talmud - Mas. Yoma 5aR**. Joseph says the putting<sup>1</sup> of the hands [upon the head of the sacrifice] is the difference. According to the one who holds that the omission of any detail renders the ceremony invalid, [failure] to lay the hand upon the head of the sacrifice would render the ceremony invalid. According to him who holds that only the omission of what is indispensable in the future renders the ceremony invalid, [omission of] the putting of the hand on the animal's head did not render the ceremony invalid. Whence do we know that in the future [the omission of] the putting of the hands [on the animal's head] is not indispensable? - For it has been taught: And he shall lay his hand . . . and it shall be accepted for him [to make atonement for him].<sup>2</sup> Does the laying on of the hand make atonement for one? **Does not atonement come through the blood**, as it is said: For it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life!<sup>3</sup> Why, then, is it written: ‘And he shall lay his hand on . . . and it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him’? To say that if he performed the laying on of the hands as an unimportant part<sup>4</sup> of the commandment, Scripture would account it to him as if he had not obtained proper atonement.<sup>5</sup> R. Nahman b. Isaac said: The waving<sup>6</sup> is the difference. According to him who holds whatever detail is prescribed for the ceremony is indispensable, the waving is indispensable; according to him who holds that only what is indispensable for all the future is indispensable now, the waving is not indispensable. Whence do we know that for all time to come the waving is not indispensable? — For we have been taught: <sup>7</sup> to be waved, to make atonement for him.<sup>8</sup> does the waving make atonement? **Is it not the blood which makes atonement**, as it is written, ‘For it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life’? Then why does Scripture say, ‘To be waved, to make atonement for him’? To say that if he treats the waving as an unimportant part of the ceremony, Scripture accounts it to him as if he had not obtained proper atonement.
- **Talmud Zevachim 6 a**: The question was asked: Does it [a burnt-offering] make atonement<sup>12</sup> for [the violation of] a positive precept [committed] after the separation [of the animal], or not? Do we say, it is analogous to a sin-offering: just as a sin-offering [makes atonement] only for [the sins committed] before separation, but not for [those committed] after separation, so here too [it makes atonement] only for [the sins committed] before separation, but not for [those committed] after separation. Or, perhaps, it is unlike a sin-offering, for a separate sin-offering is incurred for each sin, whereas here, since it makes atonement if he had been guilty of [violating] many positive precepts, <sup>13</sup> it may also make atonement for positive precepts [neglected] after separation? — Come and hear: And he shall lay [his hand upon the head of the burnt-offering]; and it shall be accepted [for him to make atonement for him]; <sup>14</sup> does then the laying [of hands] make atonement? Surely atonement can be **made only with the blood**, as it says, for it is the blood that maketh atonement by reason of the life! <sup>15</sup> What then is taught by the verse, and he shall lay . . . and it shall be accepted . . . to make atonement? — [To teach] that if he treated [the laying of hands] as the residue of the precept, <sup>16</sup> Scripture regards him as though he did not make atonement, and yet he did make atonement. Now what is meant by ‘he did not make atonement’ and ‘he did make atonement’? Surely, ‘he did make atonement’ [means] in respect of positive precepts [neglected] before the separation [of the animal], while ‘he did not make atonement’ in respect of the positive precept of laying [of hands], because it is a positive precept [neglected] after separation? <sup>17</sup> — Said Raba: You speak of the precept of laying [the hand]?
- There it is different, because as long as he has not yet slaughtered, he is subject to the injunction ‘Arise and lay [hands]’; <sup>18</sup> when then is it a [neglected] positive precept? After the

- slaughtering; and in respect of [a precept neglected] after the slaughtering no question arises.19 R. Huna b. Judah said to Raba: Perhaps it means, 'It did make atonement' — for the person,
- The Holy One, blessed be He, will tell him (the Messiah) in detail what will befall him... their sins will cause you to bend down as under a yoke of iron and make you like a calf whose eyes grow dim with suffering and will choke your spirit as with a yoke, and because of their sins your tongue will cleave to the roof of your mouth. Are you willing to endure such things? The Messiah will say: Master of the universe with joy in my soul and gladness in my heart I take this suffering upon myself provided that not one person in Israel shall perish, so that not only those who are alive be saved in my days, but also those who are dead, who died from the days of Adam up to the time of redemption." , **Piska 36.1**The Patriarchs will arise and say to the Messiah... our righteous Messiah, even though we are your ancestors, you are greater than we because you did suffer for the iniquities of our children, and terrible ordeals befell you, such ordeals as did not befall earlier generations or later ones for the sake of Israel." **Piska 37:1** Our sages said, 'King Messiah is subjected to sufferings in every generation according to the sins of that generation. The Holy One, blessed be He, said, In that hour (of the Redemption) I shall create him a new and he will no longer suffer.'" page 146b **Pesekta Rabbati**
  - "the word 'man' in the passage refers to the Messiah, the son of David as it is written, "Behold the man whose name is Zema"; there Jonathan interprets, Behold the man Messiah; as it is said "a man of pains and known to sickness." **Midrash Tanhumi, Rabbi Nahman**
  - Rabbinical Elijah the prophet quote: "Bear the suffering and punishment of thy Master, with which he chastises thee for the sins of Israel, as it is written, 'He is pressed for our rebellion--crushed for our iniquities' until the end come." **Midrash Cohen, BhM, 2:29**
  - "And when Israel is sinful, the Messiah seeks for mercy upon them, as it is written, "By His stripes we were healed, and He carried the sins of many; and made intercession for the transgressors."**B'reshith Rabbah**

The Jewish poet, Eliezar HaKalir, paraphrased Yeshayahu 53 in the **Yom Kippur prayer of Keter in Musaf Service:**

“Messiah, our righteousness, hath turned from us: we are in terror and there is none to justify us! Our iniquities and the yoke of our transgressions He did bear for He was wounded for our transgressions: He carries our sins upon His shoulders that we might find forgiveness for our iniquities and by His stripes we are healed.O Eternal One the time is come to make a new creation: from the vault of heaven bring Him up, out of Seir draw Him forth, that He may make His voice heard to us in Lebanon, A SECOND TIME by the hand of **Yinnon**[5].”

- **Talmud Sanhedrin 98b**: Rab said: The world was created only on David's account .24 Samuel said: On Moses account; 25 R. Johanan said: For the sake of the Messiah. What is his [the Messiah's] name? — The School of R. Shila said: His name is **Shiloh**, for it is written, until Shiloh come.26 The School of R. Yannai said: His name is **Yinnon**, for it is written, His name shall endure for ever:27 e'er the sun was, his name is **Yinnon**.28 The School of R. Haninah maintained: His name is **Haninah**, as it is written, Where I will not give you Haninah.29 Others say: His name is **Menahem** the son of Hezekiah,for it is written, Because Menahem [‘the comforter’ ], that would relieve my soul, is far.30 The Rabbis said: His name is ‘the leper scholar,’ as it is written, Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him a leper, smitten of Elohim, and afflicted.31

The Following statements are from Yefeth ben Ali (10<sup>th</sup> Century) who was a Karaite:

“As to myself, I am inclined, with Benjamin of Nehawend, to regard it as alluding to the Messiah, and as opening a description of his condition in exile, from the time of his birth to his ascension to the throne: for the prophet begins by speaking of his being seated in a position of great honor, and then goes back to relate all that will happen to him during the captivity. He thus gives us to understand two things: In the first instance, that the Messiah will only reach his highest degree of honor after the long and severe trials; and secondly, that these trials will be sent upon him as a kind of sign, so that, if he finds himself under the yoke of misfortunes whilst remaining pure in his actions, he may know that he is the desired one...By the words “surely he has carried our sicknesses” they mean that the pains and sickness which he fell into were merited by them, but that he bore them instead...And here I think it necessary to pause for a few moments, in order to explain why Elohim caused these sicknesses to attach themselves to the Messiah for the sake of Yisrael...The nation deserved from Elohim greater punishment than that which actually came upon them, but not being strong enough to bear it...Elohim appoints his servant to carry their sins, and by doing so lighten their punishment in order that Yisrael might not be completely exterminated... “And YHWH laid upon him the iniquity of us all.” The prophet does not by avon mean iniquity, but punishment for iniquity, as in the passage, “Be sure your sin will find you out” (Num.22:23)-**Driver and Neubauer, editors, The Fifty-Third Chapter of Yeshayahu According to Jewish Sources**

“The prophet says, the Messiah son of David of whom the text speaks, will never be conquered or perish by the hands of his enemies. And, in fact the text teaches this clearly...And by his stripes we were healed...because the stripes by which he is vexed and distressed will heal us; Elohim will pardon us for his righteousness, and we shall be healed both from our own transgressions and from the iniquities of our fathers.”**Nachmanides (R.Moshe ben Nachman 13<sup>th</sup> Century)-Driver and Neubauer, pp.78**

- “Maimonides himself affirmed the Messianic interpretation of Yeshayahu 53.” **S.R. Driver & A. Neubauer, ed. The 53<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Yeshayahu , op.cit. Vol.1, p.322**

Even Rashi, the great Jewish commentator has some obscure references that the “Servant of YHWH” was the Messiah. Rashi stated that the “eved Adonai” was the nation of Yisrael in his exposition of Yeshayahu 53, BUT in his Talmudic commentary of this same chapter he contradicted himself by writing that the “eved Adonai” refers to the Messiah!

Rabbi Elijah ben Moshe De Vidas, a great Kabbalist from Sefed believed that the ‘eved Adonai’ in Yeshayahu referred to the Messiah. He wrote that Yeshayahu 53:5 refers to the Messiah who was “wounded for our transgressions...bruised for our iniquities.” According to this rabbi from Sefed, this verse meant that whoever will not accept the truth that the Messiah suffered for their iniquities will have to suffer for those transgressions.

When the Messiah hears of the great suffering of Yisrael in their dispersion, and of the wicked amongst them who seek not to know their Master, he weeps aloud on account of those wicked ones amongst them, as it is written: “But he was wounded because of our transgression, he was crushed because of our iniquities” (Ibid. LIII, 5). The souls then return to their place. The Messiah, on his part, enters a certain Hall in the Garden of Eden, called the Hall of the Afflicted. There he calls for all the diseases and pains and sufferings of Yisrael, bidding them settle on himself, which they do. And were it not that he thus eases the burden from Yisrael, taking it on himself, no one could endure the

sufferings meted out to Yisrael in expiation on account of their neglect of the Torah. So Scripture says; "Surely our diseases he did bear", etc. (Ibid. LIII, 4). A similar function was performed by R. Eleazar here on earth. For, indeed, beyond number are the chastisements awaiting every man daily for the neglect of the Torah, all of which descended into the world at the time when the Torah was given. As long as Yisrael were in the Holy Land, by means of the Temple service and sacrifices they averted all evil diseases and afflictions from the world. Now it is the Messiah who is the means of averting them from mankind until the time when a man quits this world and receives his punishment, as already said. When a man's sins are so numerous that he has to pass through the nethermost compartments of Gehinnom in order to receive heavier punishment corresponding to the contamination of his soul, a more intense fire is kindled in order to consume that contamination. The destroying angels make use for this purpose of fiery rods, so as to expel that contamination. Woe to the soul that is subjected to such punishment! Happy are those who guard the precepts of the Torah! **Zohar 2:212a**

According to one of the most moving accounts of the Messiah legends, Elohim, when He created the Messiah, gave him a choice whether to accept the sins and sufferings of Yisrael upon himself. The Messiah answered: "I accept it with joy, so that not a single soul of Yisrael should perish."

Also, according to the Zohar the Messiah himself summons all the pains, diseases, and sufferings of Yisrael to come upon him, in order to ease the anguish of Yisrael which otherwise would be unbearable.<sup>[6]</sup> Thus, the Messiah becomes heir to the Suffering Servant of YHWH of Yeshayahu and suffers for the sins of others. It is clear that the idea of Yisrael of the Suffering Servant is merely a projection and personification of the sufferings of Yisrael since the Messiah Yahshua is an embodiment of all Yisrael.

In the modern torah and Haftarah reading in the synagogue Yeshayahu 53 is skipped in the weekly readings. They go from Yeshayahu 52 to Yeshayahu 54. F.F. Bruce notes in his book, *The Spreading Flame*, that, "It is a distinguished orthodox Jewish scholar who tells us the reason why the prophecy of the Suffering Servant is not included in the synagogue lectionary, although the passages immediately preceding and following it are found there, is the 'Christian' application of that prophecy to Y'shua."<sup>[7]</sup> This Jewish scholar is Herbert Martin James Loewe of Cambridge University, and the author of the *Rabbinic Anthology*. His exact words are: "Quotations from the famous 53<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Isaiah are rare in rabbinic literature. [Because of the Christological interpretation given to the chapter by Christians, it is omitted from the series of prophetic lessons for the Deuteronomy Sabbaths...the omission is deliberate and striking."<sup>[8]</sup> Could it be that modern traditional Judaism fears that the Yehudim will see the true Moshiach in this chapter?

We also know that after the council of Yavneh, every prophecy concerning the Messiah and the Suffering Servant was explained away by the rabbis that met there. The modern interpretations were solidified after Rashi's commentary on the chapter despite the fact that the earlier rabbinical sages knew the 53<sup>rd</sup> Chapter was Messianic.

"But he was wounded . . . meaning that since the Messiah bears our iniquities which produce the effect of His being bruised, it follows that whosoever will not admit that Messiah thus suffers for our iniquities, must endure and suffer for them himself" **Rabbi Elijah de Vidas**

- "I am pleased to interpret it in accordance of our rabbis, of the King Messiah, and will be careful, so far as I am able, to adhere to the literal sense: thus, possible, I shall be free from the fancied and far fetched interpretations of which others have been guilty. . ." **Rabbi Moshe Kohen Ibn Crispin of Cordova and Toledo in Spain, ca. 1350**

### **The Suffering Servant at Qumran**

The concept of a suffering Servant may have been known by the Qumran sect according to the Dead Sea Scrolls. There is a fragmented text dated about 100 BCE known as *4QAaron A (4Q541)* dealing with a priestly figure. The translation of the crucial fragments (9 & 24) reads:

“He will atone for all the children of his generation, and he will be sent to all the children of his people. His word is like a word of heaven, and his teaching is in accordance with the will of Elohim. His eternal sun will shine, and his light will be kindled in all corners of the earth, and it will shine on the darkness. Then the darkness will pass away from the earth and thick darkness from the dry land. They will speak many words against him, and they will invent many lies and fictions against him and shameful things about him. Evil will overthrow his generation... His situation will be one of lying and violence and the people will go astray in his days, and be confounded (*4Q451.9*). Do not grieve for him ... Elohim will set many things right... many revealed things... Examine and seek and know what the dove (*Yonah*) sought and do not afflict the weak by wasting or hanging... Let not the nail approach him. So you will establish for your father a name of joy, and for your brothers a proven foundation... You will see and rejoice in the eternal light, and you will not be an enemy (*4Q541.24*).

Fragment 9 describes a priest that teaches the Torah and atones for the sins of nation of Yisrael. This atonement is not substitutionary but representative, and the atonement is not by offering himself, but a sacrifice according to this fragment. This passage is not a direct parallel Yeshayahu 53, But we do find the concept of a Messianic figure who atones for the transgressions of Yisrael. Also, in fragment 24 we can read of the method of execution of this figure by hanging with nails. Impaling on a stake was a well known method of execution and the Jewish Priest-King Alexander Jannaeus nailed 800 of his Jewish opponents to the stake around the time this was written. Even though the Torah in Devarim 21:22-23 called such a death a curse, and this, with the example of King Jannaeus, may well have turned the Jewish leadership against committing their own to such a defiling death. This fragment may be saying “not to be an enemy” of the people by committing such an act.

Fragment 9 clearly shows a priestly messianic figure who will suffer, even to the point of death. This man will be persecuted because he will appear in a time of great apostasy.

We can conclude that these fragments do not offer us a parallel to the 53<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Yeshayahu, but it does generate a viewpoint of a Messiah who suffers, atones, and reverses the sinful condition of his people- which can lead us to compare the Messianic concepts presented within the 53<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Yeshayahu.

**Targum** [\[9\]](#) **Yeshayahu 53**

Who hath believed these tidings? And to whom hath the power of the mighty arm of [YHWH] been so revealed? And the righteous shall grow up before him even as budding shoots; and as a tree that sendeth forth its roots by streams of water, so shall the holy generations increase in the land that was in need of him: his appearance shall not be that of a common man, nor the fear of him that of an ordinary man; but his countenance (or complexion) shall be a holy countenance, so that all who see shall regard him earnestly. Then shall the glory of all the kingdoms be despised and come to an end; they shall be infirm and sick even as a man of sorrows and as one destined for sickness, and as when the presence of the Shekinah was withdrawn from us, they (or we) shall be despised and of no account. Then he shall pray on our behalf of our transgressions and our iniquities shall be pardoned for his sake, though we were accounted smitten, stricken before [YHWH], and afflicted. But he shall build the sanctuary that was polluted because of our transgressions and given up because of our iniquities; and by his teaching shall his peace be multiplied upon us, and by our devotion to his words our transgressions shall be forgiven us. All we like sheep had been scattered; we had wandered far off each on his own way; but it was [YHWH's] good pleasure to forgive the transgressions of us all for his sake. He was praying, and he was answered, and before he opened his mouth he was accepted; the mighty ones of the peoples shall he deliver up like a lamb to the slaughter, and as an ewe that before her shearers is dumb, and there shall be none before him opening his mouth or speaking a word. Out of chastisements and out of punishment shall he bring our exiles near and the wondrous things that shall be wrought for us in his days who shall be able to recount? For he shall take away the dominion of the peoples from the land of Israel, and the sins which my people sinned shall he transfer unto them. And he shall deliver the wicked unto Gehinnam, and those that are rich in possessions which they have obtained by violence unto the death of destruction, that those who commit sin may not be established, nor speak deceits with their mouth.

And it was [YHWH's] good pleasure to refine and to purify the remnant of his people, in order to cleanse their soul from sin: they shall look upon the kingdom of their Anointed One (or Messiah), they shall multiply sons and daughters, they shall prolong days, and they that perform the law of [YHWH] shall prosper in his good pleasure. From the subjection of the peoples shall he deliver their soul; they shall look upon the punishment of them that hate them; they shall be satisfied with the spoil of their kings: by his wisdom shall he justify the just, in order to subject many to the law, and for their transgressions shall he make intercession. Then will I divide unto him the spoil of many peoples and the riches of the strong cities; he shall divide the booty, because he delivered his soul unto death, and subjected the rebellious to the law; and he shall make intercession for many transgressions, and the rebellious shall be forgiven for his sake.

#### **Why Yeshayahu 53 must be the Messiah**

- The Suffering Servant of Yeshayahu 53 is a guiltless sufferer. Yisrael is never described as sinless. **Yeshayahu 1:4** says of the nation: "Alas sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity. A brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters!" He then goes on in the same chapter to characterize Yehudah as Sodom, Yerushalayim as a harlot, and the people as those whose hands are stained with blood (verses 10, 15, and 21)
- The prophet said: "It pleased the YHWH to bruise him." Has the mistreatment of the Yehudim really been Elohim's pleasure, as is said of the suffering of the servant in Yeshayahu 53:10? If, as some rabbis contend, Yeshayahu 53 refers to the holocaust, can we really say of Yisrael's suffering during that horrible period, "It pleased the YHWH to bruise him???" It makes sense that Elohim was pleased to have Messiah suffer and die as a sin offering to provide forgiveness and atonement.

- The person mentioned in this passage suffers silently and willingly. Brave Jewish men and women fought in resistance movements against the Nazis. Can we really say Jewish suffering during the holocaust and all the preceding centuries was done silently and willingly?
- The figure described in Yeshayahu 53 suffers, dies, and rises again to atone for Yisrael's sins. The Hebrew word used in **Yeshayahu 53:10** for "sin-offering" is "*asham*," which is a term meaning "sin-offering." It is used in **Vayiqqra chapters 5 & 6**. Yeshayahu 53 describes a sinless and perfect lamb who takes upon himself the sins of others so that they might be forgiven. Yeshayahu 53 speaks of a figure that suffers and dies in order to provide a payment for sin so that others can be forgiven. This cannot be true of the Jewish people as a whole.
- It is the prophet who is speaking in this passage. He says: "who has believed our message." The term "message" usually refers to the prophetic message, as it does in **Yirmeyahu 49:14**. When we understand the Hebrew parallelism of verse 1, we see "Who has believed our message" as parallel to "to whom has the arm of the YHWH been revealed." The "arm of the YHWH" refers to Elohim's powerful act of deliverance. The message of the speaker is the message of a prophet declaring what Elohim has done to save his people.
- The prophet speaking is Yeshayahu himself, who says the sufferer was punished for "the transgression of my people," according to verse 8. Who are the people of Yeshayahu? Yisrael. So the sufferer of Yeshayahu 53 suffered for Yisrael. So how could he be Yisrael?
- The figure of Yeshayahu 53 dies and is buried according to verses 8 and 9. The people of Yisrael have never died as a whole. They have been out of the land on two occasions and have returned, but they have never ceased to be among the living.
- If Yeshayahu 53 cannot refer to Yisrael, how about Yeshayahu himself? But Yeshayahu said he was a sinful man of unclean lips (**Yeshayahu 6:5-7**). Yeshayahu did not die as atonement for sins.

Of whom does Yeshayahu speak? He speaks of the Messiah, as many ancient rabbis concluded. The second verse of Yeshayahu 53 makes it clear. The person grows up as "a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground."

The shoot springing up is beyond reasonable doubt a reference to the Messiah, and, in fact, it is a common Messianic reference in Yeshayahu and elsewhere. The Davidic dynasty was to be cut down in judgment like a tree, but it was promised to Yisrael that a new sprout would shoot up from the stump. The Moshiach was to be that sprout. Several Hebrew words were used to refer to this Messianic image. All the terms are related in meaning and connected in the Messianic texts where they were used. **Yeshayahu 11**, which virtually all rabbis agreed refers to the Messiah, used the words "shoot" (*hoter*) and branch (*netser*) to describe the Messianic King. **Yeshayahu 11:10** called Messiah the "Root (*shoresh*) of Jesse," Jesse being David's father.

Yeshayahu 53 described the suffering servant as a root (*shoresh*) from dry ground, using the very same metaphor and the very same word as Yeshayahu 11. We also see other terms used for the same concept, such as branch (*tsemach*) in **Yirmeyahu 23:5**, in **Yeshayahu 4:2** and also in the startling prophecies of Zekaryah 3:8 and 6:12. Beyond doubt, **Yeshayahu 52:13-53:12** refers to Messiah Yahshua. Messiah is the shoot who sprung up from the fallen Davidic dynasty.

**Yeshayahu 52:13** states that it would be the Messiah who will "sprinkle" many nations. What does that mean? What was Messiah's ministry to be toward the nations? The word translated "sprinkle" or sometimes "startle" is found several other places in the TaNaK. The Hebrew word is found in **Vayiqqra 4:6; 8:11; 14:7**, and **B'midbar 8:7, 19:18-19**. The references cited all pertain to priestly

sprinklings of the blood of atonement, the anointing oil of consecration, and the ceremonial water used to cleanse the unclean. Is **Yeshayahu 52:13** telling us that the Messiah will act as a priest who applies atonement, anoints to consecrate, sprinkles to make clean? But, priests were to come from the tribe of Levi and Kings from the tribe of Judah! What kind of priest is he? David told us Messiah would be a priest of the order of Melchizedek (**Tehillim 110 & Ivrim 7-9**).

**Yeshayahu 53** must be understood as referring to the coming Davidic King, the Moshiach. King Messiah was prophesied to suffer and die to pay for our sins and then rise again. He would serve as a priest to the nations of the world and apply the blood of atonement to cleanse all who have *emunah*. There is one alone who this can refer to, Yahshua! According to the testimony of the Jewish Apostles, Yahshua died for our sins, rose again, ascended to the right hand of Elohim, and he now serves as our *Cohen HaGadol* and our King. The first century Nazarenes were willing to die rather than deny they had seen the risen Messiah. Only if one has presupposed Yahshua cannot have been the Messiah can one deny that which is obvious. Yahshua is the One Yeshayahu prophesied of in this chapter!

### Conclusion

Believers in the Moshiach Yahshua took seriously their Master's command to be witnesses to all the four corners of the earth, first to the Yehudim and beginning at Yerushalyim. They had the risen Messiah, historical fact, and the Messianic prophecies of the TaNaK as their witnesses. The rabbis had to change Scripture and their earlier interpretations in order to counter their witness. They erected a wall that has been torn down by Messiah and His finished work of Restoring the Tribes of Yisrael into one Renewed Man. Let us be strengthened in our resolve to continue the early talmidim's mission and message!

### Prophecies from the Book of Yeshayahu and Brit Chadasha

1. Isaiah 42:2-Matthew 12:15,16,19
2. Isaiah 40:11-Matthew 12:15,20
3. Isaiah 42:3- Hebrews 4:15
4. Isaiah 35:5-6- Matthew 11:4-6
5. Isaiah 53:9-1 Peter 2:22
6. Isaiah 49:7-John 15:24-25
7. Isaiah 7:14- Matthew 1:18
8. Isaiah 50:6- Mark 14:65
9. Isaiah 53:4-6- Matthew 20:28
10. Isaiah 53:7- Matthew 26:63,Matthew 27:12,14
11. Isaiah 53:12- Mark 15:27-28
12. Isaiah 11:12-John 3:34;Isaiah 61:1- Acts 10:38
13. Isaiah 53:9- Matthew 27:57-60
14. Isaiah 61:1-2-Luke 4:18-19
15. Isaiah 9:1-2-Matthew 4:12,16,23
16. Isaiah 28:16- Acts 10:45
17. Isaiah 53:2-Mark 6:3,Luke 9:58
18. Isaiah 11:10- Acts 10:45
19. Isaiah 11:11-12- 1948 Israel

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