ISAIAH DESCRIBES JESUS

Isaiah 53:5 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.

The Jewish problem with Isaiah 53: “Isaiah 53 does not appear in synagogue calendar readings. But its obscurity, its presence in the shadows, and the silence surrounding it shouts its importance. Its omission from the synagogue readings points to its uniqueness. One Jewish scholar, Claude Montefiore explained: ‘Because of the Christological interpretation given to the chapter by Christians it is omitted from the series of prophetical lessons for the Deuteronomy Sabbaths… the omission is deliberate and striking.’

“Why is the omission so striking? Because when we finish the cycle of readings for the year, we haven’t really finished it. **We’ve left out a portion of our own prophets ostensibly because of what Christians think about it.** Why has the Christian interpretation of Jewish Scripture placed regulations on what is or is not read in synagogues around the world.

“But it isn’t only because of the Christian interpretation that the Isaiah passage is omitted. After all, the services from which it is omitted aren’t for Christian ears. So the problem is not what Christians think of the passage – it’s what Jewish people might think.” Taken from the Jews for Jesus website.

The Isaiah Passage

Isaiah 52:13-15 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.

Jewish Bible Translation: “Behold my servant shall prosper; he shall be exalted and lifted up, and he shall be very high. As many wondered about you, ‘How marred his appearance is from that of a man, and his features from that of people!’ So shall he cast down many nations; kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for, what had not been told them they saw, and (at) what they had not heard they gazed.”

Jewish commentary (Rashi): “Behold, at the end of days, My servant, Jacob (i.e.) the righteous among him, shall prosper…How marred is his (Israel’s) appearance from that of a man! See how their features are darker than those of other people; so, as we see with our eyes.”

Isaiah 53:1&2 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.

John 1:46 “Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?” Nathanael asked. “Come and see,” said Philip.

Isaiah 53:3&4 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. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.

John 7:5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

Isaiah 53:5&6 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.

Jewish Bible Translation Verse 5: “But he was pained because of our transgressions, crushed because of our iniquities; the chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his wound we were healed.

The biggest problem with the current Jewish interpretation is that it makes “our” and “we” mean Gentiles and “he” and “him” mean Jewish people.

Isaiah 53:7&8 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.

Matthew 27:12-14 When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge – to the great amazement of the governor.

Isaiah 53:9&10 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. 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.

“He was assigned a grave…he will…prolong his days.” He will die, and then he will live. Though not stated, the resurrection is implied.

Matthew 27:57-60a As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus’ body, and Pilate ordered that it be given him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock.

Isaiah 53:11&12 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 sins of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

“The light of life” is not in the Masoretic text but is in the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint (Greek Translation).

“By his knowledge” or “by knowledge of him” NIV note.

Jewish translation from verse 11: “their iniquities he would bear.”

Jewish translation verse 12: “Because he poured out his soul to death, and with transgressors he was counted; and he bore the sins of many, and interceded for the transgressors.”

Luke 23:32-34 Two other man, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed. When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals – one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

Things to Remember

The official Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 since about 1,000AD has been that it is about the Jewish people suffering to pay for the sins of the world. Before that, most rabbis said it described the Messiah, the Christ.

Isaiah 53 is never scheduled to be read in Jewish synagogues, officially, because of what Christians say it means.

Isaiah 52:14-53:12 is an incredibly accurate description of Jesus: His life, death and even His resurrection is implied.

It tells us over and over again that Jesus suffered and died to pay for our sins and that someday He will be highly exalted.

Meditating on this passage is good preparation for the Lord’s Table.