

WHAT WOULD TEVYEH THINK?

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In Fiddler on the Roof, Tevye the milkman, upon hearing that Motle, his future son-in-law, has acted as the match-maker for his own marriage to Tevye's oldest daughter, shouts, 'And are you the rabbi and the bride and the groom too?!' His exasperation at hearing that Motle had defied Jewish tradition in arranging his own 'match' was very evident. We Jews should only be as fraught with concern over what Rashi did in overturning our ancient tradition of understanding Isaiah 53 as befitting Messiah. One can only wonder what Tevye would have thought about Messiah being not only King and servant, but Priest and sacrifice.

In Isaiah 52:13-53:12, the Messiah is presented as exalted and debased. He's also seen as both our High Priest, and the sacrifice which purifies us from our sins. This concept, that Yahveh would cleanse us of our sins, is seen in one of my favorite scriptures:

'He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the Sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they may present to Yahveh, offerings in righteousness' (Mal. 3:3).

This concept, that Yahveh would cleanse us of our sins, is found, and is the reason for, the New Covenant, as expressed by the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34). It would not be by magic or by divine fiat that Yahveh would free us from the power of sin and give us His righteousness (Jer. 23:6). It would be by the sacrifice of His son, Messiah Yeshua. It is the blood that has 'the life' in it (Lev. 17:11). Because Messiah's blood has His Life in it, it is able to not only forgive us our sins, but to give us a new nature, the nature that the prophet Ezekiel spoke of: our new heart and God giving us His Spirit (Ezk. 36:24-27). Isaiah saw this 2,700 years ago. May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob open your eyes to see the wonder and the Glory of this Mystery: our Messiah, sacrificed for us, that we might be like Him. Malachi goes on to say in the verse before it, 'And who shall stand when He appears?! For He is like a refiner's fire' (Mal. 3:2). Will you be able to stand in that Day?

Isaiah 52:15—He Will Sprinkle Many

'So, he will sprinkle many nations and because of him, kings will shut their mouths; for what wasn't told to them, they will see, and what they didn't hear, they will understand.'

Translators and commentators are at odds with one another over how to properly interpret the Hebrew word *זָרַח* (*yaz-zeh*), in this particular verse. Every time the word is used in the Hebrew Bible, it always refers to the sprinkling or splattering of some liquid that is generally associated with sacrifice (blood, oil or water). Every time except for here, some would tell us.

Rashi (11th century), translates it as 'scattered'. He comments that Israel's 'hand will become powerful, and he will cast down...the nations who scattered him.'¹

We have opted for sprinkle as many do² and as we will show, with good reason. Other definitions include

¹ Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. two (New York: The Judaica Press, 1995), p. 423.

² David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p. 59; Dr. Francis Brown, Dr. S. R. Driver, Dr. Charles A. Briggs, based on the lexicon of Professor Wilhelm Gesenius; Edward Robinson, Translator and E. Rodiger, Editor, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Au-

‘tremble’,³ ‘startle’,⁴ ‘scatter’⁵ and even Rabbi Manasseh’s ‘speak.’⁶ Rabbi Manasseh translates the passage, ‘so he’ (Israel) ‘will cause many nations to speak’. This relates to the idea that the nations will be shocked at Israel’s exaltation and they won’t be able to stop talking about it. He writes that at,

‘the sudden change in the fortune of Israel, rising from such extreme meanness to such extensive empire, all the kings of the earth will wonder and discourse on the subject.’⁷

Unfortunately for Rabbi Manasseh, the verse tells us that the kings will shut their mouths, not open them to speak. We are pleased to say that running very deep within the Tanach (Hebrew Bible) and the New Covenant (also part of the Hebrew Bible), is God’s Love for His Jewish people and her final praise and glory.⁸ But the problem with Rashi and Rabbi Manasseh’s translation and interpretation is that it’s based on the Servant of Isaiah 53 being Israel. As we saw from our previous examination of Is. 52:13-14, this is not a solid foundation to stand on. By the end of the text (Is. 53:12), we’ll see that it will have completely crumbled. Suffice it to say for now, Rashi and those who present Israel as the Servant of Isaiah 53, will continue to interpret it as such. This they can do because in many places, the ambiguity and generalizations of what is spoken of the Messianic Servant can also be said to speak of Israel.

Rashi translated the word as ‘cast down’ by literally changing the word. He replaced the Hebrew letter *z*ion (ז) with the *da*let (ד). This would make the word דָּהַד (yah-dah). It’s root meaning is ‘to throw, cast’.⁹ Rashi interprets 52:15 as, ‘So now, even he—his hand will become powerful, and he will cast down the...nations’ who dispersed Israel.¹⁰ The problem with this is obvious. Rashi made up his own word! It has nothing to do with what is written in Isaiah 52:15.

Rashi resorted to an ancient device of the Rabbis that allowed them to substitute letters that looked similar

thors, 1978), p. 633; Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 542; John Goldingay, *New International Biblical Commentary: Isaiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2001), p. 308; R. L. Harris, Editor; Gleason Archer, Jr. and Bruce Waltke, Associate Editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p. 566; Sanford Howard, *L’Chayim: Finding The Light of Shalom*, p. 223; King James Version; New American Standard; New King James Version; New International Version; Charles Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 646; Seth David Postell, *Who?* (Eilat, Israel: Unpublished paper, 2000), p. 6; Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 1992), p. 170.

³ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001; originally published by T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1866-91), pp. 501-502.

⁴ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, p. 303; *The Holy Scriptures According to the Masoretic Text*, vol. 2, p. 1078; Howard, *L’Chayim: Finding The Light of Shalom*, p. 223; Dr. David H. Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible* (Clarksville, MD: Jewish New Covenant Publications, 1998), p. 521.

⁵ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 542, speaks of this as a possible interpretation; Frydland, *What the Rabbis Know About the Messiah*, p. 97, notes the Targum on Isaiah 52:15 uses scatter.

⁶ Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p. 22. ‘Speak’ is Rabbi Manasseh’s literal rendering and paraphrase of the word.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸ See 2nd Sam. 7:10-13, 16; 2nd Chron. 21:7; Ps. 2; 48; Isaiah 1:26-27; 4:2-6; 27:6; 29:7-8, 22-24; 30:19, 26; 31:4-5; 33:5, 20-22, 24; 34:8; 35:1-10; 41:8-20; 44:21-23; 45:17, 25; 54:9-15, 17; 60:1-22; 61:4-7; 62:1-12; 63:7; 65:17-25; 66:10-13, 20-24; Jer. 23:5-8; 30:4-24; 31:1-14, 31-40; 32:37-42; 33:6:25; 50:18-20; Ezk. 16:60-63; 28:25-26; 34:11-31; 36:6-15, 22-27; 37:11-14, 15-28; 38:1-23; 39:23-29; 47:13-23; 48:1-29; Hosea 1:10-11; 2:16-23; 3:5; 11:8-11; 13:14; 14:4-7; Joel 2:18-19, 23-32; 3:1-2, 12-21; Amos 9:14-15; Zephaniah 3:8-20; Zech. 2:4-5, 12; 8:18-19, 23; 9:16; 10:6; 12:1-9; 13:1-2; 14:1-21; Mal. 3:3-4, 11-12 (also: Rom. 11:1-12:3; Rev. 21:1-12; 22:16, etc.). For Israel as a special people or treasure to Yahveh: Ex. 19:5; Lev. 20:24, 26; Deut. 26:18-19; 28:9-10, 12-14; 32:9-13; 33:3, 29.

⁹ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 296. As a side note, this verb is where we get the names Judah and Jew from. It means ‘to confess...give thanks...praise’ in the sense of ‘throwing it up’, or ‘casting it up’ to God.

¹⁰ Rosenberg, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. two, p. 423.

to each other. They did this as a sort of game to see how many different meanings they could derive from a text. Most of the time it was intended for homiletical usage, not theological. In other words, they could use this device to extend a teaching on say, morality, or respecting one's neighbor, but they wouldn't do it to seriously explain what any particular text meant. Rashi was grasping at straws.

Rabbi David Kimchi (1160-1235), saw it as it literally is, 'he shall sprinkle', but he aligned it the with verb *yatif* יָטִיף which means, 'he shall drip' ('in the sense of speech'). This allowed him to interpret the verse as meaning, 'letting words drip from the mouth.' He states:

'Just as they' (the Gentiles), 'were bewildered by his humility' (Israel), 'so shall they be bewildered by his greatness, and talk about him constantly.'¹¹

Like Rashi, Kimchi's 'relating' of the verb *yatif* with *yazeh* has absolutely no foundation in the text. But perhaps this is where Rabbi Manasseh (17th century), got his view. Again, we see a kind of rabbinic juggling going on in order to come to some kind of meaning for the verse. Of course, there is nothing in יָזְזוּ (yaz-zeh), to warrant it's use to mean, 'speaking', and as we saw, this goes against the text as it states that kings 'will shut their mouths.'

Ibn Ezra (12th century), 'deriving the word from the same root' as Rabbi Kimchi says, 'He shall shed the blood of many nations.'¹² Here we see the plain meaning of the verb referring to the blood (sacrifice) but twisted into meaning the destruction of the Gentiles who have harmed Israel. So much for Israel redeeming the nations by its suffering as Rabbi Manasseh taught. Obviously, not all the Rabbis who agreed with Rashi about the Servant being Israel, agreed with him about the interpretation of the verse.

Scatter is how Targum Jonathan paraphrases it¹³ but as Delitzsch points out, the use of it is 'altogether out of the question'.¹⁴ This is because the picture that is being drawn here in Isaiah 53 is of a Messiah who will save and gather his people by his death, not scatter the Gentiles. It is a picture that builds on the desire of Yahveh to redeem Israel and the nations.¹⁵

Franz Delitzsch presents tremble as his translation for the word, with others using a similar word, startle. They do this in the sense of, surprising someone with something astonishing so they will tremble or be startled. Delitzsch thought that the Servant (Messiah), is so transformed before them, from humiliation to exaltation, that they 'tremble' or are surprised at this. This is an ingenious interpretation and application by Delitzsch, yet conceptually, it's the same as the modern Jewish view, created by Rashi, which has Israel as the object of this 'amazement'. It fails on several points though, not the least of which is that we have to stretch beyond reason to accept Isaiah's use of an Arabic definition for a Hebrew word.

Delitzsch found an Arabic word with the same root letters as sprinkle and presented its definition as fitting Isaiah's ancient meaning. This fails for two reasons. One, the usage of the word in the Tanach speaks against it. And two, it would seem rather strange for Isaiah to use an Arabic definition of the word when he would know that the Hebrew definition was different from it, without the slightest hint to us that it was an Arabic word. And why would he chose an Arabic meaning? There are 12 different Hebrew words for *tremble*.¹⁶

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid. Rabbi Rosenberg writes that 'scatter...is probably related to sprinkling.' This would follow Redak and Ibn Ezra in their understanding that the verb should be translated as 'sprinkling'.

¹⁴ Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, vol. 7, p. 503. He also rules out the phrase, 'he will spill' (as in the blood of his enemies); as being out of place also for the same reason.

¹⁵ Deut. 32:43; Is. 42:6; 49:6; 53:10; 56:1-8; Jer. 4:2; Zech. 2:11; 9:9-10; Mal. 1:11, etc.

¹⁶ William Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, no publishing date is given), p. 453.

The *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* says that the Arabic word might be related to the Hebrew word, but presents nothing to support that, but as for the primary meaning of Isaiah's word, they state, 'The verb is always associated with liquids, which spatter (*qal*) or are made to spatter, i.e., used to sprinkle something (*hiphil*).'¹⁷ This would rule out transferring it to an Arabic word that means, 'to leap' or 'spring' up, which Delitzsch argues.

Delitzsch's understanding centered around the 'surprising change that has taken place in the servant of Jehovah.' We think that this misses the mark. It's not the change in the Servant that they will see but 'what wasn't told to them, they will see' (52:13), meaning the realization that the Servant of Yahveh died for them, to give them forgiveness of sin and eternal life. This will become known to them, who weren't looking, and they will be amazed at what the God of Israel has done for them. This will cause them to 'shut their mouths', in awe and deep reverence.

It's very sad to relate that in Rabbi Yerushalmi's commentary on Isaiah 52:13-53:12 (*The Book of Yeshayahu* (Isaiah) 1995) and in Rabbi Rosenberg's two volume commentary on Isaiah (*The Book of Isaiah*, 1997 & 1999), not one mention is made of the ancient Jewish understanding that the Servant of 52:13, and consequently, the entire passage, relates to Messiah. Yet, in Rabbi Rosenberg's book he expressly states that he is familiar with the ancient commentaries, having 'quoted frequently from Talmudic and Midrashic literature.'¹⁸

It's one thing to disagree with an opinion. It's quite another to bury 1,500 years of it by not presenting it. This is dishonest and doesn't let the reader know that another understanding prevailed for a millennia and a half before the current one by Rashi. It's as though all the ancient Jewish sources on this passage were collectively blocked out and banished, never to be heard from again. Why this sudden reversal and black-out of traditional interpretation? There can only be one reason. If it were made known that the ancient Jewish community believed the Servant to be Messiah, it would cause many Jews to come to the conclusion that Yeshua is their Messiah.

What Isaiah prophesied about the Servant of Yahveh in Is. 52:12-53:12, and what happened to Yeshua, are identical. As we've already stated in previous writings, the ancient Jewish community saw this passage as referring to Messiah.¹⁹

With specific reference to 'sprinkle', as well as other parts of Is. 53, we find not the opinion of one individual, but the collective authority of the ancient Synagogue. Out of the Machsor, the order of prayers for the holy days, in this case, the Passover, we find multiple references to Isaiah's Messiah:

'high and exalted and lofty (refers to Is. 52:13), shall be the despised one (refers to Is. 53:3); he shall be prudent in judgment (refers to Is. 52:13), and shall sprinkle many!' (refers to our verse and the word in question, Is. 52:15)²⁰

¹⁷ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, p. 300.

¹⁸ Ibid., vol. 1, 1997; p. ix.

¹⁹ Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2000), p. 997, tells us that Is. 52:13 in the Targum is applied to the Messiah (not the Jewish people). Also, in *Yalkut 2*, par. 338, p. 53c. Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p. 11, quotes Is. 52:13 in the Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel 1st century A.D: 'Behold, my Servant Messiah shall prosper'. Also, p. 11, Baron also writes that in *Sanhedrin* 98b, it asks, 'The Messiah, what is His name? The Rabbis say the 'leprous one'; and '(those) of the house of Rabbi (say) 'The sick one', as it is said, 'Surely He hath borne our sicknesses.' Predating Talmud and Targum are two passages from Midrash. Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings*, pp. 203-204, tells us that the bread and wine of Ruth 2:14 are repeatedly associated with Messianic sufferings which are related to the Messiah of Is. 53 (*Ruth Rabbah* parasha 5, and *Vayikra Rabbah*, par. 34).

²⁰ Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p. 15, note 1: 'David Levi, the English translator of the Machsor, a Jew, says in a note that this verse referred to 'the true Messiah.'

Reasons Against Using Sprinkle

There are two reasons against translating the Hebrew word as sprinkle: syntax, and the ‘sudden’ presentation of the Servant as a priest. Delitzsch rejects the use of sprinkle telling us the Hebrew word,

‘is never construed with the accusative of the person or thing sprinkled’; ‘moreover, there would be something very abrupt in this sudden representation of the servant as a priest.’²¹

The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament also tells us that the standard meaning of the Hebrew word (sprinkle) shouldn’t apply to Isaiah 52:15. This is because of the perceived grammatical error. And yet they admit that it’s not black and white, telling us that ‘startle’ (or ‘tremble’) is not convincing either. In the end, with no clear choice, they opt for *startle* as the lesser of the evils. They write:

‘The meaning of *yazzeḥ* in Isa. 52:15 is unclear. The form appears to represent a 3rd person masc. sg. hiphil impf. of the root *nzh*. The syntax of the clause, however, with *goyim rabbim* (many nations or many peoples)²² ‘as the direct object of the verb, precludes the translation ‘he will sprinkle many nations,’ since this meaning would require the prep. *al*. Some scholars have proposed keeping the derivation from *nzh* and interpreting *yazzeḥ* with a direct object as ‘scatter, overcome.’ Others emend the text or connect the form with Arab. *naza*, ‘jump, hop,’ and translate ‘cause to jump, startle.’ None of these explanations is convincing. The last is the most satisfying, since it preserves the text and fits the context best.’²³

We disagree that it ‘fits the context best’, as this is but an interpretation on their part. In a moment we’ll present evidence to the contrary. The construction of the sentence, as Delitzsch and *TDOT* write, seems to rule out ‘sprinkle’ as a suitable translation because of the syntax but this is not an insurmountable objection. Also, Delitzsch stated that the use of ‘sprinkle’ is not proper because it presents the ‘sudden representation of the servant as a priest’. The fact that Isaiah is a prophet, and that the two verses before this (52:13-14), present the Servant’s exaltation, and brutal degradation and death respectively, are in themselves quite contradictory. This certainly lends itself to the ‘sudden introduction’ of the idea that the Servant will function in a priestly way and sprinkle the nations with his own blood, water and oil (the last two being symbolic of the Holy Spirit as Living Waters and the Anointing from Heaven: Jer. 2:13; Ezk. 36:24-27; John 7:37-39, etc.).

Sprinkle

Despite Isaiah’s poor syntax, I believe that sprinkle is the meaning that God intended. The *TDOT* tells us that Is. 52:15 is an exception to understanding the word as sprinkle.²⁴ Yet many Bibles and Bible commentators translate the Hebrew word as sprinkle,²⁵ not overly concerned with the problem of a missing

²¹ Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, p. 503.

²² The word ‘*goyim*’ can be translated as either ‘Gentiles’, ‘peoples’, or ‘nations’.

²³ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, p. 303.

²⁴ *Ibid.* p. 300, point 2.

²⁵ Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p. 59; Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 633; Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 542; Goldingay, *New International Biblical Commentary: Isaiah*, p. 308; Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 566; Howard, *L’Chayim: Finding The Light of Shalom*, p. 223; KJV; NAS; NKJV; NIV; Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 646; Postell, *Who?* p. 6; and Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings*, p. 170.

preposition. This may be because the Servant of Is. 53 will give his life's blood as a sacrifice, and sprinkle would best fit the context of the entire passage. We also note that in the Mosaic Law, blood was sprinkled for a variety of reasons (e.g. for cleansing and for sanctification, etc.), which we see the Servant performing. Add to this the fact that every use of the word in Scripture, as well as by the Rabbis and the Es-senes,²⁶ relates to sprinkling, and one is hard pressed to see why the meaning of the word should be different for Is. 52:15.

The Hebrew word Isaiah uses that we translate as 'sprinkle' is זָרַק (yaz-zeh). It is a Hifil future, 3rd person, masculine, singular verb whose root is זָרַק (nah-zah).²⁷ There is no higher lexical authority than The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon. It specifically presents the meaning as 'sprinkle' for Is. 52:15.²⁸ Benjamin Davidson's, *Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* also tells us that it means, 'sprinkle' and he too specifically relates it to Is. 52:15.²⁹

Obviously, these two lexical authorities didn't value the syntactical problem as much as some others did. The verb is used 24 times in the Tanach; four times in the Kal and twenty times in the Hifil.³⁰ It is 'always associated with liquids which spatter...or are made to spatter' or to 'sprinkle something'.³¹ The Hifil is how our word is conjugated. It is always used in association with sacrifice and cleansing. It has nothing to do with people being 'startled' or 'made to tremble', or made to speak 'constantly'. Franz Delitzsch concedes that the Hebrew word,

'means to spirt or sprinkle...and is applied to the sprinkling of the blood with the finger, more especially upon the capporeth³² and altar of incense on the day of atonement (differing in this respect from *zaraq*, the swinging of the blood out of a bowl), also to the sprinkling' for 'purification upon a leper with the bunch of hyssop (Lev. 14:7), and of the ashes of the red heifer upon those defiled through touching a corpse (Num. 19:18); in fact, generally, to sprinkling for the purpose of expiation and sanctification. And Vitringa, Hengstenberg, and others, accordingly follow the Syriac and Vulgate in adopting the rendering' for Isaiah 52:15 as 'he will sprinkle'. They have the usage of the language in their favor'.³³

The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* also presents the meaning as 'sprinkle' and lists Is. 52:15 as, 'a reference to cleansing from sin'.³⁴ They specifically state in reference to our word in v. 15 that the,

'prophesied servant of the Lord'...was to 'expiate' the sins of the Gentiles' and that 'this pronouncement is quite important (Acts 8:32-37)'.³⁵

It seems that they didn't have as great a problem with the improper syntax or with the 'sudden' introduction of a word associated with sacrifice, relating to a priestly function. The idea is not that the Gentiles would be startled by the sudden prominence of Israel (Rashi), or that they would tremble at the Servant's

²⁶ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, p. 303-304.

²⁷ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 305.

²⁸ Brown, *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon*, p. 633.

²⁹ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 542.

³⁰ Botterweck, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 9, p. 300.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

³² This is the Hebrew term for the Gold Lid Cover commonly known as the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant.

³³ Delitzsch, *Commentary On The Old Testament: Isaiah*, vol. 7, pp. 502-503.

³⁴ Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, p. 566.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

sudden exaltation (Delitzsch). It speaks of foreign kings and peoples who will be forgiven of their sins and given eternal life, and that from a Jewish Messiah. They weren't looking to Israel to bring forth a Savior. But this concept is in line with Is. 49:6, that Messiah would be a Light to the Gentiles, as well as the Restorer of Israel, bringing Yahveh's salvation to both groups. The Theological Wordbook tells us that the verb means,

'a spattering or (Hiphil) sprinkling of blood, oil, or water with one's finger' (Lev. 4:6) or a 'sprinkler' (Lev. 14:7). It is distinguished from *zaraq*, a heavier 'sprinkling' executed with the whole hand (Ex. 9:8; 29:20-21; Lev. 4:6').³⁶

Davidson says that the word carries with it the idea to 'expiate'.³⁷ This speaks of the expiation or rooting out of sins as inherent in the biblical meaning of the verb 'to sprinkle'. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* also prefers 'sprinkle' over the others, stating that,

'Sprinkle is still the best attested rendering of this frequently occurring word, although some have preferred to translate 'startle' (which would then be the only occurrence of that meaning for this root in the OT). The sprinkling connotes the bestowal of spiritual cleansing upon the nations'.³⁸

With these four authorities (BDBG; Davidson; *Theological Wordbook*; *Wycliffe's Bible Commentary*), as our basis for translating the word as 'sprinkle', we go on to address, 'the sudden presentation of the Servant as priest.' Prophets do speak in enigmatic ways and Isaiah presenting Messiah in his priestly role would not be out of line, as sacrifice is the primary concept for sprinkle, and the text of Isaiah 52:13-53:12. Isaiah presents the Servant as dying for the sins of Israel (53:5-6, 10), something that is obviously sacrificial. Therefore, speaking a word that is associated with sacrifice is not as 'far-fetched' as Delitzsch and others would have us to believe. John Goldingay, while recognizing the syntactical dilemma and the theoretical nature of 'startle' believes that sprinkle should be used here:

'The usual expression would be, 'he will sprinkle (water or whatever) over many nations.' Only here is the recipient of the sprinkling the object of the verb. NRSV follows a speculative suggestion regarding another meaning of the verb ('startle'), based on Arabic'. It fits the immediate context better, though the sacrificial references later make sprinkle less surprising here.'³⁹

Goldingay links 'sprinkle' with the body of the text that follows, even though he is aware of the grammatical problem. He is not 'surprised' by the use of a word that lends itself to sacrifice because he is aware that sacrifice is a major theme of Is. 53:4-12. Before Goldingay, David Baron tells us that the missing preposition is not that unusual:

'It is true that *hizzah* (to sprinkle) is usually construed with the accusative, in which case the preposition *על* 'al, 'upon', should follow the verb. But slight deviations and irregularities in the construction of phrases do sometimes occur in the Hebrew Bible; they do not, however, alter the meaning of words, and in this case, though *hizzah* al would mean, 'sprinkle upon,' *hizzah* by itself still means 'sprinkle'.

'Secondly, the only other passage in the second half of Isaiah where another form of this same verb occurs is' chapter 63:3, 'and there the word most certainly means 'sprinkle.' It is alleged against the rendering of the phrase, 'so shall He sprinkle,' that 'there would be something very abrupt in the sudden representation of the Servant as priest...but there is

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, p. 542.

³⁸ Pfeiffer, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 646.

³⁹ Goldingay, *New International Biblical Commentary: Isaiah*, p. 308.

no more abruptness...in the introduction of this idea of priesthood in this passage than in the sudden transition from the exaltation described in the thirteenth verse to the depth of humiliation in the fourteenth verse.'

'In this introductory section' (the three verses of Is. 52:13-15); a brief summary' (of Is. 53), in 'condensed form', is presented. It 'would seem strange if there were no reference also to the priestly atoning function of the Servant...of which the next section' (Is. 53), 'is so full.'⁴⁰

Adding Goldingay and Baron to our list of authorities as our basis for 'sprinkle', we see that the idea that God had in mind when He gave His word to Isaiah centered around sacrifice. The idea of sprinkling with blood⁴¹ is seen in four major themes of Torah. All of them relate to Messiah's role as High Priest (Ps. 110:4; Zech. 6:12-13), and Isaiah's exalted and suffering Messianic Servant:

1. the ratifying of the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai;
2. forgiveness of sin for all Israel on the Day of Atonement;
3. the cleansing of the leper, and
4. the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests in the Tabernacle where the Living God dwelt.

Sprinkle: The Mosaic Covenant

Perhaps the most telling place of all, where blood was sprinkled, was upon the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai in the official ratification of the Covenant with Yahveh (Ex. 24:6, 8). The idea of a covenant is best described as a union between two parties, which is conceptually reflected in the institution of marriage. We are not talking about a rental contract where one party tries to get the best of the other, but a living relationship that grows deeper in love over time, for all time. With the Mosaic Covenant, God acted as the man, freeing his Bride, Israel, from cruel slavery; protecting her from her enemies, and providing food, shelter and clothing for her. Israel for her part was to be grateful and faithful to Yahveh and to Him alone, and to love Him by obeying His Commandments (Ex. 24:4-8).

The sacrificial blood served as that which solemnly bound both parties together. The animal's life was in the blood (Lev. 17:11) and this life would be offered up to Yahveh as the foundation for the Covenant, binding both parties together in a holy ceremony. Each party was required to live out their obligations of the Covenant, under penalty of death. The Covenant was 'sealed' in the blood of the sacrifice. Everything agreed upon was permanent and irrevocable. At Mt. Sinai the blood was not only placed upon the altar but also upon the people of Israel. The two parties, Yahveh and Israel, were brought together, bound together as 'one', by the blood of the sacrifice. How appropriate this next passage is, concerning sprinkling, and what Yeshua did in establishing the New Covenant by his blood.

'Moses wrote down all the words of Yahveh. Then he arose early in the morning and built an altar at the foot of the Mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve Tribes of Israel. He sent young men of the Sons of Israel and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to Yahveh. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.'

'Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people and they

⁴⁰ Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, pp. 65-66.

⁴¹ Sprinkling could be with oil as well as water but we have chosen blood because in Isaiah 53 the context speaks of a blood sacrifice.

said, 'All that Yahveh has spoken we will do and we will be obedient!' So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'Behold! The blood of the Covenant which Yahveh has made with you in accordance with all these words.' (Ex. 24:4-8)

The Covenant that Yahveh made with Israel through Moses was incredible. The God of the Universe was binding Himself to an earthly people. He would watch over them. He would fight their enemies. He would heal their sick. He would provide them with their own nation, the Land of Israel. And He would be their God forever.⁴²

It was the sprinkling of the blood sacrifice that enabled the two parties to be one. It serves as a perfect example for what we think Isaiah meant in his use of it: the Servant sprinkling the nations (and Israel), with his blood. The picture of the Suffering Servant offering his life as a sacrifice is seen in that the nations, as well as Israel, will come into God's New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). A number of verses in Isaiah 53 specifically deal with the theme of the Servant's sacrificial death (vv. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12).

How much more powerful is the Covenant that God has made with us through the blood (Life), of His son? The Servant not only made a Covenant between Yahveh and the people, he is that Covenant. Many think that the New Covenant (Testament), is written on paper. What is written on paper is the explanation of what the New Covenant entails. Yeshua from Nazareth is the New Covenant. It is he that was used by Yahveh to establish God's Word to Israel that our sins are cleansed, and we are given new life. Yeshua is the one who was 'torn apart' or sacrificed, that we might know how serious God is concerning His desire for a holy people that He would dwell among forever.

Yeshua is literally the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). This is seen in two other passages of Isaiah that are acknowledged by our Jewish Sages as pertaining to Messiah:

Is. 42:6: 'I am Yahveh. I have called you in righteousness. I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you and I will appoint you as Covenant to the' Jewish 'people; (also) as a Light to the nations'.⁴³

Is. 49:8: 'Thus says Yahveh, 'In a favorable time I have answered you and in a day of salvation I have helped you. And I will keep you and give you for a Covenant of the people, to restore the Land' of Israel, 'to make them' the Jewish people, 'inherit the desolate heritages'.⁴⁴

Mt. Sinai served as a type and picture for the ultimate Covenant that God sealed with Israel through the death of His unique son, Messiah Yeshua. The sprinkling of blood upon the altar and the people speak of Yeshua's blood being sprinkled upon the heavenly Altar (Rev. 6:9; 11:1, etc.), and on all those that believe in him, for entry into this New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). Only with this blood can one enter into the Kingdom of Messiah, for the Kingdom of Messiah Yeshua is pure and holy and only his blood forgives our sin and transforms our nature to be like his and because Messiah's Life is in his blood, we have power to walk out what God requires of us.

When Abraham asked how it was that his sons would possess the Land of Canaan, Yahveh said:

'Bring Me a three year old heifer, a three year old female goat, a three year old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon. Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other but he did not cut the birds.' (Gen. 15:9-10)

The Life that was in (the blood of) the animals established God's promises to Father Abraham. Now God

⁴² Gen. 12:7; 13:15-17; 15:7-8; 17:2, 7-9; 24:7; 28:4, 13; 35:12; Ex. 6:6-8, etc.

⁴³ Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, p. 996. The section (from Is. 42:1ff) is found in the Targum as relating to Messiah, 'as also in the Midrash on Ps. 2; and in Yalkut 2, p. 104d.'

⁴⁴ Ibid. *Yalkut 2*, p. 52b.

has established his promises of eternal life to us by the sacrificial death of His son, Yeshua. The Messiah has been made the Covenant. It was he that was 'cut' or pierced to the tree as the authoritative seal of what Yahveh had promised: that Israel's sins would be forgiven and that she would have eternal life with Him.⁴⁵ The idea of another covenant, after Moses, is seen not only in Jer. 31:31-34, but also two chapters after Isaiah 53:

'Incline your ear and come to Me. Listen, that you may live and I will make an everlasting Covenant with you according to the faithful mercies shown to David.' (Is. 55:3)

This is not the Mosaic Covenant, as great as that is. Here God states that He 'will make', future tense, an everlasting Covenant with us. Yahveh made the New Covenant with Israel, and extended it to the Gentiles,⁴⁶ using the blood of His Messiah to sprinkle all who believe in Him. This brings the new heart (new life, 'for the life of the flesh is in the blood' and the Life of Messiah was in his blood), and God's Spirit that Yahveh speaks of, that all might walk in His Ways:

'Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the Land that I gave to your Fathers and so you will be My people and I will be your God.' (Ezek. 36:26-28)

Yeshua's sacrificial death forms the basis or underlying superstructure for the promises of God to Israel. This is the strongest possible assurance that God could give. All His promises in the other covenants (Noah, Abraham and Moses), were ratified with the blood sacrifice of animals. But the New Covenant has been ratified with the blood of His own son. In this there is no greater assurance from God that sins are forgiven (Jer. 31:31-34), and the new nature is given (e.g. the 'new heart' of Ezk. 36:24-27, which is a reflection of Messiah's nature), and eternal life in the New Jerusalem (Is. 30:16; 66:22-24; Joel 2:11, 31; Amos 5:18-20; Mal. 4:1-5, etc.). We must not take lightly what God has done for us. The writer of Hebrews takes note of this and it's not an accident that he uses sprinkle in relation to the (blood) cleansing of our heart:

'and since we have a High Priest over the House of God, let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds'. (Heb. 10:21-24)

'Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severe the punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God and has regarded as unclean the blood of the Covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of Grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!' And again, 'Yahveh will judge His people.' It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the Living God.' (Heb. 10:28-31)

'For you have not come to a Mountain that can be touched and to a blazing Fire and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind and to the blast of a heavenly Shofar⁴⁷ and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spo-

⁴⁵ 2nd Sam. 7:16; Ps. 16:8-11; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezk. 36:24-27; Dan. 12:13.

⁴⁶ Deut. 32:43; Ps. 22:27; Is. 42:6; 49:6; 56:1-8; 65:1; Jer. 4:2; Zech. 2:11; 9:9-10; Mal. 1:11, etc.

⁴⁷ The Hebrew word 'shofar' is an instrument like a trumpet that is generally made from the horn of a ram. This is the word used in the account of God descending upon Mt. Sinai in Ex. 19:16ff and is generally rendered trumpet in English.

ken to them. For they could not bear the command, 'If even a beast touches the Mountain, it will be stoned.' And so terrible was the sight that Moses said, 'I am full of fear and trembling.'

'But you have come to Mount Zion and to the City of the Living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to millions of angels, to the General Assembly and Congregation of the Firstborn who are enrolled in Heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Yeshua, the mediator (High Priest), of a New Covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned them on Earth, much less will we escape who turn away from Him who warns from Heaven.' (Heb. 12:18-25)

Isaiah 52:15 speaks of Messiah as our High Priest, with the use of the sacrificial term, sprinkle. After having just spoken of his death (52:14), Isaiah speaks of what his death (blood), will procure for the kings and peoples of the Earth: cleansing from sin and a new life in the Kingdom of Messiah. They will be humbled by the great gift of eternal life, at the cost of God's son, Yeshua. We must not take 'belief' in Yeshua lightly. Yeshua was literally made the Covenant. God promised all these blessings upon the death of His unique son. We have this New Covenant because of what the Father and the Son have done for us.

In the next Jewish Newsletter we'll pick up where we've left off and speak of the other three themes in our Tanach that address sprinkling with blood. They are forgiveness for sin for Israel on the Day of Atonement; the cleansing of the leper; and the consecration of Aaron and his sons as priests in the Tabernacle where Yahveh dwelt.

What would Tevyeh have to say about all this? Some might think that believing in Yeshua as our Messiah would be just too much for him. They can see him now, saying, 'Tradition!', and refusing to believe. And he most likely would have, at first. But, after hearing the matter out and mulling over it, we think he'd ask God what He thought about it. And God, ever faithful, would draw Tevyeh into the realization that this was His Truth. And Tevyeh would rejoice in that day, having found his Messiah, the ancient Hope of Israel. May you too rejoice with Tevyeh and hundreds of thousands of other Jews who have found Life in Messiah Yeshua.