

# WHO WOULD BELIEVE?

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The last three verses of Isaiah 52:13-15 offer an introduction and summary for the Servant of Yahveh who is the Messiah of Israel. In five previous Jewish Newsletters (#28-32) on those three verses, the Talmud (*Suka* 52a, 2nd century BC), Targum (1st century AD), and Rambam (1135-1204 AD) in his Letter to Yemen, all note that Isaiah was speaking of our Messiah, but about 930 years ago, Rashi (1040–1105 AD) changed the interpretation to mean Israel. All the Rabbis of his time were up in arms against him but today Rashi's interpretation prevails. Why? Because the ancient interpretation that it's the Messiah finds a perfect picture in Jesus. And that's why Rashi changed it. Even *The Jewish Encyclopedia* says Isaiah spoke of Messiah.<sup>1</sup> Rashi was wrong. Rambam was right. This means that you've been traveling down the wrong path and need to switch over to God's path for you. It's a matter of eternal life and death...yours.

The Servant of Yahveh (Is. 52:13) would be so honored that our ancient sages said he would be greater than Father Abraham, greater than Moses and even greater than the angels.<sup>2</sup> This was seen from the three verbs of exaltation in the verse. Are there any beings or creatures that exist who are greater than the angels yet lesser than God? No. There's nothing 'in-between' the angels and God. But our ancient Rabbis placed Messiah here.

The prophet Micah lived around 700 BC and said that Messiah *existed* before time, from the ancient days.<sup>3</sup> And God speaks of Messiah as being His Son

in Ps. 2:2, 6-7, so being exalted above the angels would be His normal position.

Messiah's humiliation would come before His exaltation though. As God the Son, He left His heavenly abode to reveal the Father to us. He not only spoke as no one had before or since, but He would die to bring us the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34). This atones for our sins, and gives us a new heart and the Spirit of the Living God (Ezk. 36:24-27) so that we can know our God intimately.

Why do we Jews think our rejection of Yeshua (the Hebrew name of Jesus), means that He wasn't our Messiah? When Moses came to save us out of Egypt, we cursed him (Ex. 5:19-21) and when we were in the Wilderness we wanted to stone him (Ex. 17:4, etc.). Moses is a picture of Messiah (Dt. 18:15-18) and so our rejection of Yeshua only means that we're true to form, following in the evil deeds of our Fathers. It's time to rethink our rejection of Yeshua for God knew that we would do that (Ps. 118:22), and yet holds out His Son to us that we might change our minds and come to know true Life.

Yeshua was brutally beaten and crucified, not for His sins, but for ours (Is. 53:5). He took our place. All of us have broken God's holy Law with our thoughts and actions (Ex. 20:17) and the penalty for that is death in this lifetime and Hell in the next. His humbling Himself, taking our place, not only gives us a way out of an impossible situation but reveals Who our Messiah and our Father are. They love you. And They have proven their love for you in Messiah's humiliation. You want to know the God of Israel? The Way has been made open to you by the death and resurrection of Yeshua.

Please don't think that because you're a good per-

<sup>1</sup> Sanford R. Howard, L'Chayim: Finding The Light of Shalom (Thorsby, AL: Sabbath House, Inc., 1999), pp. 222-223, *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, p. 204, article 'Servant of God'.

<sup>2</sup> Rabbi Shmuel Yerushalmi, Translated by Yehoshua Starrett, *The Book of Yeshayahu* (Isaiah), (Jerusalem: Moznaim Publishing Corporation, 1999), p. 334. See also *Midrash Tanhuma* and *Yalkut* vol. 2, para. 338.

<sup>3</sup> תורה נביאים וכתובים (Torah, Nivi'im and Kituvim: The Law, Prophets and Writings): *The Holy Scrip-*

*tures According to the Masoretic Text*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, thirteenth printing, 1982), pp. 1478-1479; Micah 5:1 (5:2 in some English translations).

son that God will give you eternal life on Judgment Day. First of all, there's nothing in our Scriptures that confirms this popular but false rabbinic notion. In other words, it's not grounded in what God thinks about the situation. Second, it's not a question of my good works outnumbering my evil deeds because just one evil deed is enough to get me God's death sentence. So it wouldn't matter if all my deeds were good except for one; I'd still have to die and go to Hell because I'm not *like* God and Heaven means dwelling with the Living God who is spiritual Fire (Dt. 4:24). And who really knows how many good or evil deeds they've done? Have you been keeping track all your life?

This way of thinking only brings fear and God doesn't want that for you. He wants you to know what awaits you on Judgement Day. A good verdict! But not because you fasted and prayed on Yom Kipur. The good verdict will come as you *believe* what God Himself has done for you in sending His Son to die for you and to forgive your sins and fill you with His Spirit...now!

The people that our God has reached out to, who weren't even looking for Him, were the Gentiles! And we who think we know Him, have spurned His only Son, which dishonors our God. Well do we earn the epithet of our Fathers in the Wilderness who said they believed but wouldn't trust Him with their lives when push came to shove. Our Fathers rejected the very God who brought them out from underneath Egyptian slavery! As improbable as this seems, *this is* our history and they were our ancient Fathers!

Our sins can only be forgiven by Yeshua's blood sacrifice. This is what Isaiah means when he says that Messiah would 'sprinkle many nations' (Is. 53:15). Some might think it gross or silly for blood to be shed in order to be forgiven but that's how God set up the Mosaic sacrificial system (Lev. 1-5), and how we Jews came into covenant with Him (Ex. 24:4-8). It's also how we were forgiven as a nation every year on the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16), and it was by a blood sacrifice that the leper was cleansed (Lev. 14:7). In God's eyes, we're all like lepers in need of being cleansed from our filthiness and uncleanness. And God has provided that for you in the blood sacrifice of His Son. Will you reject

Yeshua too or believe?

Not many of us Jews have believed what our God has done for us in sending Messiah Yeshua to die for our sins. Isaiah says in 53:1,

*'Who has believed our message?! And to whom has the arm of Yahveh been revealed?'*

This speaks of our unwillingness to accept Jesus which is rebellion toward God Himself. The Lord speaks of this and of going to the Gentiles who *would* accept Messiah Yeshua:

*'I was ready to be sought out by those who did not ask, to be found by those who did not seek me. I said, "Here I am! Here I am!" to a nation that did not call on My Name. I held out my hands all day long to a rebellious people who walk in a way that is not good, following their own thoughts; a people who provoke Me to My face continually' (Is. 65:1-3).*

God knew that we would be the last peoples on the face of the Earth to believe that Yeshua was the Messiah. Isaiah 53:1 is sad proof of this. Rashi interprets it to mean that it's the nations that won't believe what God has done with us Jews, exalting us over them.<sup>4</sup> When one starts from a false premise, they usually get a wrong answer and Rashi is no exception. What makes his concept so insidious is that God does have a wonderful plan for exalting Israel.<sup>5</sup> But Isaiah's message and Messenger has to do with a Jewish Messiah who comes *not* like a conquering King David, but who is accused by our own religious authorities of His day as being a blasphemer. They had Him crucified by the Romans. *How could any Jew believe that a crucified Jew was the Messiah?! This is at the heart of 'Who has believed our message?'* And the lies that are being told about Him to this day! That Yeshua hated the Jewish people and our ways...it's just not true. Read the New

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi A. J. Rosenberg, *The Book of Isaiah*, vol. two (New York: The Judaica Press, 1995), pp. 424-425.

<sup>5</sup> Num. 23:19-24; 24:3-9; 2nd Sam. 7:10-13, 16, 24; Is. 1:26-27; 2:1-3; 60:1-22; 61:4-7; 62:1-12; 63:7; 65:17-25; 66:10-13, 20-24; Jer. 23:5-8; 30:3-24; 31:1-15, 23-28, 31-40; 32:37-44; 33:6-25.

Testament and find out for yourself how Jewish Jesus really is. He's *the* true Son of Father Abraham.

Truth be told, no one believed that He was the Messiah when He died. It looked like there was nothing more to His claims of being Messiah. But God our Father raised His Son Yeshua from the dead, never to die again as a sign to us that Yeshua is indeed our Messiah. Now, I wasn't there but Peter, James, John and a number of other Jewish followers of His were. They say that they saw Him alive from the dead. And this totally changed their lives because when He was crucified, the New Testament records that they all fled and were afraid that our religious leaders would pick them up and crucify them too. But when they saw Him alive and in His glorified body, their lives were radically transformed.

Before, they were scared to death. But now, they were bold as lions to proclaim our Risen Savior! And they all laid their lives on the line for the rest of their lives, declaring that Yeshua is our Messiah, even to the point that ten of eleven of Yeshua's closest followers, His Apostles, would later die because of their insistence that Yeshua is the Messiah. That's quite a change for those scared men and this tells us that something really did happen to turn them around. Were they all just crazy and trying to deceive us or had they truly seen our Messiah alive from the dead? They also said that in His Name was not only forgiveness of sins but the coming of the Holy Spirit of God to dwell in us.

Isaiah 53:1 continues by speaking of God *revealing* His arm. The arm of Yahveh is seen as the power or redemption of God. And it being revealed means that God will redeem Israel (and many other people). Just a few verses before this (Is. 52:10), the prophet speaks of Yahveh *bearing* His arm so that all can see it. And in Is. 51:9 he sees Israel asking this arm to 'awake!' as in former times and deliver her. Yeshua is the personification of that arm. He is the Right hand and arm of Yahveh that Yahveh has revealed and bared to us.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In these cites it seems that Scripture is speaking of a person: Ex. 15:6, 16; Dt. 9:29; 11:2; Ps. 89:19-21, 22-24; 98:1-2; 118:16; 138:7-10; Is. 40:10; 48:13; 52:10; 53:1; 62:8; 63:5, 12; 66:1-2, etc.

## *Parched Ground*

Isaiah goes on in verse two to speak of Messiah and the rebellious environment that He would grow up in:

'For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot and like a root out of parched ground. He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.'

In other words, He wasn't head and shoulders above His peers and strikingly handsome as King Saul (1st Sam. 9:2). He looked just like an ordinary Jew and so we weren't attracted to Him because of natural looks. It's also here that Rashi's concept that Isaiah is speaking of Israel, begins to break down. The verse reads best when it's seen as speaking about a person, not a nation, no? Other verses that follow this in Is. 53 will confirm this.

The word for tender shoot *יֹנֵק* (yonek) literally means, 'a sucker, sprout, shoot' and is used of an infant child who is still nursing.<sup>7</sup> It, as well as the word for *root* immediately call to mind Isaiah's words about the Child that would be born to us, the Son that would be given to us who would reign on David's Throne (Kingdom) and is called the Prince of Peace (Is. 9:6-7). Speaking of this, the Targum says that, 'His name has been from ancient time' and that, 'Messiah has been for ever.'<sup>8</sup> Four chapters later the prophet further describes the heir to the Throne as a shoot coming from the stump of Jesse, a branch from his roots (11:1).

Parched ground is a land that doesn't get much if any rain and so doesn't bear grain or fruit. A land like this is sparsely inhabited. It's a symbol of our Jewish people that were in rebellion to God at the time of Messiah. Yes, they all said they believed in God but when God the Son stood before them, many of our religious leaders wanted to murder

<sup>7</sup> Benjamin Davidson, *The Analytical Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1979), p. 324.

<sup>8</sup> Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Old Testament in the Light of Rabbinical Writings* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 1992), p. 196.

Him. As you read the New Testament you'll see that many of our Jewish people loved to be with Yeshua and to hear His words and to see the power of God moving through Him as He healed *all* that came to Him. It was our Father revealing His love and compassion for us, the core of the Torah (the Law of Moses; Lev. 19:18), through His Son. Seth Postell suggests that the verse,

'could be an allusion to the spiritual atmosphere in the period of time of the servant coming' with the word for 'Zion' possibly meaning *tsiah* or 'dry...the same word used here for 'dry' ground. In other words, Israel, or Zion, is a spiritually dry people because of her disobedience, and it's amidst this dry atmosphere that the servant brings new life.'<sup>9</sup>

Rashi interprets this verse to mean that we were a humble people but humility implies trust and reliance upon God and we were anything but that in the Wilderness with Moses.<sup>10</sup> Radak sees it a little differently and states it speaks of our exile in Babylon and Israel coming up before God in a miraculous manner. He says that a root growing in dry ground is truly miraculous.<sup>11</sup> Rashi's thoughts don't line up with Scripture but Radak's is ingenious for it seems to be a possible interpretation of the text, at least for this verse but Postell explains why it can't be interpreted as Rashi and Radak believed:

'Throughout the rest of the chapter we find a distinction of the pronouns 'us' and 'we' and the pronouns 'he' and 'him.' Why does Isaiah make this distinction? In this chapter it is very clear that the 'he' and 'him' refers to the servant. Rashi understood the 'us' and 'we' as referring to the Gentile nations' reaction towards the servant. But can this be supported from the context? Why, then, does Isaiah refer to the

Gentiles in 52:15 as 'they' and 'them'?'<sup>12</sup>

Rashi, saying that Isaiah is speaking about Israel and not Messiah distorts the prophet's words and defies common sense. Radak changes the venue but also fails to convince.

I know on Judgment Day that a good verdict awaits me. Not because of any good works that I've done but because I, like Father Abraham have believed God and walk with Him. And in this, there are many righteous works that I do, yet not I but the Spirit of God that dwells within me. I cannot boast that I have earned eternal life. It's a free Gift from God and for that I am so grateful.

It's simple to get to know Messiah and our Father. Thirty-two years ago in Oct. 1975, I bowed my head and asked Yeshua to come into my heart and to forgive me of my sins. I wasn't expecting what happened next. The Spirit of the Living God came upon me and entered me and I felt Shalom from Heaven for the first time in my life. It was unlike anything I had ever known. I was actually able to feel and sense the Spirit of God in me. And it was wonderful! Peace like a river, as Isaiah spoke of (66:12). I was being given that new heart and I began to know God, not just to know *about* God but to personally experience the God of our Fathers. In all that time the Spirit of God has never left me.

You, too, can know this new Life that God has for you, in His Son. Come. Begin to walk in your ancient Jewish heritage. This is the promise that God made to Father Abraham when He said that in your Seed all the nations would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). Yeshua says,

'This is indeed the will of my Father; that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the Last Day' (John 6:40).

<sup>9</sup> Seth David Postell, *Who?* (Eilat, Israel: unpublished paper, 2000), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> Rosenberg, *The Book of Isaiah*, p. 424.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. Radak, an acronym for Rabbi David Kimchi lived from 1160 to 1235 AD

<sup>12</sup> Postell, *Who?*, p. 8.