

The Chosen People



Volume XIII, Issue 8 SPECIAL EDITION

*Would
you*



*recognize
the
Messiah
if...*

...our Hebrew Bible made it clear?



Is the Lubavitcher Rebbe,
Menachem Mendel
Schneerson, the Messiah?



Who Is the Man of Sorrows?

by Alan M. Shore



As I entered young adulthood, I was like every other Jewish person I had ever known. As was the case with all of my Jewish peers, the name Jesus produced in me a complex set of emotions, dominated mainly by embarrassment. I was baffled by the plethora of churches, crosses, statues, paintings and street preachers that came into view in virtually every direction I turned. I couldn't fathom it. Add to this the suspicion of the Christian world that was practically encoded in my DNA, and you won't be surprised that getting to know Jesus was not high on my list of priorities.

Later, as I became more aware of what Jesus meant to the Christians, I could finally, honestly, ask what his death could possibly have to do with me. He had been crucified. So what? It was a sad but distant tragedy. What could the death of a man twenty centuries ago mean to me today?

It was during this time of questioning that someone showed me Isaiah 53, a passage in my own Jewish Bible. These verses leapt out at me: *He was despised, and forsaken of men, a man of pains, and acquainted with disease, and as one from whom men hide their face: he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely our diseases he did bear, and our pains he carried; whereas we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded because of our transgressions, he was crushed because of our iniquities: the chastisement of our welfare was upon him, and with his stripes we were healed* (Isaiah 53:3-5 JPS).

For the first time, I was able to make a connection with this helpless sufferer who had been given an oversized portion of the rejection, grief, humiliation and suffering that seemed to characterize the history of my people. I also began to see at last that somehow His suffering touched my own. What was this "Man of Sorrows?" Taken together with other pieces of knowledge that were coming my way, it was not a great leap for me to see it was Jesus or Yeshua (the Hebrew name his mother called him).

Isaiah 53 helped me to see two things of critical importance. The first is that the suffering of the Man of Sorrows is meaningful—not only in the abstract but also in concrete ways that help us to understand ourselves and our circumstances. As the suffering of Yeshua becomes real to us, it somehow helps us to bear our own suffering.

The second thing, perhaps even more important, is that the suffering Man of Sorrows depicted in Isaiah 53 powerfully reveals the Jewish dimension of Yeshua's personality. After I made this connection, I could no longer see Yeshua as alien to Jewish life. It was quite the opposite. He seemed to me to be the embodiment of Jewish experience for all time—destined to suffer at the hands of the world, yet finally to be vindicated by God.

A Jewish Sailor Reads Isaiah 53

by Israel Cohen

Once I was in the Navy and away from my parents, I had the opportunity to do some new things—not all of them strictly kosher—and also to consider some ideas that I never could have thought about before: ideas like Yeshua being the Messiah.

My father and I regularly attended our Conservative synagogue in Philadelphia, especially during the High Holy Days, and from the age of eight I went to Hebrew school every afternoon. But after my Bar Mitzvah, my religious education came to a halt. Later on, I joined the Navy and found myself away from home for the first time. Of all places to get stationed, I wound up in Morocco, North Africa.



One afternoon as I sat alone in the barracks, a young sailor came over to me and asked if I was Jewish. When I told him I was, he asked me to teach him about being Jewish (obviously he was not!). As I started to tell him, he interrupted me: “Can you teach me about being Jewish from the Bible?” I got hold of a Jewish Bible, but didn’t know where to turn. So he asked me to turn to Isaiah. When he saw I was having trouble finding it, he found it for me and turned to the 53rd chapter.

“Read this aloud,” he said, and I did. At first I thought I had the wrong Bible. Was this young sailor tricking me? It sounded so much like what my Christian friends used to say about Jesus.

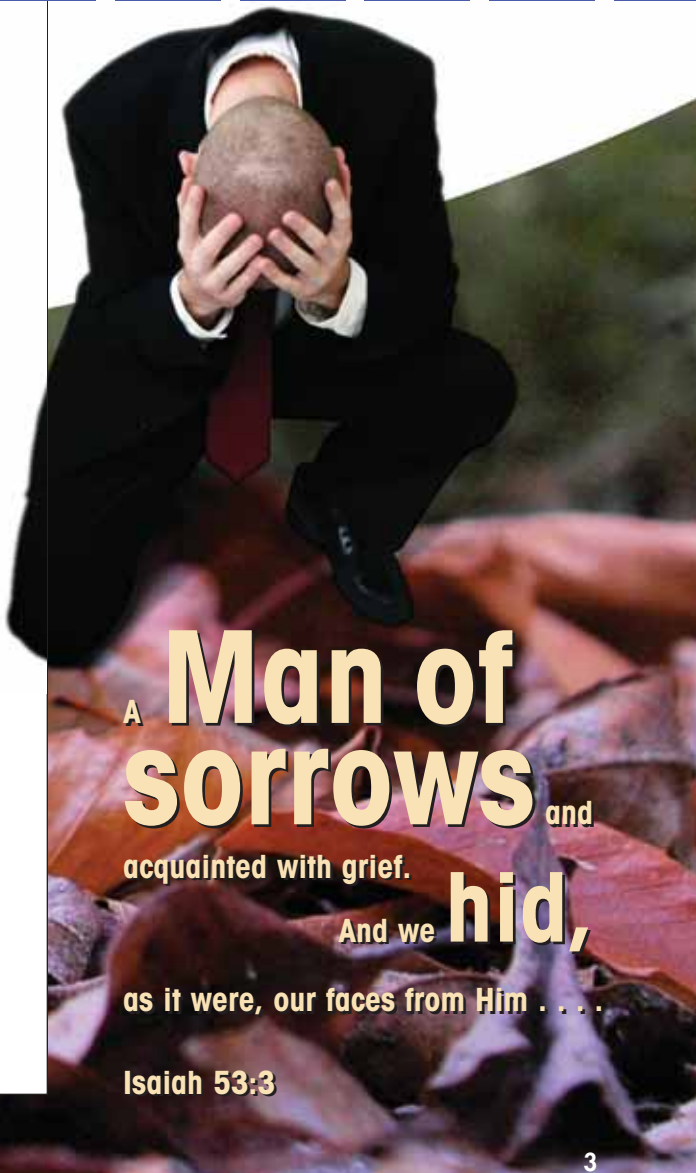
My confusion deepened when the sailor took out his New Testament and had me read the third chapter of a book called “John.” I read about a Jewish man talking with Jesus, and I could not figure out why a Jewish person would want to talk to Jesus the Christian.

My friend explained that Jesus was Jewish, the New Testament was written by Jews and that it tells all about the Jewish Messiah. Never in my life had I been so confused!

But after three hours of talking and reading from both of our Bibles, especially Isaiah 53 in my Jewish Bible, my confusion started to disappear. I understood that I needed the forgiveness offered by Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. But I also knew I was Jewish and that Jews do not believe in Jesus!

I was so torn that I actually cried that sleepless night, pulling my blanket over my head so the others could not hear my weeping. I then turned on a flashlight so I could read the New Testament my friend had given me.

As my tears fell upon the pages of the New Testament, I could no longer resist doing what I knew I had to do: I prayed to God and told him that I believed Jesus was really the Jewish Messiah. I asked His forgiveness for the many ways I had failed to live as I knew God willed! A few moments later, I went peacefully to sleep—and woke up to a brand new life.



A **Man of sorrows** and

acquainted with grief.

And we **hid,**

as it were, our faces from Him

Isaiah 53:3

A Secret Identity

by Paula Michelson

As a 14-year-old big sister, I well remember when my brother, Ron, was studying for his Bar Mitzvah. While he was supposed to be paying attention in Hebrew class to his Haftarah (the portion he was assigned to master for the ceremony), I guess he got bored (as only he could!) and started restlessly looking at other writings in his Bible.

He was a little surprised to discover a book, Isaiah, that he had never heard of and a chapter that grabbed his attention the instant he read through it. When he came home he found that our parents were out and he cautiously asked me into his bedroom. He gave me his Bible and had me sit down while he closed the door. This was a very unusual act since our parents' rule was that none of our doors were to be closed during the day unless someone was ill. I looked down at the chapter he had opened his Bible to and began to read.

I remember reading these words as if it were yesterday: *"Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?"* (Isaiah 53:1). After I read this entire chapter, my brother asked me, almost afraid of what I would answer, "Who do you think Isaiah was speaking about?"



At that moment, I knew. But it was a big risk to say what I did: "I think it's Jesus." To my surprise, he agreed. "But what," he asked, "do we do about this?"

We agreed to keep it our secret, for the time being, frightened that our parents would throw us out of the house!

Years later my brother and I became convinced that Yeshua (Jesus) is the Messiah. I wish I had known as a teenager what I know now: that knowing our Messiah does not cause us to abandon our Jewish identity. Instead it allows us to become what God always intended, faithful Jews united with Messiah.



By his knowledge
**My
righteous
Servant**

shall justify many,

For he shall bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:11



Isaiah 53 in Rabbinic Thought

“Jesus can’t be the Messiah because he didn’t bring world peace!” How many times have you heard this, or that the passages that Christians quote from the Hebrew Bible—particularly Isaiah 53—to sustain their claim have absolutely no support among the Jewish sages?

While it is commonly taught that the Messiah’s role is to restore the Kingdom of God, there is also a basis for a Suffering Messiah in Jewish thought. Let’s look at the sources:

Isaiah 53:5 – *“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed.”*

Midrash Konen (11th century) – “Messiah Son of David who loves Jerusalem . . . Elijah takes him by the head . . . and says ‘You must bear the sufferings and wounds by which the Almighty chastises you for Israel’s sins’ and so it is written, He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.”

Zohar, Numbers, Pinchus 218a – “The children of the world are members one of another. When the Holy One desires to give healing to the world, he smites one just man amongst them, and for his sake heals all the rest. From where do we learn this? From the saying (Isaiah 53:5), ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities.’”

Isaiah 53:10 – *“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; He has put him to grief. When You make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.”*

Midrash Aseret Memrot – “The Messiah, in order to atone for them both (Adam and David), will make his soul a trespass offering (Isaiah 53:10) as it is written next to this parashah ‘Behold my servant’ (Isaiah 52:13).”

A modern day interpretation:

Some Chabad Lubavitch publications attribute *all* of Isaiah 53 to Messiah and apply it to their late Rebbe Menachem Schneerson: “. . . the illness of the Moshiach is clearly foretold by the prophet Isaiah in chapter 53 . . .” (Shmuel Butman of Chabad, Chairman of the International Campaign to Bring Moshiach, *Jewish Press*, April 22, 1993.)

Commenting upon Rebbe Schneerson’s incapacitating illness, a member of the Lubavitcher women’s group stated, “It is written that the Messiah will endure intense suffering before being revealed.” (Interview with Michael Wherip in the *Seattle Post Intelligencer*, January 3, 1993.)

Although the above may represent a “minority report” among Jewish scholars, it cannot be denied that Isaiah 53 has been and is understood by many Jewish people to be a Messianic passage.

For more information on this subject, e-mail info@gotmessiah.com.



What is a Midrash?

A Midrash is a reading of the Hebrew Bible according to a set of Jewish principles of interpretation. It may also refer to a collection of Midrashic teachings

organized in a specific fashion. For example, Genesis Rabbah is a collection of Midrashic writings on the book of Genesis. The term Midrash can also refer to a particular verse of the Hebrew Bible and the Midrashic interpretation that follows it.

The Zohar (radiance) is a mystical commentary on the Torah. Its origins are disputed. It was claimed to have been discovered by a Spanish Jew named Moshe de Leon in the 13th century, who proclaimed it to be the work of a second-century rabbi. However, some scholars are firmly convinced that de Leon himself was the author.

Additional info:

www.faq.s.org/faq.s/judaism/FAQ/03-Torah-Halacha/section-25.html

www.faq.s.org/faq.s/judaism/FAQ/03-Torah-Halacha/section-34.html



The Servant of the Lord in Prophecy and Fulfillment

Who is the Servant of the Lord depicted in Isaiah 53? While much attention has been focused upon this biblical chapter, there are four important passages that Isaiah penned on the ministry of the Servant of the Lord that lead up to and include Isaiah 53. These "Servant Songs" show us how to understand his Messianic task.



The Servant Songs of Isaiah round out the Messianic portrait that culminates in the stunning verses of Isaiah 53. They reveal one who obediently suffers with, and on behalf of, humanity, yet who triumphs, vindicated, on behalf of the same humanity for which he has suffered.

"... the Son of Man (Messiah) did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28).

For He shall grow up
before Him as a tender

plant,
And as a root
out of dry
ground.

Isaiah 53:2a

PROPHECY



The Servant Is Chosen for a Specific Task

Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles, to open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison, those who sit in darkness from the prison house. (Isaiah 42:1a, 6-7)

The Servant Restores the Jewish People

Indeed He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth." Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, their Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to the Servant of rulers: "Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the Lord who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel; and He has chosen you." (Isaiah 49:6-7)

The Servant Is Tormented

The Lord GOD has opened my ear; and I was not rebellious, Nor did I turn away. I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide my face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. He is near who justifies me; who will contend with me? Let us stand together. Who is my adversary? Let him come near me. (Isaiah 50:5-8)



The Suffering Servant Will Be Vindicated

Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider. (Isaiah 52:13-15)

F U L F I L L M E N T

So he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And he was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." Then he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:16-21)

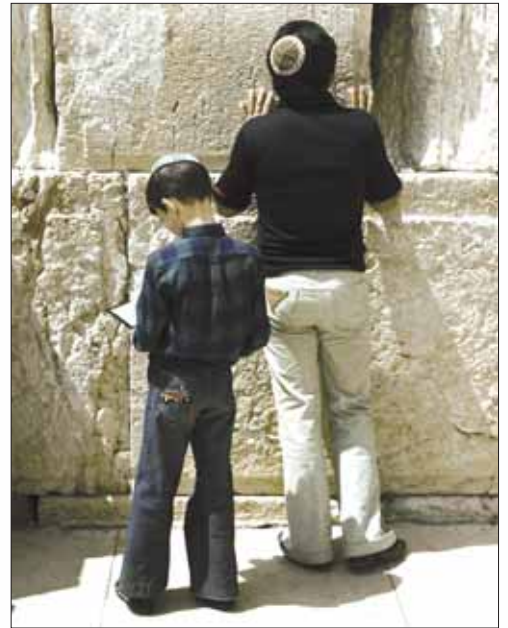
He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end. (Luke 1:32-33)

For my eyes have seen Your salvation which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel. (Luke 2:30-32)

Then they spat in his face and beat him; and others struck him with the palms of their hands saying, "Prophecy to us, Messiah! Who is the one who struck you?" (Matthew 26:67-68)

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole garrison around him. And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on his head, and a reed in his right hand. And they bowed the knee before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Then they spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. And when they had mocked him, they took the robe off him, put his own clothes on him, and led him away to be crucified. (Matthew 27:27-31)

Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Messiah to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Messiah, that his soul was not left in Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus, God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he poured out this which you now see and hear. (Acts 2:29-33)



Why the Messiah Must Be a Person and Not a Nation

1. Israel is not an innocent sufferer.

Israel as a nation was, at times, unrighteous and in need of forgiveness and redemption.

2. Israel is not a silent sufferer.

The Hebrew Bible has many examples of Israel's complaints against unjust suffering.

3. Israel has never died as Isaiah 53 describes.

Despite its many enemies and lengthy exile, Israel has had a continual existence throughout its history.

4. The language of the text points to the suffering of an individual, not a nation.

There is ample evidence of rabbinic support for a suffering Messiah (see page 5). Also, if the Servant dies on behalf of the nation, it cannot be the nation itself that dies.

Have Messianic Jews and Christians Been Wrong for 2,000 Years?

Visit www.AboutMessiah.com on Sunday, October 28, 2007 to view

a limited, one-day webcast of the debate entitled "Did Jesus Die for Our Sins?" Watch as Messianic Jewish scholar Dr. Michael Brown and Orthodox Rabbi Shmuley Boteach, one of America's best-known rabbis, argue for two very different interpretations of Isaiah 53.



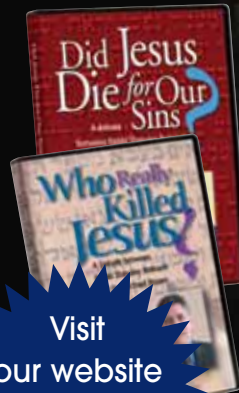
Originally held in the summer of 2007 on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, this debate features opposing viewpoints about the hard questions surrounding the identity of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53.

For more discussion, you can also watch the DVD entitled "Who Really Killed Jesus?" This spirited debate that took place in New York City in 2005 between Rabbi Shmuley Boteach and Dr. Michael Brown reflects the 2,000-year-old controversy that surrounds the death of Jesus. You will hear a number of surprising and even startling conclusions as to who was really responsible for the death of Jesus.

Order a copy of either debate on DVD for your home library or to share with a friend. The debate DVDs are available for only \$19.95^{US} each.

Did Jesus Die for Our Sins? (8036)

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SPECIAL EDITION
Volume XIII, Issue 8

Published by
CHOSEN PEOPLE MINISTRIES

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Our Spanish website is
www.pueblolegido.com

The Chosen People newsletter is published monthly by Chosen People Ministries. For more information, or to receive *The Chosen People* newsletter, write to Chosen People Ministries. Editors: Zhava Glaser, Andrew Sparks; Staff Writer: Alan Shore; Design: Lois Gable. Stock photography is used throughout this magazine and is meant to be representative only.



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