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# Ki Tetze

# כי תצא

*“When you go out”*

Torah Deuteronomy 21:10–25:19

Haftarah Isaiah 54:1–10 (Ashkenaz); Isaiah 54:1–10 (Sephard); Isaiah 52:13–54:10 (Messianic)  
If Haftarat Rosh Chodesh replaced Haftarat Re'eh (Isaiah 54:11–55:5) on Shabbat  
Re'eh, the haftarah for Ki Tetze expands to include 54:11–55:5.

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## PART ONE

### Summary of Haftarat Ki Tetze

For the historical context, see Parashot Noach and Shoftim.

The haftarah for Shabbat Ki Tetze is the fifth in a series of seven successive haftarah readings that follow the Fast of Av and the anniversary of the destruction of Jerusalem. The Seven Consolations,

each drawn from Isaiah's Book of Consolations (Isaiah 40–66), offer words of comfort to Zion and promises of future redemption. Each one prophesies the return from exile, Zion's restoration, and, ultimately, the Messianic Kingdom of Heaven on earth.

- First Consolation (Va'etchanan):  
Isaiah 40:1–26
- Second Consolation (Ekev): Isaiah 49:14–51:3
- Third Consolation (Re'eh): Isaiah 54:11–55:5
- Fourth Consolation (Shoftim):  
Isaiah 51:12–52:12
- Fifth Consolation (Ki Tetze): Isaiah 54:1–10
- Sixth Consolation (Ki Tavo): Isaiah 60:1–22
- Seventh Consolation (Nitzavim):  
Isaiah 61:10–63:9



Haftarat Ki Tetze, the fifth of the Seven Consolations, returns us to Isaiah 54, a passage that also serves as the haftarah portion for Parashat Noach. (The commentary on 54:1–10 repeats content presented for Haftarat Noach.) The haftarah personifies the city of Jerusalem as a barren woman, a widow, and an abandoned wife. The prophecy offers consolation to Jerusalem during a period of exile, promising her that her inhabitants will return in great numbers. Surprised by the sudden influx, she must expand her borders to accommodate the population boom.

The haftarah portion begins in Isaiah 54:1. Our commentary, however, starts more than a chapter earlier in 52:13 to include the critical prophecies of the Suffering Servant, which the synagogue lectionary omits. The Suffering Servant oracles describe how the Servant of the LORD will be high and lifted up, but must first undergo suffering for the sin of Israel.

Communities that replaced Haftarat Re'eh (Isaiah 54:11–55:5) with the reading for Rosh Chodesh Elul append Haftarat Re'eh to Haftarat Ki Tetze in order to ensure that all seven of the Seven Consolations are read.

This week's commentary is dedicated to our daughter Miriam Salome (מרים שלמת), born Elul 11, 5759 during Parashat Ki Tetze and with God's help will come of age the year of this writing, 5770.

## PART TWO

### The Suffering Servant in Jewish Interpretation

That which refers to Me has its fulfillment. (Luke 22:37).

Who is the Suffering Servant described in Isaiah 51:13–53:12? Christianity and Judaism have contended over the identity of Isaiah's "Servant of the LORD" since the first recorded debate between a

Christian and a Jew: Justin Martyr's *Dialogue with Trypho*. Christians identify the Suffering Servant as the Messiah; whereas many Jewish commentaries identify the Suffering Servant as a personification for the entire nation of Israel.

In the broader context of Isaiah's references to the Servant of the LORD, both interpretations have merit. Sometimes Isaiah's mysterious Servant of the LORD appears as an agent of Israel's redemption, and at other time, the Servant appears to symbolize the whole of the people.

For example, in Isaiah 49:6 God commissions the Servant of the LORD to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the nation of Israel. The Servant of the LORD is an agent working on Israel's behalf. Clearly, in this passage, the Servant is a minister to Israel, an individual separate from Israel:

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 make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (Isaiah 49:6)

On the other hand, some passages seem to identify the Servant of the LORD as the nation of Israel. Isaiah 41:8–10, for example, a passage that prefaces the servant songs of Isaiah, requires this identification:

But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, descendant of Abraham My friend, You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its remotest parts and said to you, "You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you." (Isaiah 41:8–9)

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 depicts the Servant of the LORD as a "man of sorrows," a "lamb led to the slaughter," "pierced through for our transgressions ... crushed for our iniquities ..." (53:4–7). Since the days of the apostles, believers have interpreted these passages in light of our Master's suffering. The apostolic writers make frequent allusions to Isaiah 53, and their



messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53 seems to have been a foundational text for their interpretation of the crucifixion of Yeshua of Nazareth. Polycarp, a disciple of John, called it “the golden passion of the Old Testament.”<sup>1</sup>

Even before the birth of our Master, the Qumran community that left us the Dead Sea scrolls understood Isaiah’s Suffering Servant as a messianic redeemer. The Thanksgiving Scroll contains a messianic hymn in which the anticipated Messiah declares, “[Who] has been despised like [me? And who] has been rejected [of men] like me? [And who] compares to m[e in enduring] evil?”<sup>2</sup> This means that the messianic interpretation of the Suffering Servant existed in Judaism before the first century.

Today, Jewish interpretation insists that the Suffering Servant prophecies apply to the nation of Israel, not the Messiah. In the early second century, though, many interpretations still understood the passage to speak of the suffering which must come upon the Messiah for the sake of Israel’s redemption. For example, in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin Martyr makes continual allusions to and direct quotations from Isaiah 53 to prove his case for Yeshua. Trypho offers no objection to Justin’s messianic applications of those passages. He has no objection to the notion of a suffering Messiah; he only objects to the mode of crucifixion as an appropriate fulfillment of the Messiah’s predicted sufferings:

Then Trypho remarked, “Be assured that all our nation waits for Christ; and we admit that all the Scriptures which you have quoted refer to Him.... But whether Christ should be so shamefully crucified, this we are in doubt about. For whosoever is crucified is said in the law to be accursed, so that I am exceedingly incredulous on this point. It is quite clear, indeed, that the Scriptures announce that Christ had to suffer; but we wish to learn if you can prove it to us whether it was by the suffering cursed in the law ... for we know that He should suffer and be led as a sheep. But prove to us

whether He must be crucified and die so disgracefully and so dishonorably by the death cursed in the law. For we cannot bring ourselves even to think of this.”  
(*Dialogue with Trypho*, 89–90)

As Jewish people continued to have “dialogues” with polemicists like Justin Martyr, they began to retreat from a messianic interpretation of Isaiah 53. Years of Christian missionary efforts against Judaism have employed these passages to try to win converts. That process has galvanized the majority Jewish opinion against reading Isaiah’s Servant of the LORD as the Messiah.

New interpretations assigned the Suffering Servant passages to Moses, King Hezekiah, King Josiah, the prophet Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah, or in some cases, all the righteous who suffer for the sins of their generation. *Targum Yonatan* weaves a national and messianic interpretation together, representing the Messiah as the Servant of the LORD but assigning some of the suffering passages to Israel and some to the Messiah. Origen reports disputing with sages from his day who interpreted the sufferings of Isaiah 53 as “prophesied of the whole people as one, which was both dispersed abroad and smitten.”<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, messianic interpretations persisted in rabbinic teaching and midrash until the time of the first crusade and the writings of Rashi.

Rashi is the first commentator to draw a hard and fast line, insisting that the Suffering Servant must be understood as the nation of Israel suffering in exile among the nations. The massacres of Jewish communities in 1096 by the crusaders probably reinforced the interpretation. In any case, the messianic interpretation of the Suffering Servant came too close to the Christian interpretation. It made the Jewish community vulnerable to criticism from Christians.

Rashi’s commentary insists on a national interpretation. Later commentators such as Ibn Ezra and Radak followed Rashi’s lead with the new interpreta-

tion. However, even Rashi admitted that his interpretation is not consistent with that of the earlier rabbis. In version of his commentary on Isaiah that is no longer extant, Rashi admits, “Our Rabbis apply this to the Messiah: Behold, they say, the Messiah was stricken, as it is written, ‘He carried our sicknesses and bore our pains.’”<sup>4</sup>

Even after Rashi, as will be shown below, a few rabbis clung to a messianic interpretation of the Suffering Servant and rejected the national interpretation. The mystical *Zohar*, which began to circulate in the Jewish community more than a century after Rashi’s day, also retains the older, messianic interpretation of the Suffering Servant. Significantly, even though Ramban (Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman, thirteenth century) acknowledged Rashi’s interpretations as “the right view respecting this Parashah,” he nevertheless went on to explain the entire passage in reference to the Messiah. Also noteworthy, Rabbi Moshe Kohen ibn Crispin of Kordova (fourteenth century) wrote a strong refutation of the national interpretation and composed a commentary on Isaiah 53 arguing throughout that the Suffering Servant must be the Messiah:

[Other commentaries on the Suffering Servant] distort the verses from their natural meaning. And then it seemed to me that the doors to the literal interpretation of the Parashah were shut in their face, and that “they wearied themselves to find the entrance,” having forsaken the knowledge of our Teachers, and inclined after “the stubbornness of their own hearts,” and their own opinion, I am pleased to interpret it, in accordance with the teaching of our Rabbis, of the King Messiah. (Rabbi Moshe Kohen ibn Crispin)<sup>5</sup>

The *Torah Club Volume Three* commentary will rely primarily upon the works of Ramban and Rabbi Moshe Kohen ibn Crispin, both of which, along with other significant sources, are presented in *The Suffering Servant of Isaiah according to the Jewish*

*Interpreters*, a book from 1877 that was reprinted in 1999 by *Hashivenu*. Most of the citations in this commentary are drawn from that important compendium. The writings of Ramban, Ibn Crispin, and others who maintained the messianic reading prove that identifying the Servant of the LORD as Messiah is not outside of the scope of Jewish interpretation. Instead, prior to arguments with Christians about Jesus, the rabbinic world commonly understood the Suffering Servant prophecies as referring to the Messiah of Israel. Faint echoes of that line of interpretation can still be heard in many Jewish sources.

We should allow room for both interpretations though. As the quintessential Israelite, the promised seed of Abraham, and the fulfillment of the Israel’s divine purpose, Messiah represents all Israel. As the king of Israel, he represents Israel. Similarly, as the people of Messiah from whom Yeshua springs forth, Israel represents the Messiah:

[He] calls the King Messiah “My Servant,” speaking as one who sent him. Or he may call the whole people “My Servant,” as he says above “my people” (Isaiah 53:6): when he speaks of the people, the King Messiah is included in it; and when he speaks of the King Messiah, the people is comprehended with him. (Rabbi Sh’lomoh Astruc)<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, when we read Isaiah’s prophecies about the Servant of the LORD, we keep the double-meaning in mind. On the one hand, these prophecies refer to Israel’s prophetic destiny, which is fulfilled through her son, Yeshua. On the other hand, they speak directly about Yeshua Himself, the focal point of Israel’s national experience:

We have been sunken in our misery even until now because of our evil deeds. Our Rock does not draw near to us. Messiah, our righteousness, has departed from us. We are in terror, and there is no one to vindicate us. But he will bear our iniquities and carry the yoke of our transgressions, for he was wounded for our transgress-

sions. He will carry our sins upon his shoulder, so that we may find forgiveness for our iniquities, and by his stripes we are healed. O Eternal One, the time has come to recreate him anew. From the vault of heaven bring him up. Raise Him up from the land of Seir, so that he may make his voice heard to us in Lebanon, a second time by the hand of Yinnon! (Yom Kippur Liturgy)<sup>7</sup>

## PART THREE

### Commentary on Isaiah 52:13–53:12

#### Exaltation of the Messiah

Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. (Isaiah 52:13)

In early Jewish interpretation, the Servant of the LORD presented in Isaiah 52:13 is the promised Davidic Messiah king. *Targum Yonatan* paraphrases saying, “Behold, My Servant the Messiah shall prosper, He shall be exalted and extolled.”

Isaiah declares that the Servant of the LORD will “prosper (*sakal*, שכל),” a word that is better translated as “act wisely” or “be prudent.” Ramban explains, “At the time of the redemption the Messiah will perceive and understand (*sakal*) the end, and know when the period for his coming is at hand, and the time has arrived for him to reveal himself to the congregation of those that are waiting for him.”<sup>8</sup>

The exaltation of the Servant of the LORD is described in three expressions. The Servant will be 1) high, 2) lifted up, and 3) greatly exalted. An early and once well-known midrash on the passage explains Isaiah 52:13 to speak of Messiah’s exaltation above the forefathers, above Moses, and even above the angels. The midrash appears in numerous sources, with numerous variations on the same theme.<sup>9</sup> Even Rashi cited the messianic exaltation as an alternative interpretation to his.<sup>10</sup> The writer of the book of Hebrews offers similar thoughts on the

exaltation of Messiah when he says, “He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:3–4), and when he says, “He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (Hebrews 3:3). Paul points directly to Isaiah 52:13 when he says, “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him” (Philippians 2:9). The Messiah is lifted “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Ephesians 1:21).

The following version of the midrash plays on the Hebrew words for “high (*rum*, רוּם),” “lifted up (*nasa*, נשא),” and “exalted (*gavah*, גבה),” finding a corresponding form of the word in reference to Abraham, Moses, and the angels respectively:

This refers to the King Messiah ... he is greater than the patriarchs, as it is said [in Isaiah 52:13], “My servant will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.” Higher than Abraham, who says [in Genesis 14:22], “I have raised my hand *high* to the LORD.” Lifted up above Moses, to whom it is said [in Numbers 11:12], “*Lift* it to your bosom.” More exalted than the ministering angels, of whom it is written [in Ezekiel 1:18], “As for their rims they were *exalted* and awesome.” And out of whom does he come forth? From David. (*Yalkut Shimoni* II 571)<sup>11</sup>

The same collection of midrash (*Yalkut Shimoni*) employs Isaiah 52:13 to prove that the Servant of the LORD is called the son of God:

The words concerning My Servant are told already in the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. Where in the Torah? [As it says in Exodus 4:22], “Israel is My son, My firstborn.” Where in the Prophets? [As it says in Isaiah 52:13], “Behold, My servant will prosper,” and nearby [in Isaiah 42:1], “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold.” Where in the writings? [As it says in Psalm 110:1], “The LORD said to my Lord” and [in Psalm 2:7], “The LORD,

He said to Me, [‘You are My Son.’]” (*Yalkut Shimoni* II 621)<sup>12</sup>

The student of rabbinic literature could cite numerous similar examples to prove that the early sages regarded the Servant of the LORD in Isaiah 52:13ff as a prophecy about the Messiah. Rashi, however, and many of the commentators that follow him, depart from the earlier messianic interpretation and explain the high, lifted, and exalted Servant of the LORD as the nation of Israel. “This section refers to the Jews in exile, whom He calls ‘My servant,’” Ibn Ezra and Radak explain.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, the messianic interpretation persisted in Jewish thought. The *Zohar*, apparently compiled more than a century after Rashi, offers a Messianic interpretation in which the Messiah is compared to the moon which will, in the time to come, be restored to its full luminance. Moreover, God exalts His servant by means of giving Him the keys to the resurrection:

“Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted” (Isaiah 52:13). He will be high, above the upper light of all the luminaries, as it is written [in Isaiah 30:18], “He waits on high to have compassion on you.” He will be lifted up above Abraham, lofty above Isaac, greatly exalted above Jacob ... All the dead who are in the dust will then awake. This is the mystery of “My Servant,” in whose hands are the keys of His Master, as were Abraham’s in those of Eliezer. (*Zohar*, *Vayashev*, 181b)<sup>14</sup>

### The Astonishment and Disfigurement

Just as many were astonished at you, My people, so His appearance was marred more than any man and His form more than the sons of men. (Isaiah 52:14)

Isaiah speaks of the Servant of the LORD as one whose appearance and form was marred more than man, more than the sons of men. “Just as many were astonished at [the nation of Israel], so His appear-

ance was marred ...”<sup>15</sup> It seems that Isaiah draws upon an earlier metaphor which he used to describe the nation of Israel under the punishment of God as a stricken man, sick, faint, bruised, and wounded from head to foot:

Where will you be stricken again, as you continue in your rebellion? The whole head is sick and the whole heart is faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is nothing sound in it, only bruises, welts and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil. (Isaiah 1:5–6)

The nations were astonished at the bruising Israel endured, as it says in the Torah, “When they see the plagues of the land and the diseases with which the LORD has afflicted it ... all the nations will say, ‘Why has the LORD done thus to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?’” (Deuteronomy 29:22–24). Just as they were astonished at the punishment God visited upon the nation of Israel, so too they are astonished at the affliction visited upon the Servant of the LORD. However, the Servant of the LORD’s suffering is not for His own sins, but for the sins of His people:

So great will be his grief and pain endured thus on our behalf, that those who see him will despise him, thinking that in consequence of his many deficiencies and sins God brought all those chastisements upon him ... and they will count him as nothing, not perceiving the great perfection that is in him, who will be a compassionate father to have compassion on us, even more than Moses our master, and in the multitude of his compassion for us will draw to himself all those sicknesses and chastisements. (Ibn Crispin)<sup>16</sup>

Alternatively, Ramban explains “many were astonished at you” as an address not to Israel but to the Messiah: “Their astonishment was shewn by mocking him when he first arrived, and by asking how one ‘despised,’ ‘meek and riding upon an ass (Zech. ix. 9), could conquer all the kings of the world who

had laid hold upon Israel, and rescue him from their hand.”<sup>17</sup>

The marred “form” and “appearance” of the Messiah seems to underlie the Christology in Philippians 2. Note the lexical allusions to Isaiah 52:13–14:

But emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him. (Philippians 2:7–9)

### Sprinkle Many Nations

Thus He will sprinkle many nations. (Isaiah 52:15)

What does it mean that the Messiah will sprinkle many nations? From an apostolic point of view, the sprinkling alludes to the Torah’s sin offering procedures and purification rituals, such as the ceremony of sprinkling with the ash-water of the red heifer.<sup>18</sup> The nations are spiritually washed and sanctified by the Messiah. The Messiah saves us “by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:5), through the “sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24). This is the “sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Yeshua the Messiah and be sprinkled with His blood” (1 Peter 1:2).

Another interpretation understands it to mean that Messiah will scatter the nations like one who splashes blood or water.<sup>19</sup> Ibn Cripsin takes it as a reference to the Messiah’s teachings: “For a speaker sprinkles and scatters his words towards his hearers.”<sup>20</sup> Ramban explains, “His speech will drop [sprinkle down] upon them and they will open their mouth wide for the rain of his word.”<sup>21</sup>

After my words they did not speak again, and my speech dropped on them. They waited for me as for

the rain, and opened their mouth as for the spring rain. (Job 29:22–23)

Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as the droplets on the fresh grass and as the showers on the herb. (Deuteronomy 32:2)

### Kings will Shut their Mouths

Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him; for what had not been told them they will see, and what they had not heard they will understand. (Isaiah 52:15)

Kings will shut their mouths at King Messiah. This prophecy lent itself to several different interpretations. Several interpretations are complementary, not mutually exclusive.

Ramban says that the Messiah will sprinkle the nations by means of teaching them his words. The nations will open their mouths to receive it, but the wicked kings of the nations will not open their mouths to receive his teaching. Instead, they will shut their mouths on account of Him, “and even in the chamber of their heart will be afraid to speak of him, saying each to his neighbor, ‘Even in thy thought curse not a king.’”<sup>22</sup>

Alternatively, Ibn Cripsin says that “Kings will shut their mouth: because from the vastness of his might and the number of his miracles and the greatness of the terror cast upon them, when he ‘smites the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips slays the wicked,’ they will be so amazed at his rebuke as to close their mouth, and not to speak from amazement at what he does ... when he comes to fight against the kings and to redeem Israel from their power, they will shut their mouth in silent amazement, seeing in him marvels which had never been told them, and discerning high attributes which before they had never heard of.”<sup>23</sup>

Maimonides says, “All the kings of the earth will be thrown into terror at the fame of him—their king-





doms will be in consternation, and they themselves will be devising whether to oppose him with arms, or to adopt some different course, confessing, in fact, their inability to contend with him or ignore his presence, and so confounded at the wonders which they will see him work, that they will lay their hands upon their mouth.”<sup>24</sup>

The apostle Paul understood 52:15 to speak of Gentile nations who had not yet received the Gospel. In his epistle to the Romans, he quoted the Septuagint version of the passage as he expressed his desire to proclaim the Gospel among nations where the concept of Messiah had never yet been heard:

Thus shall many nations wonder at him; and kings shall keep their mouths shut: for they to whom no report was brought concerning him, shall see; and they who have not heard, shall consider. (Isaiah 52:15, LXX)

And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was already named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation; but as it is written [in 52:15], “They who had no news of him shall see, and they who have not heard shall understand.” (Romans 15:20–21)

## Who Has Believed?

Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? (Isaiah 53:1)

Not everyone believes in the good news of the Messiah. Ramban says, “When the report of the Messiah comes among the people, who is there among them that will believe it?”<sup>25</sup> Paul explains, “They did not all heed the good news; for Isaiah says, ‘Lord, who has believed our report?’ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of the Messiah” (Romans 10:16–17). The Gospel of John quotes the passage, saying, “Though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: ‘Lord, who has believed our report? And

to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” (John 12:37–38).

The revelation of the “arm of the LORD” is the revelation of Messiah. The arm (*zeroa*, זרוע) of the LORD can be understood as a title for the Messiah.<sup>26</sup> Ibn Cripsin asks, “Upon whom of yore was the might of the Lord revealed, so as for him to rule by means of it over all the sons of men, as it is now seen upon this Messiah, and as it has never been seen upon any besides him?”<sup>27</sup>

## Out of Parched Ground

For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground. (Isaiah 53:2)

The Messiah came up before the LORD like a sprout growing up out of dry and waterless soil. In his commentary on Matthew, Rabbi Yechiel Tzvi Lichtenstein interprets Isaiah 53:2 to mean that the Messiah, like David, was born of an undistinguished family. Just as David was descended from Ruth, a Moabitess, the Messiah's pedigree will contain unsavory characteristics. The house of David, then, is the parched ground from which the tender shoot springs up, still attached to the original root of David.<sup>28</sup> The Messiah exclaims, “I am the root and the descendant of David” (Revelation 22:16).

In addition, the passage alludes to the miracle of the virgin birth. Like a sprout growing up out of parched ground, He sprang up out of an unfertilized womb. A version of the *Midrash Rabbah*, which is no longer extant, offers a similar interpretation that was probably edited out of later editions because it lent support to the virgin birth of Yeshua:

The redeemer whom I shall raise up from among you will have no father, as it is written [in Zechariah 6:12], “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place.” And likewise Isaiah says [in 53:2], “He grew up before Him like a tender

shoot.” Says Rabbi Berechiah: The Holy One said to Israel, “You have spoken before me, saying [in Lamentations 5:3], ‘We have become orphans, fatherless.’ The redeemer whom I shall raise up out of your midst will have no father also, as it is said, “Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: for he shall branch out from his place.” And likewise Isaiah says, “He grew up before Him like a tender shoot.” (*Genesis Rabbah of Rabbi Moshe Had-Darshan*)<sup>29</sup>

Apparent Moses Maimonides knew this interpretation as well. In his *Letter to Yemen*, he interprets 53:2 to mean that the Messiah “will appear, without his father or mother or family being known.”<sup>30</sup>

### An Unremarkable Appearance

He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. (Isaiah 53:2)

The passage means that there was nothing remarkable about the Messiah’s appearance. He appeared as a common man, like any other man. He had no supernatural aura or hovering halo that set him apart from others around Him, nor did He appear as a noble, stately king riding forth in majesty and pomp. As Ramban explains, “He had no army and no people, but was ‘meek and riding upon an ass,’ like the first redeemer Moses, our master, when he entered into Egypt with his wife and children upon an ass.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, the Messiah “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself” (Philippians 2:7–8).

### Man of Sorrows

He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with [sickness]; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. (Isaiah 53:3)

The Messiah was despised and forsaken by men, rejected by the world. The world hates Him because its deeds are evil. “He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (John 1:11). He is the stone the builders rejected. He explained to His disciples, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected” (Luke 9:22). He was rejected by the religious authorities of His day, and He was rejected by His generation, as He said, “He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” (Luke 17:25). The martyr Stephen explains that Messiah had to be rejected because He was the prophet like “Moses whom they disowned, saying, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’” (Acts 7:35). Israel will despise and forsake the Messiah just as the nation rejected Moses and the prophets.<sup>32</sup>

Everyone who is despised by the world, provided on it be not for deeds of wickedness, will be exalted in the future, as it is written [in 52:13], “Behold my servant shall prosper: he shall be high and exalted and lofty exceedingly.” Who is signified here? The same of whom it is written in the text below, “He was the despised and forlorn of men.” (*Sefer Chasidim*)<sup>33</sup>

The Messiah is called a “man of sorrows.” The Gospels depict Yeshua of Nazareth moved with compassion for the sorrows of the people and the generation. “When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it” (Luke 19:41). He has sympathy for human suffering and sorrow over His generation’s doom.

Rabbinic literature depicts the Messiah weeping and mourning over the exile, yearning for the day when He can reveal Himself to all Israel and bring about the final redemption.<sup>34</sup> A midrash attributed to Rabbi Tanchuma understands the word “man of sorrows” as a title for the Messiah, and at the same time, seems to allude to the *Ecce Homo* of the Gospels:

Rabbi Nachman says, “The word ‘man’ in the passage [in Numbers 1:4], “There shall be a *man* of each tribe,

each one head of his father's household," refers to the Messiah the son of David, as it is written [in Zechariah 6:12], "Behold, a *man* whose name is Branch," which *Targum Yonatan* interprets as, "Behold the *man*, Messiah." And so it is said [in Isaiah 53:3], "A *man* of sorrows and acquainted with sickness." (*Midrash Tanchuma*, Numbers 1)<sup>35</sup>

Yeshua then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Behold, the Man!" (John 19:5)

## Man of Sicknesses

Surely our [sicknesses] He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried. Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:4)

The Messiah is acquainted with sickness.<sup>36</sup> Isaiah says, "Surely our [sicknesses] He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried." The Gospel of Matthew points to the healing ministry of Yeshua of Nazareth as a fulfillment of the prophecy:

He healed all who were ill. This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: "He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases." (Matthew 8:16–17)

Jewish apologists use Isaiah 53:4 to prove that Yeshua of Nazareth is not the Suffering Servant. Many point out that the Gospels never say He suffered sickness. For example, Rabbi Jacob ben Reuben writes, "I know, in fact, that you will not find either in your own New Testament, or in the words of the wise men of your own religion who tell you about the Messiah and his deeds, or, in fact, in any book in the world, that he ever had a pain—even a headache—up to the day of his death ... only one visited with various kinds of diseases is said to be smitten of God."<sup>37</sup>

On the contrary, our Master did suffer sickness like any man: "He had to be made like His brethren in all things" (Hebrews 2:17), indeed, He was

subject to every human weakness and ailment. "He Himself was tempted in that which He has suffered" (Hebrews 2:18). From the common cold to death itself, He suffered as a man. The Gospels never indicate that He did not suffer sicknesses.

In early Judaism, sickness and suffering were often seen as direct punishments for sin. The sicknesses and suffering of the Messiah lead men to the false conclusion that He is "stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" for His sins.

Ramban explains, "He was pained for the iniquities of Israel, which occasion his tarrying, and hold him back from becoming king over his people, 'and known to sickness,' because a man who is sick is continually distressed with pain ... 'Yet he carried our sicknesses,' being himself sick and distressed for the transgressions which should have caused sickness and distress in us, and bearing the pains which we ought to have experienced."<sup>38</sup>

Rabbi Moshe Kohn ibn Kripsin says, "His grief will be such that the colour of his countenance will be changed from that of a man, and pangs and sicknesses will seize upon him (for great grief, as physicians know, by producing melancholy, subjects a man to many diseases); and all the chastisements which come upon him in consequence of his grief will be for our sakes ... Truly all his pains and sicknesses will be for us; continually will he be prostrating himself, and stretching out his hands to God on our behalf, and praying him to hasten the time of our redemption."<sup>39</sup>

The Hebrew word translated as "one stricken" in 53:4 is *nagua* (נָגַע), a catastrophic, shocking disease. In the Bible, leprosy is sometimes called *nega* (נֶגַע).<sup>40</sup> In tractate *Sanhedrin* of the Talmud, the sages discuss different names and titles for the Messiah. One of the names offered is "The Leper," and the "Sick One," because the Messiah takes upon Himself the diseases of Israel:

And the rabbis say: “His name is The Leper.” Those of the House of Rabbi say, [“The Sick One,”] as it is said [in Isaiah 53:4], “Surely our sicknesses he himself bore and our sorrows he carried, yet we ourselves esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.” (b.*Sanhedrin* 98b)<sup>41</sup>

Likewise, the Talmud depicts the Messiah wrapped in bandages, lying among the lepers at the gates of Rome while he awaits the final redemption.<sup>42</sup> The midrashic collection *Peskita Rabbati* envisions a conversation between God and the soul of the Messiah prior to the creation of the world. In the imaginary conversation, the LORD is unwilling to create the world unless the Messiah first consents to suffer on behalf of Israel:

The Holy One brought forth the soul of the Messiah, and said to him, “Are you willing to be created and to redeem my sons after 6000 years?” He replied, “I am.” God replied, “If so, you must take upon yourself chastisements in order to wipe away their iniquity, as it is written [in Isaiah 53:4], “Surely our sicknesses He himself bore.” The Messiah answered, “I will take them upon me gladly.” (*Peskita Rabbati*)<sup>43</sup>

In the *Zohar*, the Messiah takes upon Himself the sicknesses and chastisements due the people of Israel. His suffering is likened to that of a single limb which a physician must bleed in order to bring healing to the rest of the body:

Messiah then enters, and summons every sickness, every pain, and every chastisement of Israel; they all come and rest upon him. And were it not that he had thus lightened them of Israel and taken them upon himself, there had been no man able to bear Israel’s chastisements for transgressions of the Torah. This is that which is written [in Isaiah 53:4], “Surely our [sicknesses] He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried.” (*Zohar, Vayakheh*)<sup>44</sup>

When the Holy One desires to give healing to the world, he smites one righteous man from among them, and for his sake heals all the rest. From where do we learn

his? From the saying [in Isaiah 53:4], “Surely our [sicknesses] He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried.” (*Zohar, Pinchas*, 218a)<sup>45</sup>

At the time when the Holy One desires to atone for the sins of the world, like a physician who to save other limbs bleeds the arm, he smites their arm and heals their whole person, as it is written [in Isaiah 53:5], “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities.” (*Zohar, Pinchas*)<sup>46</sup>

### Pierced for Transgressions

But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities. (Isaiah 53:5)

Jewish commentaries which present the Suffering Servant as the nation of Israel explain that the people of Israel suffered wounding and crushing for the transgressions and iniquities of the nations. The kings of the nations declare, “Israel suffered on behalf of us!”

Other interpretations, however, understand the Suffering Servant as the Messiah pierced for the transgressions of Israel and crushed for the iniquities of the people. This older, more authentic interpretation of the passage survives in a few midrashic scraps. For example, *Ruth Rabbah* quotes Isaiah 5:6 as a reference to the sufferings of the Messiah:

[Ruth 2:14] refers to King Messiah: “And at mealtime Boaz said to her, ‘Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine[-vinegar].’” “Come here” means draw near to the kingdom, “and eat some bread,” refers to the bread of the kingdom, “and dip your morsel in the wine-vinegar,” refers to his sufferings, as it is said [in Isaiah 53:5], “But he was pierced through for our transgressions.” (*Ruth Rabbah* 5:6)

Another passage from the *Midrash Rabbah* (no longer extant) explains that King Messiah rejected and was rejected by his wicked generation. Therefore

He seeks mercy and pardon for Israel by undergoing self-mortification:

“Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother” (Genesis 24:67). This is the King Messiah, who belonged to the generation of the wicked, but rejected them, and chose the Holy One and His holy name to serve him with all his heart, and applied himself to seek for mercy for Israel, and to fast and humble himself on their behalf, as it is said, “He was pierced through for our transgressions,” etc. And when Israel is sinful, the Messiah seeks for mercy upon them, as it is written, “By His scourging we are healed,” and [in Isaiah 53:12], “He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.” (*Genesis Rabbah of Rabbi Moshe Had-Darshan*)<sup>47</sup>

Don’t look for the passage in today’s editions of the *Midrash Rabbah*. Thanks to the ongoing argument with Christianity for control of Isaiah 53, the passage has disappeared, apparently edited out of later copies.

According to a tradition reported by Rabbi Huna, Isaiah 53:5 can be used as a proof text to prove that a portion of the punishment due to Israel for her sins fell upon the Messiah:

Rabbi Huna, on the authority of Rabbi Acha said, “The chastisements are divided into three parts. One for David and the Fathers. One for our own generation. And one for the King Messiah, as it is said [in Isaiah 53:5], “He was pierced through for our transgressions.” (*Yalkut Shimoni* II 620)<sup>48</sup>

In all of these interpretations, Messiah suffers punishment on behalf of Israel. He suffers vicariously for Israel’s sins. “The meaning of which is that since the Messiah bears our iniquities which produce the effect of his being bruised, it follows that whoso will not admit that the Messiah thus suffers for our iniquities, must endure and suffer for them himself.”<sup>49</sup>

## Peace and Healing

The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. (Isaiah 53:5)

The Hebrew words translated as “chastening for our well-being” are “*musar shelomenu* (מוסר שלומנו),” which can be literally rendered, “discipline for our peace.” Such “discipline” comes from the hand of the LORD, as in Proverbs 3:11: “My son, do not reject the discipline (*musar*) of the LORD,” and Proverbs 13:24: “He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines (*musar*) him diligently.” In the case of the Suffering Servant, however, the LORD does not discipline him for his own misdeeds. Instead, he disciplines for the misdeeds of the people. He takes the punishment that was due the nation, and thereby brings shalom to the people. The word *shalom* can also mean “whole.” Accordingly, some rabbis rendered the verse to mean “the chastening of the whole of us fell upon him.”<sup>50</sup>

At the time of His suffering, our Master endured beating, flogging, and crucifixion. The Roman scourging tore His flesh and left welts on His body. The marks left by the crucifixion are never healed, and even the resurrected Yeshua still bears those wounds in His body. The apostle Peter explains Isaiah 53:5 in light of the crucifixion: “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

Ramban explains that healing often appears in the prophets as a metaphor for redemption. He says, “The stripes by which [the Messiah] is vexed and distressed will heal us: God will pardon us for his righteousness, and we shall be healed both from our own transgressions and from the iniquities of our fathers.”<sup>51</sup>

The NASB says “by His scourging we are healed,” but many other English versions render it as, “by

his stripes we are healed.” The word translated as “scourging” or “stripes” is *chaburah* (חבורה). Ibn Crispin says, “*Chaburah* means an incision or slit. Our rabbis explain it as signifying a blow which causes the blood to coagulate beneath the skin, in accordance with their saying [in b.*Shabbat* 107b], ‘What is a *chaburah* which never disappears? It is a bruise where the blood, though it does not break out through the skin, nevertheless coagulates beneath it:’ the meaning will then be, that by the weals breaking out on his flesh in consequence of his anxiety for us, God will have mercy upon him, and, by sparing him for the sake of his sufferings endured on our account, heal us.”<sup>52</sup>

Alternatively, *chaburah* could be read as *chavurah*, which means “fellowship” and “union.” On that reading, Ibn Crispin suggests translating 53:5 to say “And by union with him we are healed.” He explains, “Although [the Messiah] is in the utmost distress from pain and sickness, yet by union and nearness to him we are healed from all the diseases to which our afflictions give rise.” Paul alludes to this alternative reading of the Hebrew when he tells the Philippians that He has counted all things as loss so that he might “know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10). In Hebrew, the term “fellowship of His sufferings”<sup>53</sup> points to Isaiah 53:5 and both readings of the word *chaburah*.

### Sheep Gone Astray

All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. (Isaiah 53:6)

The people of God behaved like a flock without a shepherd, each one wandering after His own way. Ramban says, “He charges Israel with guilt, because during their exile they apply all their attention to

the business of this world.”<sup>54</sup> Ibn Crispin says, “Like sheep which have no shepherd, and which wander hither and thither on the plain, so were we wandering in our own works and ways.”<sup>55</sup>

Our Master came to seek and save the lost sheep of Israel. He seeks each individual to bring him to repentance like a shepherd seeking a single lost sheep. “When he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing” (Luke 15:5). He is the good shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep. The apostle Peter applies Isaiah 53:6 saying, “For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (1 Peter 2:25).

See now the mercy of God: after we had individually gone astray, he might have been expected to punish us individually likewise ... yet the Lord did not look to this, but counted us as one man, reckoning up the iniquity of us all together, and causing it to light upon this just one, who was accordingly sufficient to bear the whole of it. (Rabbi Mosheh El-Sheikh)<sup>56</sup>

### He did not Open His Mouth

He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth. (Isaiah 53:7)

We were like sheep going astray, but the Suffering Servant is also compared to a lamb. He is like a lamb led to slaughter and like a ewe-lamb that does not bleat while being sheared. Ibn Crispin says, “He is like one who stands at the bar before his judges, and they condemn him to death.”<sup>57</sup> The Suffering Servant was oppressed and afflicted. Ramban expounds, “When he first comes, ‘meek and riding upon an ass,’ the oppressors and officers of every city will come to him and afflict him with reviling and insults, reproaching both him and the God in whose name he appears, like Moses our master, who, when Pharaoh said, I



know not the Lord, answered him not ... So will the Messiah give no answer, but keep silence ... like a sheep led to the slaughter, he will think in his heart, 'Even though they slay me, I will perform the mission of my Creator, as it is my duty to do.'<sup>58</sup>

Isaiah twice states, "He did not open His mouth." When Caiaphas placed Yeshua on trial, our Master made no reply to the accusations against Him. "The high priest stood up and said to Him, 'Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?' But Yeshua kept silent" (Matthew 26:62–63). He offered no defense and spoke only when charged to do so under oath. King Herod "questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing" (Luke 23:9). "Pilate questioned Him again, saying, 'Do You not answer? See how many charges they bring against You!' But Yeshua made no further answer; so Pilate was amazed" (Mark 15:4–5). "While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

When the Ethiopian eunuch read Isaiah 53:7–8, he asked Philip, "Please tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Yeshua to him" (Acts 8:34–35).

## The Transgression of My People

By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due? (Isaiah 53:8)

Ibn Crispin explains Isaiah 53:8 to mean that the Messiah "is like one taken out of confinement, and from the place of judgment and led away to execution."<sup>59</sup> He further explains the words, "He was cut off out of the land of the living," to mean, not just

his death, but also to allude to the dual-nature of the Messiah's being. He says, "The nature of this Messiah is exceeding wondrous: it is composed of two contradictory elements. His soul is 'cut off from the land of the living;' in other words, it is derived from the living angels who exist for ever, i.e., from the abstract intelligences: these form the source from which his own intelligence emanates, and gradually, in virtue of its comprehensive wisdom, ascends to an elevation, which ... none else has ever attained. His body, on the other hand, is composed of griefs and pains and sicknesses—of grief for the transgression and affliction of his people (which was so great as to disfigure his appearance), and of pains and sicknesses greater than those of other men ... all that hear of him, or know him, will marvel at him exceedingly, because never in the world had a prophet or wise man been heard of who was compounded of two natures such as these."<sup>60</sup>

Those of His generation did not realize that His death was on account of the transgression of the nation. To them the stroke was due, but He took it upon Himself.<sup>61</sup>

## A Grave with the Wicked and the Rich

His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death. (Isaiah 53:9)

The Gospels present the death and burial of Yeshua as a fulfillment of Isaiah 53:9. He was crucified as a criminal with criminals. Had Rome buried him, they would have placed him in a common grave with other executed criminals. In that regard, "His grave was assigned with wicked men." Instead, two wealthy men of the Sanhedrin made special request to take charge of His body. One was "a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Yeshua" (Matthew 27:57), and the other was Nicodemus, who, according to the

Talmud, was the richest man in Jerusalem.<sup>62</sup> They lavishly prepared His body for burial, wrapping Him in linen with about a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloe. Then they laid him in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, “a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid” (John 19:41). Thus “He was with a rich man in His death.”<sup>63</sup>

### No Violence nor Deceit

Because He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth. (Isaiah 53:9)

Isaiah says that the Suffering Servant did no violence nor did He utter deceit. Our Master offered no resistance to His oppressors, and He taught against violence. The Suffering Servant spoke no deceit with His mouth. Our Master alluded to this passage when He laid eyes on the disciple Nathanael and declared, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” (John 1:47). Even the Master’s enemies among the sages confirmed that Yeshua was a man of truth. They said to Him, “Teacher, we know that You are truthful and teach the way of God in truth, and defer to no one; for You are not partial to any” (Matthew 22:16). He was born into the world to testify to the truth, and everyone who is of the truth hears His voice.

The Hebrew word translated as violence is *chamas* (חַמַּס), a word which the rabbis often translate as robbery. The prophet wants to convey that the suffering which the Messiah endured was not for any sin of His own. Instead, He was without moral blemish: He “offered Himself without blemish to God” (Hebrews 9:14) as “a lamb unblemished and spotless” (1 Peter 1:19).

The Septuagint translates the phrase “He had done no violence” as “He practiced no iniquity.” The apostolic doctrine of Messiah’s sinless perfection may be

based partially upon that interpretation. It appears in Peter’s description of the Messiah:

For you have been called for this purpose, since the Messiah also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, “Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth;” and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:21–24)

### The Guilt Offering

The LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering.” (Isaiah 53:10)

Because He was morally unblemished and without iniquity or deceit, “the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; if He would render Himself as a guilt offering” (Isaiah 53:10). In the Torah, the guilt offering (*asham*, אָשָׁם) is a type of sin offering that represents the payment of indemnity for transgression.<sup>64</sup> The Suffering Servant offers Himself as a guilt offering on behalf of the nation, and the LORD delights (*chafetz*, חָפֵץ) to accept His atoning sacrifice.

Psalm 22 prophetically depicts the crucifixion of the Messiah, “All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the LORD; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because He delights (*chafetz*, חָפֵץ) in him” (Psalm 22:8–9[7–8]). At the cross of Messiah, mockers and revilers said, “He trusts in God; let God rescue him now, if He delights in Him” (Matthew 27:43). The text of Matthew alludes to Psalm 22. The mockers understood the crucifixion as a sign of God’s displeasure in the Master. Instead, if they had understood Isaiah 53:10, they would have





recognized the crushing and grief of the Messiah as a sign of God's delight in Him: "The LORD was pleased (*chafetz*) to crush Him." As a result of the Suffering Servant offering Himself as a guilt offering, "the good pleasure (*chafetz*) of the LORD will prosper in His hand" (53:10).

### His Offspring

He will see His offspring. (Isaiah 53:10)

The LORD does not abandon His Servant. After suffering grief and affliction, He receives a reward from the LORD. He sees His offspring—literally "seed." Ramban says, "In him will be fulfilled the promise of Psalm 45:17(16): 'In place of your fathers will be your sons; you shall make them princes in all the earth.'" Ibn Crispin understands it to mean "the reward for all the afflictions which [God] imposed upon his body for the Lord's people is, that he will recover strength and vigor so as to have seed, and enjoy long life, and prosper in whatever he sets his hand to."<sup>65</sup> He goes on to point out that this interpretation rules out applying the passage to the Christian Messiah.

Several of the rabbinic commentaries that attempt to refute the Christian explanation of the Suffering Servant object that Yeshua of Nazareth left no seed. Christian commentaries explain the reference to His disciples. The disciples are the seed that Yeshua left behind. Rabbinic literature frequently refers to a man's disciples as his sons. According to that explanation, the Master will be rewarded after His suffering by seeing His disciples carry on His work. Jewish commentaries object that, if the disciples of Jesus had been meant, the verse should have said "He will see His sons." Disciples may be called "sons," but the word "seed" refers only to children born from a sexual union.

In the Hebrew, however, it does not say "His seed." It literally says, "He will see a seed." In this regard,

the language is the same as that of Psalm 22 where "a seed" describes a future generation not yet born. Psalm 22 says that those who seek the afflicted one (the Messiah) will praise the LORD: all the ends of the earth and all the families of the nations will worship before the LORD and a future generation will serve him:

[A seed] will serve Him; it will be told of the Lord to the coming generation. They will come and will declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has performed it. (Psalm 22:31–32[30–31])

In Psalm 22 the "seed" that will serve the LORD is not God's offspring. Instead, it refers to a future generation of humanity. The Septuagint translates the seed promise of Isaiah 53:10 as, "Your soul shall see a long-lived seed." In *Targum Yonatan*, the seed of Isaiah 53:10 is the kingdom of the Messiah:

It was the pleasure of the Lord to refine and to purify the remnant of His people, in order to cleanse their souls from sin, that they might see the kingdom of their Messiah. (*Targum Yonatan*, Isaiah 53:10)

### Length of Days

He will prolong His days. (Isaiah 53:10)

The LORD will reward the Suffering Servant by allowing Him to see seed and by prolonging His days. Ibn Crispin says, "In opposition to what the world thought of him, who imagined from his prostration that he was destined to have no seed, and that it was impossible for him to have long life, the Creator, whose thoughts are not as our thoughts, promises that 'he shall see seed, and prolong his days;' he will restore him to the days of his youth, and he will give him his seed and lengthen his days."<sup>66</sup> Ramban explains that the lengthening of the Messiah's days is a reference to eternal life. The LORD grants His servant immortality: "He shall lengthen days, that is,

for ever and ever.”<sup>67</sup> He cites two proof texts from the Psalms to establish the immortality of the Messiah:

[The king] asked life of You, You gave it to him, length of days forever and ever. (Psalm 21:5[4])

You will prolong the king’s life; His years will be as many generations. He will abide before God forever. (Psalm 61:7–8[6–7])

Likewise, Psalm 89:37(36) combines both the “seed” and the “length of days” promise in a single prophecy about the Davidic dynasty: “Once I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. His [seed] shall endure forever and his throne as the sun before Me” (Psalm 89:35–36). The resurrected Messiah possesses “an indestructible life” (Hebrews 7:16). According to Peter, the living Messiah is “not of seed which is perishable but imperishable” (1 Peter 1:23). Yeshua declares, “I am ... the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore” (Revelation 1:17–18).

### Good Pleasure of the LORD

The good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. (Isaiah 53:10)

Ramban says that the good pleasure (*chafetz*, צִפֵּץ) of the LORD will prosper in the Messiah’s hand “because he will accomplish the Redemption in which the Lord finds his pleasure, and will teach all the Gentiles to ‘understand and know’ the Lord: this is what is meant by the pleasure of the Lord, as it is written, ‘In these is my pleasure.’”<sup>68</sup>

Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight (*chafetz*, צִפֵּץ) in these things. (Jeremiah 9:23[24])

The LORD was pleased to crush the Messiah, and His good pleasure prospers in the Messiah’s hand.

The Apostle Paul expands upon the concept of the LORD’s “good pleasure” when he tells the Colossians, “It was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross” (Colossians 1:19–20).

### The Anguish of His Soul

As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied. By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:11)

The Suffering Servant endured anguish of soul. On the night He was betrayed, our Master said, “Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, Father, save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour” (John 12:27). That same night, He said, “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38). “Being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground” (Luke 22:44). “For the joy set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame” (Hebrews 12:2).

Ibn Crispin explains, “Because of the labour and distress which he brought upon his living soul, and upon his body, for the sake of the people of the Lord, he will see all prosperity so as to be satisfied with it.”<sup>69</sup> Ramban says, “Because of the labour which he saw (experienced) in himself, and because he was satisfied with ‘shame instead of glory’ [Habakkuk 2:16], therefore by his knowledge he will justify the just, he will know and recognize who are the just that ought to be redeemed; and so in all his judgments he will find out the just, as it is written [in Isaiah 11:3–4], ‘he will not judge with the sight of his eyes.’”

The Servant of the LORD is titled “The Righteous One, My Servant.” The apostle John uses the same appellation when he says, “If anyone sins, we have



an Advocate with the Father, Yeshua the Messiah the Righteous” (1 John 2:1).

Isaiah says that the righteous Servant of the LORD will justify many and bear their iniquities by His knowledge. The apostles frequently invoke of the knowledge of Messiah. For example, Paul speaks of the “surpassing value of knowing the Messiah Yeshua” (Philippians 3:8), and Peter encourages us to grow “in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Yeshua the Messiah” (2 Peter 3:18). Through this knowledge, sinners are justified, because He “was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25). “Through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19). “For the Messiah also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18). Ibn Crispin explains, “He will atone for them in the perfection of his nature, until their sins depart from them and they are left guiltless.”<sup>70</sup> *Targum Yonaton* says, “By His wisdom He shall justify the righteous, in order to make many to keep the Torah.”

### A Portion with the Great

Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong. (Isaiah 53:12)

After His suffering, the Messiah receives a portion with the great and divides the spoils of war. Ramban expounds, “The whole of many nations will be his portion and inheritance, and from among the Gentiles he will divide the strong as spoil for his people and servants because he emptied his soul of everything for death, i.e. he resolved in his mind and resigned himself to die.”<sup>71</sup> Ibn Crispin explains that He will receive a portion in the land of Israel, as predicted in Ezekiel 48:21, and He will divide the

booty of “the mighty nations, Gog and Magog, who come to attach to him, he, and Israel.”<sup>72</sup>

The LORD promises to “give the nations” and “the very ends of the earth” to the Messiah as an inheritance and possession.<sup>73</sup> He allots the Messiah a portion at the right hand of His throne, and He places the nations beneath His feet, as it says, “Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet” (Psalm 110:1). Quoting Psalm 8:6(5), the writer of the book of Hebrews explains that God has “Put all things in subjugation under His feet, for in subjecting all things to [the Messiah], He left nothing that is not subject to him” (Hebrews 2:8).

Therefore I will divide Him the spoil of many people, and the treasures of strong fortifications; He shall divide the spoil; because He has delivered His life unto death, and He shall make the rebellious to keep the Torah. (*Targum Yonatan*, Isaiah 53:12)

### Moses the Suffering Servant

A creative midrash in the Talmud explains why Moses so earnestly desired to enter the promised land and yet God denied it of him. In the midrash, Moses takes on the role of the Suffering Servant. He suffers because he is banned from entering the Promised Land. He consents to die a sacrificial death outside of the land of Israel for the sake of the nation. He is reckoned with transgressors in that He agreed to die along with the generation that perished in the wilderness. Because he consents to suffer for Israel’s sake, the LORD accounts it to him as if He has fulfilled the whole Torah:

Rabbi Simlai taught, “Why did Moses our teacher long to enter the land of Israel? Was it because he wanted to eat of its fruits or satiate himself with its produce? No. This is what Moses said, ‘There are many commandments given to Israel which can only be fulfilled in the land. I want to enter the land so that they might all be fulfilled through me.’” The Holy One, blessed be He,

said, “I will account it as if you performed [the whole Torah],” as it is written [in Isaiah 53:12], “I will allot Him a portion with the great, and He will divide the booty with the strong, because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors.” ... because [Moses] surrendered himself to die, as he said in [Exodus 32:32], “[Forgive Israel’s sin], and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!” And Moses “was numbered with the transgressors” because he was numbered with the generation who were condemned to die in the wilderness. “Yet he himself bore the sin of many” because he made atonement for Israel when they made the golden calf. And Moses “interceded for the transgressors,” because he begged for mercy on behalf of the sinners in Israel that they should turn and repent. (b.*Sotah* 14a)

Although Isaiah 53 cannot be literally reckoned to Moses, the midrash illustrates how “the final redeemer will be like the first redeemer.”<sup>74</sup> Since Moses, the first redeemer, prefigures the work of Messiah, the final redeemer, the imagery and symbolism of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 naturally works both directions and aptly describes the sacrifice of Moses as well. Just as Moses offered to lay down his life so that Israel might be forgiven, so too Messiah surrendered Himself to die for the forgiveness of sins. Just as Moses was numbered with transgressors, meaning that he took on their punishment even though he had not committed their sins, so too Messiah was numbered with us, taking on our punishment for sin. Just as Moses bore the sin of many by making atonement on behalf of Israel and restoring their covenant relationship with God after the sin of the golden calf, so too Messiah has worked atonement on our behalf. Just as Moses interceded for Israel, actually interposing Himself between God and Israel, so that the children of Israel might be given the opportunity to repent, so too Messiah has

interceded for us and called us to repent from evil and turn to righteousness.

### Numbered with Transgressors

Because He poured out Himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many, and interceded for the transgressors. (Isaiah 53:12)

The Suffering Servant poured Himself out to death. The Messiah hymn of Philippians 2 explains this to mean that the Messiah “emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men ... by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:7–8). He was “numbered with the transgressors” in as much as He was executed as a common criminal. The people of his generation numbered him with transgressors when they assumed He suffered for his own transgressions. Ibn Crispin explains, “Those that saw him imagined him to be like the transgressors and counted him among them.”<sup>75</sup>

On the night He was betrayed, Yeshua warned His disciples about His impending fate. He told them, “I tell you that this which is written must be fulfilled in Me, ‘And he was numbered with transgressors’; for that which refers to Me has its fulfillment” (Luke 22:37).

Ramban states, “What happened to him at that time was not for his own sins, but for the sins of others.”<sup>76</sup> Ibn Crispin summarizes the matter, “All this befell him because of the greatness of his love and compassion for his people Israel. Yet he in his perfection carried the sins of Israel ‘the many,’ until he made expiation for them and removed their sins from them ... This prophecy was delivered by Isaiah at the divine command for the purpose of making known to us something about the nature of the future Messiah, who is to come and deliver Israel, and his



life from the day when he arrives at discretion until his advent as a redeemer.”<sup>77</sup>

## The Suffering of Messiah

Ramban’s commentary, Ibn Crispin’s commentary, and all the rabbinic commentaries that support a messianic interpretation of the Suffering Servant prophecy conclude with assurances that, although the Suffering Servant prophecy applies to the coming Messiah, the prophet was not speaking of Jesus. Then we must ask, “Of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself or of someone else?” (Acts 8:34). “Thus it is written, that the Messiah would suffer” (Luke 24:46). “Was it not necessary for the Messiah to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). “The things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Messiah would suffer, He has thus fulfilled” (Acts 3:18).

[The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to the soul of the Messiah], “The iniquities of those who are hidden with you will ultimately bring you into an iron yoke, and they will do to you like this calf, darkening its eyes; they will choke your breath with the yoke and with their iniquities. Your tongue will ultimately cling to the roof of your mouth. Are you willing on these terms?” ... He replied to him, “Master of the universe, with a joyful and glad heart, I will accept upon myself on condition that not one of Israel will perish, and not only those who live in my time shall be saved, but even those that are hidden in the dust, and not only the dead from my time alone shall be saved, but even those who died from the days of Adam the first man until now, and not only these, but even those who were miscarried in my time shall be saved, and not only those who were miscarried, but even those you considered creating but were never created. On these terms I am willing; on these terms I accept.”

They said, on the week that the son of David comes, they will bring beams of iron and place them upon his neck, until his stature is bent, and he cries and weeps,

and his voice ascends to heaven. He will say before him, “Master of the universe, what is my strength, and what is my spirit, and what is my soul, and what are my limbs? Am I not flesh and blood?” At that time, David cries, saying [in Psalm 22:15], “my strength has dried up like a clay pot.”

At that time, the Holy One, blessed is he, will say to him, “Ephraim, my Righteous Messiah, you have already accepted this upon yourself from the six days of creation; now your suffering is like my suffering.” ... At that time, the Messiah said before him, “Master of the universe, my mind is now at ease, because it is sufficient for a servant to be like his master.” (*Yalkut Shimoni*, Isaiah, 499)

## PART FOUR

### Commentary on Haftarat Ki Tetze

#### The Barren Woman

Shout for joy, O barren one ... (Isaiah 54:1)

The sin of the people is atoned for by the suffering of the Servant of the LORD. The triumph of the Messiah brings about the final redemption. Therefore, the prophet turns his attention back to Zion and the forsaken city of Jerusalem to offer yet another consolation in this series of consolations.

The prophet addresses Jerusalem as a barren woman. Though once full of people, she now sits lonely like a widow. Though once filled with throngs of pilgrims who came annually to celebrate the appointed festivals, her streets are now astonishingly desolate. The city once called beautiful is a place of empty ruins and broken stones. This is the Jerusalem of Jeremiah’s Lamentations, the city to whom the oracle of Isaiah 54 is addressed—barren and without inhabitant:

How lonely sits the city that was full of people! She has become like a widow who was once great among the nations! ... She weeps bitterly in the night and her tears



are on her cheeks; she has none to comfort her ... no one comes to the appointed feasts. All her gates are desolate. (Lamentations 1:1–4)

In biblical society, barrenness was stigmatized. The barren woman's great hope in life was to give her husband children. For women in the biblical era, failure to conceive must have felt like a slap in the face from God. Remember how desperately Rachel cried out to Jacob saying, "Give me children, or else I die" (Genesis 30:1).

Jerusalem in ruins could be likened to a barren woman because her children were gone. They were carried away into captivity and driven into exile. The silent stones of the city were like a sad memorial to the seemingly failed promises of God.

The barren woman metaphor draws inspiration from a common, biblical tradition of barren women who experience miraculous reversals of fortune. Sarah, the mother of our faith, was barren. Rebecca was barren. Rachel was barren. Samson's mother was barren. According to rabbinic interpretation, Ruth was barren. Hannah the mother of Samuel was barren. The Shunamite woman of 2 Kings 4 was barren. In each of these instances, the LORD miraculously granted the barren woman conception. Miraculous fertility is an anticipated blessing from the LORD in the Messianic Age.<sup>78</sup>

Telling the barren woman to burst forth in joyful shouting is a reversal of expectation. Would it not be more appropriate to tell the barren woman to mourn and wail? Are not the words of Jeremiah's Lamentations a more accurate and honest assessment of the situation? The LORD, however, tells Jerusalem to break out in songs of joy and celebration because her children will be more numerous than those of an inhabited city—a married woman.

A certain heretic came to Beruria, the wife of Rabbi Meir, and said, "It is written [in Isaiah 54:1], 'Shout for joy, O barren one, you who have borne no child.' Does

it make sense for a woman to sing for joy because she has not given birth?" Beruria replied, "Fool! Read to the end of the verse where it says, 'the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman.'" The heretic replied, "Then what does it mean when it says, 'barren one, you who have borne no child?'" Beruria replied, "The assembly of Israel sings out. She is like a barren woman only in as much as she has not given birth to children destined for Gehennah like you have." (b.*Yoma* 10a)

The scattered people of Judah, the children of Jerusalem will return to her. Just as each of the aforementioned barren women of Scripture experienced a miraculous reversal when the LORD supernaturally opened their wombs, so too Jerusalem will rejoice in the Messianic Era when the LORD supernaturally returns the exiles of Israel to her.

In that day, "the sons of the desolate one will be more numerous than the sons of the married woman" (Isaiah 54:1), and "even the barren gives birth to seven, but she who has many children languishes" (1 Samuel 2:5). "He makes the barren woman abide in the house as a joyful mother of children. Praise the LORD!" (Psalm 113:9).

## Sarah's Big Tent

Enlarge the place of your tent; stretch out the curtains of your dwellings, spare not; lengthen your cords and strengthen your pegs. (Isaiah 54:2)

The LORD tells Jerusalem to prepare for the great ingathering of exiles that will come to her at the time of the final redemption. She must stretch and expand to make room for her children. She must spread out to the right and to the left. "The children of whom you were bereaved will yet say in your ears, 'The place is too cramped for me; make room for me that I may live here'" (Isaiah 49:20). "Jerusalem will be inhabited without walls because of the multitude of men and cattle within it" (Zechariah 2:4). Those



returning from exile will be so numerous that they will “possess nations and will resettle the desolate cities” (54:3). Then the barren woman of Jerusalem will say in her heart, “Who has begotten these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children and am barren, an exile and a wanderer? And who has reared these? Behold, I was left alone; from where did these come?” (Isaiah 49:21).

The prophet metaphorically depicts Jerusalem as a tent that must stretch its curtains wide to accommodate the crowds. Messianic Jerusalem is “a tent which will not be folded; its stakes will never be pulled up, nor any of its cords be torn apart” (Isaiah 33:20).

By depicting Jerusalem first as a barren woman and then describing her as the owner of a tent, the prophet alludes to Sarah, the wife of Abraham. Sarah was in her tent when she overheard the LORD tell Abraham that she would bear a son.<sup>79</sup> After her death, her son Isaac brought his bride Rebekah into Sarah’s tent.<sup>80</sup>

The sages followed Isaiah’s lead and created a midrashic connection between Sarah’s tent and the Temple in Jerusalem. In the midrash, a cloud hovered over Sarah’s tent just as the Divine Presence filled the Temple in the form of a cloud. Sarah’s tent curtains were spread wide to receive guests just as the Temple doors were open to receive pilgrims. A blessing rested on Sarah’s bread dough, just as the bread of the presence in the Temple was said to remain warm and fresh from Sabbath to Sabbath. Sarah’s Sabbath lamp used to burn all week just as the western lamp of the Menorah was said to remain burning through the week:

You find that as long as Sarah lived, a cloud hung over her tent, when she died, that cloud disappeared ... As long as Sarah lived, her doors were wide open; when she died that liberality ceased ... As long as Sarah lived, there was a blessing on her dough, and the lamp used to burn from the evening of the Sabbath until the

evening of the following Sabbath; when she died, these ceased ... (*Genesis Rabbah* 60:16)

In the midrash, the miracles of Sarah’s tent ceased when she died, corresponding to the destruction of the Temple, but they returned when Rebekah entered Sarah’s tent, corresponding to the messianic redemption.

The Apostle Paul made a similar connection between Sarah and Jerusalem. In Galatians 4, Paul creates an analogy to illustrate that Gentile believers need not take on Jewish status to be counted among the sons of Abraham. In Paul’s midrash, he contrasts Hagar with Sarah and allegorically represents them as Jerusalem under Roman bondage and New Jerusalem, respectively. He cites Isaiah 54 as his proof-text:

But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written [in Isaiah 54:1], “Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.” (Galatians 4:26–27)

So then, brethren, we are not children of a bondwoman [i.e., Hagar], but of the free woman [i.e., Sarah]. (Galatians 4:31)

According to Paul’s interpretation, the children of Messianic Jerusalem include Gentile believers who have become sons of Abraham by faith. Therefore, the great, end-times ingathering into Jerusalem will include both the exiles of Israel and the nations as well:

Rabbi Chanina was sitting and lecturing on the verse [in Jeremiah 3:17] that says, “At that time they will call Jerusalem ‘The Throne of the LORD,’ and all the nations will be gathered to it, to Jerusalem.” Rabbi Yochanan asked, “Is it possible that Jerusalem will be able to fit them all? This is unbelievable!” Rabbi Chanina replied, “The Holy One, blessed be He, will order it, saying, ‘Lengthen! Enlarge! Receive your hosts!’ as it is writ-

ten [in Isaiah 54:2], ‘Enlarge the place of your tent.’”  
(*Genesis Rabbah* 5:7)

### Lechah Dodi

For you will spread abroad to the right and to the left ...  
Fear not, for you will not be put to shame; and do not  
feel humiliated, for you will not be disgraced; but you  
will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach  
of your widowhood you will remember no more. (Isaiah  
54:3–4)

When the final, messianic redemption occurs, Jerusalem’s shame, humiliation, disgrace, and reproach will be forgotten. It will no longer be called, “Forsaken,” or “Desolate.”<sup>81</sup> The once barren city will swell large with people. The abandoned, widowed wife will be reclaimed by her husband. “The actual marriage ceremony will take place in the Messianic Era, as it is written [in Isaiah 54:5], ‘For your husband is your Maker.’”<sup>82</sup> Jerusalem will be called “My delight is in her,” and her land will be called “Married.”<sup>83</sup>

For the LORD delights in you, and to Him your land will be married. For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons will marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:4–5)

These themes of casting off disgrace, remarriage, and spreading out to accommodate the exiles all appear in the popular liturgical song *Lechah Dodi* (Come My Beloved). Originally composed by the Kabbalist Rabbi Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz, the sixteenth century mystic of Safed, the song is an artful compilation of more than thirty biblical passages that speak of the Sabbath, the coming messianic redemption, and the New Jerusalem. Jewish communities around the world sing the song at sunset on Friday nights to welcome the Sabbath. The song compares the Sabbath to a bride, entering adorned for her husband, and to the Messianic Jerusalem.

The following excerpt from the song draws on the imagery of Isaiah 54.<sup>84</sup>

Be not ashamed, be not abased;  
Why so downcast, why disgraced?  
The poor shall find a place to dwell,  
The City built upon the hill.

As a groom rejoices his bride to see,  
So will your God’s rejoicing be.  
You will spread to left and right,  
The LORD will be great in your sight.

### For a Brief Moment

For a brief moment I forsook you, but with great compassion I will gather you. (Isaiah 54:7)

In a moment of anger, the husband stormed out of the house, slammed the door behind him, and left his young bride trembling and alone. The girl was terrified. She assumed that she had so angered her husband that she would never see him again. She felt despair sweep over her spirit, and her heart was crushed. How could she have been so foolish to make her husband angry? Tears of shame and confusion spilled from her eyes, and she wept for what seemed like hours. Surely she had lost his love forever.

Meanwhile, her husband’s anger cooled. A few minutes after leaving, he regretted his angry outburst. He returned home, found his young wife weeping, and his heart was moved with compassion for her. He spoke tenderly to her, and said, “I was only angry for a moment.” Through her tears, she saw the clock on the wall and realized that what had seemed like hours had only been a few minutes.

The prophecy employs this metaphor to explain the destruction of Jerusalem and the long years of exile. Jerusalem and the people of Israel are likened to the young wife. God is likened to the angry husband. He expresses his anger and displeasure, top-



pling Jerusalem and sending the people into exile. “For a little moment I removed the presence of my Shechinah,” *Targum Yonatan* says.

From our perspective, this period of God’s displeasure seems to last for centuries. It has been almost two thousand years since the Temple’s destruction and since our Master’s ascension. From God’s perspective, though, only a brief moment passes. “With the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness” (2 Peter 3:8–9). When the redemption finally comes, the long years of Israel’s exile and Messiah’s absence will seem inconsequential, like a moment in time.

When the brief moment of God’s displeasure has passed, He says that He will show Jerusalem compassion with “everlasting kindness” (54:8). He will gather Jerusalem “with great compassion” (54:7), another reference to the ingathering. Though it is only a brief moment away, our Master longs for the day of the ingathering of the children of Jerusalem.<sup>85</sup>

## My Covenant of Peace

For this is like the days of Noah to Me, when I swore that the waters of Noah would not flood the earth again; so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you nor will I rebuke you. (Isaiah 54:9)

The oracle compares God’s judgment on Jerusalem and on His people with the story of His judgment during the days of Noah. In the days of Noah, God punished humanity and purged it of wickedness by bringing a cataclysmic flood upon the earth. In a similar manner, God punishes the people of Israel for sin and purges His people of wickedness through the desolation of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple within it, and the suffering of the people during the years of exile.

When Noah’s flood had passed, God made a covenant whereby He promised never to flood the earth again. Likewise, in the Messianic Era, God will make a covenant of peace with Jerusalem, promising that the city will never again be destroyed, nor will He bring punishment again. He says, “My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, and My covenant of peace will not be shaken” (54:10).

# Questions for Small Groups

1. What are the three expressions Messiah's of exaltation in Isaiah 52:13. How does the midrash apply these three expressions? How does the exaltation language echo in the Apostolic Writings?
2. How does Messiah sprinkle many nations? What does it mean that kings will shut their mouths at him? Offer more than one explanation.
3. How does Isaiah 53:2 allude to the virgin birth?
4. Was Yeshua subject to human sickness? Why does the Talmud refer to Messiah as "the Leper?"
5. What are the stripes by which we are healed? Explain the relationship between the Hebrew of Isaiah 53:5 and Paul's statement in Philippians 3:10.
6. How did the death and burial of the Messiah fulfill the predictions of Isaiah 53:9?
7. What is the "seed" (53:10) that Messiah will see? What is meant by "length of days?"
8. Who is the barren woman of Isaiah 54? Who are the children of the woman? How does the woman of Isaiah 54 allude to Sarah? How does Paul use this passage in Galatians 4?



# Endnotes

- 1 David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah: An Exposition of Isaiah Chapter 53* (Jerusalem: Keren Ahvah Meshihit, 2000), 3 (hereafter cited as *The Servant of Jehovah*).
- 2 4Q Self Glorification Hymn: Israel Knohl, *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 15. Moreover, the recently translated Dead Sea text called *Chazon Gabriel* (Gabriel's Revelation) appears to make reference to Ephraim, Messiah son of Joseph, the suffering Messiah known to us from *Pesikta Rabbati*, and the new translation of *Chazon Gabriel* suggests that this suffering Messiah will die and rise to life on the third day. Israel Knohl, "The Messiah Son of Joseph: 'Gabriel's Revelation' and Birth of a New Messianic Model," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 34:5 (2008): 58–62.
- 3 Origen, *Against Celsus*, 55.
- 4 The comment is no longer found in printed editions of Rashi or in the manuscripts, but the Spanish monk, Raymundus Martini recorded it in 1278 in his work *Pugio fidei* (*Dagger of Faith*). *The "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah According to the Jewish Interpreters* (trans. Samuel Driver, Adolf Neubauer; Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1999; previously published by James Parker and Co., 1877) [hereafter cited as *The "Suffering Servant"*], vi, 39.
- 5 *The "Suffering Servant,"* 99–100.
- 6 *Exposition of the Parashah, "Lo, My Servant Shall Prosper," by the holy En Sh'lomoh Astruc*, as translated in *The "Suffering Servant,"* 129.
- 7 "Seir" of Edom is a rabbinic code word for Rome, wherein the Suffering Messiah remains hidden until the redemption. "Yinnon" is a rabbinic title for Messiah based upon Psalm 72:17. The poem is a stanza of the *mussaf piyut* "Az Milifnei Vereshit" from *Siddur Umachzor Kol Bo* (vol. 2; nusach Sefard; Vilna: Widow and Brothers Rom, 1923), 221. David Baron ascribes it to the famous ninth century liturgist Eleazar ben Qualir. Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah*, 156–157.
- 8 *The "Suffering Servant,"* 78. Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban) cites Daniel 12:9 to support his interpretation: "Many will be purged, purified and refined, but the wicked will act wickedly; and none of the wicked will understand, but those who have insight (*sakal*, שָׂכַל) will understand."
- 9 For example, Rabbi Moshe Kohen ibn Crispin cites it as, "According to the Midrash of our Rabbis; 'he will be higher than Abraham, more exalted than Moses, loftier than Solomon, exceedingly above the ministering angels.'"
- 10 Raymundus Martini, *Pugio fidei* (*Dagger of Faith*): *The "Suffering Servant,"* 39.
- 11 *The "Suffering Servant,"* 9.
- 12 *The "Suffering Servant,"* 8.
- 13 *Mikraoth Gedoloth—Isaiah Volume Two: A New English Translation of the Text, Rashi and Other Commentaries* (trans. A. J. Rosenberg; Brooklyn, NY: The Judaica Press, 1993), 422.
- 14 *The "Suffering Servant,"* 12–13.
- 15 The NASB translation supplies the words "My people" in 52:14, but those words do not appear in the

Hebrew. The NASB translators supply those words to make a distinction between the second person singular address, “many were astonished at *you*,” which the NASB understands as the nation of Israel, and the third person singular, “*His* appearance . . . *His* form,” which the translators understand as the Servant of the LORD. Alternatively, Ibn Kripsin says, “The prophet begins in the 2nd pers. ‘at thee,’ and then proceeds to speak in the 3rd ‘his countenance’: he ought properly to have used the 3rd pers. from the first, ‘at him,’ but it is customary for the two persons to be thus combined in a single verse.”

- 16 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 104.
- 17 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 18 Cf. Haftarat Parah on Ezekiel 36:25.
- 19 *Targum Yonatan*, Isaiah 52:15.
- 20 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 105.
- 21 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 22 *Ibid.* Ramban alludes to Ezekiel 8:12 and Ecclesiastes 10:20.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 105–106.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 374–375.
- 25 Ramban, *The “Suffering Servant,”* 80.
- 26 See commentary in Haftarat Va’etchanan, Isaiah 40:10.
- 27 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 106.
- 28 Cf. Isaiah 11:1.
- 29 A passage of *Genesis Rabbah* in the edition of Rabbi Moshe Had-Darshan of Narbonne (eleventh century), unfortunately no longer extant, but preserved by Raymundus Martini. *The “Suffering Servant,”* 33.
- 30 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 374.
- 31 *Ibid.*, 80.
- 32 An obscure piece of apocalyptic writing explains Israel’s rejection of the Messiah in terms of the two Messiah theory. After the death of the Suffering Servant, Messiah ben Joseph, the LORD reveals the second Messiah, the Messiah ben David, but Israel rejects him: “And afterwards the Holy One will reveal to them Messiah, the son of David, whom Israel will desire to stone, saying, ‘You speak falsely. The Messiah is already slain, and there is no other Messiah to stand up after him.’ And so they will despise him, as it is written [in Isaiah 53:3], ‘Despised and forsaken of men.’ But he will turn and hide himself from them, according to the words, ‘Like one from whom men hide their face.’” (*Mysteries of Shimon ben Yochai*). *The “Suffering Servant,”* 32.
- 33 *Ibid.*, 394.
- 34 For examples of Messiah’s sorrow, see Raphael Patai, *The Messiah Texts: Jewish Legends of Three Thousand Years* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1988), p. 46.
- 35 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 11.

- 36 The NASB translates *choli* (חֹלִי) in 53:3 and 4 as “grief,” but the rabbis, the apostles, the Septuagint, and the Targums all agree in translating it as “sickness.”
- 37 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 59.
- 38 *Ibid.*, 80–81.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 103.
- 40 C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Isaiah* (vol. 7 of *Commentary on the Old Testament*; trans. James Martin; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 508.
- 41 The edition of the tractate *Sanhedrin*, from which Raymundus Martini copied, words the passage differently than today’s extant versions. Martini’s version represents what must surely be a better reading of the original than the current version which reads, “Leper of the house of study.” *The “Suffering Servant,”* 5.
- 42 b.*Sanhedrin* 98a.
- 43 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 11. Cf. *Yalkut Shimoni* where the midrash receives significant expansion.
- 44 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 15.
- 46 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 47 A passage of *Genesis Rabbah* in the edition of Rabbi Moshe Had-Darshan of Narbonne (eleventh century), unfortunately no longer extant, but preserved by Raymundus Martini. *The “Suffering Servant,”* 35.
- 48 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 10.
- 49 Rabbi Eliyyah de Vidas, *Ibid.*, 386.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 108.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 81.
- 52 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 53 Delitzsch renders as: “הַבְּרִית עֲנִיָּוִי.”
- 54 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 81.
- 55 *Ibid.*, 109.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 268.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 110.
- 60 *Ibid.*, 110–111.

- 61 Several of the rabbinic commentaries that attempt to refute the Christian explanation of the Suffering Servant point out that 53:8 says the “stroke was to them (*nega lamo*, נגע למו),” i.e., the nation, not “to him (*nega lo*, נגע לו).” Rabbinic commentaries often repeat this objection as if this single Hebrew word dismantled the Gospel interpretation. There is no difficulty here. The Bible sometimes uses *lamo* as a singular, third person form (Ibid., lii; Keil and Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 514). Even if it does say, “the stroke was to them,” that reading does not, in any sense, reverse the meaning that the Suffering Servant took the stroke for them. The NASB reads *lamo* in the plural form as referring to the nation, and translates: “to whom the stroke was due.”
- 62 Nakdimon ben Gurion. b.*Taanit* 19b–20a; b.*Ketubot* 66b; b.*Gittin* 56a.
- 63 Several of the rabbinic commentaries that attempt to refute the Christian explanation of the Suffering Servant point out that 53:9 uses a plural form for the word “death.” Hence it might literally be rendered, “He was with a rich man in his deaths.” They use this to indicate that the death refers to many righteous people dying, not to one individual. There is no difficulty here. There is no reason why [the plural form] should not mean “the state of death;” as חיים (*chayim*) [which is also plural] means “the state of life” (*The “Suffering Servant,”* iv). In any case, the Septuagint, the Targums, and all early interpreters render it in the singular form.
- 64 Leviticus 5. Cf. *Torah Club Volume One* and *Five* on Parashat Vayikra.
- 65 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 112.
- 66 Ibid.
- 67 Ibid., 83.
- 68 Ibid.
- 69 Ibid., 113.
- 70 Ibid.
- 71 Ibid., 83.
- 72 Ibid., 113.
- 73 Psalm 2:8.
- 74 *Numbers Rabbah* 11:2.
- 75 *The “Suffering Servant,”* 114.
- 76 Ibid., 84.
- 77 Ibid., 114.
- 78 Deuteronomy 7:14.
- 79 Genesis 18:9–10.
- 80 Genesis 24:67.
- 81 Isaiah 62:4.
- 82 *Genesis Rabbah* 15:31.

83 Isaiah 62:4.

84 “*Lechah Dodi*” in the Sabbath Evening Prayers (trans. Aaron Eby; Vine of David/FFOZ Siddur).

85 Matthew 23:37.








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