

# Why doesn't God intervene?

Suicide bombers blow themselves up in crowded markets, killing and injuring dozens of innocent Israeli citizens. Thousands are murdered and millions forced to leave their homes in Darfur. Poverty, injustice and hate run rampant in the world today. Why doesn't God do something to relieve the suffering of His people?

For many years, the Jewish people have awaited the coming of the Messiah, who would save the world. According to the prophets, the Messiah would...

- **Care for the poor and oppressed** (Isaiah 61:1-2)
- **Give up his life to save humankind** (Isaiah 53:12)
- **Overcome sin and death** (Zechariah 13:1, Hosea 13:14)
- **Be the new covenant between people and God** (Malachi 3:1, Isaiah 42:6, Jeremiah 31:31)
- **Bring salvation** (Isaiah 59:15-16 and 62:11, Zechariah 9:9)
- **Establish an everlasting kingdom** (2 Samuel 7:12-13, Daniel 7:13-14)

## Is this for real?

Many of us wish we could know the future. We read horoscopes, tarot cards, and stock market newsletters and at best we can only guess. But the predictions of the Jewish prophets were not just guesswork or wishful thinking; they came true with uncanny accuracy. The things they wrote thousands of years ago about events in the Middle East and the future of Israel are happening before our eyes. Just turn on the news!

## The Jewish Prophet Isaiah

Some of the most powerful prophecies about the Messiah were made by the Jewish prophet Isaiah, who

lived in the eighth century BCE. It was a turbulent time in the history of Israel: the kingdom was divided, and wars and invasions abounded as alliances were made and broken. In the midst of chaos, Isaiah paints an accurate picture of God's plan for the future of Israel and the nations. He also describes the Messiah, the one whom God would send to change the world!

Take a moment to read the words of the prophet, and then consider how these predictions could possibly have

been fulfilled by anyone other than that well-known Jewish carpenter from Israel, Yeshua the Messiah. If not him, then who else?



## The Suffering and Glory of the Servant

Isaiah 52

<sup>13</sup> See, my servant will act wisely; will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

<sup>14</sup> Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—

<sup>15</sup> so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

Isaiah 53

<sup>1</sup> Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

<sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have

gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

<sup>9</sup> He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

<sup>11</sup> After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

## Who is the Suffering Servant?

Who is this servant of God who bears a horrible, undeserved punishment for our sake? Isaiah gives us several clues to his identity:

- He was innocent; he had done no wrong (verse 9)
- He was despised and rejected by people (verse 3)
- He was silent during his affliction (verse 7)
- He was wounded and killed (verses 5 and 9)
- He was restored to life and honored by God (verses 11-12)

Many Jewish leaders interpret Isaiah 53 as speaking about Israel rather than about one particular person. But when we consider the details provided by the prophet Isaiah, this explanation doesn't make sense.

First of all, Israel is not an innocent sufferer. Isaiah and many other prophets rebuked and chastised Israel for repeated wrongdoing. Second, Israel does not suffer in silence like the servant described in Isaiah 53. The Jewish people have often rallied to their own defense and even when defeats have been crushing, they have not lost without a fight. Third, Israel has never died or ceased to exist. Even under the fiercest persecution, Israel has never been destroyed in the same way that the sufferer in Isaiah 53 has.

If the servant described in this passage is not Israel, then who is it? Some of the weightiest voices in Jewish tradition suggest an answer. The Talmud, the Zohar, and even Maimonides suggest that Isaiah 53 points to an individual and not to the nation!

"The Messiah, what is his name? ...those of the house of Rabbi Yuda the Saint say, the sick one, as it is said, "Surely he had borne our sicknesses."

- Sanhedrin 98b

"The Messiah enters, and he summons every pain and every chastisement of Israel...as it



is written, 'Surely our sicknesses he has carried.'  
- *Zohar II, 212a*  
(medieval)

"What is to be the manner of Messiah's advent, and where will be the place of his appearance?... And Isaiah speaks similarly of the time when he will appear,

without his father or mother or family being known, he came up as a sucker before him, and as a root out of the dry earth, etc."

- *Maimonides, Letter to Yemen* (12th century)

### Why do we need a Messiah?

Nobody's perfect. There is not a single person on earth who has not disobeyed God. Why does it matter? After all, we're only human. We make mistakes. But God is holy and perfect, and the wrongs we commit prevent us from having a personal relationship with Him.

According to the Torah, God required the blood of animal sacrifices to atone for the transgressions of His people: "For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life" (Leviticus 17:11). These animals had to be perfect and spotless, without defect, in order to be acceptable sacrifices.

Although we no longer practice animal sacrifice today (and we're glad we don't!) we still do wrong in the eyes of God. As Isaiah points out, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (Isaiah 53:6). Our relationship with God still needs to be restored—but how?

The prophecies in the Bible tell us that the promised Messiah of Israel would restore God's people to a right relationship with Him. Could the Messiah have

done this by becoming a perfect and spotless sacrifice, whose death would atone for our wrongs once and for all? Read the prophecy and ask yourself who it is that Isaiah might be describing.

### What does it all mean?

How are the words of an ancient prophet and the suffering of an innocent servant relevant to you and me today?

Isaiah makes it clear that Messiah's sacrifice affects all of us. The pain he suffered was a punishment that is rightly ours: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities." Although he was blameless in God's eyes, he voluntarily suffered for our wrongs, for the sake of our healing and the restoration of our relationship with God: "The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed." How will you respond to such a loving sacrifice?

The good news is that his death and resurrection satisfied God's justice. When we recognize that Isaiah 53 points to Yeshua the Messiah and we turn from our sins, then we can have peace with God and know the joy of forgiveness that He offers through the death of His Son. Wouldn't now be a good time for you to receive the Messiah?

### More food for thought

Some other prophetic factors to consider:

The Messiah would be...

- A descendant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:1-3)
- From the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10)
- A son of David (2 Samuel 7:14-16)
- Born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2)
- Born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14)
- An offering for our sin (Psalm 22, Isaiah 53)
- Resurrected from the dead (Psalm 16:10)



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