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# Isaiah

## Isaiah 53 in the New Testament

It has always been my ambition to preach the gospel where Christ was not known, so that I would not be building on someone else's foundation. Rather, as it is written, "Those who were not told about him will see, and those who have not heard will understand (Isa 52:15)." Romans 15:20-21

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed (Isa 53:1)?" John 12:37-38

But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message (Isa 53:1)?" Romans 10:16

When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah, "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases (Isa 53:4)." Matthew 8:16-17

The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants For his life was taken form the earth (Isa 53:7-8)." The

they knew to be a hoax?

- **Too public**—We must also remember that the events of Christ's passion were public. The apostle's writings about Christ could be verified or rejected by those who witnessed the events, whether Christians or non-Christians. This weighs against Spong's "reshaping" thesis.

- **Too early**—Related to the events being public is the important fact that the message of Christ's crucifixion is extremely early in the history of the church. It did not evolve slowly but was the church's bold stand from the beginning. Paul, writing in the early 50's A.D., relates the basic gospel message: "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . ." (1 Cor 15:3-4). What's interesting is that Paul claims to be passing on what he received when he first converted. We know Paul became a Christian over a decade earlier, so the message of the cross according to the Scriptures (i.e. in fulfillment of the OT prophecies) certainly dates back to the 40's A.D., if not the mid-thirties! So from the beginning it appears the church proclaimed Christ's sufferings in a way similar to Isaiah 53, in public, in the very city where those sufferings occurred!

A far simpler and more plausible explanation for the correspondences between the NT account and Isaiah 53 would be the one given by Luke: Then he [Jesus] opened their minds so that they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" Luke 24:45-47. Could it not be that Jesus actually underwent his sufferings according to the Scriptures?

eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Acts 8:32-35

To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth (Isa 53:9)." When they hurled their insult at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

1 Peter 2:21-23

It is written, "And he was numbered with the transgressors (Isa 53:12)." And I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment. Luke 22:37

### Is Isaiah 53 really prophetic?

Christians have long held Isaiah 53 as a classic example of predictive prophecy in the Bible. Even by the most skeptical approach to dating biblical texts, Isaiah 53 was written centuries before the time of Christ. And yet Isaiah 53 corresponds to Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection in many specific details. This seems to be a stunning example of genuine predictive prophecy.

However in a recent television debate hosted by Lee Strobel between Bishop Spong and Dr. Mohler, Bishop Spong offered an alternative explanation for the correspondences between Isaiah 53 and the record of Jesus' sufferings. He postulated that the apostles, who's mental framework about the Mes-

siah was shaped by Isaiah's writings, wrote their descriptions of Christ's sufferings to correspond to Isaiah 53. Thus the apostles shaped their accounts of Jesus to fit Isaiah. While certainly possible, this explanation seems extremely unlikely for several reasons:

- **Too many writers**—Perhaps the greatest difficulty for Spong's view is that all the NT writers described the suffering Christ in ways similar to Isaiah's prophecy, and many of them explicitly identify verses from Isaiah 53 as fulfilled in Christ and the gospel mission. Spong's thesis might be plausible if we had only one account of Christ's sufferings by one author. But we have multiple, independent accounts from four gospel writers, as well as mention being made in Acts, the epistles, and Revelation. Did *all* of these authors independently reshape the historical event in their writings, in the same way, to match Isaiah 53? Or did they all conspire to reshape the historic event in the same way? Neither seems highly likely.
- **Too central**—The gospel message was central to the preaching and teaching of the church. From the beginning (see below), its message has been "Christ crucified." Would so many good men have preached, suffered and died for message they knew to be somewhat concocted?
- **Too many details**—Another problem for Spong's view is the large number of details in Isaiah 53 reflected in the NT account of Christ. An author would need to rewrite many details of Christ's sufferings in order to create so many correspondences. Is it really plausible to assume that so many apostles revised the story in so many details? And what about the resurrection? Did they create that detail to fit Isaiah 53? Were they willing to die for a detail