

“ISRAEL MY GLORY”

Israel’s Mission, and Missions to Israel

by

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CHAPTER TWENTY

FIFTY-THIRD CHAPTER OF ISAIAH

To the editor of the Jewish World

In the early part of the year 1881 a discussion for some weeks was carried on in the Jewish World—a weekly newspaper conducted by Jews—on the meaning and application of this fifty-third of Isaiah. I waited until the editor gave his summary in a leading article, for which he held himself responsible, and then wrote a brief reply to some of his statements, and gave my view of the chapter as plainly referring to Jesus as the innocent sufferer; and to the Jewish people as among those suffered for. The editor kindly inserted my letter in full, without a word of reply or comment. It may be helpful to some if I give the letter just as it appeared in the columns of the Jewish World for May 20th, 1881.

“Sir,—As one of your regular Christian readers permit me to express my thorough appreciation of your liberality in opening your columns for a friendly discussion of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah—a chapter which many Jews have told me is never read in the synagogue.

“I fully agree with you when you say in your own notice of the prophecy, ‘NEITHER PROFOUND LEARNING NOR CRITICAL ACUMEN IS REQUIRED IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE WORDS OF THE PROPHET OR INTERPRET HIS MEANING.’

“This principle is as sound as it is simple, and where truly applied to the reading of the Scriptures is honoring to the God of the Bible. It is devoutly to be wished that both Jews and Christians would read the Word of God on the principle that if the plain and obvious sense make good sense we should seek no other sense.

“Apart then from the fact, which is an important one, that ancient Jewish interpretation of high authority refers this chapter to the Messiah, and that thousands of modern Jews have been influenced by it to confess Jesus as the Messiah, the plain and obvious sense of this chapter will not permit its reference to the Jewish nation as meant by the innocent sufferer. It seems to me that the entire chapter or paragraph falls naturally into two parts.

“First, an innocent person suffering for the sins of others;

“Secondly, persons suffered for.

“Now if the person suffering for the sins of others whilst innocent himself be the Jewish nation, who are the persons suffered for? Surely not the Gentiles. For Isaiah was assuredly a Jew, and he puts himself amongst the persons suffered for, e.g., **‘He was wounded for our transgressions’** (מִפְשָׁעֵנוּ), **‘And with his stripes we are healed’** (וּבַחֲבֵרָתוֹ נִרְפָּא־לָנוּ). **‘All we, like sheep, have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.’**”

“If then, Isaiah, being a Jew, puts himself amongst the persons suffered for, the persons suffered for must represent the Jewish nation. The innocent sufferer cannot then mean the Jewish nation, unless the innocent and the guilty can be one and the same people at one and the same time. Besides, if the innocent sufferer means the Jewish nation, why should Isaiah, in his first chapter, call heaven and earth to witness a fact that ought to appall the universe, **‘I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. The ox knows his owner and the ass his master’s crib, but Israel doth not know, my people do not consider, Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity’** &c.

“The repeated charges of guilt brought by Isaiah against the Jewish nation for their varied and multiplied transgressions absolutely forbid the identity of the innocent sufferer in the fifty-third with the Jewish nation, even apart from the fact that Isaiah puts himself amongst the persons suffered for. And, further, the language of the chapter itself forbids the identity. How can verse nine refer to the Jewish nation? **‘And His grave was assigned with the wicked, but he was with a rich man after his death, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth’** (translated by a Hebrew scholar and a Jew).

“If this chapter do not fit Jesus of Nazareth, it certainly must be applied to one like Him; anyhow it cannot fairly be made to fit the Jewish nation, except as in the persons suffered for.

“You observe in your notice of the chapter that it cannot refer to Jesus because the 10th verse forbids this application. You say under (יִרְאֵה זֶרַע) and (יֶאֱרִיךְ יָמִים) that **‘CHRIST DIED CHILDLESS,’** and that **‘CHRIST PERISHED WHEN ONLY THIRTY-THREE YEARS OF AGE,’** and then you say, **‘NOW WE WOULD ASK ANY CANDID CHRISTIAN HOW THESE CONDITIONS WERE FULFILLED IN THE NAZARENE.’** No one can complain of the tone of this appeal to **‘ANY CANDID CHRISTIAN.’** In dealing with this verse I will endeavor to be **‘THE CANDID CHRISTIAN.’** You say that זֶרַע (*seed*)(IS NEVER USED IN HEBREW SAVE IN ITS PURELY NATURAL SENSE OF BODILY ISSUE.’

“Now in Isaiah 1:4 we have the sinful nation called; **‘a seed of evildoers,’** which surely means disciples or imitators of the wicked. Again in Isaiah 57:4 we have the expressions **‘children of transgressors—a seed of falsehood.’** But the passage to which I would specially call your attention is Psalm 22:30: **‘A seed (זֶרַע) shall serve him, it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.’** In verse 27 of this psalm we find the Gentiles representing this seed of the Messiah reckoned a generation for the Lord: **‘All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.’** So much for (זֶרַע) seed, no one will deny that Jesus has multitudes of disciples.

“Now permit a few words as to the words, ‘**he shall prolong days.**’ According to Daniel 9:26 Messiah is to be cut off (יכרת משיח).

“In Psalm 16:9, 10, the Messiah says, ‘**Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.**’ And further, Daniel 7:13 represents the Messiah as coming as ‘**Son of Man in the clouds of heaven.**’ And as No one can be called son of man who has not been born on this planet, these passages taken together—and they all relate to the Messiah—evidently teach the advent, death, resurrection, and return of the Messiah; so there seems no difficulty as to ‘**length of days.**’

“But it is not necessary to go beyond the verse itself, from which the words, ‘length of days’ are quoted, to find death and resurrection certainly implied. It is when; He shall make himself a sacrifice for sin (אשם) he shall see seed.’ &c. Now the sin offering was always killed, and it was no sin offering while alive, so that the seed was to be a seed after deaths and the length of days must be in resurrection life. You state that ‘THE WORD (לני) IS ACTUALLY PLURAL, THE EQUIVALENT, AS EVERY HEBREW STUDENT KNOWS, OF (להם) “THEM,” AND SO THE ANGLICAN TRANSLATORS VERY PROPERLY RENDER IT IN DEUTERONOMY 33:3, WHERE THE WORD TWICE OCCURS. SO THAT THE PROPHETIC VERSE IN HEBREW REALLY READS, “FOR THE SINS OF MY PEOPLE THEY WERE STRICKEN.” THIS, HOWEVER, WOULD HAVE BEEN AN AWKWARD ADMISSION FOR CHRISTIAN COMMENTATORS, SINCE THE TRANSLATORS OF THE AUTHORIZED VERSION WERE GOOD ENOUGH, IN THE SPIRITUAL INTERESTS OF THEIR FOLLOWERS, TO RENDER, OR RATHER, MIS-RENDER THE TEXT IN ACCORDANCE WITH THEIR PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS,’ I think, on reconsideration, you will see that such insinuations are not only ungenerous but unjust.

“In the first place, it is readily admitted that the *poetic* equivalent for (לני), is used as a plural in prose or historic Hebrew, but is used also as a singular in Job 20:23, and (להם), and also in Isaiah 44:15, (עשהו פסל ויסדו־למו), ‘**He maketh it a graven image and falleth down to it**’ (לני). But even should the plural be insisted on, the scope of the chapter would not be affected, for a very able Hebrew scholar, a Jew, translates it thus, ‘On account of the stroke which should have been upon them.’ and certainly the word (ננע) being a noun, is better translated by: ‘*stroke*’ than by a verb in the passive.

“It should not be thought strange by the Jews, that Christians apply this chapter to Jesus, when the most ancient and trusted authorities amongst the Jews themselves apply it to the Messiah. Witness the famous Alsech, who says, ‘Our rabbis with one mouth’; have confirmed, and received by tradition, that king messiah is here spoken of.’ I trust that this discussion may be conducted with reverence and goodwill, and with a desire honestly to know the truth as God has revealed it. I feel sure you will do me the justice to receive this kindly, as I have for many years felt a kindly interest in your nation, and a longing desire for your spiritual and temporal welfare.

— yours obediently, John Wilkinson.”

A few questions we may suggest as proper to ask the Jew respecting this wonderful portion of Old Testament Scripture.

- Is there not here a wonderful sufferer, suffering for the sins of others, but having none of his own?
- How can this one sufferer be made to mean the Jewish people?
- Have they no sins of their own?
- Besides, who were the persons suffered for?
- Was not Isaiah a Jew?
- Was he not amongst the people suffered for?
- How can the sufferer and the people suffered for be the same?
- Did not the great majority of ancient Jewish interpreters regard this sufferer as the Messiah?
- Why should not modern interpreters do the same?
- Does not this sufferer answer exactly to Jesus?
- Does not the atoning work of this sufferer give meaning to all the atoning sacrifices offered under the Levitical law?
- Does not this atoning work also give hope to the poor sinner?
- Must you not have a Messiah according to Scripture?
- If your Messiah should come to-day, and must fulfil Scripture, must he not be all that Jesus was?
- Must he not do all that Jesus did?
- And must he not be treated by the Jews exactly as Jesus was treated?

Why not accept Jesus, trust His atoning blood for the forgiveness of your sins, and get eternal life as God’s free gift?

- Must the Messiah not be of the seed of David?
- Are not all genealogies lost?
- Must he not have come before the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, and have been “**cut off**” by a violent death?
- Are you not shut up to Jesus or no Messiah at all?

Throw away at once, my Hebrew friend, your prejudice and your self-righteousness, and accept Jesus as “**The Lord our righteousness**,” and get healing for your soul, through the stripes inflicted on Him. Jesus is God’s love-gift to poor sinners—Jews and Gentiles.

~ end of chapter 20 ~

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