

Messianic Prophecies: The Suffering Servant

What constitutes a Messianic prophecy? At times it can be difficult to understand how an Old Testament passage, read within its context, is a Messianic prophecy; the New Testament reader only knows that it is, because the New Testament writers refer to that Old Testament passage as applying to Jesus. The disciples apparently had the same problem, and it was not until the resurrection of Jesus Christ when they were fully informed how the Old Testament spoke of Him, which they passed on when they penned the gospels.

Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” (Luke 24:44-49, ESV)

1. Some Messianic prophecies are easy to identify because they are recounted almost verbatim. Notice how the following chart helps you compare and observe similar passages. When you read Matthew’s account, what does he tell you about Jesus?

Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. (Isa 42:1-4, ESV)	This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets; a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope.” (Matt 12:17- 21, ESV)
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Today, in contrast, Judaism argues that Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is about the nation of Israel. In suffering for the sins of Gentile nations, the nation of Israel fulfilled Isaiah 53. This view was popularized by Rabbi Rashi (1050 A.D.) and others in response to the persecution of Jews for not believing in Jesus Christ during the Middle Ages.

2. Underline the messianic prophecy identified by Matthew. When you observe Isaiah's prophecy, what do you learn from Matthew's account?

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
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And when Jesus entered Peter's house, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases." (Matt 8:14-17, ESV)

3. After the gospel accounts, within the same theme of the suffering Servant, the apostles use Messianic prophecies that portray Jesus as the unblemished sacrificial lamb. What are some reasons for Messianic prophecies placing an emphasis on Jesus as the suffering Servant?

<p>He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth;</p> <p>like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.</p> <p>By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered</p> <p>that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? (Isa 53:7-8, ESV)</p>	<p>Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:</p> <p>“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.</p> <p>In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation?</p> <p>For his life is taken away from the earth.”</p> <p>And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. (Acts 8:32-35, ESV)</p>
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Messianic Prophecies: The Suffering Servant Teacher Notes

What constitutes a Messianic prophecy? At times it can be difficult to understand how an Old Testament passage, read within its context, is a Messianic prophecy; the New Testament reader only knows that it is, because the New Testament writers refer to that Old Testament passage as applying to Jesus. The disciples apparently had the same problem, and it was not until the resurrection of Jesus Christ when they were fully informed how the Old Testament spoke of Him, which they passed on when they penned the gospels.

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It may be worthwhile for the student to learn is that during the formative years of the disciples developing their faith in Jesus Christ, they were no different than us. In the beginning, they saw Jesus as a rabbi and their relationship reflected the contemporaneous first century disciple – rabbi relationship of respect and friendship. As they spent more time with Jesus, their relationship became more familiar and comfortable but not worth dying for. But after the resurrection, when they realized what Jesus did in atonement and understood Him in the context of the Old Testament, did they see Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and lived boldly representing Him.

1. Some Messianic prophecies are easy to identify because they are recounted almost verbatim. Notice how the following chart helps you compare and observe similar passages. When you read Matthew’s account, what does he tell you about Jesus?

<p>Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights;</p> <p>I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.</p> <p>He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street;</p> <p>a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice.</p> <p>He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. (Isa 42:1-4, ESV)</p>	<p>This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah:</p> <p>“Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased.</p> <p>I will put my Spirit upon him, and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.</p> <p>He will not quarrel or cry aloud, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;</p> <p>a bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench, until he brings justice to victory; and in his name the Gentiles will hope.” (Matt 12:17- 21, ESV)</p>
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Intended as an example, this chart shows a method of Bible study where different passages can be compared and contrasted with each other. It is a method that helps in observing the text, see similarities / differences, examine their contexts and hopefully lead to a better understanding of God’s word.

As the student studies the two above passages, ask: how do you know that Jesus is the fulfillment of Isaiah's God chosen servant on whom God has poured out His Spirit? What does this look like?

This answer requires some knowledge of the gospels. But apparent abstract concepts can be tangibly understood when one has a good handle of God's word. Jesus only does what His Father shows Him (John 5:19) and says only what His Father authorizes (John 14:7-11).

So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing. For whatever the Father does, that the Son does likewise. (John 5:19, ESV)

If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him." Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.** Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. (John 14:7-11, ESV)

Ask the student: did you notice Isaiah's prophecy of "bring forth justice to the nations?" But instead of coming as the Son of Man Lord of the Sabbath, how does Jesus come?

Jesus comes in humility and gentleness (i.e. He will not quarrel nor cry out) and with compassion for the weary and burdened (i.e. battered reed and smoldering wick).

Jesus did not come asserting His power as the Son of God and Judge; He came with God's message of salvation. In God's judicial treatment of sin and evil, bringing justice is a matter of choice: accept God's provision of Jesus as Savior or face Him as Judge.

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This is to inform the student one reason why Jews today reject Jesus Christ. There are many logically developed arguments against associating Jesus Christ with Isaiah's messianic prophecies; however, the logic comes at the expense of good objective biblical hermeneutics. Unsound biblical hermeneutics is a common problem for all sorts of theology. These lessons are an attempt to help one be more objective and rigorous towards God's word.

2. Underline the messianic prophecy identified by Matthew. When you observe Isaiah's prophecy, what do you learn from Matthew's account?

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Here is an example where the Old Testament messianic prophecy is a little more difficult to locate because the New Testament citation is not verbatim.

Ask the student: was Isaiah's prophecy of healing limited to physical healing (literal sense) or something else (metaphorical sense)? Or both? Discuss literal verses metaphorical definitions.

In one of His earliest large healing events, Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and others who visited "to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 'He Himself took our infirmities and carried away our diseases'" (Matt 8:14-17). Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 53:4 revealed that Jesus' physical healing metaphorically represented the spiritual healing of salvation that would result from His atonement of sin.

3. After the gospel accounts, within the same theme of the suffering Servant, the apostles use Messianic prophecies that portray Jesus as the unblemished sacrificial lamb of Passover. What are some reasons for Messianic prophecies placing an emphasis on Jesus as the suffering Servant?

<p>He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth;</p> <p>like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth.</p> <p>By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered</p> <p>that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? (Isa 53:7-8, ESV)</p>	<p>Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:</p> <p>"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.</p> <p>In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation?</p> <p>For his life is taken away from the earth."</p> <p>And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. (Acts 8:32-35, ESV)</p>
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Encourage discussion of the student's observation between the two texts.

By associating Jesus Christ with the Passover lamb, the Suffering Servant's voluntary sacrificial death is understood in the context of atoning for sin. This was the good news Philip explained to the eunuch. The resulting atonement opens the way for repentance and forgiveness – the healing of one's relationship with God.

The Suffering Servant demonstrates the true nature of servanthood where one puts aside self-glorification and obediently follows God's word. God, who is faithful, vindicates one who is faithful.