“MESSIANIC PROPHECIES IN ISAIAH”

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The one thing that separates the Jews from the Christians is, quite simply, the one thing that the Jews want the most, namely the Messiah. There are many, many prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament, including passages in Genesis, Zechariah, the Psalms, 2 Samuel, and in other books as well. However, for our purposes in this paper we are only going to be discussing the messianic prophecies in the book of the Prophet Isaiah. Many of these prophecies are incredibly vivid word pictures of what the Messiah will do and be like, and about His life in general. For example, “Isaiah 9 and 11 foresee the regal splendor of the coming king,”¹ and Isaiah 7:14 mentions a “virgin” giving birth to a son who will be named Immanuel, which means “God with us.” Now of course there is much disagreement these days as to whether or not this latter passage is really a messianic prophecy or whether it is merely a prophecy that had its fulfillment long ago, shortly after the prophecy was made. In the pages below we are going to discuss this passage (Isaiah 7:14) as well as others, such as Isaiah 42, 49, and 53 (also known as the Servant of the Lord passages), and determine whether or not they are in fact messianic prophecies. Although there are seemingly countless other messianic prophecies in Isaiah, as this is a very short paper we do not have time to address all, or even most of them here, and so we will be sticking to the list of passages above in this document. We will then end with some concluding remarks after a brief recapitulation of everything discussed below.

Isaiah 7:14

Isaiah 7:14 says, “Therefore, the Lord Himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive, have a son, and name him Immanuel (HCSB).” Now, as we said above, this is a hotly debated passage these days with regard to whether or not it really does speak of the Messiah.

James Smith, in reference to chapter 7 of Isaiah, says this, “In chapter 7 Messiah is about to be born.” Smith also points out,

“Since the days of Delitzsch the ranks of those who believe that Isaiah 7 contains personal Messianic prophecy have dwindled. To see the virgin birth of Christ in Isaiah 7:14 is no longer popular. Modern scholarship notwithstanding, the interpretation which identifies Immanuel as Messiah is superior to those which regard him as a child born in the days of Isaiah.

The issue seems to be one that can be resolved quite effectively if we remember that prophecies often times in the OT have a double fulfillment. Stephen Miller agrees with this sentiment when he states that this passage, like most of Isaiah’s prophecies, seem to apply to two eras of time. Miller also points out that the term for “virgin” in this passage can also be translated as “young woman,” and the Zondervan Handbook to the Bible says that this term “virgin” is possibly more like the English word “maiden.” If this is the case, then it would seem that the virgin birth is actually not in view in this passage. However, Smith makes recognizes that the Hebrew term used here that is translated “virgin” (almah), since this term refers to a young woman of marriageable age, based on the demands of logic, can only mean one of two things, namely either an unmarried immoral woman, or a virgin. Smith also argues that since illegitimate children were so common in those days, as they are today, a baby born of an unmarried woman could not rightly be classified as a “sign,” and so the Greek translators of the OT properly used the Greek word parthenos (virgin) when translating the Hebrew word almah in this passage in

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3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Pat Alexander and David Alexander, Zondervan Handbook to the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 422.
7 This is because the woman is said to bear a child, and if she is not married this she must be immoral.
8 Smith, The Major Prophets.
9 The other reason that these are the only two logical options seems to be that a young married woman having a child would certainly not be abnormal enough to constitute a “sign” either.
the LXX.\textsuperscript{10} \textit{The Concise Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament} agrees with Smith’s assessment of the definition of this Greek word as being “virgin” or “one who has had no sexual relationship.”\textsuperscript{11} The simple fact that the Greek translators of the Septuagint used the Greek word for “virgin” here is a clear indication that, hundreds of years before the coming of Christ, this passage was understood to be referring to a virgin birth. However, even if that is not enough to solidify my argument here, Matthew 1:18-23 and Luke 1:26-35 discuss this very birth of the virgin, and Mathew 1:22-23 explicitly quotes this passage from Isaiah when it states, “Now all this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet: See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated “God is with us (HCSB).” As we can see this passage states that the virgin birth of Jesus was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah 7:14, and in Matthew 1:23 the same Greek word from the Septuagint listed above for virgin (\textit{parthenos}) is used, and in Luke 1:27 a derivative of that same word is also used (\textit{parthenon}).

So, to close up this section on Isaiah 7:14, it seems as though \textit{The Zondervan Handbook To The Bible}, which says that the sign mentioned in this passage “seems to have both present and future significance,”\textsuperscript{12} is correct, as are Smith and Miller regarding their above statements on the issue, for the immediate fulfillment of this passage could have been in Isaiah’s wife, or perhaps the king’s wife,\textsuperscript{13} but exactly what it referred to we cannot be certain, and as far as the then future fulfillment of this prophecy in the virgin birth of Jesus, we can rest assured based on the above evidence that Isaiah 7:14 is in fact a messianic prophecy.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Alexander and Alexander, \textit{The Zondervan Handbook to the Bible}, 422.
\textsuperscript{13} Miller, \textit{The Complete Guide to the Bible}, 187.
Isaiah 42

Walter C. Kaiser Jr. thinks that some of the “Servant passages” in Isaiah, including Isaiah 42, are referring primarily to the nation of Israel, or at least the Messiah and the nation of Israel. However, his explanation of why this is so, as well as his exegetical means and interpretive presentation of these passages is incredibly strained and best, and downright blasphemous at worst. Delitzsch concurs with my analysis when they state,

“In Ch. 41:8 this epithet was applied to the nation, which had been chosen as the servant and for the service of Jehovah. But the servant of Jehovah who is presented to us here is distinct from Israel, and has so strong an individuality and such marked personal features, that the expression cannot possibly be merely a personified collective.”

Now, Isaiah 42:1-4 reads,

“This is My Servant; I strengthen Him, this is My Chosen One; I delight in Him. I have put My Spirit on Him; He will bring justice to the nations. He will not cry out or shout or make His voice heard in the streets. He will not break a bruised reed, and He will not put out a smoldering wick; He will faithfully bring justice. He will not grow weak or be discouraged until He has established justice on earth. The islands will wait for His instruction (HCSB).”

This passage may seem to be difficult to correlate with what we know about the Messiah, as it does seem a bit cryptic in certain places. However, in Matthew 12:16-21 Jesus applies this passage to himself. Now although Jesus quotes the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 42:1-4 in Matthew, He nevertheless clearly believes that this Isaiah passage is referring to Him, and if that is the case then we are most certainly in no position to question Him on that, or on anything else for that matter, for He is God and we are not, plain and simple.

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Also, John Calvin, one of the infamous reformers, regarding Isaiah 42:7, tells us that the Lord is explaining through Isaiah, when speaking of the Servant “opening blind eyes,” that the Messiah would come and illuminate our inadequate understanding of the mysteries of God as well as make us see the depravity of our souls. Now of course this is not something that would have most likely been deduced from this passage by the Hebrews prior to the first advent of Christ, but it is nevertheless an accurate depiction of what Jesus clearly came to do as the Anointed One, as it can be seen by reading the Gospels that we are now so privy to possess. It must also be noted that Jesus, the Messiah, physically healed the blind while He was on earth, and in John 9:1-5 Jesus even makes it clear that a certain blind man was born blind just so that he could be healed by Jesus, so that Jesus could show the power of God through that act. The fact that Jesus indicates in verse 4, in the direct context of this healing of the bling man, that He must do the will of the One who sent Him, thereby showing that He was someone else’s Servant, is yet another attestation to the fact that Isaiah 42:7 is referring to the Messiah, for as we already discussed, this chapter is known as a “Servant of the Lord passage.”

So, we have seen in this section that Isaiah 42 is very clearly about the Messiah. We have also seen that there is no clear indication that this passage is referring to Israel. Now that we have looked at one of the “Servant passages” we are going to look at another one, namely Isaiah 49.

Isaiah 49

The second half of verse 1 of Isaiah 49 says this regarding the Servant of the Lord: “The LORD called me before I was born. He named me while I was in my mother’s womb (HCSB).” David W. Baker makes the point that such a “prenatal call,” as is described in the first part of the

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passage above, was not necessarily uncommon in ancient times, and that it was not strictly something found in the Old Testament. According to Baker, several Mesopotamian kings mention a similar calling.\textsuperscript{18} This type of calling was intended to show that someone was not special merely because of personal accomplishments, but rather that they were unique in that they were recommended and vindicated by God Himself (or in pagan culture the gods).\textsuperscript{19} Hence, this passage shows that this Servant, namely the Messiah, is someone who was set apart for a special purpose before the time of His birth. Acts 2:23 does in fact state such a special purpose for the Messiah, namely that He was “delivered up (HCSB),” or in other words He was crucified, according to predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. This fits squarely with the above information regarding a prenatal call, considering the fact that we know that His crucifixion is what compels us as Christians to live for Him (2 Corinthians 5:14), which most certainly makes His crucifixion a special and noble calling! This evidence makes it clear that Isaiah 49:1 is a messianic prophecy.

Also, verse 6 mentions, as does verse 6 in chapter 42, that this Servant shall be a “light for the nations (HCSB).” This term translated as “nations” is equivalent to the term “Gentiles,” or non-Jewish people. In Luke 2:32 Simeon refers to baby Jesus as this light to the Gentiles, and so we can rest assured that this passage is also a prophecy of the Messiah.

So we have seen that Isaiah 42 is clearly full of messianic prophecy. We have also seen that Isaiah 49 is filled with messianic prophecy. There are other “Servant passages,” but for the sake of time we are only going to discuss one more, namely Isaiah 53, the “suffering Servant passage.

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{18} David W. Baker, \textit{Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 161.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Isaiah 53

There are an incredible number of prophecies regarding the Messiah in Isaiah 53. I am going to first list the passages in Isaiah 53 along with the NT passages that show their fulfillment in Jesus, the One whom we now know is the Messiah, and then we will briefly discuss a few of them: Isaiah 53:1 (John 12:38; Rom. 10:16), Isaiah 53:3 (John 1:11), Isaiah 53:4-5 (Matt. 8:16-17; Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:40-41; 1 Pet. 2:24), Isaiah 53:7-8 (John 1:29,36; Acts 8:30-35; 1 Pet. 1:19; Rev. 5:6,12), Isaiah 53:9 (Heb. 4:15; 1 Pet. 2:22; Matt. 27:57-60), and Isaiah 53:12 (Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:27-28; Luke 22:37; 23:33; John 19:18). I mention these NT passages only as further validation that these passages from Isaiah truly are messianic prophecies. As we can see by the above list, there is much reason to believe that Isaiah 53 is full of messianic prophecy.

The passages that we are going to look at quickly here from Isaiah 53 are verses 3 and 5. Miller calls to our attention in his discussion on Isaiah 53 that the Jews were not looking for a suffering Messiah who would come and die a brutal death. No, they were looking for a conquering Messiah who would bring about national and political restoration to the nation of Israel. The problem with that type of thinking is that it clearly misses the messianic prophecies regarding the Messiah and His suffering in Isaiah 53. For instance, verse 3 refers to the Messiah as being despised, rejected, and un-valued. This seems to be a clear indication that the Messiah would be some sort of Prophet, for at least in one’s own land the Scriptures make it clear that a prophet is without honor, as the true Messiah makes clear (Mark 6:4, John 4:44, Matt. 13:57, and Luke 4:24). We can also see that Isaiah 53:3 is referring to the Messiah in that the Messiah was

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21 Miller, The Complete Guide to the Bible, 188.
crucified, flogged, spit on, laughed at, and a number of other things while He was here on earth (Mark 15:21-41; Luke 23; John 19; Matt. 27).

Now, verse 5 states that He will be pierced and crushed for our sins, and that we will gain peace through His punishment and healing through His wounds. Paul seems to identify this passage in Isaiah 53 with the Christ when he mentions in 1 Corinthians 15:3 that the Jesus died for our sins. This clearly means the same thing as Isaiah 53:5 and what it says about the Servant, for there is obviously an strong atoning aspect to Isaiah 53:5, and so again, since we know for a fact in our day and age that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, we can be certain that this passage in Isaiah is referring, like all the others discussed above, to the Messiah.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 42, Isaiah 49, and Isaiah 53 are all full of messianic prophecies, and the NT, although not the focus of this paper, clearly corroborates such an assertion. Many people use the OT prophecies to prove that Jesus is the Messiah. I have merely taken that knowledge and then flipped it around to also prove that those passages really are messianic prophecies. With this information in hand I plan to make it a point, whenever I come in contact with someone who doesn’t know Christ, and most especially a Jew, to discuss with them the messianic prophecies of the book of Isaiah, as they are so unmistakably about the Messiah when you view them in correlation with what we now know about the Messiah that someone would have to be blind not to see the connection. I have also, through writing this paper, gained a more thorough knowledge of both the book of Isaiah and messianic prophecies in general, and that knowledge will certainly always be useful for my evangelizing endeavors.
Bibliography


