

Refuting all “Messianic prophecies” of Jesus

By: cal

The Quran calls Jesus the Messiah (4:157; 171), but our understanding of who the messiah is is vastly different from the Christian's, and we are not dependent as Muslims upon the Bible to prove anything. However, Christians love to claim that their concept of a messiah (NT rendition of Jesus) fulfills over 300 messianic prophecies relating to his divinity, death, burial, resurrection, and return, and inShaAllah I will demonstrate in this document how these are nothing but copies.

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Is Genesis 3:15 a foreshadowing of the crucifixion?

We read in this passage:

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Genesis 3:15)

They claim that the seed, or offspring of the woman is Jesus, and that the seed of the serpent would be Satan. However, this is taking the passage out of its original context. Firstly though, it is important to understand that NOWHERE DOES IT MENTION a death, rather a triumph. Jesus gives his followers authority to "tread on serpents" (Luke 10:19) which obviously doesn't mean they will be crucified, but rather that they have power over the forces of evil. This means we have no reason to interpret it as such. Even if it is the messiah, it could be the messiah defeating evil and triumphing in ANY manner, which some Jewish midrash believed.

However I don't grant this interpretation. Lets look at the broader context of the chapter:

"So the Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life." (Genesis 3:14)

Clearly the serpent here is literally an animal, hence why God condemns him as "livestock". Genesis 3 outlines the fall of man, where Adam and Eve ate from the fruit of the garden which God commanded them not to do. In verses 10-13, God finds out, and in verse 14, He begins pronouncing curses upon them, like we see above with the serpent. Then immediately after verse 15, we see:

"To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life." (Genesis 3:16-17)

Would Christians also like to say this is foreshadowing Jesus? That the virgin birth was painful? Obviously they would say these are merely physical curses God is pronouncing upon man for their sin. This is clearly the author of Genesis trying to explain human and animal flaws (childbirth pains, physical labor, death, etc) by saying they were caused by the sin of the Garden and they are "cursed by God". The same applies for verse 15. It's not some special foreshadowing of a crucified messiah, rather this is outlining a constant struggle men (offspring of Eve) will have with serpents (offspring of the serpent). In fact, in the ancient near east, it was

extremely common for men to kill serpents by crushing their heads. The author is trying to make sense of why this is. I'll provide scholarship below:

"Each fights in his own way: the serpent strikes at the human's heels when it has opportunity: but the human, given the opportunity, smashes the serpent's head. (The opposites are noteworthy: heel, head. Hebrew poetry loves such diction.) Neither wishes to wound, but to kill. What is the origin of this bitter mortal combat? It is the dreadful effect of Yahweh's curse... The serpent is very clearly an animal here, too. The "seed of the [woman]" are serpents just as the "seed of the woman" are humans. The myth belongs to the category of myths and fairy tales very common in antiquity and among primitive peoples which tell how certain animals came by the unusual characteristics, "why the flounder has its oblique mouth, the donkey its long ears, and the bear its stumpy tail" (cf. W. Levon CXX:16 with bibliography)."
(Herman Gunkel, *Commentary on Genesis*, pg 20-21)

"Whatever the philological specifics, this new cursed relationship is one in which humans and serpents habitually try to kill each other... In addition to the complexities of the poetry, 3:15b has a long and complicated interpretation history. Judaism found in these words a messianic hope for victory over Satan, as evidenced by the translations. Subsequently, interpretations of the curse as a prophecy of Christ's victory over Satan became popular among a few early Christians (Justin and Irenaeus), and finally became widespread in the modern era. Such interpretations assume "offspring" (zera') should be taken singularly, referring to Christ as the woman's seed, rather than collectively to denote humankind in general. As such, this verse was labeled the protovangelium, the "first good news," or first messianic prophecy, despite scant New Testament associations (Rom 16:20, and perhaps Heb 2:14 and 1 Cor 15:25). Yet as one recent interpreter has observed, "the verse is good news whether we understand zera' [offspring] singularly or collectively." Although it must be cautioned that messianic prophecy is not intended in 3:15, it remains an attractive appropriation of these words to find their fullest meaning (sensus plenior) in a future member of the human race destroying the serpent as part of God's redemptive plan, especially as it might relate to ancient Israel's royal ideology."

(Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis - a Commentary*, pg 68-69)

"The translation of this verse remains a puzzle, but at the minimum this pronouncement marks a turn in human-animal relations, indeed an important shift from the mastery implicit in the human's naming of the animals in Gen 2:20. The snakes among the animal subjects of the human in 2:20 will now be the eternal enemies of his wife and her offspring in an apparent unending battle. This too represents an etiological link to the reality of life of the readers of the text. Other biblical texts frequently note the danger that snakes pose to humans." (David M. Carr, *International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament*, Genesis 1-11, pg 130)

Is Isaiah 7:14 about the virgin birth of the Messiah?

The passage in question is below:

"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: *The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*" (Isaiah 7:14)

This passage is cited in reference to Jesus' birth in Matthew 1:22-23. Firstly, lets address this horrible mistranslation of the hebrew word that shows up as "virgin" (almah). This word appears 7 times in the Old Testament (Genesis 24:43, Exodus 2:8, 1 Samuel 20:21-22, 1 Chronicles 15:20, Psalm 68:25, Proverbs 30:18-20, Isaiah 7:14). Christians insist it must mean virgin. However, take a look at this passage:

"There are three things that are too amazing for me, four that I do not understand: the way of an eagle in the sky, the way of a snake on a rock, the way of a ship on the high seas, and the way of a man with a YOUNG WOMAN (almah). This is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats and wipes her mouth and says, 'I've done nothing wrong.'" (Proverbs 30:18-20)

The author compares three things to the way of a man with an ALMAH, and all of them have one thing in common: they leave no trace. Here, the word almah almost undoubtedly means "young woman" in reference to age and not sexual status, because she is described as someone who engages frequently in adulterous practices, which no one would think of a virgin as engaging in. Similarly, King Solomon declares that once a man has been sexually intimate with an almah, i.e. a young woman, no trace of sexual intercourse is visible, unlike a virgin who will leave behind a discharge of blood after her hymen is broken. Therefore, in the following verse (Proverbs 30:20) King Solomon explains that once this adulterous woman "eats" (a metaphor for her fornication), she removes the trace of her sexual infidelity, "wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done no wrong.'" The word alma clearly does not mean a virgin. In the same way that in the English language the words "young woman" does not indicate sexual purity, in the Hebrew language there is no relationship between the words almah and virgin. On the contrary, it is usually a young woman who bears children. The word alma only conveys age/gender. Had Isaiah wished to speak about a virgin, he would have used the word betulah ((In fact, although Isaiah used the Hebrew word almah only one time in his entire corpus (7:14), the prophet uses this word virgin (betulah) five times throughout the book of Isaiah (23:4; 23:12; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5).)) not almah. The word betulah appears frequently in the Jewish Scriptures, and is the only word – in both biblical and modern Hebrew – that conveys sexual purity. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the masculine form of the noun עַלְמָה (alma) is עַלְמָם (elem), which means a "young man," not a male virgin. This word appears twice in the Jewish Scriptures (I Samuel 17:56, 20:22). As expected, without exception, all Christian Bibles correctly translate נָשָׁה as a "young man," "lad," or "stripling," never "virgin." Why does the King James Version of the Bible translate the masculine Hebrew noun לְעַלְמָם (la'elem) as "to the young man" in I Samuel 20:22, and yet the feminine form of the same Hebrew noun נָשָׁה as "a virgin" in

Isaiah 7:14? The answer is Christian Bibles had no need to mistranslate I Samuel 20:22 because this verse was not misquoted in the New Testament.

Even if we grant the Septuagint (LXX) reading (parthenos), which the NT most certainly quotes as meaning virgin, it would still not prove a virgin birth. It nowhere in the text says the woman will give birth as a virgin, rather that the virgin WILL conceive. This could be properly understood as “the virgin (at this present time) will conceive (have relations sometime in the future) and give birth to a son...”.

But even if a Christian manages to get past this issue, the son still cannot be Jesus for many reasons. The first one is the actual historical context of the passage. Isaiah is addressing the Syro-Ephraimite war. Lets begin reading the opening of the chapter:

“When Ahaz son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah, King Rezin of Aram and Pekah son of Remaliah king of Israel marched up to fight against Jerusalem, but they could not overpower it. Now the house of David was told, “Aram has allied itself with Ephraim”; so the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shakenA, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.” (Isaiah 7:1-2)

We see that the referent of the chapter is King Ahaz, and the Northern Kingdom of Judah has just been invaded by the king of Aram, and the son of the king of Israel (remember Israel and Judah were divided). The people, Ahaz included, are overwhelmed by this massive burden, and we see God comforting Ahaz by telling him that to not be worried and that God will aid the Judahites in their fight (verses 3-6). He then says that the two kings will eventually be defeated (verses 7-9) and tells Ahaz to ask Him for a sign (verses 10-13). However, Ahaz denies, claiming he would never test God, and God gets upset, now turning to the House of David giving the prophecy of Immanuel. However, Christians stop reading here. They assume that the sign is the son, but that doesn't make much sense. God telling Ahaz to ask for a sign that He will be with them during the crisis they were facing in the immediate context, then God saying He will give a sign of a son born 700 years later when this crisis will be long over? In fact, the actual sign is the next 2 verses, which are the most crucial to properly understanding the prophecy.

“He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, for before the boy knows enough to reject the wrong and choose the right, the land of the two kings you dread will be laid waste.” (Isaiah 7:15-16)

Isaiah gives a metaphor for how the child will be extremely young (before the age of accountability, see Deuteronomy 1:39, Jonah 4:11, most likely 12-13 years old) before the two kings Ahaz dread were laid waste. This occurred in 2 Kings 15:27-30, when Hoshea son of Elah assassinated king Pekah of Israel, and Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser took over the lands (fulfilling Isaiah 7:8-9), and then king Rezin was defeated in 2 Kings 16:9. These events all took place

around 730 BCE, meaning the son must have been born and at a young age BEFORE they occurred. Obviously Jesus came hundreds of years later, meaning he does NOT fit the prophecy.

Does Isaiah 9:6-7 prove there is a divine Messiah?

Christians love to appeal to this passage in the book of Isaiah to prove this assertion, and not only that, but that it is about their conception of the messiah, the NT Jesus:

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder. And his name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the lord of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:6-7 NKJV)

Firstly, I'll deal with the claim that this son is “divine”, since this is the point of contention with our beliefs (ie. even if it is Messiah, as long as he's not divine it doesn't raise much of an issue).

The Christians claim that these titles can only be applied to the Most High, and since they are applied to the son, he must be God. A layout of their “evidences” I provide below:

“Wonderful Counselor” - Isaiah 28:29
“Mighty God” - Isaiah 10:21
“Everlasting Father” - Isaiah 63:16; 64:6
“Prince of peace” - Judges 6:24

To begin, it is important to note that the Septuagint (LXX) of Isaiah, which the NT quotes all over (Matt 1:23 cites Isaiah 7:14, Matt 8:17 cites Isaiah 53:4-5, Matt 12:21 cites Isaiah 42:4; Matt 15:8-9/Mark 7:6-7 cites Isaiah 29:13, Luke 4:18 cites Isaiah 61:1, Romans 15:12 cites Isaiah 11:10, etc.), does NOT include any of these titles, rather that this son is a “Messenger of great counsel”. This is even further supported by the fact that the NT authors never ONCE cite Isaiah 9:6 about Jesus, despite citing or alluding to the surrounding passages (Matt 4:14-16 cites Isaiah 9:1-2, Luke 1:32-33; 79 allude to Isaiah 9:7). You would think that if the intention of the authors was to portray a divine messiah, they would've certainly included those titles!

Secondly, if we grant the reading of the Masoretic text (which most modern Bibles take from), this could also be an example of a theophoric name (honoring the God who sent them), which was common for kings or places. I'll give a few examples of this concept below:

“Then Jehu (YHWH is He) gathered all the people together, and said to them, “Ahab served Baal a little, Jehu (YHWH is He) will serve him much.” (2 Kings 10:18)

"In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell safely. And this is the name by which she will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS." (Jeremiah 33:16)

King Jehu's name literally means "Yahweh is He", or more properly "He is Yahweh". Judah's name is "Yahweh our righteousness" too. Obviously it is erroneous to claim they are God themselves, rather that this title is applied to them to honor the God who is above them.

The second rebuttal is going to be that these supposed divine titles given to the Son are not exclusive to God alone. For “wonderful counselor”, the Hebrew is עִזָּה (ya’ats), which appears 78 times in the Hebrew Bible in reference to human kings and leaders (Exodus 18:19, Numbers 24:14, 2 Samuel 15:12, 2 Kings 6:8). It quite literally means someone who “advises”. For “mighty God”, the Hebrew is אֵל גִּבְּרֹר (’êl gib-bō-wr). Now, although this is only used one other time in the singular (Isaiah 10:21), it actually occurs one other time in the plural, in reference to other than God (Ezekiel 32:21). Essentially, a bunch of mighty warriors trying to oppose God are called “ele gibbowrim”, which means that each individual person is “el gibbor” (see strongs 1368 and strongs 410 for word reference, same as Isaiah 9:6; 10:21). However, the translators render it as “mighty chiefs” or “strong among the mighty” (similar to Ezekiel 31:11). In fact, Brown Driver Briggs Lexicon states: **“applied to men of might and rank, אל גוּם mighty one of the nations Ezekiel 31:11 (of Nebuchadnezzar; וְאֵלְמִים some MSS. Co); mighty men אלִים Job 41:17 (many MSS. Di); mighty heroes אלִ גִּבְּרִים Ezekiel 32:21 (MSS. Co); many MSS. אֵלִים (אֵלִים) Ezekiel 17:13; 2 Kings 24:15 (Kt Exodus 15:15; אֵלִים probably plural of III. אֵל, q. v.) These readings are uncertain because of an effort to distinguish these forms from the divine name. אל גִּבְּרֹר mighty hero (as above) or divine hero (as reflecting the divine majesty) Isaiah 9:6.”** The point is, el gibbor can have a semantic range and does not necessarily have to mean “mighty God”, but could be rendered “mighty authority” or “mighty chief”. In light of the fact that the “el gibbor” of Isaiah 9:6 is a child, it makes the most sense to translate it as such, due to the Old and New Testaments each teaching God cannot dwell on earth respectively (1 Kings 8:27, 2 Chronicles 2:6; 6:18, Isaiah 66:1, Matthew 5:34-36, Acts 7:48; 17:24). Next, for “Everlasting Father”, this is actually another case of a faulty translation. The Hebrew utilized is אָבִיךָד (’āb-bî-’ad). It carries the lexical meaning of “perpetually/to eternity”, however it is not limited to this. According to BDB again, it can mean **“2 of future time, לעד (usually לעד) for ever: a. during lifetime, of king Psalm 21:7; Proverbs 29:14; of others Psalm 9:19; Psalm 22:27; Psalm 61:9; Proverbs 12:19.”** The example I underlined in Proverbs 29 states that if a king judges the poor fairly, his throne will be established FOREVER. Obviously this is not literal language, therefore “Everlasting Father” could be properly understood as “Father (source) of continuity”. Lastly, for the title “prince of peace”, this is pretty straightforward, many people in the Old Testament are called “princes”, such as the 12 sons of Ishmael (Genesis 17:20; 25:12-18), Israelite tribal leaders (Numbers 1:16; 7:2; 10:4), Solomon’s officials (1 Kings 4:2-4), and leaders of Israel in the book of Isaiah itself (Isaiah 3:14; 32:1). Also, being a “peacemaker” doesn’t make you God (Matthew 5:9).

The other claim of the Christians is that this son's throne is "forever". Firstly, let's examine God's promises to righteous kings in the Old Testament:

“The Lord has sworn in truth to David; He will not turn from it: “I will set upon your throne the fruit of your body. If your sons will keep My covenant and My testimony which I shall teach them, **their sons also shall sit upon your throne FOREVERMORE.**” (Psalm 132:11-12)

“The king who judges the poor with truth, **His throne will be established FOREVER.**” (Proverbs 29:14)

God says that any king who obeys His decrees will be established on the throne FOREVER. We know there were many righteous kings in Jewish history (1 Kings 15:11; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:2; 14:3; 15:3; 34; 18:3; 22:2), meaning their thrones were “forever”. It doesn’t necessitate divinity unless Christians wish to add those as persons to the trinity. Secondly, the word “owlam” in the Hebrew can mean a “long duration of time” and does not necessarily mean literally forever. We see examples of this in Jonah 2:6, where Jonah states he was in the belly of the whale “forever”, when it was only 3 days. Also, Christians must be consistent: because God says in Genesis 17:12-14 that the PHYSICAL CIRCUMCISION covenant will be “everlasting”, while Paul abrogates this in Romans 2:28-29, Philippians 3:2-3, Galatians 5:2; 6:15, meaning it doesn’t have to be literal there. Therefore, when it says the Son’s kingdom will be “forever” it’s not literal, and if it is, other kings are promised the same thing.

NOW WHO IS THE SON?

I have refuted it being about a God-man, but the question still remains: who is this son? Is it Jesus? No, the answer is King Hezekiah, son of Ahaz. Firstly, we need to understand the context of the passage:

“Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed **the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali**, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, **in Galilee of the Gentiles**. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined. You have multiplied the nation and increased its joy; they rejoice before You according to the joy of harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. **For You have broken the yoke of his burden** and **the staff** of his shoulder, **the rod of his oppressor, as in the day of Midian**. For every warrior’s sandal from the noisy battle, and garments rolled in blood, **will be used for burning and fuel of fire.**” (Isaiah 9:1-5)

I highlighted/underlined the relevant words to make the historical connections (for reference, the historical context of Isaiah 9 is the Assyrian crisis (8th century BCE), where King Sennacherib came up against Israel and sieged it (2 Kings 18:13, Isaiah 36:1). This oppression is reiterated in Isaiah 52:3-5, and Assyria was a major burden for the israelite people, and they needed someone to set things right). Now the chapter begins with a shout for joy. The people of Israel have just seen a great light and specific lands are mentioned: Zebulun, Naphtali, and Galilee. We see the same lands being mentioned as the places which the King of Assyria took over in 2 Kings 15:29-30 (734-732 BCE), deporting mass groups of Israelites there, marking a turning point in what is known as the “Assyrian threat”. According to Isaiah, these lands,

uncoincidentally, have just been freed from some sort of oppression. What better could it be than the freedom from the Assyrians! We further read in verse 4 that the joy has been increased of the nation of Israel, and how God has broken the yoke of his burden, which God promised Israel that He would do in relation to the Assyrians (Isaiah 10:27; 14:25). It also states that this would be “like as in the day of Midian”. What is the day of Midian? In Judges 6-7, God miraculously saved a mere band of 300 Israelite soldiers from thousands of Midianites surrounding them. This comparison parallels God defeating 185,000 Assyrian soldiers and defeating Sennacherib and his forces for good (2 Kings 19:35-38). Verse 5 even further connects these events to Israel being freed from Assyria. The language about “burning of fuel and fire” in relation to the soldiers boots and garments directly parallels Isaiah 10:16-17; 31:9.

Now that we understand the historical context better, how do we prove Hezekiah is the son? Well, here is some evidence I think is extremely convincing. A major hint is actually in verse 7:

“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over his kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 9:7)

Isaiah uses a hebrew phrase that is only used 2 other times in the Hebrew bible:

“For out of Jerusalem shall go a remnant, and those who escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” (Isaiah 37:32, 2 Kings 19:31)

Now we know from verse 21 in Isaiah 37 and verse 20 in 2 Kings 19, that this sign was for HEZEKIAH, due to his prayer against the Assyrian king Sennacherib. God promises to bring a remnant who was captive back from oppression, the SAME THING THAT OCCURS IN ISAIAH 9:1-5! This means it is likely the same event, and Hezekiah was the intended referent of the phrase. Another good proof comes from the phrase “from this time forth and forevermore”. The Hebrew word for “from this time forth” is מֵעַתָּה (mê-‘at-tāh). It literally means “now, at this time, at present” according to major lexicons. Some examples of where this phrase occurs are Psalm 113:2; 115:18; 121:8; 125:2; 131:3, where the psalmist says he will praise God “from this time forth” and “forever”. Obviously the psalmist does not intend to worship God in the far future, rather it means from that generation. (Other examples in same phraseology include Isaiah 59:21, Micah 4:7). This means the son must have been alive during the relevant generational events (Assyrian crisis) in Isaiah 9, which means it CANNOT be a future messiah hundreds of years later like Jesus.

How does Hezekiah fulfill all the titles?:

For “Wonderful counselor”, Hezekiah was a righteous king (2 Kings 18:1-3) who took down the high places of idol worship in Israel (2 Kings 18:4-6, 2 Chronicles 31:1), and reinstated true worship/torah observance (2 Chronicles 29:3-5; 18-19; 30:6-8). He perfectly fits the criteria of counseling Israel. For “Mighty God”, again going back to earlier in this article, el gibbor can be used for mighty men (Ezekiel 32:21), and we know Hezekiah was a powerful king both militarily (2 Kings 18-19) and in prayer (2 Kings 19:20, Isaiah 37:21). Even “Hezekiah” itself means God

makes mighty/strengthens. For “everlasting father”, we’ve agreed the best translation is actually father of continuity. Father can also be used metaphorically for humans (Isaiah 22:20-22) and it simply means ruler or source. In the case of Hezekiah, he is the father of continuity due to Israel being able to remain a nation in his days (2 Kings 19:20-32, Isaiah 37:21-33). Lastly, for “prince of peace”, the peace in the context of Isaiah 9 is about the Assyrian threat. Hezekiah is the historical king who tried to make peace with the king of Assyria (2 Kings 18:13-23), and by his prayer, Assyria was defeated (2 Kings 19:20; 35-37, Isaiah 37:21; 36-37). In fact, Hezekiah explicitly described peace in his days (2 Kings 20:19, Isaiah 38:3).

The Septuagint also makes it clear it must be Hezekiah:

“For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us, whose government is upon his shoulder: and his name is called the Messenger of great counsel: for I will bring peace upon the princes, and health to him.” (Isaiah 9:6 LXX)

God says He will bring health to the son. Let’s now take a look and see how this fits Hezekiah:

“In those days was Ezekias (Hezekiah) sick even to death. And the prophet Esaias the son of Amos came in to him, and said to him, Thus saith the Lord, Give charge to thy household; for thou shalt die, and not live. And Ezekias turned to the wall, and prayed to the Lord, saying, Lord, remember, I pray thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thine eyes. And Ezekias wept with a great weeping. And Esaias was in the middle court, and the word of the Lord came to him, saying, Turn back, and thou shalt say to Ezekias the ruler of my people, Thus saith the Lord God of thy father David, I have heard thy prayer, I have seen thy tears: behold, I will heal thee: on the third day thou shalt go up to the house of the Lord. And I will add to thy days fifteen years; and I will deliver thee and this city out of the hand of the king of the Assyrians, and I will defend this city for my own sake, and for my servant’s David sake. And he said, Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it upon the ulcer, and he shall be well.” (2 Kings 20:1-7 LXX)

The famous passage: Isaiah 53, who is the suffering servant?

If you go into any church, speak to any missionary, or Christian in general, and ask them “where is Jesus in the Old Testament”, they will 9 times out of 10 cite Isaiah 53, and the reason is not surprising. At surface level, someone reading about a servant who is “without deceit”, “pierced for our transgressions”, “bears our punishment”, “gets exalted”, etc, it sounds a lot like the major conception most have about Jesus on the cross. In fact, it is cited eight times in the New Testament (Matt 8:17, Luke 22:37, John 12:38, Acts 8:32-33, Romans 10:16; 15:21, 1 Peter 2:22-25). Now the main issue is this: people have yet to separate their preconceived notions of Christ from the actual historical context of the passage. Now what is this context? Well, most Christians simply assume that Isaiah 53 was written by the historical Isaiah “700 yrs” before Jesus was born. This, however, ignores the consensus of scholarship.

"Modern scholars generally identify three major stages of composition in the book [of Isaiah]: (1) the works of Isaiah ben Amoz, which appears in chs 1-39; (2) the work of an anonymous prophet known as Second Isaiah from the conclusion of the Babylonian exile in chs 40-55; and (3) the work of Third Isaiah, a collection of materials from several prophets who wrote during the early Persian-period restoration of Jerusalem (late sixth through fifth or early fourth centuries BCE..." (The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version with the Apocrypha, 5th Edition, ed. Michael D. Coogan (New York: Oxford University Press USA, 2018), p. 977)

"Most of the book of Isaiah does not come from the Prophet Isaiah, and even those discourses which are his come in the reports of those who wrote them down from auditions or from memory. The book is a compendium of many types of prophecy from diverse periods." (John McKenzie, "Dictionary of the Bible", p. 387)

Clearly, most scholars agree that there are different stages of composition of the book of Isaiah: first, second, and third. Second (deutero) Isaiah contains Isaiah 53, and it was written during the conclusion of the Babylonian exile. This will be extremely important to keep in mind when I go in depth on who the servant actually is. But before I do that, lots of people may contend to the fact that Isaiah 40-55 has a later composition. However, here is some internal evidence that helps give us reason to believe such. 2 Kings is describing a period of time from 930 BCE - 586 BCE (including the time of Isaiah), beginning with Solomon's reign and concluding with the Babylonian exile. In fact, Isaiah himself makes an appearance in such places as 2 Kings 19:2-7; 20:34; 20:1-11). Now, here are all the citations of the book of Isaiah in 2 Kings:

Hezekiah's reign begins: (2 Kings 18:1-8 - Isaiah 36:1), Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib: (2 Kings 18:13 - Isaiah 36:1), Assyrian officials sent to Jerusalem: (2 Kings 18:17 - Isaiah 36:2), Rabshakeh's first speech: (2 Kings 18:19-25 - Isaiah 36:4-10), Officials ask Rabshakeh to speak Aramaic: (2 Kings 18:26-27 - Isaiah 36:11-12), Rabshakeh's public address: (2 Kings 18:28-35 - Isaiah 36:13-20), Silence of the ppl and report to Hezekiah: (2 Kings 18:36-37 - Isaiah 36:21-22) Hezekiah seeks Isaiah: (2 Kings 19:1-7 - Isaiah 37:1-7), Second Assyrian threat: (2 Kings 19:8-13 - Isaiah 37:8-13), Hezekiah's prayer: (2 Kings 19:14-19 - Isaiah 37:14-20), Isaiah's prophecy against Assyria: (2 Kings 19:20-34 - Isaiah 37:21-35), Destruction of the Assyrian army: (2 Kings 19:35-37 - Isaiah 37:36-38), Hezekiah's illness and recovery: (2 Kings 20:1-11 - Isaiah 38:1-8), Babylonian envoys and PROPHECY of exile: (2 Kings 20:12-19 - Isaiah 39:1-8).

Now, here's what's interesting: remember the numbering for deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40-55). Is it a coincidence that prior to the Babylonian exile described in 2 Kings 24-25, only up to chapter 39 of Isaiah is quoted? Even the transition between Isaiah 39 and 40 is rough: 39:8 describes Hezekiah's thoughts near death, and 40:1-3 speaks about God comforting Jerusalem and how they are freed from exile (as if they have been going through it for a long time).

Now with this in mind, we need to understand the broader context of Deutero-Isaiah. The major theme of the section is the Babylonian exile, and how Israel has been freed from this suffering (see opening of Isaiah 40:1-2). On top of this, Isaiah already identifies the servant to us:

"But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend; you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, 'You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off'" (Isaiah 41:8-9)

"But now hear, O Jacob my servant, Israel whom I have chosen!" (Isaiah 44:1)

"Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, 'The Lord has redeemed his servant Jacob!" (Isaiah 48:20)

(also see Isaiah 43:10-11; 44:21; 49:3)

Clearly, God designates His servant as the collective nation of Israel within Isaiah. However, there are a few instances in which the servant seems to be distinct from the wicked nation of Israel. These are what are known as the "servant songs". There are four of them (see Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-6; 50:4-7; 52:13-53:12), where there is a servant identified as Israel who is yet distinct and suffers at the hands of others. The best example is below:

"And he said to me, 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified...and now the Lord says, he who formed me from the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him—for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord, and my God has become my strength—" (Isaiah 49:3; 5-6)

The servant is said to be Israel, yet he is also gathering Israel back to him? This is what most Christians use as proof that there are two servants in Isaiah, and that this righteous servant who is distinct is the Messiah. However this does not logically follow, since we know there were many righteous prophets and figures during this time period. In fact, according to certain scholarship, the earliest interpretation of Isaiah 53 was done by the writer(s) of the book of Daniel in the 2nd century BCE, and they interpreted it as the righteous sufferers of Israel (aka the righteous remnant):

"H.L. Ginsberg considers Daniel 11:33-35; 12:3 to offer evidence that the earliest interpretation of Isaiah's servant was a collective one since it describes faithful Jews of the Antiochene period as the "wise," alluding to Isaiah 52:13..." ("The Oldest Interpretation of the Suffering Servant," VT 3 [1953] 400-404). Cf also J. Day, "DAAT 'Humiliation' in Isaiah LIII 11 in the Light of Isaiah LIII 3 and Daniel XII 4, and the Oldest Known Interpretation of the Suffering Servant," VT 30 (1980) 97-103; J.J. Collins, Daniel (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993) 385, 393, R.J. Clifford, "Isaiah, Book of (Second Isaiah)," ABD, 3, 490-501, at 500.)

Now I am almost done with the exposition and context giving, but we need to understand the position I hold to. I do NOT believe the servant in Isaiah 53 is the ENTIRE nation of Israel. I think that the servant is what is known as the “righteous remnant”, aka the faithful Jews (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc) who came out of the Babylonian exile pure and were suffering at the hands of the nations and their forefathers. The reason I mention this is because Christians love to say “well, Israel was wicked! How can they be the servant!” Not all of Israel was evil.

Now this actually leads perfectly into the refutation. We need to understand the context of 53 better. It doesn't actually begin in 53, rather 52. Lets read:

“Awake, awake, Zion, clothe yourself with strength! Put on your garments of splendor, Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; **rise up, sit enthroned,** Jerusalem. **Free yourself from the chains on your neck, Daughter Zion, now a captive.**” (Isaiah 52:1-2)

It is speaking of Israel (whom we know is the servant from previous chapters as I've established) being freed from exile. This fits the broader historical context as well as what we see in the prophetic writings from that time period (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, etc). Now we continue to read chapter 52:

“For this is what the sovereign LORD says: “At first my people went down to Egypt to live; **lately, Assyria has oppressed them.** “And now what do I have here?” declares the LORD. **“For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,”** declares the Lord. “And all day long, my name is constantly blasphemed.” (Isaiah 52:4-5)

We see above a direct parallel between the servant of Isaiah 53:8, where it says the servant was “taken away in oppression and judgement” (see also 2 Kings 24:15; 25:11, 2 Chronicles 36:20, Jeremiah 52:15, Amos 5:27), and Israel in 52. NOW we get to a very important section for context:

“Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, **he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations,** and all **the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God.**” (Isaiah 52:9-10)

The “redemption” mentioned here is clearly Israel being saved from the exile as seen prior in the chapter, and God says He has done this by His “holy arm”. Now what is this holy arm? This verse previously in Isaiah tells us who:

“Come together all of you, and listen: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The LORD's chosen ally will carry out his purpose against Babylon; **his arm will be against the Babylonians.**” (Isaiah 48:14)

God's arm is said to be against the Babylonians. We know this is a reference to none other than King Cyrus, God's anointed, whom He appointed to free the Israelites from Babylonian captivity (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1; 13; 46:11, Ezra 1:2-6). Continuing...

"See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted."

(Isaiah 52:13)

The servant (Israel in context) is said to be exalted highly. We also see this in the passages I'll provide below, where Israel is said to be exalted among the nations and distinguished:

"Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish,[a] bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor." (Isaiah 60:9)

"Go through my gates, and make a way for my people; and cast the stones out of the way; lift up a standard for the Gentiles." (Isaiah 62:10 LXX)

"Hope in the Lord and keep his way. He will exalt you to inherit the land: when the wicked are destroyed, you will see it." (Psalm 37:34)

"who says, "I will cut off the horns of all the wicked, but the horns of the righteous will be lifted up." (Psalm 75:10)

Now, some Christians might object that the Hebrew used for the servant being exalted is the same as for God on His holy throne. It is "yā·rūm wə·niš·šā" (high and lifted up). It occurs 3 other times in Isaiah (Isaiah 6:1; 33:10; 57:15), only in reference to God's exaltation. However, this logic is flawed. 4 examples is not enough to establish a pattern of exclusivity. Let's show how this backfires against these missionaries by using the very chapter in question: Isaiah 53:8 uses the Hebrew word "׃יְהֹוָה" (lā-mōw) to refer to Israel. It is rendered as "him" (singular) in the English translation, but it appears over 300 times in the Hebrew Bible as "them" (plural). We even see this multiple times in Isaiah itself (see Isaiah 1:4; 8:20; 14:1; 16:4; 23:1; 14; 30:5; 33:8; 40:11; 41:7; 41:29; 44:7; 48:21; 50:3). Obviously, this would be an objection to the servant of 53 being a singular individual (Jesus), which Christians will not accept. So, they make an EXCEPTION to a pattern of a term used, which we can do the same with "high and lifted up".

Now let's continue chapter 52...

"As many were astonished at you—his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind - so shall he sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths because of him, for that which has not been told them they see, and that which they have not heard they understand." (Isaiah 52:14-15)

It begins to speak about the servant after suffering and how kings and nations will ponder on the servant's miraculous exaltation and will only NOW truly understand. It is also important to note

that originally, Isaiah did not have chapter and verse separations and did not for millenia, up until around the 13th century (1227 CE) when Archbishop Stephen Langton introduced chapters, and during the 15th century (1448 CE), when Jewish Rabbis began to include verses. This means that when someone prior would read a scroll of Isaiah, chapters 52 and 53 were not separated and in fact are the same context, even according to headings on most modern Bible translations. This means Isaiah 53:1 should be a CONTINUATION of Isaiah 52:15.

“...[52:15] so he will 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. [53:1] WHO HAS BELIEVED WHAT WE HAVE HEARD, and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?” (Isaiah 52:15-53:1)

So, we see a consistent reading from 52:15-53:1, with it speaking about the Gentile kings who took Israel captive and then quoting them. This makes the most sense with the flow of the context as there is no other speaker that makes more sense. Supporting this, Gentile kings and nations are said to be ashamed of Israel and astonished at what God did for them (their salvation from exile):

“As in the days when you came out of Egypt, I will show them my wonders. Nations will see and be ashamed, deprived of all their power. They will put their hands over their mouths, and their ears will become deaf.” (Micah 7:15-16)

It quite literally describes how the nations will “cover their mouths” and be “ashamed” at Israel post-exile, the SAME way we see the servant of 52 being described. (also see Isaiah 47:6-7; Jeremiah 33:9). Even if we go back to Isaiah 52:9-10, it talks about God making bare his holy arm in the eyes of all nations, and we already established this is Him saving Israel from exile. This means the context is all about the nations seeing the servant (Israel) whom they had forsaken for so long be exalted, and being astonished at the news of them being free (Isaiah 40:1-2; 48:20). They are the speakers in 53, not the Israelites themselves. Even the Jewish Study Bible mentions this:

“53.1-11a: The surprised observers speech. The identity of the speakers who express their shock at the career of the servant is unclear. Are they the kings and the nations of the world (cf. 52.15)? If so, then the servant is probably the nation Israel, and the nations are stunned that such an insignificant and lowly group turns out to have been so important to the divine plan.” (Jewish Study Bible, Jewish Publication Society, Tanakh Translation, p. 891)

With that being said, I will now give the parallels and explanations to every verse in 53 between the suffering servant and the righteous of the nation of Israel:

V1: “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

We know the arm of the LORD was revealed to Israel in the form of salvation from exile, which all nations are seeing and are contemplating (Isaiah 43:14; 44:28; 45:13; 48:14-20; 51:9; 52:9-10; 55:5; 59:16; 63:5). They are the subjects of the chapter.

V2: “He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty of majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.”

Israel is explicitly called the “shoot” that God planted (Isaiah 60:21). God also says that while none of the nations looked upon Israel with any pity or compassion, he made them grow up like a plant in the field (Ezekiel 16:5-7). The “root out of dry ground” is a metaphor for how unexpected this vindication of the servant was (because roots cannot grow unless their is wet, fertile soil). The nations, we know, were shocked that Israel had been free after suffering in exile for so long (Isaiah 47:6-7; 55:5, Micah 7:15-16, Jeremiah 33:9).

V3: “He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain, like one from whom people hide their faces. He was despised, and we held him in low esteem.”

Israel is said to be'n a “reproach to their neighbors” and a nation whom “peoples shake their heads at” (Psalm 44:13-14). God also calls Israel forsaken and hated by the world (Isaiah 60:15). Still, the nations are realizing their mistakes (holding the servant in low esteem, aka not treating them with proper care).

V4: “Surely he took up our pain, and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted.”

The nations speaking mourn over how the servant was mistreated. Israelites were indeed mistreated by their captors (Psalm 137:3-7, Lamentations 1:2; 2:15-16; 5:11-12, Jeremiah 50:33, Isaiah 47:6). They were forced to sing songs of grief, their children and land were harmed, and they were refused to be released. We also see how righteous Israelites bear the iniquities of their wicked fathers as well (Lamentations 5:7, Ezekiel 4:4-6), meaning it does not need to be vicarious, rather it is simply enduring suffering.

V5: “But he was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”

This is actually a mistranslation of the Hebrew. The correct rendering of the hebrew prefix “*וְ*” (mi-) is not “for” rather “because of” or “from”. This means that the servant is not suffering FOR the sins of the nations, but rather AS A RESULT of them. If someone slaps you in the face, you're suffering BECAUSE OF their sin, not FOR it. Tying this back in to the speakers, the gentiles originally had thought in verse 4 that the Israelite suffering was judgement from God alone, and that they were free from sin. This directly parallels Jeremiah 10:25; 50:7, where it states that the enemies of the nation of Israel only claimed God was being harsh on Israel for sinning. However, the “but” at the beginning of v5 indicates that the speakers now realize their mistakes, and how the servant was actually suffering because of their own actions. And,

because the servant is suffering and enduring the pain, the Gentiles will be able to see Israel exalted for persevering and ultimately lead them to the light of salvation (cf. Isaiah 49:3-6; 55:5; 60:3-5). In other words: “by Israel’s wounds (their suffering in exile and patience) we (the Gentiles) are healed (brought to the knowledge of the true God).” Some interpretation allow for this to be messianic. Deuteronomy 30 outlines how if Israel repents and does good, Messiah will come, leading to worldwide healing. NOT that the messiah suffers on behalf of his people.

V6: “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

The nations realize they have been misguided all along, and that God has allowed Israel to act as a scapegoat and example for the nations. Again, I’ll restate it, iniquities laid upon a person does not mean they die for your sins (Exodus 28:38, Lamentations 5:7, Ezekiel 4:4-6).

V7: “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 its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.”

Israel was oppressed (Isaiah 52:4), and is described as sheep to the slaughter (Psalm 44:11; 22, Jeremiah 23:1; 50:17, Ezekiel 34:11-12; 36-37, Zechariah 11:4-5; 7). Them “opening not their mouth” is a metaphor for them having zero control over it. Obviously a Christian won’t take this hyperliterally, because Jesus cried out during oppression to be saved (Matthew 26:39; 27:46, Luke 22:42-46). So even if Israel cried out to God because they were suffering, it wouldn’t negate them “opening not their mouth”.

V8-9: “By oppression and judgement he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people he was punished. 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.”

Israel was explicitly “taken away” for nothing in the chapter before (Isaiah 52:5). When it refers to the servant being “cut off”, this is a metaphor for them being exiled into Babylon. To prove this, God gives Ezekiel a vision of a bunch of bones in their graves, crying out that they have been “cut off”. God says that these bones are the “whole house of Israel”, and He promises them He will bring them back to the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37:11-14). We know that Israel is called the “land of the living” (Ezekiel 26:20), meaning that Israel was cut off (exiled) from the land of the living (Israel) and entered into the graveyard (Babylon). Babylon is also explicitly described as being “rich” due to them taking the treasures when they ransacked the temple (2 Kings 24-25). The righteous remnant of Israel is described as having “no deceit found in their mouths” (Zephaniah 3:12-13), and this is not LITERAL, hence why Jesus says to Nathaniel that he is an Israelite, in whom there is NO DECEIT (John 1:47).

V10: “Yet it was the LORD’s will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.”

A couple of things to unpack here. Firstly, when it says it pleased God to crush him, this just refers to Israel suffering in general, and how it was “for the sake of God” (Psalm 44:22). Secondly, and possibly the biggest game changer when it comes to refuting the Christian argument is the part referring to the servant being an “offering for sin”. This is a horrible rendering in the English which is why we must read the original language. The Hebrew is ('im-), and it occurs 786 times in the Hebrew Bible and is properly rendered as “if”, not WHEN. Lexicons define it as a hypothetical participle. So, the correct translation should be IF his soul makes an offering for sin, which is conditional. We read the septuagint which translates it as “...if YE CAN GIVE an offering for sin, your soul shall see a long-lived seed”. It mentions nothing about the servant actually being a literal sacrifice, it captures the Hebrew perfectly and shows the true meaning: IF the servant (Israel) makes an offering for their sins, they will see generations of literal children (Hebrew “זֶרַע” (ze·ra')) after their restoration (cf. Isaiah 44:3; 59:21; 61:9, Jeremiah 30:20; 31:36; 32:39, Ezekiel 37:25). This is extremely similar to the patterns in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28-30 where God gives conditional statements for Israel to obey (ie. IF you obey, then you will be blessed...)

(Important note: the Gentiles have stopped speaking, and God resumes speaking about His servant)

V11: “After he has suffered, he will see the light of life [a] and be satisfied, by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many and he will bear their iniquities.”

I included a footnote under “light of life” due to the fact that the Masoretic text (the recension the Bibles today use) does not include it, rather that he will “see the fruit of his suffering”. We know Israel’s patience in suffering leads to God restoring them (cf. Jeremiah 29:14; 30:17-20, Isaiah 54:6-7). The second portion regarding the servant justifying many by his knowledge is seen by previous and following chapters in Isaiah as well as the entire Old Testament that one of Israel’s roles is to be a light to the nations and to bring people to the knowledge of the one true God (cf. Deut 4:5-8, Isaiah 2:3-4, Zech 8:23, Micah 4:2-3), meaning the Gentiles will know Israel and their suffering to be justified by believing in their God. Also, Daniel says righteous Jews will lead many to righteousness (Daniel 11:33-35; 12:3) it is not exclusive at all. Again, for the third time, bearing iniquities is also not exclusive to the servant (Exodus 28:38, Lamentations 5:7, Ezekiel 4:4-6). It just means to suffer because of someone’s sins to you.

V12: “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.”

After their exaltation from exile, Israel is described as being endowed with splendor, served by the nations, and the nations will bring them plunder and treasures from all around (Isaiah 60:1-21). Israel acts as a sacrificial lamb by suffering the pain the world deserved and allowing themselves to be made an example for all nations.

That concludes my portion of proving it is the righteous nation of Israel. Now I'll move on to dealing with common objections and also proving it cannot be the NT conception of Jesus.

Is Isaiah 49:3-6 about Messiah?

Christians cannot claim this passage is about Jesus, because Paul quotes it about him and Barnabbas in Acts 13:47-48 about their mission to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 22:20-21, Romans 11:13 Galatians 2:8-9).

Is Isaiah 53 vicarious atonement?

No, Matthew 8:17 quotes the LXX rendition of Isaiah 53:4. The context (Matt 8:14-16) is Jesus healing many, including Peter's mother in law Martha, and the demon possessed as well. Matthew says this is the fulfillment of "bearing" our sicknesses. This means that Matthew interpreted it to be in a non-literal sense, rather than the servant heals people of their diseases as opposed to literally carrying them upon himself (otherwise Jesus would be demon possessed if taken literally). This means that we can simply interpret "bearing" iniquities as healing them, which all prophets did.

Did Rashi (medieval rabbi) invent the interpretation of the servant being Israel?

No, early church father Origen dealt with Jews in the 2nd century who claimed it was the nation of Israel as well. This means that the interpretation was much earlier than people think:

*"Now I remember that, on one occasion, at a disputation held with certain Jews, who were reckoned wise men, I quoted these prophecies, to which my Jewish opponent replied, that these predictions bore reference to the whole people, regarded as one individual, and as being in a state of dispersion and suffering, in order that many proselytes might be gained, on account of the dispersion of the Jews among numerous heathen nations." (Origen of Alexandria, *Contra Celsum*, Book 1, Chapter 55, Written c. 248 CE)*

Does Isaiah 59:16 prove the servant is God?

The verse in Isaiah 59 speaks about God being appalled that there was no one to intercede, so his own arm interceded for him (also see Isaiah 63:5). They say that, because no man can intercede, only God's arm, and the servant intercedes, that he cannot be a man and must be God. This logic is extremely flawed. We know God's arm is a metaphor for His power biblically (Isaiah 48:14; 62:8; 63:12). It can also be a position of power (1 Kings 22:19, 1 Chronicles 18:18, Psalm 110:1). So, how should Isaiah 59:16 be read? Since we know that the arm means power, when it says "no man can intercede" and then proceeding to say God's own arm (power) interceded, this means the implication is that no man can intercede WITHOUT GOD'S POWER. This means an agent could be used, not that the arm of the LORD is the servant or God.

Is Micah 5:2 about a divine Messiah?

Yet another verse Christians use to prove that the Messiah in the Old Testament is prophesied as the Almighty God. This verse correlates heavily with Isaiah 9:6-7

“But you, **Bethlehem** Ephrathah, though you are little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of you shall come forth to Me, **the one to be Ruler in Israel**, whose goings forth are from of old, **from everlasting**.” (Micah 5:2)

They say this “Ruler” is the Messiah, because Jesus was from Bethlehem, and they correlate it to the passage below to prove that he must be God.

“Are You not **from everlasting, O Lord my God**, my Holy One? We shall not die. O Lord, You have appointed them for judgment; O Rock, You have marked them for correction.” (Hab 1:12)

It says God is “from everlasting”, and then depending on their translation of Micah 5, it will say the ruler is “from everlasting”. They use this to prove the Messiah is eternal and therefore God. However, it is important to note that some translations actually do not render it as such:

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me, one who will be ruler over Israel, whose **origins** are from of old, from **ancient times**.” (Micah 5:2 NIV)

In this section, I will focus on defending this translation of the Hebrew. Lets first see what the Hebrew phrase utilized actually is: “mî·mê ‘ō·w·lām”. The same words with a slightly different phrasing are used elsewhere in the Bible, in reference to the days of David:

“On that day I will raise up **the tabernacle of David**, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it **as in the days of old (kî-mê ‘ō·w·lām)**.” (Amos 9:11)

Here are other instances where it is rendered as “days of old” as opposed to “eternity”:

“I thought about **the former days**, the years **of long ago...**” (Psalm 77:5)

“Awake, awake, arm of the Lord, clothe yourself with strength! Awake, as **in days gone by**, as **in generations of old**. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through?” (Isaiah 51:9)

“In all their distress he too was distressed, and the angel of his presence saved them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them; he lifted them up and carried them all **the days of old**.” (Isaiah 63:9)

“Then his people recalled **the days of old**, the days of Moses and his people—where is he who brought them through the sea, with the shepherd of his flock? Where is he who set his Holy Spirit among them,” (Isaiah 63:11)

"Then the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years." (Malachi 3:4)

In fact, if Micah really wanted the readers to believe that this ruler was God, he would've used the phrase "ū-mê-'ō-w-lām 'ad- 'ō-w-lām" (from everlasting to everlasting), as seen in Psalms 90:2, which is unambiguously about God's eternity. However he chooses the ambiguous term. Now which translation makes the most sense in context? Well firstly, in Habukkuk, the phrase is simply "from" everlasting. However, in Micah, the ruler has ORIGINS (ū·mō·w·ṣā·'ō·tāw) from everlasting. How can something have an everlasting origin? That raises the rendering of the passage in most bibles as "everlasting" questionable. Let's see what scholarship has to say:

"The Hebrew vocabulary used in Micah 5:2 is not saying that Jesus physically existed forever. Bill Schlegel writes about the Hebrew word sometimes translated "origins," and says, "The word translated as 'origins' or 'goings forth' (motsa'ot, מוצא) [Strong's #04163] occurs only here in the Bible in the feminine form (and only in plural), with one additional possible textual variant in 2 Kings 10:27." From the same root is "descendant" נצץ (e.g. Job 5:25; Isa. 44:3) and later Hebrew "ancestry" נצץ. In association with miqqedem, mimei olam ("from before, from days of long ago"), which relate to Israel's historical past, the feminine plural form in Micah 5:1 (5:2 in the English versions) most likely relates to physical ancestry, especially David's and/or Abraham's." (Excerpt from REV Bible Commentary)

The word for "origins", as he points out, most likely refers to ancestry from the line of David. He then expands on the meaning of the promise in the chapter:

"In Micah 5:2, the use of mōtsa'ah along with yōm olam conveys the idea that "the ancestry of the expected ruler traces back to David's time as well as David's city." Furthermore, J. M. P. Smith also sees this as a reference to the Messiah belonging to one of the oldest families, that is, the Davidic family, and so does Ralph L. Smith, describing how Micah has in mind the idea of a "new David" by making use of colloquial language where the days of David were spoken of as "the ancient days." like in Amos 9:11."

The point is, God is making a comforting promise to Bethlehem that, although they are small among the tribes, that one would come from the line of the very king who lived there (King David, see 1 Samuel 17:12), NOT that there is a God who became man.

Now as for who the son is, there's speculation. This chapter correlates HEAVILY to Isaiah 9, as Micah was a contemporary of Isaiah (Isaiah 2:2-4 parallels Micah 4:3-5, etc). The ruler here is most certainly Hezekiah in my opinion, and cannot be Jesus, as I'll show from Micah 5:

V1: "Marshal your troops now, city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod."

This was written during the Assyrian threat, when King Sennacherib rose up and sieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13, Isaiah 36:1). King Hezekiah was the king at this time (2 Kings 18:1-3). What siege occurred when Jesus was born, when the gospels cite this passage about him? (Matthew 2:6)

V3: "Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor bears a son, and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites."

Israel was "abandoned" and allowed to be captured and ransacked by the Assyrians. The language of "bearing a son" is used in reference to the siege (Isaiah 37:3). During Hezekiah's time, a remnant was described to return (Isaiah 10:20-21, 2 Kings 19:30-31, Isaiah 37:31-32).

V4: "He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth."

"The flock" is in reference to the people of Israel (Psalm 77:20; 80:1, Jeremiah 31:10, Ezekiel 34:12, Micah 7:14). Kings are shepherds to their people, such as David (2 Samuel 5:2; 7:8, Psalm 78:70-71), Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28), and even wicked rulers (Isaiah 56:9-11, Zechariah 10:3). This means Hezekiah fits the role of a shepherd. It also states this ruler has a God. Without presupposing Christian theology and the roles in the triune Godhead, it is most likely to be a human king as opposed to God Himself. It also states Israel will live securely. Hezekiah described peace in his days (2 Kings 20:19, Isaiah 39:8). What about his greatness reaching the "ends of the earth"? This phraseology does not have to be taken literally, as seen when Babylon is called "the ends of the earth" (Deuteronomy 28:49), or when Daniel says there is a tree that was visible throughout the "whole world" (Daniel 4:20). It can just be in reference to a long strip of land, and we know Hezekiah had a lasting legacy and impact on many nations. Now as for Jesus, Israel did not live securely in his days, as they remained in Roman captivity for hundreds of years, and their temple was destroyed in 70 AD.

V5: "And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses. We will raise against them seven shepherds, even eight leaders of men."

The most explicit reference: again, Hezekiah was the king who made peace with the Assyrian king by paying him the treasures in the temple (2 Kings 18:13-23), prayed for the destruction of Assyria (2 Kings 19:20-23, Isaiah 37:21-24), and described peace in his days (2 Kings 20:19, Isaiah 39:8). The seven shepherds and eight leaders are not literal individuals, but rather a form of Hebrew graded numerical parallelism (n, n+1), in which the first clause has a specific number of something, and the second clause follows it up and emphasizes the severity by adding an extra one. (other examples include Amos 1:3, "for three sins... even for four", and Proverbs 30:18, "three things that amaze me... four I do not understand"). The point is, Israel needs extreme help to fend off the many Assyrian generals and warriors. The point of the passage is to say that God will provide ample support for them. Now the question again rises, when did Jesus ever deal with the Assyrians?

V6: "They will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, the land of Nimrod with drawn sword. **He will deliver us from the Assyrians** when they invade our land and march into our borders."

Again, the same thing: Hezekiah was the one who historically delivered the Israelites from Assyrian oppression when they sieged, not Jesus.

V7-8: "**The remnant of Jacob** will be in the midst of many peoples **like dew from the Lord**, like showers on the grass, which do not wait for anyone or depend on man. **The remnant of Jacob** will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, **like a lion among the beasts** of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep, which mangles and scatters as it goes, **with no one to rescue**."

The remnant of Jacob is described as bearing much fruit during Hezekiah's time (Isaiah 37:31-32). They were amongst foreigners and were meek and gentle. However, when they were threatened, they became untouchable like a lion, because they only depended on God, and He was with them (2 Kings 19:35-38), despite the Assyrians claiming no one would help them (Isaiah 36:4-7).

V9-15: "Your hand will be lifted up in **triumph over your enemies**, and all your foes will be destroyed. "In that day," declares the Lord, "I will destroy your horses from among you and demolish your chariots. I will destroy the cities of your land and tear down all your strongholds. **I will destroy your witchcraft** and you will no longer cast spells. **I will destroy your idols** and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands. **I will uproot from among you your Asherah poles** and demolish your cities. I will take vengeance in anger and wrath on the nations that have not obeyed me."

We know Israel triumphed over their enemies (the Assyrians) during this time. God then goes on to condemn Israel for their wickedness and disobedience to Him. Hezekiah was the righteous king during this time who destroyed their wickedness and reinstated true Torah observance (2 Chronicles 29:3-5; 18-19; 30:6-8). The Israelites would raise up Asherah poles (Exodus 34:13, Judges 3:7; 6:25-27), as well as the Bronze Serpent Moses raised up in the wilderness (Numbers 21:9) and Hezekiah destroyed them (2 Kings 18:4-6, 1 Chronicles 31:1). However, Jesus went to a bunch of monotheistic Jews, whom he claimed knew who they worshiped (John 4:22-24), just in the wrong way (Matthew 15:7-9). He never destroyed any idols.

In conclusion, Micah 5:2 is most likely about King Hezekiah during the Assyrian threat, whose origins were from the line of David, not everlasting.

Is the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13-14 Jesus?

Is the timeline in Daniel 9:24-27 leading up to the crucifixion of Jesus?

Is Zechariah 2:10-11 about the incarnation?

Is Zechariah 6:12-13 about a priestly/kingly Messiah?

Christians read this as a foreshadowing of the Messiah, who would build the New Temple:

“Say to him: Thus says the Lord of hosts: Here is a man whose name is The Branch; for he shall branch out in his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord. It is he who shall build the temple of the Lord; he shall bear royal honor, and shall sit upon his throne and rule. There shall be a priest by his throne, with peaceful understanding between the two of them.” (Zechariah 6:12-13)

They correlate this to other passages where the Messiah is called “the Branch” (Jeremiah 23:5-6, Isaiah 4:2; 11:1-2), and try to make it seem as if this is exclusive. However, branch does not have to refer to Messiah. Rather, it simply refers to someone from the line of David. Now lets see what Christians do NOT read in this chapter:

“The word of the Lord came to me: Collect silver and gold from the exiles—from Heldai, Tobijah, and Jedaiah—who have arrived from Babylon; and go the same day to the house of Josiah son of Zephaniah. Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest Joshua son of Jehozadak;” (Zechariah 6:9-11)

The referent of the passage is none other than the high priest of Judah, Joshua! (also see Ezra 2:2; 3:2-3; 3:8-9; 4:3; 5:2; 10:18, Nehemiah 7:7; 12:1; 12:7; 12:10; 12:26, Haggai 1:1; 12; 14; 2:2-4, Zechariah 3:1-9, where Joshua is mentioned as the High Priest coming out of Babylon.) Someone might argue that the name Joshua (also Jeshua) has the same etymology as Yeshua (the Hebrew name for Jesus), however this is just special pleading, because the references I gave, AND the fact that it names his father shows us that this is not some typological prophecy but rather Yahweh promising the high priest Joshua of that time that he would sit on the throne.

Is Zechariah 9:9-10 about Jesus riding on a donkey?

The passage is below:

“Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion, shout, Daughter Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”
(Zechariah 9:9)

This passage is cited in reference to Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem in Mark 11:1-11, Luke 19:28-44,

Is Zechariah 12:10 a prophecy about YHWH being crucified?

Is Zechariah 13:7 about the crucifixion of God's shepherd?