

Why Don't Jews Believe in Yeshua (Jesus)?

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The user Truthfrees on CHRISTIANFORUMS.COM's forum¹ for Messianic Judaism asked the following questions in response to my recent debate on that forum (under the username yonah_mishael) over the proper interpretation of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. In the course of our discussion, I told him that I would put together my answers to his questions and send them his way. Given that CHRISTIANFORUMS.COM's rules do not allow non-Christians to offer their reasons for rejecting Jesus, I have chosen to put my answers into a paper presentation and upload it to my own website THEHEBREWCAFE.COM. Here are his questions:

Why don't our Jewish brothers see the Lord Yeshua² as the Messiah? Why did the Jews see Yeshua as their Messiah in the apostles' days, but not now?

Not only is this type of question very common among Christians, it plays out in the very types of things that they say about Jews who refuse to accept their claim that Jesus was the Messiah. They truly believe that the Tanach (the Old Testament) is so clearly christological (centered on the teaching of Jesus as the Messiah) that anyone who fails to see Jesus in the text of the Bible must be spiritually blind. I simply do not believe that it is true that Jews are any blinder in some spiritual sense than any other people group, nor do I believe that the case that Christians construct in support of their claim that Jesus was the Messiah holds any water, and this is where the problem lies. It should not be up to Jews to demonstrate that Jesus wasn't the Messiah, although this is how it is often portrayed. Rather, those who make the positive claim must support their position and prove it true; the *onus probandi* ("burden of proof") always rests on the one who makes the claim – not the one who would deny it. In discussions with Christians, though, the question of whether or not Jesus was the Messiah most regularly takes

1. These questions have been taken from the Messianic Judaism forum on that site (<http://www.christianforums.com/t7827661>).
2. יֵשׁוּעַ *Yeshua* is the form of Jesus' name that Messianics tend to use. They feel that the name traditionally used by Hebrew speakers for "Jesus of Nazareth" (that is, יֵשׁוּ הַנּוֹצְרִי *Yéshu ha-Nótzri*) is an insult to Jesus, believing that *Yéshu* is an abbreviation for the phrase יָמַח שְׁמוֹ וְזָכְרוֹ *yimach shmo ve-zichro* (יש"ו), meaning "may his name and memory be blotted out." Jews for Jesus in the United States write *Yshua*, as if the *tsere* (◌ִ) were not present in the name (as if it were *יֵשׁוּעַ instead of יֵשׁוּעַ). *Yeshua* is a valid Jewish name, as it appears in both the Talmud and in the Bible. It also appears in the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah* (in Laws concerning Kings and Wars, chapter 11), thus it is not a problem to use the name or apply it to Jesus – though we cannot say for sure how people addressed Jesus in his own lifetime. The majority of Israelis do not have *yimach shmo ve-zichro* in mind when they use the name *Yéshu* to refer to Jesus. It's simply an issue of custom.

the form of something which the Jews must prove wrong – and if it is not proved wrong, then it is assumed right by default. This is not how the argument *should* work, but it seems to be how it *does* work in practice.

That said, I will do my best to explain my reasons for rejecting the Christian claim – that Jesus was the object of the prophetic unction of those who prophesied in ancient Israel, that the concept of the Messiah/Christ³ was to be one who laid down his life to save the world, that Jews missed the boat and were spiritually blinded by God in order to have Jesus crucified and to obtain redemption for the world, etc. The story of salvation as told by Christians does sound good when you hear it. It sounds persuasive when you think of the Creator of the universe sending his own son to deliver his creation from the destruction that they brought upon themselves. There is no doubt that this story sounds both amazing and cosmic – as do all great myths. But no matter how wonderful the message is,⁴ is it what the prophets of Israel foretold would happen? Did the prophets imagine the story of Jesus playing out? Did God intend to give Israel this salvation story? Were the Jews who did not recognize Jesus as the coming Messiah spiritually blind?

My answer to all of these questions is simply *no*. No, the prophets of Israel did not foretell the events of Jesus' life – neither his birthplace, nor the manner of his death; neither his ministry, nor the claims that he was resurrected from the dead. No, the prophets did not imagine the story of Jesus or what would supposedly take place in his life. And no, the Jews who rejected Jesus' followers' claims that he was the Messiah were neither stupid nor spiritually blind. They rejected this claim with good reasons – sound reasons that remain relevant today. In this short treatment of the subject, I want to lay out the basic reasons why thinking religious Jews of Jesus' day and just thereafter would have rejected the claim that he was the Messiah and why we should do the same today.

3. That is, מָשִׁיחַ *ha-mashiach* in Hebrew or ὁ χριστός *ho christos* in Greek, which both mean “the anointed (one).”

4. If we ignore the gruesome nature of Jesus' death and the entire assumed concept that God in this gospel must be bound by a higher authority than himself in order to have to sacrifice his son and not be able to simply forgive those who request forgiveness without making some kind of sacrifice.

ASSUMPTION: THE JEWS IN JESUS' DAY ACCEPTED HIM AS THE MESSIAH

Embedded within the question asked by Truthfrees, the claim that the Jews of the first Century of this era were believers in Jesus while later Jews and those of today somehow just *stopped* believing in him is simply false. The Jews with whom the apostles apparently came into contact were not excited about the claims of those who belonged to the Nazarene tradition (what early followers of Jesus most probably called simply *the Way*).⁵ From the very beginning, those who knew most about the teachings and practice of the Torah rejected the faith of the Way, and it is thus absurd to ask why Jews at that time accepted Jesus while Jews today do not. One would just as appropriately ask why the sky is red on a cloudless mid-afternoon. The sky is not red at such an hour, so this question is absurd. The same is true about the question of the poster – it becomes absurd when you realize its historical background, since the question assumes that Jews of that time accepted Jesus and Jews of today do not. Jews of that time did not accept the claim that Jesus was the Messiah, and Jews today are the same – rejecting this claim from the get-go.

What did the prophets of the Bible expect to happen? We can be sure that the prophets expected several things to happen, as is written in the text of the Bible.

1. They expected the people of Israel to return from exile and to be united under one specific ruler, who would be descended from Judah and from the house of David. This ruler would figuratively be called “David” and be descended from the stock of Jesse.
2. They expected that this king of Israel would free Israel from subservience to other nations and usher in the time of the “kingdom of God.”
3. They expected that the temple would be rebuilt in this period and that sacrifices would be offered in that temple, which would be glorious and never be destroyed.
4. They were promised that at this time all nations would stream to Jerusalem and seek to be taught of Yahweh, who would be God over all the earth.

Were there good reasons for the prophets and those who followed them to believe these things? Yes, in fact, this was the message that was supposed to have been delivered from the prophets to the people of Israel through the time of the prophetic period – from Isaiah and on until the time of Ezekiel. There are not a lot of specific prophecies about the coming of the Messiah in the Tanach, but the text is very clear about what will happen at the time of the redemption – that is, at the time of the coming of the Messiah. Given the clarity of the text, which we will see soon, it should not be surprising that the religious Jews of Jesus’ time rejected the claim that he was the one whom the prophets foretold. He simply did not bring about the events predicted by the prophets; therefore, he was not the Messiah.

Even the gospel that is named after John says that “he came to his own home, but those of his own kin did not receive him” (John 1.11).⁶ If it is the case that “his own kin did not receive him,” how can the questioner

5. “The Way” is known as ἡ Ὁδὸς *hē hodos* in Greek and הַדֶּרֶךְ *ha-derech* in Hebrew. The group of followers of Jesus was called “the Way” in Acts 9.2, 19.9, 19.23, 24.14 and 24.22. It seems to have been the chosen nomenclature for the Jesus Movement used by the early believers – though it is impossible to know to what extent the book of Acts represents the earliest group of believers. This may be connected to the manner in which the Didache lays out two “ways” for people – one of life and one of death. They believed that the Christian message, the gospel, was the way of life and that Christians were the ones who followed it.

6. The Greek reads: εἰς τὰ ἴδια ἦλθεν, καὶ οἱ ἴδιοι αὐτὸν οὐ παρέλαβον. [Scripture quotations in this paper, when unmarked, are my personal translation. I use the Society of Biblical Literature’s *Greek New Testament* (SBLGNT) for Greek NT passages and the

imply that the Jews of Jesus' time accepted him as the Messiah? It simply isn't the case, and this is confirmed in the book of Acts, in which we find:

God's message had to be spoken first to you (the Jews). But since you reject it and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the non-Jews.

Acts 13.46

The Jews *rejected* the claim that Jesus was the Messiah from the beginning, and this was also essentially the case in the majority of the synagogues that Paul visited – the Jews refused to believe the message of the cross, and Paul brought the message to the non-Jews, who were a more willing audience generally. Paul upholds his normal mantra that the gospel is “to the Jew first” in his insistence that the Jewish rejection of the message is what resulted in the Gentiles receiving the hope of the *evangelion* (εὐαγγέλιον). It cannot be that the Jews at the beginning of the Christian era accepted Jesus as the Messiah, else Christianity would have remained a Jewish movement and would not have gone over to the Gentiles, as it did in the missions of Paul. It is certainly the case that *some* Jews believed in Jesus – such as those who came to be called the apostles (οἱ ἀπόστολοι) as well as Paul the missionary. But, the belief in Jesus never held the attention of a large portion of the Jewish population.

Masoretic Text (MT) for the Tanach. Quotations marked NIV are taken from the New International Version. The abbreviation KJV refers to the King James Version. All Scripture quotations are used by permission of the companies responsible for maintaining the rights of those who worked on the translations in accordance with all copyright laws.]

WHO IS THE MESSIAH?

The concept of the Messiah must be understood as it relates to the redemption of the people of Israel. Before we can come to terms with the concept of the Messiah, we must take a look at what the prophets had to say about the time of the redemption and the resurrection of the people of Israel in their own land. The Tanach tells us that the kingdoms of Israel (also called Ephraim) and Judah went into exile separately, but the promise that they would return from exile lay always on the horizon. The conditions of the return were never met in any of the subsequent instances of Jewish return. Here is how the Tanach relates these events:

Speak to them, ‘Thus spoke the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am taking the children of Israel from among the nations where they have dwelt, and I will gather them from all around and bring them to their own land. I shall make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel, and they will have one king as king for all of them. They shall not be divided again into two nations or into two kingdoms. They shall no longer be defiled with their idols, with their abominations or with any of their crimes. I will deliver them from all of their dwellings in which they have sinned and purify them. They will be my people, and I will be their God. My servant David will be king over them, and they will have one shepherd for all of them. They will walk in my judgments, keep my laws and observe them. They will live on the land which I gave to my servant Jacob, in which their fathers dwelt. They, their children and their children’s children will live on it forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace for them. It will be an everlasting covenant with them. I will establish and multiply them, and I will place my sanctuary among them forever. My tent will be over them – I will be their God, and they will be my people. And the nations will know that I Yahweh do sanctify Israel when my sanctuary is among them forever.’

Ezekiel 37.21-28

This text lays out the basic concepts in question, which reflect what was written above about the prophets’ expectations for the Messianic Era. They are:

1. The ingathering and unification of the people of Israel.
2. An everlasting covenant made between the people and God (cp. Jeremiah 31).
3. Forgiveness of their sins and transgressions.
4. The people will again be recognized as the people of God.
5. There will be one king over the people.
6. The people will be upright and will observe the Torah fully.
7. The sanctuary of God (that is, the temple) will stand among the people (cp. Ezekiel’s description of the temple).

This particular text calls the king by the name of his ancestor, David. We should not expect that the king over the people will literally be called David. This king is the one that we today call “the Messiah,” but he is never called such in the Tanach. The word מָשִׁיחַ *mashiach* appears in various forms thirty-nine times in the text of the Tanach, but not once is it used of the personage that we call by the term today.⁷ It applies to both people and things that undergo anointing with oil – including the sanctuary, the priests who work there and the king. There

7. The KJV translates מָשִׁיחַ *mashiach* as “the Messiah” in Daniel 9.25 and 9.26, but this is misleading. This meaning was not part of the biblical language but was added by the English translators in an attempt to make it look like Daniel 9 was speaking of the coming of the Messiah. This has led many to claim that the rabbis of the first century knew that Messiah was supposed to come then and adjusted their teaching as a result of his failure to appear, or of the rabbis’ failure to find the Messiah in the person of Jesus.

were many anointed kings over Israel, but Israel has not had an anointed king in generations. The next anointed king is the one that is called “the Messiah” in the Jewish religious tradition – although, to stress this point, he is not called this in the Tanach. The tradition of calling the next king of Israel by the name of “Messiah” began in the period between when the Tanach was finished being written and the time of Jesus. Other concepts that were added to Judaism during this time were: a clear belief in the resurrection of the dead; the survival of the soul beyond death; and, the ineffability of the name of Yahweh (יהוה־יהוה or יהוה).⁸

All of the texts that refer to Israel returning have similar themes, each dealing with the return of the people to the land under a single leader/king/prince. This prince is prophesied to be descended from David, being the only proper royal line among the Jews. Any text that describes the coming of this king (that is, the Messiah) will do so only in connection with the re-establishment of the people of Israel in their own land. Here is a little about what the Tanach says about the Messianic Era⁹ and who he will be:

A descendant will come out of the stock of Jesse – a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The spirit of Yahweh will rest upon him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh. He will delight in the fear of Yahweh, and he will neither judge by what his eyes see nor make decisions by what his ears hear. Rather, he will judge the lowly with justice and make decisions with uprightness for the poor of the land. He will strike the land with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips will he put the wicked to death. Justice will be the girdle of his loins, and the belt on his waist will be faithfulness. A lion will dwell with a lamb, a leopard will lie down with a kid – a calf, a young lion and a fatling together, with a small boy leading them. A cow and a bear will range together, their young will lie down together. A lion will eat straw like the cattle. An infant will play over a cobra’s hole, and a weaned boy will put his hand over the lair of a poisonous snake. They shall neither harm nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea. On that day, nations will seek after the root of Jesse, which stands as a banner for peoples, and glory will be his resting place. And it will happen on that day that the Lord will again, for the second time, extend his hand to redeem the remnant of his people who remain from Assyria, Egypt, Patrus, Kush, Eilam, Shinar, Chamat and the islands of the sea. He will lift up a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel. He will gather the scattered of Judah from the four corners of the earth.

Isaiah 11.10-12

It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be established as the chief of the mountains, and it will be raised up above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will instruct us in his ways that we may walk in his paths.” For instruction will go forth from Zion and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and make decisions for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation will not take up sword against another nation, neither will they study war anymore.

Isaiah 2.2-4

It shall come to pass in the last days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be established as the chief of the mountains, and it will be raised up above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will instruct us in his ways that we may walk in his paths.” For instruction will go forth from Zion and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and make proofs for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. One nation will

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8. Religious Jews today do not use the name יהוה *Yahweh* in writing or speech out of reverence for the name. In the Bible, it is written as if pronounced יהוה *Yehowah*, which comes from the superimposition of the vowels of the word אֲדֹנָי *adonai* (“the Lord”) on the name. In ancient times, the name was used regularly in both speech and writing, and there was no fear associated with using it. Even within several manuscripts of Greek texts, we see this form in ancient Hebrew (איהוה), which indicates that the name was still being used even after Jews began to speak Greek in the Diaspora.
9. The Messianic Era is known as יְמֵי הַמָּשִׁיחַ *yemot ha-mashiach* (that is, “the days of Messiah”) in the Hebrew of the Mishnah.

not take up sword against another nation, neither will they study war anymore. Every person will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make him quiver – for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken. Each nation walks in the name of its God, but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God forever and ever.

Micah 4.1-5

Therefore say: “Thus spoke the Lord Yahweh, I will gather you from the peoples and collect you from the lands in which you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel. You shall come there and remove all of its idols and abominations from it.” And I will give them one heart and will place among them a new spirit. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh that they will walk in my statutes and be mindful to keep my judgments. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Ezekiel 11.17-20

These are a few very clear passages dealing with the Messianic Era. They fill in some of the details about the ingathering of the people of Israel, their unification, the desire of the nations to come to know God and to be observant of his instruction, *et cetera*. The passage in Isaiah 2 was copied from the book of Micah *verbatim* in the Hebrew, with each passage ending a bit differently. I have left the conclusion of the Isaiah passage off but included that of Micah because of its repetition of the idea that there will be no harm or destruction at that time. The motif is similar throughout the passage, and it is that God gathers the people of Israel together from their גלות *galut* (“exile”) and brings them into their own land. The Messiah is king or prince over the people of Israel, descended from David (and Jesse, his father), empowered by the spirit of wisdom to judge the people properly and with true justice. The nations of the earth come to Jerusalem to be taught of God – at the instruction of the Messiah – and they seek out how to walk in the paths of God. Peace spreads all over the earth as a result of the knowledge of God becoming commonplace. All of these things represent the prophecies that the people of Israel received from their spiritual leaders known as the prophets. And *none* of these things was brought to pass by the person known as Jesus of Nazareth – and this is why he was not recognized as the Messiah of Israel and should not be claimed today to have been such.

THE NEW COVENANT

Christians use the Tanach – the Hebrew Scriptures – as one of the two major sections of their Holy Scriptures. The other major section is a set of letters from leaders in the early church (among which are many of questionable authorship), a select four “gospels” that tell the stories of Jesus’ life and ministry and one book that traces the earliest days of the church from the same person who wrote the third gospel. The gospels are written anonymously, although Christians will often claim that the names attached to each is the name of its author – Matthew being the author of the first, Mark of the second, Luke of the third and John of the fourth. There is no real internal evidence for any of these assignments, and we must conclude that these books are written anonymously and represent the opinions of those who chose them from among a larger corpus of gospel writings that emerged in the first and second Centuries of this era.

Be that as it may, Christians at some point began to call this gathering of letters and gospels by the name “the New Testament” or “New Covenant.”¹⁰ The term comes from the book of Hebrews – one of the epistles in the Christian Scriptures – which claims that Jesus is the mediator of a “better covenant” for those who believe in him. The author compares the covenant that Jesus is said to mediate in heaven (the covenant that is confirmed in his own blood as the sacrificial atonement for those who believe in him) with the covenant given at Mount Sinai with Moses as its mediator. It is said there that:

Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant.

Hebrews 7.22 NIV

But in fact the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, since the new covenant is established on better promises.

Hebrews 8.6 NIV

With this, they began to call the Hebrew Scriptures by the term “Old Testament” (that is, “Old Covenant”) and the Christian Scriptures the “New Testament” (that is, “New Covenant”). This quickly became a contention with Jews, since Christians would often dismiss Jewish arguments as coming from the “Old Testament” and no longer carrying any validity for those who were under the authority of the new – which both superseded and negated the authority of the Jewish Scriptures. Jews refer to the Scriptures in several ways: (1) the Scriptures (הַמִּקְרָא *ha-mikra*), which in English means “what is written” and in Hebrew means “what is read”; (2) the Hebrew Bible, since the text of the Bible is written in Hebrew; (3) the Jewish Bible, since these are the holy writings of the Jewish people; and, (4) the Tanach (הַתַּנַּ"ךְ *ha-tanach*), which is an acronym using the first letter of each of the divisions of the Scriptures – תּוֹרָה *torah* (the Law), נְבִיאִים *nevi'im* (the Prophets) and כְּתוּבִים *ktuvim* (the Writings). The New Testament is generally referred to as the Greek Text/Testament (GT) or simply as the Christian Scriptures.

It was certainly a bold move on the part of the early apologists for Christianity to lift Jeremiah 31 out of its context – which is actually quoted in Hebrews 8 as the proof text for the “new covenant” being the basis of the Christian relationship to God – and to ignore the other chapters of the Bible that speak of this new everlasting covenant being established with Israel at the time of the redemption. These writers (the authors of the gospels,

10. “The new covenant/testament” is called ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη *hē kainē diathēkē* in Greek and הַבְּרִית הַחֲדָשָׁה *ha-brit ha-chadasha* in Hebrew. This comes from Jeremiah 31, which foretells of a “new covenant” that would be established between Israel and Yahweh, representing the everlasting covenant of peace spoken of in Ezekiel 37, quoted above. It would be absurd to think that the new covenant of Jeremiah 31 is anything other than the everlasting covenant of Ezekiel 37, and yet Christians have taken the concept of the new covenant, quoted it from Jeremiah, applied it to Christianity and completely erased its attachment to the return of Israel from exile.

Paul and the author of the letter to the Hebrews)¹¹ claimed that Jesus established the new covenant with his disciples and all who would follow after him, a covenant that was confirmed in the blood of his personal sacrifice and involves the forgiveness of the sins of anyone who believes in the message preached about Jesus coming from heaven to die for them. By applying the concept of the new covenant to the basis of Christian faith, they stripped the concept of its true context. This is what we find in Jeremiah 31 with regard to the establishment of the new covenant. Notice the timing and the things involved in the covenant, since these are themes that we have already encountered in the passages above about the redemption.

“Behold, days are coming,” says Yahweh, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers when I held their hand to take them out of Egypt, my covenant that they broke even though I was a husband to them,” says Yahweh. “But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” says Yahweh. “I will place my Torah in their midst and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his fellow or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know Yahweh.’ For all of them will know me – from their smallest one to their greatest,” says Yahweh. “For I will pardon their iniquity and will no longer remember their sin.”

Jeremiah 31.30-33

When we compare this passage about the “new covenant” with the texts that we have already looked at, we see that the conclusion that they are speaking of the same thing is inescapable. This text speaks of a covenant being established at the return of the people from other nations (see Jeremiah 31.4-13 for confirmation that this is the time being spoken of), which is mentioned in Ezekiel 37 as an everlasting covenant and a covenant of peace. It states clearly that God would reaffirm his relationship to Israel (“I will be their God, and they will be my people”) in exactly the same way that we see it in the Ezekiel passage. It mentions knowledge of God thoroughly penetrating the people, just as we saw in Isaiah 11, which said that knowledge of God would cover the earth like the seas. Finally, it mentions God pardoning the sins of Israel and forgetting their former transgressions.

The new covenant is a central part of the prophecies concerning the return of the people of Israel from exile, their reunification, the reestablishment of their relationship with God, their work as priests to the rest of mankind – and, finally, it is central to the discussion of the coming of the Messiah and his work. It is amazing that Christianity has changed the meaning of the new covenant prophecy, made it apply to non-Jews, stripped it of the Torah that is at its heart, isolated Jeremiah from the rest of the writings of Israel’s prophets and not allowed the context of the passage to speak for itself. Yet, it should not come as a shock to anyone that this is the least abused of passages that the Christian Scriptures yank from their context to establish the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. It gets much worse.

11. Because of the anonymity of the authors of most of the New Testament – even some of the letters traditionally associated with Paul are now doubted with regard to their authorship – this really is the only way that we can refer to their authors. It makes for cumbersome references, but it would be misleading to say that Matthew said *x* or that John said *y*, since neither Matthew nor John wrote the gospels associated with them historically.

TREATMENT OF NON-MESSIANIC PROPHECY IN CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

Found in the pages of the Talmud is a principle that Christianity seems early-on to have adopted and exaggerated. The principle is as follows:

Rabbi Yochanan said: “The whole lot of the prophets prophesied only concerning the Messianic Era.”
 Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 99a

If we take this statement literally,¹² it means that everything the prophets ever wrote had to do with the Messiah, yet that truly cannot be.

There are many things that the prophets wrote that had absolutely nothing to do with the Messianic Era and should not be interpreted that way. For example, in the book of Isaiah we find the following:

Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms,
 the pride and glory of the Babylonians,
 will be overthrown by God
 like Sodom and Gomorrah.
 She will never be inhabited
 or lived in through all generations;
 there no nomads will pitch their tents,
 there no shepherds will rest their flocks.
 But desert creatures will lie there,
 jackals will fill her houses;
 there the owls will dwell,
 and there the wild goats will leap about.
 Hyenas will inhabit her strongholds,
 jackals her luxurious palaces.
 Her time is at hand,
 and her days will not be prolonged.

Isaiah 13.19–22 NIV

This passage was written about the fall of Babylon in the ancient world. It doesn't have anything to do with “Babylon the Great” from the book of Revelation, though some may think otherwise. No one would argue that the fall of Babylon – like the fall of Ninevah or the fall of Byzantium – has much to do with the concept of the Messianic Age, so how can we really make the point that the prophets wrote only about the Messianic Age? The idea seems almost clearly wrong, yet it is what the rabbis said as well.

It would seem to me that the rabbis simply meant to say that we should view all of the words of the prophets through the lens of the Messianic Age – that is, we should see them all aiming at the arrival of the Messiah and those things which are prophesied to take place just before and after his arrival. It does not mean that we should take the details of every prophet's life as if it were a prophecy about the Messiah or a way to identify him. Yet, this is precisely what the Scriptures of the Christians have done. They searched the Tanach for identity markers for the Messiah, and then they claimed that these markers were played out in the life of Jesus. Furthermore, the identity markers that were culled from the texts of the prophets were, for the most part, taken from passages that did not truly speak about the Messiah in any sense at all. This is contrary to what Rabbi Yochanan meant in his statement quoted above.

12. The Hebrew of this text reads: אָמַר ר' יוֹחָנָן כָּל-הַנְּבִיאִים בָּלֵן לֹא נִתְנְבְּאוּ אֶלָּא לְיְמוֹת הַמָּשִׁיחַ. Source: www.mechon-mamre.org.

What we find in the New Testament, rather, represents an exaggeration of the principle expressed by Rabbi Yochanan. The writers of the gospels, for instance, find Jesus in every scrap of a verse, and they make the claim again and again that he fulfilled even the smallest comment left in the writings of the prophets. Things that clearly do not make any reference at all to the Messiah suddenly become infused with Messianic intention, as we will see below. These claims at prophecy fulfillment are often introduced or summarized with phrases like: “then what was spoken through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled...,” “so that what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled...,” “Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled in them...,” “so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled...,” “this took place so that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled...,” “all this happened so that the prophetic Scriptures would be fulfilled...” These phrases have been pulled only from the gospel of Matthew! There are yet more throughout the gospels and the rest of the texts of the New Testament. If we just look at the texts that are introduced with these phrases, we will see what “fulfillment” constituted for the writers of the New Testament.

The author of the gospel of John states very clearly what the purpose of the gospel books is:

So, while Jesus performed many other signs before his disciples that have not been written in this book, these things have been written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and so that by believing you might have life in his name.

John 20.30-31

They wrote the gospels with the express purpose of spreading faith in Jesus, and this may indeed be fine. After all, I am writing this presentation so that you may understand the Jewish perspective and perhaps also reject the claim that Jesus is the Messiah. Every writing must have some sort of purpose, and this is encouraged. However, the gospel writers went overboard in their attempt to persuade, to the point that they committed grave errors in their application of the Jewish Scriptures. Whether these errors were intentional or accidental is unclear, but they are certainly errors. Now, as we approach various passages of the Hebrew Bible as quoted in the gospels, let us ask ourselves if the prophets really intended the texts to be understood in the way that the gospels interpreted them.

The first text that we must look at is Isaiah 7.14 and its quote in the gospel of Matthew.

Now all of this has happened so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying: “Behold, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will call his name Emmanuel,” which is translated “God with us.”

Matthew 1.22-23

We are told here that the circumstances of Jesus’ birth were orchestrated from above in such a way as to bring about the fulfillment of the words of Isaiah. First off, there are two translational problems in this verse that must be addressed:

1. The word translated here as “virgin” did not mean *virgo intacta* (a female who has never been sexually active) either in the original Hebrew language or in the time of the translation of the Septuagint (LXX). Neither *הַעַלְמָה* *ha-almah* nor *ἡ παρθένος* *hē parthenos* meant “virgin” even in 200 BCE, despite what many think or argue. The word *parthenos* in ancient Greek meant “young woman,” and it was an appropriate translation of the word *almah*. The problem is that the time between the LXX’s translation and the writing of the New Testament witnessed a shift in the

meaning of the term *parthenos*, similar to how the word “gay” has changed meaning in the last hundred or so years in American society. If we were to read a passage from 150 years ago and find the word “gay” in it, it would be wrong to read it to mean “homosexual.” So it was with *parthenos*, which did not mean “virgin” to the LXX translators even though someone in the first Century would have understood *parthenos* to mean “virgin.” Both *almah* and *parthenos* meant “young woman” when the texts were penned, and reading the text to mean “virgin” and basing an entire dogma of virgin birth and the immaculate conception of Mary on this supposed prophecy is just wrong.

2. Additionally, the Hebrew text does not say “they will call his name Emmanuel.” The “calling” verb in the Hebrew text can be interpreted either to say “she will call” or “you (masculine singular) will call.” The consonantal text reads וקראת, which can be understood either as וקראת *ve-kara’t* (“she will call”) or וְקָרָאתָ *ve-kara’ta* (“you will call”). Even the LXX reads the same, when it translates the text as καλέσεις *kaleseis* (“you will call”) rather than καλέσουσιν *kalesousin* (“they will call”), as in Matthew’s gospel. This would have been written as וקראו *ve-kar’u* in the Hebrew text. This seems like a petty distinction, but it is relevant with regard to *who* was supposed to call him Emmanuel. Was it people generally who would later say that he was God among men, or was it his own mother who was supposed to bear testimony that he was God? The actual meaning of the text does not reside in either option, but if we accept the New Testament’s meaning, then it would have to be other people calling him this. It’s clear that Mary didn’t call Jesus “Emmanuel,” thus the author changed the text to reflect this.

The meaning of the text in Isaiah 7, according to its own context does not lend itself to understanding it with reference to a child being born to a virgin some five hundred years after the life of Isaiah. When you read the entirety of Isaiah 7 (and it’s best to read it with chapter 8 also), you will better understand that this is talking about a stressful time in the history of the Jewish people. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was divided into two parts – the north, which was called alternatively Ephraim or Israel (“the house of Israel”); and the south, which was called Judah (“the house of Judah”). These two kingdoms became antagonistic of one another, and at this point in the story we see that Judah was afraid that Israel would ally itself with Syria and come against Judah to take Jerusalem for its own.

Ahaz, then king of Judah and the father of Hezekiah, was afraid of what would happen if the alliance of Israel and Syria came against Jerusalem. He was seeking out ways to ensure that Judah would not fall to those powers, and one avenue that he pursued was to call on the king of Assyria and offer himself as a vassal to him if he would wipe away the northern enemies of Judah. Isaiah was trying to get Ahaz and the entire house of Judah to trust in Yahweh and not to become servants of Assyria.

When Isaiah came before Ahaz, he told him to choose a sign to serve as evidence of the fact that Yahweh would protect Judah from Israel and Syria. Ahaz, confident in the fact that he had already sent his offer to Assyria and wanting to appear modest before the prophet, said that he would not ask for any sign. Isaiah replied that God would give him a sign despite his false modesty, and the sign would be this:

Therefore, the Lord himself will give you a sign: Behold, the young woman is pregnant and bearing a son, and she will call his name “Immanuel.” Butter and honey shall he eat until he knows how to reject what is

bad and choose what is good. For before the boy knows how to reject what is bad and choose what is good,
the land of the two kings that you dread will be abandoned.

Isaiah 7.14-16

The sign was not that a virgin would give birth. The sign was that a child born to a girl who was already pregnant at that time – and we should imagine Isaiah pointing to a girl in the royal court who was standing before them all, perhaps visibly pregnant – would give birth to a son who would see the end of both Israel and Syria while still in his young years. The sign that Judah should trust in Yahweh was the fall of the two kingdoms that had allied themselves against them! It had nothing at all to do with a virgin giving birth. In fact, the tale goes on to tell us about the birth of Isaiah’s own son *Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz*, and in chapter 8 we read a prophecy about the coming flood of the Assyrian army sweeping through the area and wiping out Israel and Syria. Within that prophecy is another mention of the child called “Immanuel,” which did not mean that the child himself was God among men but rather than the name “Immanuel” was given as a sign to say that God was “with us” (that is, fighting on the side of Judah) and not “with them” (that is, supporting the cause of Israel and Syria).

Yet, this is only one prophecy that was ripped from its context to support the claim that Jesus was the Messiah. In Matthew 2, we find the following claim:

And he was there until the death of Herod, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying: “I called my son out of Egypt.”

Matthew 2.15

The author of the gospel of Matthew wants us to believe that there was a prophecy spoken by “the prophet” that needed to be fulfilled which claimed that God would call his son (the Messiah) out of Egypt. This passage appears in the Hebrew Bible in Hosea 11.1. All we have to do is read this text in Hosea instead of Matthew to see what the verse is referring to:

When Israel was a child, I loved him; and I called my son out of Egypt. I called them, yet they walked away from me, sacrificed to the ba’alim and offered incense to idols.

Hosea 11.1-2

By simply removing the reference to Israel, Matthew has turned this passage into a prophecy about the Messiah being called out of Egypt – yet, no such prophecy exists in the Hebrew Bible. The Messiah is not supposed to be called out of Egypt, and yet Matthew said that this was fulfillment of prophecy given by God.

We could proceed through passage after passage that the New Testament claims is evidence that Jesus was the Messiah based on fulfillment of prophecies from the Hebrew Bible. In every case, we will find some sort of problem like these. The texts are consistently taken out of context, misquoted or simply invented whole cloth (as in the case with “he shall be called a Nazarene” from Matthew 2.23). The question, then, should be put to those who make the claim: what verses did Jesus really fulfill? Most claim that he fulfilled a hundred prophecies of the Messiah. When I was younger, I remember the claim being made that he fulfilled over three hundred! When we look through the list of prophecies that are said to have been fulfilled, we find it exactly like what we have already covered – that if the proof is in the pudding, this pudding is spoiled.

Thus, we find that the very founders of Christianity misquoted verses in order to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. Yes, they abused the Hebrew Bible and took its verses out of context. Does this prove that their claim is wrong? No, not directly. It shows that their case is weak, but perhaps Jesus was the Messiah despite the inability

of the original authors to write about it correctly. Perhaps the truth is found in the *narrative of the gospel* and not in its details. In other words, perhaps the power of the message, the claim that Jesus died for other people's sins, the idea that Jesus came down from heaven and rose back up to the celestial realm, the miraculous powers of those who established the Christian religion – perhaps this is enough to establish Jesus as the Messiah quite apart from the use of the Hebrew Bible.

What we see is that those verses which are clearly Messianic and refer to the return of Israel to the land do *not* support the claim that Jesus was the Messiah, and those verses which were used to prove that Jesus was the Messiah were *not* Messianic and had nothing to do with the Messiah. This in combination is truly a better reason to reject the Messianic and Christian claim. We find that one must reject the Hebrew Bible as true in order to accept that Jesus was the Messiah.

GENTILES WILL TURN TO THE JEWS IN THE END

If the Christian message is true, the end of the age should witness multitudes of Jews seeking out the message that has populated the Gentile world. We would expect the prophets to continue on the vein of something that Paul wrote to the Romans:

Again I ask: Did they stumble so as to fall beyond recovery? Not at all! Rather, because of their transgression, salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.

Romans 11.11 NIV

If Israel missed the truth (because of spiritual blindness or from whatever other cause), we would expect just this type of situation. The Jews would eventually see the error of their ways, their eyes would be opened to their mistake, and they would become envious of the Gentiles and seek out how to come to terms with the truth that the Gentiles now possess that the Jews lack – and we would expect, if this is all predicted by the prophets, that the prophetic books of the Bible would give us some sort of clue that this would be how it was to play out.

This is quite the opposite of what the prophets had to say, though. In the words of the prophets, the arrival of the Messianic era will bring about an eagerness on the part of the non-Jews to know the teachings of Israel. We are told that:

This is what Yahweh of hosts has said: “In those days shall ten men of every language of the Gentiles take hold of the hem of the garment of a Jewish person, saying, ‘Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.’”

Zechariah 8.23

It would make no sense for the Gentiles to seek out the Jew if it is truly the case that the Gentile has already been “grafted in” (as Paul argues) and if it is they who have received the truth of the gospel message. It should be the other way around! We should see in Zechariah a prophecy about the Jews flocking to the Gentiles and confessing that they have missed the boat and want in on what they should have caught the first time around. It simply is not what the prophet had to say.

Further, we find this in Jeremiah’s prophecy:

Yahweh, my strength and my fortress, my refuge in a day of trouble. Unto you shall the Gentiles come from all over the earth. They shall say: “Our fathers have inherited only lies – vanity in which there is no gain.”

Jeremiah 16.19

If the Christian gospel is correct, it should be the Jews confessing that they inherited lies from their fathers, who inherited lies from their fathers. After all, we are told again and again that the Talmud is false, that rabbinic Judaism is not original, that the Jews have been deluded in their pursuit of self-justification. Why, then, does the Scripture say that it will be the Gentiles – and not the Jews – who will come and say that they have inherited lies from their fathers? The timing of this prophecy has to do with the Jews’ having paid double for the measure of their sins – thus, it has to do with the exile and its completion. It can be interpreted as saying that this is the reaction of the Gentiles at the time of the redemption of the Jews, when they realize their error and God reveals himself to them through the very act of redemption.

Finally, we are told clearly that Jerusalem (Zion) will be elevated above all the mountains of the world and that the Torah will pour forth from there. תּוֹרָה *torah* is a word that means “instruction.” This is what Isaiah says about the Gentiles during the time of Israel’s redemption:

And it will happen in the end of days that the mountain of the house of Yahweh will be established as the chief of the mountains and will be lifted up above the hills. All the Gentiles shall flow unto it. Many peoples will come and say, “Let us ascend the mountain of Yahweh, up to the house of the God of Jacob, so that he may instruct us in his ways and we may walk in his paths.” For Torah shall go forth from Zion and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.

Isaiah 2.2-3

The word for “he may instruct us” in Hebrew is יָרְנוּ *yorénu*, which comes from the same root as the word *torah*. We are again told that the Gentiles will come to Jerusalem, that they will come to hear of the God of Israel (Jacob), that they will seek to live by the Torah.

It cannot be that the Gentiles will seek out the Jews at the end of days in order to learn about God if the gospel truly caused the reversal of the situation. We are told in the New Testament that God offered his son to the Jewish people, that they rejected him, that the true message came to the Gentiles, that Jews would become jealous and seek out the gospel, and thus all who believe will be saved – both Jew and Gentile. This is *not* what we get from the prophets, who consistently tell us that in the end it will be the Jews who have the true message, that the Gentiles will realize that they have inherited lies from their fathers, that they will come to Jerusalem to hear the words of God and learn Torah, that they will take hold of a Jew and beg him to let them go and learn with him. This being the case, the Christian message about Jesus being the Messiah must indeed be false. It is the opposite of the picture that we get from the prophets.

WHY DON'T JEWS BELIEVE IN YESHUA?

My personal reasons for rejecting the claims of missionaries and Messianics are really all that I can give as an explanation for the Jewish rejection of the claim that Yeshua (Jesus) was the Messiah. These reasons are essentially that the expectation of the Messiah as described in the Tanach is not fulfilled in Jesus, that the verses which are rallied in support of the claim that he was the Messiah do not uphold the claim, that the Jewish people traditionally have died rather than allow themselves to become Christians (or Messianics) and that Christianity has constituted a threat to the Jewish people and the Jewish identity throughout the two thousand years for which it has currently been circulated.

With this, I think I have answered – to the best of my ability without a back-and-forth discussion – why Jews do not generally believe in Jesus and why I think it is that we continue to reject the Christian understanding of history and God's will for the world.

One aspect that I have not brought up is the distinct difference between Christian and Jewish religion. The traditional religion of the Jews is based on הַלְכָה *halachah* “law,” the system of arriving at legal decisions that are binding via the types of Jewish reasoning and argumentation. We think in terms of מוּתָר *mutar* “permissible” and אָסוּר *assur* “forbidden,” in terms of תּוֹרָה *torah* and the reasoning of the גְּמָרָא *gemara*. Christians, on the other hand, think in terms of *sins*, *sacrifice* and *eternal life*. If you ask a religious Jew about the way to get closer to God, his answer will have something to do with your behavior – to what extent you study Torah and keep its מִצְוֹת *mitzvot* (commandments). Yet, if you ask a believing Christian the same question, you will get an answer that has to do with “seeking the will of God” in your life, confessing your sins and believing in the sacrifice of Jesus as an atonement for your sins. It can be reduced to a question of perspective – Judaism majorly looks *forward* and at *this life*, while Christianity looks *backward* and at a more nebulous *life of the spirit*. Not to say that Judaism does not focus on the soul and spiritual questions, but the outlook of Judaism has to do with one's actions and how they learn to behave in this world, while that of Christians has to do less with actions and more with what they term “relationship.” The first chapter of מְסִילַת יִשְׁרָיִם *Mesilat Yescharim* (“The Path of the Upright”) encapsulates the Jewish outlook when it says:

The path to the place of our greatest desire lies in this world [*zeh ha-olam*]. This is what the Sages meant when they said: “This world is like an entryway into the next world” (Pirkei Avot 4.6). The means that bring a person to this end are the mitzvot which God has given us, and the place where mitzvot may be performed is only this world. For this reason mankind was placed in this world in the very beginning – so that by these means that are available to them here they might arrive at the place which was prepared for them (namely, the next world [*ha-olam ha-ba*]), and there drink their fill of the goodness that they acquired for themselves by performing the mitzvot. This is what the Sages meant when they said: “Perform them today and receive their reward tomorrow” (Eruvin 22a).

In other words, while the ultimate goal of Judaism and Christianity may be the same – namely, the desire to live on into the next world (“the world/age to come”) – the means by which the next world is attained are completely different because of the opposing perspectives of these two religious systems. Christians have traditionally found it difficult to convert Jews who are serious about their Judaism to faith in Jesus, and this has a lot to do with the fact that we come at religion and our relationship with God from a very different point of view. Why do Jews reject Jesus as the Messiah? Because the Christian way of life is foreign to the traditions of Judaism, because the function of the Messiah as outlined in the prophets' writings is clear, because Jesus does not fulfill this function in the slightest, because the verses pulled in defense of the claim that he was Messiah are taken out

of context and maligned, and because we have a complete and fully functioning religion of our own – not to mention an eternal covenant with God – that does not include or need Jesus. We remain Jewish in remembrance of the past, since so many Jewish people underwent persecution, torture and death for their refusal to bend the knee to any other so-called deity. We remain Jewish in hope of the future, that the Jewish people will remain present in this world and – God-willing – have a place in the world to come that will justify the suffering we’ve had to endure as a people.

And with that, I close this presentation hoping that it has brought together enough reasons to support my position without going into all the details of every misinterpreted prophecy. I covered Isaiah 53 (“the Suffering Servant”) as best I could in the online debate, and I think I justified the position of Judaism well enough. This position is, by way of a reminder, that the “servant of Yahweh” in that passage refers to those who have remained faithful to God among Israel. Not every Jew has been considered a servant of God, but in every generation there are righteous Jews preserved as a remnant to bring Israel as a whole back to the Torah. These righteous people have suffered in exile along with the rest of Israel, though their suffering was undeserved and the result of other people’s wrongdoing. Isaiah 53 is telling us that although the remnant of Israel suffer unjustly, they will eventually be made strong, planted back in the land of promise, raised higher than the mountains and be given the power of the kingdom again. This is all about the time of the Messiah (which is why the Targum inputs Messiah in the text), but the servant himself in the Hebrew refers to Israel’s suffering, not to the suffering of a single man for the sins of the world. For a clear demonstration of the word picture called to mind by Isaiah 53, one only need read the first two chapters of Isaiah’s prophecy, where he speaks about Israel being beaten because of their sins – but, certainly, it was not the sins of the righteous among Israel that brought about the beating. The beginning of Isaiah’s prophecy looks at the whole people having been beaten for their sins, while chapter 53 looks at the righteous among the people and says that they shouldn’t have undergone the same foul treatment – but that their suffering brought about the survival of the people.

May this presentation bring understanding to those who wonder why we continue to remain “obstinate” and refuse to submit to the arguments (or threats) that are leveled against us. May we have further and better interfaith discussions as a result of what is written herein. May this be only the first step in open dialogue regarding our differences in faith and dissimilarities in perspective. And through our dissimilarity, may we come to appreciate what we do have in common and not feel the need to change one another’s mind.