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How Can We Know Jesus Is the Messiah?

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#STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how we can know Jesus is the Messiah when so many Jews claim passages such as Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 7:14 are not Messianic prophecies and what appropriate comfort a Christian can offer at a funeral when a non-Christian passes.

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* What is appropriate comfort a Christian can offer at a funeral when a non-Christian passes?

Transcript

I'm Amy Hall. I'm here with Greg Coco and you're listening to the #STRAskPodcast, I understand the reason. All right, Greg.

Here's a question from Hallie Higgeson. "How can we know Jesus is the Messiah when so many Jews claim passages such as Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 7 14 through 16 are not messianic prophecies?" Well, this becomes a matter of interpretation to some degree, obviously, and one has to look at these texts themselves. There's actually two different ways to look at this.

I haven't done this work, but I think others have. And one of them is a question is, "How was this understood by Jewish scholars before the time of Jesus if we have any record of that?" My understanding is Isaiah 53 was considered messianic. It's interesting as chapter 7 of Isaiah, which is the Virgin Shogib birth.

Prior to the New Testament times, when the Old Testament was translated into the Septuagint, the LXX, that is the Greek translation of the Old Testament before the time of Jesus. That passage, the young woman that is in view there were translated in our translations as Virgin, that Hebrew word doesn't explicitly need Virgin. It means young maiden, Alma, I think is the word, but the implication is possibly Virgin.

What's interesting though is that those who translated the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament before the time of Christ, translated that into Parthenos. And that Parthenos means Virgin. It's the only meaning.

It's univocal. It's not just young maiden. So they understood it to mean Virgin even before the Jesus thing became an issue.

Hundreds of years before that. So that's one angle. The other angle is to just look at the passage and see what seems to be the case.

Remember that the suffering servant and the way that Jews want to characterize this passage is the servant is Israel. So they want to generalize and say that the suffering servant is Israel. And by the way, there does seem to be some merit to understanding the servant of God as Israel in earlier chapters of Isaiah.

But when you get to Isaiah 53, it is the particular characterizations of that individual that make it difficult to read it that way. And let me just go there because it's a very strong statement of substitutionary atonement too, because of the way the words actually play themselves out. So here's the passage.

Now just think about this and try to think about these words as if they were speaking of Israel, a group of people, as opposed to an individual. Isaiah, oh, I'm in the wrong chapter. That's why I don't have any highlights here.

Isaiah 53. Okay. All right.

Who is believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed for he grew up before him like a tender shoot and like a root out of parched ground. He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon him nor appearance that we should be attracted to him. Well, that sounds like an individual, but I guess you could talk about a group of people that had no stately form.

But that isn't true a certain times of Israel's history when they were actually quite triumphant. David's dynasty Solomon's dynasty, especially Solomon. Okay.

No, it was the Civil War afterwards, but I mean, I don't know. Verse three, "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and equated with grief, and like the one from whom men hide their face, he was despised and we did not esteem him." Who's the we? If this is Isaiah, the prophet speaking of Jews as being him, who is the we? Again, this looks pretty much like an individual's of you. Surely our griefs, he himself bore and our sorrows, he carried.

Smitten of God and afflicted, pierced through for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, the chastening for our well-being fell upon him, and by his scourging we are healed. All of us at like sheep have gone astray, that does describe Israel, which is the us

and the our. Obviously, each of us has turned to his own way, but the Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on him.

I don't see how anybody can make the him be Israel when the him Israel is receiving the just punishment for Israel in the place of Israel. I just read verses four through six. You can keep reading onto the end of the chapter, but this is in a grave of a rich man, or I am looking where is that? His grave was assigned with wicked men, yet he was with a rich man and his staff, because he had done no violence.

Really? The Jews have done no violence? No. Was there any deceit in his mouth? Isaiah is, you know, along with the rest of the prophets are chastising Israel all the time for their immorality. This look, people can read for themselves and it's, it's you have to interpret who he's talking about, but some interpretations are better than others, and some interpretations simply do not make sense.

So they're going to be people who disagree about lots of stuff. How do you figure out what the text means? You've got to go back to the text. And sometimes it's, it's really a very broad judgment call.

Huh, your guess is as good as mine. Not in this case, in my view. The wording here does not allow that option.

And when you read these words, it is so obvious that these words match the details of the life of Christ. And by the way, we have Isaiah in texts in Greek that which texts themselves predate the time of Christ. We have also not only Septuagint Greek, but we also have famously Hebrew in the, in Jerusalem there in the, keep forgetting what they call that, the shrine of the scroll.

And they have all of this stuff. There's no question that all these details predated the time of Christ. Piers through for our transgressions, scourging heals us.

Cut off from the land, the living for the transgression of my people, for whom the stroke was due. His grave was assigned with the wicked man who was where the rich man is death. He doesn't know violence, so as he just seet in his mouth.

Really? I mean, all of these things match Jesus, details of Jesus' life. He will bear their iniquities. Verse 11, "Lots here," verse 12, "he bore the sin of many and interceded for the transgressors." Okay.

People can make their own call, but it just seems to me this really matches Jesus. And it says he's cut off from the land of the living. And then he sees his generation after that.

Yes. Sounds like a resurrection. Well, I would, how can we know Jesus as a Messiah? Let's say this prophecy isn't in there.

We don't only know that from the prophet, the specific prophecies. In fact, Jesus said that the law and the prophets spoke of him. He spent that whole time on the road to Emmaus explaining how all of the Old Testament was pointing to him.

And it wasn't just specific prophecies. It was things like the whole law, the sacrificial system, which the New Testament says was a shadow of things to come, that Moses was supposed to build it in a particular way so that it would serve as a shadow of the substance, which was Christ coming to die for our sins since the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins. So all that whole system was prefiguring Christ.

It wasn't just a thing here and there. It's the whole story. It's the idea that Jesus is coming from the line that they said he would come from, that he, the other thing is the resurrection.

Romans 1 says he was declared the son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead. So the resurrection is another way that we know Jesus was the Messiah. In fact, that's the sign that he told the Jews would be the sign.

So when he clears the temple in the early part of his ministry, by what authority do you do this tear down this temple and I will raise it up in three days. And this he said the text says that he meant the temple of his body, his psalma, and the disciples realized this later. So there's one time and also give us a sign.

He said no sign will be given to you but the sign of Jonah in the belly of the creature for three days and three nights. And so there are two explicit references to the resurrection of Jesus himself gives that this will be the sign verifying my claims. And so it was a good point.

Even if there was no Isaiah 53, we would have plenty of evidence that Jesus substantiated and verified his messianic claim. He didn't come out of nowhere. When you look at the Old Testament and you understand what's happening, Jesus fits into that story.

He wasn't like shoe horned in and oh yeah, this guy, he's the one. Right. It actually makes sense in the things that he went through and what's in what's said in the Old Testament and the in all the different types that prefigured him.

It's one story and I think Christians miss that a lot because I think a lot of us aren't familiar with the Old Testament. We're not familiar with how there are certain things that go all the way through and culminate in Jesus. And I think if we understood that a lot better, this would make more sense.

Well, that prompts a suggestion. It's a series that we have a standard reason called the Bible Fast Forward. It's eight sessions, 50 minutes each, and it will show you that.

We start basically with the call of Abraham, which is the foundational covenant of the Bible and everything else follows from that, the Abraham of Covenant. But then by the time we get to Jesus, the final, the 12th major historical event that we track through in the history of Israel, we see that just like you pointed out, Jesus didn't fall from the sky. None of this happened in a vacuum, theologically.

All of these things were anticipated. And so Jesus comes on the stage. All of the, the, the, the, follow the drama metaphor here, all of the props are in place.

And all the lines are squared away. And so, and this is exactly what you see in the birth narratives, all these different individuals that are giving testimony to the fulfillment in the life of Jesus of all of these details that we have just spent a number of weeks to track through as we were looking at the Old Testament, building the case for the one who is to come. It's funny you said he didn't fall out of the sky and I, I mean, it's like he came from heaven and he went to heaven.

Yeah, that's right. But of course, I know what you mean. The one part of this question, I think, is why do Jews reject Jesus? And I think the answers they give are sometimes are usually about their expectations for the Messiah and the kingdom that's to come on the heels of his advent.

Right. But I did want to point people to Paul's explanation because he actually answers this exact objection in Romans 9 through 11 because he's saying, well, did God reject his people? No, he didn't reject his people. There are still Jews who believe in Christ.

And he says, what ultimately he says is that God has hardened the Jews for a time for the purpose of bringing in the Gentiles so that while he's showing grace on the Gentiles now, then later he will show grace to the Jews because he wants to, it says, I think he, they're all bound to disobedience so that he can show grace to all. And I think this is in, I can't remember if it's 10 or 11. Let me see if I can find it.

It's in chapter 11 for just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience. So these also now have been disobedient that because of the mercy shown to you, they also may now be shown mercy for God has shut up all in disobedience so that he may show mercy to all. Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

So there is a purpose, there is a reason that this actually is addressed in the Bible. Why did the Jews not come to Jesus in, in droves? So you can take a look at that there and also, Paul talks about it in Corinthians three, I think, or maybe four, and he talks about this blindness that is his veil over them. He talks about Moses having the veil and the glory is fading.

He first has the veil to block the glory and then he's got the veil so people can't see the

glory has receded. Anyway, he uses it as a metaphor to say that there is a veil over the eyes of the Jews now and it's a judicial judgment, but that will be lifted. And in Romans says, "Thus all Israel will be saved." I think the point there is not every single Jew is going to be saved, but characteristically Israel is going to turn to Christ, their Messiah, and to Jesus.

But that's sometime in the future once the fullness of the Gentiles have come in. And it's important to note that there is always a remnant. There are always Jews who are believing in Christ.

He's very clear about that also. All right, so hopefully that will help you answer that question. And I would also look into the reasons that they give because it's good for us to know responses to the idea that Jesus did not usher in the kingdom.

So therefore he can't be the Messiah. Right. Well, that is another common objection.

But as to Isaiah 53, this is where they interpret it differently than we interpret it. They interpret it in light of their theology and one could say, "We interpret it in light of our theology." So who's right? Well, you go back to the text and you see, and this is what I did when I read through it. So this is pedagogy I'm giving you.

This is technique of learning, solving these kind of problems. You go back to the text and read it. And sometimes there is going to be understandable ambiguities.

And other times you're going to say, "Well, I don't get it. I don't see where you get that." And this text, in light of the way the author is putting the details here. And it seems clear that there is an individual who is suffering for the sins of a group.

Someone who's good at answering these objections is Michael Brown. He's a part of his websites devoted to messianic questions. Because he's a messianic Jew.

He's a Jewish believer in Christ. So he's looked into a lot of these questions and that his website would be a good place to go for his own. I think his treatment is like a five volume treatment.

Yes. You know, five books. I have them all.

He gave them to me, actually. But I've only, and I've used them at different times. I'll go on to answer questions for myself.

He thinks through these things very well. So if you're someone who interacts with Jewish people a lot, that might be a good resource to have. All right.

Let's go use one more question in here, Greg. This one comes from Jeffrey. What is appropriate comfort a Christian can offer at a funeral or when a known non-Christian passes? Well, the only thing that comes to mind for me is you weep with those who

weep.

So you pay attention to the person agonizing over the loss. You don't pay attention to the one who's gone. In fact, I think my brother Mark, who is a pastor for 35 years, he's just now retiring in the midst of transition right now, said when he does funerals, he focuses not on the dead person, but on the living person.

Now, if it's a clearly a Christian, then there's a celebration element that's involved and that's a little different, but he focuses on those who are alive. But if you're at a 10D, then I think just grieving with those who grieve is appropriate. I think that saying something like you see in movies or whatever, he's in a better place now, or those kinds of comments that are meant to console people, I don't think that's helpful, especially if you have no conviction that that's the case.

But it doesn't mean you have to say, "Well, he's in a worse place now." It just means don't say anything about that. Just console the one who's grieving. I don't know what's wrong with that.

It works. I would avoid the temptation to say things that are false just to make people feel better, because that gives them a false sense of hope. Do you think it would be inappropriate to... Well, obviously, right in the midst of intense grieving, it probably is.

But would it be inappropriate to ask the person, "Do you ever think about where you're going or turning it towards them? Or do you think that's too much?" Well, I wouldn't do it at that time. Yeah, I think there would be too much. That's a kind of a judgment call.

Some people are good at that. Some people are not so good at that. They can move more deftly in that circumstance.

When people die, this gets generally the ones almost said, "This gets them thinking." Well, they're not thinking when they're dead. That gets their friends and family thinking about ultimate issues. There may be opportunities to think about that, to talk with them about that.

This is what my brother does when he does a funeral, and there's not a clear conviction that the person knew the Lord. So he's focusing in on the living. You could always point the living to Jesus as a source of comfort also.

Instead of pointing out there in hell and you don't want to go there, it's a good opportunity to show Jesus as someone who is welcoming the brokenhearted and calling out to them and reaching out to them. I guess that could be something you could say in a sermon or anytime. This is a tough situation.

I don't do funerals. I did my grandfather's funeral, but I had reason to believe my grandfather knew the Lord. That was the tack that I took at his funeral, but that was a

long time ago in the 80s.

Don't ask me to do your funeral, friends. Why you're a wedding. That is just a really tough question.

It's really tough. But I agree, Greg, I don't think you should say something you don't believe. There are ways to show Jesus as the comfort, to run to him, to run to him for peace at this time.

I don't know how much detail you go into. Don't comfort with false information, but comfort with sympathy. Simple summary.

Well, thank you, Ali and thank you, Jeffrey. We appreciate hearing from you. If you'd like to send us a question, you can go through our website or you can send it on Twitter with the hashtag #strask.

This is Amy Hall and Greg Cocle for Stand to Reason.

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(upbeat music)