

The Messiah משיח

8. Isaiah Chapter 52:13-53:12, Part 1



Ishtar Gate, Babylon
Isaiah foretold the coming of Babylonians against Judah, (Isaiah 39:27)

Introduction to Isaiah 52;13-53:12

This section of scripture is central to the Christian view of Messiah, written over 700 years before the birth of Jesus, Christians see Jesus as the fulfillment of these verses. Jewish interpreters object to this reading, they see the servant here as; the *nation of Israel*, *Jeremiah* or the *Messiah*, but not Jesus.

The importance of this scripture in the Jewish-Christian debate on the Messiah can be traced back to the time of *Origen* (185-254 A.D.) and earlier. In the book of *Acts*, we see a man, a eunuch, of Candace queen of the Ethiopians, sitting his chariot reading from Isaiah 53, not understanding what he is reading. Phillip then explains to the man in the chariot the meaning of the verses in Isaiah, according to the Christian understanding (Acts 8:30-35).

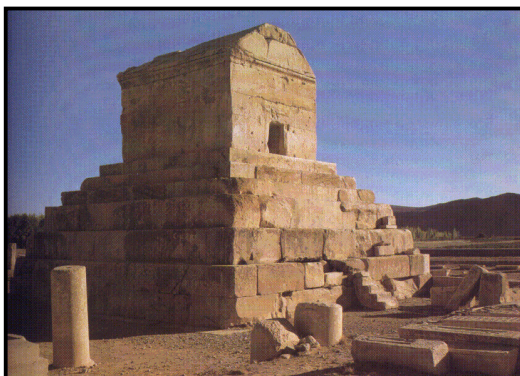
Who is the person or group being referenced to in this section of Isaiah? The meaning of this scripture is a touchstone on the understanding of just who the Messiah is in Christianity.

What is the background of Isaiah

Isaiah from the early part of his ministry commissioned to warn Judah and Jerusalem called them to repentance, in the face of God's judgment.

And He said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on hearing, but do not understand; Keep on seeing, but do not perceive.'.. Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered: "Until the cities are laid waste and without inhabitant, The houses are without a man, The land is utterly desolate, Isaiah 6:9,11

Isaiah warned Ahaz, father of Hezekiah of the coming Assyrian invasion (Isaiah 7:17-25), before he asked for their help. Isaiah was there when all hope seemed lost, and the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by the armies of *Sennacherib*, 701 B.C., then with supernatural intervention the *Angel of the Lord* slew the army of Assyria, Judah and



Tomb of Cyrus the Great (Isaiah 45:1-2)

Jerusalem were saved (Isaiah 36-37). This part of Isaiah, classified as *Proto-Isaiah* (First Isaiah), by Isaiah's critics (Chapters 1-39), deals with the Assyrian conflict in Israel and Judah. In chapter 39, we see the envoys from Babylon who visit *Hezekiah* after his illness. Isaiah warns Hezekiah,

about the coming captivity of Babylon, which will follow, after Hezekiah's death (Isaiah 39:6).

Chapters 40 to 55, skip forward in prophetic time to the

Isaiah	Jeremiah Ezekiel Daniel	Zechariah Nehemiah Malachi
Assyria	Babylon 605-539 B.C.	Persia 539-331 B.C.

Babylonian captivity, which occurs after Babylon defeats Assyria, then captures Jerusalem,

destroying the city and taking captives (605, 597, 587 B.C.)¹. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is located in a portion of scripture, dealing with Judah and Jerusalem's future, and redemption. Isaiah writes about this coming captivity and redemption from the Babylonian.

Isaiah died even before the Babylonians took Judah and Jerusalem captive, and *Cyrus*, king of Persia, defeated Babylon in 539 B.C. However, Isaiah wrote about Cyrus, and how he would free the LORD's people (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1-2). For this reason, many who doubt the supernatural nature of scripture have classified this section as *Deutero-Isaiah*², saying, Isaiah, who died before Cyrus was born, could not have written about someone he did not know.

It's in this context, Isaiah writes a message of comfort and redemption to a future captivity of Judah, yet to occur. Isaiah 53 is part of this portion of scripture, dealing with the LORD's plan of redemption for His people Israel and His city Jerusalem.

What is Isaiah 52:13-53:12

This portion of Isaiah foretells the coming of a righteous servant who would suffer for the sins of the people, but in the future will be exalted above his persecutors, who were unaware that his suffering was for their sins. The questions, which follow the literal reading, of this portion of Isaiah are the following; who is the servant? Is the servant a person or a nation? Is this about the Messiah? Did this already happen or is in the future?

What is the Christian view?

The Christian view is unified on this scripture, Jesus the Messiah fulfills the picture presented by Isaiah, when he died for the sins of world on the cross, and rose again. This portion of Isaiah is quoted throughout the New Testament, demonstrating Jesus as the fulfillment of the *Suffering Servant* foretold in Isaiah.

What is the Jewish view?

Who is Isaiah talking about? From the Jewish view, its not Jesus. The Jewish view varies however, there are several different views on who is the focus of this scripture. The main view today is that Isaiah is talking about the *nation of Israel*, as the Lord's Suffering Servant. Other views include a righteous remnant, the prophet Jeremiah and even the Messiah, but not Jesus.

These views will be discussed in detail, below, as we answer Jewish objection to Jesus.

Various Translations of Isaiah

New King James Translation	JPS Translation³ (Tanakh Translation)	Douay Rheims Translation
Isaiah 52:13-15	Isaiah 52:13-15	Isaiah 52:13-15
13 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. 14 Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage was marred more than any man, And His form more than the sons of men; 15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; For what had not been told them they shall see. And what they had	13 "Indeed, My servant shall prosper, Be exalted and raised to great heights. 14 Just as the many were appalled at him— So marred was his appearance, unlike that of man, His form, beyond human semblance— 15 Just so he shall startle many nations. Kings shall be silenced because of him, For they shall see what has not	13 Behold my servant shall understand, he shall be exalted, and extolled, and shall be exceeding high. 14 As many have been astonished at thee, so shall his visage be inglorious among men, and his form among the sons of men. 15 He shall sprinkle many nations, kings shall shut their mouth at him: for they to whom it was not told of him, have

¹ Jerusalem fell three times to Babylon, the third time in 587 B.C. Babylon destroyed the city and Temple. The first two times hostages were taken, after a final rebellion Babylon destroyed the city.

² Historical Criticism of scripture denies the supernatural nature of scripture, therefore the first 39 chapters (1-39) are classified as *Proto-Isaiah* (First Isaiah) and chapters 40-55 as *Deutero-Isaiah* (Second Isaiah), with some placing a third classification, known as *Trito-Isaiah* (Third Isaiah) (chapters 55-66)

³ The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Oxford University Press, Pgs. 889-891, 2004, New York

<p>not heard they shall consider.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Isaiah 53</p> <p>1 Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? 2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, There is no beauty that we should desire Him. 3 He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, And as a sheep before its shearers is silent, So He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, And who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; For the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked—But with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, For He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, And He shall divide the spoil with the</p>	<p>been told them, Shall behold what they never heard.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Isaiah 53</p> <p>“Who can believe what we have heard? Upon whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For he has grown, by His favor, like a tree crown, Like a tree trunk out of arid ground. He had no form or beauty, that we should look at him; No charm, that we should find him pleasing. 3. He was despised, shunned by men, A man of suffering, familiar with disease. As one who hid his face from us, He was despised, we held him of no account. 4. Yet it was our sickness that he was bearing, Our suffering that he endured. We accounted him plagued, Smitten and afflicted by God; 5. But he was wounded because of our sins, Crushed because of our iniquities. He bore the chastisement that made us whole, and by his bruises we were healed. 6. We all went astray like sheep, Each going his own way; And the LORD visited upon him the guilt of all us.” 7. He was maltreated, yet he was submissive, He did not open his mouth; Like a sheep being led to slaughter, Like a ewe, dumb before those who shear her, He did not open his mouth. 8. By oppressive judgment he was taken away, Who could describe his abode? For he was cut off from the land of the living Through the sin of my people who deserved the punishment. 9. And his grave was set among the wicked, And with the rich, in his death— Though he had done no injustice And had spoken no falsehood. 10. But the LORD chose to crush him by disease, That, if he made himself an offering for guilt, He might see offspring and have long life, And that through him the LORD’s purpose might prosper. 11. Out of his anguish he shall see it; He shall enjoy it to the full through his devotion. “My righteous servant makes the many righteous, It is their punishment that he bears; 12. Assuredly, I will give him the many as his portion, He shall</p>	<p>seen: and they that heard not, have beheld.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Isaiah 53</p> <p>1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed? 2 And he shall grow up as a tender plant before him, and as a root out of a thirsty ground: there is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him: 3 Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with infirmity: and his look was as it were hidden and despised, whereupon we esteemed him not. 4 Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: and we have thought him as it were a leper, and as one struck by God and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our iniquities, he was bruised for our sins: the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his bruises we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way: and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was offered because it was his own will, and he opened not his mouth: he shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and he shall not open his mouth. 8 He was taken away from distress, and from judgment: who shall declare his generation? because he is cut off out of the land of the living: for the wickedness of my people have I struck him. 9 And he shall give the ungodly for his burial, and the rich for his death: because he hath done no iniquity, neither was there deceit in his mouth. 10 And the Lord was pleased to bruise him in infirmity: if he shall lay down his life for sin, he shall see a long-lived seed, and the will of the Lord shall be prosperous in his hand. 11 Because his soul hath laboured, he shall see and be filled: by his knowledge shall this my just servant justify many, and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore will I distribute to him very many, and he shall divide the spoils of the strong,</p>
--	--	--

strong, Because He poured out His soul unto death, And He was numbered with the transgressors, And He bore the sin of many, And made intercession for the transgressors.	receive the multitude as his spoil. For he exposed himself to death And was numbered among the sinners, Whereas he bore the guilt of the many And made intercession for sinners.”	because he hath delivered his soul unto death, and was reputed with the wicked: and he hath borne the sins of many, and hath prayed for the transgressors.
--	---	--

Jewish Objections to Jesus being the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53

Objection 1: The Servant in Isaiah 52:13-53:1-12 is the nation of Israel, not the Messiah!

Rashi comments on this section of scripture, as Israel being the “Suffering Servant”

Behold My servant shall prosper Behold, at the end of days, My servant, Jacob, [i.e.,] the righteous among him, shall prosper.... As many wondered As many peoples wondered about them when they saw them in their humble state, and said to one another, How marred is his [Israel's] appearance from that of a man! See how their features are darker than those of other people, so, as we see with our eyes.⁴

Reply to Objection 1:

1. Israel is not the servant of Isaiah 52:13-53:12

First we need to understand the word Servant is used throughout scripture and the book of Isaiah. The book of Jeremiah in fact calls Nebuchadnezzar, the wicked pagan king of Babylon (605-562 B.C.) , the servant of the LORD.

6 'And now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the beasts of the field I have also given him to serve him. Jeremiah 27:6

Why would God call Nebuchadnezzar his servant? Because Nebuchadnezzar was the Lord's instrument of judgment against the sins of the land, through the Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord judged Judah. Later, in Isaiah, the Lord calls Cyrus, his *anointed*, translated *messiah*.

"Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held-To subdue nations before him And loose the armor of kings, To open before him the double doors, So that the gates will not be shut: Isaiah 45:1

Why would the Lord call a pagan king his anointed? Because Cyrus was chosen or anointed to serve the Lord's purpose, to subdue nations and free his people, from their Babylonian captivity.

The two servants of Isaiah

In the book of Isaiah, the Lord calls Jacob “His servant”(עֶבֶד `ebed ,) but Jacob is not the only servant in Isaiah, there is a greater servant in Isaiah, the one who rescues and restores Jacob, the “*Suffering Servant*” of Isaiah. The “Suffering Servant” is clearly seen in the four “Servant Songs” of Isaiah, (1). *Isaiah 42:1-4*,(2). *Isaiah 49:1-6*,(3). *Isaiah 50:4-9* (4) *Isaiah 52:13-53:13*. Both servants come from the opposite ends of the their relationship with the Lord;

- Israel as a servant, does not know the Lord, the Isaiah 53 servant, is called the “Arm of the Lord”
- Israel as a servant needs, sins and transgressions to be blotted out, the Isaiah 53, is righteous, lacking any deceit, in fact, making others righteous.
- Israel as servant needs redemption, the Isaiah 53 servant, redeems, bearing sin and making others righteous, acting as Redeemer.

⁴ The **The Judaica Press Complete Tanach**, with Rashi comments

Contrast between the "Servants" in Isaiah

Characteristics	Israel	Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)
Knowledge of the Lord	For Jacob <u>My servant's</u> sake, And Israel My elect, I have even called you by your name; <u>I have named you, though you have not known Me.</u> Isaiah 45:4	Behold, <u>My Servant</u> shall deal prudently... to whom has <u>the arm of the Lord</u> been revealed? Isaiah 52:13, 53:1
Sins	"Remember these, O Jacob, And Israel, for you are <u>My servant</u> : I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, <u>your transgressions</u> , And like a cloud, <u>your sins</u> . Return to Me, for I have redeemed you." Isaiah 44:21,22	He had done no violence, Nor was any deceit in His mouth.... <u>My righteous Servant</u> shall justify many... He shall bear their iniquities... He bore the sin of many Isaiah 53:9,11
Redemption	Return to Me, for I have redeemed you." For the Lord has redeemed Jacob, Isaiah 44:22,23	My righteous Servant <u>shall justify many</u> , For He shall bear their iniquities

Israel was a servant, but sin disqualifies it from being the Isaiah 53 servant

As can be seen, Israel cannot be the "Righteous Servant" of Isaiah 53, because Israel as a nation lacks righteousness according to scripture. The whole reason Assyria and Babylon were used in judgment against Judah was because of their sin, not their righteousness. Isaiah declares Israel's guilt before the Lord and the cause of judgment.

24 Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, Nor were they obedient to His law.

25 Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger And the strength of battle; It has set him on fire all around, Yet he did not know; And it burned him, Yet he did not take it to heart. Isaiah 42:24-25

2. For Israel to be the servant of Isaiah 53, God would have to invalidate the Torah

The Torah, specifically Deuteronomy, is very clear regarding Israel as a nation. Before, they entered the Promised Land, the LORD promised Israel *blessings* and *cursing* on the nation. If the nation was obedient and righteous, they would be blessed above all nations, if they were disobedient they would suffer curses. The blessing, Deuteronomy 28:1-12, the curses Deuteronomy 28:15-68, here the LORD gave Israel as a nation instruction on what would follow, if they choose the path of obedience or disobedience.

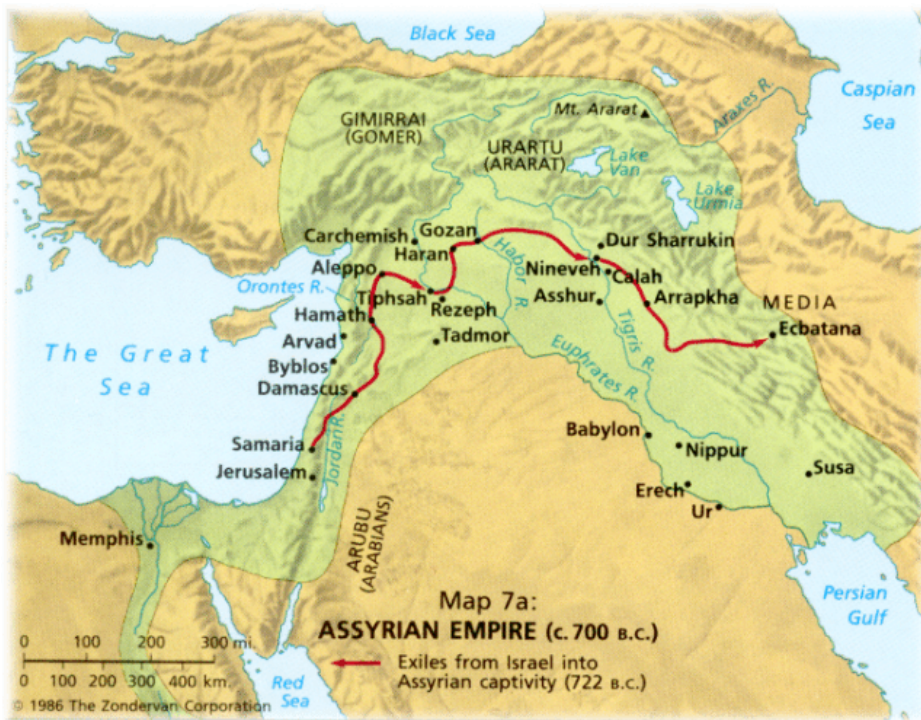
1 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.
 2 "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God:
 13 "And the Lord will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath, if you heed the commandments
 Deuteronomy 28:1-2,13

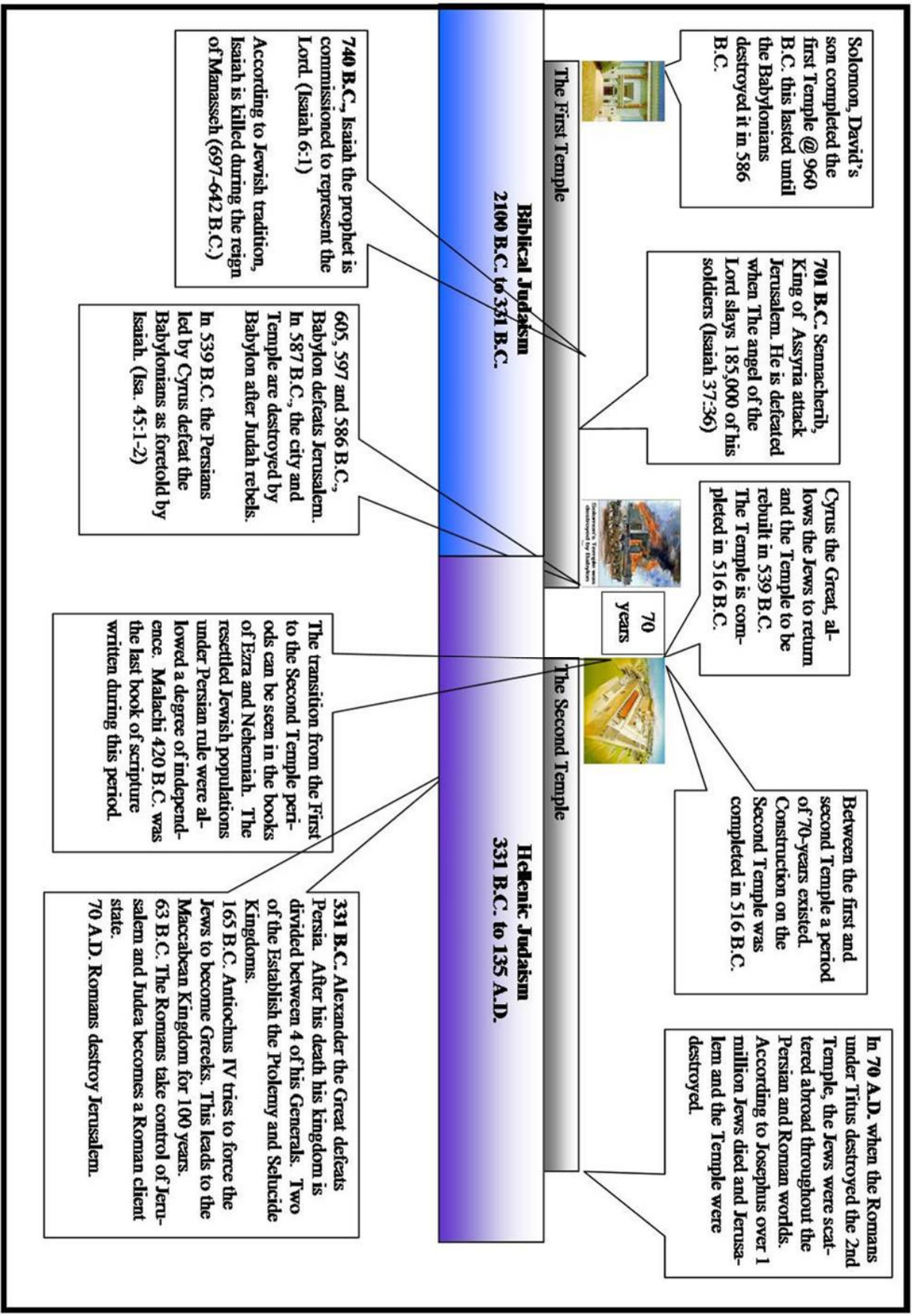
If Israel was an obedient nation, they would not suffer punishment or suffering, they would receive blessings. They would be placed above the nations of the earth. Therefore the idea, that the *Suffering Servant* of Isaiah 52:12-53:13, is the nation of Israel violates the Torah, because it implies Israel as a righteous servant would suffer. In fact, Isaiah presents Israel as a disobedient nation, which is judged by the LORD because of their sins (See Isaiah 42:24-25). The captivity in Babylon was not because of obedience but disobedience.

15 "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:
 49 "The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand,
 50 "a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor show favor to the young.

63 "And it shall be, that just as the Lord rejoiced over you to do you good and multiply you, so the Lord will rejoice over you to destroy you and bring you to nothing; and you shall be plucked from off the land which you go to possess.
Deuteronomy 28:15

Jeremiah refers to Nebuchadnezzar, as the "Servant" of the Lord (Jeremiah 27:6), when he conquers Jerusalem and takes the people captive to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is fulfilling the LORD's judgment against Judah, because of their sins, not because they are righteous.





The Three other Servant Songs

Isaiah 42:1-4	Isaiah 49:1-6	Isaiah 50:4-9
<p>Isaiah 42 1 "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles. 2 He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, Nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. 3 A bruised reed He will not break, And smoking flax He will not quench; He will bring forth justice for truth. 4 He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands shall wait for His law."</p>	<p>Isaiah 49 1 "Listen, O coastlands, to Me, And take heed, you peoples from afar! The Lord has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. 2 And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me." 3 "And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, In whom I will be glorified.' 4 Then I said, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain; Yet surely my just reward is with the Lord, And my work with my God.' " 5 "And now the Lord says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, So that Israel is gathered to Him (For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, And My God shall be My strength), 6 Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.' "</p>	<p>4 "The Lord God has given Me The tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear To hear as the learned. 5 The Lord God has opened My ear; And I was not rebellious, Nor did I turn away. 6 I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting. 7 "For the Lord God will help Me; Therefore I will not be disgraced; Therefore I have set My face like a flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed. 8 He is near who justifies Me; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand together. Who is My adversary? Let him come near Me. 9 Surely the Lord God will help Me; Who is he who will condemn Me? Indeed they will all grow old like a garment; The moth will eat them up.</p>