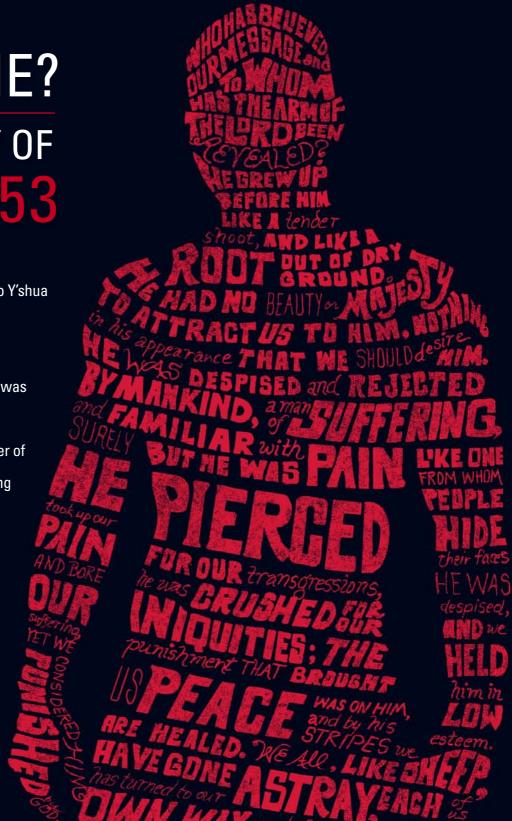
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WHO IS HE? THE MYSTERY OF ISAIAH 53

o the Hebrew Scriptures point to Y'shua (Jesus)? He said they did: "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). The 53rd chapter of Isaiah stirs much debate. Is it speaking about the Messiah? If so, does it describe Jesus?

In this edition, we tackle this controversy and share the stories of one secular and two Orthodox Jews who were greatly impacted by Isaiah 53 on their way to believing in Y'shua.



RABBIS, SKEPTICS AND THE SUFFERING MESSIAH by Daniel Mann

If anyone was a skeptic about Jews believing in Jesus, I was. Born to second-generation Jewish American parents in Brooklyn, I experienced much anti-Semitism growing up in the 1950s and '60s. Since my persecutors weren't Jewish, I assumed they were Christian. When I was fourteen, there was talk that a certain Jewish family in my neighborhood had converted to Christianity. I was filled with disgust. How could Jews do such a thing?

As a young adult, I had a lot of pent-up resentment against Christianity. I enjoyed ridiculing anyone who tried to talk with me about Jesus. But I was spiritually hungry. I moved to Israel, lived on a *kibbutz*, visited a Hasidic *yeshiva* to ask questions, but returned to the United States still wondering how to really connect with God—a Jewish God, not a Christian one.

People kept telling me about Jesus. I had a great problem with him. Many Jews had died in his name, and many who hated Jews called themselves Christian. And the idea of someone dying on a cross for me seemed like a bunch of hocus-pocus.

But I kept meeting Christians who seemed genuine in their love and concern for me, and their prayers for me seemed to "work." So finally I prayed, "God, if Jesus is the Savior and Messiah that the Hebrew prophets wrote about, you're going to have to show me."

As I studied the Bible, I began to see how Jesus could have fulfilled many of the prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures. I also discovered that the New Testament wasn't something arbitrarily tacked onto the Hebrew Bible by people who hated Jews. I was shocked to learn that Jews had written it and that Jesus himself was a Jew.

One of the most convincing passages showing that the Messiah would make the ultimate sacrifice and die for our sins was Isaiah 53.

Present-day rabbis disagree. Rashi (1040–1105 A.D.) might have been the first to deny that this incredible passage is messianic. But many Jewish sages, before and after Rashi,

saw the Messiah in Isaiah 53.

The highly regarded first-century Rabbi Shimon Ben Yochai stated: "The meaning of the words 'bruised for our iniquities' [Isaiah 53:5] is, that since the Messiah bears our iniquities, which produce the effect of his being bruised, it follows that whoso will not admit that the Messiah thus suffers for our iniquities, must endure and suffer them for them himself."

Rabbi Moshe Alshich, a famous sixteenth-century scholar, asserted: "[Our] Rabbis with one voice, accept and affirm the opinion that the prophet [Isaiah 53] is speaking of king Messiah."²

In contrast, today's rabbis have rallied around the assertion that the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah 53 is the nation of Israel and not the Messiah. Let's take a look:

Isaiah 53:1-3:

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.

Throughout Isaiah 53, the masculine singular pronoun "he" is used to designate the suffering servant. This pronoun is very rarely used in regards to Israel. More usually, Israel is referred to as "you," she/her," and "they/them." But there is no problem at all using "he" in reference to the Messiah.

Isaiah 53:4-6:

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken

by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

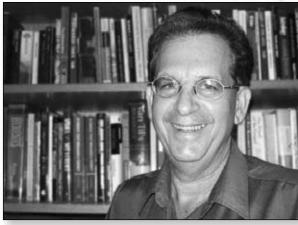
Just a quick read through the Prophets will show that Israel could not even bear its own sins, let alone those of others. It was our Jewish people who had "gone astray" and "turned to our own way."

According to the revered twelfth-century Jewish scholar Ramban (Nachmanides), the Redeemer is the *Messiah*:

Yet he carried our sicknesses, being himself sick and distressed for the transgressions which should have caused sickness and distress in us, and bearing the pains which we ought to have experienced. But we, when we saw him weakened and prostrate, thought that he was stricken, smitten of God. The chastisement of our peace was upon him—for God will correct him; and by his stripes we were healed.³

While today's rabbis deny substitutionary atonement—one man dying for the sins of the world—this had not previously been the case. The mystical Zohar records:

The children of the world are members one of another. When the Holy One desires to give healing to the world, he smites one just man amongst them, and for his sake heals all the rest. Whence do we learn this? From the saying, "He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:5). (Numbers, Pinchus, 218a)



Daniel Mann

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Isaiah 53:7:

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

We cannot find any biblical references to affirm that Israel was silent in the face of oppression. But we do find that this is true of Jesus. Before the Sanhedrin, he remained silent. When he finally spoke, it only aided the prosecution:

But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. Again the high priest asked him, "Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?" "I am," said Jesus. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his clothes. "Why do we need any more witnesses?" he asked. (Mark 14:61–63)

Jesus astonished Pilate with his silence: "Then Pilate asked him, 'Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?' But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor" (Matthew 27:13–14).

Isaiah 53:8-9:

By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

Yet who of his generation protested? (continued on page 8)

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PEDALING WITH A PURPOSE by Hans Myors

'm not famous like three-time Tour de France winner Greg LeMond, I've never cycled competitively. But since 1993, I've cycled the equivalent of almost nine times around the equator!

Why? I have always loved touring on my bike. But on four consecutive nights in February 1993 I dreamt I was traveling by bicycle. Except for the last night, the dreams were silent. The silence was broken by one word: "GO!" The command snapped me to attention, like the blast of the *shofar*.

Coming from a religious Jewish background, I had read about the prophets dreaming dreams, seeing visions or hearing the voice of *HaShem*. Believe me, if I were HaShem, I wouldn't pick someone like myself. I wasn't given any special message to spread, but I knew I had to go. Within four days, I was on the road. Since then, I have crossed the country sixteen times, pedaling almost 222,000 miles.

I help with disaster relief, counsel people and help faith organizations set up compassion ministries. My ministry is called Pedal Prayers, and with every revolution of my bicycle wheels a prayer goes up to heaven. That's over one billion prayers so far! I often pray in Hebrew. I use my actions to express my faith in Y'shua (Jesus).

How did a Jew studying to be a rabbi end up believing in Jesus? Let me take you back to my childhood in Germany.

I was born in 1956 on a small farm outside the town of Bad Toelz, Bavaria. I was the oldest of four siblings. My parents were Holocaust survivors. They were not in the concentration camps, but were rescued and hidden when they were adolescents. My father lost all of his family in the

camps. The only one to survive on my mother's

side was her mother.

A lot of older people in our part of Bavaria wished for the "old days" (under Hitler). So we didn't tell anyone we were Jewish or openly practice our faith. The nearest synagogue was in Munich, 60 miles away.

My parents lived in constant fear that if we were found out we would be taken away; they had Holocaust nightmares. My father handled them with alcohol. My mother went through terrible mood swings.

My grandmother lived with us and kept a kosher home. She never told us about her time in the concentration camp and wore long sleeves to cover the number tattoo on her arm. When she lit the candles on *Shabbat*, she closed the thick curtains on the windows. We didn't have a *mezuzah* on the door.

I remember my grandmother diligently removing every speck of leaven from the house before *Pesach*. I remember lighting the menorah at Hanukkah and spinning the *dreidel*. My favorite food was *latkes* with applesauce.

When I was fourteen, we moved to the Riem area of Munich so I could get medical attention for a serious ear infection and so that I could expand my education at a specialized high school. I was on track to become the first in my family to attend university.

There were Jewish people in our new neighborhood, so we could openly practice our faith and attend synagogue. I spent much time studying for my *bar mitzvah*, which I had on my fifteenth birthday. It meant a lot to me to be counted in the *minyan*.

My parents wanted me to become a rabbi. I went to *yeshiva* afternoons and on Sundays, but after eighteen months I dropped out. I couldn't find the relevance in tractates thousands of years old. I wanted to know how *Torah* related to me now. It troubled me that we couldn't go to *Adonai* directly with our wants and needs.

For the 1973–1974 school year, I traveled to a small rural high school in Ohio as an exchange student. My host family was Christian, but they didn't proselytize me. My host mother tried very hard to prepare kosher meals, and she found a *hanukkiah* for me. It was hard to be the only Jewish person in the community of 1,000 people.

The family would mention Jesus, and I did peek into one of their Bibles. It made me curious, but I felt I needed to explore it later by myself.

After returning to Germany and completing high school, I moved into a small apartment in the *Olympischen Dorf* (1972 Summer Olympics athletes' village) in Munich while I attended university. Now that I was on my own, I wanted to

see if the Messiah in the Christian faith was the same Messiah we Jews were waiting for. During Hanukkah 1975, I bought a New Testament.

As I read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, I was amazed that the majority of the people were Jewish and that so much could be linked back to the *Tanakh*. I discovered more than 50 prophecies in the Psalms that pointed to Jesus



Hans Myors and his recumbent bike

being the Messiah, but the strongest evidence was in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. Even though Isaiah 53 was written seven hundred years before the birth of Y'shua, it foretold his crucifixion. Verse 5 says the Messiah "was pierced for our transgressions." I became convinced Y'shua was the Redeemer of Yisrael we Jews had been longing for.

I didn't tell anybody what I believed for almost five months. I wasn't sure how people would react, especially my family. I found out when I went home for Passover in 1976.

Things happened quite suddenly when I rang the doorbell. My father opened the door and asked me how I was. I unhesitatingly said that I believed Y'shua is the Messiah. My father started to curse and scream that I was no longer his son. Through the open door, I could see my mother crying and going into the kitchen and closing the door. I never caught sight of my siblings. Before the front door was closed on me for good, I watched my grandmother

remove a white mourning cloth from the bureau drawer to cover up my picture on the wall. Before slamming the door, my father yelled that from now on I would be a stranger to my family.

This was an utter shock. Just nearing my twentieth birthday, I was forever cut off from my family. A week later friends told me there had been a funeral for me at the

synagogue. I have never seen my family since, but I cannot deny the one in whom I have come to believe.

I finished my university education and taught a year of sixth grade before immigrating to the United States in 1979. I received my citizenship in 1984 and traveled and did social work with non-profit and religious agencies. For the first ten years of my new faith, I was mostly alone in living it out. It wasn't until 1986 while I was working in San Francisco that I met other Jewish believers in Jesus. I attended *Erev Shabbat* services at the Jews for Jesus Shalom House.

People call me "The Cycling Rev." But I am still a Jew, like Jesus—with a higher purpose. I have helped after the Great Mississippi River Flood in 1993; Hurricanes Andrew, Charley, Emily, Frances, Isadore, Ivan, Katrina, Lili, Opal and Rita; and the Los Angeles earthquake in 1994. I try to ride to the disaster area if I am within 500 miles. I also

volunteer with Habitat for Humanity.

I have never been without money or food. If I come across someone who is hungry, I give them a meal and a few food items to take along. I get a lot of my funding through what I call "green handshakes" (on-the-spot donations), "road manna" (money I find alongside the road), and speaking engagements.

I want to show the love of HaShem through my actions. The Bible says, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (James 2:17). And Y'shua said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

More than twenty years ago HaShem told me, "Go." Until I'm unable or HE tells me, "Stop," I'll keep on pedaling and praying. ■

Visit Han's website at www.pedalprayers.org

WHY AREN'T OUR PEOPLE TOLD THIS? by Matt Sieger



Debbie Landers in 1993

any Jewish refugees from Russia settled in Omaha, Nebraska, between the 1880s and World War I. Among them were Debbie Landers' grandparents. Landers, born Deberah Schwartz in Omaha in 1951, and her younger sister were raised Orthodox by their parents. The Schwartzes were one of just four Jewish

families in a primarily Catholic neighborhood.

Unfortunately, Debbie still remembers taunts of "Christ killer" and "dirty Jew" from the neighborhood children. But she has good memories of family holiday celebrations, which included her grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins. She followed her parents' advice to always do *mitzvahs* for others. She considered this the best way to stay in good favor with God.

But her feelings toward God changed when her father died of a heart attack when she was fifteen.

"I thought, How could you take my father from me? How could you do that?" she recalls.

When other important people in her life died over the next ten years, she became still more hardened toward God. She began to wonder, *Who's next?* She was especially fearful on Yom Kippur, when she pictured God with a big book with her name in it as well as the names of other people she loved.

Her father's death did motivate her professionally. She attended college and became a nurse.

"I wanted to be a nurse because I love taking care of people," says Debbie, "and I wanted to be able to care for people like my father, who had a heart condition." She worked in the coronary care unit of an Omaha hospital for several years.

Although God wasn't part of her life, a full-page ad in a major magazine caught her eye when she was in her twenties.

"It was a picture of a guy with dark hair, very handsome" Debbie says. "It was an ad for Jews for Jesus, and I thought, Wow! What is this!? I wasn't offended—just surprised."

When she was 25, she and Richard Pearl were married under the *chuppah*. They lived in Milwaukee, where Richard worked for the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*. They had two children, Laura and Andrew. When Richard's brother asked him to work for his paint company, the Pearls relocated to St. Louis.

Debbie had begun to experience weakness on one side of her body, dizziness and difficulty walking, and the symptoms intensified after Andrew's birth. In 1983 she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis; she sank into depression.

She and Richard were experiencing much tension in their marriage, and they divorced in 1987. After a lull in her MS symptoms, Debbie joined the singles group at the Jewish Community Center and met Myke Landers, whom she married later that year.

"Everything seemed to be going well," says Debbie, "but then my body went on the blink. I was so sick and miserable."

One night, when the pain was unbearable, she telephoned her good friend Sue, a Jewish woman she had met a few years before at an MS support group. Sue asked, "Do you have a Bible?" Debbie grabbed her Hebrew Scriptures, and Sue asked her to read the 53rd chapter of the book of Isaiah aloud over the phone.

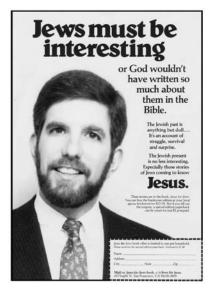
After reading it, Debbie asked, "Who is this man they are talking about?"

"It's all about Jesus," Sue replied.

"You're kidding me. What? He's there? He's in Isaiah?"

"He's all through the Hebrew Scriptures."

Until that moment, Sue had never told Debbie that she was a



An early Jews for Jesus ad like Debbie saw

Jewish believer in Jesus. But more shocking to Debbie was the thought that Isaiah might be writing about Jesus. She determined to find out if it was true.

"I told my husband that night," she recalls, "'We have to go get a Bible [one that included the New Testament].'" So she and Myke went to a bookstore and the saleswoman showed them a section full of Bibles.

"I didn't know which one to get," Debbie remembers. "The Holy Scriptures I owned were in the Masoretic text and hard to read. So I asked her, 'Do you have a Bible that you can understand what you're reading?' So she showed me one called *The Book*, and we got that."

Debbie began with the first five books of Moses. In 1988, when her husband was away one Saturday with his military Reserve unit, Debbie and her children went to Shabbat service. After the service Debbie felt ill, so she and the kids left right away. On Monday the rabbi phoned to ask if there was anything he could do. Eager to discuss the Scriptures—specifically Isaiah 53—Debbie asked him to stop by.

"When the rabbi arrived," Debbie says, "I asked him about Isaiah 53. He tried to tell me the passage was about Israel. But I knew it wasn't. I asked him, 'Why aren't our people told that this is about Jesus?' And he had no answer."

Soon afterwards, Debbie had another serious bout with her MS.

"I was doing childcare in our house, and I was so sick," she recalls. "I asked my next-door neighbor to help me put the children down for a nap. I just had to lie down on my bed. Then she asked if she could pray for me. When I said okay, she asked, 'Do you mind if I pray in the name of Jesus?' I said, 'That's fine.' She also suggested that I read the Gospel of John in the New Testament.

"So I began to read John, and I didn't see anything bad.
As a child in Sunday school, I learned maybe one sentence about Jesus: 'He was a rabbi, a good man and maybe a prophet.' But that was it. So I decided, I'm going to read these other men here—Matthew, Mark and Luke. And I was so fascinated, I could not read enough."

As she continued to read, she became convinced that

Jesus was indeed Israel's promised Messiah. With the encouragement of another Jewish woman in her neighborhood who believed in Jesus, Debbie decided to follow him.

All was not rosy after that. Her MS got worse over the next couple of years, and her newfound faith amplified problems in her marriage to Myke. They divorced in 1992. Then in 1997, a biopsy of a lump in her neck revealed that she had non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Debbie worked in a St. Louis bread company at the time, and when she shared the news, a co-worker said, "Oh Debbie, you're a goner." Debbie replied, "Oh, no I'm not. I know without the shadow of a doubt that when I die I'm going to live with God in his presence forever."

Debbie is still going strong. "The cancer is in my bone marrow," Debbie says. "It is stage four, but all these years it's been indolent [slow-growing], for which I thank the Lord."

She returned to nursing in 2005 and now attends to those with dementia and Alzheimer's at a residential care center.

"I was a mess on the outside," Debbie says. "But God healed me from the inside out. He changed me over time. And he continues to change me as I go deeper with my Y'shua [Jesus], whom I love so much."

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For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

DO ISAIAH 53 AND OTHER HEBREW SCRIPTURES SPEAK OF JESUS?

Jesus was deprived of justice ("judgment") and was killed. Israel was not "cut off

from the land of the living." It is also clearly untrue that Israel "had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his [Israel's] mouth." At times, the prophets charged that our people had morally descended below the gentiles. The Gospels declare that Jesus' grave was with both the wicked and the rich, as he died with sinners and was buried in a rich man's tomb.

Isaiah 53:10-11:

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

There is no reason to suppose that Israel's death could represent "an offering for sin." Sin offerings had to be without any blemish. But we were covered with them. How could the knowledge of Israel "justify many?" But faith (knowledge) in the Messiah will.

This servant, who dies as a sin offering for the people, will eventually "see the light of life and be satisfied." He will live subsequent to his death—a cryptic reference to the resurrection.

1. Adolf Neubauer, *The Fifty-Third Chapter of Isaiah: According to*

Jewish Interpreters (New York: KTAV Publishing House, 1969), p. xl.

2. Rachmiel Frydland, *What the Rabbis Know about the Messiah: A Study of Genealogy and Prophecy* (Clarksville, MD: Messianic Jewish Resources International, 2002), p. 53.

3. Neubauer, op. cit., p. 81.

Isaiah says that this servant will bear the iniquities of many. When I first studied this passage as a young man, it began to dawn on me that I personally needed to be forgiven for my wrongdoing, what the Bible calls "iniquities." And this servant—who was looking to me more and more like Jesus—had made that possible.

Jesus told the Jewish religious leaders of his day, "You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me" (John 5:39). Do Isaiah 53 and other Hebrew Scriptures speak of Jesus? Does the New Testament confirm this? Do as I did. Read and decide.

Daniel Mann, a Jewish believer in Jesus, has been teaching apologetics and theology at the New York School of the Bible since 1992. For a more in-depth look at Isaiah 53, read his article at http://mannsword.blogspot.com/2013/02/rabbis-skeptics-and-suffering-messiah.html. Find additional resources to more fully explore the implications of Isaiah 53 at j4j.co/isaiah53

