

Jesus is the Messiah

by Sebastian R Fama

As Catholics we consider Jews to be our spiritual elders. Pope Pius XI once said: "Spiritually, we are Semites." The purpose of this essay is not to repudiate Judaism but to show that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. The Jews were, are and always will be God's chosen people: "For the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable" (Romans 11:29).

The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) predicted the coming of the Messiah. It also gave us clues as to who He would be and what His mission would entail. Jews see the Messiah as a human leader. They believe he will inspire people to act in a righteous manner. He will also be a great general who will lead Israel to victory. He will be a descendent of King David and he will bring about the return of the Jewish people to Israel. He will also rebuild the temple. Furthermore, they believe the Messiah is yet to come. Christians, on the other hand, see the Messiah as the Son of God. His main purpose would be to atone for the sins of mankind. Christians believe that Jesus Christ is the Messiah. As the Son of God, He is fully divine. As the son of Mary, He is fully human.

Signs pointing to the Messiah begin to appear in the book of Genesis. We hear God forbidding Adam to eat from a certain tree, the serpent (the devil) tempts his wife Eve to defy this order, she does so and gives some of the fruit to her husband, God confronts them, Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent (2:15-17 and 3:1-13). As a result, God lets them all know that there will be consequences for their actions. But He also promises a remedy:

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." (Genesis 3:14-15).

The woman spoken of here is not Eve. God said that there would be enmity between the devil and the woman and between his offspring and hers. Enmity is a deep-seated hatred for and a complete opposition to something. Since Eve was a sinner, she would still, on occasion, give in to the temptations of the devil. Thus, there would be no complete separation. Conversely, Mary would be totally obedient to God. Her offspring (Jesus) would crush the head of the serpent by destroying the power of sin with His death on the cross.

Some Jewish Rabbis agree that Genesis 3:14-15 refers to the coming Messiah. However, they do not see him as an atoning Messiah. As previously stated, they believe the Messiah will be an earthly king who would deliver them from their earthly troubles. But the prophet Isaiah provides us with some evidence to the contrary:

But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned everyone to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgement, he was taken away; and for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people (Isaiah 53:5-8).

While Christians see this as a prophecy concerning the Messiah, our Jewish friends see this as a reference to the nation of Israel. One argument to this effect is based on Isaiah 52:13 which is an introduction to Isaiah 53. In that verse God says: "Behold, my servant shall prosper..." They assert that this can only refer to the people of Israel. The reason for that is simple. On several occasions prior to this the people of Israel are called "The servant of the Lord." Thus, they reason, Isaiah 53 must also be speaking about the people of Israel. But a title that is applied to the Nation of Israel can also be applied to an individual. The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) refer to David, Samuel, Moses, and other individuals as servants of the Lord. Furthermore, the text clearly states that in this case, the Lord's servant will suffer on behalf of others: "The chastisement upon Him was for our benefit." It also states that those benefitting from His suffering despised Him: "He was despised and we had no regard for Him" (Isaiah 53:3). If the suffering servant is the nation of Israel, on whose behalf does Israel suffer? Note what comes next:

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to bruise him; he has put him to grief; when he makes himself an offering for sin (Isaiah 53:9-10).

So why would Christians see Jesus in this passage? The text literally says that the suffering servant was an offering for sin. In other words; an atoning Messiah. He was innocent and died for sinners. Can this really be a description of the nation of Israel? When she was loyal to God she was blessed. When she turned her back on God she was punished. The suffering servant "had done no violence and there was no deceit in His mouth." And yet, "It was the will of the Lord to bruise Him."

The end of verse 10 says this: "The will of the Lord **shall (future tense) prosper in His hand.**" How is that possible if He is dead and in the grave? That could only happen if He were to be raised from the dead. And that is exactly what the New Testament says happened to Jesus. Isaiah 53 describes many of Jesus' other attributes as well. I would think if the Messiah were to be an earthly king He would be described as something more along the lines of a King David.

Many passages in the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) prefigure what we find in the New Testament. In other words, there are passages that predict or illustrate what is to come. In the Old Testament a lamb or goat would be sacrificed to atone for sins. Any animal sacrificed would have to be without blemish. This would prefigure Jesus' who was sinless (without blemish). The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way:

You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers . . . with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was made manifest at the end of the times for your sake." Man's sins, following on original sin, are punishable by death. By sending his own Son in the form of a slave, in the form of a fallen humanity, on account of sin, God "made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21; CCC 602).

That does not mean sin would cease to exist. What it means is that men would no longer be powerless against it. The grace produced by Jesus' death on the cross would empower them to overcome it. In the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) the Holy Spirit was bestowed on a select few. In the New Testament He is available to everyone. This is the power of the cross, a grace that transforms and saves. Jesus did not go to the cross to take away our free will. He went there to purchase our salvation.

God's grace comes to us in different ways. We receive it through prayer, the sacraments and at Mass. The Mass is the pure sacrifice spoken of in Malachi 1:11: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place, incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts." Jesus is a pure offering because He is God. Jeremiah says as much. The word rendered as Lord at the end of the following passage is Yahweh and it is a name that can only be used for God:

Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The **Lord** is our righteousness' (Jeremiah 23:5-6).

The Mass is a re-presentation of the Last Supper. When we celebrate the Mass, we are being obedient to our Lord's command: "Do this in remembrance of me" (Luke 22:19). To participate at Mass is to partake of the fruits of Jesus once for all sacrifice on the cross. On the cross Jesus is both High Priest and sacrifice. Jesus is the "Pure Offering" that is offered up among the nations. In other words, the New Testament sacrifice is not for the Jews alone, but for the whole world.