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ISAIAH'S MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

BY STEPHEN R. MILLER

THEOLOGICALLY, ISAIAH STANDS as the Mount Everest of the Old Testament. Central to Isaiah's message and to God's plan for the redemption of the human race is the Messiah (literally, "anointed one"). No prophet gives a more complete picture of Messiah's Person and work than does Isaiah. Who was this Old Testament Messiah? He was Jesus of Nazareth. The New Testament writers (for example, John 1:41; 4:25) and Jesus Himself (vv. 25-26; Luke 24:44-48) affirmed this identification.¹ Moreover, the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah's first coming were perfectly fulfilled in Jesus' life and ministry.

Above: Isaiah, as depicted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Direct Messianic Prophecies

Messianic prophecies fall into three basic categories—types (prominent in the Pentateuch; compare Ex. 12:1-51 with 1 Cor. 5:7), indirect prophecies, and direct prophecies. We will first examine Isaiah's direct, personal messianic prophecies. In this type of prophecy the inspired Old Testament author wrote directly of the Person and/or work of the

LESSON REFERENCE

ETB: The Book of Isaiah

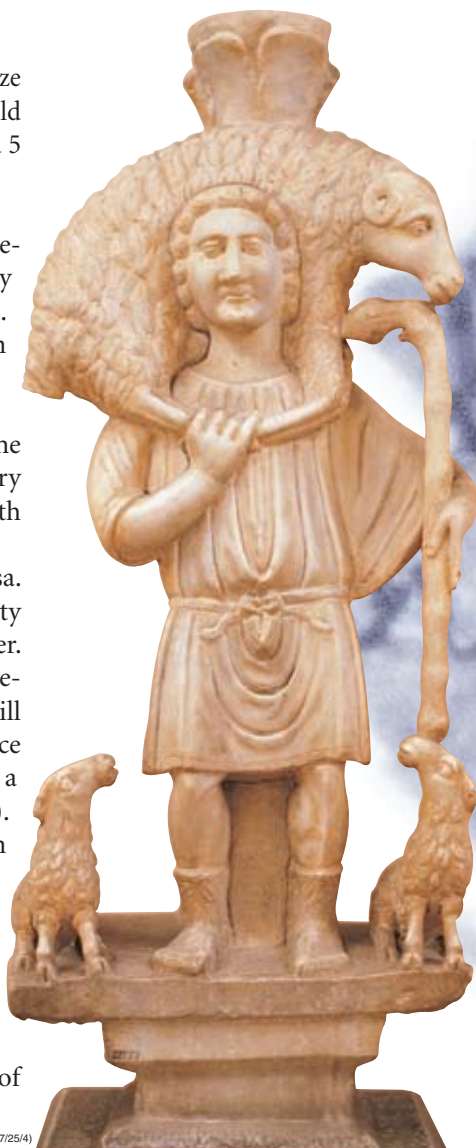
Davidic Messiah. Evangelical scholars generally recognize about 70 direct predictions of the Messiah in the Old Testament² and the following 10 in Isaiah (5 as King and 5 as Servant-Priest).

Messiah as King—Isaiah depicted the Messiah most frequently as King. In Isaiah 4:2-6 Messiah’s royal ancestry (“the branch” from David’s line, HCSB; compare Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15) and glorious future reign are in view. In Isaiah 7:1-16, the prophet predicted King Messiah’s miraculous birth—to a virgin!³ Matthew positively identified this child as Jesus, the son of the virgin Mary (Matt. 1:20-23). No other person in history could legitimately bear the title Immanuel (“God with us”) except Jesus the Messiah.⁴

Messiah will be history’s most amazing King (Isa. 9:1-7). The “son” of the virgin will be the “Mighty God” (an epithet for Yahweh Himself; 10:21, HCSB; Jer. 32:18) and the “Eternal Father” (the eternal and therefore uncreated source of all creation). His reign will never end. In Isaiah 11:1-16 Isaiah described the peace and safety of Messiah’s universal reign in terms of a return to garden of Eden conditions (compare 65:25). The loving and just reign of our King is stressed in Isaiah 16:5.

Messiah as Servant (Priest)—Four passages in Isaiah are known as “Servant Songs” (42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13–53:12).⁵ These passages depict the coming Messiah as the Lord’s faithful “Servant.” He is obedient to the Father’s will and fulfills His priestly work of redemption.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO BOB SCHATZ/GRECO-ROMAN MUSEUM, ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT (17/25/4)



Left: One of Isaiah’s titles for the coming Messiah was “shepherd.”

Right: Basalt foundation stones on the tel at Bethshean in northern Israel. The Messiah was coming as a tested stone foundation (Isa. 28:16).

MESSIANIC TITLES IN ISAIAH

The following messianic titles summarize the unimaginable greatness of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

The Branch	(4:2; 11:1)
Immanuel	(7:14)
The Light of the World	(9:2; 60:1)
Wonderful Counselor	(9:6)
Mighty God	(9:6)
Eternal Father	(9:6)
Prince of Peace	(9:6)
A Shoot	(11:1)
Anointed One—with the Spirit	(11:2; 42:1; 61:1)
Judge	(16:5)
King	(24:23; 32:1; 33:17,22) ⁶
The Tested Stone, Precious Cornerstone, Sure Foundation	(28:16)
The Glory of the Lord	(40:5; 60:1)
Shepherd	(40:11)
My Servant	(42:1; 49:3,5,6; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11)
My Chosen One	(42:1)
A Witness to the Peoples	(55:4)
Leader and Commander for the Peoples	(55:4)
Redeemer	(59:20)





ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BOB SCHATZ/COURTESY FERRINI AND BIONDI (29/19/98/10)



Left: Dead Sea Scroll fragment containing parts of Isaiah 26:19–27:1: “...your dead shall live again, and their bodies shall rise, shall awake... My people, enter your chambers, and shut your doors...to punish the iniquity of the inhabitants of the earth... In that day...and on Leviathan.” Shown are the original fragment and an infrared photograph, which shows unseen details of the fragment.

The first Servant Song (42:1-9; Jesus Christ, according to Matt. 12:15-21) emphasizes the Messiah’s character (for instance, He is just, strong, and peaceful). Both the first and second Servant Songs assert the inevitable success of His mission as a spiritual “light to the nations” (Isa. 42:6, HCSB; 49:6). Though “despised” at His First Advent, Christ will someday receive the honor He deserves (49:7; compare Phil. 2:10-11). Isaiah predicted Christ’s mockery and torture in the third Servant Song (Isa. 50:4-11; compare Matt. 26:67; 27:26,30-31,39-44). Yet with God’s help the Servant would fulfill His mission and overcome all opposition (Isa. 50:7-9). The third Song concludes with a frightening warning to trust in the true spiritual light (Messiah) or face “torment” (vv. 10-11).

If the Book of Isaiah is the theological Mount Everest of the Old Testament, the fourth Servant Song (52:13–53:12) is its peak. According to R. H. Gundry, Isaiah 53 is quoted or referred to in 41 verses in the New Testament.⁷ The New Testament witness is loud and clear—the Servant of this fourth Servant Song is none other than Jesus of Nazareth (compare Acts 8:30-35). Here Isaiah described the Messiah’s atonement for our sin at Calvary (especially 53:4-6,8,11-12). Though not labeled a servant song, Isaiah 55:3-5 depicts the Servant offering salvation (made possible by His atonement) to all nations.

Living With Anticipation

The fulfillment of these messianic prophecies would have been centuries or even millennia in the future for Isaiah’s original audience. But Isaiah and his fellow believers did not know this. No doubt they eagerly watched for the Messiah’s coming, hoping it would be in their lifetimes. Regardless of the exact time of fulfillment, these promises assured Isaiah that someday God would raise up a Savior for sin and a righteous Ruler who would bring world peace, security, and freedom from tyrants. People still need a Savior from sin, and

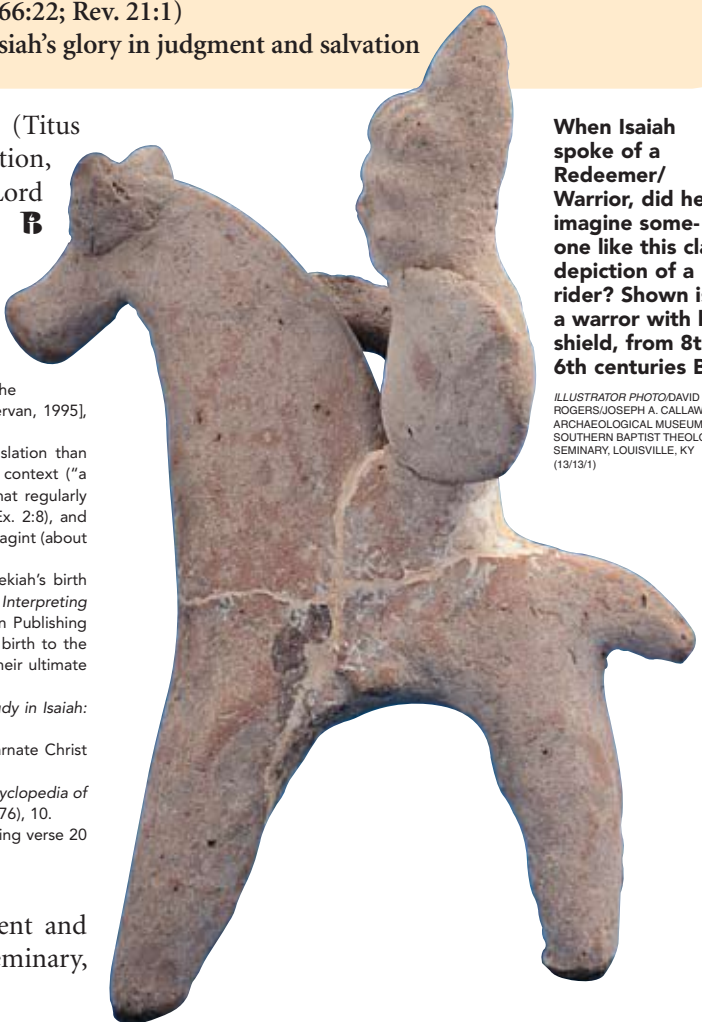
ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/DAVID ROGERS (4/17/1)

INDIRECT MESSIANIC PROPHECIES

Many texts in Isaiah prophesy the Messiah indirectly. Prophecies of Yahweh’s coming to judge the earth and His reign are indirectly messianic since the Bible is clear that earth’s coming Judge and the King of the messianic age will be the Messiah—God incarnate (for example, Isa. 4:2-6; 9:6-7; Matt. 25:31-46; 2 Thess. 1:7-10; Rev. 19:11-21; 20:4). All the following messianic prophecies are of this Yahweh as Judge/King type except Isaiah 32:1-2 (Messiah as the ideal King) and Isaiah 61:1-2 (applied by some evangelicals to Isaiah as well as to the future Messiah).

Isaiah 2:2-4	Messiah’s reign of justice and peace
Isaiah 24:21-23	Messiah reigning on Mount Zion
Isaiah 25:6-12	Messiah’s victory over death (1 Cor. 15:54; Rev. 21:4)
Isaiah 28:16	Messiah as cornerstone, a sure foundation (Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:6)
Isaiah 30:19-26	Blessings of Messiah’s reign ⁸
Isaiah 32:1-2	Messiah the ideal King
Isaiah 33:17,22	Messiah as divine King
Isaiah 35:1-10	Joy and blessing in Messiah’s kingdom
Isaiah 40:3-5	Messiah’s glorious appearance (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23)
Isaiah 40:9-11	Messiah as our victorious Shepherd
Isaiah 59:15b-21	Messiah as divine Warrior who brings justice (Rom. 11:26-27)
Isaiah 60:1-3	Messiah as the Light of the world
Isaiah 61:1-3	Messiah as Proclaimer of good news (Luke 4:16-21)
Isaiah 62:11-12	Messiah as coming Savior (compare Rev. 22:12)
Isaiah 63:1-6	Messiah as Redeemer and Judge (compare Rev. 19:11-21)
Isaiah 65:17-25	Messiah as Creator of a wonderful new world (compare Isa. 11:6-9; 66:22; Rev. 21:1)
Isaiah 66:15-24	The revelation of Messiah’s glory in judgment and salvation

Messiah’s coming remains the “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13, HCSB) for believers suffering persecution, hardship, disease, and death. “Amen! Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20, HCSB).



When Isaiah spoke of a Redeemer/ Warrior, did he imagine someone like this clay depiction of a rider? Shown is a warrior with his shield, from 8th-6th centuries B.C.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO: DAVID ROGERS/JOSEPH A. CALLAWAY ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM/THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, LOUISVILLE, KY (13/131)

1. Twice in the New Testament the Greek transliteration of Hebrew “mashiah,” “Messias,” appears as a designation for Jesus (John 1:41; 4:25). Like Hebrew *mashiah*, Greek *Christos* means “anointed one” and is the word from which we get our English name “Christ.” *Christos* appears over 500 times in the New Testament as a title for Jesus.

2. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. identified 65 direct messianic prophecies in the Old Testament (*The Messiah in the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995], 240-142).

3. In Isaiah 7:14, “virgin” (HCSB, NIV, for example) is a better translation than “young woman” (NRSV) for the following reasons: (1) the supernatural context (“a sign”), (2) the usage of Hebrew *’almah* in the Old Testament (a term that regularly denotes a young woman who is a virgin; compare Gen. 24:43, HCSB; Ex. 2:8), and (3) the Greek translation *parthenos* (specific term for “virgin”) in the Septuagint (about 250 B.C.) and New Testament (Matt. 1:23).

4. Some evangelical scholars have suggested both a near/now (Hezekiah’s birth to Ahaz’ wife [Kaiser, 160] or a child of Isaiah’s wife [Herbert M. Wolf, *Interpreting Isaiah: The Suffering and Glory of the Messiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 91]) and a far/not-yet fulfillment of this prophecy (Jesus’ birth to the virgin Mary). Unlike critical scholars, they agree that Isaiah’s words find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus the Messiah.

5. For further study of the Servant Songs, see F. Duane Lindsey, *A Study in Isaiah: The Servant Songs* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985).

6. In Isaiah 6:5, “the King, the Lord of Hosts” is a title of the preincarnate Christ (compare John 12:40-41).

7. R. H. Gundry, “Quotations in the NT” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Merrill C. Tenney, gen. ed., vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 10.

8. Kaiser sees Isaiah 30:19-26 as a direct messianic prophecy, interpreting verse 20 (compare HCSB, NASB) to speak of Messiah as “Teacher” (172-173).

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