

Role of Prophet

Throughout the Hebrew Bible we can see many examples of God speaking His word to people primarily through the Prophets who were used as His spokesman. There are quite a few other prophets amongst the major and minor ones who don't have writings in the Hebrew Scriptures. Elijah and Elisha are examples of two of the greatest Prophets and there are no writings by them (Glaser 2010:49).

The Old Testament Prophets had one purpose. This was to be a spokesman for God. They would have gone to a variety of places to speak God's word to His people. However, they would have not been part of the Temple as such, and would have not taken part in the given religious worships of the day. A Prophet would usually have been respected but would have been on the fringe of the community. God used the Prophet as His oracle to speak to the people. And we know that in the book of Isaiah, God wanted to reveal to the people of Judah that if they didn't repent then destruction was going to come their way.

How was the Jewish Nation organized?

Israel was divided in 2, the North and the South, the South being Jerusalem. The split of Israel between the North had been taken by the Assyrians in 722 – 1. The capital of Assyria was Nineveh (See the story of Jonah). The Assyrians took the conquered people of the North and had them scattered to deter any rebellion and to keep them as an oppressed people. After the destruction of the Northern kingdom the Hebrew Scriptures talk of the Southern kingdom. And by 597 BC Jerusalem was taken over by the Babylonians, another tribe which had ultimately taken over the Assyrians. By approximately 597 BC the temple of Solomon was destroyed. A few decades later the Persian ruler gave permission to rebuild the temple which was only to be destroyed in 70 CE this time by the Roman Empire. The historical books approximately span 600 years. There was the birth of David's kingdom around 1000 BC until the return to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah in the mid-5th century BC.

Who was the Prophet Isaiah?

Isaiah was a scholar and he served as a prophet and great preacher under the reign of at least 3 kings. He was from a privileged background. His prophetic ministry began while Uzziah was king. During the first part of Isaiah's ministry Assyria was a huge super power which spanned an area in Mesopotamia that included modern day Iraq and it was Assyria that was threatening the Southern kingdom of Israel. Isaiah was continually warning the Jewish people against the Assyrian leaders and urging Judah to repent and return to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and not pursue greed, oppress the poor and follow other Gods. Only God would save His people from an

Assyrian attack. The people of Judah were dishonouring the temple and not looking to their God who could save them and God warned them through Isaiah that calamity would come upon them. (See Isaiah 57).

Following a year of inconclusive campaigning, the united Medes and Babylonians laid siege to the Assyrian capital Nineveh in May 612. And so it was that the Babylonians conquered the Assyrians. We see Isaiah warning the Israelites to obey the Torah so that the Babylonians would not be brought in by God as an example of God's judgement. (See Isaiah 30:8-11).

Isaiah is not preaching a new system of ethics (Johnson: 1987:75) Isaiah was not talking of a religion of endless sacrifices and priestly ceremonies but of an ethical religion of the heart. Talmudic tradition suggests that he was murdered in the reign of the idol worshipping king Manasseh.

Suffering servant

Who was the suffering servant? Many Jewish people would argue that this passage of scripture is a representation of Israel. Some even suggest that it could be Isaiah himself. When we think of what Messianic Jews see as the Messiah Yeshua, he was the only way we can have a relationship with God through His sacrifice for our freedom.

This text of Isaiah 53 introduces the reader to the suffering servant. He is described by the Prophet as nothing special to look at. And yet we can read how this Servant is willing to suffer for the benefit of those who are rejecting Him. This Servant bears all pain and grief. He takes on the punishment that otherwise would be on mankind.

There is no denying that the Servant is a Servant who was a heroic figure for Jews and extends to Gentiles and the Nations.

Yeshua said that:

'No one has greater love than a person who lays down his life for His friends (John 15:13).

Christ was short for Christos meaning the anointed/Messiah. Jesus was the Greek word for Joshua. So it was Yeshua the Messiah who laid down His life so that we can be restored in a right relationship with God. As Israel was redeemed from slavery God would redeem the Jewish people from slavery to sin through the Messiah's death which enabled both Jews to have the gift of salvation and the Nations are then grafted in.

In the year 1050 according to Rashi, he argued that this passage of Isaiah 53 was speaking of the Nation of Israel. This caused controversies with many religious scholars of the time. Moses Maimonides known as Rabbi Moses ben Maimonides 1135 – 1204, born in Spain, is one of the great Jewish philosophers of the Middle Ages. He stated that Rashi was incorrect in his assertions and was going against the Jewish traditional point of view (Fruchtenbaum 1998:54).

Another Rabbi known as Rabbi Jonathan ben Eliezer who live around 7th century CE wrote a prayer for the afternoon service of Yom Kippur(Day of Atonement) It reads as follows:

‘Messiah our righteousness is departed from us; horror hath seized us, and we have none to justify us. He hath borne the yoke of our iniquities, and our transgressions and is wounded because of our transgression. He bears our sin upon his shoulder, that he may find pardon for our iniquities. We shall be healed by his wound at the time the Eternal will create him (the Messiah) as a new creature. O bring him up from the circle of the earth. Raise him up from Seir, to assemble us the second time on Mount Lebanon, by the hand of Yinnon(Isaiah 53 1969:5).

We can suggest that this prayer refers to the Messiah as He was the one who ‘bore our sins ‘and He was the one who was ‘departed from us’. We have none now who will justify the Jewish people. As the word Yinnon can be translated to mean Messiah, we can suggest that that the prayer tells of the Messiah who is to come a second time to ‘assemble us’.

There were other Rabbis who also refuted Rashi’s view such as Rabbi Moshe Cohen Ibn of Cordova of Spain.’ At approximately 1350 wrote a reflexion of his interpretation of Isaiah 53 which contradicted Rashi’s view:

‘I shall be free from the forced and far-fetched interpretations of which others have been guilty. This prophecy was delivered by Isaiah at the divine command for the purpose of making known to us something about the nature of the future Messiah who is to come and deliver Israel’(Isaiah 53 1969:99 –102).

These Rabbis are not saying that Isaiah 53 is referring to Israel, but a suffering servant who was taking our iniquities on Himself.

Jewish scholars today suggest that the Christians have changed Isaiah 53 and the servant is Israel. How can Israel die on behalf of sinful Israel? The words on the text in this case make no sense. Many therefore have come to realise that this servant has to be Yeshua, the promised Messiah.

Questions to consider for the reader:

Are we truly able to keep 613 laws and regulations?

248 mandatory commandments and 365 prohibitions.

Or is it impossible?

Are we convinced that when we leave this life as Law abiding Jews, we can stand in front of a powerful God and say that we have kept every Law and regulation?

The law makes us aware of sin, but it will not save us from the coming of God's wrath. As calamity came upon the North and the south so it will come for those who do not accept the atonement of the Suffering Servant.

For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which is lost. (Luke 19:10)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him be saved. (John 3:16).

Bibliography

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