

Jesus is the Messiah

by Sebastian R Fama

Before we begin, we need to be clear on one thing. 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 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 like King David. By his example, 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. Jews 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 (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, who symbolizes the devil (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.

Our Jewish friends do not associate anything in the second and third chapters of Genesis with the Messiah. They will claim that God is merely saying that there would be an ongoing hostility between humanity and snakes. But if that is the case why did God say: "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel?" Shouldn't He have said: "They will bruise your head, and you will bruise their heels?" Hebrew has the equivalent of both words and they are used hundreds of times throughout the Old Testament. Why not here? And if the serpent is just a regular snake, how is it that this snake acts as God's adversary in tempting Adam and Eve?

The idea that the Messiah was to atone for our sins is further developed by Isaiah:

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. (53:5-7).

Once again, Jews object to this interpretation. They claim that Isaiah 53 refers to the people of Israel. They base their argument 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 Old Testament refers 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).

So why would Christians see Jesus in this passage? Because the entire 53rd chapter of Isaiah describes Him. He wasn't the sort of person that the world would take notice of. He was rejected by His own people. Because He was tortured and killed He was thought to be cursed by God. Although He was innocent Jesus did not protest when He was being persecuted. And He willingly died for our sins. All of this is spoken of in Isaiah 53.

Much of the Old Testament prefigures 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 the one perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. The Catechism of the Catholic Church says it this way:

Consequently, St. Peter can formulate the apostolic faith in the divine plan of salvation in 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 doesn't 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 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 offer us salvation. We can still say no to Him by sinning.

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 in 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. In the words of Isaiah: "I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations" (42:6).

It is true that not all who claim to follow Christ act in a Christ like manner. However, it is also true that those who do are a great benefit to all those they encounter. And isn't that the sort of thing we all believed would happen at the coming of the Messiah?