

SEEING THE CROSS FROM ABOVE

The Importance of Having God's Perspective on Yeshua's Death

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Perspective is a term that describes the way that you form a mental opinion based on what you see from a particular vantage point. That means two people viewing the same object, action or symbol might interpret it differently because they are seeing it from a different angle. That also means our ability to process the events of history and the things occurring around us in the present are influenced by our unique perspective on the world.

The issue of perspective is especially evident in two interrelated passages of Scripture. The first of these passages is the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. It initially describes a man called God's Servant (52:13) in this manner:

“He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him” (v. 3).

Clearly this is someone who has a very negative public opinion that leads to his rejection. The next verse goes on to give a dramatic contrast:

“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (v. 4).

This is a statement of perspective. The reality is the Servant is doing an act of righteousness for the welfare of the people by taking on their griefs and sorrows. But from the perspective of the people who are observing this man identified as a Servant, they consider Him to be judged and punished by God. So when people have that kind of perspective, it is human nature to assume that it is a punishment for something that *he* did wrong. In spite of this flawed perspective, the passage continues by describing what is really taking place:

“But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed” (v. 5).

So the text is showing that the people who are observing the punishment are the actual guilty parties. They are the ones who sinned, while the Servant is innocent. The passage backs this up by describing Him as being like an innocent lamb that is led to slaughter (v. 7) and that He hadn't done anything wrong (v. 9). Yet the Servant is the one who bears the punishment. The point here is that it is easy for people to draw conclusions, based on their perspective, that are inaccurate when it comes to what God is doing in this world.

This understanding is evident in the Targums, which were ancient translations of the Hebrew words of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) into Aramaic. So they are windows into the minds of the Jewish people in biblical times, and they reflect what was widely believed about the interpretation of Scripture. *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* directly states that this passage is about the

Messiah (Isaiah 52:13). This shows that the belief existed among the Jewish people in those days that the Messiah would be punished, even to the point of death, because of the sins of the people.

It is not until you get to Rashi in the 11th century A.D. that this passage was interpreted rabbinically as a reference to the sufferings of Israel. That view arose from his perspective that Christianity was in error, and thus there was a need for alternative interpretations. But the problem with this view, in addition to originating 1700 years after Isaiah recorded the words, is that Israel has never been fully innocent or bore the sins of the nations in atonement. It is an interpretation that

Yet that is a perspective that persists today in Judaism because so many Jewish people simply cannot bring themselves to see Isaiah 53 as a description of Yeshua (Jesus), even though the text fits Him perfectly. The chapter is completely omitted from the official Scripture readings in the synagogue. As a result, the content has become virtually unknown within the contemporary Jewish community.

Nevertheless, the key to understanding this prophecy of Isaiah is that from man's perspective, the Servant was being judged by God for something He did wrong, when in reality it was God judging *their* sins and the Servant paid the price for them. That was the prophecy. And 700 years later, it became a reality exactly as it was foretold in a second passage that underscores the issue of perspective.

The difference between God's perspective and man's perspective of the crucifixion of Yeshua

If you were present in second temple times, and you are walking outside the walls of the city of Jerusalem, you may have come upon a place where the Romans carried out their harsh form of capital punishment—crucifixion. That was a horrible kind of execution that was intended to make a person suffer greatly. Moreover, it was performed in a very public way so that it sent a message to people that there was no choice other than to submit to the might of Rome. That made the act of crucifixion a symbol, and the same was true for the object at the center of the act—a cross created by nailing a person to a crossbeam and then attaching it to an upright post that had been embedded in the ground.

It was well-known in territories conquered by Rome, that it wasn't just murderers and those who engage in rebellion who were punished by crucifixion. Even people guilty of theft could be killed that way. So if you were walking past the place called Golgotha—the place of the skull where crucifixions were carried out, and it happened to be in the late afternoon on what was called the Preparation Day (the day before Passover), there among common criminals dying for their harmful actions, was Yeshua.

So if you knew about Rome's way of dealing with crime, it seems reasonable to conclude that He, too, was being punished for a legitimate offense. After all, there was a man on one side of Him who was known for robbing people. And there was another captured thief on the other side. Matthew 27:37 tells us that "above His head they put up the charge against Him which read, 'This is Yeshua the king of the Jews.'" It was well-known that such a claim was totally forbidden under Roman rule, so you could readily conclude that His crime was sedition, and thus worthy of death in that context.

It's not like people didn't know about Yeshua, however. He had created quite a stir in Jerusalem during the week prior to His crucifixion. And He had been going there in previous years during the feasts, each time teaching publicly. And He did talk about the kingdom of heaven and how He was the Savior. So if you were in Jerusalem, you would have been familiar

with His message.

But if you were passing by Golgotha on that day, the likelihood is that you were one of the persons who had rejected that message because most of the believers had either scattered or were in hiding at that moment (Mat 26:56).¹ Here is how the majority of those who were present responded:

Those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, “You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Mat 27:39-40).

They were basically saying, “You lied about heading up your kingdom. Now you are getting what you deserve.” As we read on, we are told:

In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if he delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Mat 27:41-43).

When you mock someone, you repeat that person’s words, but not in agreement. You turn the words back on the person who apparently cannot live up to them. And that’s what they did. Thus we can observe that both common people of Israel and the leaders of Israel looked upon the scene and concluded that Yeshua was not who He said He was. And they were all convinced that He was being punished for His own sinful actions. That was their perspective.

It was just like Isaiah had foretold 700 years earlier. This is the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy when he declared in advance: “we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4). By using the first person plural pronoun “we,” Isaiah was placing this statement in the context of his inclusion in the Jewish people. He was saying that from a national perspective—both common people and leaders alike—Yeshua was not the Messiah of Israel and the one who brings salvation from our sins. And this account in the gospel of Matthew confirms it.

But that perception also applies to anyone who rejects Yeshua, because always at the heart of such rejection is a misunderstanding of who He is and what He has done. From the perspective of the people present at Golgotha, Yeshua had no choice. He was shackled and guarded by soldiers with weapons. He has been weakened by being beaten and scourged, which was performed by a whip with pieces of metal that would flail away your skin. People like that don’t escape. But Yeshua had stated previously:

“Do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?” (Mat 26:53).

Nevertheless, Yeshua did not exercise that power because He was doing what He had come to this earth to accomplish—to bring salvation for sinful people like those in Jerusalem on that day, and here in this place today. So from God’s perspective, Yeshua went to the cross as an exercise of His will. Thus He allowed Himself to be led to slaughter just like a lamb, as Isaiah foretold. And then, in the most monumental moment in all of history, the consequences of the sins of the humanity came upon Him.

At that moment, “Yeshua cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘*Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?*’ that is [in Aramaic], ‘My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?’” (Mat 27:46).

¹ John was the only disciple who was present. He was accompanied by Mary, the mother of Yeshua and several other women (Jn 21:24; Mat 27:55-56; Mk 15:40-41).

That is a direct quotation from Psalm 22, in which David describes graphically in advance all of the things that would transpire during the crucifixion of Yeshua. How long this forsaking lasted, we do not know. And just exactly what it meant in a divine sense, we cannot comprehend. But when the sins of humanity were placed upon Yeshua, the full wrath of God the Father was carried out against sin. And Yeshua experienced the penalty multiplied by everyone who has ever lived and believes in Him by faith. That was what was really happening at that very moment. That's looking at it from God's perspective, which is ultimately the only true perspective.

Then to emphasize how the crowd had it all wrong from their perspective, we are told, "Some of those who were standing there, when they heard it, began saying, 'This man is calling for Elijah'" (Mat 27:47). That was a confusion over Elijah's name because Eli is the first part of Eliyahu, meaning "My God is the LORD."

This, then, is the greatest distinction you will ever see when it comes to the issue of perspective. It was all about interpreting the meaning associated with the same event. From the perspective of human beings, this was a common man getting punished for something he did wrong. But from God's perspective, it was about the Son of God who came to this earth taking on the punishment of people that he loves dearly.

The sad thing is that the people of that day should have known better. They had the written words from Isaiah and David available to them. Yet they ignored those words. And the same is true today. All of those prophetic words and more are easily accessible to everyone. So we all have the ability to understand what God has accomplished in a redemptive sense, rather than relying on our distorted, misinformed human perspective. We just have to read the Book.

Whether we know it or not, Yeshua *is* the King of Israel. He is the one who Saves. He trusts and delights in the Father, and He is the Son of God, all of these things, just as the prophets foretold. The mockers and the scoffers missed that understanding when it was right in front of them. And it is right in front of us as well because God's message has been preserved for these many centuries for our benefit.

Having God's perspective for our lives

We need to acknowledge that God's perspective for this world may be different than our own

When we look at the world around us, it is easy to think that God is not in control of what is going on. You can live a life that is consistent with biblical principles and still face persecution and difficulties of many kinds. You can consider how people suffer and begin to doubt that He even exists. Sometimes everything around us looks like a total catastrophe without a solution. But that is the perspective from the ground, not from above.

Having a perspective on this world that is in line with God's perspective means knowing the specific things that He has declared. Yes, when Yeshua was on the cross dying, it looked like everything was hopeless. But the prophets, including Isaiah in 53:10 and David in Psalm 16:10, declared that even though He would die, the Servant and the Holy one of Israel would rise again from the grave. That was part of God's plan of redemption as well. And since those things came to pass exactly as foretold, we can know with confidence that His promises to save us and to enable us to live on in His presence after we die are all true as well.

When we have that kind of perspective that aligns with God's perspective, the immediate circumstances around us don't have to make sense completely. At the end of the day, it boils down to whether we can say with sincerity, "In God we trust; in Yeshua we trust."

We need to know that God is able to redeem all things for His purposes

It is such a commonly quoted verse that it can seem cliché, but we can indeed stand on Paul's exhortation: "We know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28).

When you go through a trial that comes from completely out of the blue like a health crisis, God can cause that to work together for good. He can cause you to lean on Him all the more and at the same time give you a testimony of faith to others. Or maybe it's not life dealing you a hardship, but it is the result of making a wrong choice on your own. From your perspective, you can get down on yourself. But from God's perspective, He desires to lift you up, help you to learn from your mistake, and then use you for His purpose. An addiction can turn into a ministry, for example, if you allow God to use you in helping others. That is why perspective is so important for making a difference in our world.

We need to show grace to those who haven't yet come to know God's perspective

At one point in their lives, many people mocked and scoffed at God and Yeshua and those who believe in Him. Then, due to circumstances of many kinds, they realized the truth of the gospel, and said yes, "I believe in Yeshua. Save me Lord from my sins." When that happens, we become a new creature in Messiah as Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:17. And we become someone who is very different in many ways.

So as believers in Yeshua spend time with others who have not reached that point of understanding and spiritual transformation, we need to show them grace, to be patient with them, and simply walk their journey with them. Let us not pressure people to make a spiritual commitment. Rather, be a gentle witness and leave the rest to God. That, too is a matter of having God's perspective, not our own.

These practical applications are empowered by having a right understanding of what took place two thousand years ago at a place right outside the city of Jerusalem. May we all have no confusion over what the cross represents. It is a symbol of victory over sin and death, won by Yeshua. That's how God sees it from above. And we are greatly blessed when we see it the same way from down here below.