

How Jesus fulfilled Isaiah's restoration prophecies

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(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

Virgin Birth

Matthew 1:22-23: Jesus' virgin-birth fulfills Isaiah 7:14 — the Immanuel promise.

Historical Context:

King Ahaz and his people are terrified when Israel and Aram invade Judah in 735/734 BC (Isa 7:1-2).

Ahaz is urged to calm down and trust God; the invaders will not succeed (Isa 7:3-9)!

God offers Ahaz a miraculous sign to confirm his promise and strengthen the king's faith (Isa 7:11).

But Ahaz has already decided to seek Assyria's help. Feigning piety, he declines God's offer (Isa 7:12), so God himself takes the initiative to provide a sign: The birth of Immanuel to a young woman or virgin (Isa 7:14).

Immanuel means "God is with us". The promise had an imminent fulfillment for Ahaz, and an intended long-term fulfillment for the whole house of David.

For Ahaz, the birth of baby Immanuel (probably within the next year) was intended to encourage faith in God, whose presence with them meant that, just as their immediate enemies will soon be destroyed (Isa 7:16; 8:4), so ultimately will Assyria and all other enemies of God's people (Isa 8:9-10).

Note that the Hebrew word *'almāh* (usually rendered "virgin" in 7:14) is a general term for a young woman that leaves room for a non-supernatural fulfillment in Ahaz's day (Isa 7:15-16).¹

With regard to the sign's long-term fulfillment, a supernatural virgin-birth is undoubtedly intended.

The Immanuel promise, addressed to the whole Davidic dynasty,² was a stinging indictment of its members:

God was exasperated with their unbelief and failure; none were qualified to be Messiah's father.

Instead, Messiah will be Yahweh's own son (cf. 2Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7, 12) — truly "God with us".³

¹ Some scholars insist that *'almāh* means "virgin". Others claim that had Isaiah intended "virgin", he would have employed the more specific term *bē'tūlāh*. After all, Isaiah does employ *bē'tūlāh* elsewhere (in 23:4, 12; 37:22; 47:1; 62:5).

Interestingly, both terms are used to describe Rebekah in Genesis 24: the inspired narrator identifies her as *bē'tūlāh* (in 24:16), whereas Abraham's servant (unfamiliar with her virginal status) calls her *'almāh* (in 24:43). *'almāh* in 24:43 is rendered "maiden" by the ASV, NASB1995, NIV1984 and WEB, and "young woman" by the EXB, LEB, NET and RSV.

² Each of the three YOUs of Isaiah 7:13-14 is 2nd person masculine plural — God is addressing the entire house of David.

³ A virgin birth is entirely in keeping with God's promises and action elsewhere in salvation-history. Recall the many "barren" women throughout Israel's history: Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Samson's mother, Hannah, Elizabeth. Through divine intervention these women gave birth to patriarchs, saviors and prophets; God's purposes triumphed despite human disability and failure! All those incidents foreshadowed Mary's virginal conception and birth of the Savior. (See Luke 1:34-37; Romans 4:17; 9:8-9; Galatians 4:23.)

This son to be born receives further attention in Isaiah 9:6-7:

He will be a Davidic king; his names show that he will truly be “God with us”.⁴

Isaiah 11:1-10 elaborates further on this Davidic king and his reign of peace and justice.

Matthew grasped the fact that Isaiah’s Immanuel promises (Isa 7:14; 8:9-10) were to be understood in light of the prophet’s Davidic king prophecies, and that “Immanuel” would ultimately be born of a virgin.

Davidic King

Luke 1:32-33: Jesus was the Messiah, the Davidic king promised in Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1-10; 16:5, and 32:1.

He would be truly God’s “Son” (cf. Ps 2:7).

Gabriel here strongly echoes the language of Isaiah 9:7: Jesus will inherit the throne of David and his reign and kingdom will have no end.

Isaiah’s prophecies are set against the brutality of the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 733 BC.

Assyria had annexed the northern half of Israel (Galilee) as well as the region east of the Jordan (Gilead).

Many Israelites had been deported (2Kgs 15:29).

Against this seeming hopelessness, Isaiah foretold the birth and gift of a son — a king from David’s line, through whom God would crush the foreign oppressor and restore the nation (Isa 9:1-7).

This king will bring about lasting peace and justice for God’s people.

The name “Jesus” is the Greek form of “Joshua”, which means “the LORD saves”.

But his deliverance is spiritual, not political — a deliverance from the guilt and power of sin (Mt 1:21).

John the Forerunner

Matthew 3:3 (and parallels: Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4-6; John 1:23):

John the Baptist was the one foretold in Isaiah 40:3, who would announce Yahweh’s advent:

The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of Yahweh.

Make straight in the desert a highway for our God.”

(Literal rendering of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 40:3.)

Isaiah 40 introduces Isaiah’s final prophecies (chaps. 40 – 66) which look well beyond the prophet’s own time to the nation’s return from exile in Babylon and, ultimately, to the deliverance from sin that Messiah will bring.

In Jesus, God himself visited his people in order to deliver them from the captivity of sin (Mt 1:21).

Yahweh’s Son and Servant

In his baptism Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit for his messianic task (Lk 3:22a; 4:18; Ac 10:38).

As Jesus came up from the water, the Father declared (Luke 3:22b):

“You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

⁴ Three things serve to connect Isaiah 9:1-7 with the earlier Immanuel promises of 7:14 and 8:9-10:

First, this new prophecy concerns a child to be born and a son to be given to Israel.

Second, the son’s names show his close connection with God himself — he will truly be “God with us”.

Third, through him God will crush the oppressor and restore the nation, thereby fulfilling the promise of Isaiah 8:9-10.

This served to identify Jesus, first, as God's anointed Son (Ps 2:2, 7).

And second, as the Spirit-anointed Servant of Isaiah 42:1 and 61:1 — the One "in whom [God's] soul delights" (Isa 42:1).

As noted above, Isaiah's final section (chaps. 40 – 66) foretells the nation's return from exile in Babylon. Cyrus, whom Isaiah twice mentions by name, will be God's agent to deliver the people and rebuild Jerusalem (41:2, 25; 44:28; 45:1-5, 13; 46:11; 48:14-15).

Yet this final section looks beyond Cyrus:

Isaiah's prophecies are punctuated with several "Servant Songs" that foretell the coming of One who will definitively save and restore. These Songs are found in Isaiah 42:1-7; 49:1-9; 50:4-9, 52:13 – 53:12; 61:1-3.⁵ Yahweh's Servant will save by dealing with the root cause of exile — the people's sin (Isaiah 53; cf. 50:1): Needless to say, these prophecies are fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus.

Ministry in Galilee

Matthew 4:12-16: Jesus' initial ministry in Galilee fulfilled the prophecies of Isaiah 9:1-2.

As aforementioned, Isaiah 9 is set against the brutality of the Assyrian invasion of Israel in 733 BC.

Assyria had annexed all of Galilee (Zebulun and Naphtali), and many Israelites had been deported (2Kgs 15:29).

Against this seeming hopelessness, Isaiah prophecies concerning God's restoration of the nation and their deliverance from the foreign oppressor (Isa 9:1-5).

The gloom and darkness began to be lifted with Jesus' ministry in these northern regions.

Jesus was the promised King (Isa 9:6-7) who would restore the nation and establish God's eternal kingdom.⁶

Ministry of Healing

Matthew 8:16-17:

Jesus' healing ministry, which included deliverance from demonic possession, fulfilled Isaiah 53:4 — part of Isaiah's Suffering Servant prophecy (his 4th Servant Song).

Matthew 12:15-21:

Jesus' healing ministry also fulfilled Isaiah 42:1-4 — part of Isaiah's 1st Servant Song.

This song speaks of the Servant's gentleness towards the weak and his coming rule of justice.

Luke 7:21-22:

Responding to John's inquiry, Jesus points to his healing ministry as fulfilling Isaiah 35:5-6a and 61:1.

Isaiah 35 relates the joy of those returning to Jerusalem, having been released from exile (see 35:10).

Isaiah 61:1 concerns the redemptive work of Yahweh's Servant (see below).

⁵ Isaiah 61:1-3 isn't usually, but probably ought to be, regarded as an additional (fifth) Servant Song.

⁶ Isaiah's prophecy is also referenced by Zechariah as he celebrates Israel's imminent deliverance through Jesus (Lk 1:79; cf. Isa 9:2).

Jesus has brought the Messianic Banquet

In Isaiah, God promised to someday invite all the world's nations to a sumptuous feast on Mount Zion, where he would "swallow up death" for them — "forever" (Isa 24:23; 25:6-8).

Jesus has fulfilled this; he has brought the "wine" of God's kingdom (Isa 25:6; Jn 2:1-11), and he invites people to participate in the feast via the gospel (Lk 13:28-30; 14:15-24).

For those who are in Christ, death has been effectively abolished; eternal life is their present possession (Jn 6:50; 8:51; 11:25-26; 1Cor 15:54-55; 2Tim 1:10).

The Servant's work of Restoration

Luke 4:17-21: Jesus' work fulfilled Isaiah 61:1-2 — part of Isaiah's 5th Servant Song.⁵

The prophet's references to "liberty" for captives and "the year of the LORD's favor" recall the Year of Jubilee. Yahweh's Servant would bring Jubilee release for the Jewish captives.

Luke 4:18-19 (literal Greek text):

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim to the captives release and to the blind recovery of sight, to send forth the oppressed in release, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

The Greek words here rendered "release" derive from the noun *aphesis* (Strong's G859) — "a sending away, letting go, release". In context, they denote a release from imprisonment and bondage.

The term is often rendered as "forgiveness", which is a release from sins.⁷

Once every 50 years, at the close of the Day of Atonement (and with the nation's sin now removed), trumpets would sound throughout the Land to announce the Year of Jubilee — to proclaim rest for the land, liberty for bonded laborers, and the restoration of family inheritances (Lev 25:8-13, 39-41).

Isaiah applies this concept of Jubilee release to the end of the Jewish exile in Babylon (Isa 61:1-2).

Release from captivity and restoration to their ancestral land!

Jesus applies Isaiah's prophecy — and implicitly the concept of Jubilee release — to his own mission of bringing deliverance for the poor and oppressed: "Today [Isaiah's prophecy] has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Lk 4:21). With the start of Jesus' ministry, the long-anticipated epoch of salvation had finally commenced.⁸

In both his person and his work Jesus fulfilled the Law of Moses and the Old Testament prophets (Lk 24:27, 44). Jesus' ministry was one of release and restoration, ultimately through his own death.

Isaiah's prophesied deliverance of Judah from captivity was definitively fulfilled in the spiritual release of God's people from bondage to sin and death and Satan.

The Jubilee regulations of the Law anticipated this same spiritual release.

⁷ See, for example, Matthew 26:28; Luke 1:77; 3:3; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 5:31; 10:43; Hebrews 9:22. Forgiveness of sins is "the letting go" of them as if they had never been committed; it is a "remission" of their penalty, a "release" from the obligation or debt incurred. The KJV most frequently renders *aphesis* as "remission". See the Bible Hub entry for *aphesis* (Strong's G859): https://biblehub.com/greek/strongs_859.htm.

⁸ For an analysis of Jesus' preaching in the Nazareth synagogue, and from which I have drawn for this section, see Joel B. Green, NICNT series: *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), pp. 206-219.

The Suffering Servant

Acts 8:32-35; 1 Peter 2:22-25:

The apostolic Church understood Isaiah's Suffering Servant prophecy (Isaiah 53) to be fulfilled in Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross, through which sinners are justified (i.e., acquitted and declared righteous). (Jesus also viewed his impending death as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy — see Luke 22:37.)

Isaiah 53 explains the Servant's death as the means through which the people's guilt will be removed:

- The Servant will be "pierced" and "crushed" on account of the people's sin (53:5).
- He will bear the "chastisement" (punishment) due to them, so that they might enjoy peace (53:5).
- He will be "cut off out of the land of the living" for the people's sin (53:8) — killed despite his own innocence (53:9).
- It will be Yahweh's will to "crush" him in order to make his life "an offering for guilt" (53:10).
- The Servant will be raised from death and restored to divine favor (Isaiah 53:11a, WEB):
*After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied.*⁹
- He will "justify the many, for he shall bear their iniquities" (53:11b, MEV).
- In his death "he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors" (53:12, MEV).
- Isaiah 52:13-15 (and 53:12) relates the Servant's vindication and exaltation before the nations.

These prophecies are truly remarkable:

- They revealed how the Law's sin-offerings were to be finally fulfilled:
No mere animal can ever atone for sin — rather, the Servant will himself substitute for sinners, enduring and thereby appeasing God's wrath (propitiation).
That's how God can forgive people (e.g., Ex 34:7; Ps 32:1-5; 51:1-9; 85:1-3; 103:3, 10-12; 130:1ff.).
- Israel's exile — her expulsion from the Land — represented the nation's death.¹⁰
The Servant is the one true (the ideal, perfect) Israelite. In fact, he's even called "Israel" (Isa 49:3).
So, in Isaiah 53, "Israel" the person substitutes for "Israel" the people.
The Servant's death represented the ultimate exile; his resurrection was the ultimate restoration.
He substituted for the nation: his death/exile on behalf of Israel means that the nation will be finally restored, not destroyed.
- All this, of course, is fulfilled in Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross (2 Corinthians 5:21, my translation):
God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Charles Ellicott comments concerning this verse:

God dealt with Christ, not as though He were a sinner, like other men, but as though He were sin itself, absolutely identified with it.¹¹

⁹ The WEB here follows the Dead Sea Scrolls and the Septuagint; Bible versions following the Masoretic text omit "the light".

¹⁰ Moses, in Deuteronomy, anticipates Israel's future exile and portrays it as the nation's death. Disobedience will cause Israel to "perish" or "be destroyed" (Dt 4:26; 6:15; 7:4; 8:19-20; 11:17; 28:20; 45, 48, 51, 61, 63; 30:18).

As Kenneth Turner observes, "The people will continue to exist physically in exile; yet, as a single entity, Israel is said to 'perish' or 'be destroyed.' So, it is not Israel as an historical or socio-religious people, but Israel as Yahweh's elect son and servant (Dt 1:31; 7:6; 14:1) that is put to death. Exile constitutes the death of Israel as a nation in covenant [with Yahweh]."

Kenneth J. Turner, quoted by Jason S. DeRouchie in *Why the Third Day? The Promise of Resurrection in All of Scripture*, <https://jasonderouchie.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/2019-Why-the-Third-Day-Resurrection-DeRouchie.pdf>.

¹¹ Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers, via the Bible Hub website:

https://biblehub.com/commentaries/ellicott/2_corinthians/5.htm.

- The Servant died “for the transgression of my people” (Isa 53:8) — for Israel. But Gentiles, too, would be saved through him (Isa 42:4, 6; 49:6; 51:4-5; 56:6-8). Through Jesus all of God’s elect people are gathered and reconciled to him (1Pet 2:24-25; cf. Jn 11:51-52).

The gospels, also, are concerned to show Jesus’ solidarity with Israel and with mankind.

- Whereas Adam and Israel both failed as God’s “son” (Gen 5:1-3; Ex 4:22; Dt 32:5, 20; Hos 11:1ff.), Christ in the desert withstood Satan and rendered perfect obedience to God’s Law (Lk 4:4, 8, 12).
- Jesus in his baptism identified with sinners and represented his people — necessary in order to “fulfill all righteousness” (Mt 3:13-15). As our Sin-bearer Jesus symbolically sank beneath the flood of God’s wrath, in anticipation of his death (Mk 10:38). And he emerged from the water in anticipation of resurrection victory and as the Head of a New Humanity.
- Christian baptism depicts our own union with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection (Rom 6:3ff.). To be “in Christ” is to be joined to and identified with him in his redemptive accomplishments. Our old (Adamic/sinful) identity is dead and buried — gone forever. His resurrection served to vindicate him as the Son of God (Rom 1:4; 1Tim 3:16) — demonstrating that he was no mere criminal, but God’s chosen Messiah and instrument of redemption. Jesus was “raised for our justification” (Rom 4:25). This means that:
 - 1) Our justification is tied up with God’s acceptance of his atoning sacrifice on our behalf.
 - 2) His own righteousness becomes ours and is credited to us (Rom 4:22-24; 2Cor 5:21).

Jesus left heaven to become truly human (Jn 1:14; Php 2:6-8).

The Heidelberg Catechism explains why this was necessary:

16 Q: Why must he [Jesus] be a true and righteous man?

A: He must be a true man because the justice of God requires that the same human nature which has sinned should pay for sin (Rom 5:12, 15; 1Cor 15:21; Heb 2:14-16). He must be a righteous man because one who himself is a sinner cannot pay for others (Heb 7:26-27; 1Pet 3:18).

17 Q: Why must he at the same time be true God?

A: He must be true God so that by the power of his divine nature (Isa 9:6) he might bear in his human nature the burden of God's wrath (Dt 4:24; Nah 1:6; Ps 130:3), and might obtain for us and restore to us righteousness and life (Isa 53:5, 11; Jn 3:16; 2Cor 5:21).¹²

¹² The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Lord’s Day 6, adapted from the website *A Puritan’s Mind*: <https://www.apuritansmind.com/creeds-and-confessions/the-heidelberg-catechism-by-zacharias-ursinus/>.