

"ARM OF THE LORD" – REVEALING THE TRUTH AND EXPOSING THE LIE!¹

I. INTRODUCTION

A common phrase in the Hebrew Bible, “arm of the Lord”, a metaphor that normally would not conjure up thoughts of Christian “proof texts”, has found its way into the Christian messianic paradigm via its application in Isaiah 53:1. Christian missionaries claim that the “arm of the Lord” is a reference to the (Christian) messiah, Jesus, as demonstrated by the following examples:

The arm of the Lord is the Messiah and Saviour not the Jewish people or the nation of Israel.²

The Messiah, the arm of the LORD, is the subject of Psalm 110:2.³

Here is the startling revelation -- “the arm of the LORD” is a he, a person! It is a figure for a Savior, a Redeemer! “The arm of the LORD” is none other than the humble Servant!⁴

Yeshua/Jesus is the ARM of the Lord (Isaiah 53:1-5, 51:1,5, 59:16, 62:1-2,8, 63:1,3-5, Luke 1:46,51, John 12:37-38).⁵

Arm of the LORD is a phrase that is used exclusively to refer to the Messiah. The metaphor is used in no other context.⁶

Some writers go even beyond making a seemingly authoritative statement concerning what the “arm of the Lord” represents; they falsely attribute this interpretation to important Jewish works:

There is no confusion of Messianic Nationalism in the Targum. The “arm of the Lord” is the person of the coming Messiah to the Jewish Targumists both before and after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth.⁷

¹ Transliterations of Hebrew terminology into the Latin alphabet will follow these guidelines:

- Transliterated terminology is shown in ***bold italicized*** font
- The accented syllable in transliterated terminology is shown in ***SMALL CAPS*** font
- Latin vowel-sounds, A – E – I – O – U, are used (not the English versions thereof!)
- Distinct Hebrew letter that have ambiguous Latin letter sounds are transliterated according to the following rules:
 - A vocalized letter א is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel
 - A vocalized letter ו is transliterated as the equivalent Latin vowel with an added underscore
 - The letter ה is transliterated as “h”
 - The letter ח is transliterated as “ch”
 - The letter כ is transliterated as “k”
 - The letter ק is transliterated as “q”
 - A vocalized שְׁוָא (וְ אֵ אִ אֶ אֹ אִּ) is transliterated as a superscripted “e” following the consonant
 - There is no “doubling” of letters in the transliterations to reflect the ***daGESH*** (emphasis)

² **DOES ISAIAH 53 SPEAK OF JESUS -**

http://associate.com/ministry_files/Other_Electronic_Texts/Protestant/Isaiah.shtml

³ **Psalm 110 -** <http://www.branchofdauid.org/teachings4.htm>

⁴ **WHO IS THE SERVANT OF ISAIAH 53? -** <http://www.outreachtojudiasm.net/whois.html>

⁵ **LINE UPON LINE, LESSON #19 -** <http://www.hebroots.com/lul19.html>

⁶ **Come Home and After Babylon Look for the Messiah -** <http://www.ao.net/~fmoeller/isa50-52.htm>

⁷ **Isaiah 53 : The Suffering Messiah -** <http://www.ao.net/~fmoeller/isa53.htm>

Unfortunately, this writer fails to point out is that the *Targumim* (plural of *Targum*) were not literal translations of the Hebrew Bible into the Aramaic vernacular of the era. Rather, these were interpretive translations that often incorporated *Midrash* (homily), which is never used as a basis for prophecy nor taken as prophetic text.

As important a concept to Christianity as the “arm of the Lord” appears to be, its connection with the Christian "Old Testament" and, by implication, with the Hebrew Bible, requires careful scrutiny. Therefore, all direct references to the “arm of the Lord” in the Hebrew Bible, including the application in Isaiah 53:1,⁸ are examined in this essay in order to determine whether there is scriptural support for this claim by Christian missionaries.

II. OVERVIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN RATIONALE

The identification of the “arm of the Lord” with the messiah of Christianity by Christian missionaries originates in their interpretation of Isaiah 53, that it is a prophecy about the (Christian) messiah. The author of the Gospel of John "quotes" Isaiah 53:1, and declares that Jesus has fulfilled this prophecy:

John 12:37-41(KJV) – (37) But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: (38) That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? (39) Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, (40) He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. (41) These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of him.

The context here is that, although Jesus had performed many miracles before their eyes, as stated by Isaiah, the unbelief by the Jews in his divinity was caused by their blindness and the hardness of their hearts, which was, in and of itself, the fulfillment of yet another prophecy by Isaiah.⁹

In order to make this paradigm work, the applications of the “arm of the Lord” that appear throughout the Book of Isaiah, particularly those that occur within the *Fourth Servant Song* – at Isaiah 53:1,12, and nearby, are declared to be *de facto* references to Jesus, the messiah of Christianity. Another quote from a Christian website helps demonstrate this:

Who is the “Arm of the Lord”?

⁸ For a detailed analysis of “Isaiah 53” see *Who is the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53? Part I – The Jewish Interpretation, Valid or Not?* - *Who Is the* <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Isa53JP.pdf> and *Who Is the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53? Part II - The Christian Interpretation, Valid or Not?* - <http://thejewishhome.org/counter/Isa53CP.pdf>

⁹ In annotated Christian Bibles, John 12:40 points back to Isaiah 6:10. This is the source of the common and familiar charge by frustrated Christian missionaries that "Jews are blind, deaf, and hard-hearted, and that is why they reject Jesus".

What is the identity of the person described in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah? The identity is revealed in the first verse of the 53rd chapter. He is called the "Arm of the Lord", and the verse asks, "To whom is He revealed?" The term or description of the LORD'S arm is personified in a number of places. However, here in the 52nd and 53rd chapter we see that "Arm of the LORD" will suffer, be beaten, and killed but come back to life.

An arm is extension of the self. Our arms allow us to interact in the world. Isaiah is revealing to us information about the nature of the "Suffering Servant" that could easily be overlooked. The servant is none other than God himself who extends Himself into the world in the Body of man to intercede on the behalf of man because there is no alternative.¹⁰

By inference, all other occurrences of this anthropomorphism in the Christian "Old Testament" become synonymous with Jesus, who also is divine by virtue of being part of the Christian godhead.

III. A REVIEW OF (ALMOST ALL) REFERENCES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE TO GOD'S "ARM"

The Hebrew noun זְרוֹאֵף (*z'ro'af*), **arm**, appears on 38 occasions in the Hebrew Bible as an explicit references to God's "Arm". All but two of these verses are listed below. The two remaining passages appear in a single verse, Isaiah 51:5, which is a special case to be discussed later in the analysis.

To facilitate the analysis, the 36 verses are separated into seven groups, each of which reflects a common purpose or function of God's "Arm":

A. Role in the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt

1. **Exodus 6:6** - Therefore, say to the children of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will take you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you from their labor, and I will redeem you with an outstretched **Arm** and with great judgments.
2. **Deuteronomy 4:34** - Or has any god performed miracles to come and take him a nation from the midst of a[nother] nation, with trials, with signs, and with wonders, and with war and with a strong hand, and with an outstretched **Arm**, and with great awesome deeds, as all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?
3. **Deuteronomy 5:15** - And you shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and that the Lord your God took you out from there with a strong hand and with an outstretched **Arm**; therefore, the Lord, your God, commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.
4. **Deuteronomy 7:19** - The great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, the wonders, the mighty hand, and the outstretched **Arm** with which the Lord, your God, brought you out; so will the Lord, Your God, do to all the peoples you fear.
5. **Deuteronomy 9:29** - But they are Your people and Your inheritance, which You brought out with Your great strength and with Your outstretched **Arm**.
6. **Deuteronomy 26:8** - And the Lord brought us out from Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched **Arm**, with great awe, and with signs and wonders.

¹⁰ Is the Messiah God? - <http://www.truthnet.org/Christianity/Apologetics/ismessiahgod13/>

7. **2 Kings 17:36** - Only the Lord Who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great might and with an outstretched **Arm**, Him shall you fear, and to Him shall you prostrate yourselves and to Him shall you slaughter sacrifices.
8. **Isaiah 51:9** – Awaken, awaken, dress yourself with strength, O **Arm** of the Lord, awaken, awaken like days of old, generations of yore; are you not the one that hewed Rahav¹¹ and slew the sea monster?
9. **Isaiah 63:12** – He led at Moses' right the **Arm** of His glory, splitting the water before them to make for Himself an everlasting name.
10. **Psalms 77:16** - You redeemed Your people with Your **Arm**, the sons of Jacob and Joseph forever.
11. **Psalms 136:12** - With a strong hand and with an outstretched **Arm**, for His kindness is eternal.

B. Role in protecting Israel from her enemies and helping her

1. **Exodus 15:16** - May dread and fright fall upon them; with the **Arm** of Your greatness may they become as still as a stone, until Your people pass through, O Lord, until this nation that You have acquired passes through.
2. **Isaiah 40:10** - Behold the Lord God shall come with a strong [hand], and His **Arm** rules for Him; behold His reward is with Him, and His recompense is before Him.
3. **Isaiah 62:8** - The Lord swore by His right hand and by the **Arm** of His strength; I will no longer give your grain to your enemies, and foreigners shall no longer drink your wine for which you have toiled.
4. **Isaiah 63:5** – And I looked and there was no one helping, and I was astounded and there was no one supporting, and My **Arm** saved for Me, and My fury-that supported Me.
5. **Psalms 44:4** - For not by their sword did they inherit the land, neither did their arm save them, but Your right hand and Your **Arm** and the light of Your countenance, for You favored them.
6. **Psalms 79:11** - May the cry of the prisoner come before You; according to the greatness of Your **Arm**, set free those condemned to die.

C. Role in God's accomplishments and attributes

1. **Deuteronomy 11:2** - And you shall know this day; that [I speak] not with your children, who did not know and who did not see the instructions of the Lord, your God, His greatness, His mighty hand, and His outstretched **Arm**.
2. **Jeremiah 27:5** - I made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the face of the earth, with My great strength and with My outstretched **Arm**, and I gave it to him that pleased Me.
3. **Jeremiah 32:17** - "Alas! Lord God, behold, You have made the heaven and the earth by Your great power and Your outstretched **Arm**, and nothing is hidden from You.
4. **Psalms 71:18** - And even until old age and hoary hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I tell [of] Your **Arm** [might] to the generation, to everyone who comes -Your might.
5. **Psalms 89:14** - You have an **Arm** with might; Your hand is mighty, Your right hand is high.

¹¹ The name Rahav (רַחַב) [*Rahav*] is a metaphor for Egypt. (See also Psalms 87:4 & 89:11.)

6. **Psalms 98:1** - A song. Sing to the Lord a new song, for He performed wonders; His right hand and His holy **Arm** have saved Him.

D. Role in the gathering, judgment, and future redemption of Israel

1. **Isaiah 59:16** - And He saw that there was no man, and He was astounded for there was no intercessor, and His **Arm** saved for Him, and His righteousness, that supported Him.
2. **Isaiah 52:10** - The Lord has revealed His holy **Arm** before the eyes of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.
3. **Isaiah 53:1** - Who would have believed our report, and to whom was the **Arm** of the Lord revealed?
4. **Ezekiel 20:33** – As I live, says the Lord God, surely with a strong hand and with an outstretched **Arm** and with poured out fury, will I reign over you.
5. **Ezekiel 20:34** - And I shall take you out of the peoples, and I shall gather you from the lands in which you were scattered, with a strong hand and with an outstretched **Arm** and with poured out fury.

E. Role in dealing with individual personalities

1. **Isaiah 48:14** - All of you, gather and hearken, who of them told these? The Lord loves him, who shall do His work in Babylon and [show] His **Arm** [upon the] Chaldeans. [God is speaking of Cyrus, the agent appointed to bring Israel back to the Holy Land (see Isaiah 45:1).]
2. **Jeremiah 21:5** - And I will wage war with you with an outstretched hand and with a strong **Arm**, and with anger and with fury and with great wrath. [God is speaking to Zedekiah, the last King of Judah.]
3. **Psalms 89:22** – With whom My hand will be established, even My **Arm** will strengthen him. [God is speaking of King David and his future dynasty.]
4. **Job 40:9** - Do you have an **Arm** like God, or do you thunder like Him with [your] voice? [God is speaking to Job.]

F. Role in helping to draw the nations to God

1. **1 Kings 8:42** - For they shall hear of Your great Name, and of Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched **Arm**, and will come and pray toward this house.
2. **2 Chronicles 6:32** - And also to the stranger, who is not of Your people Israel, but will come from a distant land because of Your great name, Your strong hand, and Your outstretched **Arm**, and they will come and pray toward this House.

G. Role in subduing, defeating, and subjugating God's enemies

1. **Isaiah 30:30** - And the Lord shall make heard the glory of His voice, and the laying down of His **Arm** shall He show, with furious anger and a flame of consuming fire, bursting and storming rain, and hailstones.
2. **Psalms 89:11** - You crushed Rahav like one slain; with the **Arm** of Your might You scattered Your enemies.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE REFERENCES IN THE HEBREW BIBLE TO THE “ARM OF THE LORD”

The first step in analyzing these 36 references to the “arm of the Lord” was their grouping according to common themes. The next step is to look for a common thread that connects the various categories.

The most striking common theme these seven groups share is that all shown references to the “arm of the Lord” point to God, the Creator, taking some form of direct action and executing acts of vindication, either on behalf of or against some entity and, generally, with Israel somewhere in the picture. This is quite similar to instances of other anthropomorphisms found in the Hebrew Bible, such as God’s Hand, and God’s Finger. Therefore, the references to God’s Arm in the 36 examples cited above allude to both the physical and spiritual redemption (deliverance and salvation) of Israel from the hands of oppressors.

With this common theme in mind, look back at the list of 36 references to the “arm of the Lord” and ask yourself the following questions: *Can the messiah of Christianity be unambiguously identified with this common theme that connects all the instances of this symbolism, or with each and every application of it in the Hebrew Bible? Can one simply substitute the term “messiah” in each case and maintain the original context? Could it be that this paradigm was foisted on Christianity by the author of the Gospel of John?*¹²

The coup de grâce

As noted earlier, there are two additional references in the Hebrew Bible to the “arm of the Lord”, both of which occur in the same verse:

Isaiah 51:5 – My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, and My Arms shall judge peoples; islands shall wait for Me, and on My Arm shall they trust.

Take note of the occurrence of the reference by God to “My Arms” (plural) first, with which He will judge nations, and then a reference to “My Arm” (singular), in which the nations will trust. The KJV renders of this verse as follows:

Isaiah 51:5(KJV) - My righteousness is near; my salvation is gone forth, and mine arms shall judge the people; the isles shall wait upon me, and on mine arm shall they trust.
[Similar renditions are also found in the AMP, ASV, DARBY, ESV, KJ21, NASB, NKJV, RSV, and YLT Bibles.]¹³

This translation is consistent with the Jewish translation from the Hebrew.

¹² God’s Arm is mentioned on two other occasions in the New Testament, at Luke 1:51, where Mary “quotes” Psalms 98:1, but long before Jesus was born, and at Acts 13:17, where Paul, on his first missionary journey, addresses a crowd and refers to the Exodus from Egypt.

¹³ AMP – Amplified Bible; ASV – American Standard Version; DARBY – Darby Translation; ESV – English Standard Version; KJ21 – 21st Century King James Version; NASB – New American Standard Bible; NKJV – New King James Version; NRSV – New Revised Standard Version; RSV – Revised Standard Version; YLT – Young’s Literal Translation.

The Christian missionaries now face the following dilemma: *If the “arm of the Lord” is a metaphor for Jesus, what does the use of the plural “arms” mean? Does this imply that Jesus has a “partner messiah”? Which one of the “arms” represents Jesus?*

A survey of various Christian Bibles available on the Internet indicates that many follow in the footsteps of the KJV, and have both the plural “my arms” and the singular “my arm”, respectively, in their renditions of this verse. Other Christian translations deal with this verse in different ways. For example, the New International Version (NIV) Bible translation is:

Isaiah 51:5(NIV) - My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm. [See also the NIRV and NIV-UK Bibles.]¹⁴

The NIV and its related editions “solve” the problem by simply replacing the plural “my arms” with the singular “my arm”. *So, who authorized the NIV translators to change Isaiah’s divinely inspired words?*

The forced equation of the “arm of the Lord” with Jesus at John 12:38, which was designed to establish a major building block of the Christian messianic paradigm, has created a major stumbling block to it instead.

V. SUMMARY

Is the claim that the “arm of the Lord” is synonymous with the messiah valid?

Christian missionaries, who accept the New Testament as the “word of God”, are obligated to accept the statement therein that Jesus, the messiah of Christianity, is the “arm of the Lord”. However, as the analysis has shown, this equation cannot be made for at least the following two reasons:

- ➔ **The context of the respective passages in the Hebrew Bible does not support it**
- ➔ **It creates serious problems for the Christian messianic paradigm**

According to the Hebrew Bible, the “arm of the Lord”, as well as the hand and finger of the Lord, are anthropomorphic metaphors that symbolize direct actions taken by God. The promised Jewish Messiah, מָשִׁיחַ, (*mashi’ah*), is expected to complete the tasks spelled out in the messianic agenda that is found in the Hebrew Bible, and he will surely have some help from God, but he is not symbolized by any anthropomorphism of God’s limbs. The Hebrew Bible is very clear about the fact that מָשִׁיחַ will be a flesh and blood human being, a direct descendant of King David, not someone who will be a manifestation of God and worshipped.

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¹⁴ NIRV – New International Reader’s Version; NIV-UK – New International Version - UK.