

Isaiah 53

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This chapter is the central chapter of the second major division of the book. This section commences with a word of comfort for God's people and for Jerusalem. All hangs upon the intervention of God in the Person of His servant. We learn from chapter 41 that Israel had miserably failed as Jehovah's servant — "they are all vanity; their works are nothing; their molten images are wind and confusion" (Isaiah 41: 29).

In Isa. 40: 3, we have an obvious prophecy respecting John the Baptist as Jehovah's messenger; "Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

John was sent to prepare Jehovah's way, and in John 1: 30, calling attention to Jesus, the Baptist said; "This is He of whom I said, After me cometh a man who is preferred before me; for He was before me," an evident pointer to the pre-time glory of the Person of the Son of God. The Jesus of the New Testament is the Jehovah of the Old.

This second section of Isaiah, covering Isa. 40 to 66, closes with the re-gathering of Israel (Isa. 66: 20), and their presentation as an offering to the LORD. Also all nations and tongues shall be gathered to witness the glory of the LORD (v. 18). The grand finale of the way of Jehovah, which is introduced in Isa. 40 with the presentation of the Messiah, is that "it shall come to pass . . . all flesh [shall] come to worship before Me, saith the Lord" (Isa. 66: 23).

The basis of all this — the blessing of Israel, the blessing of the Gentiles, the glory of the LORD, is brought powerfully before us in chapter 53. The importance of this prophetic chapter is emphasised as we note its frequent citation in the New Testament — some fourteen references are found there.

As a matter of interest we note there are 66 chapters in Isaiah, and there are 66 books in the Bible. The first section of the prophet covers 39 chapters; there are 39 books in the Old Testament. This leaves 27 chapters in the second section of the prophet, and there are 27 books in the New Testament. The central feature of this prophetic section is chapter 53, and the central fact of the New Testament is the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jehovah's Servant served unto death in the book of Isaiah, and in the New Testament Christ became obedient, even unto death, and that the death of the cross. Well might we then consider this 53rd of Isaiah.

We might first say that in Isa. 50 Christ's deity introduces His humiliation. See, for instance, verse 3 of that chapter, "I clothe the heavens with blackness," the language of the Governor of the universe; yet in verse 4 He is in the Learner's place. Then in verse 6 He is humiliated and maltreated by those who had witnessed Him in the grace of His humility.

In chapter 53, His humiliation introduces His glory!

Verse 1. — The prophet laments the unbelief of those who were peculiarly the subjects of the mercy of God. The Arm of the LORD is a symbol of the power of God, so often exerted for the overthrow of His enemies and for the salvation of those who trust in Him (see Isaiah 51: 9; Isa. 52: 10; Isa. 53: 1; Isa. 59: 16; Isa. 62: 8; and Isa. 63: 5, for uses of this title). On occasion, as in chapter 53, the Arm of the LORD seems to be personified.

Verses 2 and 3 — "He shall grow up before Him." This is the 'Arm of the LORD' growing up before Jehovah. To Him, Christ in the days of His flesh was a root out of a dry ground; life and fruitfulness in all their potentialities were there in Him. Israel was the dry ground. There was no

sustenance for our Lord there. All His support was drawn from above. To Israel He was an object of derision and scorn — hence "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief."

Verses 4 and 6 — This will be the language of Israel in the coming day of their conviction and repentance, for the nation shall yet learn the truth of the sympathetic as well as the sacrificial and redemptive sufferings of the holy Sin-Bearer. Verse 4 certainly teaches us — as quoted in Matthew 8: 17 — that He first bore in His spirit that which he removed by His power. He entered, in the deep and holy feelings of His heart, into all that His people suffered. *He* suffered sympathetically in the acuteness of His sinless perfection; *they* for their sins under the governmental hand of God. The day will assuredly come when the sufferings of the holy Sin-Bearer shall be rightly apprehended, then shall Israel say in deep contrition, "He was wounded for our transgressions."

The prophet Hosea has this day of atonement for Israel in mind when he says in his last chapter, verses 1 and 2, "O Israel, return unto the LORD thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. *Take with you words*, and turn to the LORD; say unto Him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously; so will we render the calves of our lips." Israel then finds in Isaiah chapter 53 the words which they will take in the day of their national repentance.

Verse 5 — Their sins are confessed, as it were, over the head of the "scapegoat" (Leviticus 16: 21, 22).

Verse 6 — They recognise the holy Sufferer as the One upon whom, sacrificially, as it were, the LORD's lot fell (Leviticus 16: 8, 9, 15). True confession will be produced from the lips of the repentant people — we have gone astray, we have turned every one to his own way. How great had been their disobedience and rebellion! Yet, wondrous mercy! — "The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all."

Surely we have in these verses the great anti-type of the Day of Atonement:

The righteous claims of God fully met by the blood of the sin offering — *Propitiation*.

The guilt of the people met in the confession over the scapegoat — *Substitution*.

Both goats were necessary on the Day of Atonement to set forth these two aspects of the one sacrificial and redeeming work of the Lord Jesus Christ when He offered Himself, through the eternal Spirit, to God. By His spotless sacrifice He eclipsed every sacrifice in the ceremonial system of Judaism, for it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to put away sin and make perfect the comers unto God (Hebrews 10: 1-4).

Verses 7 and 8 — tell of the willing submission of the unresisting Lamb of God; of His unrighteous treatment; His being cut off; and withal, the true reason for His death, "for the transgression of My people was He stricken."

Wonderful Saviour!

Verse 9 — attests, by His burial in the rich man's tomb, that there is a divinely fixed limit to the wicked activity of sinful men, "thus far shalt thou come and no further." God takes care to attest His appreciation of the moral beauty of that life. Men may say, "when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him." The charm, the moral perfection, of that blessed Man were unattractive to those who did not believe, but nonetheless there was superlative beauty there, "the beauty of holiness." So we read, "He was with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth." Truly, like the paschal lamb, the Saviour had passed the scrutiny of the eyes of divine holiness — kept from the tenth to the fourteenth and proved to be without blemish or spot.

Verse 10 — Deeper far than all His sufferings at the hands of men for righteousness sake, were the sufferings at the hands of God for sin — this only and entirely in His sacrificial death. "He hath put Him to grief."

Verses 10 to 12 — The grand issues of the redeeming and God-glorifying death of Jesus: —

1. "He shall see His seed." A generation, a race, after His own kind, would be brought into being.
2. "He shall prolong His days." The cross is not the end for Him, no, He shall come forth, the mighty Victor over death and the grave.

3. "The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand." He shall establish the will of God universally. The administration of the coming kingdom will be in those competent hands which once had been pierced at Calvary.

4. "He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied." The fruit of His work shall be worthy of the work and of the Workman — fitting answer to the suffering, shame, and loss, of the Cross.

5. "By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant instruct many in righteousness." The basis of righteous blessing has been laid in His death and all who are brought into blessing before God shall be instructed in the righteousness of their standing through the value of Christ's finished work.

6. "For He shall bear their iniquities." Not a cloud shall exist between God and His own. Everything which had stood between them has been fully and righteously dealt with, to God's satisfaction. Hence, as instructed by God's righteous Servant they will be perfectly at rest in heart and conscience.

7. "I will divide Him a portion with the great . ." Once alone in the awful sufferings of the Cross, He shall not be alone in the recompensing glory. He shall have companions then. God declares (grand expression of His complete satisfaction with the finished work of Christ), "I will divide Him a portion with the great." The Saviour in the unselfish activity of His love — proof that the cross has not exhausted His love — "shall divide the spoil with the strong." Who are the great and strong in that day of Christ's coming glory? Those who have borne reproach for His Name in the world which crucified Him. Those who share rejection with Him here shall share glory with Him there.

All this, says God, for four reasons:

1. "He hath poured out His soul unto death." His death shall never be forgotten in the glory.
2. "He was numbered with the transgressors." His shame shall be fully answered. Though earth may despise and defame Him, God honours Him in heaven and will manifest His approval of Him to a wondering universe. This chapter gives an answer to such a question as — "What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour" (Esther 6: 6).

3. "He bare the sin of many." God answers with glory that love which took Christ into death for the justification of others. He who once "bare the sin" will bear the glory.

4. "He made intercession for the transgressors." That prayer of His, uttered in the extremity of suffering, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34), though little accounted by the motley throng which surrounded the cross, has been fully evaluated in heaven, and is here added to these features which bring forth the reward of God to Him in the day when the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

As we close this meditation on this wonderful prophetic Scripture, we would sincerely say, "To

Him be the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever. Amen."