



## Isaiah Chapter Fifty Three

This expansion of Isaiah Chapter Fifty Three was initially constructed in support of a wider project, specifically in relation to references made in Romans Chapter Four. It is not intended to be a complete study of this beautiful scripture, which prophesies the suffering of the Jewish Messiah, later fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. It is believed this scripture was used extensively by the early church to help them to understand why Messiah had to suffer and die, but would be raised to life again.

### Isaiah 53:1-3 - The servant lived in rejection

<sup>1</sup> Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

### Isaiah 53:1

Our refers to the believing remnant of Israel and is quoted: <<Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfil the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" >> (John 12:37-38), and: <<But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?" >> (Romans 10:16).

The arm of the Lord is the power of God in action: <<See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power, and his arm rules for him. See, his reward is with him, and his recompense accompanies him>> (Isaiah 40:10), <<Awake, awake! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the Lord; awake, as in days gone by, as in generations of old. Was it not you who cut Rahab to pieces, who pierced that monster through?>> (Isaiah 51:9), and: <<The Lord has sworn by his right hand and by his mighty arm: "Never again will I give your grain as food for your enemies, and never again will foreigners drink the new wine for which you have toiled>> (Isaiah 62:8).

<sup>2</sup> He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

### Isaiah 53:2

Unbelief in the servant was natural because he was an obscure, outwardly unimpressive person in a failed culture. His generation was blind. And yet we read scriptures that tell us Jesus had something about him that people could clearly detect: <<As he walked along, he saw Levi son

of Alphæus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him>> (Mark 2:14).

<sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

### Isaiah 53:3

Rejection of the servant reveals how misguided the human mind is: <<This is what the Lord says – the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel – to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation, to the servant of rulers: "Kings will see you and rise up, princes will see and bow down, because of the Lord, who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you" >> (Isaiah 49:7), and: <<He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognise him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him>> (John 1:10-11).

A man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Jesus experienced sorrow and grief of various sorts throughout his whole life. Familiar with could also be rendered knowing. Also see comments on v.11.

### Isaiah 53:4-6 - The servant bore the sins of other people; he was himself innocent

This section is the heart of the passage.

<sup>4</sup> Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

### Isaiah 53:4

Surely introduces the truth about the servant's sufferings.

Acting as his people's substitute, with no support or understanding from them, the servant took upon himself the bitter consequences of their sin: our infirmities, our sorrows: <<When Jesus came into Peter's house, he saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever. He touched her hand and the fever left her, and she got up and began to wait on him. When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases" >> (Matthew 8:14-17). The sufferings of the servant would show the consequences that sin brings to fallen humanity, though he himself would not sin (v.9).

Smitten by God, and afflicted. God would be the ultimate source of the sufferings of this faithful servant.

<sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

### Isaiah 53:5

But contrasts with our incomprehension in v.4b. The servant's anguish was our fault, not his own.

Our transgressions, our iniquities. His sufferings went to the root of all human woe: <<This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "He took up our infirmities and

carried our diseases" >> (Matthew 8:17), in comments made on v.4, and: <<He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed>> (1 Peter 2:24).

Pierced, crushed, punishment, wounds. Isaiah emphasises how severely God punished the rejected servant for the sins of mankind and to appease his wrath against them.

<sup>6</sup> We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

#### Isaiah 53:6

We all, each of us. The servant, who alone was sinless and perfectly obedient to God's will and purpose, was uniquely qualified to bear the sins of all others, and all people subsequently contributed to his pain.

Like sheep we are stupid and helpless; totally dependent on our shepherd: <<I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me — just as the Father knows me and I know the Father — and I lay down my life for the sheep>> (John 10:14-15).

The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Consider the scapegoat: <<He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites — all their sins — and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert>> (Leviticus 16:21-22), <<God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God>> (2 Corinthians 5:21), and the lost sheep: <<For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls>> (1 Peter 2:25).

#### Isaiah 53:7-9 - The servant dies in innocence

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

#### Isaiah 53:7

Like a lamb he was totally innocent, submissive, not complaining: <<The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!>> (John 1:29), <<When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!">> (John 1:36), <<The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth" >> (Acts 8:32-33), and: <<"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly>> (1 Peter 2:22-23).

<sup>8</sup> By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

### Isaiah 53:8

By oppression and judgment, that is, oppressive judgment. The servant was wrongly condemned.

He was cut off from the land. Those who condemned Jesus did not understand what they were doing: <<Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing">> (Luke 23:34a), <<You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer">> (Acts 3:14-18), and: <<None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory">> (1 Corinthians 2:8).

<sup>9</sup> He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

### Isaiah 53:9

He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich. The numerous parallels between the description of the servant in this verse and the death of Jesus have led Christians through the ages to see this as fulfilled by the events surrounding Jesus' death.

Although the servant was condemned as a criminal, and should have been buried with the wicked, he was in fact buried in an expensive garden tomb belonging to a rich man. Likewise the servant is presented as someone who was completely innocent, both in deed, i.e. he had done no violence, and in word, i.e. there was no deceit in his mouth. The servant is thus described as a person of total moral purity, the true substitute for sinners (see v.7).

Matthew 27:57-60 provides the fulfilment of this prophecy: <<As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away">>.

### Isaiah 53:10-12 - The servant was crushed but victorious

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.

### Isaiah 53:10

The Lord's will. There was a divine purpose for the oppression of the servant: <<Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?>> (Luke 24:26), <<This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross">> (Acts 2:23), and: <<Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen">> (Acts 4:27-28).

His life is frequently translated as soul, so he suffered not just in his body but in his deepest inner self.

A guilt offering. The servant's sacrificial death compensated for human sin by setting sinners free from their guilt and shame before God: <<"When a person commits a violation and sins unintentionally in regard to any of the Lord's holy things, he is to bring to the Lord as a penalty a ram from the flock, one without defect and of the proper value in silver, according to the sanctuary shekel. It is a guilt offering. He must make restitution for what he has failed to do in regard to the holy things, add a fifth of the value to that and give it all to the priest, who will make atonement for him with the ram as a guilt offering, and he will be forgiven>> (Leviticus 5:15-16). The Septuagint translates 'offering for guilt' as 'offering for sin', which explains why Paul could say that Christ's death 'for our sins' was 'according to the scriptures' in 1 Corinthians 15:3.

He will see his offspring. Those who strayed like sheep (v.6) return as children.

Prolong his days. Death is not the servant's end; he will receive everlasting life. Although resurrection is not explicit here, it is the natural inference, hence in 1 Corinthians 15:4 Paul can again speak of the resurrection as being 'according to the scriptures'.

The will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. The servant becomes the executor of God's will and plan.

<sup>11</sup> After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

Isaiah 53:11

He will see the light of life and be satisfied. The outcome of the servant's sufferings is not regret but the satisfaction of obvious accomplishment.

By his knowledge, that is, his experiential knowledge of grief (v.3).

Justify many. His triumph, which does not secure the salvation of every individual without exception, i.e. universalism, spreads out beyond the remnant of Israel to: <<a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language>> (Revelation 7:9b), and: <<But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!>> (Romans 5:15). They will receive a new seal of righteousness through justification: <<And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised>> (Romans 4:11-12).

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Isaiah 53:12

Therefore. The sacrificial death of the servant explains his subsequent glory and the eternal blessings of those who believe in him.

A portion, the spoils. The imagery is that of a conqueror sharing his victory with his allies.

Numbered with the transgressors. The servant is identified with rebels, confirmed by Jesus: <<It is written: 'And he was numbered with the transgressors'; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfilment>> (Luke 22:37).

Made intercession. This is the servant's priestly work on behalf of those he represents, securing their acceptance before God.