

Ernie Brown

Christ's Sufferings

As Predicted In Isaiah 53

Isaiah 53

Christ's sufferings were foretold by Isaiah in his final Servant Song (Isa. 52:13-53:12), which readily divides into five sections of three verses each. The song ends on a note of victory, for His suffering must precede His exaltation.

We see this fact presented in the New Testament as well:

- "Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter His glory?" (Luke 24:26 KJV).
- "... The sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Peter 1:11).

An Outline Of Events

Isaiah 52:13-15

Jehovah, the omniscient God of Israel, gave a summary of what would transpire. He contemplated His anointed Servant (42:1), first put to shame but eventually exalted on the summit of glory before every eye. His early extreme humiliation would lead to His ultimate glory.

The blessing that will come to Israel will not be deserved in view of anything they have done. It will be the outcome of the activities of Jehovah's suffering Servant, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God (52:7-10). He "shall deal prudently" (52:13) in judicious activity which leads eventually to prosperity.

When He presented Himself to Israel, they gave their answer to Him: We don't want Him! Totally rejected, He was terribly abused by the nation He came to save. The overall agony of His sufferings was so intense that onlookers were absolutely appalled at His very appearance. He was barely recognizable as a man at all (v. 14).

Then, after His cruel death, God made plain Christ's value (v. 13):

- From the tomb, "He shall be exalted" – in resurrection.
- Then, "He shall be extolled" – in ascension.
- After that, He shall be made "very high" – in heavenly glory at the right hand of God.

Many were astonished, dismayed, even shocked at His extreme humiliation on the cross. Throngs will be equally startled – absolutely astounded – at His glory and majesty when, at His public appearing, they see Him "high and lifted up" (v. 13 ESV). We are assured at the very outset that Jehovah's Servant would not fail. He would succeed, accomplishing the will of God.

The Future Godly Remnant Defines Israel's Position Nationally

Isaiah 53:1-3

This prophecy was given in about the 8th century BC. It describes the reaction and response of Israel's godly remnant when Messiah will appear "with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). Then they will look back to assess how their people treated Him when He lived here on earth. They will pass their own judgment about what their nation did to Him and said to and about Him. In about 30 AD, the nation decisively rejected and crucified Him. The remnant will trace the past guilty blindness of Israel and its total misjudgment of His life and death. Who will believe the true report of the remnant? Even then, very few!

"He shall grow up before [His God]" (Isa. 53:2 KJV) describes His early life and development: "The Child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him ... And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:40, 52). He was like a tender plant sprouting up from the root of the tree, growing alongside it but distinct from it – having a life of its own, not dependent on the main part of the tree for anything!

“Out of a dry ground” (Isa. 53:2) is a picture of spiritually barren, spiritually lifeless Israel. No wonder they saw “no form nor lordliness” (v. 2 JND) in Him! They said, “There is no beauty that we should desire Him” (v. 2 KJV). To them, He was no Saul (1 Sam. 9:1-2; 10:23-24) or Absalom (2 Sam. 15:1-13). He displayed no brilliant, external splendor. There was no “outward show” (Luke 17:20 margin) in Him or His kingdom at that time. There was indeed full, moral, inward perfection in Him. However, they could not see it! Significantly, “He is despised and rejected” (Isa. 53:3). Not only *was* but *is* remains the general attitude of the Jews to their long-promised Messiah. He is, still, in their eyes, “a Man of sorrows” (v. 3). Men much prefer an impressive leader.

Jesus Christ was fully “acquainted with grief” (v. 3) by personal experience. Israel nationally and the world at large still do not want to know a Messiah, a Savior, like Him. They hid their “faces from Him” (v. 3), deliberately turned away – a very definite act of refusal and rejection.

The Remnant Speaks Of Messiah As Their Substitute

Isaiah 53:4-6

During His life and ministry on earth the Lord Jesus relieved many afflictions, healed diseases, gave sight to the blind and even raised the dead. But for Him it was not just a question of performing physical miracles. First, He endured in His spirit what He then dismissed with His power. He bore grief and sickness sympathetically. He carried their sorrows as a burden: “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). Virtue and health flowed out of Him, and He was conscious of it. Luke 8:45 records His sensitivity: “Who touched Me?” He asked when the woman touched the hem of His garment. He knew, of course, but He wanted her to testify to her trust in Him.

The final answer of those He came to serve was to roughly abuse His *body*. They thought Him an impostor whom God was smiting in His *soul* because He thoroughly deserved it. He was afflicted, browbeaten and intellectually intimidated in His *spirit* before they actually nailed Him to the cross. Even then, of the six hours on the cross, only the last three involved suffering from God.

Isaiah 53:5-6 presents the heart of His sufferings. Verse 5 relates to His death for our sins, His work of atonement. The various terms give graphic descriptions of the different aspects of the Lord’s sufferings. He was “wounded” (v. 5), His *body* pierced through by cruel, wicked men. He was “bruised” (v. 5) by men at the behest, or command, of Satan, as prophesied in Genesis 3:15.*

“The chastisement of our peace was upon Him” (Isa. 53:5) is the very basis of our spiritual peace. He accepted the punishment that we deserved for our sins, causing Him to suffer in His *spirit*. “With His stripes we are healed” (v. 5) – made thoroughly whole spiritually in the sight of God. If ever we were to be brought into the peace of God, Jehovah’s suffering Servant must endure all this. Man’s worst and God’s best were both revealed at the cross, yet only an act of God could bring in salvation. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

Isaiah 53:6 emphasizes our responsibility in this:

- “All” – without exception!
- “We” – this is a universal situation!
- “Every one” – each individual!
- “His own way” – complete, self-centered independence!

Sin has had that same effect on the whole human race. But how gracious God is! “The LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Jehovah Delights In His Suffering Servant Son

Isaiah 53:7-9

Verse 7 says,

- “He was oppressed” – in His *soul*.
- “He was afflicted” – in His *spirit*.
- “He opened not His mouth,” a member of His *body* – before the chief priests and elders and before Pilate (Matt. 27:12-14). “When He was reviled, [He] reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not” (1 Peter 2:23).

How precious! He was content to wait for God to justify Him. He used neither violence in His actions nor corruption in what He thought and said. His mouth, a member of His *body*, gave expression to the thoughts of His *spirit* and the feelings of His *soul*.

“He was taken from prison and from judgment” (Isa. 53:8). The Lord was deprived of common justice, for the alleged trial went against all the legal rules of the time. The whole procedure was riddled with sheer corruption. It amounted to judicial

murder. Because He was violently cut off, the question is asked, “Who shall declare His generation?” (v. 8). Verse 10 provides God’s answer.

They “made His grave with the wicked” (v. 9). He would have been buried in a garden to the north of Jerusalem, in a cliff face, on top of the hill Golgotha, a cemetery reserved for common criminals. But God intervened. Instead, He was “with the rich in His death” (v. 9). “Rich one” (singular) refers to Joseph of Arimathea, who is mentioned with honor in all four Gospels. “Deaths” (plural, margin) is expressive of extreme intensity of suffering, bearing sin under the judgment of God.

The Response Of The Godly Remnant

Isaiah 53:10-12

“It pleased the LORD to bruise Him” (v. 10) is the realization of the godly remnant. Messiah was crushed, beaten and oppressed under the heavy burden of the wrath of God. He suffered this in His soul when it was made a trespass offering (JND footnote). All was for the accomplishment of the will of God. Jehovah derived satisfaction, indeed joy, not from the suffering inflicted on the Messiah but from the total devotion of His suffering Servant-Son and the results flowing from it (see Heb. 10:7-10).

God is pleased to give an appropriate answer to His devoted Servant: “He shall see His seed” (Isa. 53:10) – fruit from His mighty work. This includes Christians at the present time, Israel later, then the saved among the Gentiles, but ultimately the cleansed universe!

“He shall prolong His days” (v.10) – the life of the Victim continues! What a contrast, for in all other cases of murder the life of the victim is shortened! “I am alive for evermore, Amen” (Rev. 1:18). Similarly, He pleads in Psalm 102:24, “Take Me not away in the midst of My days.” The immediate reply is, “Thy years shall have no end” (v. 27).

God will give Him “a portion with the great” (Isa. 53:12; see Phil. 2:9-11) because He voluntarily “poured out His soul unto death” (Isa. 53:12). He chose to do it. In this life the innocent may suffer for the guilty, but not willingly. This was an intelligent decision (John 10:17), an act of His personal *spirit*. He felt it keenly, in His *soul*. “Unto death” involved His *body*. He bore the weight of sin.

“Numbered with the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12) means He was classified as a common criminal. He “made intercession” for His people, including the transgressors. He even prayed for them because He felt for them in His *soul* (Luke 23:34).

Truly, He is worthy to enter His glory!

“And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15 KJV).

Adapted by David Anderson with Ernie Brown’s permission from his talk: “His Visage Was So Marred,” T1089, www.truthfortoday.org.uk.

