



THE SHEPHERD OF ISRAEL

THE PROMISE OF TOMORROW

WHAT DOES ISAIAH 53 SAY?

By Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum

Previously we have written about the rabbinical interpretation of Isaiah 53 and we saw how the traditional view was always that it spoke of Messiah. We mentioned some features of it which also pointed to the fact that Isaiah 53 referred to a single individual. Now let us follow up these points by dealing with the content itself. The text really begins in the previous chapter, Isaiah 52:

Behold, my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. Like as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand. (vs. 13-15).

God is speaking, calling the attention of everyone to the suffering Servant. God declares that His Servant will act wisely and His actions will gain a position of glory. God further states that His Servant will suffer, but this suffering will eventually gain the solemn attention of the world rulers, when they begin to understand the purpose of the suffering. The Servant will be terribly disfigured but will save many.

VERSES 1 - 3

Who hath believed our message? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed? For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not. (53:1-3).

After God has drawn the attention of His people to His Servant, in chapter 53, verses 1-9, the people respond. In verses 1-3 they confess their non-recognition of this Servant in His person and calling. In verse one, they are astonished at what they had just learned in chapter 52. In verse two they note that at the time the Servant was with them, there was nothing special about Him. His childhood and growth were no different than those of others. He was not particularly charismatic in His personality that would attract men to Him nor were His outward features unique.

Verse three points out that He was despised and rejected by men in general. He was a man of sorrows, well acquainted with personal grief.

His rejection was not merely passive; it was active. The people avoided Him.

VERSES 4 - 6

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

In verses 4 - 6, the people confess that at the time of His suffering, they considered it to be the punishment of God for His own sins. But they now acknowledge that the Servant's sufferings were vicarious. He was suffering for the sins of the people and not for His own sins. The people confessed it was they who went astray. They each had gone on their own selfish ways and the punishment of their sins was placed on the Servant of Jehovah. In this confession there is a change of attitude on the part of the people towards the Servant as they recognize the true nature of the sufferings. The severe judgment which the Ser-

vant was suffering had led the people to form an opinion of Him, since His sufferings seem to mark Him out as a special victim of Jehovah's anger. But now in their confession there is a reversal of this opinion as they perceive the true nature of His mission, that He suffered vicariously — for the sins of others. This change marks the beginning of the repentance and a clear concept of vicarious suffering is seen.

In verse four, the people confess that when the Servant was suffering, they considered His suffering as a punishment from God for His own sins. But they see here that the Servant of Jehovah was vicariously suffering for them and took upon Himself what was actually due to them. Thus, they who formerly despised the Servant on account of His miserable condition, now confess that this suffering is of a different nature from what they had supposed. The people are better instructed now and admit their former blindness to the vicarious character of the deep agonies involved in the suffering. The thought of substitutionary sufferings is clearly expressed. The error being confessed is not the fact that they considered His sufferings as punishment for sins, but the fact that they considered them as punishment for the sins He Himself had committed.

In verse five, the people confessed that the Servant of Jehovah suffered vicariously for their sins and the sufferings of the Servant resulted in their own reconciliation and spiritual healing. This verse penetrates more deeply into the meaning of His sufferings. We see the connection of His sufferings and their sins. The connection is twofold. First, it was the chastisement for sins. His suffering was the penalty due for the people's transgression. Second, it was the means of reconciliation. This was the remedy by which the people are given spiritual health. This was the true cause for His sufferings.

In verse six, the people confess that the sufferings of the Servant were necessary due to their sins. They were selfishly seeking their own way so Jehovah laid all their sins on the Servant. This verse describes the occasion and necessity of the sufferings spoken of in the preceding

verses. The people were so completely separated from God that substitution was required for reconciliation. Thus they confessed with sorrow that they had mistaken Him Whom God had made to suffer for their good, when they had gone astray.

VERSES 7 - 9

He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who among them considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

In verses 7 - 9, the prophet appears to be doing the speaking and he describes in detail the sufferings of the Servant that lead to His death.

In verse seven, the Servant is pictured as humbly submitting Himself to unjust treatment. He does not speak a word in His own defense. He suffers quietly and never speaks against the injustice of it all.

In verse eight, we have the death of the Servant of Jehovah. We are told that after a judicial judgment, He is taken away for execution. No one seemed to realize that the Servant of Jehovah was being executed for the sins of the prophet's own people and that they were the ones who deserved the judgment of judicial execution. This is a key verse to the entire passage. In it we learn that the sufferings of the Servant end in death, a judicial death. In other words, He is sentenced to death by a court of law and executed. The verse clearly states that He did not deserve the sentence or the execution. The speaker's own people were the guilty ones who deserved judicial execution. But judgment fell on the Servant so it would not fall on the people. The verse clearly states that no one realized this at the time of

His death. But rather, as in verses 4-6 earlier, they assumed that He was dying for His own sins.

In verse nine, the burial of the Servant is described. After death by means of execution, He was assigned to be buried with other criminals in a criminal's grave, as they considered Him to be a criminal. That is why He was executed. But instead, He was buried in a rich man's tomb. This is true poetic justice since in actuality the Servant had not done anything wrong in His actions nor was there anything criminal in His character. So although the executors intended Him to be buried in a criminal's grave, He was buried in a rich man's tomb.

VERSES 10 - 12

Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

In verses 10 - 12 we read about the results of the sufferings and death of the Servant of Jehovah and these results are in the end very beneficial.

In verse ten God records how pleased He was to allow the Servant to suffer and die, for this was the means by which God was to make an atonement for the people. The death of the Servant was a sin offering for the sins of the people. They were the ones who had gone astray and who deserved judicial punishment for their sins. When the suffering Servant died, His death provided the atonement for the people. God punished the Servant in place of the people, and thus the sins of the people were atoned for. This verse

further states that the Servant will see His posterity and His days will be prolonged. But how could this be if the Servant is killed? The only way that this can be possible is by means of resurrection. So by means of the resurrection of the suffering Servant, the pleasure of the Lord will prosper in the Servant's hand.

Verse eleven declares that God will be satisfied with the work of the Servant. The Servant dies a substitutionary death for the sins of the people. The question is: "Will God accept this substitute?" The answer is, "Yes." God will see the sufferings and the death of the Servant and His justice will be satisfied. Therefore God can make the next statement that because of the vicarious sufferings and death of His righteous Servant, the righteous Servant will justify many. To justify means to declare somebody as being righteous. So the suffering Servant Who

suffered and died is now resurrected and will be able to make many righteous. The people who were sinners and could do nothing because of their separation from God, will be made righteous. This verse concludes by telling us how it is possible. The Servant bears their sins. Their sins are put on the Servant's account and the account is considered "paid in full" by the Servant's death. So God declares that this righteous Servant will cause many to be justified in the knowledge of Himself for He will bear their sins.

Verse twelve records that the Servant will be tremendously and greatly blessed by God in the end above all others. The reasons for this are given in the passage. First of all, He willingly and voluntarily suffered and died. Secondly, He was humble enough to allow others to consider Him a sinner and to conclude that

He was suffering and dying for His own sins. However, thirdly, He actually bore the sins of many. For the many who are justified and declared righteous are so only because the Servant puts their sins on His account and the account is paid in full by His blood. Fourthly, and finally, the Servant makes intercession and pleads to God on behalf of the sinners.

It should be clear that the words of Isaiah 53 can only be true of an individual, and the only individual in history Who can perfectly fit the description of the suffering Servant is Jesus of Nazareth, the Jewish Messiah. It is for our Jewish people that the Servant died. It is for our Jewish people that Jesus died. And, by accepting His substitutionary death on our behalf, Jesus can justify us before God just as Isaiah 53 says He would. △

I FOUND PEACE

By Martin Wolf

PROPHECY LED ME TO THE MESSIAH

I was born in a Jewish home and brought up in the traditions of my people, Israel. In our home the Sabbath was faithfully kept. On Friday night, as the sun went down, my mother would *bentchen licht* (light the Sabbath candles), and my father would say the *Kiddish* (prayer for the Sabbath). On the Sabbath, we would attend the services in the synagogue.

Although, at the time, I did not fully appreciate having to go to the synagogue or to *Chedar* (Hebrew school), as I look back I am very thankful for my religious training. For example, I never had any doubts that the *Tanach* (Old Testament) is really the Word of the living God. My mother used to read to us from the Scriptures. When I attended the Sabbath services I saw men touching their *tallit* (prayer shawls) to the Scrolls as these Scrolls were carried around the sanctuary, and then kiss their shawls on the spot where it touched the Scroll. As a youngster I thought, "You don't show such reverence and respect to a book of

fairy tales!" Thus I learned, both at home and in the synagogue, to respect and believe the Word of God.

I also learned about the *Mashiah* (Messiah) and was eagerly awaiting His coming. I knew one day He would come and bring redemption, salvation, and peace. In *Chedar* I was taught the "Thirteen Principles of Faith." In this connection, two of these "Principles" stand out most vividly: "I believe with perfect faith in the coming of the Messiah . . ." and "I believe with perfect faith that all the words of the prophets are true."

MY SEARCH

As *Yom Kippur* approached in the year of my *Bar Mitzvah*, I wanted to really know that I would be forgiven for my sin. To realize that as I became a "Son of the Law" (*Bar Mitzvah*) I would be fully responsible and would have to answer to God personally for my sin, frightened me. Thus that *Yom Kippur* stands out in my mind.

Just before I became *Bar Mitzvah*

I was in the synagogue with my parents for *Yom Kippur* and saw an old man two or three rows ahead of me. He had a long *tallit*, and he was praying to God and beating his chest and weeping. He had been fasting as we all had, and he was praying for the forgiveness of his sins. I thought, "This man knows all the ritual, all the prayers; he must know all there is to know about forgiveness. I am going to ask him whether he has the assurance that his sins are forgiven."

I waited until the end of the service. As the sun was going down and we were leaving the synagogue, I went over to him and said, "Sir, do you have the forgiveness of your sins? Do you know that your sins are forgiven?"

I can still see the tears coursing down his face; he had been crying the whole day. Looking at me, he replied, "Son, I only hope so; I only hope so."

I thought, "What chance do I have? I don't know all these prayers and rituals. I don't know all the traditions. If he doesn't know that his

sins are forgiven, how can I know?"

In college I continued the study of French, which I had begun in high school, for I planned to be a teacher. At a French Club dinner I met the young woman who later became my wife. A year after we were married we went to France to further my education.

While in France we talked about the Bible, and my wife asked me whether I had ever read the *Brith Hadasha* (New Testament). When I answered, "No," she suggested that we read it aloud together. Thinking over her suggestion, I reasoned, "No one in my family would know or could object." After all, I was 21 years old, 3500 miles away from home, and I thought, "Well, why not?" So I opened the New Testament and saw the first verse in the book of Matthew. It says, "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham."

I said, "Wait a minute. David, Abraham — these people I know. What does this Christian man, Matthew, know about these Jews?" That is when I found out that Matthew was a Jew. His last name was Levi.

I read down a little further, "Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord, by the prophet." Prophet? What prophet? The Old Testament prophets, I was told. So for the first time in my life I really went into the Old Testament. But I went in with

a belligerent attitude. My purpose in reading the prophets was to prove that Matthew did not know anything about the Old Testament.

THE PROPHETS SPEAK OF MESSIAH

Little by little I began comprehending for myself the prophecies concerning the Messiah.

As a Jew I had to be honest with myself. I couldn't say, "Well, because tradition says I am not supposed to believe them because in Hebrew school I had learned the Thirteen Principles of Faith. I remember one of them said, 'I believe with perfect faith that all of the words of the prophets are true.'" I reasoned, "If my own prophets are telling me about *Yeshua*, the Messiah, why shouldn't I believe them?"

As I said, I had been raised with the hope of Messiah's coming. No one, however, had bothered to tell me that the *Tanach* — the Old Testament — talks in detail about Him.

It was with fear and trembling that I considered believing in Messiah Jesus, because here was something that I never thought would happen to Martin Wolf, never in a million years, "How do I know for sure?" I asked my wife.

"Well, you pray," she said.

"I'm a good Jew. I've prayed," I told her.

"You have to pray in the Name of the Lord Jesus," was her astounding reply.

I pray in this One's Name? But I wanted to know for sure; so I decided to ask God.

I do not even remember the words any more, but as I lay awake in bed one night I looked up toward the ceiling and told God that if this were true that Jesus was really the Messiah and would forgive me my sins I would accept Him. I prayed, "If this is all true, I ask this in Jesus' Name."

HOW I FOUND PEACE

I'll be honest with you. I thought that the ceiling was going to cave in, so different was this prayer from any I had ever prayed. No one could imagine what was going on inside of me. But the ceiling did not cave in. No lights flashed; no bells rang. Into my heart, however, came such peace that I knew the prayer I had prayed was right. I knew I had found the Messiah and had passed from death into life. I had forgiveness of my sins, not because of anything I had done, nor because I deserved it, but because of what He had done for me. I had come to Him with my burdens, and He had given me rest.

I have not told the whole story, but just shared a little of what happened to one Yiddish boy to whom the Lord has given eternal life. And I thank Him for it. If you who are reading this account have not as yet found the Messiah and believed in Him, you have missed the full meaning of being a Jew and missed the whole purpose of life. △

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"I Found Peace"

By Martin Wolf

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