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“Behold My Servant”

*A Summary of
The Servant Prophecies of Isaiah
(Jim Luke)
and a
Verse-by-Verse Exposition of Chapter 53.
(John Martin)*



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A SUMMARY OF THE SERVANT PROPHECIES OF ISAIAH

ISAIAH 40

As John the Baptist was the forerunner of Christ, so Isaiah 40 first deals with his work of preparation before introducing and summarising the work of the Servant.

Vv. 1- 2: The ultimate result of servant's work is first stated—Israel not to be punished forever, but forgiven.

Vv. 3- 6: Levelling of human pride—the necessary preparation for the Glory to be revealed.

Vv. 7- 8: The WORD to prevail over the FLESH.

Vv. 9-11: The Divine Glory revealed: "Behold Your God"!
A *reward* (v. 10) and *gentleness* (v. 11) to be his hallmarks.

Vv.12-26: YAHWEH directs the course of all things by His unsearchable wisdom and power. His purpose with His servant cannot fail.

v.12 — Unsearchable wisdom

v.13 — Yah has no instructor

v.14 — The greatest things are insignificant to Him

v.18 — Conclusion—Yahweh incomparable

v.19 — Yet foolish man worships a tree elaborated by human hands

v.21 — Seeing Yahweh's supremacy is so evident, man is reprov'd for failing to perceive it

v.22 — Yahweh's sovereignty further emphasised by His loftiness and power

v.25 — Conclusion—Yahweh is incomparable

v.26 — Yahweh is the creator and controller of heavens— a glimpse at heaven will tell the truth

Vv.27-31: In persecution and delay, Israel feels deserted. Yet seeing Yahweh directs all things—the faithful will surely be rewarded.

ISAIAH 41

Theme: Cyrus' activity will make the nations tremble, but there is no need for Israel to fear (v. 4, 10).

God raised up Cyrus and He will 'Comfort Zion' v. 27.

- Vv. 1- 4: Divine challenge: The work of Cyrus was prophesied by Yahweh—Who then controlled him? Who is sovereign? Obviously Yahweh.
- Vv. 5- 7: The Coastlands being terrified of the uprising of the man from the East, turn to their idols.
- Vv. 8-10: The event that filled Israel's oppressions (Babylon) with fear must occasion her with comfort? Yahweh will vindicate and comfort His servant, His chosen, the seed of Abraham.
- Vv.11-16: **OBJECTIVE 1**
Oblivion of enemies of Israel, especially Babylon.
- Vv.17-20: **OBJECTIVE 2**
Provision to the poor—blessings in the wilderness.
- Vv.21-24: Yahweh challenges idolators to set forth their fore-knowledge of future events as He has done, in proof of their veracity.
- Vv.25-29: What Yahweh has declared and done—provided a destroyer of Babylon and builder of Jerusalem. V.25, 27—The silence of idolators to His challenge proves their vanity.

ISAIAH 42

Chapter of Paradoxes

1. A conquering passive servant?
2. A blind, privileged servant?

God's purpose had been frustrated by the sins of His collective servant, the nation of Israel. In order for it to proceed to its ultimate conclusion, He has provided another individual servant who prevails where Israel had failed. By passively submitting himself to the malice of man, according to the will of God, he conquers the power of sin and lays the foundation for God's judgment and righteousness to be "set in the earth".

Vv. 1- 7: **FIRST SERVANT SONG**

The paradox of Yahweh's servant—victory through submission, salvation through suffering!

- V. 8: Glorification of Yahweh is absolute in obedience to death (v.6). What greater reverence could there be than to surrender unto death? What idol could command such adoration? None. Who could prophesy it? None other than Yahweh.

- Vv.10-12: Rejoicing among the Gentiles—now embraced in the salvation of Yahweh’s Servant.
- Vv.13-17: The time to cry and roar has come. The nations are judged for their idolatries, but blind Israel preserved.
- Vv.18-21: The unfathomable blindness of the national servant, Israel.
- Vv.22-25: Despite the tell-tale judgment of AD70 and the suffering in dispersion for slaying Yahweh’s Servant, Israel still remains blind and unenlightened.

ISAIAH 43 — Time for Change

- Vv. 1- 7: At the end of Gentile times—Yahweh’s unfailling love to Israel declared in their:
- 1) Preservation in trial
 - 2) Redemption from captivity.
- Vv. 8-13: Israel’s preservation—an infallible proof of Yahweh’s omniscience and ability to save. Unconscious and unwilling, Israel is, nonetheless the key witness.
- Vv.14-17: The extinction of Gentile might is for Israel’s sake, said the *Creator* of Israel.
- Vv.18-21: A new thing declared.
The water of life in the wilderness of Gentile lands provide salvation to Gentile “Beasts”. They then become “My People”—“My Chosen”, showing Yahweh’s praise!
- Vv.22-28: Even Gentiles will praise Yahweh but Israel failed to render true worship.
God, not Israel, had become weary—He has to “put up with their indifference and heartless formalism”. Yet He forgives. Why then do they not rejoice in worship?
Israel is challenged—the whole nation has sinned and so it is impossible that they should be just. But Yahweh’s judgment is righteous.

ISAIAH 44

- Vv. 1- 5: Despite sin and suffering (43:28) Israel will yet be blessed and delight in Yahweh (cp. 45:22-24).
- Vv. 6- 8: Israel’s glory declared in verses 2-4 is the proof of Yahweh’s omniscience. Who can forecast like Him?

- Vv. 9-20: In utter contrast Yahweh presents His people (cp. v.6-8) but the idol cannot save its devotee, who is blinded by sin and fearful (cp. v.2,8).
- Vv.21-23: In contrast with the idolator, Jacob can rejoice. Yahweh of Israel forgets not His promise, forgives and redeems His people.
- Vv.24-28: A rehearsal of majesty and mighty works of Yahweh. Yahweh's declarations about future events establish His omnipotence and omniscience.

ISAIAH 45

- Vv. 1- 8: That Yahweh is the Master of the situation is proved absolutely by His detailed prophecy of Cyrus' work. Clearly He controlled Cyrus' works, and is thus God alone. Such power is the guarantee that Yahweh will ultimately pour down righteousness and salvation upon the earth.
- Vv. 9-13: Man may not dictate to the Most High.
- Vv.14-19: Because the God of Israel is the Saviour, Israel shall not be confounded as will the Gentiles.
The Gentiles humbled before Israel and God's purpose in creation achieved.
- Vv.20-21: Now that God's purpose has been achieved, surviving Gentiles can see the futility of their philosophies and idols. They turn to Yahweh and confess that in Him alone is salvation.
- Vv.22-25: Yahweh calls all to submit to Him as a basis for justification.

ISAIAH 46-47

Deal with the destruction of Babylon and the confusion of her idolatry.

- Vv. 1- 2: The idols of Babylon, rather than saving her from destruction, became a burden when taken into captivity!
- Vv. 3- 4: In contrast with the idols of Babylon, Yahweh declares His intention to bear Israel, even till old age.
- Vv. 5-13: Yahweh's ability to perform His foreordained purpose with Israel (cp. idols)—is the ground of His claim for recognition as supreme.

ISAIAH 47

The Daughter-of Babylon to be put to shame.

- V. 6: The mercilessness of Babylon's destruction of God's chosen.
- Vv. 7- 9: For her arrogance Babylon will be swiftly widowed and suffer loss of children.
- Vv.10-11: Self-deceived and arrogant Babylon shall be taken unawares.
- Vv.12-15: Babylon's sorceries and wise men shall prove worthless in the hour of need.

ISAIAH 48

- Vv. 1- 8: In order to convince Israel of His supremacy, Yahweh declares future events and quickly brings them to pass.
- Vv. 9-11: God's wrath upon Israel—deferred for His name's sake.
- Vv.12-15: Yahweh again beseeches recognition on account of his foreknowledge of the destruction of Babylon by Cyrus.

YAHWEH'S APPEAL TO ISRAEL

- Vv. 16: Yahweh defends Himself against the possible accusation that his prophecies were deliberately kept secret and hidden at first—to allow for their possible correction before being brought forth after fulfilment—Isaiah his representative.
- Vv.17-19: An impassioned appeal to Israel—great blessings would have followed obedience.
- Vv.20-22: Jacob is redeemed from Babylon with joy and blessedness.

ISAIAH 49

Vv. 1- 6: **SECOND SERVANT SONG**

The Isles (Gentiles) are addressed. Despite the fact that he has been commissioned by Yahweh, the Servant's work with Israel is discouraging. He is consoled with the promise that his work shall extend beyond Israel and even embrace the Gentiles.

- Vv. 7-12: The faithful Yahweh assures His afflicted Servant that He has chosen him and will help him that he might establish the earth!

Vv.13-21: Though exhorted to rejoice in universal salvation and comfort for all nations, Zion cannot rise to the occasion—she still mourns being forsaken.

Zion is given strength and reassurance—Gentile converts gather to her causing her amazement! How has she been able to bear children while estranged from her husband? Gentiles have been joined to the hope of Israel while Israel was cast off.

Vv.22-23: Dramatic reversal of attitude of nations towards spiritual and national Israel.

Vv.24-26: No earthy power can interpose between Yahweh and Israel—vengeance poured out on Israel's oppressors.

ISAIAH 50

Vv. 1- 3: A further answer to challenging question of 49:14,21. Who has forsaken whom? No irrevocable bill of divorce can be produced by Israel. God has not so acted.

Rather Israel's sins have caused her to be put away.

Vv.2-3 Emphasises:

- 1) their complete failure is contrasted with
- 2) Yahweh's absolute power to save.

Vv. 4- 6: **THIRD SERVANT SONG**

In this song, the individual servant is contrasted with the national (cf. Vv.2-3). The national has been sold by iniquities but the individual turns his ear to God while his body is abused by men.

Vv. 7- 9: Despite every suffering and shame, Yahweh's Servant has supreme confidence in His power to save.

Vv.10-11: In view of Yahweh's vindication of his Servant and destruction of his accusers, men are exhorted to trust in Yahweh or perish.

ISAIAH 51

God's Servant vindicated—NOW the method of attaining righteousness is declared for others desiring salvation.

Vv. 1- 3: Pursuers of righteousness are exhorted to examine the reasons why Abraham and Sarah were blessed.

Vv. 4- 6: The Mosaic heavens and earth to vanish before the Messianic heavens and earth which are eternal. The true Israel, made up of Jews and Gentiles, will be characterised by the common bond of faith..

- Vv. 7- 8: The suffering of followers of Christ for righteousness' sake at hand of Jewry and later Roman Catholicism is anticipated. The disciples are exhorted to fear not.
- Vv. 9-11: The historic redemption from Egypt by the arm of Yahweh is the ground for absolute confidence in the future redemption by Yahweh's arm (Ex. 15:16; 59:16; 40:10; 52:10).
- Vv.12-16: All are exhorted to fear God and not men. He has absolute power, and He has laid the new heavens and earth by His work in Christ. Righteousness is now available to men in Christ and as a consequence Zion shall be established.
- Vv.17-20: Jerusalem is addressed and called to heed the message of v.21. She is addressed as one destitute of faithful sons and who has drunken of the fury of Yahweh's judgment.
- V.21: The message is now stated. Zion's persecutors are now to have their turn—they now must drink the cup of affliction.

ISAIAH 52

- Vv. 1- 2: Captive Zion is ordered to arise, leave her chains and put on garments of beauty in anticipation of eternal emancipation.
- Vv. 3- 6: Though Zion has sold herself for nought, she shall be redeemed without price!
- Vv. 7- 8: Zion's watchmen announce with joy the glorious gospel of salvation.
- Vv. 9-10: Zion to rejoice and be comforted, and all nations shall see the salvation.
- Vv.11-12: The captive saints long oppressed by the Gentiles are invited by God to free themselves. Their safe departure from the world will be guaranteed by Yahweh.
- Vv.13-15: **FOURTH SERVANT SONG** (52:13-53:12)
INTRODUCTION: The brilliant ultimate destiny of Yah's Servant despite his misfortunes: The past is contrasted with the future.
 V.13—Yahweh's Servant to be exalted.
 v.14-15—How exalted? Through suffering, his visage was marred!

ISAIAH 53

- Vv. 1- 9: A historic review of the Servant's career in his humiliation and suffering. Also the tragic confession that he had been misjudged and the stunning realisation that he had borne the sins of men.
- Vv.10-12: An announcement of his glorious future—the reward of obedience unto death.
- V. 1: Who could believe one who would so come?
- V. 2: The reason for failure to believe.
- V. 3: Esteemed as a leper by appearance—hence the erring moral assessment of Vv.4-6.
- Vv. 4- 6: Bearing our infirmities and our sins.
- Vv. 7- 8: His Trial—he is oppressed even though he resisted not. His death a travesty of justice. Though dead his name shall live.
- V. 9: An honourable burial.
- Vv.10-11: His death according to God's will. Why? A multitudinous seed is the fruit of his suffering.
- V.12: Jesus is highly exalted for his obedience.

ISAIAH 54

The fruits of salvation—the outcome of the servant's work and the national repentance of Isaiah 53.

The future joy of Zion reunited with Yahweh in an everlasting covenant.

- Vv. 1- 3: Barren Zion is comforted with the assurance of more children than those lost.
- Vv. 4-10: Zion, the wife Yahweh forsook, shall forget her shame in the joy of reconciliation to her Husband.
- Vv.11-12: Zion to be rebuilt with lavish magnificence.
- Vv.13-14: Zion's citizens, being Yahweh's disciples, shall enjoy prosperity, undisturbed by the thought of oppression.
- Vv.15-17: Yahweh purposes peace for Zion. Woe to those who stir up strife! This assurance is guaranteed by Yahweh as makers and users of weapons are His workmanship.

ISAIAH 55

Upon the basis of such a “Heritage”, all are invited to embrace the salvation freely offered—the result of the Servant’s work being accomplished.

Vv. 1- 3: A First call.

Salvation is freely offered the thirsty. Moreover, those engaged in the pursuit of earthly goods are called to reason with the offer of complete satisfaction—an everlasting covenant of life.

Vv. 4- 5: As a result of the call (Vv.1-3), Gentiles rally behind the leadership of Christ.

Vv. 6- 9: A second call. This is an urgent summons to the wicked—pardon is offered even them, upon repentance. So do Yahweh’s thoughts transcend man’s!

Vv.10-11: As snow and rain inevitably fertilise the earth so the objects of the Word will be accomplished.

Vv.12-13: The purpose of the Word briefly stated—joy, peace and blessing.

ISAIAH 56

Vv. 1- 2: A third general call to obedience in view of the impending revelation of Divine righteousness.

Vv. 3- 8: Assurance of perfect equality and reward is held out to eunuchs and strangers.

V. 4: What the eunuch must do.

V. 5: The eunuch’s reward.

V. 6: What the stranger must do.

V. 7: The stranger’s reward.

Vv. 9-12: The ravenous Gentile beasts are called upon to devour Yahweh’s flock, rendered defenceless by slothful leadership.

ISAIAH 57

Vv. 1- 2: The Godly removed because of impending calamity.

Vv. 3- 6: The lewd sons of Zion are reprobated for their licentious worship. Yahweh challenges the unfaithful nation to see if the idols they fear will rescue them when calamity comes.

Vv. 7-10: The endless quest for new gods.

Vv.11-14: Yahweh enquires why His people have feared idols rather than Him. There are three questions, v.12. "Why were you more afraid of them than me? How is it that you gave not even a second thought to me? Is it because I've been too gentle that you have no fear of me?" (Living Bible).

Israel's ways to be judged (v.12). The idols of the wicked will not save them. But the righteous shall inherit the holy mount. Their progress to Zion will not be impeded.

Vv.15-21: Yahweh's ultimate purpose—"Peace for Jew and Gentile". This will be realised despite judgments on the wicked.

ISAIAH 58

True fasting and Sabbath keeping contrasted with the counterfeit.

Vv: 1- 2: Hypocritical fasting is exposed and denounced. Need for rebuke despite outward devotion!

Vv. 3- 4: Israel's question and God's answer. The worthlessness of inconsistent worship.

Vv. 5- 7: God's question and answer.

The fast He has not chosen (purely negative) is contrasted with the fast He has chosen (positive).

Vv. 8-12: The promised protection and blessedness of those who truly fast.

V. 9: "If thou—10 . . . soul" Further obligations.

V. 10: . . . "Then—v.12. Further promises.

V. 13: The essence of true Sabbath keeping and its reward.

ISAIAH 59

Vv. 1- 8: The sins of the people are solely responsible for the delay in Yahweh's deliverance.

Vv. 9-15: The people confess that their piteous plight is the fruit of their wrong doing

- V. 15 (from “and it”) -21: The mighty arm of Yahweh is compelled to intervene—to vanquish the forces of evil, headed by Gogue.
—to redeem Israel.
—to establish His fear in all the earth.

ISAIAH 60 THE GLORIES OF NEW JERUSALEM

- Vv. 1- 3: Zion called upon to dispel the deep gloom of the nations.
- Vv. 4- 7: Zion called on to behold her exiled sons and the wealth of the land and sea, concentrating upon her.
- Vv. 8-14: The supremacy of Zion—Nations submit and glorify her.
- Vv.15-22: Dramatic reversal of Zion’s fortunes—her eternal glory and prosperity.

ISAIAH 61 THE JUBILEE YEAR PROCLAIMED

- Vv. 1- 3: The Messiah announces his Mission and the joyful results of its fulfilment. He will set free the slaves of sin and death to the glorification of His Father’s name.
- V. 4: The meek to rebuild.
- V. 5 -9: Yahweh’s love of Justice ensures their exaltation and the subservience of mortals.
- Vv.10-11: Isaiah is moved by the exhilarating contemplation of immortality—joy replaces mourning.

ISAIAH 62

- Vv. 1- 5: Yahweh will not rest until Zion’s salvation shines forth from her. Zion’s sons shall rejoice over her as a bridegroom.
- Vv. 6- 7: Jerusalem’s watchmen must not hold their peace until Yahweh makes her a praise in the earth.
- Vv. 8- 9: Yahweh assures Zion’s sons with an oath that they will be afflicted no more.
- Vv.10-12: A vivid picture of Yahweh’s will. Progress to Zion is facilitated by Yahweh’s behest. Zion, Messiah and his sons united and consoled.

ISAIAH 63 “WHO IS THIS THAT COMES FROM EDOM”

Vv. 1- 6: Christ appears from Edom as bloodstained, victorious Warrior. He reveals that he has in fury conquered all the Nations without the assistance of any, not even Israel!

V. 7--

64:12: **AWESTRUCK** Isaiah makes a sustained appeal for Israel as deserving of special consideration.

- (a) 63: 7- 9: Isaiah recalls the tender love shown Israel when in Egypt and during the early years.
- (b) 63:10-14: Because of rebellion Yahweh became Israel's foe. When in affliction Israel recalled the former mercies shown to them by Yahweh (e.g. Gideon).
- (c) 63:15-16: In view of His former love for Israel, Isaiah appeals to Yahweh to prove His Fatherhood.
- (d) 63:17-19: An impassioned appeal to Yahweh to return and reverse the fortunes of oppressed Israel.
- (e) 64: 1- 5: Isaiah calls for a Sinai—like manifestation of power in which the Gentiles are judged (63:1-6) and the righteous (Israel by implication) are saved.
- (f) 64: 6- 7: Isaiah recognises Israel's sins, and as a representative of the nation, confesses them.
- (g) 64: 8-12: A final impassioned appeal for Israel's preservation.

ISAIAH 65 “THE DIVINE ANSWER”

Vv. 1- 7: Yahweh replies, pointing out that

- (a) others have sought Him, whilst Israel has spurned Him.
- (b) Far from being indifferent to Israel, He has made frequent appeals.
- (c) Therefore they had fulfilled what Moses had testified against them and would be summarily punished.

Vv. 8-10: Israel, however, not to be utterly destroyed because of the precious seed to arise from her.

Vv.11-16: The fearful end of apostates is compared with the joy and blessedness of the elect.

Vv.17-25: A glorious picture of the joy, peace and prosperity of the new heavens and earth.

ISAIAH 66

- Vv. 1- 4: **The Almighty Creator will be served in humble sincerity. The sacrifices of the wicked are obnoxious to Him. He will choose their peril.**
- Vv. 5- 9: **The ostracised ecclesia is comforted with the assurance that a nation of immortals will be brought forth when Zion travails.**
- Vv.10-14: **The immortals are made to rejoice because of the peace, glory and riches of mother Zion.**
- Vv.15-18: **Yahweh's fearful judgements upon the wicked.**
- Vv.19-21: **The survivors of Israel are sent to regather their kinsfolk scattered among the nations. Some will be taken for priest.**
- Vv.22-24: **All flesh shall come to Zion for worship. They shall be reminded of the consequences of rebellion, for they shall be shown Gogue's mausoleum (Ezk. 39:11).**

A VERSE-BY-VERSE EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH 53

INTRODUCTION

The prophecies relating to Yahweh's servant are to be found from chapter 41 to chapter 53 of Isaiah. By following through this section of the prophet, our mind is directed to a contrast between God's "national servant", Israel and His "individual servant", the Lord Jesus Christ. Israel national had been called to an honourable position of service to the God of Heaven. This multitudinous servant is referred to with special esteem in the following places: 41:8, 42:19; 43:10; 44:1, 21; 45:4; 48:20. But unfortunately Israel had despised this privilege and had not fulfilled their duties in this servant capacity. For this cause Yahweh through the prophet sharply rebukes them (Isa. 42:17-20). Meanwhile He calls upon them to "Behold MY servant" (Isa. 42:1). They had failed but the individual servant would not. God's individual servant would accomplish what the national servant could not. Through him the work of the Creator would be carried to its ultimate conclusion. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he has set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait to His law" (42:4).

In his work of service he would not only bring the rebellious servant back to Divine favour, but also incorporate the Gentiles in the Hope of Eternal life (Isa. 49:6). Such was to be the effect of this servant's obedience. From the beginning of their national life Israel had been styled Yahweh's "firstborn" "Israel is my son, even My firstborn" (Ex. 4:22). As His son great privileges and responsibilities were theirs. Yahweh speaks of the great love He had for them when, by the Divine call, He brought them out of Egypt (Hosea 11:1). Having rejected the heritage they had as "sons", they were in turn rejected and Yahweh called another "son" out of Egypt to perform His pleasure (Cp. Hosea 11:1 and Matt. 2:15).

By comparing these quotations it is readily seen that the individual son now takes over the role of the servant, to perform what national Israel could not do, and so in the prophecy HE is styled by Yahweh "My Servant ISRAEL" (he who will have power with God) (Isa. 49:6).

Twice in the "Servant Prophecies" we find the statement, "Behold My Servant" (Isa. 42:1-Isa. 52:13). Yahweh calls upon us to fix our attention upon him and to see what has actually been accomplished through him, and to consider the magnitude of the work. The title of a "servant" implies work done for "another". Yahweh is the prime mover in the case before us; it is His work, the purpose of which is for the ultimate glory of His name (Isa. 45:23-25).

Hearkening to our rule of interpretation, we find that the Apostle Paul quotes these verses of Isaiah 45 on two occasions in his writings, v.12 Rom. 14:11 and Phil. 2:10. What is the significance of his interpretation? Just this, that Yahweh is “the Saviour and there is none else” (Isa. 43:11, 45:21), and that it is in and through the name of Yahweh that all Israel shall be “justified” (Isa. 45:25). Seeing then that there cannot be any other Saviour beside Him, it was necessary that Yahweh give unto Jesus a name which is above every name, and that name which He has given unto him is the name of the Lord Jesus Christ—Yahoshua Anointed (Phil. 3:11).

Having then “glorified God on the earth” (John 17:4), God has exalted him “to be a Prince and a Saviour”, (Acts 5:31). In order to do this his nature was changed to that of his Father’s so that both morally and physically he now is the exact impress of the Divine nature (Heb. 1:3). In this way he has obtained that “more excellent name” (Heb. 1:4) by which he has become the Saviour of men, so that when Peter says that there is “No other name given under heaven whereby we must be saved”, there is a complete agreement with the words of Isaiah, “I am Yahweh and beside Me there is no Saviour” (Acts 4:12; Isa. 43:11). This then is the ultimate to which the Servant obtained: his work of service involves the forgiveness of our sins. Because of our incompetence and inability to remove our transgressions, it was necessary for the Father to “serve with our sins” (Isa. 43:24), in order to “blot out our transgressions” (verse 25). To this work of service the Son of God was called. The 53rd chapter calls our attention to the fact of his obedience to this service. Under extreme difficulties the salvation was accomplished. God’s own Arm wrought salvation (Isa. 59:16) and in words full of pathos God, by the mouth of his prophet, calls upon us to “Behold My Servant” (Isa. 52:13).

It is at this juncture that the final prophecy begins. Ignoring then the chapter division, we commence our consideration at Chapter 52:13 and continue to the end of chapter 53.

ISAIAH 52

VERSE 13

Our attention is focused upon the suffering servant. He is contrasted to the disobedient national servant of Yahweh, the nation of Israel (Cp. Isa. 41:8). This is the second time we are invited to “Behold My Servant”. The first set out the broad outline of Messiah’s work among Jew and Gentile (Isa. 42). We are now invited to consider in closer detail the physical sufferings involved in this work. There is a progressive thought running through the Servant prophecies. In chapter 42:4 we have our first hint of his sufferings; in 49:4 his open lament over apparent failure; 50:6 tells us of the abuse and ill-treatment heaped upon him, while in 53:8 we learn of his violent death.

“Deal Prudently”

R.V. “wisely”. Prudent is a good translation in the case, as the word signifies to “act wisely, discreetly, and behave as if by forethought”.

“Exalted”

This exaltation was subsequent to his sufferings. Note Paul’s comment on this prophecy: “God hath highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9) because he took on him the “form of a servant” (v.9). In Paul’s comment the words “highly” and “above” are the same Greek word. “Hyper” and are equivalent to Isaiah’s “very high”. So we conclude that the “very high” position is the obtaining of the “Name which is above every name.”

VERSE 14

“Astonied”—“Amazed”. The astonishment is two-fold. Firstly in relation to the marred vision and next to the marvellous international events resulting therefrom.

“His visage was so marred”

Who can wonder at the marred visage? Care and sorrow aged him prematurely; the Jews thought him to be near fifty (John 8:57). Think of the lines of grief left by Gethsemane’s anguish (Luke 22:44). What would a crown of thorns do to human flesh? When they were called upon by Pilate to “Behold the Man”, we can imagine the impression upon his audience, deep and lasting (Jn. 19:1-5).

VERSE 15

“Sprinkle”

The word signifies “to startle” and “to leap”, although the usage of the same word in Leviticus 14:14 and chapter 16, etc., indicates that “sprinkle” is a good translation. Once again our rule of interpretation assists us with the meaning. Paul used this verse to show that the prophecy relates to the purification (by “sprinkling”) of the nations (Rom. 15:19-21). He speaks in another place of “the blood of sprinkling” (Heb. 12:24. Also 1 Pet. 1:2), by which forgiveness is obtained. The sprinkling of the blood of Jesus is the anti-type of that sprinkling of the water of separation spoken of in Num. 19. There the ashes of an heifer, which had been offered and consumed by fire “without the camp” (Num. 19:3; Cp. Heb. 13:12), were gathered and mixed with water to cleanse by sprinkling those who had contracted defilement by the contact with the dead (Num. 19:13). Paul explains this as typical of the “Blood of Christ” which is able to purge us from “dead works” and from the defilement of death which we have inherited from our father Adam (Heb. 9:14). This work of sprinkling will extend into the Millennium, beginning with the “sprinkling” of Israel (Ezek. 36:25), when a fountain for sin and uncleanness will be opened in Jerusalem for the inhabitants of the city (Zech. 13:1). How remarkable that many nations will finally receive of this “sprinkled” purification. This astonishment will match the astonishment of those who watched the Son of Man in the hour of his grief and shame.

ISAIAH CHAPTER 53

VERSE 1

“Who hath believed our report?”

The R.S.V. renders this phrase, “Who hath believed what we have heard?” Isaiah speaks of himself and the other witness who had heard from the Father things relating to Messiah. Under the Law a thing was established in the mouth of *two* or three witnesses (Num. 35:30, Deut. 19:15). The Lord quoted this procedure in relation to his own testimony; “I am one that beareth witness of myself, and the Father that sent me beareth witness of me” (Jn. 8:17-18). He had spoken only those things that he had *heard of God* (John 8:38-40), but they had not received his testimony (John 3:32), fulfilling the words of Isaiah 53:1, “Who hath believed our report” (quoted in John 12:38). That the Apostles were included in this witness is shown by Paul’s quotation from the Septuagint version, “Who hath believed the hearing of us” (Rom. 10:16 Margin). The Apostles spoke only of those things they “had seen and heard” (Acts 4:20, 1 John 1:1).

“Arm of Yahweh”

Hebrew, “Zeroah” signifies strength used as a figure of extension. Yahweh’s arm or power to save was seen in the performance of miracles (John

12:38, Acts 4:30). This arm is Jesus Christ, who is again spoken of as such in Isa. 40:10—compare Rev. 22:12.

In her song of exultation Mary considering the conception of Messiah, speaks of the manifestation of the Arm of the Lord (Luke 1:51). The original word, “Zeroah” is closely related to the word “Zerah”—“seed”, Isa. 53:10. Here then is the “Seed of Yahweh”, who is to become the extension of his Father’s purpose. He is also the *seed* of the woman, who is to be *bruised* for our iniquities (Isa. 53:5, Cp. Gen. 3:15). Being planted by the Father at the beginning, he would “grow up before Him as a tender plant” (v.2) only to be “cut off” (v.8), and yet he would still reproduce “his seed” (v.10). The manner by which this could be accomplished is the subject matter of this prophecy.

VERSE 2

“Tender plant”

There is no original word for “plant”, but the word rendered “tender” signifies a “sucker” or “twig of a felled tree”. The same word is used in Job. 14:7 concerning the “tender branch” that will shoot out of the stump of a felled tree because of the scent of water. This matter of the tender branch is a feature of Isaiah’s prophecy; he mentions it in chapter 6:13; also the “twig” out of the stump of Jesse (Isa. 11:1). David’s Tabernacle had fallen down (Amos 9:11); his family tree since had been felled, yet from its stump has come forth this branch that is to be the centre of a new healthy life for the Israelitish tree.

“Dry ground”

This term signifies barren and arid ground, like that of a desert. The Rod of Yahweh’s planting was to appear out of a history of wickedness. Cp. Mat. 23:33-36.

VERSE 3

“He was despised and rejected of men”.

Israel saw no beauty in Messiah and rejected him, but he was the branch of Yahweh’s planting, and will produce other branches which, like him, will be “glorious in the eyes of Yahweh” (Isa. 49:5; 60:21, 61:3). Notice the fulfilment of this verse in the gospel records, eg. Lk. 4:22 and Jn. 7:27.

VERSE 4

“Surely”

A word of emphasis, “SURELY he hath borne our griefs”. Matthew quotes this verse in relation to the curing of physical ailments (Matt. 8:17). But the Lord Jesus Christ deals with sin and sickness as cause and effect (Matt. 9:6). His curing of ills is a demonstration of his power to ultimately remove the cause of all physical infirmities, namely, mortality. Mortality and its related evils are traced back to the transgression of Divine law in Eden. The Lord got

to the root of the matter by showing that, in curing their diseases, he has the power to forgive sins and ultimately, by this process, to swallow up mortality in life. Note the parallel concerning sin and sickness in Psa. 103:3. "Who forgiveth all thine *iniquities*, who healeth all thy diseases" (cp. Isa. 33-24). However, while it is true that sin is the basic cause of all the evils of the flesh, it is not to be supposed that every sickness is the result of some particular transgression. This also was made plain by the Master (John 9:1-3).

"Stricken"

The word signifies "to touch" or "to smite". It is translated "plague" over fifty times in Lev. 13 and 14, and is used there in relation to leprosy. This is one of the most loathsome of all diseases and under the Law strict instructions were given regarding its treatment. It required special cleansing and purification and the victim was periodically inspected by priests, who ascertained his recovery or otherwise. During this period of purification the leper dwelt outside of the camp, being pronounced, "unclean" and avoided by his people lest they should contract this dreadful disease. This then, was the Jews' estimate of their Messiah: an unclean man to be shunned, lest they themselves become defiled by his presence.

VERSE 5

Notice the emphatic teaching here concerning the Lord's offering: contrast the words "He" and "our"; all this was done for *us*. Even though they esteemed him a moral leper, he in fact died for *their* sins. No greater love could be manifested than that a man should die for his friends (John 15:13). But how much more is this painfully impressed upon our conscience when we realise that "while *we* were yet sinners, Christ died for *us*" (Rom. 5:8).

These verses are often quoted to prove the theory of substitution, that Christ died *instead* of us. This is not the implication however, and it is put beyond doubt when we consider the Apostolic comment on these verses. In I Pet. 2:21-25, the Apostle, paraphrasing the words of Isaiah, says, "Who his *own* self bare *our* sins in his *own* body on the tree, that WE BEING DEAD to sins should live unto righteousness". Here is complete *identification*, showing the need for us to become involved in our Lord's sacrifice, firstly by baptism (Rom. 6) and then by consecrating our lives to the extent of becoming "living sacrifices" (Rom. 12:1).

"Healed"

This is the same word used in Leviticus in relation to the healing of leprosy. They looked upon him as a leper, yet he healed lepers in Israel (Luke 7:22, 17:12). Ultimately the Lord shall *heal* this "vile" or "humiliating" body of mortality (Phil. 3:21), the anti-type of the plague of leprosy.

VERSE 6

"All we like sheep have gone astray"

Sheep are easily led and are easily scattered when they have no leader. The

Lord quoted the prophecy of Zech. 13:7, which speaks of the smiting of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep (Matt. 26:31). Peter, however, shows that now that the leader has been raised to life, they who had previously gone astray are returned to "the Shepherd and the Bishop of their souls" (I Pet. 2:25).

VERSE 7

"He opened not his mouth"

Examples of this are shown when Jesus was brought before the Sanhedrin (Matt. 26:63), before Pilate (Matt. 27:12-14) and before Herod (Luke 23:9-11). Here is wonderful control of the unruly tongue. James says that only a perfect man can completely tame it (James 3:1-6). Heed the exhortation to follow his example (I Pet. 2:23, 18-20; Heb. 12:3).

"Lamb led to slaughter"

John the Baptist proclaimed him to be "the lamb of God" (John 1:29), thus linking him with the books of Moses (Gen. 4 and Ex. 12). Imagine the consternation when he appears as "the lamb having been slain", but then seen as all powerful (7 horns) and all seeing (7 eyes) (Rev. 5:6). Philip applies this verse to Jesus when teaching the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:32).

VERSE 8

One of the most remarkable features concerning this verse is that in the exposition of it by Philip he was directing his words to a EUNUCH (Acts 8:27-34). Isaiah speaks of a eunuch in another sense than the literal. Here was one of whom it is asked, "Who shall declare his generation?" Who, indeed, for before he could raise up children to perpetuate his name he was "cut off out of the land of the living!" The generation is indeed declared from Adam to Christ (Matt. 1 and Luke 3), but from Christ onwards there are no fleshly descendants. Yet the prophecy says "He shall see his seed" (or posterity). This seed then must be developed along spiritual lines. The spirit of Christ in Isaiah speaks of "the children which God hath given me" (Cp. Isa. 8:18 and Heb. 2:13). These children are not born by the will of the flesh, but become the seed of Christ by faith (Jn. 1:13; Gal. 3:27-29). We can imagine the Ethiopian eunuch's delight when he was told of a family that is to be developed along lines other than by physical procreation and that he himself can become a member of a large family of brethren and sisters rejoicing in their heavenly parentage.

The record in Acts tells us that "he went on his way rejoicing". No wonder, especially if, as we may suppose, he would continue reading the prophecy and come to chapter 56:4-6, where a grand promise is made to eunuchs. Here he would learn that despite their impotency, the eunuchs would be given a name that would not be "cut off" if they became related to God's covenant. And so at last, the literal eunuchs, leaving no earthly posterity and making

themselves spiritual eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake would find complete satisfaction in that grand company of the redeemed, all members of the family of God (Matt. 19:12).

VERSE 9

This verse had its complete fulfilment in the death and burial of the Lord. The word "wicked" is in the plural, while the word "rich" is singular ("a rich man"). This is in exact accord with the outworking of the prophecy. He was crucified between two thieves after which he found his temporary resting place in the tomb of the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea (Matt. 27:57-60).

VERSE 10

"Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him"

The crucifixion was a Divine arrangement (Acts 2:23; 4:28). Notice that the speaker in both these quotations is Peter, who was previously rebuked for suggesting that the Divine scheme should not be carried out (Matt. 16:21-23). At that time he incurred the displeasure of Christ, who foresaw that it was necessary to die in order to meet the requirements of God's holiness, to justify his Father and to effect the great salvation that will fill this earth with the Glory of God. Throughout the Divine record there are the suggestions that Yahweh would require the death of His son to effect His purpose. Psalm 69:26 speaks concerning Messiah whom "thou (Yahweh) had smitten" and because this great offering would be more efficacious for salvation than animal sacrifice, the Psalmist goes on to say: "This shall *please* Yahweh better than an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs" (v.31). Zechariah adds his testimony when speaking under inspiration. He says, "Awake, Oh sword against My shepherd and against the man that is My fellow" (Zech. 13:7). Here is a clear indication, that, according to the fiat of Deity, the crucifixion must take place. But this still does not completely answer the question, Why did it please the Lord to bruise him? Actually, Yahweh's *displeasure* was shown by the frowning elements when His son was brutally put to death at Golgotha (Matt. 27:45-46).

There is another sense however, in which the Father was pleased by this terrible event. It was *the means whereby God's holy name was vindicated, His honour completely satisfied and His justice clearly demonstrated* to all mankind. Paul says emphatically that the death of Jesus declared the "righteousness (justification) of God". He repeats the statement in two verses of scripture (Rom. 3:25-26). This then, was the pleasing element in this awful scene. The Son of God hung upon the cross, not merely because it was a decree of God, but that it might be demonstrated for all to see that God's mercy is not indifferent to holiness.

In this declaration there is laid a basis for forgiveness. By a *law of God* Adam was sentenced to return to the dust, in which sentence all his posterity became involved (Rom. 5:12). Being a divine decree there could be no repeal,

unless the law was fully discharged. On the other hand the one who discharges this law must, in some way or another, escape its ultimate consequences, because to discharge it he must die, for that is its claim. Therefore, if he were to remain dead, nothing at all is gained in the transaction. Furthermore, we must consider that the *Divine* decree of Eden stands in the way of the Divinely declared purpose of Ex. 3:14-15. If Yahweh purposes to manifest Himself in flesh, glorified and immortalised, then He must seek a way to remove the curse of mortality, which is a natural barrier to this manifestation. These problems created by Divine laws, could only be solved by Divine wisdom. The problems are insuperable, as far as flesh is concerned. So what has been impossible with man, God, through the instrumentality of His servant, has accomplished.

In order then to discharge the law of death imposed upon mankind, it was necessary for the servant to be born into the constitution of sin and death. To destroy this mighty foe the servant must meet it in its own domain—the flesh (Rom. 8:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Heb. 2:14). Hence the apostle says in another place, “He was born of a woman”. When he died therefore “He died *unto* sin once” (Rom. 6:10), positively declaring, “God’s justice” by so doing. The very manner of his death, being public, gave emphasis to this truth. This was the first necessity in the solving of the problem, “He became obedient unto death, even *the death of the cross*” (Phil. 2:8). The Son had given the Divine decree all that it could claim and now it was necessary for the Father to show His acceptance of the offering. “God raised him from the dead”. Peter says that “*the grave could not hold him*” (Acts 2:24), the reason being, that *another* divine law was involved.

One law, the law of Eden, involved him in death for the upholding of the Father’s honour. Another law, however, says that “the wages of sin is death”. Now the apostle says, “He knew no sin” (2 Cor. 5:21). He styles him as the one who is “Holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26). Therefore it is true that the grave could not possibly hold him. He died to discharge one Divine law, he rose to give meaning to another.

In this way, God’s justice was upheld in *death* and in *resurrection*. The problem had been completely solved and a way opened up by which sins can be forgiven, on a basis of understanding and faith. Where the forgiveness of sins operates, the power of sin has lost its ascendancy. God’s mercy extended *in* and *through* Jesus Christ, is efficacious to forgive and ultimately to remove sin and its effects. There is a power now available to all the saints, the power of FORGIVENESS. The conditions of receiving it are sincere prayer and a confident anticipation of the results to be obtained. In the words of Jesus, “Be it unto you *according to your faith*”. Flesh and blood forgiven for Christ’s sake, opens up the way for the Divine manifestation, which is the ultimate of Yahweh’s Purpose. The work of God through His servant has not only solved all the problems brought about by man’s disobedience, but has made the pathway clear for the glorious consummation of all things. “THE EARTH SHALL BE FILLED WITH THE GLORY OF YAHWEH”. When the objects of his death are perceived is it any wonder that “It pleased the Lord to bruise him”?

“He hath put him to grief”

The word “grief” signifies a “malady”; it implies “weakness” in the Servant’s case as he was inflicted with the weakness and “disease” of mortality. Notice Paul’s comment, “He was crucified through *weakness*” (2 Cor. 13:4) which is equivalent to being “put to death in the *flesh*” (I Pet. 3:18). Hence the prophet, following through this thought, says, “His soul (nephesh) was made an offering for sin”

“Thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin”

The Hebrew word is “Asham”, and is used of the trespass offering under the law. The laws regarding the sin offering and the trespass offering were basically the same but with this difference. The sin offering was made for sins, the effects of which terminated primarily upon the sinner; the trespass offering was for sins, the effects of which terminated primarily upon another. The trespass offering related to deliberate acts of deceit and violence (Lev. 6:1-6, Num. 5:6-8). In the true spirit of understanding the Lord said, “Forgive them for they know not what they do”. He was making *their* offering; they were the ones who had used deceit and violence against him. Truly the prophet says, “The chastisement of *our* peace was upon him” (v.5).

“Prolong his days”

Literally this means to “lengthen and draw out”. Note the promise of Yahweh concerning the lengthening of Messiah’s days (Psa. 21:4; Psa. 45:6; Cp. Heb. 1:8). What folly to speak of Yahweh “lengthening the days” of Messiah if he pre-existed, as some suppose.

“Pleasure of the Lord”

Pleasure is a good translation, the word also being used for “purpose” (Eccl. 3:1, 17; 8:6). At this moment the purpose of God is prospering in his hand, seeing that the Father has committed to him “all power” and the “Revelation” of His will. (Matt. 28:20, Rev. 1:1).

VERSE 11

“Travail of his soul”

This word is not the same as that used of child-birth, but signifies, “labour and toil”, “wearying effort”, (Strong’s). As always the sufferings precede the glory (I Pet. 1:1), but the apostle says, that ‘the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed’ (Rom. 8:18). It was this picture of glory that sustained the Lord (Heb. 12:1-3). Notice that He said, “The hour is come” (John 17:1). The time was predicted; the thoughts of the Servant, however, were beyond the cross, “Glorify thou me with thine own Self” (John 17:5).

“By his knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many”

Salvation is an *intellectual* matter and it was through the Servant’s knowledge that it was effected. The word “knowledge” here means precisely what it says. For its use compare Psa. 119:66; Prov. 1:17, 10:14; Eccl. 7:12. Concerning knowledge we have these important scriptural references.

- * The Branch was raised up in the knowledge of Yahweh (Isa. 11:2).
- * It is to be the stability of his Millennial reign (Isa. 33:6).
- * Israel perished for lack of it (Hos. 4:6).
- * The Apostle Paul delivers an exhortation to us upon the subject (Eph. 1:17; 4:13; Phil. 1:9; Col. 1:9-10).
- * The earth shall be full of the knowledge of Yahweh (Isa. 11:2,9).

The words “righteous” and “justify” are the same in the original. He was first justified in order to justify his brethren (Zech. 9:9, Margin, Heb. 9:12, Omitting “for us”, there being no warrant for their inclusion—the verb demanding the meaning “for himself”). Being the Deity manifest in flesh (I Tim. 3:16), he became “just and the justifier of him that believeth in Him” (Rom. 3:26).

VERSE 12

“Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong.”

Both word “great” and “strong” imply a multitude. Their meanings are as follows, “a host”, “abundant”, “to multiply to increase”, “numerous”, “ten thousand times ten thousand”. Although “cut off”, the servant would “see his seed”, now great and multitudinous, fulfilling, the promise to Abraham. “Thy seed shall be as the stars of the heaven” (Gen. 15:5).

“The spoil with the strong”

Hebrew for “spoil” is “Shalal”. Notice the name of Isaiah’s younger son, Maher—“Shalal”—Hash—Baz (Isa. 8:3; Margin: “In making speed to the spoil he hasteneth to the prey”). This boy, along with his brother Shear-Jashub (“A remnant shall return,” Isa. 7:3) was typical of the *Brethren* of Christ (Cp. Isa. 8:18 and Heb. 2:13). With these ‘children’ (seed) then, shall Messiah divide the spoils of glory, when he cometh to be glorified in his saints (Isa. 61:3; 2 Thess. 1:7-10).

“He was numbered with the transgressors”

(Fulfilled Mark 15:28).

His numbering or identification however went further than with the two thieves. He was identified with the whole human race (Heb. 2:14; 4:15, Rom. 8:3). Unfortunately the whole human race is not *identified with him* and if we are to gain this salvation so painfully won, we must take our place along side of him. We must, as the apostle Paul, become “buried with Christ” (Gal.

2:20) and by experience we must come to know “the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil. 3:10). In this way only can we be saved, to partake of the division of the spoils. “If we suffer with him, we will reign with him”, was the advice of Paul to Timothy (2 Tim. 2:12).

“Behold my Servant” is the counsel of God, and as we trace the sufferings of that servant, and the ultimate glory to be revealed, let us be moved and stimulated to follow his example. “He was numbered among the transgressors”—are we among those who are now identified with him through a life of sacrifice? Are we dead to sin but alive unto God? Are we daily crucifying our affections and lusts? In answering these questions let honesty be our guide, let the measure of comparison be Isaiah 53—“Who hath believed our report and to whom is the Arm of Yahweh revealed”.