

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 • The Work of the Messiah

Introduction

If you don't think this passage is important, consider the fact that Isaiah 53 is quoted at least 85 times in the New Testament. Also consider God's previous statement through Isaiah:

*Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things which have not been done,
Saying, 'My purpose will be established,
And I will accomplish all My good pleasure';
Isaiah 46:10*

Just as God predicted many centuries in advance the fulfillment of every detail of the Messiah's First Coming, so will His Second Coming be fulfilled. In our present comfort and assurance of the Messiah's initial work is our hope and faith established in anticipation of its completion.

¹³Behold, My servant will prosper,
He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.
¹⁴Just as many were astonished at you,
My people,
So His appearance was marred more than any man
And His form more than the sons of men.
¹⁵Thus He will sprinkle many nations,
Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;
For what had not been told them they will see,
And what they had not heard they will understand.

[Read 52:13-15]

Q: What is unique about the way this passage begins when compared to the whole?

A: It begins by seeing the Messiah as already having successfully completed His earthly ministry. It first presents the **end** result before discussing the process He went through to get there.

*So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.
Mark 16:19*

*...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.
1 Peter 3:21b-22*

Q: How does v.14 establish for us precisely who God is referring to in this passage?

A: God specifically compares His special, individual Servant to Israel, His servant-nation. There can be no mistaking that God is speaking specifically of the Messiah and therefore these verses cannot be applied to Israel.

Q: What is the contrast of v.13 to v.14-15?

A: Whereas v.13 opened with Christ's exultation, the rest deal with the seeming contradiction of His humiliation. This was an extremely difficult concept for ancient scholars to reconcile because they failed to understand it as "One Messiah, Two Comings".

*As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches and inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.
1 Peter 1:10-11*

[Continued on the next page.]

Q: There's a specific sequence of events here. Why is it important that it's first noted that the Messiah's "appearance was marred", that then "He will sprinkle many nations", and that finally many will be astonished at His appearance?

A: It's an important sequence because Isaiah is providing a very compressed summary of Christ's work both in His First Coming and Second Coming. He is crucified ("appearance was marred"), resurrected (sprinkles many nations), and returns a second time (the world is astonished).

"And in that day I will set about to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.

Zechariah 12:9-10

BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.

Revelation 1:7

Point: Isaiah begins with an overview of the entire work of the Messiah which covers **BOTH** His First and Second Comings.

^{53:1}Who has believed our message?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord
been revealed?

²For He grew up before Him like a tender
shoot,
And like a root out of parched ground;
He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be
attracted to Him.

³He was despised and forsaken of men,
A man of sorrows and acquainted with
grief;
And like one from whom men hide their
face
He was despised, and we did not esteem
Him.

[Read 53:1-3]

Q: According to v.1-2, what was the basis for Israel's initial rejection of the Messiah? (Hint: It's a three-fold rejection.)

- They rejected His words ("report")
- They rejected His works ("arm")
- They rejected His person ("no stately form or majesty")

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him.

John 1:11

Q: What is the meaning of the way the Messiah is described in v.2?

A: "A tender shoot" literally means "a little bush". In other words, Christ was not a great tree, but a humble bush, which would be quite a contrast to Israel's desire for a "conquering" Messiah rather than the "suffering servant" first sent to them. However, this fit with other descriptions of the Messiah.

*Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse,
And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.*

Isaiah 11:1

Q: What is indicated in v.2 that probably points to the Messiah coming in the form of a man?

A: "He grew up". For the most part, the Jews would not accept that God would come in the form of a Servant in this manner.

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“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him.

Mark 6:3

Q: How was Christ greeted and treated according to v.3?

- “Despised” – not wanted, looked down upon
- “Rejected” – forsaken by His disciples, His nation, and His world
- “Not Esteem[ed]” – not valued highly, not wanted

Point: *These things combine to provide us with a picture of His rejection.*

⁴Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.

⁵But He was pierced through for our
transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell
upon Him,

And by His scourging we are healed.

⁶All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of
us all
To fall on Him.

[Read 53:4-6]

Q: What do these verses explain about the Messiah?

A: The purpose of His death on the cross and the price He paid:

- Wounded/pierced – referring to His death on the cross
- Bruised/crushed – referring to the weight of the burden of sin placed upon Him.
- Chastised/punished – taking upon Himself what we should have borne ourselves for breaking the Law.

Q: The previous question described the physical sufferings Christ underwent – what were the even more serious spiritual sufferings that were an integral part of the work of the cross?

- “He was pierced through for our transgressions”
- “He was crushed for our iniquities”

Essentially, He took upon Himself our very sin nature.

Q: How does v.5 describe both aspects of our sin nature?

- We are sinners by birth (“All of us like sheep have gone astray”)
- We are sinners by choice (“Each of us has turned to his own way”)

Q: What is the contrast of the use of the word “all” in v.6 in how it’s first used compared to how it’s finally used?

A: Whereas it begins that “all” are condemned, it concludes with the “all” of salvation.

He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

2 Corinthians 5:21

Point: *These things combine to provide us with a picture of His redemption.*

⁷He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its
shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.
⁸By oppression and judgment He was
taken away;
And as for His generation, who
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?
⁹His grave was assigned with wicked
men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

[Read 53:7-9]

Q: How did John the Baptist first describe Jesus when he saw Him?

A: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Observation: A sacrificial animal cannot mount any kind of protest or defense or refuse in any way to undergo the purpose for which it has been assigned.

Q: What do these verses specifically describe that actually came about?

A: They describe the rigged trial of Jesus and His silent sufferings during all that ensued in the course of them.

Q: How was Jesus "cut out of the land of the living"?

A: Not just a literal allusion to death, His being sent outside of the city to die was the same way they treated lepers and other people considered to be unclean, those people's conditions often referred to as being "cut off from the living."

Q: What was most likely to happen to Christ's body if Joseph ("a rich man") had not taken care of it?

A: The traditions of the time would have dictated that it either be buried in a potter's field or thrown in the garbage dump. Men may be unjust, but God is just.

For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

1 Peter 2:21-25

Point: These things combine to provide us with a picture of His resignation.

¹⁰But the LORD was pleased
To crush Him, putting Him to grief;
If He would render Himself as a guilt
offering,

He will see His offspring,
He will prolong His days,
And the good pleasure of the Lord will
prosper in His hand.

¹¹As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.

¹²Therefore, I will allot Him a portion
with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the
strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the
transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

[Read 53:10-12]

Q: Are we to take these verses as meaning that God was actually “happy” and “rejoicing” at His Son’s suffering and death?

A: No. They actually convey God’s pleasure to see the work of salvation completed, the sacrifice accepted, and sin atoned for. This meant that God’s grace could be extended to save undeserving sinners. God’s “pleasure” is in the results of the cross.

Point: *Although Christ was killed by evil men, their evil deed was overridden by God to accomplish His ultimate purpose. Christ’s death was not a “moral example”, but a sin offering in our place.*

“Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know— this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death. But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Acts 2:22-24

Q: Apart from the joy of doing the Father’s will, what was Christ’s reward?

- He was raised from the dead. (“He will prolong His days”)
- He was given a spiritual family. (“He will see His offspring”)
- He was given a spiritual inheritance. (“He will divide the booty”)
- He is ranked with “the great” (“I will allot Him a portion with the great”)

Q: How does v.12 take it back to the cross?

A: “Numbered with the transgressors” along with the fact that He “interceded for the transgressors” alludes not just to His death between the two criminals, but His intercession for them and His accusers. (“Father, forgive them...” – Luke 23:34) There is no judgment on them because He bore it all upon Himself, just as he has likewise done for each of us.

Point: *These things combine to provide us with a picture of His reward.*

Overall Application

It’s very interesting to note that this entire passage is narrated as if spoken by a Jew who, standing at the end of time, looks back to explain and put into proper perspective the Messiah’s First and Second Coming. Have you trusted Him as your own Savior?