

Messianic Prophecies in Isaiah #6: The “Suffering-Servant” Prophecy in Isaiah 53

Christ’s Substitutionary Atonement for Sinners in Death – Isa. 53

v. 1 – “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?”

Christ as “the Arm of the LORD” will be covered in a later message.

v. 2 – “For he shall grow 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 shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.”

Jesus grew up, in unpromising circumstances. He didn’t just appear as a fully grown Messiah. He was not physically striking, like Saul. He did not appear to be anyone special. Mt. 13:54-57

vv. 3-5 – “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows [*pain*], and acquainted with grief [*sickness or disease*]: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs [*sickness or disease*], and carried our sorrows [*pains*]: 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.”

The Pharisees and Sadducees certainly despised him, and plotted continually. Antagonistic bystanders jeered and considered that he was getting what he deserved as a pretender-messiah. Mt. 26:68, 27:39-44

“We hid as it were our faces from him” – In hatred and spite, men turned away from him. Jesus is the Light of the world (Jn. 1), and those who live in darkness cannot stand to look at the Light of righteousness. They don’t want their evil deeds to be exposed. But this must also apply to those who, like Peter, are ashamed to confess him before men. Mt. 10:32-33

In the Hebrew, sorrows should be “pain”; grief should be “sickness”. This is confirmed by Mt. 8:16-17 – “... he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our **infirmities**, and bare our **sicknesses**.” So 53:4 is literally, he bore our diseases, and carried our pains.

But his wounds were the punishment for our transgressions and sins. The punishment we deserved fell upon him. 1 P. 2:22-24 – “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by his stripes [*wounds*], we were healed.” Healing is in the atonement.

v. 6 – “All we like sheep have gone astray: we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Every one of us is (was) lost in sin (Rom. 3:9-23), having gone astray from God in word and thought and intention. We were every bit as lost spiritually, as a sheep who wanders away from the shepherd and flock is, physically. But God the Father laid upon his Son the punishment we deserved.

Men turn to “their own way” – Prov. 21:2 – “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD pondereth the hearts.” Judges 21:25 – “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown commentary says “The innocent was punished *as if* guilty, that the guilty might be rewarded *as if* innocent.”

v. 7 – “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

As severe as his physical sufferings were, he did not speak up in his own defense. Mt. 27:12-14 In his silence, even Pilate was amazed. Jn. 19:4-11

v. 8 – “He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken.”

“who shall declare his generation” – might be, “who can believe the wickedness of this generation?” But more likely, “who can comprehend the extent of those who will ultimately come to life through his atonement?” In this case, “generation” would refer to his seed, his spiritual descendants, those who become sons of God by receiving Christ (Jn. 1:12).

He was arrested, and taken from the judgment seat to be scourged. Death was predicted, and again it is stated that his afflictions were not for himself, but for the transgressions of God’s people.

v. 9 – And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.”

He died between two real criminals (Mt. 27:38), and was buried in the tomb of a rich man (Mt. 27:57-60).

He was not a violent trouble maker, nor a deceiver.

v. 10 – “Yet it pleased the LORD 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 the LORD shall prosper in his hand.”

It pleased the Father to put the Son to grief! Not that he wanted to see him suffer, but it was according to his eternal good pleasure to redeem men by the sacrificial death of the Son. Christ was “slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8). His soul was made a sin offering.

Christ on the cross would see and recognize that by his death he was purchasing an elect people who would be his “seed”, his generation (those who would be generated to life as a result of his death and resurrection).

“he shall prolong his days” speaks of his resurrection to an endless life.

As the Messiah is the “arm of the Lord”, God’s good pleasure, his sovereign will of mercy and blessing to his elect, will prosper. It will have its intended effect.

v. 11 – He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.”

The Father would look on the Son, hanging on the cross in great travail of soul, and the divine justice was fully satisfied against the sins of his people. Mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed (Ps. 85:10).

“By his knowledge” – i.e., by the knowledge of him, we are justified. 2 P. 3:18 – “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” Phl. 3:9-10 – “... righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection ...”

On the cross, Christ was not a sinner – he was God’s “righteous servant”. He was a sin offering, pure and holy. He bore, not the iniquities themselves (how would that even be possible?), but the punishment of our iniquities. The OT sacrificed animal did not become sinful, but men’s sins were confessed over them and then they were slain as men’s substitutes. They bore the sins in a representative way. The sacrifices were always called holy, even after the sins were confessed on their heads.

v. 12 – “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong: because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Because he was obedient unto death, Christ receives the spoils of that great battle with Satan at the cross – the souls of men. He was numbered with the transgressors, and mocked, when in actuality he was bearing the sins of his people and by that death he is able to continually make intercession for transgressors. Heb. 7:25