

• The 'Servant of the Lord' must rescue both Israel and the gentiles

1. The Servant of the Lord will succeed in proportion to his suffering

• He will experience terrible suffering – but this is what will bring Him success

• God will sprinkle salvation on nations

2. The Servant of the Lord is at first misunderstood

• God's servants always have to face misunderstanding – especially Jesus

• The 'Servant' is the 'Arm' of the Lord – requires a revelation in the heart

• He is distinct from God – God watches His human growth

3. His suffering is because He is a sacrifice for our sins

Everything in Isaiah so far seems to be getting ready for Isaiah 53, surely one of the greatest chapters in the Bible! We know already that the 'Servant of the Lord' is to be sent to achieve a twofold task. He must rescue Israel but at the same time be the Saviour of gentiles. His work will certainly be effective. Yahweh will enable him to achieve the task. We have seen how the prophet eagerly looks forward to the coming salvation. Now we are brought to the Arm of the Lord who brings that salvation^{□1}.

1. The Servant of the Lord will succeed in proportion to his suffering.

¹³Behold, my servant, his wisdom will succeed;
he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

¹⁴Just as there were many who were shocked by you –
(his appearance was such a disfigurement
beyond that of any man

and his form marred beyond human likeness) –

¹⁵exactly so will he sprinkle many nations.
Kings will shut their mouths because of him,
for what they were not told, they will see,
and what they have not heard, they will discern.

The structure of the sentence is complicated but its main point is clear. The Servant will experience terrible suffering, and yet it is his suffering that will bring him success. By suffering he is able to 'sprinkle many nations'. We remember that the blood of animals was sprinkled upon the people to give them assurance of salvation. So God will sprinkle salvation upon nations because of the sacrificial suffering of his Servant.

2. The Servant of the Lord is at first misunderstood. God's servants always have to face misunderstanding and this was supremely true of our Lord Jesus Christ.

¹Who has believed our message
and to whom has the Arm of Yahweh been revealed?

²He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

³He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows, and familiar with weakness.
And he was one from whom men hide their faces;
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

The 'Servant' is the 'Arm' of the Lord. He is God himself, come down to save men and women. He is not generally appreciated and it requires a 'revelation' in the heart before anyone truly sees him as the Arm of the Lord and the Saviour.

Yet he is distinct from God, and his human growth was watched over by God. He had uninspiring origins ('a root out of dry ground'); there was nothing impressive about his appearance^{□1}; people avoid him and fail to see who and what he is for the human race^{□2}.

3. The explanation of his suffering is found in his being a sacrifice for our sins.

⁴Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

□1 52:13-55:13

□1 53:2b
□2 53:3

• Jesus bears the weakness and damage done by sin as well as the sin itself – final resurrection glory flows from this

• Jesus substituted Himself as the One who should be punished for our sin

• Three types of sin – wandering, self-rebellion and iniquity

• The Saviour is punished – both because of the will of the Saviour and the will of God

• Peace results – with the wholeness resulting from our reconciliation with God

⁵But he was pierced to death for our transgressions,
he was crushed to death for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and, at the cost of his wounds, healing has been accomplished for us.
⁶We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and Yahweh laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Upon the cross Jesus bears our sins but Isaiah begins (in verse 4) at a slightly different point. Jesus bears in himself not only sins but the weaknesses and the damage done by sin. Every kind of weakness and sorrow was somehow carried by Jesus during his ministry and upon the cross (a point that Matthew 8:17 applies to a healing-miracle). There is 'healing in the atonement' (as is often said) for every possible result of sin as well as for the sin itself. This does not mean that miracles can be 'switched on' at will; it does mean that final resurrection glory and every foretaste of it along the way flows from the sin-bearing work of Jesus.

Jesus' sacrifice upon the cross was substitutionary. We sinned. He substituted himself as the One who should be punished^{□1}.

Three ways of speaking of our sinfulness come in 53:6. There was wandering ('sheep . . . gone astray'); there was self-rebellion (each one turns 'to his own way'); there was iniquity ('twisted-ness' in our natures). What Isaiah says is true of the totality of the human race ('all'), of each member of the human race ('each'), and of myself and everyone I know as members of the human race ('we all . . . each of us').

What happens is that the Saviour is 'smitten . . . afflicted . . . pierced to death . . . crushed to death'. He is punished. He is wounded.

What happens takes place by the will of the Saviour ('he took up our infirmities . . .') and by the will of the God of Israel who sent him ('Yahweh laid on him the iniquity of us all'). On his side he was 'taking up' and 'carrying'. But it was God's activity also ('Yahweh laid on him the iniquity of us all').

The result of what the Servant does is peace. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him. His is the punishment; ours is the peace – the wholeness that comes to us as a result of our being reconciled to God. There is no peace for the wicked, said 48:22, but by bearing our sins in his body, the 'Arm of the Lord' does what no other agency can do. He brings us peace by reconciling us to God.

□1 53:5



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