

4. Verse 6 plays an important role in this section of the burden as it serves to join together verses 1-5 and 7-9. But beyond this, commentators are not in agreement. Many see verse 6 as concluding the preceding treatment of false prophets. Specifically, the person being addressed is regarded as the same individual who speaks in verse 5. Thus the purported relation between these two verses: Some unidentified individual inquires of the hypothetical false prophet of verse 5 concerning his wounds, and that man answers that he received them in the house of his friends. So also, those who hold that this false prophet's denial represents a disingenuous act of self-preservation (ref. again 13:3) tend to treat the statement of verse 6 in the same way. That is, this man's lacerations were inflicted upon him for being a false prophet, but, consistent with his posture of denial, he doesn't want men to know that. So, when asked about his wounds, he lies and attributes them to a misfortune which occurred in his friends' house. McComiskey's comments are representative of this interpretation: "*Fearful for his life, this hypothetical prophet will claim another profession, owning to being a hired hand who worked the fields all his life... Should someone wonder about the lacerations on the back of this false prophet, the response will be so lame as to bring a smile to the face: 'Wounds? Oh, these! These are wounds I received in the house of my friends.'*"

But there is another possible interpretation – one that arguably better fits the language and larger context and provides an important transition into verses 7-9. This interpretation has the prophet who speaks in verse 5 asking the question in verse 6. The Hebrew text suggests this arrangement by the parallel construction which opens both verses: Verse 5 begins, "And *he* will say, 'I am not a prophet...,'" while verse 6 begins, "And *he* will say to him, 'What are these wounds between your hands...'" If this view is correct, the circumstance depicted here is as follows:

- The text spotlights a false prophet who has come to see himself for what he is and, out of shame and remorse (note the connection with the community of mourners in 12:10-14), renounces his claim to be one of Yahweh's prophets.
- He has looked upon himself with clear eyes, and now his gaze is fixed on another man who bears wounds between his hands. But these are not the wounds of accidental injury, but those which result from being beaten; *they are the wounds of a stricken man*. This self-proclaimed prophet who had claimed to be a seer was brought to his senses and afforded a clear sight of himself, and now his scrutiny was directed toward another man who appears before him battered and lacerated.
- Stunned by what he sees, he asks the wounded man how he came to be stricken in this way and the latter responded that it happened in the house of his friends. Immediately after this explanation the burden introduces the figure of Yahweh's Shepherd – *a man who is stricken even as a sword is called against him* (13:7).

The penitent prophet set his gaze upon a battered individual, and Yahweh identified this man as His Shepherd and Associate. Interpreted in this way, verse 6 serves as a poignant transition from the Lord's pledge of purging to His introduction of His Shepherd through whose smiting and piercing He accomplishes this purging (cf. again 12:10 and 9:9-17).

The second interpretation is preferable for several reasons. First of all, it reflects the most natural reading in Hebrew. But it also provides a better explanation for the statement that these wounds were received in the house of the wounded man's *friends* (the Hebrew term connotes a relationship marked by affection or even love). With the first interpretation, the false prophet was beaten by his friends, which would seem to reiterate the point in verse 3: When the Lord does His purging work, His people will oppose all falseness, even when promoted by those they love. But with the second interpretation, this beating in the house of friends has a much more profound significance:

- One of the great scriptural themes is Yahweh's rejection by His covenant people. This rejection began in Egypt and characterized the house of Israel throughout its history (cf. Ezekiel 20:1-32 with Isaiah 1:1-4; Jeremiah 1-3; Hosea 1:1-2:13; etc.). And the prophets predicted that it would come to its apex in Israel's rejection of Yahweh in the person of His Servant (Isaiah 53; Zechariah 11:12-13). When Israel's covenant Lord and Father at last came to them in His Servant-Redeemer, they would denounce Him, strike Him and put Him to death (ref. again 12:10).
- The gospel writers uniformly emphasized this dynamic, weaving it into the very fabric of their accounts. Yahweh incarnate had come to His own, but His own neither recognized Him nor embraced Him. Rather, they regarded Him to be a satanic deceiver whom they sought to destroy in the name of honoring their God (cf. John 1:1-11 with Matthew 8:1-13, 11:1-24, 12:38-45, 27:11-25; Mark 2:18-3:6, 20-30, 14:55-64; Luke 2:25-35, 4:14-30, 13:22-35, 14:1-24, 20:9-20; John 5:1-47, 8:12-59, 9:1-10:39, 11:1-54, 15:18-25, 19:1-16, etc.).

Read through this lens, the interchange in verse 6 takes on huge importance as yet another predictive witness to the ironic truth that the Lord's coming – which was the great and perpetual longing of the house of Israel – would be met with fierce opposition: Yahweh was going to be pierced to death, but He would receive those fatal wounds in the house of His "friends": the house of Israel, His beloved "son" and covenant seed of Abraham, His friend (cf. 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8) whom He had come to deliver.

- a. In this passage, the burden identified Yahweh's Shepherd as the pierced one; previously it implied that it was Yahweh Himself who was to be pierced. This apparent disparity is resolved by the further identification of the Shepherd as a *man* who is Yahweh's *Associate* (13:7). While not an explicit statement of incarnation, this designation does express an intimate relation between the divine and the human as situated in the person of the Lord's Shepherd.
 - This individual is directly identified as a man, but a particular sort of man: *The Hebrew term connotes man considered at the pinnacle of his mature strength and vitality.* In this form and applied generically without a specific referent, the noun highlights the creature man at his greatest and most capable – man as truly *man*. (Notably, a cognate of this noun forms a title for Yahweh – *and David's Branch* – emphasizing the divine strength and power: *El Gibbor* – the Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6, 10:21)).

- Parallel with this designation, this man is further identified as Yahweh's *associate*. This noun connotes relational intimacy, whether the relationship is familial, social, or intentional (i.e., shared purpose or intention). In the Scripture, the term is typically rendered *neighbor*, where it designates a person who is a fellow member of the covenant community (cf. Leviticus 5:21, 18:20, 19:11-17, 24:19, 25:15-17; etc.). Though this Shepherd, considered as David's Branch and the Isaianic Servant, is an "associate" of the Israelite people (i.e., a fellow Israelite), the designation here identifies Him as Yahweh's Associate. The immediate context provides no further clarification of this relationship, but the larger burden does: *In striking Yahweh's associate with the sword, Yahweh Himself is pierced*. Thus, more than merely intimate partners in the work described in the burden, this Shepherd is so closely associated with the Lord that, what happens to the one happens to the other.

- b. The second thing to note is that Yahweh Himself – the almighty Lord of the armies of heaven and Israel ("Lord of Hosts") commands the sword to arise against His Shepherd. This accords with Isaiah's fourth "servant song" which has Yahweh crushing His Servant, but for the sake of purging and restoring His inheritance (53:10-12; cf. Acts 2:22-24, 3:1-19). So it is here, but with a unique twist: The Lord commands the sword to strike His Shepherd with the result that falseness is eradicated (the idols, prophets, and two parts of the land) and the remnant is purged and restored to Him (13:7-9). But in directing the sword against His associate, the Lord directs it against Himself. Yahweh's crushing of His Servant is His crushing of Himself; He takes the death blow against falseness and impurity for the sake of Zion's children and their cleansing and restoration.

- c. And when the sword arises against the Shepherd, the sheep will be scattered. The gospels record that Jesus Himself saw the fulfillment of this prophecy in the disciples' flight when He was arrested and led away to His death (ref. Matthew 26:31-56; Mark 14:27-50). Others extend this fulfillment to include the dispersion of Israel under the Roman siege that culminated in Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D. The scattering of the sheep due to the smiting of the Shepherd began in Gethsemane and reached its apex in the Roman diaspora. Fear provoked the first instance; divine retribution the second one (cf. Luke 19:41-46 with 21:1-22).

Less clear is the meaning of the subsequent clause: "*I will turn My hand against the little ones.*" The starting point in interpreting this statement is recognizing that the Hebrew expression can be treated negatively or positively: The Lord's hand could be *against* the little ones or *extended in their aid*. Interpreted negatively, the suggestion is that striking the Shepherd would incur Yahweh's indignation to the point that He would raise His hand against even the little ones (lambs) among the sheep (ref. again Luke 21:10-24; cf. 23:26-31). Treated positively, the statement indicates that, subsequent to the sword accomplishing its work against the Shepherd, the Lord was going to return His hand of favor and recover the scattered ones including the least among them (ref. vv. 8-9).

The children of Israel could never have imagined that their deliverance was going to come from Yahweh through their murderous rejection of Him. He would liberate them from their captors, cleanse them and restore them to Himself, but not by deposing human imperial powers. In the ultimate sense, neither Assyria, Babylon nor Rome had subjugated the covenant house of Israel; Abraham's offspring were taken captive and enslaved by their own estranged hearts and minds (cf. John 8:12-59, 9:39-10:39, 15:18-25, etc.). Thus the kingdom they sought could not be established by military conquest, for it is not a natural kingdom (ref. John 3:1-8, 6:1-15, 18:28-37). Yahweh's everlasting kingdom was to be established by an act of cosmic triumph over the true subjugating powers of alienation and death and the prince of the power of the air. He was going to arise against and defeat all that contradicts Him and His creation and its purpose: *He was coming to defeat all falseness, and would do so by taking it up in Himself so as to put it to death in Himself.* And this work of death was to come at the hands of those who would benefit from it: In a way yet veiled in mystery, the enmity of human contradiction exerted against the One who is the truth would be the very act of its own destruction.

And this destruction of all that contradicts the Lord and His truth (here represented under the imagery of Israel's idols and prophets) meant the purging of uncleanness, for impurity (in whatever form) is the fruit of falseness; when falseness is truly eradicated, impurity is purged. Yahweh's deliverance of David's house and kingdom (12:1-9) was going to come through the act of striking His Shepherd (13:7), and this deliverance would bring purging – the purging of falseness from the hearts and minds of the sons of the kingdom evident in penitent mourning (12:10-14) and zeal for the Lord and His truth (13:1-5).

- d. The smiting of the Shepherd meant liberation and purging for the Lord's covenant people, but not all of them. In the end, the prophetic word would prove true that not all Israel was Israel; most of the nation would be cut off, such that only a remnant would be brought through the fire and purified from their dross (13:8-9; cf. 8:1-15; also Isaiah 10:1-27, 11:1-16, 28:1-18, 49:1-6; Jeremiah 23:1-6). Here that recovered remnant is expressed in terms of a *third*, but this must not be treated with wooden literalism. Rather, by assigning a concrete number, the burden was accomplishing two things: First this highlights the *certainty* of the promised restoration; the Lord will keep His covenant oath to Abraham and David (Psalm 89, 105, 132; Isaiah 41:1-42:9, 51:1-3; Jeremiah 33:19-26; Micah 7:14-20; cf. also Luke 1:26-33, 67-79). But it also highlights the prophets' repeated insistence that Yahweh's restorative work will embrace only a *remnant* of Israel (just as was being depicted in the remnant's return to Judea from Babylon).

Only a portion of Abraham's household would see deliverance, purification and restoration; nevertheless, the Lord would "keep covenant" with Abraham. Fifteen hundred years earlier Yahweh pledged to Abram that He would make him a great nation as the father of many nations. And the greatness of this multitude would be that Yahweh is their God and they are His people *in truth* (cf. Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-7 and Exodus 3:1-17, 6:1-8 with Isaiah 40:1-11; Jeremiah 11:1-5, 30:1-22; Ezekiel 36:16-36). Zechariah, too, received this pledge (cf. 2:10-11, 8:7-8); yes, exile and subjugation continued, but liberation and restoration were coming.