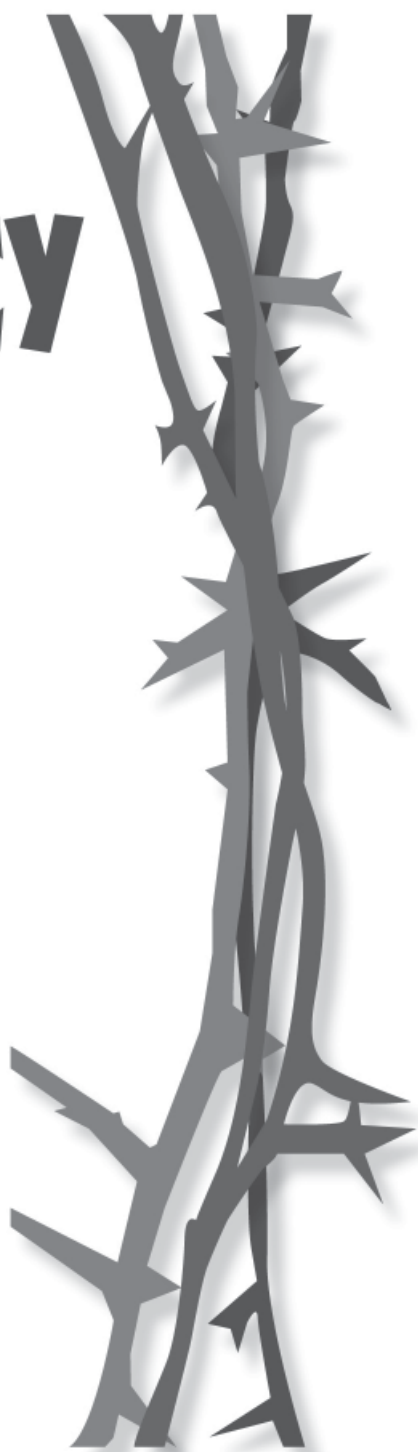


# ISAIAH'S PROPHECY OF THE CHRIST

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

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***Isaiah's Prophecy of the Christ***

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# Isaiah's Prophecy of the Christ

## **700 Years Before Christ**

The prophet Isaiah lived from 740 to 680 B.C. According to tradition, he was martyred by being placed inside a hollow log and then sawed in two. His prophecies are recorded in the Book of Isaiah, which contains 66 chapters, making it one of the larger Old Testament books.

Many believe that Isaiah 40-66 is the pinnacle of Old Testament prophecy. Isaiah addressed many details relating to the future of Israel and the nations of the world. The most significant passage within those chapters is Isaiah 52:13—53:12. In fact, this section is often considered the apex of the Old Testament because it describes the Christ, His obedience to the Father, His suffering, death, and resurrection, and His ultimate glorification. This passage describes the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, unlike any other section of the Old Testament. In great detail, Isaiah shows Jesus' suffering and death to pay the penalty for sin, and His future glorious exaltation to rule and reign over all the earth.

What is amazing is that Isaiah wrote this prophesy 700 years before the birth of Christ. Astonishingly, Isaiah described exactly what Jesus Christ would do and how He would do it in clear detail. There is no explanation for Isaiah's accuracy, except that the sovereign God was speaking through him to prepare the world for the coming of His Son.

## **Jewish Perspective on Isaiah's Prophecy**

Throughout the centuries, Jewish rabbis have confirmed that these verses declare truth regarding the Messiah of Israel. But, by and large, they have failed to understand that this passage was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

An orthodox Jewish rabbi, theologian and historian, Pinchas Lapide, (1922—1997 AD) claimed that the resurrection of Jesus was a true, historical event. That caused quite a stir among the Jewish population! In his book *The Resurrection of Jesus: A Jewish Perspective*, Lapide stated that the evidence of Christ's resurrection is overwhelming. Lapide affirmed that he did not believe Jesus was the Messiah of Israel, but that He may well have been the Savior of Gentiles.

But that is a faulty conclusion. Scripture clearly indicates that there is one Savior, Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5), and only one way of salvation (Rom. 3:28-30). There can't be two Messiahs or two ways of salvation (see Romans 3:29-31).

It is baffling that Jews can read Isaiah's rich presentation of the Messiah and His work of redemption and not be convinced that Jesus is the Messiah. In his letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul revealed the reason that the Jews didn't recognize their Messiah when He came. "But to this day whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their heart" (2 Corinthians 3:15). As clear as the Scriptures are, the Jews are unable to see and understand because there is a veil over their eyes. Of course, Jews are not the only people whose eyes are veiled; many Gentiles are also blind to the Messiah's coming.

## **Dead Sea Scrolls**

There have been claims that this passage was altered after Isaiah wrote it and that it was changed to fit Jesus Christ. That theory was dismissed when the Dead Sea Scrolls were found in 1947.

A scroll on which the Book of Isaiah was written was one of the original seven scrolls discovered by a Bedouin shepherd in the caves of Qumran, by the Dead Sea. It is the largest and best preserved of all the scrolls, containing all 66 chapters in the Hebrew language. The Great Isaiah Scroll dates to about 125 BC.

Even if one doesn't believe Isaiah wrote these words 700 years before Christ, the Dead Sea Scrolls prove that the passage existed more than a century before Christ was born.

## **Servant of God**

Isaiah 52:13-53:12 make up a single, continuous thought. It's also the fourth in a series of poems in Isaiah about the Servant of the Lord. In this section, there are five stanzas comprised of three verses each. They encompass the character, person and work of the Servant of God—the Messiah of Israel—and show Him to be the one who provides salvation from sin.

Most Bibles have a subheading that groups each of the five stanzas together: 52:13-15; 53:1-3; 4-6; 7-9; and 10-12. Each of these five stanzas unfold Isaiah's message, which focuses on the work of salvation that the Servant of the Lord will accomplish through His terrible suffering and death.

### **“Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted” (Isaiah 52:13).**

This first stanza, which includes verses 13-15, focuses on the mystery of this Servant, the One who will be exalted. The title “My Servant” is a reference to the Messiah of Israel, and the Jews recognized this title. He is the one who would come to do the will of His Father and carry out His purposes. He is the Servant of Jehovah.

This Servant, whom God calls “My Servant,” will prosper. This is a declaration that He will successfully accomplish the work God gives Him to do. The verse goes on to say, “He will be high and lifted up, and greatly exalted.” This shows that the Servant will be glorified after He accomplishes God's purposes.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote:

He [Jesus] humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:8-11).

This scene will take place at Christ's second coming to earth in great

power and glory.

**“Just 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” (Isaiah 52:14).**

The words “My people,” are printed in italics in the Bible to show that they were not part of the original Hebrew text. Those two words were inserted by the translators to help us understand the context. On this occasion I don’t think the insertion is helpful, because Isaiah was still talking about the Servant of the Lord. “Many were astonished at you,” refers to the Servant of the Lord.

Isaiah’s voice changed from second person to third person with, “So His appearance...” Information communicated in the third person takes on a more formal tone, thus producing a dramatic effect. This change of voice, or what is today called ‘point of view,’ was not uncommon among Hebrew poets. Despite the change of voice, we are still talking about the same person, Jesus Christ.

People were astonished as they beheld the Servant of the Lord after He had been beaten and abused by Pilate’s soldiers. His appearance was more disfigured than anything they’d ever seen. In fact, Jesus could scarcely be recognized as human. The word translated “astonished” is a strong word. It denotes shock. People were stunned at His appearance. Why? “His appearance was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.” His mutilation was so grotesque that the people who looked at Him were dumbfounded.

The work of accomplishing our redemption was tremendously costly for Christ. Yet, we receive salvation as a gift from God, graciously bestowed upon us by His grace. Although it is a gift to those who believe, it was purchased at a great price.

Christ’s grotesque appearance is the result of two things: the intense physical sufferings He underwent and the spiritual burden He carried as He paid the penalty for sin. It is beyond our ability to understand how God, in the person of the God-Man, could do what Peter wrote, “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross” (1 Peter 2:24).

The physical suffering, which included the physical abuse and hu-

miliation He endured, and ultimately crucifixion, was tremendous. Crucifixion has been used as a form of capital punishment by several civilizations. At least 20,000 people were crucified during the Roman Empire. Although many people suffered the physical agony of crucifixion, including the two men who were crucified next to Christ, no one ever suffered to the extent that the Son of God did. Only Christ bore our sins in His body on the cross, and only Christ experienced the agony of separation from His Father. The level of suffering that He experienced was beyond what anyone else could endure. His torment was incomprehensible. In wretched agony He cried out, “My God! My God! Why have you forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46). Surely, the people who looked at Him were dumbfounded.

Isaiah’s prophecy, even to this day, is a grave reminder of the awful cost of our redemption. The Son of God underwent such horrible physical and spiritual agony to pay the penalty for our sin that His appearance was grotesque, unlike any man.

It is pointless for people to think they are going to Heaven because they were baptized, because of their good works or because of their best efforts. It took the horrible suffering of the Son of God—suffering so intense that it distorted His whole appearance—to pay the penalty for our sin. No amount of effort or good works can come close to that.

## **Sprinkling of Blood**

**“Thus 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” (Isaiah 52:15).**

The sprinkling of blood had special significance to the Jews because it was an integral part of their sacrificial system. It was common practice for the blood of the slain animal to be sprinkled, or applied, to the tabernacle and to articles used for worship. Among other things, the sprinkling indicated that preservation, satisfaction, sanctification, access to God and purification of sin was taking place. Although the sprinkling of blood was the means by which God’s people secured atonement in the Old Testament, no matter how much blood was sprinkled, it wasn’t a

permanent solution. “For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins” (Heb. 10:4). The forgiveness of sins was foreshadowed in the Old Testament with the blood of bulls and of goats, but it was not fulfilled until the great sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

The sufferings of Christ enabled Him to sprinkle many nations. Note that it was not just Israel that would be sprinkled, but many nations would be purified. In Peter’s letter to the Christians scattered throughout the world, he wrote:

To those who . . . are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure (1 Peter 1:1-2).

Peter used the same word, “sprinkled,” to refer to the personal application of Jesus’ sacrifice for salvation. Through His blood, which purifies and cleanses us from our sins, we are forgiven and brought into a right relationship with God.

## **First and Second Coming Intertwined in Prophecy**

Isaiah didn’t follow an orderly progression of events in his prophecy. However, now that the picture is completed in the New Testament, we see how everything he wrote fits together.

In verse 13, we read about the success and glory of the Messiah. Then, in verse 14, we read about His grotesque disfigurement. In the first part of verse 15, we read about the effects of His death. Verse 15 continues with His exaltation in glory at His second coming. Isaiah did not grasp that Christ would come to earth twice, so he combined the first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ into one prophecy.

Isaiah had to have been confused about how this all fit together. How could the servant of the Lord prosper, then be grotesquely marred, then purify many nations, and then have these nations stand in silent awe before Him?

According to Peter, the prophets did not completely understand what they wrote about the suffering and death of Christ, and His glory and exaltation:



As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, 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. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look (1 Peter 1:10-12).

Now we know the Son of God will come to earth twice. The first time He came to suffer and die; the second time He will come to rule and reign. The two comings are intertwined in this prophecy, although they are separate events.

Ultimately, Jesus Christ's great exaltation will be realized at His second coming. That is revealed in the middle of verse 15 when Isaiah says, "Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him." The greatest of men, the most powerful kings, will stand in silence before Him. For the first time they will see Him in all His glory, and they will see with their very eyes what they did not know or understand. They will be dumb-founded and silent before the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

## **Rejection of the Servant**

The first three verses of Isaiah 53 describe in more detail what was summarized at the end of chapter 52.

**"Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1).**

This is a declaration in question form, stating that the message of the prophets concerning the Servant of God will not be received. The Servant of the Lord would appear on earth in fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, but they will go unheeded.

At His first coming, Christ revealed the mighty power of God, which Isaiah referred to as the "arm of the Lord," because it showed His strength, His might and His power. The "arm of the Lord" was demonstrated through the miracles Christ performed during His earthly ministry. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would not be believed or received by

the people, and He was not.

At the conclusion of Christ's public ministry, John confirmed the overwhelming disbelief in Jesus, the Servant of God, as prophesied by Isaiah:

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him; this was to fulfill the word of Isaiah, the prophet, which he spoke, "Lord, who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (John 12:37, 38).

The masses did not believe the message of the prophets, and they did not believe the display of the power of God through Christ while He was on earth. What a tragedy. With all the prophecies regarding the Messiah, they should have been prepared to see Him, but they did not believe. It is remarkable that 700 years before Christ, Isaiah wrote with clarity, prophesying that people would not believe in the Servant of God.

## **Humble Origin**

**"For 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" (Isaiah 53:2).**

Isaiah described the Messiah as growing up before God "like a tender shoot, like a root out of parched ground." Christ's beginnings were unspectacular and unpromising. His birth was lowly, in a stable in Bethlehem. On top of that, he was raised in the despised city of Nazareth.

Nazareth had an evil reputation, and its citizens were known for their low morals. When Philip found Nathanael and told him that they had found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, Nathanael's comment was, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). That says a lot about Nazareth.

Jesus was not what the Jews expected the Messiah to be like. They thought the Messiah should have all the trappings of glory and display the magnificence of His presence, and thus overwhelm the world. They saw no potential for these overwhelming displays of power in the son of a poor carpenter from Nazareth, and so they despised Him.

The Jews' disdain was recorded by Matthew:

**Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things? And they took offense at Him (Matthew 13:55-57).**

The problem they had with Jesus was that He was not rich or famous. He was a carpenter's son, and they knew His family members. The Jews found Christ's wisdom and power offensive because these characteristics weren't displayed in the way they expected and desired.

We're not so different today. When someone influential speaks, everyone listens—no matter how senseless their words are. Someone with wealth gets noticed. But if someone who is not wealthy, powerful, or influential says something of great wisdom, they are challenged with, "Who are you to be talking like that?"

The Jews judged that Christ was nobody special and that He could not possibly be the Messiah. They were in the presence of the Servant of the Lord, the one who fulfills the Old Testament prophecy, and they were offended. He wasn't what they were looking for in a Messiah. Their Messiah was certainly not someone born in a stable and raised in a carpenter's home in Nazareth.

They were looking for someone who stood out above everyone else. They were looking for someone ruggedly handsome who came with blatant displays of might and power. They were looking for someone who would swiftly deliver them from the oppression of the Romans. No one else would do. It didn't matter what He said or did, or that He fulfilled the Scriptures.

According to Isaiah, the Messiah had no stately form or majesty (53:2). We have a fascination with royalty. Even a monarch with no real function, except for performing ceremonial duties, is fascinating to us. If a monarch or future monarch comes to the United States, their every move is covered by the media and we crane our necks to get a glimpse of them.

We also have an attraction to certain characteristics that we asso-

ciate with importance. Christ didn't have any of these characteristics. There was nothing about His appearance or demeanor that we would be drawn to or consider attractive.

People didn't believe the prophetic messages concerning Him because He wasn't physically attractive. They didn't believe in Him, even when they saw Him perform miracles, because of His humble origin and lack of dramatic presence.

**“He 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” (Isaiah 53:3).**

Verse three begins and ends with “He was despised.” The emphasis is on the word “despised,” which is a strong word; it denotes disdain and bitter contempt. People hated Christ. Besides being despised, He was “forsaken of men . . . like one from whom men hide their face.” Not only was He despised, hated and rejected, but people wanted absolutely nothing to do with Him.

The Hebrew word Isaiah used for “men” usually refers to men of prestige and rank. This is interesting because it was the religious leaders who asked, “No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?” (John 7:48). You can hear the sarcasm in their question. They had nothing but contempt for Jesus. In their eyes, He was worthless, a nobody.

That attitude was reflected in the Jewish nation, and it is reflected in people today.

## **Despised by the World Today**

The Messiah, Christ Jesus, is despised by the world even today. There is nothing attractive about the Savior. Even His demeanor does not appeal to mankind. Furthermore, Christ's work on the cross—His suffering and death to pay for the sins of the world—is considered foolishness.

This is clearly seen in religious people who do not have saving faith in Jesus. They talk about the love of God and don't appear to despise

Christ. But, grapple with them about the Christ of Scripture, share the truth of the Christ that the Bible teaches, or challenge them with their hopeless condition before God, and their disdain for Christ becomes evident. People love the Christ that they have created, but that is different from loving the Christ of the Bible.

*If we're not careful, we will yield to the pressure to remake the Messiah into a form that will be acceptable to those who despise Him.*

We have a Savior who is despised and hated by the world. By God's grace through faith in Him, we have come to love Him, to know Him and to see Him as beautiful and desirable, but that's only because God's grace completely transformed us. That's not the way we were, and we never would have changed unless God had intervened in our hearts.

## **Atonement Accomplished**

The atonement accomplished by God's Servant is revealed in verses 4-6.

**“Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4).**

Jesus bore our griefs and our sorrows in His body as He suffered and died on the cross. Since the Hebrew words for “griefs” and “sorrows” can also be translated “sickness” and “diseases,” we take it that there is both spiritual and physical healing in the atonement. Did Christ die for our sicknesses when He died for our griefs and our sorrows? The answer is, yes and no. The prime emphasis of Isaiah 53 is on the spiritual deliverance accomplished by the Messiah when He bore our sins in His body on the cross. But, in dealing with sin, the provision to deal with sickness is included as well. This physical healing will not be realized until Christ's second coming.

Isaiah's combining of the first and second coming of Christ is confusing. Jesus Christ does not rule and reign in glory on the earth today. Jesus came the first time to suffer and die for our sins so we could be forgiven and cleansed. He will come again, and when He does, He will rule and reign, and all sickness will be removed.

Jesus' power over disease is well documented:

And when Jesus had come to Peter's home, He saw his mother-in-law lying sick in bed with a fever. And He touched her hand, and the fever left her; and she arose and waited on Him (Matthew 8:14-15).

After the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, the word was out and people with all kinds of afflictions came to Jesus to be healed:

And when evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed; and He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were ill (Matthew 8:16).

Matthew explained why this was done:

In order that what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, "He Himself took our infirmities, and carried away our diseases" (v. 17).

This is a reference to Isaiah 53:4, verifying that Isaiah's prophecy had been fulfilled.

Jesus' primary focus was on the forgiveness of sins. However, healing sickness and affliction was included in His work because His redemption will ultimately result in the curse being lifted from creation. This was demonstrated in Jesus' healing of the man who could not walk:

And behold, they were bringing to Him a paralytic, lying on a bed; and Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "Take courage, My son, your sins are forgiven" (Matthew 9:2).

It is significant that Jesus said, "your sins are forgiven." The response of the scribes was that Jesus was a blasphemer, that He was claiming the prerogative of God by demonstrating the power to forgive sins (see 9:3). Jesus answered them:

Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven," or to say, "Rise, and walk?" But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins—then He said to the paralytic, "Rise, take up your bed, and go home" (Matthew 9:5, 6).

Jesus' healings were a demonstration of His power to forgive sin. One day, Jesus, the Messiah, will rule over the earth, and it will be free from sickness, suffering, and death in the normal flow of life. The

freedom from sin, sickness, suffering, and death was provided in His redemption.

Isaiah prophesied that when men saw Him suffering and dying on the cross, the response would be, “We ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isaiah 53:4). They thought Christ was being punished by God for His own sin in declaring Himself to be the Son of God and the Messiah of Israel. Man’s perspective was that He was getting what He deserved.

We’ve all seen television preachers who claim God does not intend for His people to be sick. “Christ died for your sicknesses, and He wants you to be healthy” they preach. But, the curse has not been lifted from the earth, and sicknesses and diseases will continue until the curse is removed. Faith healers from past generations had sicknesses and diseases, and eventually all died. If Jesus Christ does not come in the next 50 years, all the present-day ones will be dead too.

Ultimately, when Jesus returns the second time and establishes His kingdom on earth, the curse will be lifted from creation. We will have health and prosperity, and the desert will blossom like a rose. It will be a perfect kingdom, and those in that kingdom, even in physical bodies, will be spared the pain we endure today. Yes, the provision was made for the ultimate lifting of the curse in the death of Christ, but the prime issue to be dealt with is our sin.

## **Crushed for Our Iniquities**

**“But 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” (Isaiah 53:5).**

Man’s perspective and God’s perspective are totally different. Man sees Christ getting what He deserves; God knows that Christ is getting what He does not deserve, but what sinners deserve. Isaiah uses four expressions to describe Christ’s suffering, death, and provision of forgiveness for sin:

*“He was pierced through for our transgressions.”* This was not for

His, but for our transgressions. “Pierced through,” refers to His death and would certainly fit the picture of crucifixion, as He was nailed to a cross.

**“He was crushed for our iniquities.”** This doesn’t mean that He was literally crushed by something like a large stone, but rather He was crushed by the shattering events He endured to pay the penalty for sin.

**“The chastening for our well-being,”** refers to the punishment that brought us peace.

**“By His scourging we are healed.”** The King James Bible puts it, “By His stripes we are healed.” A typical scourge had several thongs attached to one handle, with bits of metal or pottery embedded in each thong. A scourging (whipping the back with a scourge) was designed to lacerate the skin and flesh and cause intense pain. Isaiah’s point is that Jesus took our scourging and we are healed from the wounds caused by our sin.

His suffering and death was to pay the penalty for our sins, for our transgressions, for our iniquities, for our well-being, and for our healing. This is the substitutionary atonement of Christ. Keep in mind that the penalty for sin is death. This means eternal suffering in hell. Jesus took our place and paid our sin penalty.

Many people, even those within evangelical circles, have trouble accepting the reality of an eternal hell. But when we stop and consider a passage like Isaiah 53 and see that only the infinite agony, suffering and death of God’s beloved Son satisfies the righteous demands of the Father, is an eternal hell for vile sinners that difficult to comprehend?

We have a shallow concept of sin. We have no conception of its horror or seriousness. This is sad, considering that God’s hatred of sin is so great that He (God) “was pleased to crush Him [Jesus].” This ‘crushing’ refers to Jesus’ death.

## **We Are Straying Sheep**

One of the greatest verses in the entire Bible is part of Isaiah’s prophecy.

**“All 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” (Isaiah 53:6).**

This verse is sometimes called the John 3:16 of the Old Testament. Like the well-known New Testament verse, Isaiah 53:6 clearly expresses Christ’s work of redemption.

Isaiah includes himself in his description of the state of mankind. We are all straying sheep. We have turned our own way, the way that we wanted to go. But God has placed our iniquities, our sins, upon Him. This is a concise statement of the gospel message. I am a straying sinner, but God placed my sin on Christ so that I might be forgiven and cleansed through His sacrifice.

We have all heard, “I have my beliefs; you have yours. I have my religion; you have yours. I have my church; you have your church.” The problem is that not all systems of belief satisfy the demands of God’s righteousness. They may seem right, but Scripture tells us the end:

“There is a way which seems right unto man; but its end is the way of death” (Proverbs 16:25).

We can join a church, but the penalty for sin is not church membership. We can be baptized, but the penalty for sin is not baptism. The penalty for sin is death. God’s provision of salvation took place when He put our sins on Christ.

## **Willing Submission**

This Servant of God, the Messiah, Jesus Christ, willingly submitted Himself to horrible suffering, and death.

**“He 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” (Isaiah 53:7).**

The events of the day of Christ’s crucifixion, which we call Good Friday, are recorded in verse 7. Isaiah presented these proceedings as though he was an eye witness, as he was, in effect, given that kind of perspective. It is impossible to comprehend the immense suffering and agony that led to the death of Christ, but the prophet shows that Jesus

suffered in silence. The Lord did not attempt to defend Himself or argue over the injustice taking place.

The injustice is obvious. Even Pilate's wife warned her husband: "Have nothing to do with that righteous Man" (Matthew 27:19). Pilate, the one who had to approve the execution, also knew this was a miscarriage of justice. Pilate declared, "I find no guilt in this man" (Luke 23:4). Pilate tried to reason with the Jews, but Christ made no attempt to defend Himself before Pilate. He suffered and took the abuse in silence.

The Sanhedrin, the governing religious body in Israel, tried to marshal false witnesses to bring condemnation upon Christ so they would have reason to execute Him. A lot of people came forward and told lies, but no one's story matched anyone else's.

Later on, two came forward and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" The high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do you make no answer?" (Matthew 26:61-62).

Jesus kept silent. He made no attempt to defend Himself or point out that these were false witnesses, or that they were not accurately reflecting what He taught. We see the verification of Isaiah's prophecy: "He did not open His mouth."

The high priest, the official representative of the nation was outraged and said, "I adjure You by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ, the Son of God" (Matthew 26:63).

Silence at that point would have been mistaken as a denial that He was the one who would come to rule and reign in glory. Therefore, Jesus finally responded:

"You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven." The high priest tore his robes, saying, "He has blasphemed!" (Matthew 26:64-65).

It is interesting to note that the only time Christ spoke was when His silence would be taken as a denial that He was the Son of God, the Messiah of Israel. Later he spoke up again to defend His rightful position.

Later, when Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And Jesus said to him, “It is as you say” (Matthew 27: 11).

If Jesus had remained silent for that question, it would have been understood as a denial. But, there was no defense given by Christ of Himself, no attempt to escape, no attack on the injustice being done. He willingly and silently went to His execution.

There is great symbolism here. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah, Servant of God, would be “like a lamb that is led to slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7) and that “The Lord has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him” (v. 6). Seven hundred years later, John the Baptist introduced Jesus with: “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). John recognized Jesus as the Messiah prophesied by Isaiah.

The silence of Christ is recorded in all four gospels. At the end of His earthly ministry, He was like the sheep that is silent before its shearers. He did not open His mouth. Jesus fulfilled all that was represented in the sacrificial system of the Old Testament.

**“By 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?” (Isaiah 53:8).**

Under the pretense of justice, Jesus’ life was violently taken. The people deserved to die, not Jesus. This is true for all of us. Like the Jews, we are sinners by birth, and sinners by practice.

The people were mocking, sneering and casting insults at Jesus, even as He hung on the cross. The Messiah’s suffering and death was for the transgression of “my people.” The Jewish nation did not realize that the Messiah’s suffering and death was for them, for the transgressions of “my people,” as Isaiah says, “to whom the stroke was due,” or to those who deserved the punishment.

## **His Grave**

**“His 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” (Isaiah 53:9).**

We can see how the Jews could have a hard time with this verse. “How can this be the Messiah? The Messiah is going to be exalted, and rule and reign in glory, and the nations will be in silent awe of Him. Now you’re telling me He died? He’s buried? His grave was assigned with wicked men? Because He was crucified and suffered capital punishment at the hands of the Romans, He was considered a criminal. He should have had a criminal’s burial.”

Roman law required that criminals receive a criminal burial, which continued their disgrace. However, Jesus’ suffering, agony, and disgrace was finished with His death. Joseph of Arimethea asked Pilate for permission to take Christ’s body. Pilate consented and Jesus’ disciples took His body, and “bound it in linen and wrappings with the spices, as is the burial custom of the Jews” (John 19:40). Jesus was given a “proper” Jewish burial. The disgrace was lifted in His burial. Jesus had no penalty of His own to pay. When He paid the penalty for the sins of the world, His work was done. He was honored in His burial.

It is amazing how completely the details in Isaiah’s prophecy were fulfilled in Jesus’ death and burial. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be assigned with wicked men. Jesus died as a criminal and was crucified on a cross. According to Moses’ Law, anyone hanged on a tree was cursed of God. Yet, Jesus was with a rich man in His death. How could that detail have been worked out? There is only one way: the sovereign God purposed for it to be accomplished.

## **Lamb of God**

**“But 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” (Isaiah 53:10).**

Note the difference between the end of verse 9: “He had done no violence, nor was there any deceit in His mouth” and the beginning of verse 10: “But the Lord was pleased to crush Him.” What a contrast!

It seems like an injustice that the Lord was pleased to crush the sinless one. Why was God pleased to crush Him? Because only the Son of God could pay the penalty for our sins. Jesus is the Lamb of God. He is without sin, and like the sacrificial lamb of the Old Testament, He had no spot or blemish. Jesus took our place. He took the Father's wrath for us. He was our substitute, our guilt offering. This was all part of God's perfect plan to secure salvation for those who deserve an eternal hell.

I can't die for you. You can't pay my sin penalty. It was God's sovereign plan to provide His Son as the sacrifice for sin.

On the Day of Pentecost, Peter revealed that this was God's predetermined plan:

This Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death (Acts 2:23).

Even though this was God's plan, these men were not excused from their sin, and the Jews recognized their guilt.

Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Peter told them to repent and be saved. It was God's gracious plan to provide salvation for as many as He calls to Himself.

The crushing of the Messiah looks like a contradiction. He's executed as a sacrifice, a guilt offering, but then He's going to see His offspring. He's going to prolong His days and the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. That takes us back to Isaiah 52:13: "Behold, My servant will prosper."

Isaiah must have been wondering, "How does this work? He's a sacrifice . . . He's a guilt offering . . . He pays the penalty for sin . . . He prolongs His days . . . He has offspring, spiritual children . . . He'll prosper." We see the resurrection in this passage because "He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days," but 700 years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah had to have been puzzled. We have the benefit of looking back on history. Jesus rose from the dead. We know He will come to earth a second time to reign in glory. We grasp that, but Isaiah didn't

have that all put together as clearly as we do.

We are the spiritual seed, the spiritual offspring of the Messiah Savior. The Messiah declared, "Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me" (Hebrews 2:13). Because He rendered Himself as a guilt offering, we, through faith in Him, have become His offspring, and He was our sacrifice for sin.

**"As 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, and He will bear their iniquities" (Isaiah 53:11).**

"The anguish of His soul," refers to Christ's suffering and death. Through His anguish, the righteousness of God was satisfied. Paul restated this in his letter to the Romans:

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; for the demonstration, I say, of His righteousness at the present time, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Romans 3:23-26).

"By His knowledge" can be taken two ways. It can be taken as the "knowledge that Christ had;" or as the "knowledge we have of Christ." Both are biblical truths and the grammar in the original language allows for both.

The "knowledge that Christ had" is a true interpretation because Jesus came to do the will of His Father. Jesus had knowledge of His Father's plans and purposes in providing redemption, and He came and carried out His Father's will.

The "knowledge we have of Christ" is also true because we must come to faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ for salvation: "There is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

## **Penalty Must Be Paid**

The penalty for sin is eternal destruction in hell, and it must be paid. We can pay our sin penalty ourselves by spending eternity in hell, or we can receive the gift of salvation that God provided for us through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ.

God's holiness and justice required a sinless substitute. If the substitute had any sin of his own, the substitute would be under the penalty of sin and would have to die for his own sins, not my sins.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, note his emphasis on Jesus' sinlessness:

He made Him who knew no sin to become sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Jesus is the Lamb without blemish and without spot. He had committed no violence. There was no reason for Him to die for Himself. He took our sins upon Himself. It was for our sins that He suffered and died.

Peter wrote:

You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18, 19).

Religious people in both Protestant and Catholic Churches think that living a good life according to their values, or a combination of believing Jesus existed and living a holy life by their standards makes them righteous before God. However, neither of these plans provides a sacrifice for sin. Believing that Jesus existed is not the same as believing He bled and died to pay the penalty for our sins. It is crucial to understand that God cannot forsake His justice by declaring someone righteous without a sacrifice for sin. His holy character demands that the penalty for sin be paid.

But God did not leave us without a proper payment. God the Father satisfied the demands of His holiness by sacrificing His Son for the sins of the world. In that transaction, the sin penalty was paid, so that His Servant, "My Servant" in Isaiah 53:11, "will justify the many."

Jesus Christ is the Righteous One. As the Righteous One, He provides forgiveness for sinners by bearing our iniquities. He is our guilt offering. What a beautiful picture of how Jesus paid our sin penalty. It is no wonder this passage is considered one of the greatest in the Bible. There is no clearer unfolding of the details of the gospel found anywhere else in Scripture. And Isaiah wrote it 700 years before it happened.

**“Therefore, 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” (Isaiah 53:12).**

When Jesus returns to rule and reign, there will be those who govern with Him and share in His kingdom.

Humanly speaking, Jesus’ pouring Himself out to death is a terrible thing. Yet it was part of God’s perfect plan for our redemption. We must not take His death for granted. The constant theme woven throughout this section is that the Messiah would give up His life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He would bear the sins of many and intercede on their behalf. Even though it did not all make sense to Isaiah, he painted a beautiful picture of God’s provision of salvation for sinful people. To provide that salvation, God needed an acceptable sacrifice to satisfy the demands of His righteousness. That acceptable sacrifice was designated in the eternally sovereign plan of the triune God. His Son, Jesus Christ, came down from glory and became a man, so that, as the God-Man, He could die for the sins of the world. He was forsaken by the Father as He bore our sins, but the Trinity never ceased to exist.

Scripture tells us that the suffering and agony Christ endured was more than any man has ever experienced or ever will. We are repulsed when we see the suffering that people put other people through, but that is nothing compared to the suffering that Christ endured for our sin. The penalty that our sins required was great. Tremendous love was required to pay our sin penalty in full. God offers salvation to those who despise His Son, do not esteem Him or hold Him in honor, and find nothing attractive in Him. God graciously says:



“Come now, and let us reason together,” says the Lord, “though your sins be as scarlet, they will be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they will be like wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

It is amazing that God provided salvation to cleanse and forgive us of all our sins. But, this salvation cannot be obtained on our own terms. We must accept it on God’s terms. The only way to obtain God’s gift of salvation is to believe in the person and work of His Son.

Some think they are going to earn salvation by their works. That’s not good enough. Each one of us can only have God’s forgiveness by recognizing our sinfulness, turning from our sin and casting ourselves on God’s mercy through faith in Christ. Then God declares us forgiven and His purposes and plans in accomplishing our redemption will be realized in our lives.

What a beautiful picture! What a beautiful message! This is the gospel Isaiah declared 700 years before Christ, and it’s the same gospel we are privileged to declare 2000 years after Christ.