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*Isaiah's Songs of the Servant*  
*Part 5:*

# **The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12**

**(Concluded)**

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**Believing Israelites Confess Their Misunderstanding  
of the Servant's Death Which They Contrast  
With Its True Meaning  
(53:1-9) [continued]**

The message of Isaiah 52:13–53:12 was summarized in the previous article<sup>1</sup> as Yahweh's announcement of the exaltation of His Servant because of His satisfactory substitutionary death for the sins both of His guilty people and of the Gentiles. The three middle strophes of the five which comprise this Servant song are a confessional report in which believing Israelites contrast their past rejection of the Servant with the true meaning of His death (53:1-9). This report is preceded by an introductory appraisal in which Yahweh promises to exalt His Servant supremely, who though deeply degraded, will both purify and receive the worship of nations (52:13-15). It is followed by an epilogue in which Yahweh promises to exalt His Servant because He did His will in dying as a guilt offering (53:10-12).

**BELIEVING ISRAELITES CONTRAST THEIR MISTAKEN MORAL JUDGMENT  
CONCERNING THE SERVANT WITH HIS VICARIOUS SUFFERINGS (53:4-6)**

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

<sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
 he was crushed for our iniquities;  
 the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,  
 and by his wounds we are healed.  
<sup>6</sup>We all, like sheep, have gone astray,  
 each of us has turned to his own way;  
 and the LORD has laid on him  
 the iniquity of us all.<sup>2</sup>

This strophe continues the confession of a future believing remnant of Israel which began in 53:1. In sharp contrast and strong contradiction to their pitiful misunderstanding (53:1-3), the true reason for the Servant's sufferings is now set forth. After confessing negatively their mistaken evaluation of His sufferings (v. 4) and positively the substitutionary redemptive purpose of His sufferings (v. 5), believing Israelites acknowledge that the Servant bore their corporate alienation and individual guilt (v.6).

*They confess their mistaken evaluation of the Servant's sufferings (53:4).* The remnant of Israel express their realization that their previous negative estimation of the Servant is contradictory to the actual truth of His substitutionary sufferings. The word "surely," with which the verse begins, is a strong affirmation with some adversative force. It could be paraphrased, "But the truth of the matter is . . . ." The verse continues, "he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows" (v. 4a). The Hebrew word order by juxtaposition ("the sicknesses of us he bore") vividly contrasts the emphatic pronoun "he," which identifies the Servant, with the pronoun "our," which refers to the speakers. This contrast in pronouns characterizes the entire strophe (53:4-6) and highlights the concept of the Servant's vicarious or substitutionary suffering and death.

The verbs "took up" and "carried" suggest that the Servant felt the weight of the guilt and consequences of sin as a burden to be borne, a frequent concept in the Old Testament (cf. Gen. 4:13; Exod. 28:43; Lev. 17:16; 22:9; 24:15).<sup>3</sup> The unusual feature here is that the Servant is taking on Himself the guilt and punishment of sin in a mediatorial capacity to make expiation for it.<sup>4</sup> The concept of substitutionary atonement is strongly indicated in this passage,<sup>5</sup> though the many attempts to deny or to dilute this truth are as varied as the theories of the doctrine of the Atonement.<sup>6</sup> However, several items support the full vicarious Atonement view that the Servant was not merely participating in the sufferings of others, nor simply removing their sin and sufferings, but rather that He took their sin and guilt away from

them and upon Himself and bore it as a burden: (a) the significance of the verbs (in Isa. 53:4-6, 8, 11, 12); (b) their close verbal similarities to the Day of Atonement ritual (Lev. 16);<sup>7</sup> (c) the contrast between the pronouns “he” and “us/our” (Isa. 53:4-6; cf. vv. 8, 11-12); and (d) the specific identification of the Servant as a guilt offering (v. 10). Such an action is to be understood as a substitutionary bearing of their sin, guilt, and punishment. Thus the Servant was “suffering not His own, but an alien punishment.”<sup>8</sup>

The terms “infirmities” and “sorrows,” each of which should be identified as a metonymy of effect for cause, are used generally for all suffering which is viewed as the result of sin.<sup>9</sup> This does not mean that Christ became sick or infirmed in a substitutionary sense, nor that divine healing is guaranteed through the Atonement (except in the ultimate sense of a resurrection body). Matthew’s citation of this verse (Matt. 8:17) in connection with Christ’s miracles of healing refers to the partial removal of the effect (sickness) which was in view of the complete removal of the cause (sin) which would be done through His death on the cross.

Having confessed their more recent realization of the true nature and cause of the Servant’s sufferings, the believing remnant of Israel identifies their earlier mistaken moral judgment concerning the cause of His sufferings — “yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted” (Isa. 53:4b). Their wrong understanding was not concerning the divine agency behind the sufferings of the Servant (a fact asserted in vv. 6b, 10a) but rather in the implied reason for these sufferings — that the Servant (like Miriam or Uzziah) was suffering His own due punishment from God. Westermann points out that “this attitude was the orthodox, correct, even the devout one . . . [since] in the ancient world’s way of thinking suffering as such indicated God’s smiting and his wrath.”<sup>10</sup> This is supported by the significance of the three passive participles which describe the people’s estimation of the Servant’s sufferings (v. 4b). The Hebrew word translated “stricken” (from נָגַף, “to touch, smite”) can mean “smite with disease,” especially leprosy, often in punishment for sin (Miriam in Num. 12:9, 10; Uzziah in 2 Kings 15:5). The related noun (נֶגֶף) is used about 60 times in Leviticus 13 and 14 of “leprosy” (the “stroke”). The phrase “smitten by him” (lit., “God”) amplifies the assumed divine source of the sufferings. The term “afflicted” may carry the meaning of inflicted or humiliated with disease (Num. 14:12; Deut. 28:22).

Thus believing Israelites now recognize that the Servant bore the consequences of their sin, whereas they once thought that He deserved the sufferings He received.

*They recognize the substitutionary redemptive purpose of the Servant's sufferings (53:5).* The vicarious purpose of the sufferings of the Servant (recognized in v. 4) is amplified in this verse. Negatively, the Servant's sufferings were the penalty for their sins — "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (v. 5a). The opening conjunction may be taken in either an adversative sense ("but")<sup>11</sup> or an adverbial sense ("while").<sup>12</sup> In either case, the clause draws a contrast between the real design of the Servant's sufferings and the apparent cause of His sufferings as perceived by the speakers (v. 4b). If taken adverbially, the circumstantial clause portrays vividly the greatness of their misunderstanding — that they were thinking wrongly at the same time the Servant was suffering vicariously.<sup>13</sup> The verbs "pierced" and "crushed" are two of the strongest words in the Hebrew language to describe a violent and painful death.<sup>14</sup> "Pierced" conveys the idea of "pierced through, or wounded to death" (cf. Deut. 21:1; Isa. 51:9; see also Ps. 22:16; Zech. 12:10; John 19:34). The related adjective (לָלֵךְ) usually means "slain" (Isa. 22:2; 34:3; 66:16). "Crushed" conveys the sense of "beaten in pieces, destroyed."<sup>15</sup> The Servant is thus crushed to death by the burden of the sin of others which He took on Himself, further weighted by the wrath of God due that sin. This burden of sin, guilt, and punishment is described in terms of "our transgressions" (i.e., "rebellions"; cf. 1 Kings 12:19; Isa. 1:2; 43:27) and "our iniquities" (including guilt).

Turning from the negative bearing of sin, the speakers affirm positively that the Servant's sufferings were the means of their spiritual restoration — "the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5b). The NIV translation "punishment" is preferred over the KJV "chastisement," which is too weak a term since it here procures "peace," indicating that the justice of God is involved.<sup>16</sup> "Peace" refers not to cessation of war but to the removal of the barrier of sin which caused enmity with God (cf. Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14-18; Col. 1:20). This punishment was "upon him," again indicating His substitutionary bearing of sin and guilt. The term "wounds" is a collective noun referring to His suffering in a general way. As the "peace" is spiritual rather than physical, so also is the "healing" which results from "his wounds." "As the punishment of sin

and suffering are often represented under the image of a disease, so is deliverance from them under that of *healing*.”<sup>17</sup>

This verse contributes significantly to the language of substitutionary atonement found in Isaiah 53. “Nothing can be stronger than the antithesis running through this verse, both between the pronouns *he*, *him*, *his*, on the one hand, and *our*, *our*, *our*, *us*, on the other; and that between the wounding, bruising, chastisement, stripes on the one hand, and the *peace* and *healing* on the other.”<sup>18</sup>

*They acknowledge that the Servant bore their corporate alienation and individual guilt (53:6).* Before affirming what Yahweh has done with their guilt, the believing remnant of Israel compare their corporate alienation and individual guilt to the waywardness of sheep — “We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (v. 6a). This verse clearly corrects any misconception about why the Servant suffered. The NIV very accurately retains the Hebrew word order regarding the inclusio formed by the emphatic “all” (כָּלֵנוּ, “all of us”) at the beginning and ending of the verse. This emphasizes the fact that those whose iniquity was borne by the Servant are identical to those who have corporately and individually wandered away like sheep. This fact was true of all Israel (“all” went astray), not just the elect. Thus (at least with respect to Israel) the verse teaches an unlimited atonement. Since the context of the entire Servant song indicates that the Servant’s priestly ministry is also in behalf of Gentiles (52:15), a doctrine of unlimited atonement is supported by this passage.<sup>19</sup> Such a provision, of course, does not mean that all will be saved (universalism).

“Gone astray” refers not to the exile in Babylon but to wandering in the wilderness of sin (cf. Ps. 119:176). The verb is used elsewhere of Israel’s spiritual aberration (Ps. 95:10; 2 Chron. 33:9; Ezek. 44:10) and occurs frequently in Isaiah (3:12; 9:16; 19:13; 47:15; 63:17). The simile “like sheep” pictures Israel as having no shepherd (cf. Num. 27:17), and includes the ideas of “unawareness and helplessness.”<sup>20</sup> What Israel confesses concerning herself particularly, surely arises from the human condition of universal sinfulness and so applies to all mankind generally.<sup>21</sup> In the phrase “each of us” the confession turns from the flock to the individual sheep, for while the alienation from God is universal, its manifestation is as varied as the individual number of sinners. That each individual “turned to his own way” means they were all in opposition to God’s ways (cf. Isa. 40:3;

55:7-9), and thus is very nearly a description of the essence of sin.

The believing remnant next affirm that Yahweh cast their guilt on the Servant — “and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6b). All the sin and guilt (with the punishment due on it because of Israel’s corporate and individual wandering in sin) was “laid on” the Servant. The verb usually denotes a violent hostile action (but contrast Isa. 64:5; 59:16), in the sense of either “to fall or strike upon,” so as to slay (2 Sam. 1:15; 1 Kings 2:25, 34, 46) or “to cause to converge upon.” If it means the former, it pictures human sin and guilt as coming on the Servant like a destroying foe and overwhelming Him with the wrath it brought with it. If it means the latter, it pictures the fiery rays of judgment that should have fallen on sinners individually but were deflected and converged on Him. Birks portrays the scene as “many shafts aimed at one common target” so that “each sin of every sinner would be like a separate wound in the heart of the Man of sorrows.”<sup>22</sup>

The astounding assertion in this verse is that believing Israel recognizes the divine agency behind the Servant’s bearing of sin. Men could crucify Him but only Yahweh could cause iniquity to strike down on Him, so that He bears it in a mediatorial capacity.

**BELIEVING ISRAELITES CONTRAST THE UNJUST CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE SERVANT’S DEATH WITH HIS SINLESS SUBMISSION (53:7-9)**

7He was oppressed and afflicted,  
     yet he did not open his mouth;  
 he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,  
     and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,  
     so he did not open his mouth.  
 8By oppression and judgment, he was taken away.  
     And who can speak of his descendants?  
 For he was cut off from the land of the living;  
     for the transgression of my people he was stricken.  
 9He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
     and with the rich in his death,  
 though he had done no violence,  
     nor was any deceit in his mouth.

These verses continue the Israelite remnant’s report regarding the sufferings and death of Yahweh’s Servant. An alternate view that the Prophet Isaiah becomes the speaker in this strophe (in part or in total<sup>23</sup>) does not affect the content or significance of the description, namely, that the mistreated Servant silently submitted Himself to death (v. 7), a death which His contempo-

aries did not understand (v. 8) and which was followed by an honorable burial despite the intention of His enemies (v. 9).

*The mistreated Servant silently submitted Himself to death* (53:7). The remnant of believing Israelites report that the Servant patiently endured mistreatment — “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth” (v. 7a). This verse highlights the patient submissiveness of Yahweh’s innocent Servant in the face of mistreatment. Of the various meanings of the Hebrew שָׁנָן (“press, drive, oppress, exact”<sup>24</sup>), it probably does not mean “exact” (comparing the Servant’s maltreatment to that of “an unrelenting creditor”; cf. Deut. 15:2-3)<sup>25</sup> but rather “oppressed” in the sense of mistreatment in general. The clause וְהוּא נֶעְנֶה appears to be a circumstantial clause (“while he was afflicted,” or “while he afflicted himself” [if the Niphal has a reflexive force]),<sup>26</sup> although some scholars see only an emphatic force in the וְהוּא. The Servant’s voluntary submission to suffering is further stressed in that in spite of His maltreatment “he did not open his mouth” (cf. Matt. 26:63; 27:12-14; Mark 15:5; Luke 23:9; John 19:9). This silence of absolute submission is not inconsistent with “the Lord’s responses to the high priest or to the secular court, or to what He said to Judas or to the soldiers in the garden.”<sup>27</sup>

In contrast to the wandering sheep of Isaiah 53:6, the Servant “was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (v. 7b). The entire simile (“like a lamb to the slaughter”) probably refers both to the lamb and to the Servant.<sup>28</sup> The parallel clause “as a sheep before her shearers” may suggest that the slaughter is commercial in nature rather than sacrificial. Yet the sacrificial scope of the context suggests that the “slaughter” may be sacrificial in nature. Thus the thought is probably that the Servant voluntarily submitted to sacrificial death, a meaning supported by the context (cf. 1 Pet. 1:18-19).

*The Servant’s contemporaries did not understand the meaning of His death* (53:8). The unjust condemnation of the Servant is expressed in the words, “By oppression and judgment, he was taken away” (v. 8a). “By oppression and judgment”<sup>29</sup> may be translated and interpreted several ways. Most of these possibilities suggest violent action against the Servant within a legal context.<sup>30</sup> Driver has translated the phrase, “without protection (of kin) and without due legal procedure.”<sup>31</sup> The idea in this is that no attempt was made to secure a fair trial for the Servant.

Some scholars regard the nouns as a hendiadys, meaning "by reason of an oppressive sentence,"<sup>32</sup> or "a perverted judgment,"<sup>33</sup> or alternately "judicial violence."<sup>34</sup> However, Payne's statement is perhaps correct and more representative. He suggests that there is "some fixed legal idiom here, either 'after arrest and sentence' or 'from prison and lawcourt.'"<sup>35</sup> Calvin understood the next phrase ("he was taken away") to refer to rescue by resurrection (i.e., taken away into glory).<sup>36</sup> However, the general sense must be "dragged to punishment,"<sup>37</sup> but not merely to "take away to prison," like the Israelites to exile (52:5).<sup>38</sup> In the light of the context, it is a reference to the Servant being "hurried away to death."<sup>39</sup> Culver understands it as a reference to "hurried, forcible, violent treatment, resulting in death."<sup>40</sup> In summary, the Servant "was the victim of a judicial murder."<sup>41</sup>

The translation of the next colon is debatable, hinging in part on the meaning of the Hebrew word דָּוָר. Some scholars have taken this word (usually by emending the text) in the sense of "fate,"<sup>42</sup> "plight,"<sup>43</sup> or "what befell him."<sup>44</sup> McKenzie emends the noun to דָּבָר and translates as "case," to fit in with the judicial context in the preceding colon.<sup>45</sup> Scholars who accept the reading of the Masoretic text choose between the translations "descendants"<sup>46</sup> (NIV text) and "generation"<sup>47</sup> (NIV marg.), that is, "contemporaries." The translation of the remainder of the verse given in the NIV margin is to be preferred: "Yet who of his generation considered that he was cut off from the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the blow was due?"<sup>48</sup> Thus the meaning of the verse is this: although the Servant was unjustly condemned, the Servant's contemporaries did not understand the meaning of His death. The meaning of "cut off" suggests a violent, premature, and unnatural death,<sup>49</sup> though the term does not indicate the exact cause of death. The violence indicated by the word is suggested through a translation such as "forcibly removed"<sup>50</sup> or "wrenched."<sup>51</sup> The addition of "from the land of the living" eliminates any doubt as to the fact of the Servant's death (cf. Isa. 38:11; Ezek. 32:22-32). Whybray's attempt to regard the phrase as metaphorical of Deutero-Isaiah's suffering<sup>52</sup> (a literary device found in the lament and thanksgiving psalms) is out of harmony with the clear thrust of the passage.

The term "my people" clearly distinguishes the Servant from Israel,<sup>53</sup> but to whom does the pronoun "my" refer? The singular pronoun "my" seems to interrupt the preceding report by a group



of speakers who identify themselves by plural pronouns. This has led scholars to adopt various devices to explain the change. Apart from various emendations of the text,<sup>54</sup> several approaches have been suggested. Alexander regards the singular pronoun as conveying a plural meaning (cf. 1 Sam. 5:10; Zech. 8:21), so that the speakers really mean “our people.”<sup>55</sup> Some scholars refer the pronoun directly to God.<sup>56</sup> The pronoun is referred to the prophet Isaiah by others, such as Leupold, who states: “A momentary personal note enters the picture when the prophet observes the fact that it was his own people (‘my people’) that were the beneficiaries of this strange transaction.”<sup>57</sup> Since the term “people” refers unambiguously to Israel, the identity of the pronominal reference affects only the form or structure of the verse, not its significance which supports the Servant’s substitutionary death for the nation. That “the blow was due” (NIV marg.) to Israel but fell on the Servant (cf. vv. 4-7) reaffirms one more time the substitutionary nature of the Servant’s death which was not comprehended by most of His contemporaries.

*The innocent Servant received an honorable burial despite the intent of His enemies (53:9).* The description of the Servant’s sufferings and death moves on to the facts of His burial. The intention of the Servant’s enemies went unfulfilled in view of His honorable burial — “He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and[or, ‘but he was’] with the rich in his death” (v. 9a). Since they were crucifying the Servant with wicked men, it would be expected that He would be buried with them. North points out:

It was usual for a man to be buried “with his fathers,” and to be denied such a burial was a calamity (1 Kings xiii. 22). For those who had no family grave there was the common burial place (2 Kings xxiii. 6; Jer. xxvi. 23; cf. Matt. xxvii. 7). Whether some part of this was reserved for criminals we do not know, unless it may be inferred from this passage.<sup>58</sup>

Several problems arise in the next colon. Is the *waw* a conjunctive (“and”) or an adversative (“but”)? That is, is the second colon synonymous or antithetical to the first colon? Many scholars regard the parallelism as synonymous, viewing “wicked” and “rich” as synonymous (and negative) terms.<sup>59</sup> However, Urwick points out that there is “no intimation of character” in the word “rich.”<sup>60</sup> The phrase “in his death” obviously refers to after dying (cf. Lev. 11:31; 1 Kings 13:31), that is, “in his burial,” but there is no need to revocalize the text with McKenzie and others to get “his tomb.”<sup>61</sup> It is preferable to understand the parallelism as

antithetical — they appointed His grave with wicked men, but He was actually buried in a rich man's tomb (cf. Matt. 27:57–60).<sup>62</sup> The implication of the passage is that Yahweh overrules the intentions of men and ordains that His Servant will have a splendid tomb.<sup>63</sup> "The reason for His honorable sepulture [*sic*], so different from what His foes had planned, was that after His redemptive work had been accomplished, the Lord allowed no more indignities to be perpetrated upon Him."<sup>64</sup>

The NIV text translates the next line concessively, affirming that men rejected Him, "although he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth" (v. 9b).<sup>65</sup> It is more probably causal, indicating the cause of Yahweh's providential overturning of men's purposes — "because he had done no violence."<sup>66</sup> On no "deceit" being "in his mouth," see 1 Peter 2:22.

This strophe in which the unjust circumstances of the Servant's death are contrasted with His sinless submission concludes the confessional report of believing Israelites, a report anticipating the repentance of Israel at the Second Advent (cf. Zech. 12:10–13:1).

### **Yahweh Promises to Exalt His Servant Because He Did His Will in Dying as a Guilt Offering (53:10-12)**

<sup>10</sup>Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,  
and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering,  
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,  
and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

<sup>11</sup>After the suffering of his soul,  
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,  
and he will bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,  
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,  
because he poured out his life unto death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors.  
For he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

As the fourth Servant song begins with a divine oracle in which Yahweh announces the exaltation of His Servant (52:13–15), so it climaxes with a divine oracle in which Yahweh again promises the Servant's exaltation (53:10–12). "The revolutionary truth announced in these verses is that the servant's vindication comes after his death. A great miracle takes place, therefore, for after his death and burial he is enabled to see his offspring, to

prolong his days, and to witness the successful completion of his mission."<sup>67</sup>

The promise of Yahweh is introduced by a declaration in which Isaiah reveals that the will of Yahweh is accomplished through the sacrificial death and subsequent exaltation of the Servant (53:10). In the oracle proper Yahweh first promises that His Servant will justify many as a result of His (priestly?) knowledge and suffering (53:11), and secondly that His Servant will have victorious dominion because He died bearing the sins of many (53:12).

ISAIAH REVEALS THAT THE WILL OF YAHWEH IS ACCOMPLISHED IN THE SACRIFICIAL DEATH AND SUBSEQUENT EXALTATION OF THE SERVANT (53:10)

*The Servant suffers and dies as a guilt offering according to the will of Yahweh (53:10a).* Isaiah indicates that the Servant's suffering and sacrificial death are within the will of Yahweh: "it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and . . . the LORD makes his life a guilt offering." Men could inflict suffering and death on the Servant but only Yahweh could make His life a guilt offering, thus making the wrath of men serve His merciful purpose (cf. 1 Pet. 1:20; Acts 2:23).<sup>68</sup> Culver correctly observes that "the divine plan and purpose are in view rather than divine enjoyment."<sup>69</sup> The two verbs may be a hendiadys meaning "to bruise him painfully."<sup>70</sup> The reference is directly to the dying sufferings of the Servant.<sup>71</sup>

Controversy arises as to the subject of the verb **הָפַשׂוּ**, which could be second person singular ("you make," NIV marg.) or third feminine singular (agreeing in gender with the noun **נַפְשׁוֹ**, "his life" or "soul"). If the verb is second person ("you make"), the undesignated antecedent of the pronoun must be Yahweh (so the NIV translates "the LORD makes . . ."). Although Yahweh has just been referred to in the third person, so that this change to the second person is abrupt, it is not unparalleled in prophetic literature.<sup>72</sup> In fact, this sudden address to Yahweh can be compared to the previous use of apostrophe in 52:14 (where Yahweh abruptly addresses the Servant), the two cases of apostrophe in the epilogue and prologue forming a kind of literary inclusio.<sup>73</sup> Therefore the NIV margin gives the most accurate translation: "You [Yahweh] make his life [i.e., the Servant] a guilt offering."<sup>74</sup>

Offered as such by the Servant and accepted as such by Yahweh, the Servant poured out His life in death as "a guilt

offering." The guilt offering was one of the basic Levitical sacrifices (cf. Lev. 5:14–6:7; 7:1–6). It was required when one deprived another (whether God or man) of his rightful due. It normally occasioned a restitution payment and fine to the party wronged. The ram of the guilt offering was not part of the restitution but was an expiation for the sin before God (Lev. 5:15, 18; 6:6; 19:20). The results of the guilt offering included atonement and forgiveness (Lev. 5:16). Although some scholars view the reference to the guilt offering as merely a generic reference to the sacrificial system,<sup>75</sup> the term probably emphasizes Christ's expiatory death as an atonement for the damage or injury done by sin. In either case, the passage clearly points to the sacrificial character of the Servant's death as a satisfaction of divine justice.

*The Servant triumphs after death to advance the will of Yahweh (53:10b).* After declaring that the Servant accomplished the will of Yahweh by offering Himself as a guilt offering, Isaiah discloses that the Servant will triumph after death: "he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand." Payne is correct in saying that "Isaiah 53 contains no plain statement of resurrection, and one does not know by what process the prophet envisaged death as giving place to life."<sup>76</sup> However, there is a strong implication of resurrection not only in that the Servant "will see his offspring" after He has died but also that He will "prolong his days," that is, enjoy long life in spite of having given His life as a guilt offering. While it is correct that "long life and numerous descendants are regarded by the Hebrews as the highest prosperity, as a theocratic blessing and a reward of piety,"<sup>77</sup> the passage does not explicitly state that the life and offspring are given to the Servant as a reward (but cf. v. 12).<sup>78</sup>

The verse concludes as it began — with an affirmation concerning the efficient accomplishment of the purpose of Yahweh through His Servant, that "by His mediation, God's purpose is completely accomplished."<sup>79</sup> As He did with Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 39:3–4), so Yahweh will cause the Servant to be successful in all His undertakings.

YAHWEH PROMISES THAT HIS SERVANT WILL JUSTIFY MANY AS A RESULT OF HIS (PRIESTLY?) KNOWLEDGE AND SUFFERING (53:11)

Yahweh now speaks, affirming that the Servant will have satisfaction after suffering (v. 11a), and that the Servant will justify many (v. 11b).

*The Servant will have satisfaction after suffering (53:11a).* Pieper views verses 11-12 as an amplification of the clause “he will see his offspring” (v. 10).<sup>80</sup> The validity of this view depends on the interpretation of “he will see” in this verse and “a portion” in verse 12. In any case the Servant’s post-mortem satisfaction includes more than seeing His spiritual offspring. Death does not spell defeat for the Servant, for “after the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied” (v. 11a). Although the NIV translates the preposition in a temporal sense (“After”),<sup>81</sup> it seems also to include an element of causality (“because of”).<sup>82</sup> However, the temporal element must not be minimized, for the “seeing” is subsequent to the “suffering,” that is, it is after the Servant’s death. Urwick’s suggestion that the cross is “the point from which he looks and is satisfied”<sup>83</sup> misses the point of the sequence.

But what is the object of the verb “he will see”? The Hebrew Masoretic text lacks the phrase translated “the light of life” (NIV). This translation is supported in part by the Dead Sea Scroll 1QIs<sup>a</sup> and the Septuagint. The NIV margin translates the Masoretic text as follows: “he will see the result of the suffering of his soul and be satisfied.” Hengstenberg identifies the implied object as “the fruits and rewards of his sufferings.”<sup>84</sup> More properly it looks back to “his offspring” (v. 10) as well as forward to the “many” who are justified (v. 11b).<sup>85</sup> Young views the verbs “see” and “be satisfied” as a hendiadys meaning “he shall see with abundant satisfaction,”<sup>86</sup> but Hengstenberg more correctly separates them as forming a climax.<sup>87</sup> This highest spiritual satisfaction follows on the most profound depths of the Servant’s sufferings.

*The Servant will justify many (53:11b).* Yahweh’s promise, “by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many” (v. 11b), has been the subject of much debate, with attention focused especially on the means of this justification stated in the phrase “by his knowledge.” The question has been precisely stated by Murray: “Is the knowledge subjective or objective in respect [to] the person in view? Is it the knowledge the Servant possesses, his own knowledge (subjective) or is it the knowledge others possess of him, knowledge of him (objective)?”<sup>88</sup> Hengstenberg, with many scholars, views the knowledge as objective, claiming that the topic is “not the procuring of righteousness but only the conferring of it.”<sup>89</sup> Likewise, Young maintains, “Not by his knowledge does he justify men, but by bearing their iniquities.”<sup>90</sup> Alexander similarly states: “The only satisfactory

construction . . . makes the phrase mean, *by knowledge of him* upon the part of others; and this is determined by the whole connection to mean practical experimental knowledge, involving faith and a self-appropriation of the Messiah's righteousness."<sup>91</sup> On the alternate side, Delitzsch has argued for the subjective sense of the Servant's own knowledge, comparing it to the priestly knowledge referred to in Malachi 2:7.<sup>92</sup> The most adequate statement of the subjective view of this phrase has been given by Murray.

There are numerous respects in which knowledge may be viewed as an essential part of the equipment of the righteous Servant in the expiatory accomplishment which is the burden of the passage. . . . From whatever angle the task assigned to him and perfected by him as the Servant of the Lord may be viewed, knowledge is an indispensable ingredient of the obedience which his servanthood entailed. . . . His own knowledge can therefore be conceived of as not only relevant to the Servant's justifying action but also as indispensable to its discharge, whether the action is that of his once-for-all expiatory accomplishment or that of his continual work [in actual justification] as the exalted Lord.<sup>93</sup>

Thus Murray concludes that Isaiah is speaking of "the Servant's own knowledge in all the reaches of its reference as it applies to the work of the Servant as the sin-bearer, as the trespass [guilt] offering, and as the high priest offering himself."<sup>94</sup>

It is difficult to determine how Isaiah understood this point. As a whole the passage is speaking of the Servant's work of substitutionary atonement. Apart from the implied faith on the part of the speakers of 53:1-9, there is no direct reference to the appropriation of the Servant's expiation. Yet it is questionable if one should go all the way with Murray and regard justification here as "the virtual synonym of expiation," with no reference at all to, as Murray calls it, "actual [subjective] justification."<sup>95</sup> Rather, the word play in the Hebrew (יִצְדִּיק יְצַדִּיק) supports the identification of this justification as forensic and actual: "My *righteous* Servant will declare many *righteous*."<sup>96</sup>

The verse concludes with another reference to the Servant's substitutionary work for Israel and the nations: "he will bear their iniquities" (v. 11c). It is the Servant's action toward the "all" as previously described in verses 4-6 that is the foundation for the justification of "many." The "all" whose iniquities are borne by the Servant (vv. 4-6) includes the "many" who are actually justified (v. 11).

YAHWEH PROMISES THAT HIS SERVANT WILL HAVE VICTORIOUS DOMINION BECAUSE HE DIED BEARING THE SINS OF MANY (53:12)

*The Servant will receive the reward of the Victor (53:12a).* The promise of Yahweh to exalt His Servant supremely is cast into a description drawn from the reward given to a victorious warrior following military conquest: "Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong." "The military idea of dividing spoil may be taken either in a literal fashion, with the Servant seen as participating in world government, or in a metaphorical sense, describing the Servant's spiritual conquests."<sup>97</sup> The term "portion" designates not "a part" but "the appointed portion, the lot, the inheritance."<sup>98</sup> The picture is apparently that of the triumphant Servant-Messiah, surrounded by the righteous ones who share His triumph, particularly the "kings"/"nations" of 52:15 and the "descendants" of 53:10. However, some view the Servant as dividing the spoils with His enemies rather than His followers: "As a result of Christ's atonement, He will rescue many from the control of Satan and his strong and powerful forces."<sup>99</sup> But this does not seem to fit the sense of the metaphors used here.

*The Servant gave His life for sinners (53:12b, c).* The basis of the Servant's inheritance or reward is identified by Yahweh: "because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors [cf. Matt. 27:38; Mark 15:28; Luke 22:37]. For he bore the sin of many [cf. Mark 10:45], and made intercession for the transgressors." This passage draws the strophe to a conclusion in ideas similar to those expressed throughout the fourth Servant song, thus emphasizing His satisfactory substitutionary sacrifice for sinners. The one statement requiring further comment is the final clause, "made intercession for transgressors." While Christ made intercession for transgressors while He was dying on the cross ("Father, forgive them . . ." [Luke 23:34]), the term here may refer to His continual high priestly intercession for His own (John 17; Heb. 7:25; cf. Isa. 62:1, 6-7). Yet in view of the emphasis in the context on His expiatory death, it is possible that the intercession described is more than verbal, and so refers to the fact that He intervened by His death for transgressors. North says that "the figure is of the Servant placing himself between the transgressors and the punishment they deserved."<sup>100</sup>

## Conclusion

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 presents the details and purpose of the Servant's sufferings and death, particularly as they relate to His exaltation and the ultimate success of His mission. The message of the song is clear — Yahweh announces the exaltation of His Servant because of His satisfactory substitutionary death for the sins of both His guilty people and the Gentiles. The passage consists of five strophes, the central three of which compose the body of the report. Thus the song consists of three basic units: (1) an introductory appraisal in which Yahweh promises to exalt His Servant supremely, who though deeply degraded, will both purify and receive the worship of nations (52:13-15); (2) a confessional report in which believing Israelites contrast their past rejection of the Servant with the true meaning of His death (53:1-9); and (3) a concluding epilogue in which Yahweh promises to exalt His Servant because He did His will in dying as a guilt offering (53:10-12).

## Notes

1 See the preceding article in this series, "The Career of the Servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, Part 4 of Isaiah's Songs of the Servant," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 139 (October–December 1982):312-29.

2 All Scripture quotations are taken from the New International Version (NIV) unless designated otherwise.

3 Mark A. Arrington, "The Identification of the Anonymous Servant in Isaiah 40–55" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971), p. 46.

4 Cf. Franz Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2 vols., Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 2:316.

5 Cf. Frederick Alfred Aston, *The Challenge of the Ages: New Light on Isaiah 53*, rev. ed. (Scarsdale, NY: Research Press, 1969), p. 10.

6 Orlinsky contends that "the concept of vicarious suffering and atonement is not to be found here or anywhere else in the Bible" (H. M. Orlinsky, "The So-Called 'Servant of the Lord' and 'Suffering Servant' in Second Isaiah" in *Studies on the Second Part of the Book of Isaiah*, Supplements to *Vetus Testamentum* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1967], p. 54). Knight identifies the Servant's sufferings as "participative," but neither substitutionary nor penal, "endured, not *instead of* the other party, but *on his account*" (George A. F. Knight, *Deutero-Isaiah: A Theological Commentary on Isaiah 40–55* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965], p. 273). See also R. N. Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981), p. 175. North's view suggests a "moral influence theory" of the atonement (Christopher R. North, *The Second Isaiah: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary to Chapters XL–LV* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964], p. 238).

7 Kay lists 11 phrases including verbal similarities to Leviticus 16 and the Day of Atonement ritual (W. Kay, "Isaiah: Introduction, Commentary and Critical



- Notes" in *The Bible Commentary*, vol 5, ed F C Cook [reprint, Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 1981], p 266)
- 8 August Pieper, *Isaiah II An Exposition of Isaiah 40–66*, trans Erwin E Kowalke (German ed , 1919, Milwaukee Northwestern Publishing House, 1979), p 440
- 9 Young indicates that "when it is said that he bore our sicknesses, what is meant is not that he became a fellow sufferer with us, but that he bore the sin that is the cause of the evil consequences, and thus became our substitution" (Edward J Young, *The Book of Isaiah The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, 3 vols [Grand Rapids Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co , 1965, 1969, 1972], 3 346)
- 10 Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66 A Commentary* (Philadelphia Westminster Press, 1975), pp 262-63
- 11 William Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah A Commentary, Grammatical and Critical, Upon Isaiah LII 13–LIII 12* (Edinburgh T & T Clark, 1877), p 122
- 12 Robert R Dewbury, "An Exegetical Study of Isaiah 52 13–53 12" (Th M thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1975), p 37
- 13 Ibid
- 14 So Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 123, contrast the view of G R Driver, "Isaiah 52 13–53 12 The Servant of the Lord" in *In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, eds Mathew Black and Georg Fohrer (Berlin Alfred Topelmann, 1968), p 94
- 15 Compare Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 441, North, *Second Isaiah*, p 239
- 16 Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2 318-19
- 17 E W Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament and a Commentary on the Messianic Predictions*, abridged ed (Grand Rapids Kregel Publications, 1970), p 236
- 18 Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 125, on the nature of vicarious substitution in this passage, see Young, *Isaiah*, 3 347-48
- 19 This is contrary to Young, who states that 'it is not warranted to draw from these words a doctrine of universal atonement' (*Isaiah*, 3 350)
- 20 Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 442
- 21 Knight says that "this verse surely describes the manner in which humanity as such behaves" (*Deutero-Isaiah*, p 235)
- 22 T R Birks, *Commentary on the Book of Isaiah* (London Rivingtons, 1871), p 270
- 23 See the discussion on "my people" in verse 8
- 24 Francis Brown, S R Driver, and Charles A Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford At the Clarendon Press, 1955), p 620
- 25 Kay, "Isaiah," p 269
- 26 North, *Second Isaiah*, p 240
- 27 Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 444
- 28 D F Payne, "The Servant of the Lord Language and Interpretation," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 43 (July–September 1971) 137
- 29 North, *Second Isaiah*, pp 240-41
- 30 Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66*, p 265
- 31 Driver, "Isaiah 52 13–53 12," p 94
- 32 North, *Second Isaiah*, p 241
- 33 J L McKenzie, *Second Isaiah* (Garden City, NY Doubleday & Co , 1968), p 130
- 34 Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 446
- 35 Payne, "Servant of the Lord," p 139
- 36 John Calvin, *Isaiah*, vol 3 of *Calvin's Commentaries* (reprint, Grand Rapids Associated Publishers and Authors, n d ), p 728
- 37 Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p 238
- 38 Whybray, *Isaiah 40–66*, p 177

- 39 Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 137, see Young, *Isaiah*, 3 351
- 40 Robert D Culver, *The Sufferings and the Glory of the Lord's Righteous Servant* (Moline, IL Christian Service Foundation, 1958), p 92
- 41 Allan A MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah* (Chicago Moody Press, 1977), p 140
- 42 D Winton Thomas, "A Consideration of Isaiah LIII in the Light of Recent Textual and Philological Study," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 44 (January-March 1968) 84, North, *Second Isaiah*, p 230
- 43 Driver, "Isaiah 52 13-53 12," p 95
- 44 H C Leupold, *Exposition of Isaiah*, 2 vols (Grand Rapids Baker Book House, 1971), 2 230
- 45 McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, p 130
- 46 If the reference is to physical descendants, the idea is that He was cut off prematurely, before the normal cycle of producing progeny. However, some scholars take the reference to spiritual progeny, the rhetorical question affirming their innumerable quantity.
- 47 Urwick refers "generation" to the Servant's own "generation," that is, origin "none fully estimated the Redeemer's generation, in its widest sense as to its origin, as to His earthly life, as to His character, perfect in holiness, and as to His everlasting reign" (*The Servant of Jehovah*, p 139).
- 48 For a defense of this general line of translation, see Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 446.
- 49 Compare Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p 239.
- 50 North, *Second Isaiah*, p 241.
- 51 Knight, *Deutero-Isaiah*, p 236.
- 52 Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, p 177, cf Westermann, *Isaiah 40-66*, p 265.
- 53 Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 140.
- 54 Several emendations are noted in James Mullenburg, "The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40-66," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols., ed George R Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 5 626, the Dead Sea Scroll 1QIs<sup>a</sup> reads עַמּוֹ ("his people") but this lacks other textual support.
- 55 Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah* (2 vols in 1) (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, n.d.), 2 300.
- 56 Kay, "Isaiah," p 268, Young, *Isaiah*, 3 352.
- 57 Leupold, *Isaiah*, 2 230.
- 58 North, *Second Isaiah*, p 241.
- 59 P A H DeBoer states "The expression 'a rich man, probably meant collectively, is a synonym of the wicked, compare the Book of Psalms wherein the wicked, the rich men are the enemies of the pious people' (*Second-Isaiah's Message* [Leiden: E J Brill, 1956], p 114).
- 60 Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 145.
- 61 McKenzie, *Second Isaiah*, p 131.
- 62 See Young, *Isaiah*, 3 353, n 34.
- 63 Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 448, but cf Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 147.
- 64 Merrill F Unger, *Unger's Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol 2, *Isaiah-Malachi* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1982), p 1299.
- 65 See Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 147.
- 66 Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2 326, 329, Young, *Isaiah*, 3 353.
- 67 Page H Kelley, "Isaiah" in *The Broadman Bible Commentary*, 12 vols (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), 5 344.
- 68 Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 148, Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 449. Young points out that "this does not absolve from responsibility those who put him to death, but they were not in control of the situation" (*Isaiah*, 3 354).
- 69 Culver, *The Sufferings and the Glory*, p 107.
- 70 Young, *Isaiah*, 3 354, n 37.
- 71 Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 149.
- 72 Kelley's view that the "you" is "the worshiper who must appropriate the servant's sacrifice and make it the means of his approach to God" is even more

abrupt and lacks contextual confirmation ('Isaiah, 5 344)

73 Kenneth L Barker, personal correspondence, June 7, 1982

74 On the other hand, Urwick says, "His soul is "not simply for the pronoun, but with special reference to the nature of the  $\text{זָכָר}$ , which was the guilt offering in the case of individual sin' (Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, pp 151-52), Thomas reports the verb as a passive and translates, "Though his own life be made an offering for sin' (Thomas, "Isaiah LIII, p 85)

75 MacRae states "The suggestion has been made that various other sacrifices prescribed in the book of Leviticus might seem better to fit the meaning of the atonement than this particular one (called a sin offering in the KJV) The answer may well be that this offering stands here as representing the entire sacrificial system, which finds its fulfillment in the voluntary death of the Servant of the LORD (*The Gospel of Isaiah*, pp 144-45), Young says that "the word stands generally for expiatory sacrifice' (*Isaiah*, 3 354)

76 Payne, "The Servant of the Lord, p 139

77 Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p 240

78 Pieper is representative of those scholars who stress that since the Servant brings the guilt offering, eternal life and His spiritual seed accrue to Him as a reward (*Isaiah II*, pp 450-51)

79 Unger, *Commentary*, p 1300

80 Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 452

81 See Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 154 ("after the suffering, glory')

82 Young, *Isaiah*, 3 356, Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 452

83 Urwick, *The Servant of Jehovah*, p 154

84 Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p 241

85 Urwick regards 'his seed' (v 10, offspring, NIV) as the implied object of the verb "see' (*The Servant of Jehovah*, p 154) Barker views the object as both the "offspring' (v 10) and the "many' (v 11) (personal correspondence, June 7, 1982)

86 Young, *Isaiah*, 3 356

87 Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p 241

88 John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, 2 vols (Grand Rapids Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1959, 1965), 1 375 Murray's "Appendix C—Isaiah 53 11 (1 375-83) is a very helpful treatment of this problem

89 Hengstenberg, *Christology*, p 241

90 Young, *Isaiah*, 3 357

91 Alexander, *Isaiah*, 2 305, see also Unger, *Commentary*, p 300

92 Delitzsch, *Isaiah*, 2 337, cf Arrington, "The Anonymous Servant, pp 52-

53 Barker suggests that such a priestly knowledge may be referred to in 52 13a and may be actually exercised in 52 15a (personal correspondence, June 7, 1982)

93 Murray, *Romans*, 1 379

94 Ibid, p 380

95 Ibid, p 381

96 Barker, personal correspondence, June 7, 1982

97 Dewbury, "Isaiah 52 13–53 12, p 53

98 Pieper, *Isaiah II*, p 455

99 MacRae, *The Gospel of Isaiah*, p 147

100 North, *Second Isaiah*, p 246, cf Payne, "The Servant of the Lord, p 142

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