The nation of Israel had abandoned God by trusting in themselves, their religious practices, and foreign nations to protect them. As a result God used Assyria and Babylon to both judge and awaken them to their sin. The northern kingdom of Israel was first conquered by Assyria then the southern kingdom of Judah by Babylon. In both cases the people were led into exile.

OUTLINE OF ISAIAH

The Book of Isaiah is divided into three major sections.

In chapters 1-39 Isaiah wrote about the times in which he lived (740-700 BC) - before the Babylonian exile.

In chapters 40-55 he wrote of the time period between 585-540 BC when the Judeans were in exile.

Then in chapters 56-66 he reflects on the conditions in Judah after the return from exile in 539 BC. This will be the section that the majority of this paper addresses.

The detail and precision of Isaiah’s prophecies has led some to believe that the book had to have been written by multiple authors after the events had transpired. Such a suggestion, however, lacks any objective evidence and is based on the belief that predictive prophecy of this nature is impossible. Christians, however, recognize that Isaiah’s pinpoint accuracy simply provides more evidence of the inspiration of the Bible and the reality of an omniscient (all knowing) God.

We will now give a brief overview of the second section of the Book (chapters 40-55), the section that is addressed to the nation during the Babylonian exile.

ISAIAH 41-48 The freedom from Babylonian captivity (Ch. 40-48)

God had promised that the exiles would be the redeemed servants of God. For this to happen, two problems needed to be solved. First, they needed to be freed by Babylon and live in the land that God had promised to them. This is dealt with in chapters 41-48. But there is another problem confronting the people of God. How could they serve God if they were sinful? It was their sin that got them into this mess in the first place. Even if God freed them from captivity, a sinful person can never serve a Holy God. The answer to the problem of sin is found in chapters 49-55.
ISAIAH 49-55 The freedom from the captivity of sin (Ch. 49-55)

What we need to see is that the language of captivity continues in chapters 49-55 but there is no longer any mention of Babylon, its idols, or Cyrus, the Emperor of Persia who freed Israel from Babylonian captivity. This is conspicuous and leads us to the conclusion that the captivity being addressed in these chapters is a captivity of a different kind. The Deliverer from this captivity is the Servant of the Lord who was first introduced in 42:1-9. His servanthood makes their servanthood, and ours, possible.

Chapters 49-55 can be divided into three sections:

In the FIRST section (49:1-52:12) God repeatedly insists that He has not cast off His people. It is also marked by the anticipation that God would somehow save His people from their captivity to sin.

The THIRD section (54:1-55:13) is an invitation to participate in the deliverance that has been accomplished.

What accounts for the change from anticipation to the invitation of participation?

It is the SECOND section (Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12). This is the fourth of four passages known as “the Suffering Servant “passages. In these passages we find that there is someone who is addressed as “The Servant of the Lord” who will provide forgiveness of sin and restore the people to a proper relationship with God so they can serve Him. Of course, with New Testament revelation, we know that the Suffering Servant is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Phil. 2:4-11).

THE SERVANT OF THE LORD’S TASK OF SALVATION

In chapters 41-48 Isaiah emphasizes the servanthood of the nation of Israel. In those chapters he declares that God would prove His power over the idols of the nations. These chapters are designed to stir up faith in this blind and rebellious “servant.” The one exception to this theme is in Isaiah 42:1-9 where God’s Servant is mentioned in glorious terms. It is clear that this is not Israel but the Servant in whom God delights.

Isaiah 42:1-9 - the FIRST “Suffering Servant” passage

Isaiah 42:1-8 “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations.” 2 “He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. (Matt 12:17-21) 4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law.” 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To
bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison. 8 "I am the LORD, that is My name; I will not give My glory to another, Nor My praise to graven images. 9 "Behold, the former things have come to pass, Now I declare new things; Before they spring forth I proclaim them to you."

In these verses we see the many qualities of this Servant that please God. He will bring justice. God’s Spirit will rest upon Him. He will not break off a bruised reed, or extinguish a burning wick; that is, He will act gently and with grace to those who are weary and downcast. - - This is similar to Jesus’ own words when He said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light"(Matt. 11:28-30). He will be a light to the nations; He will open the eyes of the spiritually blind and free them from their captivity to sin (see Lk. 4:18-19).

In chapters 40-48 God promises the exiles that they will be freed from Cyrus and restored to the land, but 42:1-9 is a foretaste of the promise that they will be freed from their sin and rebellion and restored to God by the Servant of the Lord. Chapters 49-55 will flesh this out in detail.

**Isaiah 49:1-13 - the SECOND of the “Suffering Servant” passage**

Isaiah 49:1-13 introduces the second “Suffering Servant” passage, expanding upon what has already been said in Isaiah 42:1-9.

The Servant of God has no question about His call from God. He was called from the womb, so this was not an afterthought.

Isaiah 49:1 “Listen to Me, O islands, And pay attention, you peoples from afar. The LORD called Me from the womb; From the body of My mother He named Me.”

He also has no doubt about His divine empowerment. Like a sharp sword and a straight arrow He will accomplish all that the Lord has for Him to do (John 17:4) and display the glory of God (John 1:18).

Isaiah 49:2 “He has made My mouth like a sharp sword, In the shadow of His hand He has concealed Me; And He has also made Me a select arrow, He has hidden Me in His quiver. He said to Me, "You are My Servant, Israel, In Whom I will show My glory."

Even though His ministry will seem futile, He is confident that God will not fail Him.

Isaiah 49:4 *But I said, "I have toiled in vain, I have spent My strength for nothing and vanity; Yet surely the justice due to Me is with the LORD, And My reward with My God."*

Though the Servant (Christ) is called “My Servant, Israel” in verse 3, He is called this because He is the ideal representative of what the nation of Israel was supposed to be. Proof that this is not the nation is in verses 5-6 where the Servant is said to be the One who restores the nation. The nation cannot be both the agent of restoration and the thing restored at the same time.
Throughout the Bible, Messiah and His history are inseparably linked to the nation of Israel. In the beginning of Isaiah, Israel is called the servant of the Lord, but this gradually becomes the title used exclusively of Messiah (see below).

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<tr>
<th>Isaiah 41:8-9</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>42:1-9</strong></td>
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Both Israel and Messiah are the servant of the Lord, but only Messiah fulfilled that role perfectly. Messiah will be as Israel was meant to be; He will display God’s glory (v 3) as the nation was supposed to have done.

The effects of His ministry will reach the nation of Israel but also the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 49:5 “And now says the LORD, who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant, To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel might be gathered to Him (For I am honored in the sight of the LORD, And My God is My strength).” 6 He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

In verses 7-12 it states that Christ (God’s Servant) would be despised, but a day will come when He will be vindicated. As Philippians 2:9-11 says, “God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” He is the embodiment of God’s covenant to His people (Jer. 31:31; Matt 26:28).

Isaiah 49:7 “Thus says the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel and its Holy One, To the despised One, To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers, "Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You." 8 Thus says the LORD, "In a favorable time I have answered You, And in a day of salvation I have helped You; And I will keep You and give You for a covenant of the people, To restore the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritages; 9 Saying to those who are bound, 'Go forth,' To those who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves.' Along the roads they will feed, And their pasture will be on all bare heights. 10 "They will not hunger or thirst, Nor will the scorching heat or sun strike them down; For He who has compassion on them will lead them And will guide
them to springs of water. 11 "I will make all My mountains a road, And My highways will be raised up. 12 "Behold, these will come from afar; And lo, these will come from the north and from the west, And these from the land of Sinim."

At the announcement of Messiah’s work, He breaks forth in an outburst of praise.

Isaiah 49:13 “Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Break forth into joyful shouting, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people And will have compassion on His afflicted.”

In Isaiah 49:14 the people respond negatively toward the proclamation of the Servant’s work, saying that it is in vain because God has forgotten them, so God responds in 49:14-50:3. Following God’s response comes the third “Suffering Servant” passage.

D.A. Carson, in *For the Love of God* summarizes this passage as follows:

In the first six verses of Isaiah 49 the Servant of the Lord speaks. Who is he? He is unnamed, but we can draw some inferences from the description provided by the text. Like the prophet Jeremiah, he was called by God before he was born (Isa. 49:1; cf. Jer. 1:5); like him, he meets opposition that drives him to despair, though he faithfully perseveres (Isa. 49:4; cf. Jer. 4:19-22, etc.). God has made his mouth “like a sharpened sword” (Isa. 49:2), which rather suggests prophetic ministry.

But what is most striking about this Servant is something that at first appears to be a striking confusion. God addresses him in these terms: “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor” (Isa. 49:3, italics added)—so the Servant is Israel. Yet the Lord calls this Servant “to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself” (Isa. 49:5, italics added)—which distinguishes this Servant from Israel and represents him as Israel’s savior. Why?

As in Isaiah 42, this Servant embodies all that Israel should have been. This Servant is an ideal Israel, God’s perfect Servant—and thus a figure different from empirical Israel, and one that is able to save empirical Israel. In part, the identity of this Servant is still hidden at this point in the book: “[God] made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver” (Isa. 49:2), says the Servant. God does insist, however, that it is “too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa. 49:6). Indeed, even when the Lord uses this Servant “to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself” (Isa. 49:5), surely this envisages something more than a return to the land or to Jerusalem. After all, the servant Cyrus accomplishes that for Israel. This Servant, however, brings Israel to God; the restoration is not so much to a place as to the living God.

Isaiah 49 is too long and complex to permit an adequate summary here. But I draw attention to two themes. First, in Isaiah 49:8-12, the “returning” people are not Israelites only, but Gentiles, and the return is primarily to God. Israelites would return from the north, but these come from
everywhere. Second, although God has promised some fine things, Zion (standing for the people of God) complains that the Lord has forsaken and forgotten her. But God replies with moving commitment: “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast ...? Though she may forget, I will not forget you” (Isa. 49:15). In stagnant, discouraging times, remember God’s long-range commitments, and reflect on Romans 8:31-39.

Isaiah 50:4-9 - the THIRD “Suffering Servant” passage

Isaiah 50 has a transitional importance that belies its brevity. In Isaiah 50:1-3 God addresses the children of Israel in exile, especially those who think he has utterly abandoned them. He hasn’t. He has neither divorced their mother, i.e., Zion, nor sold them into slavery to pay off some creditor—so the way back to him is still open. In this light, the last two lines of Isaiah 50:1 should be read as irony: if the children were “sold” or the mother “sent away” in any sense, it was because of their sin, not because of some final legal action on God’s part. Moreover, the sovereign Creator is certainly capable of bringing them back (Isa. 50:2b-3). The real question is, why did none of them come to him when he called? (Isa. 50:2a).

Then the Servant speaks (Isa. 50:4-9), more to himself than to others, but so as to be overheard (Isa. 50:10-11). Who is he? There have been many suggestions: Isaiah, or a sixth-century disciple of Isaiah; Jeremiah; Israel, personified as an abused and suffering person (cf. Ps. 129:1-3). As the book unfolds, Isaiah will make the Servant’s identity clear. Even now, observe his characteristics: This Servant is a gifted counselor. His words sustain the weary, for he himself has an ear for all the Sovereign Lord says, and he has not been rebellious (Isa. 50:4-5—unlike Israel). Thus he is a perfect disciple, but of the Lord, not of Isaiah (compare John 5:18ff.). He does not draw back from obedience (Isa. 50:5), even in the face of implacable abuse (Isa. 50:6; cf. Matt. 27:30; Mark 14:65; 15:19). The Sovereign Lord sustains him in his mission, so he sets his face like a flint to complete the task assigned him (Isa. 50:7; cf. Luke 9:51), confident that God will finally vindicate him (Isa. 50:7-9; cf. Phil. 2:9-11).

How, then, does the second part of this chapter relate to the first? Surely in this way: those who are addressed in Isaiah 50:1-3 still seem alienated, distant, unresponsive, cynical, while here in Isaiah 50:10-11 a line is drawn in the sand, and this line concerns the Servant. On the one side is the person who “fears the LORD and obeys the word of his servant,” who despite the terrible darkness that now engulfs him “trust[s] in the name of the LORD” (Isa. 50:10). On the other side is the person who tries to provide his or her own light, who lights fires of rebellion; God says to such a person, “This is what you shall receive from my hand: You will lie down in torment” (Isa. 50:11). Thus the identity of “the people of God” is undergoing subtle redefinition. In Isaiah 49:8-12 they embrace both Israelites and Gentiles; here one element that defines them is that they obey the word of the Lord’s Servant. (D.A. Carson, For the Love of God)
In Isaiah 49:14-50:3 Isaiah had proclaimed that God had both the power and the will to deliver His people from their sin. But how will He do this? According to Isaiah 50:4-9, He will do it through the obedience of His Servant.

This third passage (50:4-9) makes it even clearer that the Servant will suffer, but unlike Israel, His suffering is for obedience, not rebellion.

In Isaiah 49:3 it said that God’s Servant would display God’s glory. According to verse 4 the Servant will reveal God through His speech (John 5:19, 30; 8:28; 12:49; 14:10, 24). Since the Spirit of God will rest upon Him (Isa. 42:1) it follows that His ears are opened to hear God’s message and He has the desire to obey (50:5; 11:4; 61:1; John 4:34; 6:38; 10:38; 14:11; ).

Isaiah 50:4 “The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, That I should know how to speak A word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned.”

5 “The Lord GOD has opened My ear; And I was not rebellious, Nor did I turn away. “

Though speaking the Word of God will also result in suffering and abuse (50:6; Matt 26:67; 27:26, 30; Mk. 10:34; Jn. 19:1) He would nevertheless endure it (50:6; Heb. 12:2) because He has confidence that God will vindicate Him in the end (50:7-9). None will be able to accuse Him of disobedience to God (50:8-9a; Matt 26:60) or through their abuse cause Him to stop Him from obeying the Lord (50:9b).

Isaiah 50:6 “ I gave My back to those who strike Me, And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard; I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting.”

7” For the Lord GOD helps Me, Therefore, I am not disgraced; Therefore, I have set My face like flint, And I know that I will not be ashamed. 8 He who vindicates Me is near; Who will contend with Me? Let us stand up to each other; Who has a case against Me? Let him draw near to Me.”

9” Behold, the Lord GOD helps Me; Who is he who condemns Me? Behold, they will all wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them.”

Verse 9 concludes the words of the Suffering Servant and is followed by Isaiah 50:10-51:1-8 which is a commentary on the Servant’s words. It also expands upon the theme of the Servant who listens and obeys. It is addressed to the believing – to those who “pursue righteousness” “who seek the Lord” (51:1), and “whose heart is My law” (51:7). To these the Servant brings deliverance from sin which is both universal (51:4-6) and timeless (51:6, 8).

Verses 10-11 form the transition from the Suffering Servant passage (50:1-9) to the commentary on the Servant’s words (51:1-8) and emphasize the need of obedience to the Servant’s message (cf. Matt. 28:19-20). In fact, “to fear the Lord” is synonymous to “obeying the Servant.” Once again the Servant is not the nation of Israel, but the One who brings God’s word to the nation. Those who follow Him will be able to walk in light, while those who depend on their own self-manufactured light will end in destruction.
Isaiah 50:10  "Who is among you that fears the LORD, That obeys the voice of His servant, That walks in darkness and has no light? Let him trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God. 11 Behold, all you who kindle a fire, Who encircle yourselves with firebrands, Walk in the light of your fire And among the brands you have set ablaze. This you will have from My hand: You will lie down in torment."

Isaiah 51:1-8 expands the theme of “listening and obeying” the words of God’s Servant

This section is broken into three stanzas.

The First Stanza (51:1-3)

In the first stanza the righteous are called to “listen” and look back at God’s dealings with Abraham and His power within creation. God fulfilled His promises to Abraham and He would not abandon them now. Furthermore, the judgment will not last – waste places will be made fertile, the Edenic condition that God had originally created the world in will come again, and the people will experience joy.

Isaiah 51:1 "Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, who seek the LORD: Look to the rock from which you were hewn and to the quarry from which you were dug.  2 Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who gave birth to you in pain; When he was but one I called him, Then I blessed him and multiplied him.  3 Indeed, the LORD will comfort Zion; He will comfort all her waste places. And her wilderness He will make like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; Joy and gladness will be found in her, Thanksgiving and sound of a melody.”

The Second Stanza (51:4-6)

The second stanza also begins with a call to listen, but the emphasis is on listening to the work of the Servant. God’s salvation will not be merely for the children of Abraham but for all peoples (51:4-5). Lastly, His salvation will extend beyond the limits of time (51:6).

4 "Pay attention to Me, O My people, And give ear to Me, O My nation; For a law will go forth from Me, And I will set My justice for a light of the peoples.  5 My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait for Me, And for My arm they will wait expectantly.  6 Lift up your eyes to the sky, Then look to the earth beneath; For the sky will vanish like smoke, And the earth will wear out like a garment And its inhabitants will die in like manner; But My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not wane. “

The Third Stanza (51:7-8)

The last stanza of this passage also begins with the exhortation to listen. The words the righteous are to hear are both by the Servant and about the Servant. He wants to give them assurance that God will vindicate them as well and that their endurance will not be in vain. The insults they will face will someday be gone with the people who are speaking them will vanish like wool eaten by a grub.
Isaiah 51:7 "Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, A people in whose heart is My law; Do not fear the reproach of man, Nor be dismayed at their revilings. 8 For the moth will eat them like a garment and the grub will eat them like wool. But My righteousness will be forever, And My salvation to all generations."

**Isaiah 52:13-53:12 - the FOURTH “Suffering Servant” passage**

As we have said, Isaiah 50:10-51:1-8 is a commentary on the promise that through His Servant the people would be restored (50:4-9); there is hope that their sins have not isolated them from God forever. God has promised that though “the earth will wear out like a garment and its inhabitants will die in like manner; but My salvation will be forever, And My righteousness will not wane.” (Isa 51:6).

In response, the people call for God to act. They call for God to show His strength and bring His promises to come to pass. If their sins were really to be defeated and they were to be restored to God’s favor, then let it happen!

They cry out:

Isaiah 51:9” Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the LORD; Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago.”

But God very bluntly points out that He is not the One who needs to wake up – they do!

With identical terminology God tells His people:

Isaiah 51:17 “Awake, awake! Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the LORD the cup of his wrath, you who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.”

Isaiah 52:1” Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again.”

They are the ones who need to awaken and rise up in faith and take what He has offered them. It is not an issue of persuading to do what He has promised; it is developing faith so that when God acts they are ready to receive what He has done.

In Isaiah 50-51 God’s ability to restore sinners to Himself is referred to as “the arm” of the Lord – God’s arm is a metaphor of His power (50:2; 51:5, 9; 52:10; also Ex. 6:6; Jer. 21:5-6; 32:17; Ezek. 20:34; Job 40:9, etc.).

Who is the mighty arm of God that causes His far-reaching promises to come to pass?

We have had some hints about the power of God’s arm of salvation elsewhere in 42:1-6, 49:1-6, and 50:4-9, where God had promised to deliver the entire world from the power of sin through His Servant. But none of these passages sound like songs of triumph. Though victory is promised, it is accompanied by suffering, abuse, and rejection. All of this is now expanded upon in 52:13-53:12.
Introduction to the Suffering Servant (52:13-15)

The prophesy begins with the words that God’s servant will prosper, that is, His actions will succeed. He will be exalted, high and lifted up (words only used of God in Isaiah – 6:1; 57:15). So verse 14 comes as a shock. The glorious Servant of the Lord will be disfigured – marred more than any man (as His beatings prior to His crucifixion make plain).

Most Bible versions translate verse 15 as “He will sprinkle the nations”, though what they are sprinkled with is not stated. This has caused some to believe that the Hebrew is tied to another root word meaning “to startle.” If “sprinkle” is correct, then it no doubt refers to cleansing (with blood or with water). If the thought is being startled, then the idea is that the nations will be astonished that the Servant will bring justice through His own injury and abuse. They had never “heard” of such a thing but they will “see” it nevertheless and “understand.”

Isaiah 52:13” Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted. 14 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. 15 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.”

Rejection of the Servant (53:1-3)

What is astonishment in verse 15 turns to disbelief in 53:1. Those who believed that God would save His people from their sin cannot fathom that He would do it like this. How can this be the “arm of the Lord”? Who would ever imagine that when the Lord’s arm was bared to deliver His people it would look like this?

Isaiah 53:1 “Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?”

The reasons for the disbelief are listed in verses 2 and 3. The Servant appears on the scene of humanity in such an unassuming way (v.2), He has no stately appearance that people would be attracted to Him (v.2,) and he is not esteemed but rather despised and forsaken (v. 3).

Isaiah 53:2 “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. 3 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.”

This is not the image we would expect of a deliverer. Those who deliver are powerful, dominating leaders who demand respect and attention. The Servant of the Lord in no way fits the image of how we envision the “arm of God.”
But Paul sees it differently, He says:

Romans 1
16" For I am not ashamed of the gospel, **for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "BUT THE RIGHTeous man SHALL LIVE BY FAITH."

The Sin Bearing of the Servant (53:4-6)

The reason why the Servant suffers is now given. The suffering He endures is not for His transgression, but for *ours* (v. 5)! The repetition of the words “our” and “we” make sure that this is absolutely clear. He was a substitution for the people, and yet the people didn’t recognize it. Verse 4 says that they “esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.”

In the context, there is no doubt that the people who read Isaiah understood the “ours” to be them, so it was plain to them that the Suffering Servant was not the nation – they were the recipients not the one who suffered.

Isaiah 53:4 “Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 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. 6 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.”

John the Baptist understood this when He declared “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29)

The Results of Bearing Sin (53:7-9)

Verse 7 reveals the Servant’s innocence and submission to the injustices that He suffers. He is now compared to a sheep offered as a sacrifice. Jesus didn’t fight His adversaries, but accepted their hostility without any protest (I Pet. 2:21-24).

Isaiah 53:7” 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. “

53:8-9 further explain the injustice. He was deprived of descendants and “cut off” from the experience of enjoying a full, long life. Yet the stroke should have fallen on others – but few in His generation even thought of that (v.8). In the end, He was buried in the tomb of a sinner.

Isaiah 53:8 “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? 9 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. “
**The Atoning Nature of Bearing Sin (53:10-12)**

Yet the things that happened to God’s Servant were not accidental. They were God’s intention. In fact, it says it pleased the Father to crush Him. In verse 6 it says, “the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him.”

The New Testament agrees:

Acts 2:23 says, “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.”

Jesus prayed, “”My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; yet not as I will, but as You will.” (Matt. 26:39)

He also told the disciples “the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (Luke 24:7)

Isaiah 53:10” 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. “

When the Suffering Servant is accepted as a sacrifice by God, two things happen: The unbelieving see His death as futile -as nothing more than being “cut off out of the land of the living” (53:8). But verse 10 says, “He will see His offspring. He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand.” If the people accept Him as a guilt offering, His life is far from being futile; He will have children from every nation of the earth.

In other words, this is a prophecy and picture of Jesus Christ crucified and raised from the dead hundreds of years before it happens. The “crushing” is the crucifixion and death of Jesus; it is Jesus making Himself an offering for sin. The prolonging of His days is a reference to His resurrection - to eternal life after death. And when it says He will see His offspring, it means that the fruit of His suffering will be many people saved from sin and death.

More results of the Servant’s sacrifice are stated in terms of benefits to the Servant and then to the people in verses 11 and 12.

Isaiah 53:11”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, As He will bear their iniquities.

12 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. “

The Servant will be satisfied with the completion of His work in spite of the great suffering and cost. This man who is righteous, will make the many righteous (they will be justified – e.g. declared righteous – cf. Ro. 1:16-17).
In the end His suffering is victorious. He will be exalted and share the plunder as the victor.

**APPLICATION:**

Our first response should be in relation to our own acceptance of what Jesus, the Servant of the LORD, the mighty arm of God, has done. Have we admitted that we are sinful and need His sacrifice so that we can be made righteous? Are we “awake” enough to see?

Secondly, we would be wise to listen to commentary about the words of God’s Servant as outlined in Isaiah 51:1-8. There the righteous are told to look back at what God has done in creation and for Abraham, to look at what God has done in Christ, and to endure suffering for His sake, having the assurance that God will vindicate us as well and that our endurance will not be in vain.

**Chapters 1-39 - (740-700 BC) - before the Babylonian exile**

**Chapters 40-55 (585-540 BC) during the exile**

- The freedom from Babylonian captivity - 40-48
  - Isaiah 42:1-9 - the FIRST “Suffering Servant” passage
- The freedom from the captivity to sin - 49-55
  - Isaiah 49:1-13 - the SECOND of the “Suffering Servant” passage
  - Isaiah 50:4-9 - the THIRD “Suffering Servant” passage
  - Isaiah 52:13-53:12 - the FOURTH “Suffering Servant” passage

**Chapters 56-66 (after 539 BC) the return from exile**