

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #76: AN ANALYSIS OF ISAIAH 53, PART TWO

By John Temples

We are examining Isaiah's magnificent prophecy of the life and ministry of Jesus in Isaiah 53. Please go back and read Part One of this article covering verses 1-6, which deal with the lowly birth of Jesus, His ministry, and His death on the cross. This week we will look at verses 7-12:

7 "He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. 8 He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. 9 And they made His grave with the wicked — But with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. 10 Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. 11 He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."

Verses 7 and 8 are still dealing with the Lord's death on the cross. Verse 7 speaks of His willing submission to His executioners--He "opened not His mouth." Verse 8 documents the injustices and violence done to Christ in His death:

- "He was taken from prison"--from the custody of the Romans. He was turned over to the Jews to be crucified.

- “He was taken from judgment”--He had already been judged as innocent by Pilate; yet under pressure, Pilate reversed his decision and ordered His death.
- “He was cut off”--an expression signifying a violent, sudden death.
- “Who will declare His generation?”--a reference to His untimely death in the prime of His life. “His generation” means His posterity or offspring. The Jews put a lot of importance on having a continuing generation, a posterity. Jesus seemingly would have no descendants. But verse 10 affirms that the Lord would have a seed or offspring--His people.

Verse 9 foretells the facts of His burial. “They made His grave with the wicked.” “Made” has the meaning of “appointed or intended.” The evil intent of the Jewish leaders was that Jesus would receive the burial of a common criminal, and forever more be discredited. In fact, they did everything they could to discredit Him. They crucified Him between two criminals, to give the impression of “guilt by association.” They would have thrown His body into the valley of Hinnom, which was the usual fate of criminals who were executed. But the providence of God prevented that. God “raised up a Joseph”--Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man. He took custody of the body of Jesus and loaned his personal tomb to Him. So, as Isaiah says, “He was with the rich in His death.” It truly strains belief how Isaiah could possibly know or write such details 750 years ahead of time.

Verses 10-12 are about the atoning nature of Christ’s death, His resurrection, His exaltation by God, and the establishment of Christianity.

Verse 10 reads, “It pleased the Lord to bruise Him.” Let that sink in. Here we are standing on holy ground. We are looking into the mind of God as He observed His Son dying on the cross. God was not “pleased” in the sense of “enjoying” the crucifixion, but “pleased” in the sense of “having His justice satisfied.” Christ’s death gave God the legal divine right to pardon our sins. We absolutely cannot fathom such love.

Verse 10 also says, “He shall see His seed [and] shall prolong His days.” This points to the resurrection and the establishment of the church. The Jewish leaders thought to cut off the life of Jesus, to shorten His days, to deny Him a spiritual

posterity; but God “prolonged” His days by raising Him from the dead. And Christ does indeed have a seed or posterity: us and the untold numbers of Christians through the ages. The Lord is pictured in Hebrews as “showing off” His proud heritage: “Here am I and the children whom God has given Me” (Hebrews 2:13).

The next two verses, 11 and 12, are looking at the cross from God’s point of view. They are our assurance that God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus and exalted Him above all that is in heaven and on earth: “He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

It’s a bit difficult to follow the pronouns in these two verses. There are several “I’s” and “He’s” that need to be correctly assigned to the Father or the Son. Here is verse 11 paraphrased and clarified: “He [GOD] shall see the travail of His [CHRIST’S] soul and be satisfied [accept the death of Christ as full payment for the sin debt of mankind]. By His [CHRIST’S] knowledge My [GOD’S] righteous Servant shall justify many, for He [CHRIST] shall bear their iniquities.”

There’s a word in verses 11 and 12 that needs explaining: the word “many.” Verse 11 says that Christ’s death will justify “many,” and verse 12 states “He bore the sins of many.” Does this mean that some of mankind is left out of Christ’s atonement? Shouldn’t this read “all”? Here is the explanation: “Many” is a Jewish idiom (an expression peculiar to a certain people or culture). The Jews would often say “many” when they meant “all.” There’s an example in Daniel 12:2—“Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Here, “many” obviously means “everyone.” John 5:28-29 declares that “ALL who are in the graves shall come forth.” Nobody will miss the resurrection! Another example is found in Matthew 26:28—“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for remission of sins.” Paul plainly declared in 2 Corinthians 5:15 that “Christ died for all.” Hence, “many” in these passages is seen to be an idiomatic expression.

Verse 12 also requires some explanation. It says that God will “divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong.” The way this reads in the NKJV (and several other translations) makes it sound like Christ “gets a prize” for His sacrifice, but He has to share that prize. Many scholars think that this translation does not communicate accurately what the original Hebrew says. Here is how verse 12 reads in a Jewish Bible: “Assuredly, I will give Him the many as His portion; He shall receive the multitude as His spoil.” This corrects the mistaken implication that Christ shares His victory spoils with the great and the mighty; rather, the great and the mighty ARE His spoils. So the true sense of verse 12 is, “He shall conquer all His enemies and receive the saved as His portion and His inheritance.”

The last part of verse 12 says, “He made intercession for the transgressors.” This was literally fulfilled when the Lord cried on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” It continues to be fulfilled as Christ comes to the Father as our Mediator and Intercessor. Hebrews 7:25 says, “Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

So this is Isaiah’s masterpiece, chapter 53. This passage presents Jesus as the One who came from dry ground, Mary’s womb; the suffering Servant; the Lamb who atoned for our sins; the resurrected and exalted Lord; and the proud possessor of many “children”--us. In 12 verses, Isaiah covers the entire birth, life, mission, humiliation, rejection, death, and exaltation of Christ. If this chapter does not make you love and appreciate Jesus Christ, then nothing will. --John Temples