

Exegetical Notes
Isaiah 52:13-53:12
“Wounds that Heal”
Prepared by Robert W. Rice

Background

(In the book of Isaiah, several poems or songs emerge about the servant of the Lord, sometimes these songs refer to the servant as the nation of Israel as a whole (Isaiah 41:8-9, 44:1-2, 45:4, 48:20, 49:3-6) but looking at these songs from a Christian perspective some songs refer directly to Jesus as the Messiah. This song is one of them (see Acts 8:32-35)

52:13-15

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him-- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness--so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

-The writer calls us to look at what will happen. The Servant will act with insight, or wisdom given to him by God, and because he does so he will be given a place of honor and he will be lifted above all. However, unlike what many would expect, his exaltation will be accomplished through suffering.

-Many people who see the Servant will be literally horrified at his appearance because he is not like a man he has been disfigured so much (this would connect with the beatings that Jesus took before his crucifixion).

-The Servant will sprinkle or make atonement for many nations, and because of this kings and nations will be dumbfounded, because they will see what they did not understand coming true. (This verse could also be translated as “so he will startle many

nations...” which would also fit with the context about the appearance of the servant)

53:1-3

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

-The first phrase can be paraphrased, “Who could believe that this man was the Arm of the Lord?” and the answer would be only those whom the Lord intended.

-The Servant, although being the Arm of the Lord, had a natural background, and was unimpressive. He was not particularly attractive and he did not draw people to him.

-Because people did not understand who the Servant was, he is shunned and misunderstood, and in fact despised by men. He suffers because of this, and men hide their faces from him.

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. 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. 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.

-The reason for the Servant coming is now laid out. He came to heal us, to make atonement for our transgressions or sins against the law that God has laid out. We have peace because of this.

-Although the Servant took up the sin of others, those who saw him considered him to be cursed by God for having to endure the torture.

-Isaiah reminds us that all of us, like wandering sheep have turned our backs on the Lord, but the Lord chose to have the Servant take our punishment. This imagery is comparable to the scapegoat symbolically taking the sin of the people (Leviticus 16:20-22)

53:7-9

He 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. By 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. He 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.

-The Servant did not object to his suffering, and unlike a lamb being led to slaughter, he knew what was going on, but he remained silent. By taking on sin, he was given the judgment for sin, which was death.

-Although the Servant had done nothing wrong, he was assigned to die as a wicked man, but was with the rich in his death (This is fulfilled perfectly in Jesus (see Matthew 27:38, 57-60))

53:10-12

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. 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.

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.

-It pleased the Lord to crush the Servant because it fulfilled his plan for salvation.

-The next phrase (and though the Lord...) can be translated “when you make his life a guilt offering, you will see prolonged days” which refers to the Servant taking the punishment of people so they can have eternal life. But the Servant will also see prolonged days so this translation fits.

-Because the Servant does the will of God, he will be exalted. The idea of exaltation through suffering that is laid out at of the beginning of the passage.