

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Four songs of the Servant: The Suffering of the Servant**

### **Introduction**

We are going to consider today the last of four 'Servant Songs' in the Book of the prophet Isaiah. The subject comes to its climax in the fifteen verses from Isaiah 52:13-53:12. They highlight 'The Suffering of the Servant'. The portion readily divides itself into five sections of three verses each.

1. Isaiah 52:13-15: Jehovah, the God of Israel, speaks, giving a summary of what will transpire;
2. Isaiah 53:1-3: The godly remnant defines Israel's position, nationally;
3. Isaiah 53:4-6: The remnant speaks of Messiah as their substitute;
4. Isaiah 53:7-9: Jehovah takes delight in the moral beauty which shone in His Suffering Servant, the long-promised Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the world; and
5. Isaiah 53:10-12: The godly remnant responds to the account of suffering, and ultimate glory. They counted upon Jehovah granting adequate recompense. Then Jehovah gives His final confirmatory declaration.

In each section, it is instructive to see who is speaking. In looking at these sections, one at a time, it will be necessary to take account of the very words that the Holy Spirit uses, translated, of course, as accurately as we understand it can be done, into a language we ourselves can understand.

### **1. Isaiah 52:13-15: Jehovah, the God of Israel, speaks, giving a summary of what will transpire**

He contemplates His Anointed Messiah, first put to shame, but eventually on the summit of glory before every eye. His early extreme humiliation will lead to His ultimate glory.

The omniscient God gives first an outline of events as they will eventually unfold. The blessing that will come to the nation of Israel will not be deserved because of anything they have done. It will be the outcome of the activities of Jehovah's Suffering Servant, Whom we know as Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God. Overall, He shall deal prudently; the kind of judicious activity that leads eventually to prosperity. But, first of all, when He presents Himself to His earthly people, the nation of Israel shall give their answer to Him. They don't want Him.

Totally rejected, and terribly abused by the nation He came to save, the overall agony of His sufferings shall be so intense that men will be absolutely appalled at His very appearance. He shall be barely recognisable as a man at all. Then, after His cruel death, God will give His estimation of Him. From the tomb, He shall be exalted - in resurrection. Then, He shall be extolled - in ascension. After that, He shall be made very high - in heavenly glory at the right hand of God. Many were astonished, dismayed, even shocked, at His extreme humiliation on the Cross. Many will be equally startled, absolutely astounded, at His glory and majesty when they see Him high and lifted up in glory, at His public appearing.

But, before God describes the Cross of Calvary in detail, He tells us the final outcome. We are assured at the very outset that Jehovah's Servant will not be a failure. He will succeed. He will surely accomplish the will of God.

### **2. Isaiah 53:1-3: The godly remnant defines Israel's position, nationally**

This prophecy was given in, say, about the 8th century BC. These verses describe what the reaction and response of the godly remnant of Israel will be when their Messiah appears in power and great glory in, let us say, the early part of the 21st century AD. They will then pass their own judgment about what their own nation did and said to and about Him in about, say, the year 30 AD, when the nation so decisively rejected and crucified Him. That is, the prophecy looks forward to a time when the godly remnant will look back to assess how their nation treated Him when He was living here on earth.

The remnant traces the past guilty blindness of the nation, and their total misjudgement of His life and death. Who will believe the true report of the remnant? Very few! A mere, tiny minority! They describe His early life and

development. He shall grow up before His God. Indeed He did! Luke 2:40 says, *"the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him."* Luke 2:52 goes on to say, *"Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."*

He was like a tender plant - a tiny sucker - sprouting up from the root of the tree, growing alongside it, but distinct from it! Having a life of its own, not dependent on the main part of the tree for anything!

Out of a dry ground. This is surely a picture of spiritually barren, spiritually lifeless Israel. No wonder they saw no form nor lordliness in Him!

They said, *"There is no beauty that we should desire Him"*. To them, He was no Saul or Absalom. He displayed no brilliant, external splendour! There was no outward show in Him or His kingdom at that time, as the Lord Himself said in Luke 17:20. There was indeed moral, inward perfection, but they could not see it. Sadly, and, generally speaking, there has been no real change right up to the present day.

Isaiah 53:3 says, significantly, *"He is despised and rejected."* Not only was, but is! This is still a true assessment of the attitude of the general mass to the long-promised Messiah. He is, still, in their eyes, the man of sorrows (Isaiah 53:3). Men much prefer an extravert, impressive leader.

He was acquainted with grief, fully acquainted with it by personal experience. Israel nationally, and the world at large, did not want to know a Messiah, a Saviour, like that. They hid their faces from Him. They deliberately turned away, a very definite act of refusal and rejection.

### 3. Isaiah 53:4-6: The remnant speaks of Messiah as their substitute

In His life and ministry on earth, the Lord Jesus relieved many afflictions, especially among Jews. He healed their diseases, He gave sight to the blind, even raising the dead. But it was not just a question of performing physical miracles. There is a lovely, well-known statement summing up what He did, and the way that He did it. It is this: *"First, He bore in His spirit, what He then dismissed with His power."* He bore their griefs and sicknesses sympathetically. He carried their sorrows as a burden. Think of John 11:35, *"Jesus wept."* Virtue, health, flowed out of Him, and He was conscious of it. Luke 8:45 records His sensitivity. *"Who touched me?"* He asked when the woman touched the hem of His garment. He knew, of course, but he wanted her to testify to her trust in Him.

What was the final answer of those He came to serve? He was stricken. His body was roughly abused by men. They thought God was smiting Him, in His soul, as an impostor. They thought that he thoroughly deserved it. He was afflicted; browbeaten; intellectually intimidated in His spirit, even before they actually nailed Him to the Cross. Even then, of the six hours on the Cross, only the last three involved suffering from God.

Isaiah 53:5-6 give us the heart of the matter, so I shall quote the verses verbatim: *"He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."*

Isaiah 53:5 relates to His death, His work of 'atonement'; His death for our sins upon the Cross. Various terms are used in scripture to give us a sense of the different aspects of the Lord's sufferings. Think of the graphic description given. He was wounded, pierced through, by cruel, wicked men. The Lord suffered this in His body. He was bruised by men at the behest of Satan, as prophesied in Genesis 3:15. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him. This is the very basis of our spiritual peace. He accepted the punishment that we deserved for our sins. This is a spiritual matter. He suffered in His spirit.

*"By His stripes we are healed"* - made thoroughly whole spiritually in the sight of God. If ever we were to be brought into the peace of God, God's Suffering Servant must endure all this. Think of Acts 2:23. *"Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain."* Man's worst and God's best were both revealed at the Cross. But only an act of God can bring in salvation. The activities of sinful man cannot make any contribution at all to our eternal blessing.

Isaiah 53:6 emphasises our own responsibility in this:

- All - without exception!
- We - this is a universal situation!
- Every one - each individual!
- His own way - complete, self-centred independence!

You know, sheep have the facility to go astray on their own. One sheep finds a hole in the hedge. The rest of the flock inevitably quickly follow suit; But, they need help to get back. Sin has had that same effect on the whole human race. Because of our sinful nature, and practice, we have an innate tendency to follow a bad example rather than a good one. But, how gracious our God is! *"The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isaiah 53:6)

**4. Isaiah 53:7-9: Jehovah takes delight in the moral beauty which shone in His Suffering Servant, the long-promised Messiah of Israel, the Saviour of the world**

Isaiah 53:7 says *"He was Oppressed"*, in His soul; *"He was Afflicted"*, in His spirit; *"He Opened not His mouth"*, a member of His body - before the chief priests and elders (Matthew 27:12) and also before Pilate (Matthew 27:14). How precious the comment in 1 Peter 2:23, *"when he was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not."* He was content to wait for God to justify Him. He used neither violence in His actions nor corruption in what He thought and said. His mouth, a member of His body, gave expression to the thoughts of His spirit and the feelings of His soul.

Isaiah 53:8 says *"He was taken from prison and from judgment."* As we would say, He was deprived of common justice. The alleged trial contravened all the legal rules applicable at the time. The whole procedure was riddled through with sheer corruption. It amounted to judicial murder. The question is asked, *"Who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off [violently], out of the land of the living."* Isaiah 53:10 will give us God's answer.

Isaiah 53:9 says, *"He made his grave with the wicked."* His body was indeed buried in a garden to the north of Jerusalem, in a cliff face, on top of the hill Golgotha, a cemetery reserved for common criminals (Matthew 27:33; Mark 15:22; John 19:17). But, He was *"with the rich in his death"* (Isaiah 53:9). This term 'rich one' is singular, identifiable as Joseph of Arimathea, mentioned with honour in each of the four Gospels (Matthew 27:57; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50; John 19:38). The word 'death' is in the plural, expressive of extreme intensity of suffering, bearing sin under the judgment of God.

**5. Isaiah 53:10-12: The godly remnant responds to the account of suffering, and ultimate glory. They counted upon Jehovah granting adequate recompense. Then Jehovah gives His final confirmatory declaration**

Isaiah 53:10. *"It pleased the Lord to bruise Him..."* He was crushed, beaten, oppressed beneath the heavy burden of the wrath of God. He suffered this in His soul. It was for the accomplishment of the will of God. Jehovah derived satisfaction, indeed joy, not from the suffering inflicted on the Messiah, but from the total devotion of His Suffering Servant and the results flowing from it. His God shall be pleased to give an appropriate answer to His devoted Servant. He shall see His seed. There will be fruit from His mighty work. Christians at the present time, Israel later, then the saved among the Gentiles, ultimately the cleansed universe!

He shall prolong his days. In all other cases of murder the life is shortened. In this case, the life of the murdered man is prolonged. Listen to Revelation 1:18. *"I am he that liveth, and became dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore; Amen."* Similarly, Psalm 102:24 pleads, *"Take me not away in the midst of My days."* The Psalmist was given the immediate reply, *"Thy years shall have no end"* (Psalm 102:27).

Isaiah 53:12 God will give Him a portion with the great, as we read in Philippians 2:9-11. Why? He poured out His soul unto death. He did it voluntarily. He chose to do it. In this life the innocent do suffer for the guilty, but not willingly. This was an intelligent decision (see John 10:17), an act of the personal spirit. He felt it keenly, in His soul. Unto death involved the body. Numbered with the transgressors; that is, classified as a common criminal (see Luke 23:32-43). He bore a great mass of load, the weight of sin. He made intercession for His people. He prayed for them because He felt for them, in His soul (Luke 23:34).

**What conclusion should we draw from this study?**

God has given an outline of the perfection of the Suffering Servant! You might well say, "OK, That's fine. Very nice! But - so what? What difference does it make, or should it make, to you and me?" Among other things, this! Mankind as a race is sinful by nature and practice. But not only the race as a whole! It is true of every individual who has ever lived on earth, apart from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Man is a tripartite being. He has spirit, and soul and body. Man has sinned in every part of his being; spirit, and soul, and body. This is given in painful detail in Romans 1:18-32.

In incarnation, the Lord Jesus became fully man, with spirit, and soul, and body. In His life, in manhood upon earth, the Suffering Servant was demonstrably perfect; in spirit, and soul, and body. He suffered sympathetically, in every part of His holy being, in spirit, and soul and body, with all who came to Him for help. In death, He suffered vicariously, for you and me, in every part of His being; in spirit, and soul, and body. And now God has fully vindicated Him; in spirit, and soul, and body.

What a wonderful Messiah! He shall eventually be owned as such by a godly, if depleted remnant of the Nation of Israel. In the meantime, what a wonderful Saviour for all of us, Jew or Gentile, who, as individuals, trust Him as our Saviour, and confess Him as our Lord. Praise His Holy Name!

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