

ISAIAH

52:13 - 53:12

Introduction

You are immediately struck by the contrast in Isaiah's description of God's Servant. God's Servant is **both** "exalted, extolled, and very high..." **and** He is "...marred more than any man..." "Kings shall shut their mouths at Him," **yet** "He is despised and rejected by men..."

The contrast is so extreme it can cause confusion. In the Book of Acts, in chapter eight, the treasurer of Ethiopia was returning to his country after visiting the Temple at Jerusalem. A believer named Philip had been dispatched by the Holy Spirit to intercept the Ethiopian's caravan. As the Ethiopian was being carried along by his servants *he was reading aloud from Isaiah fifty-three*. Philip came alongside, heard him reading aloud, and boldly asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The treasurer replied, "How can I, except some man guide me?" Philip climbed aboard the caravan. The inspired text then says, "...Philip opened his mouth, and began **at the same scripture**, and preached unto him **Jesus**" (Acts 8:35).

He began "at the same scripture" - at Isaiah fifty-three - *because it was and is about Jesus!* Jesus **is** the Servant being described; Jesus is **both** "exalted, extolled, and very high..." **and** "...marred more than any man..." "Kings shall shut their mouths at Him," **yet** "He is despised and rejected by men..."

The completed revelation of God in the New Testament clears-up any confusion. Jesus fulfills both descriptions in His two comings to earth:

1. He came the first time, in the first century, and was "despised and rejected by men." It resulted in His being "marred more than any man" at His crucifixion.

2. He is coming a second time! "Kings will shut their mouths at Him" because He will be "exalted, extolled, and very high" when He is crowned as King of kings.

Crucified the first coming; crowned in His Second coming. We'll organize our thoughts about these comings of Jesus around two points: #1 God Will Send His Servant To Be Crowned As Your Sovereign, and #2 God Sent His Servant To Be Crucified As Your Substitute.

#1 God Will Send His Servant
To Be Crowned As Your Sovereign
(52:13-15)

The last three verses of chapter fifty-two are both a summary of and an introduction to chapter fifty-three. God's Servant is coming to rule and reign over the kings and kingdoms of the earth... But He will also be rejected by them. The emphasis in chapter fifty-two is upon the ultimate and inevitable success of God's Servant as the Sovereign Lord of the earth.

Isaiah 52:13 Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.

We've already established from the Book of Acts that the "Servant" is Jesus Christ. These verses in Isaiah are also ascribed to Jesus in Matthew 8:14-17 and First Peter 2:21-25. I only tell you that because Jewish commentators, beginning in about the twelfth century AD, say that the "Servant" is not a man at all but the entire nation of Israel. *Not so!* This is a portrait of Jesus Christ, their Messiah.

The word "prudently" means that Jesus will *succeed* in His mission and ministry. It's a superlative, as are the words "exalted, extolled" and "very high." Isaiah overdoes it to firmly establish the inevitability of Jesus succeeding.

His inevitable success is described in verse fifteen:

Isaiah 52:15 So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.

Here is a modern-language translation of verse fifteen:

"He will cleanse many nations with his blood. Kings will shut their mouths because of him. They will see things that they had never been told. They will understand things that they had never heard."

When He comes the Second time Jesus will sit in judgment over the nations of the earth. Many who survive the awful tribulations that precede His Second Coming will be cast away from His presence to await eternal damnation. But many will be saved and enter into His kingdom on the earth.

The Jews to whom Isaiah was writing already understood that their Messiah was coming to be crowned. It was verse fourteen that caused them trouble:

Isaiah 52:14 Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men;

God's Servant will suffer such damage to his appearance and abuse to his person that it will astound and appall those who see Him. He will be hardly recognizable as human being. This is the contrast to the "exaltation" of verses thirteen and fifteen and therefore grabs your attention in a big way. It begs for an explanation... Which is what you get in chapter fifty-three.

Let's first dwell upon the crowning of God's Servant. There is coming a time when "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." In the Revelation of Jesus Christ where you're told how "the kingdoms of this world become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ." Jesus is returning and every eye shall see Him.

In the mean time, Jesus can be Lord over your life. Every few years there is a debate among believers regarding the "lordship" of Jesus. "If He's not Lord of all," some say, "He's not Lord at all." Well, of course He is Lord! But it is still up to you to acknowledge His lordship. Give Him your time; your talents; and your things.

Chapter fifty-three is the explanation of the contrast. It explains how and why the One Who is to be crowned must first suffer and die.

#2 God Sent His Servant
To Be Crucified As Your Substitute
(53:1-12)

If you heard this chapter read for the first time you'd conclude that it was a description of the crucifixion of Jesus. You'd be right; but you'd be awed upon learning that it was written *before* His crucifixion, not after it. It was written *over seven hundred years before* Jesus died on the Cross at Calvary for the sins of the whole world.

Isaiah's portrait of Jesus is chronological:

1. Verses one and two portray Jesus' life and ministry.
2. Verses three through eight portray His death.
3. Verse nine portrays His burial.
4. Verses ten, eleven, and twelve proclaim His resurrection.

Thematically you would say that the verses about His life and death depict His *humiliation*; the verses about His burial and resurrection depict His *exaltation*.

In His humiliation we see Jesus spited:

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

The "arm of the Lord" is a name of Jesus that describes Him as God's Servant. He was God reaching out to mankind.

We recognize these as rhetorical questions. **No one** has believed our report; **no one** has seen the arm of the Lord.

Obviously some did believe Jesus and were saved. Still, the nation of Israel officially rejected Him; and even His own disciples could not at first understand the contrast between His crucifixion and His crowning.

At one point in the Gospels you read,

Matthew 13:54 ...Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works?

Matthew 13:55 Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?

Matthew 13:56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this *Man* get all these things?"

Matthew 13:57 So they were **offended** at Him...

They were "offended." He didn't fit their expectations of the Messiah. They sought to dismiss His message. He was therefore spited. He was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton. He was called a "friend of sinners" - and they meant it to spite Him.

In His humiliation we see Jesus slighted:

Isaiah 53:2 For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; and when we see Him, *there is* no beauty that we should desire Him.

The earth Jesus was sent to is the "dry ground" - a desert. Some people like the desert; but the thought here is of desolation and death. Jesus was like a "root" planted upon the desolate earth; He was God's "tender plant," the only thing of true heavenly beauty unmarred by sin upon this planet.

This is sometimes interpreted to mean Jesus was plain in His physical appearance. *Not true!* Other Scriptures speak of Him being altogether lovely. As a perfect man, without sin, He would have been fair indeed to look upon.

The idea here is something different. He wasn't undesirable as a man; but He delivered an undesirable message. The Jews believed that their heritage as God's chosen nation was enough to save them. The thought that they must repent and be born-again was contrary to their way of thinking. Thus they slighted the message of Jesus. At one point they accused Him of being demon-possessed in order to slight His message. Another time they brought up His questionable birth, suggesting He was illegitimate, in order to slight His message.

In His humiliation we see Jesus scorned:

Isaiah 53:3 He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

At this point I believe we are looking at Jesus on the Cross. It is then that He was "despised and rejected by men" who "hid" their "faces

from Him." Some see Jesus as the "man of sorrows... acquainted with grief" in His life and ministry... But that doesn't really describe His life and ministry, does it? As He went about doing His Father's will He was filled with the Holy Spirit. A heart filled with the Holy Spirit is singing and making melody; being filled with the Spirit produces a "joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Then, too, Jesus wasn't "despised and rejected by men" until the Cross. Crowds followed Him, pressing upon Him for healings and feedings.

This is Jesus being scorned on the Cross. You can read the Gospel accounts and hear the awful things said to Him and about Him as He died for the very people scorning Him.

In His humiliation we see Jesus smitten:

Isaiah 53:4 Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, **smitten** by God, and afflicted.

Isaiah 53:5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, *He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.*

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Isaiah 53:7 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.

Isaiah 53:8 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.

In the mind of the Jews, only a guilty man - a criminal - would be so humiliated. As Jesus died on the Cross the crowd assumed He was being smitten by God.

Jesus **was** "smitten by God," *but not for Himself!* It was for us. It was for you.

This is the biblical Doctrine of Substitution. Jesus died on the Cross as your Substitute; He took your place, and the place of every other human being ever conceived.

The mention of a "lamb" being slaughtered is the picture of substitution. For centuries, from the Garden of Eden forward, God

had allowed a lamb to be slaughtered as a substitute for the death sinners deserved. Offer a spotless lamb and you could temporarily be allowed to stand in God's holy presence. Each of those perhaps millions of sacrificed lambs looked forward prophetically to the coming of a final sacrifice. Jesus was clearly identified by John the Baptist as "the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world." Jesus is called "the Lamb" at least twenty-eight times in the Revelation.

In verses ten, eleven, and twelve you're told that Jesus was "an offering for sin"; that He "bore [the] iniquities" of others; that He "bore the sins of many." He was made sin for you that you might be able to be made right with God.

I need to say a word about verse five and the phrase "by His stripes we are healed." It is sometimes erroneously taught that you are guaranteed physical healing by these words. We certainly believe in the gifts of healing. But these words depict your *spiritual* healing, not your physical healing. When they are quoted by the apostle Peter it is in the context of your *spiritual* salvation, not your *physical* healing (First Peter 2:24).

Bible commentator H.A. Ironside said of verse six, "To me [it] is the most wonderful text in the Bible." He went on to explain,

"Here we have the entire story of the Bible epitomized: Man's ruin both by nature and practice, and God's marvelous and all-sufficient remedy. The verse begins with *all* and ends with *all*... The first [all] is the acknowledgement of our... need. The second shows how fully that need has been met in the Cross of Christ."¹

The Cross upon which Jesus died was not the end of the story! We leave His humiliation and begin to see His *exaltation* - first in His burial, then in His resurrection.

You see Jesus exalted in His burial among the dead:

Isaiah 53:9 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.

¹ Isaiah, p. 301.

By crucifying Jesus between two thieves the Romans and Jews intended to "make His grave [or death]" seem deserved as if Jesus were "wicked." But His Father saw to it that His precious Son was buried in the tomb of a "rich" man as the Holy Spirit prompted wealthy Joseph of Arimathaea to boldly ask for the body of the Lord to give Him a proper and costly Jewish burial.

By the way... The burial of Jesus is a very important aspect of the Gospel. **The Romans would not have released the Lord's body unless they were absolutely certain He was dead.**

You see Jesus exalted in His resurrection from the dead:

Isaiah 53:10 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.

Isaiah 53:11 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.

Isaiah 53:12 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.

These verses describe the Cross as it is seen from heaven. Jesus was Substituted as the final "offering for sin." The result was His ability to "justify many." This is a huge doctrinal subject - Justification by Faith. It takes most of the Book of Romans to discuss it. Justification is the act of God by which He declares a believing sinner righteous on the basis of Jesus Christ's finished work on the Cross.

To oversimplify, some commentators suggest you understand justification to mean that, when you accept Christ, it is *just-as-if-I'd never sinned*.

In His resurrection Jesus is said to "see His seed... the labor of His soul and be satisfied." He is said to "justify many... and divide the spoil with the strong." The Scripture is describing the spiritual success of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. "Many" are saved and given eternal life with all its "spoil" - all its rewards.

You're not only promised rewards; you're provided resources. "Made intercession for the transgressors" reminds you of Jesus' present ministry. He is in heaven serving as your Great High Priest Who ever

lives to make intercession for you. From the throne room in heaven you receive mercy and obtain grace.

God **sent** His Servant, Jesus, to be crucified as your Substitute. He **will send** Jesus the second time to be crowned as your Sovereign.

Conclusion

There are three questions to answer in these verses:

1. To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
2. Who has believed our report?
3. Who will declare His generation?

"The arm of the Lord" is Jesus in His mission of reaching out to save you.

He is revealed anytime the Gospel is preached... *Like today!*

The only requisite to being saved is that you "believe our report" as believers "declare His generation."