

disposition, which is obedience to Him.

We conclude, instead of <knowledge> we should read <obedience> to the Father, which gave the value to his sacrifice. The NAB reads <suffering> instead of knowledge. That is an improvement, but the direct meaning is not <suffering>, but obedience, which led the Servant to accept suffering.

But we notice also in verse 11, the word <many>. In Hebrew it is <rabbim>. The same word occurs two more times, in verse 12. It expresses the fact that His suffering was for <all>. We surely must not say He died only for some. 52:15 about sprinkling surely refers to all, for even gentile kings are sprinkled. The fact that it does mean all is clear from the context, and especially from 53:6: "All (<kulanu>) we had gone astray. . . . The Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us <all>. There the Hebrew has <kulanu>, whose meaning is beyond all doubt. So by parallel, the <rabbim> here means <all>. The solution lies in the odd use of <rabbim>. If I were in a room with three people, I could say <all>, but I could not say <many>. <Rabbim> means <the all who are many>. Greek has no such word as <rabbim>. But a check of a Greek concordance reveals that every time St. Paul uses Greek <polloi>, which means <many>, he means <all>. There is no exception. For example Romans 5:19 speaks of original sin coming upon all. The word is <polloi>. Similarly in Mk 10:45 (=Mt 20:28) Jesus said He was to give His life for <many [polloi]>. Of course He did not die just for some. 1 Tim. 2:6 echoes Mk 10:25 and uses Greek <panton>, which is of course <all>. For further data cf. G. Kittel, <Theological Dictionary of the NT> s. v., <polloi>.

Verse 12 concludes this song: So I will give Him a portion among the <rabbim>, He will divide the spoils with the strong, because He poured out His life, was counted among transgressors, and bore the sin of <rabbim>.

End of Chapters 52-53



"THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME"

ISAIAH 61:1

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THE BOOK OF ISAIAH

CHAPTERS 52-53

AND HIS NAME
WILL BE CALLED
WONDERFUL COUNSELOR,
MIGHTY GOD,
EVERLASTING FATHER,
PRINCE OF
PEACE.
ISAIAH 9:6

Isaiah is called "The Book of Salvation." The name *Isaiah* means "the salvation of the Lord" or "the Lord is salvation." Isaiah is the first book containing the writings of the prophets of the Bible. And the author, Isaiah, who is called the Prince of Prophets, shines above all the other writers and prophets of Scripture. His mastery of the language, his rich and vast vocabulary, and his poetic skill have earned him the title, "Shakespeare of the Bible." He was educated, distinguished, and privileged, yet remained a deeply spiritual man. He was committed to obedience over the long haul of his 55-60 year ministry as a prophet of God. He was a true patriot who loved his country and his people. Strong tradition suggests that he died a martyr's death under the reign of King Manasseh by being placed within the hollow of a tree trunk and sawed in two.

Isaiah's calling as a prophet was primarily to the nation of Judah (the southern kingdom) and to Jerusalem, urging the people to repent from their sins and return to God. He also foretold the coming of the Messiah and the salvation of the Lord. Many of his prophesies predicted events that occurred in Isaiah's near future, yet at the same time they foretold the events of the distant future (such as the coming of the Messiah), and even some events still to come in the last days (such as the second coming of Christ).

In summary, the message of Isaiah is that salvation comes from God—not man. God alone is Savior, Ruler and King.

Commentary on the book of Isaiah is by noted theologian Rev. William G. Most (1914-1999). His contributions to theology have been recognized all over the world. He published 12 books and a host of articles on topics ranging from biblical studies to Mariology and Latin grammar.

Book of Isaiah

Summary of Chapter 52-53

Fourth Servant Song. 52:13 - 53:12. Summary and Comments

Who is the Servant?. The Targum says it is the Messiah - though we will see presently how the Targum distorted it. The relation of this person to the previous songs is easy to see. We even saw mention of the sufferings of the servant in the third song. In the second, it seemed to be at times Israel, at times an individual. We explained the Hebrew pattern in which an individual stands for and embodies a collectivity. But here it could not be such a double though, for in no way is the Servant here Israel. Here the Servant suffers innocently; not so for the sufferings of Israel. Here the servant suffers for others; Israel did not suffer for the nations.

Next, most versions say something like this: By his knowledge. . . he will justify many." The word <knowledge> is the heart of the problem.

It makes Isaiah sound like a Christian scientist. Every version I have seen does use the word <knowledge>. What can we do with it? The Hebrew is <be da'etho>. Unfortunately the standard lexicons for that noun do not help here. But if we notice that the noun <dath> is the same root as the verb <yada> we can get an answer. That verb has a broad meaning, it is not narrow like English <know> Rather, Zorell, <Lexicon Hebraicum et Aramaicum Veteris Testamenti> lists among the meanings: <colit, amat>. He gives examples: Jer 31. 34: "Know the Lord"; Hos 8, 2: "Israel shall cry to me: My God, we know you"; Ps 36. 11: "continue your love to those who know you." 87. 4: "I will remember Rahab and Babylon among those acknowledging me."; Pr 3. 6: "In all your ways acknowledge him"; Job 24. 1: "Why are not times set by the Almighty and why do not those who know Him see His days?"; Dn 11. 32: "But a people who knows Him will be strong."

It is evident that in all of these we could use the translation <love> or <obey>. This is especially suggested in the lines from Ps 36. 11 and 87. 4 as well as in Pr 3. 6, Job 24. 1 and Dn 11. 32.

Now although there is a technical difference between <love> and <obeying> God, in practice it all the same. In loving anyone else we will good to the other for the other's sake. Of course we cannot do that for God. So we turn to the analogical sense, partly different but adjusted. Scripture pictures Him as pleased when we obey, displeased when we do not. It is not that He gains anything by our obedience - He cannot gain at all. But still He wants it for two reasons: 1) He loves all that is good: but objective goodness says creatures must obey their Creator, children their Father; 2) He wants intensely to give us good: but that is vain if we are not open to receive it. His commandments tell us how to be open, and at the same time, steer us away from the evil that lurk in the very nature of things, e. g., a hangover after a drunk, or a high danger of a loveless marriage after a lot of premarital sex. Hence when we love God it really means we obey Him. Incidentally, the Hittite vassal treaties commonly required that the subject king "love" the great king. They meant obey.

Still more helpful is Hosea 6:6, so often mistranslated. It should be: "For <hesed> is my pleasure and not sacrifice; and knowledge [or love or obedience to] of God rather than burnt offerings." The Hebrew parallelism is useful here as so often. The first half says that God takes pleasure rather in observance of the covenant, obedience, than in external offerings; the second half says the same, so it must mean that to know or love or obey God is more than burnt offerings. The thought is the same as in Isaiah 23:19: "This people honors me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me." That is, He does not desire the externals of sacrifice, but the interior

He took on our suffering, that which was due to our sins, to rebalance the objective order. The Father did not really <punish> Him - a hideous thought. Yet people thought of Him as stricken by God. He was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our sins. All we (<kulanu>) had gone astray. But God laid upon Him the iniquity of us all(<kulanu>). The punishment that brought us well-being (<shalom>) was upon Him. We are healed by His wounds.

He was oppressed, yet did not open his mouth, He was like a lamb led to the slaughter. He was taken away, out of this life, by this oppression and by a wicked judgment of His people before Pilate. He was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people.

When he died they intended to give him a dishonorable burial, a shallow burial where wild dogs might eat his body. But God planned otherwise, had Him given a tomb by the rich Joseph of Arimathea.

It was the will of the Lord to crush him. The Lord made Him a guilt offering, a sacrifice. We saw above in commenting on Isaiah 29:13 that a sacrifice consists in two things: the outward sign, and the interior disposition. The outward sign was his physical suffering and death, which expressed His interior disposition, obedience to the Father. (On the night before, He had offered the same sacrifice, putting Himself under the appearance of death, body and blood separated. The outward sign then was that seeming separation, but the interior disposition was the same). Already on entering into the world (Hebrews 10:7) He had said: "Behold I come to do your will O God." He could do this at the moment of conception only because, as the Church teaches (Cf. Pius XII, <Mystici Corporis>, <Sempiternus Rex>, <Haurietis aquas> and W. Most, <The Consciousness of Christ>) His human soul at once saw the vision of God, in which all knowledge is present. So He saw and accepted even then the painful knowledge of all that was to come. During His life that bothered Him greatly: Cf. Luke 12:50 and John 12:27 On the cross He still had that attitude of obedience to the Father - we spoke of it above as the condition of the new covenant, as the interior disposition of His sacrifice.

But now after this, the prophet speaks of His resurrection, and says: "He will see his offspring, [that is, his spiritual descendants, and He will prolong His days." So, there was a resurrection. This is a remarkable line, for the doctrine of resurrection was not much developed in the day of Isaiah. (We saw a possibility of it at 14:9-22, which describes the king of Babylon coming down to the underworld - but this may well be only a literary fancy. Again 29:19 seems to speak of a resurrection, but it could mean merely the resurrection of Israel, in its restoration. Job 19:25 seems clearer, but is difficult to interpret).

Verse 11 says much the same: After the sufferings of His soul He will see the light of life, and be satisfied.

Some have foolishly tried to see this figure taken from Babylonian mythology, from Tammuz, a vegetation divinity that died in the heats of summer, returns again later, and is mourned. But Tammuz is not an innocent sufferer, nor does he atone for others.

The concept of atonement for others is strong here, as we shall see. Such an idea comes in many other places in Judaism, e. g., Job 42:7-8; 2 Mac 7. 37; Qumran Rule of Community 5:6; 8:3, 6; Simeon ben Eleazar citing R. Meir in <Tosefta, Kiddushin> 1. 14. Especially significant is 4 Mac 6:28-29 and 17:21-22. Cf. also H. J. Schoeps, <Paul, the Theology of the Apostle>, p. 129. This idea is part of the notion that sin is a debt, which the Holiness of God wants paid, that is, He wants the scales of the objective order to be rebalanced: cf. W. Most, <The Thought of St. Paul>, appendix. Cf. also Paul VI, doctrinal introduction to <Indulgentiarum Doctrina>.

The Targum, as we said, does consider this song to be messianic. Yet strangely it distorted it sadly. It turned the meek suffering servant of the Hebrew into an arrogant conqueror. There are several reasons why this happened. First, the idea that the Messiah would reign forever and never suffer was very strong at the time of Christ. This even led at times to a belief in two Messiahs. So there is a Messiah Son of David, who does not suffer, and another Messiah, son of Joseph who does: c. Talmud, Sukkah 52a, commenting on Zechariah 12:10 (which said: "They will look upon me, whom they have pierced"). This second Messiah was to be the precursor of the Messiah, son of David. Secondly the Targum picture is influenced by hopes that Bar Kokhba (so of the star, thinking of Numbers 24:17) leader of the second Jewish revolt against Rome, 121-35. Thirdly, the Jews after a time, seeing the Christian use of this song, tried to distort it. This is admitted by several good Jewish scholars: H. J. Schoeps, <Paul> (Westminster 1961, p. 129) and Jacob Neusner, <Messiah in Context>, p. 190, and Samson Levey, <The Messiah, An Aramaic Interpretation> p. 152, note 10.

The New Testament takes this song as messianic: Mt 8:17; Lk 22:37; Acts 8:32-33; Romans 15:21.

To see the distortion, we give first the Hebrew, then the Targum of a few passages:

Verse 3:

Hebrew: "He was despised and rejected by men." Targum: "then the glory or all kingdoms will be despised and cease."

Verse 5:

Hebrew: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." Targum: "He will [re] build the sanctuary, polluted because of our sins, [and] handed over because of our iniquities."

Verse 7:

Hebrew: "He was like a lamb being led to the slaughter." Targum: "He will hand over the mighty ones of the peoples, like a lamb to the slaughter."

The word <sprinkle> in v. 15 has overtones of priestly sacrifice, and prepare the way for further sacrificial language later in this passage. Cf. Exodus 19:20-21 on the ordination of Aaron and his sons, in which they are sprinkled with the blood of sacrifice, and Leviticus 16:14-15 tells us of the sprinkling of the blood of the sin offering on the propitiatory. In Romans 3:25 Christ is spoken of as the new propitiatory. During the "time of passing over" of sins, in the Old Testament, perfect rebalance for sins was not provided. But God's concern for the objective order wanted to supply that. (On this concept of Greek <dikaosyne> in Romans, cf. Wm. Most, <The Thought of St. Paul>, appendix).

However in Romans and here we of course should not take the idea as being merely a liturgical ceremony - far too painful for that. Rather, it is the fact that the sufferings of Christ rebalanced the objective order, put out of line by sin. For the Old Testament, inter-testamental literature, the New Testament, rabbinic writings, and the Fathers view sin as a debt, which the Holiness of God wants repaid. Hence the image of a two pan scales, suggested by Simeon ben Eleazar (<Tosefta, Kiddushin> 1. 14. cited above in notes on chapter 1) is helpful. A sinner takes from one pan what he has no right to take: the scale is out of balance. It is the Holiness of God that wants it rebalanced. If the man stole property he begins to rebalance by giving it back; if he stole a pleasure, he begins to rebalance by giving up some pleasure of similar weight. But all this is only the beginning of rebalance, for the imbalance from even one mortal sin is infinite. So IF the Father wanted a full rebalance, the only way was to send a divine Person, who by anything He did, could provide infinite rebalance, in the categories of both merit and satisfaction.

In fact, the mere fact of the Incarnation, without any death, would have been infinite in both ways. (The Greek Fathers with their theology of Physical-Mystical Solidarity saw this). But the love of the Father for us and for objective goodness led Him to go even to the stable and to the cross.

We said IF, since contrary to St. Anselm, the Father was not obliged to do this or anything at all. We also stressed Holiness. There is a matter of justice too, but if we make justice central, then someone may object: if someone offends me I do not always demand justice: why cannot God just be nice about it? But if the center is Holiness, then Holiness will want full rebalance. By His terrible sufferings, Christ put back into the scale far more than all sinners taken together took away. We are reminded of the plaint of the Psalmist in 69:5: "I restore what I did not steal."

It is evident that this explanation of the sufferings of Jesus is right, and surely more in accord with the Holiness, the Justice, and the Goodness of the Father than the notion put forth by some Protestants, that Jesus was our substitute, that the Father really <punished> Him. How could there be any justice in that? How could injustice make up for sin?

We said above that the love of the Father for objective goodness and for us led Him to go beyond an incarnation without death to the stable and the cross. Really, His attitude seems to be: if there is any way to make it all more rich, I do not want to pass it by. In that vein, we might imagine Him looking back on the fact that He could have used any ordinary human to do any religious action and could have called that a redemption, imperfect, but real. So the Father willed to add to the sufferings of Christ those of Blessed Mother. She knew all too well from the very day of the annunciation, that He would suffer. As soon as the angel said He would reign forever, any Jew would see He was the Messiah).

She understood our passage of Isaiah without the distortion the stiff-necked Jews put into it. She understood Psalm 22, "they have pierced my hands and my feet". She would have understood also Zechariah 12:10: "They will look upon me whom they have pierced."

At the annunciation in saying <fiat> she agreed to be the Mother of the Suffering Messiah. At the cross of course she did not retract that. Any soul that knows what the Father positively wills, must positively will it too. She knew too well the positive will of the Father, that He should suffer and die so terribly. So she was called upon to will that He die, die then, die so horribly - and that going counter to her love which was so great that, as Pius IX wrote (<Ineffabilis Deus>), "none greater under God can be thought of, and no one but God can comprehend it." (Pius IX was speaking directly of her holiness, but holiness and love of God are interchangeable terms). So Vatican II, twice in LG #56 and again in 61 spoke of her as sharing the sacrifice by <obedience> - the obedience we are speaking of. Of course, obedience was the essential condition of the New Covenant, and was the essential interior attitude of the Great Sacrifice and of any sacrifice, without which it would have no value. So she joined with Him in that which gave His sufferings all their value. Of course, her whole ability to do that, and anything, came entirely from Him. Yet it was real, painfully real, and beyond our comprehension as Pius IX said.

His appearance was so disfigured that he hardly looked like a man - from the hideous scourging, skin torn everywhere and with blood all over. Pilate brought Him out looking this way: "Behold the man". But not even that horrid sight could appease the fury of the priests and the mob.

He will sprinkle many nations - comment given above.

Who has believed our message, what we report about Him? He grew up like a tender shoot. He had no beauty of majesty. He was despised and rejected. St. Margaret Mary reports that He told her the rejection was worse than the physical pain.