# Lesson 33 Isaiah 52:13-53:12 The Fourth Servant Song

## Introduction

We have arrived at the heart of the Book of the Servant. We began the Book of the Servant with the Lord’s commission of messengers, “Comfort, O Comfort my people (40:1).” The Lord himself said, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine (43:1)!” “I have wiped out your transgressions like a thick cloud and your sins like a heavy mist (44:22).” But how, Lord? You have also said, “There is no peace for the wicked (48:22).” Holy One of Israel, according to your prophet Isaiah, we are deaf and blind (42:18), transgressors (46:8), stubborn-minded, and far from righteousness (46:12). How can we be redeemed from our own sin? How can we remain in that redemption? How can Holy God make a sinful people His own? In the Great Deliverance, God rescues His people from the external oppression of Babylon. But can God rescue His people from internal rebellion of souls that continuously wander, that repeatedly transgress the law of God, that invite his just wrath? Yes. The Lord God promises redemption from our own sin nature. This is the greater deliverance by which God calls to Himself a people that will be His very own. They will be secure in righteousness, even though that righteousness is not of their own making. This Song is the “how” of the greater deliverance. This is God’s plan. the fourth Servant Song, Isaiah 52:13-53:12.

13 Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.

14 Just as many were astonished at you, My people, So His appearance was marred more than any man

And His form more than the sons of men.

15 Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;

For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.

1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground;

He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, nor appearance

that we should be attracted to Him.

3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried;

Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities;

The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way;

But the Lord has caused to fall on him the iniquity of us all

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth;

Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,

So He did not open His mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered

That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom

the stroke was due?

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death,

Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

10 But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,

Him to grief;

He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper

in his hand.[[1]](#footnote-1)

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see [light][[2]](#footnote-2) and be satisfied;

By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, As He will bear their iniquities.

will justify the many,

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong;

Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors;

Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

Who does that Servant sound like to you? This chapter contributes more direct quotes to the New Testament than any other chapter in Isaiah. But before we consider the connection to Jesus Christ, let’s do our best to interpret the passage in the original context of Isaiah’s message. That will be the whole focus of this lesson: what does this mean here in Isaiah? In our next lesson, we will address Jewish and New Testament interpretations of Isaiah 53.

## The Structure of the Fourth Servant Song

This is the fourth and final Servant Song in the Book of the Servant. It is common to refer to this passage as “Isaiah 53” so I might do that, even though the Song really begins with the last three verses of Isaiah 52 and then takes up the whole of Isaiah 53.

The song has a chiastic structure consisting of fives stanzas. The stanzas are not of equal length according to the number of poetic verses or lines, but they are of equal length according to the verse numbering in our Bibles. Each stanza takes up three biblical verses: 52:13-15, 53:1-3; 53:4-6; 53:7-9, and 53:9-12. The first and last stanzas are the most strongly parallel. The last stanza also repeats language from the middle stanza. So in this chiasm, those two stanzas, the middle and the last, most powerfully emphasize how God accomplishes salvation through the Servant.

In both the first and last stanzas God calls the central figure of the song, “My Servant.” The first stanza begins with God speaking. Then the song shifts to a narrator. The last stanza begins with the narrator, and then shifts to God speaking. Both stanzas present an enigma. In the first, the Servant is both exalted and disfigured. In last, the Servant is both crushed and made to prosper. The word “many” is important in both stanzas. The Servant will startle or sprinkle many nations in the first. He will justify the many in the last. If the interpretation “sprinkle” is correct in verse 14, then both stanzas present the Servant as an offering.

The inner two stanzas, stanza 2 and 4, provide poetic narrative. Stanza 2 is concerned with the birth and life of the Servant. Stanza 4 is concerned with His judgment, death, and burial. Each stanza describes the Servant with two similes. In stanza 2, He is like a tender shoot and like a root in dry ground. In stanza 4, He is like a lamb led to slaughter and like a sheep led to the shearer.

The middle stanza forms the heart of the song, and really, the heart of the whole Book of the Servant. The Servant takes our sin on Himself. That is the “how” we have been waiting for. How are our crimson hands washed as clean as white snow? How does the burning coal remove sin from Isaiah’s lips? How are a sinful and wayward people redeemed? That is what we discover in the song, and it’s going to be through the enigma.

That enigma of the first stanza is going to become more understandable by the end, though some mystery still remains. As Isaiah has said before about his prophecies, some things are made known ahead of time so when they happen, we’ll say, “God is sovereign! God planned this and He spoke it!” But some things are kept in reserve so that when they happen, we’ll marvel and we’ll say, “This is new! Who could have imagined this?” Let’s go through the song.

## The Fourth Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

### A. Enigma: exaltation and humiliation (13-15)

We begin our interpretation with the first stanza of the song, 52:13-15. I will be using Motyer’s titles. He titles this stanza, “Enigma: exaltation and humiliation.”

13 Behold, My servant will prosper, He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.

14 Just as many were astonished at you, My people, So His appearance was marred more than any man

And His form more than the sons of men.

15 Thus He will sprinkle many nations, Kings will shut their mouths on account of Him;

For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.

The reference to Servant in this verse connects us to the previous Servant Songs. We would be right to proceed cautiously. Isaiah’s use of this word “servant” depends on context. The term could apply to Israel. It could apply to the king who will deliver Israel from Babylon. It could even apply to Isaiah himself. But it does not take long reading through this song and the comment that follows in chapters 54 and 55 to recognize this text as a fourth Song addressed to that ideal Servant who meets the worldwide need for justice, who provides restoration for Israel, and salvation to the ends of the Earth.

The first verse seems completely contradicted by the second verse. “My servant will prosper.” Not only will he prosper, “My servant will be high. My servant will be lifted up. My servant will be greatly exalted.” Repeating three synonyms makes that declaration emphatic, similar to “holy, holy, holy,”; “high, lifted up,”; “greatly exalted.”

The first verset of verse 14 seems to agree positively with that statement of exaltation in verse 13. “Just as many were astonished by the people of the Lord, so also many will be astonished by the Servant of the Lord.” That astonishment could be a response to how much He prospers and how high He is exalted. But the next verse adds a twist. They will not be astonished by the exaltation or by the beauty of the Servant. They will be revulsed by how badly disfigured He is. Remember the description of Judah from chapter 1. The nation is personified as a wayward man. The Lord God has disciplined him from head to foot to turn him back from the way of death. He is so stubborn, so rebellious, he will not turn around. And there is nothing sound left in his body, “only bruises, welts, and raw wounds, not pressed out or bandaged, nor softened with oil.” Imagine a man beaten such that his blackened eyes are swollen shut; his bruised checks are puffed out; his face and body are covered with welts. He is marred. He is disfigured.

Both Alter and Oswalt comment that the idea here is not comparative. It is not that the Servant is marred more than any other man. He is so disfigured that He hardly looks like a man. His form no longer looks human, like a son of man. He has taken that much punishment.

The first verset of verse 15 uses a debatable word. Some Bibles say, “He will sprinkle many nations.” Others say, “He will startle many nations.” The argument against taking this verse as a priestly action is that the verb does not get used in the Old Testament as, “sprinkle,” without also referring to the liquid that is sprinkled. He should sprinkle with water or He should sprinkle with blood. Without the liquid being sprinkled, we are told we should take the verb to mean, “startled.” Both meaning of the verb could work in this context. “Startled” is parallel to the verb “astonished” in the first verset of 14. “Sprinkle” also works, especially when we recognize the later parallelism in 53:10, where we are told directly that He will “render himself a guilt offering.”

Whatever the verb, this is the result in the next verset. “Kings will shut their mouths on account of him.” We might assume that they shut their mouths because the Servant is so disfigured. But the following line opens us up to the possibility of something more. They shut their mouths because they see in Him the fulfillment of prophecy.

For what had not been told them they will see, And what they had not heard they will understand.

The second Servant Song gave us a similar indication. The Servant’s rejection and exaltation will be recognized by human royalty. That was in Isaiah 49:7,

Thus says the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel To the despised One,

and its holy one,

To the One abhorred by the nation, To the Servant of rulers,

“Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down…”

Future kings will come to understand the enigma. They will see a Servant whose humanity is degraded by His intense suffering and who is also somehow high, lifted up, and greatly exalted. And though some may see, we are also assured this Gospel of the Servant will not be easily received. The next stanza tells us His suffering will be observed and misunderstood. This second stanza is in Isaiah 53:1-3.

### B. Suffering observed and misunderstood (1-3)

1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground;

He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, nor appearance

that we should be attracted to Him.

3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

Isaiah is speaking prophecy to Israel about future events. And he says, “Who has believed that message? To whom has the truth about the arm of the Lord been revealed?” The Song is the message. And embedded in the Song’s prophecy about the Servant is the Song’s prophecy that the Servant will be rejected. He will be seen with human eyes. Those human eyes will fail to discern anything special in Him and fail to understand the purpose of His suffering. The Servant can only be rightly understood when the truth about Him is revealed from God. Ironically, even though the truth about the Servant is revealed in this message of Isaiah’s from God, and the truth of the Servant’s rejection is revealed in this message of Isaiah from God, the prophecy is not going to prove enough for the human eye and for human reason to overcome human blindness in regard to the Servant. He will be rejected.

That phrase, “arm of the Lord,” occurred in the middle of the eight oracles preceding this Song. Isaiah called Israel to wake up and listen. In the midst of that exhortation, Israel boldly turned that exhortation back on God with this request in 51:9.

9 Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord;

Awake as in the days of old, the generations of long ago.

The arm, as a member of the body, represents muscular strength. The phrase, “arm of the Lord,” in that previous example referred to the mighty power of God. The arm of the Lord is the Lord Himself in action. Here, the Servant is the arm of the Lord. The Servant is somehow God’s strength in action. That is what the word from Isaiah reveals. It is not what his contemporaries saw when they beheld Him with human eyes. We are told,

2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground;

As all life begins, He begins as a tender green shoot; fragile, not strong. Not mighty God. His birth is somehow surprising. He will be as a root out of parched, or dry ground. The first simile indicates the fragility of human beginnings, like a tender shoot. The second simile suggests something incongruous about the context from which He springs, like a root out of parched ground. Roots do not normally succeed in growing out of parched ground, and they rarely become fruitful if they grow out of parched ground.

There is more here. The image of a shoot also appears in the Messianic passage that starts in 11:1.

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a branch from his roots will bear fruit.

The Hebrew word for “shoot” is different in these two verses, but the idea is that same. The Hebrew word, “root,” is the same word in both places. The root in 11:1 is the Messiah. He will bear fruit. This root grows out of parched ground. How can such a root bear fruit? His context will not look promising. And He will not look like the expected Messiah. That’s the idea in 53:2.

He has no stately form or majesty

No majesty. His appearance is not kingly. Not Messianic. On the contrary,

He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, nor appearance

that we should be attracted to Him.

There is nothing about His appearance or His status in life that is going to make us go, “The Messiah! This is Him!” He is not going to be seen. He is going to be rejected.

3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;

Is He despised and forsaken because He is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, or is He a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief because He has been despised and forsaken? Which is cause and which effect? The two go together and build on one another. The next stanza will begin to explain the Servant’s suffering. That’s not what this stanza does. This stanza makes clear that the Servant comes as a normal man - and is rejected. Acquainted with grief is literally “acquainted with sickness.” He is a normal man, familiar with the sickness and sorrow of human life. Maybe more than most. Certainly more than we would expect of a son of David born in a palace.

And like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.

God says He will prosper. God says He will be high, lifted up, and greatly exalted. Isaiah then laments, “But who has believed our message?” Human evaluation of the Servant will end in rejection. Considering with the physical eye and with the human mind, He is found wanting. Whatever He is attempting, men and women of His generation will not only reject Him; they will turn away from Him. Like a leper or like a sinner, someone full of shame, they will not want to be associated with Him. They will hide their faces. They will shun Him. He will be despised. Isaiah makes it personal. We did not esteem Him. God may have. We did not.

The purpose of His suffering is explained in the third stanza. This is the central heart of the Song, Isaiah 53:4-6.

### X Suffering Explained (4-6)

4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried;

Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted.

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities;

The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way;

But the Lord has caused to fall on him the iniquity of us all

The Servant is characterized by sorrows and grief but they are not His own. What can only be known by revelation is stated here. The Servant suffers for us. He takes on Himself our griefs, our sorrows, our transgressions, our iniquities. He bore these. He carried them. He was pierced. He was crushed. He was chastened. He was scourged… for us.

The first verset declares, “Surely our griefs he himself bore.” That’s that Hebrew word that can also be translated as “sickness.” It appears in verses 3, 4, and 10. Motyer translates the word as, “the weakness that comes from sickness.” Coupled with sorrows in the next verset, he sees it as “all that mars our lives as human beings.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

The second line of verse 4a affirms the point from the previous stanza that we have failed to understand the importance of His sufferings.

Again Isaiah includes himself and draws all readers in with the first person plural. We esteemed him stricken. God esteemed Him high, lifted up, greatly exalted. We esteemed him stricken, smitten of God, afflicted. So we who see with human eyes judge Him as at fault. This is His sickness, His griefs, His sorrows. He deserves this. God has afflicted Him. God has humbled Him. “No,” Isaiah says. This is how God sees it. Verse 5,

5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities;

We are alienated from God because of our own sin. Sin deserves punishment. The word, “pierced,” is only used one other place in Isaiah, in Isaiah 51:9 where the arm of the Lord delivers a death blow to the dragon of chaos. There, the dragon is pierced. Here the Servant is pierced. “Crushed” literally applies to people trampled to death. Here, the Servant is crushed on account of our iniquities.

The second line of verse 5 goes on to describe the piercing and crushing as punishment intended to bring about restoration, but not restoration for the Servant; restoration for us.

The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.

We are the sick ones. We are the ones who need healing. The word translated here as “well-being” is the Hebrew word, “shalom,” or, “peace.” He received in Himself the punishment necessary to make us whole, to bring us into a state of peace. The Servant has become a substitute on our behalf.

Verse 6 clarifies these two truths, the one about us and the one about the Servant. The first truth is about us.

6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way;

This is the truth. We are sick and sorrowful because of our own transgression and iniquities. We have done this. We are like sheep that have wandered away from our master into the valley of the shadow of death, into the jaws of the lion. And the second verset emphasizes that this is not unintentional. It does not just happen to us. Each one of us has willfully turned away from God to go his own way. “I will do what I will do. I will say what I will say. I will think what I will think.” Everyone of us has turned to his own way. We have turned from the goodness of God, from the glory of God. We have turned from our rightful Lord to create our own definition of what is good, and so we have embraced wickedness. Punishment is justly declared over us. That’s the first truth. That’s the truth about us. Here is what’s true about the Servant.

But the Lord has caused to fall on him the iniquity of us all

This is something Yahweh has done. We have sinned against Yahweh. As the One right and true judge, He has declared the just penalty of death. For iniquity to fall on us means that just penalty of iniquity falls on us. But it doesn’t fall on us. It falls on Him.

The fourth stanza clarifies: not only did He bear our sins for us, but He had no sins of his own to bear. His suffering was voluntary and undeserved.

### B’ Suffering, voluntary and undeserved (7-9)

7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth;

Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,

So He did not open His mouth.

8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered

That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom

the stroke was due?

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death,

Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

As the second stanza spoke of the Servant’s birth (“a root out of dry ground”), and His life, (“we esteemed him not”) the fourth stanza speaks of His judgment, His death, and His burial, emphasizing both His willingness to suffer, and that He suffers undeservedly.

Even though He was oppressed and afflicted, He did not open his mouth. Isaiah develops that idea with the image of a sacrificial lamb following meekly behind the one who leads it to slaughter. He repeats the same idea with the slightly different image of the sheep led to the shearers. In the same way, the Servant allowed Himself to be led. He does not resist.

8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered

Once again the people his generation fail to understand what has happened. They failed to ponder, failed to even try to arrive at a deeper understanding. They did not consider,

That He was cut off out of the land of the living For the transgression of my people, to whom

the stroke was due?

As if to emphasize the failure of God’s people to consider the truth revealed about His Servant, Isaiah shifts from the point of view of the narrator to the point of view of God. They failed to consider that He was cut off out of the land of the living, (that is, He was killed), for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke is due, that stroke being death. His generation did not get that His death was what the people of God, they themselves, deserved. The just punishment for sin is death. God’s people still sin. No matter how good they might try to be, they still go their own way; they still sin; they still deserve to be cut off from the land of the living. That is the stroke that is due. That stroke fell on the Servant.

9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death,

Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

He will be judged. He will die. And He will be entombed in a grave. But this is to be a sign that He died innocently. He will be with a rich man in His death, whatever that means. It is not clear what it means to be with a rich man in death. It is clear why God will connect Him to a rich man in His death.

Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

He was innocent. He was put to death even though He was innocent. Isaiah confessed when God appeared to him, “I am ruined, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips.” Isaiah did not argue his own innocence. Isaiah does argue the innocence of the Servant. Like an advocate for the defense, Isaiah proclaims, “He has done no violence. There is no deceit in His mouth. In my mouth, yes. In His mouth, no.”

The final stanza restates the enigma of the first stanza, though now we can at least being to put together the mystery. Exaltation and suffering are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The Servant is exalted through sin-bearing suffering.

### A’ Solution: exaltation through sin-bearing suffering (10-12)

10 But the Lord was pleased to crush Him, putting If He would render Himself as a guilt offering,

Him to grief;

He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper

In his hand.

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, And be satisfied by his knowledge

He will see [light]

The Righteous One, My Servant, will justify As He will bear their iniquities.

the many,

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong;

Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors;

Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

This final stanza summarizes all the themes of the song. First the enigma; “The Lord was pleased to crush Him.” That’s a strange way of putting it. “Pleased” does not need to mean the Lord enjoyed the Servant’s suffering. He was pleased with the Servant’s willingness to offer Himself up for the sake of the Lord’s people. He was pleased with the Servant’s willingness to render Himself a guilt offering.

In Leviticus 5 and 6, the guilt offering is made in conjunction with the language of restitution, or reparation, or compensation. When one party injures or takes from another party, compensation must be made. The guilt offering is used to make restitution when the sin violates the moral code of God and when the sin violates another person. In fact, restitution is not complete only by through compensation, such as paying back double what is stolen. In such cases a guilt offering must also be made. Sin of any kind is always also sin against God. It might be just against God, but if it’s against another person, if it’s against someone made in the image of God, it’s also against God. It’s always against God. So, the point of the guilt offering, the point of the sacrifice is to make atonement for the penitent person who has committed the sin.

Describing the Servant in verse 10 as a guilt offering, brings together both the idea of guilt for sin and the need for atonement. Atonement has both the meaning “to cover” and “to satisfy.” The sin of the penitent is covered, thus satisfying the wrath of God. The wrath of God is satisfied by the blood of the sacrifice because the penalty due is death. So this imagery comes together in the day of Atonement sacrifice in Leviticus 16. A goat’s blood is poured over the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. In the Holy of Holies, God looks down at the Ark and sees the Covenant Law inside. Looking at that Law, God finds His people guilty of having broken the Law. They deserve the just penalty of death. But when the blood of the goat covers the over the Ark of the Covenant, it’s covering over the Law. God sees that death has been made. Sin is covered. The wrath of God is satisfied. It is not satisfied by the death of the guilty party. It is satisfied through a substitutionary death that takes the place of the guilty parties.

Only, it doesn’t really. The blood of the goat never actually atoned for the sin of even one Israelite. How can a goat be justly substituted for a man? And even if it could how could, one goat justify all the men and women of Israel? The blood of the goat stood as a symbolic commitment from God that He would atone for Israel’s sin. He would find a way to satisfy His own wrath. He provided a symbolic example of future atonement as a means by which His people could express their faith in Him to remove the guilt of sin. By performing the sacrifice they are saying, “God, we believe You are going to cover our sin. We believe You are going to satisfy Your own wrath.” Not, “We believe the goat’s blood does it.”

God has always planned to meet the need for a valid and effective substitute. What Isaiah is telling us is the Servant is God’s plan. The Servant is THE guilt offering. And that’s incredible. This is new revelation.

In the second line of verse 10 we return to the enigma. Guilt offerings die. And yet, the Servant,

He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper

In his hand.

Life after death is recognized in the Old Testament, but not in these terms. People do not return from the grave to continue life on Earth. It may happen through a handful of times, but that’s the clear exception. That’s not what life after death means. But it seems to for the Servant. He will see His offspring. He will prolong His days. And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in His hand. All three terms point to the life of a righteous man. All three terms also point to something more. First, God affirmed His promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:18 with these words, “In your seed [or offspring] all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.” The Servant will see His offspring. That sounds like a promise to Abraham. And that promise came right after God kept Abraham from sacrificing Isaac. Isaac was not a valid guilt offering. God gave a ram in his place. So Abraham named that place, “The Lord will provide.” That’s the faith of the Israelite, “The Lord will find a way. The Lord will provide another.”

The phrase, “He will prolong his days,” also has significance. That’s a regular refrain in Deuteronomy applied to Israelites who lived in righteousness according the Law of God. If you live righteously according to this Law, you will prolong your days. But the Servant is not going to prolong His days. He is going to die, right? Well, yes, but then God prolongs His days. That’s an affirmation of His righteous obedience to the Law of God, that somehow, in spite of death, the Lord is going to prolong His days. The last phrase follows on that idea, “The good pleasure of the Lord will prosper in his hands.” He acts in harmony with the pleasure of the Lord, and so, prospers.

That last verset is also parallel to the first verset, highlighting the enigma. The Lord was pleased to crush Him as a guilt offering. And yet, He is considered a righteous man who will prosper in the Lord’s good pleasure. He will be successful.

Verse 11 highlights His success. His suffering and death are purposeful, not symbolic.

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, And be satisfied by his knowledge

He will see [light]

That word “light” is debated as to whether it is original or not to the text. It’s in different manuscripts. Regardless, the Servant sees something. He will see beyond the anguish of His soul. He sees the outcome of His suffering. He has acted according to His own knowledge and is satisfied with the outcome of His submission to punishment and death. The outcome is stated concretely in the second line of verse 11.

The Righteous One, My Servant, will justify As He will bear their iniquities.

the many,

Again, the servant’s own status is defended. He is the righteous one. He does not die for punishment He deserves. He is consider righteous before the divine court. As such, His purposeful death will justify, or make righteous the many. How does His suffering make righteous the many? The next verset explains, “He will bear their iniquities.” Defendants before a judge can be justified or declared righteous in one of two ways. They may be found innocent. In that case they are righteous before the court. That is the case of the servant. He is the righteous one, innocent of any wrong doing. A defendant may also be declared righteous by pleading guilty and then fulfilling the punishment applied to him. Once that punishment is competed, he will be declared just before the court. When he pays the fine or serves out his term, he is free to go. Justice is satisfied. He is declared right.

But what if the penalty is death? How can a man still live if he is guilty and the court requires death? The law of God provides a third way. A substitute can bear the punishment on behalf of the defendant. That substitute must be righteous. If not, he must bear the penalty of his own iniquities. But if a righteous man will die, bearing the iniquities of another man, than that other man may be declared righteous before the court. His penalty has been paid. Justice is satisfied. There is a lingering question that goes unanswered here. One righteous man may die for another righteous man. How does this man take the iniquity of us all? We have had indication before that this Servant is more than a man, just a the Messiah presented in the Book of the King must be more than a mere son of David. If He is truly to reign in justice and if His reign is to never end, He must be something more. And He will be called, wonderful Counselor, mighty God, eternal Father, Prince of Peace. So, who is this righteous Servant? First, that He can actually be righteous? There is no sin to account to Him. But second, that He could bear the iniquity not of one man, but of all humanity in His death and yet live to prosper and be exalted? Who is this Servant?

Verse 12 sums up the Servant’s exaltation.

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong;

Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors;

Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

He will be high, lifted up, and greatly exalted, numbered among kings, allotted a portion with the great, and dividing the booty with the strong. Why will He be greatly exalted? Because He humbled Himself to the point of death and took on Himself a death He did not deserve to make it possible for God’s people to have the just penalty of their sin satisfied; that the many who are not righteous might justly be declared righteous. For this reason He was greatly exalted,

Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors;

Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

## Conclusion

How can a holy God dwell with a sinful people? Deliverance from external oppression is not enough. Remove all of our external problems, and we still carry the enemy within. As soon as God got His people out of Egypt, they began to grumble. A good and righteous law did not protect them. The Law condemned them. This was the point made at the end of chapter 48. “If you had paid attention to my commandments, then your well-being [your shalom] would have been like a river and your righteousness like the waves of the sea (48:18).” But they couldn’t. And as it is, “’There is no peace [shalom] for the wicked,’ says the Lord (48:22).” As it was after Sinai, so it will be after Babylon, and as it was after Babylon, so it will continue to the end of this heaven and Earth. Like wayward sheep, we will all persist in going our own way. We will all bring the righteous wrath of God on ourselves. We need someone who can save us. We need someone who can save us from us.

God has a plan. God has a way. The Servant is the plan. The Servant is the way. He is the righteous substitute for an unrighteous people. He has poured out Himself to death. He has carried the sin of the many. So that God might say, “Do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine.”

1. Though I have used Alter’s scanning of Isaiah throughout, I chose to use Oswalt for this stanza. Alter’s scanning (below) breaks up the couplet of verse ten.

   And the good pleasure of the Lord will prosper 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul,

   in His hand. He will see [light] [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. J. N. Oswalt. *NICOT: The Book of Isaiah, Chs 40-66.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998) 399.

   Oswalt provides this footnote concerning the word “light” in verse 11, “The Masoretic Text lacks ‘light,’ but the presence of the word in all the Qumran copies […] and the LXX constitutes strong evidence. Also, the omission in MT may be explained as an error due to the presence of similar consonants in the word ‘preceding’ […]” Alter also includes “light.” Motyer holds to the MT. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. J. A. Motyer. *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996) 430. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)