

EXPOSITION OF ISAIAH

Message #78

Isaiah 53:1-3

Harry Bultema said Isaiah 53 is such a glorious chapter that you must study it “verse-by-verse” (*Isaiah*, p. 505). Of course, we believe that this is the only way to study Scripture and it must be that God wanted His people to be very familiar with **Isaiah 53** because this passage is referred to many times in the N.T. and it gives us a vivid, graphic account of the work of Jesus Christ, specifically His crucifixion that you cannot find anywhere else.

This is one of the most majestic passages in the entire Bible. In this text, the prophet Isaiah lets us see the terrible suffering of Jesus Christ some 700 years before it happened. This specific passage, which we are looking at today, was specifically cited by Jesus Christ as He connected it to Himself (John 12:38).

As we said last time, **Isaiah 53** is a Hebrew poem or song comprised of five stanzas. But this is not a shallow, light, fluffy “Now I lay me down to sleep” poem. This poem takes us deep into the Divine mysteries surrounding the sufferings and sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Last time we were introduced to God’s Servant/Son/Savior. We saw a prediction of the fact that this One who would be highly exalted would be horribly brutalized. He would be marred more than any man who had ever lived. It was absolutely shocking to think that God’s Perfect Servant would be treated like this, but that is exactly what God said would happen. He never did or said one thing wrong. He never sinned one time. He never missed the mark of the righteousness of God and to give us that righteousness, He had to suffer.

Now today we come to **Stanza #2**, which really presents to us the reception of this suffering Savior. Isaiah predicts that when God sent His own Son to His own people, they would reject Him and not receive Him. They would not believe in Him. What Isaiah says in these verses is this:

WHEN GOD’S SERVANT/SAVIOR CAME INTO THIS WORLD FOR HIS OWN PEOPLE, HE WAS REJECTED AND HARDLY ANY WOULD BELIEVE IN HIM.

The attitude that Israel had toward Jesus Christ is the same attitude most of the world has toward Jesus Christ.

STANZA #2 – The rejection of God’s suffering Servant. **53:1-3**

Now in the first three verses of Isaiah 53, there are three main attitudes that Israel had toward Jesus Christ. These attitudes are still operative today:

Rejection Attitude #1 - Most did not believe Him. **53:1**

Back in Isaiah 6, God told Isaiah that he would proclaim a message to the people of Israel that they would not receive. They would not listen to it and they would not believe it (Is. 6:8-10). If ever there has been such a message in regard to Israel, it is the message of Jesus Christ. They do not believe in Jesus Christ and they certainly do not believe in a suffering Messiah.

Now Isaiah begins the 53rd chapter by asking a question, “**Who has believed our message?**” The specific message is connected in **verse 1** to the “arm of the LORD” being revealed. Now **the “arm of the LORD,” as we have previously seen, is the strength that Israel needs to trust God and depend upon God for her salvation (51:9; 52:10).** Believing in God for salvation is the strength of the arm of the Lord. **Now the question comes, “Who or what is the arm of the Lord?” God’s answer in this section of Scripture is My Servant/Son/ Savior . whom I will send into the world.**

Contextually, what Isaiah is saying here is, “Who from Israel believed our message that this Divine/Servant would come into the world and bring the salvation of God? Who from the nation Israel would believe that you could trust in this one Servant and be saved? To whom has this been revealed?”

The answer is to hardly anyone. John Calvin said, “Scarcely a hundredth person will be a believer” (*Isaiah*, Vol. 8, p. 111). Very few actually believed that Jesus Christ could save a nation and a person from sin. Very few believed it in Isaiah’s day and very few believe it in our day. This is what Merwin Stone called the “tragedies of tragedies” (*A Study of Isaiah 52:13-53:12*, Bib. Sac. 91:362, Apr. 1934, p. 224).

God sent His special revelation, His own Servant who had the strength of God to save, and no one believed Him. The same tragedy exists today. Most do not and will not turn to Jesus Christ for salvation.

Rejection Attitude #2 - Most did not even look at Him. **53:2**

In **verse 2**, there are three reasons why most did not even look at Jesus Christ and even consider the fact that He could be the Savior of Israel and the Savior of the world:

(Reason #1) - Most would not look at Him being the Savior because of His unimpressive . youth. **53:2a**

He grew up as a “tender” shoot. The word “tender” is one that means He grew up taking in nourishment (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 343). There is an interesting text in Ezekiel 17:22, which uses the same word that I think gives us the sense of this: “Thus says the Lord GOD, “I shall also take a sprig from the lofty top of the cedar and set it out; I shall pluck from the topmost of its **young twigs a tender one** and I shall plant it on a high and lofty mountain.”

The contrast in Ezekiel is between a lofty strong cedar and a small young tender twig. What I understand Isaiah to be saying here is that most would not look at Jesus Christ because when He was growing up He didn’t look like a strong Messiah who could conquer the world. He had no majesty or pomp. He was a tender-spirited Person who was taking in nourishment and growing as your average Jew. He wasn’t attending the big universities and He didn’t set Himself apart militarily or athletically; He grew up as a “tender shoot.”

As Jesus was growing, He would never have won any awards at school. He would not have been selected to be the homecoming king. He was not a big man on campus. He didn't stand out to the point that He would be voted the kid most likely to succeed. He was just a tendered-hearted shoot. No one looked at Him and said this can be our King of kings. Even though Jesus was "highly exalted" in the sight of God, no one on earth would even look at Him.

You want your kings to be rugged and tough and that is not the way Jesus grew up. No one gave Him a second look. No one looked at Him and said there is our Savior and King.

(Reason #2) - Most would not look at Him because of His lowly and obscure origin. **53:2b**

The metaphor "like a root out of parched ground" refers to the fact that He did not come from a flourishing Davidic background. He was Davidic but He sure didn't look the part. He did not come from a nice, successful, plush environment. He didn't come from a family that had a beautiful home with lots of money and political clout. He didn't seem to come from the "right side of the tracks."

Jesus Christ did not come from any place you would expect the King of kings to spring from. You would naturally expect the Messiah to come from Rome or Jerusalem. You would expect Him to have all the privileges of an elite family. But Christ came from Bethlehem and He grew up in Nazareth. This is certainly no Ivy League background that you expect of the King of kings.

When He was born in Bethlehem, the leaders in Jerusalem would not even travel five to six miles to see Him. They wouldn't even look at Him. They could not imagine that their Messiah could come from such parched ground.

(Reason #3) - Most would not look at Him because of His lowly physical appearance. **53:2c**

Jesus Christ had no "stately form or majesty." Some have said they do not think that this refers to Christ's physical look, but I think this is exactly what the Hebrew is presenting. There was nothing physically glamorous about Jesus Christ. He was somewhat unattractive to see.

The word "form" (toar) means that he did not have some beautifully formed body or physique (*Ibid.*, p. 855). God is the One who determines how a person looks. God determines whether one is tall or short, and big and strong. Jesus Christ could have picked the best designed human body ever made if He had so chosen to do so. But that is not the type of body He chose. He had no stately form. He would not have qualified to be a model.

Neither did He have any majesty about His look. The word "majesty" means that there was nothing about his look that was highly honored or magnificent or majestic. There was nothing about Him that stood out like an adorned ornament (*Ibid.*, p. 217).

Furthermore, the text says He didn't have any "appearance" that would attract anybody to Him. That word "appearance" means that there was not one thing about the way He looked that would magnetically draw any one to Him (*Ibid.*, p. 506).

He didn't have the charisma most successful people of this world have. He did not look like some winner. When you looked at Jesus Christ, you did not say - there is our King, you can see it.

There was nothing spectacular about Jesus' physique and nothing kingly about His look. He did not have some proud countenance or great honorable look. When He walked down the street, you wouldn't turn your head in awe of the fact that you just walked by the King of kings and Savior of the world. Here was the only sinless, perfect Person to walk on this earth and hardly any would even look at Him.

Isaiah says because He didn't have the right look about Him, most didn't look at Him at all. God was in Person on this earth in the Person of Jesus Christ and most who saw Him couldn't see it and didn't get it.

Rejection Attitude #3 - Most despised Him. 53:3

Now we move to a series of predictions about how Jesus Christ would be treated when He would come into this world. There are five ways Jesus Christ would be treated:

(Treatment #1) - He would be despised. 53:3a

Twice in this verse it is stressed that Jesus Christ was despised. The word "despise" means to despise something and hold it in contempt (*Ibid.*, p. 110). As Bultema said, this word means they considered Jesus Christ to be "worthless" (*Ibid.*, p. 509). **This word is never used in a positive context.**

For example, Esau despised his birthright (Genesis 25:34); Saul was despised as king (I Samuel 10:27); Michal despised David (II Samuel 6:16); various kings were despised (Jeremiah 22:28; Daniel 11:21). This is more than just not liking; this is holding something in contempt.

It is interesting that both participles "despised" are in the Niphal stem, which means each person was involved in the emotional action and the results of the action. In other words, when Jesus Christ came into this world, almost every person, in and of himself, emotionally despised Him and held Him in contempt.

Think of it; here was God's salvation in Person, Israel's Messiah, and the world's Savior and not only didn't this world like Him, they despised Him and held Him in contempt.

(Treatment #2) - He would be forsaken by men. 53:3b

The word "forsake" (chadel) carries with it the idea of ceasing or desisting from something or leaving something before it reaches its end or conclusion (*Ibid.*, pp. 261-262). What Isaiah is saying is that when Jesus Christ would come into the world, there would be many who would seem to have somewhat of an interest in Him for a while, but they would all eventually leave Him and abandon Him before He would complete His assignment. He would be forsaken by men, even His own disciples.

(Treatment #3) - He would be a man of sorrows and grief . **53:3c**

The word “sorrow” comes from the Hebrew root that often means to have terrible emotional and mental pain because of great sorrow (*Ibid.*, pp. 471 & 380). The word “grief” is one that refers to an internal sadness and affliction that just wears you down (*Ibid.*, p. 279).

As Jesus walked on this earth as the Savior of Israel and the world, and He continually saw all the sin and wickedness, and as He saw that He was rejected, and that no one even looked to Him for the salvation He could give, it just wore Him down. It grieved Him and made Him sad. There were things that happened to Him that caused Him to weep.

Think about this - Jesus Christ had to endure animosity His entire life. Satan hated Him, demons hated Him, Israel rejected Him, His own disciples abandoned Him, and His own Father had to turn against Him and pour out His entire wrath on Him. His whole existence in this sin-cursed world was that of sorrow and grief.

(Treatment #4) - He would not be welcomed and received . **53:3d**

Instead of people running to Him, welcoming Him, and receiving and believing in Him, they hid from Him. They considered Jesus Christ to be so detestable that they would not even look at Him; they hid their faces from Him.

Men would actually hide their faces from Jesus Christ. They would not look to Him as Savior and all He ever did to them was come to save them from their sins so He could give them God’s Kingdom. Not only wouldn’t people look at Him for this, they actually hid from Him.

(Treatment #5) - He would not be esteemed but despised . **53:3e**

Again it is brought out that He would be despised. This was God walking on this earth and He was not esteemed; He was demeaned and held in contempt. Israel saw Jesus Christ, Israel thought about Jesus Christ, and she despised Jesus Christ.

Do not be fooled for one second; this is a Christ-rejecting, not Christ-exalting world. You try to get people today to look only to Jesus Christ for salvation and you will see the same thing Isaiah saw. Hardly any will believe your message and most won’t even look at Jesus Christ. Sinful men do not honor Jesus Christ. Sinful men do not exalt God. Sinful men do not esteem God. Sinful men hide from God. They would rather rely on themselves than on the only Savior.

What Israel did to Jesus Christ when He was here on earth, is the same thing the world does to Jesus Christ since He has gone back up into heaven. He is despised and rejected by men.