

The Suffering Servant Isaiah's Astonishing Prophecy

John H King

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Isaiah 53

Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. Yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was punished. He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out

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his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

God's Suffering Servant

Isaiah's work is known as the fifth Gospel because of his prophecies regarding "God's Suffering Servant," Jesus. We are all the Ethiopian eunuch "sitting in his chariot on his way home, reading the prophet Isaiah" (Acts 8:28) and needing someone like the Apostle Philip to explain to us what we are reading. We continue to enquire, "who is the prophet saying this about — himself or someone else" (Acts 8:34)? Luke narrated his testimony (Acts 8:35). "Philip proceeded to tell him the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture" (Isaiah 53:7-8).

C. R. North writing in *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible* opined, "On all hands, it is agreed that whoever was the original of the servant, none except Christ was its fulfillment."

Isaiah 53

[Isaiah, upon receiving the revelation of the death of an unnamed *suffering servant of God*, exclaimed]

Isaiah 53:1. *"No one will believe us! Whom else, Lord, have you told?"*

[Isaiah, then, proceeded to share the prophecy.]

Isaiah 53:2. *He was not born into royalty, a homely lad, who came from no place important. He was a nobody among nobodies (John 1:10).*

Isaiah 53:3. *His life was a life of pain. Sorrow and grief were his companions. Talk was that he must have done something evil that God would punish him so. We treated him like a leper, keeping our distance, looking away. He was*

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nothing to us. He would probably amount to nothing. No one cared, anyway (John 1:11).

[Then Isaiah began to prophesy in detail, of things that described suffering on another level. Jewish scholars gave up trying to find out who the prophet was talking about.]

Isaiah 53:4. *His suffering was not his fault but we blamed him, else why would God afflict him? (Matthew 27:43).*

Isaiah 53:5a. *He was beaten repeatedly. He bore wounds meant for us (Luke 20:11).*

[Then Isaiah said something that cannot be explained by mere reason.]

Isaiah 53:5b-6 *Though our rebellion caused his suffering, his affliction brought us healing. We rebelled and God chastised him, instead (Matthew 8:17)!*

Isaiah 53:7. *He said nothing in his own defense when they dragged him before a judge, mistreated and humiliated him (Matthew 27:28-31).*

Isaiah 53:8. *No one considered what was happening. He was innocent. He was like the passover lamb led to his death because of the rebellion of God's people, who were worthy of the punishment he took. He was arrested, convicted of a capital crime and sentenced to die (Mark 15:2-5; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7).*

Isaiah 53:9. *But one wealthy patron of justice, after his death, saw the injustice of it all and had the suffering servant's body laid in his own tomb (Matthew 27:57-60).*

He was treated as a common criminal though he had done no one any harm; he tricked no one; he took advantage of no one; he bribed no one. No one was as truthful, as

ethical, as moral, as principled, as virtuous and as honest as he (Matthew 27:38)!

[Isaiah's explanation]

Isaiah 53:10. *It was all in God's plan that this happen to him, that he suffer so. The reason God was pleased to cause him pain was to make him an offering for our sin, of which we were guilty (Mark 10:45). But the Lord extended his life [raised him up again] because he fulfilled God's good pleasure in what he endured (Romans 4:25).*

Isaiah 53:11. *God was satisfied when He saw his soul's agony. God's suffering servant by his experience [by dying] will make many righteous (Luke 24:25-27).*

Isaiah 53:12. *Then he will be exalted above all others, since, he was killed, was counted among the rebels and he offered himself as an offering for the sins of many, interceding with God on their behalf (Philippians 2:8-9).*

Isaiah 53:6

Did Isaiah prophesy that Jesus' suffering was a punishment for our sins?

We can explain such a question with a modern example. Not far from where I live there is a maximum security prison which is called a "correctional institute." But are the men incarcerated there being corrected, rehabilitated or reformed or in anyway changed for the betterment of themselves or society, if and when they are released? Or are they simply being locked away for a set time as a punishment?

Is the word "correctional" just a polite word for punishment that sounds more pleasing to the

public's ear? Is prison really a punishment [we can use the phrase *retributive justice*], or is it what some call a *restorative justice* (designed to discipline them into good citizens)?

Some ancient philosophers—but not in Isaiah's day—thought that the goal with bad people should be to discipline them “straight.” We are here having a discussion that Isaiah never would have had. There wasn't even a word in his language for *punishment*.

There are a couple of reasons why this word may or may not sound right to some scholars.

1. A punishment is given to satisfy or appease the anger of the one with the whip [the punisher]. Their feelings are in focus. If God punished Jesus, this means God's anger was being addressed on Calvary. This is important to note because the Cross was God's idea. He authored it and, therefore, we should regard His feelings in the matter. God is in focus, even though truthfully, Jesus' crucifixion is an act of love toward us (John 3:16). This suggests He was dealing with His own feelings of anger, jealousy, hurt—something—which God had to deal with within Himself in order to reconcile us to Himself. God had to, first, satisfy His own sense of justice before He could see clear to love us openly as He wanted to.
 - *Chastisement*, on the other hand, is directed toward the one being corrected, usually to discourage them from doing it ever again. Catholics use the word penance in this sense, a purging of sin

[purgatorial]. Chastisement is not punishment.

2. Secondly, and most importantly, when God punishes, the sinner is dead! "The wages of sins is death," Paul informed us. Punishment with God is so final! Since Jesus *died* on the Cross, many call it a punishment for our sins.

Either way, can we say that God's forgiveness was not gratuitous (free and cost nothing to give)? Jesus suffered too much to say this. God's forgiveness *to us* was freely given. But it cost Him, personally, the death of His Son.

All this to explain what one professor called "the mechanism by which God saves us." Scholarship then confirms what we, in this work, have been maintaining all along that there is a "scholastic drive ... to probe the depth of this mystery for its reasonableness."

But if you are like me, you will enjoy Isaiah's straight-forward description: Isaiah prophesied, "Our sins fell upon him." Jesus encountered such suffering because we, like so many sheep, wandered off to do our own thing (Isaiah 53:6).

Sheep

Isaiah not only called you and I sheep, but *wayward* sheep. Our wandering is defined here as rebellious, a word meaning our inclination [what we were prone to do]. Sheep would not survive long without a shepherd. Sheep are not only dependent creatures; they are also singularly unintelligent, prone to wandering and unable to find their way back to a sheep fold even when it is in sight.

Jesus, in the Gospel story, saw the people of Israel as sheep in distress, scattered here and there, weak from lack of food because they had no shepherd (Matthew 9:36). He cautioned His disciples just hours before His trial and crucifixion that when He, their Shepherd is killed, as the prophet warned, they, the sheep will scatter in distress (Zechariah 13:7; Mark 14:27). But He, earlier explained God's ultimate will for Him, "I am the good Shepherd, the good Shepherd will sacrifice His life for the sheep."

There is much scriptural truth wrapped in this metaphor that beautifully describes our relationship, as believers, with Jesus. Believers have learned to recognize His voice and they follow Him (John 10:4). There is more here than this current work is intended to cover, except to say that a relationship with Jesus, and, therefore, with God (John 14:9), is because the Good Shepherd went to Calvary for us.

Isaiah 53:10

The Lord took *pleasure* in causing him such pain, in that, Isaiah's suffering servant was appointed the guilt offering for the sins of God's people. Isaiah's language must have surprised the ancient scribe. God was *pleased* to see someone *suffer*!? This was not expected! God *saves* who delights or pleases Him! David testified, "He *rescued* me, because He delighted in me" (Psalm 18:19). But is it possible we have here another argument for using the word "punishment." The use of the word "pleased" suggests God's own feelings were in view. God's justice required such an action on His part. Can we not say that Calvary was as much about God as it was about Satan or about us?

Christ, Our Sin (Guilt) Offering

A guilt offering had to be a *lamb*! Human sacrifice was taboo, strictly forbidden, in Israel (Isaiah 66:3). But Isaiah prophesied that the suffering servant of God would become the sacrifice for sin!

Jesus did not just bare our sins (forgive us), “he *became* sin” and thereby making it possible, for those who accept it by faith, to be free from its bondage, to live in harmony and friendship with God. This is where God’s pleasure resided. Paul explained, “Jesus who never sinned, who didn’t know disharmony or estrangement from God, on our behalf, was made a sinner, that we might become righteous by Him. He was rejected [Matthew 27:46] that we might be accepted; He was punished that we might go free [Romans 8:1]; He died that we might live forever. Paul said that Jesus was “made” sin (2 Corinthians 5:21).

Some say, Jesus was made the sin offering which is Isaiah’s language here. What happened on the Cross was not symbolism nor an object lesson into God’s thoughts. It happened for real. Believers in Jesus and His provision on Calvary are indeed new persons reconciled to God. The guilt offering in ancient Israel was a type of what happened for real on the Cross. Both Paul and Isaiah are saying the same; Paul in legal terms, Isaiah in terms of the sacrifice.

“We were like sheep wandering off to do our own thing instead of following the Shepherd’s voice, God’s will; and God made Jesus the intercessor for all our waywardness.” (Isaiah 53:6). God’s servant “met up with” punishment. This is the Suffering Servant

becoming God's sacrifice for our sins. As scholarship states it, "Israel ... has sinned, and the Servant of God is punished."

The Guilt Offering

When Jesus on the Cross interceded before God for us, He was not the defense attorney but became the criminal, even though, we committed the crime. The Lord caused our guilt (our punishment) to fall on him. One trusted translation of verse 8b adds, "...because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death."

I must quote J. P. Lange [in his "Commentary on the Holy Scriptures"], who concluded that Jesus took our punishment for us. Lange attempted to see Isaiah another way and then decided that there can be no other meaning!

"Now if the object of this ...was not to make the... punishment strike the Servant ...with the same ... necessity with which it would have struck the actual guilty ...and these guilty ones ...might be free from punishment," he affirms (if this is not the meaning)," then, I see not how the prophet would say "Jehovah laid on him the iniquity of us all." As Lange translated the Hebrew thought: The Lord "gave up his servant that he might take on himself the **guilt and punishment** of the sinful people."

Verse 10 makes this undeniably clear: "... the LORD makes his life an **offering** for sin" The offering spoken of here is the **guilt** offering. Here is the keystone [the central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together] of Christian theology, the primary truth that provides for us an entrance into a

relationship with God. The accent on this amazing account is Isaiah's choice of words for an offering. He speaks of the *guilt* offering. There were other offerings Isaiah must have known about. Why not the burnt offering or sin offering or peace offering? All these other offerings are object lessons about Jesus to explain what He did for us on the Cross, but Isaiah wanted us to know that the guilt offering should be particularly noted.

One clear meaning of the word "guilty" is to be culpable [deserving of blame] which does not presuppose any sense of blame. The police can give you a ticket for parking in a loading area or speeding in a residential neighborhood even if you claim you didn't see the sign. Maybe you didn't; maybe it was hidden behind a tree or blown down in a hurricane. Guilty is guilty. I raise this matter because a penitent heart is one that knows it offended God. But Jesus' death had to deal with *all* our sins because it dealt with how *God* felt about them, not how we felt about them.

But for 3 additional reasons the "guilt" offering correctly describes what Jesus provided on Calvary.

Restitution

The guilt offering was a means by which restitution could be made for damaged and broken relationships. The guilt offering made restitution for injury or sin against God (Leviticus 5:16). Forgiveness was conditioned on this offering. Jesus restored our relationship to God and God to us. And he gave forgiveness a divine power to erase the pain of sin as well as the sin, itself.

A Lamb

Poor people could substitute less expensive offerings for the burnt and sin offerings but not the guilt offering. It had to be a lamb (Leviticus 14:21-22). “Jesus was led like a **lamb** to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). It was important to specify here that a lamb would be sacrificed. The prophet spoke of God’s suffering servant as a lamb because lambs are docile. God’s suffering servant was submissive. His silence in the face of an out-of-control vitriol and tortuous evil speaks to the closing hours of the Savior’s life before the Cross (Acts 8:32).

No Festivals

The guilt offering was never offered as part of one of the great Festivals, unlike the burnt offering and the sin offering [See Numbers 28: The Sabbath Offerings, The Monthly Offerings, Passover, The Festival of Weeks]. The guilt offering was not a celebration. It was a personal encounter with God for forgiveness. If in ancient Israel there was a moment to simulate the mourner’s bench where the sinner experiences the Savior’s forgiveness, or where the Savior restores joy to the guilty, it is when they presented a guilt offering.

God was Pleased

“The Lord was **pleased** (willing) to beat him painfully” (Isaiah 53:10). This would not be the only time God expressed pleasure in what Jesus was doing (Mark 1:11; Matthew 17:5). What pleased God, according to Augustine, one of the Early Church Fathers, was the Savior’s attitude and resolve to face a Roman cross. But Isaiah told us that the Father’s

pleasure was not only in Jesus' willingness to die but the unprecedented success of his mission. He brought salvation to many. We can learn so much from one word:

- "Pleased" The language of this prophecy suggests God was as motivated, as passionate, as He was on creation day; only here. there is a more solemn tone to His wisdom.
- "Pleased" Is this only God's desire (how He feels at the moment) or also the wisdom of His counsel? Recall what the writer to the Hebrews said about Jesus at this time, "**For the joy** set before him he endured the cross" The word "for" can also mean "instead of," suggesting Jesus set aside any thought of more joyous or happier times with His Father to endure this moment. The translators all seem to support the idea that Jesus knew that this was the path to ultimate joy! (Hebrews 12:2). Did God look beyond the moment deeming this pain necessary to achieve a greater joy of or pleasure in our pending reconciliation with Him?
- "Pleased" Whatever else we conclude: God was passionate, actively participating in His plan for His Suffering Servant. "For *God* so loved the world....." (John 3:16)
- An interesting note: What was Jesus asking in the garden when He used this word? "Father, if you are **willing**, take this cup [of sorrow] from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42) But this *was* necessary

(Acts 17:3). "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Isaiah 53:11

God saw what Jesus did. Isaiah called it laborious and toilsome. Indeed Jesus carried the sins of the world with Him to the Cross. His physical suffering alone was a sorrowful travail, but He bore a spiritual burden as well. The Early Church Father's knew this as Jesus' *passion*. At some point God was *satisfied*. For God, the Savior's agony was measured because it had been determined ahead of time (Galatians 4:4).

Pain, for us, might require an instant answer to prayer; for, suffering is most unpleasant. But God's wisdom sometimes deems a certain period and intensity of suffering might be designed to accomplish some great unseen, eternal plan, of which in heaven, we will no doubt be grateful to learn (2 Corinthians 12:7; Hebrews 5:8).

Judicial Language

This becomes a reasonable explanation of Isaiah's word "satisfied." Justice required punishment. Punishment is a necessary part of God's justice. God's anger against sin was appeased [propitiated] by Jesus' suffering on the Cross. God's satisfaction was complete at the Savior's death, when He cried, "It is finished!" (John 19:30).

Punishment is intended to explain God's justice or how God would satisfy His justice. Judicial language, granted, is everywhere in Paul's writings.

“...from ... sin came the judgment, resulting in condemnation, but from many trespasses came the gift, resulting in justification. (acquittal)” (Romans 5:16). Paul proclaimed, “He was delivered over to die because we sinned” (Romans 4:25). Perhaps, one of the most revealing verses in legal language is Paul’s declaration regarding those who love God as His followers, “Therefore, there is now no *condemnation* [a case decided against them] for those in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1). Condemnation is a legal judgment or sentencing, a judicial pronouncement.

Isaiah 53:12

Parent’s used to discipline children in a way that introduced an experience painful enough to the child to bring about behavioral reform. Sometimes discipline can be less severe (a child loses TV viewing privileges for a time). This is theologically called “satisfactory” because the goal is to reform, to provide a lesson in self-discipline.

How would Jesus’ crucifixion reform us? Could not God find a less painful approach to provide our salvation? Our analogy of disciplining children isn’t working here: we do not, in the name of reform, beat children to death!

Whether Jesus’ death was a punishment for sin or a chastisement, whether it was retributive or restorative, whether propitiatory or expiatory, whether intended to appease God’s anger or to reconcile us to God—or both—we will leave for now, because this is a question Isaiah did not ponder over.

Isaiah offers us, instead, a summary of what God’s suffering servant accomplished (Isaiah 53:12).

There are many different English translations. One closest to the language of the verse is the NASB [New American Standard Bible]: "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."

Let's interpret the verse in a diagram form:

"All this being so [the preceding 11 verses],

1. he became one of the greatest victors to whom God rewards the gifts of conquest (Colossians 2:15)

in exchange for what he endured when:

4. he died with rebels, (Luke 23:33) when

3. he bore the sins of many, (1 Peter 2:24) when

2. he met with God on behalf of a rebellious people" (Galatians 3:20).

It is almost as if Isaiah is drawing circles within circles, a bull's eye, in which the reason for Calvary is specified in the center target. The outer ring, #4, Isaiah explains, is his crucifixion with rebels. Even Isaiah's words must be understood as a crucifixion because that's what Romans did to rebels.

Why so? Why did He die like a common criminal? He was carrying the burden of the sins of the world with Him, #3. He was putting an end to sin

in the lives of all those who by faith accept His death for what it truly was, God's answer to our sinfulness.

And why did He do this? In order to mediate a reconciliation between us and God, #2, Who wants us back.

Was He successful? Most assuredly! He became greatest in the kingdom of God, #1. His name is exalted above every other. But more than this, we are the spoils of war. He ransomed and redeemed us from the death grip of this present evil world (Galatians 1:4).

The writer to the Hebrews wrote of Jesus, "For a short time, made inferior to the angels that he might suffer ... in order that, by God's grace, he might taste death for all, we see Jesus [now] gloriously crowned with honor. It was the right thing for Him, the author and leader of ... salvation, to complete the work through suffering, since [thereby] He has led many sons and daughters to glory " (Hebrews 2:9-10).

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He died with rebels

He bore the sins of
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What's Amazing

This essay is a look at the “*Suffering Servant*” in Isaiah’s prophecy. My primary interest is centered on a couple verses in his 53rd chapter which for me provides irrefutable proof in the revelatory content of Isaiah’s prophecy and therefore an additional support for a christian’s faith in God. For centuries there has been a scholastic or academic effort to refute this simple faith in the inspiration of Scripture. Christian faith has been incorrectly lumped in with all religious “faiths” [and, no doubt, other religions would on their own terms disassociate from this “group-all” view] as a cognitive dissonance or escape from the present real world, a use of ritual and fable to explain life in unscientific terms or, at best, only self-revealing—not God. The sciences of linguistics and archeology as well as evolutionary theory have been used to discredit the simple belief in the inspiration of Scripture and a humble love for the Bible as God’s Word. A revisiting of these arguments exposes their weaknesses and uncovers much support for a return to faith in the Word as God’s revelation. And in this regard Isaiah’s “*Suffering Servant*” and his 53rd chapter in particular is worth another, closer, look.

According to F.W.Albright, the father of Biblical Archeology, the prophecy of Isaiah “*may more correctly be styled*” as an anthology of “*oracles and sermons*”¹ since the chapters are not ordered chronologically. This supports the conservative view that the text is the work of a single author, the son of

¹ R. K. Harrison, “Introduction to the Old Testament,” Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 777

Amoz.² Other views, however, suggest 1 or even 2 separate unknown writers for the chapters 40-66 of Isaiah's prophecy. There is a history behind this change that is worth a review since as christians it has always been important to us to include Isaiah's prophecy in the Canon of Scripture as "*God breathed*,"³ If Isaiah deserves to be a part of the Canon it is because it is part of the revelation of God. It defies sound reason to assign it a place in the Canon if chapters 40-66 are of unknown authorship. As R. K. Harrison in his "*Introduction to the Old Testament*" reasons, a prophetic message or oracle considered a divine revelation would not likely be anonymous or of unknown authorship.

A "Deutero-Isaiah," or second and unknown author, for chapters 40 thru 66, was theorized on the basis of alleged form or linguistic differences. But as Harrison, from whom most of this study is taken, points out, "*Conservative scholars generally met the arguments relating to differences in theological standpoint by demonstrating the ideas in later chapters of the prophecy [40-66] were broader and more extended than their counterparts in chapters 1-39.*"⁴

Harrison will argue that the alleged style differences between chapters 1 thru 39 and chapters 40 thru 66 (and in this second half we find our 53rd

² The vision concerning Judah and Jerusalem that Isaiah son of Amoz saw during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

³ 2 Timothy 3:16 θεόπνευστος. Proof the Bible is Genuine, Authentic, Inspired Revelation of God <http://www.gotchoices.net/authenticity/>

⁴ R. K. Harrison, "Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 777

chapter) can be accredited to changes that are natural over the span of a writer's career. This is clear in my poetry: how I wrote at age 25 and at 75. I am not 2 different authors!

Scholasticism

I have less interest in revisiting the countless theories that claim multiple authors, than you have in reading it; so, it should suffice to offer only a synopsis of the hermeneutic of the last few centuries of Biblical study that affected not just an understanding of Isaiah but the Old Testament as a whole. Put simply, since the Reformation of the 16th Century of the present era, scholarship has been more interested in the literary value of scripture and not its inspirational value. Scholars have been concerned with *when* the scriptures were compiled and less with the message or content. Scholarship, I maintain, lost its way for 3 reasons:

1. The theory of evolution: Since Darwinism, scholarship has been obsessed with a religious theory of evolution. Did the stories in the Bible and the Torah and Targums [commentary on the Torah] evolve from ancient religious myths?
2. The popularity of Hegel's philosophy of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.⁵ Hegelian

⁵ According to Wiki: "Hegelian dialectic, usually presented in a threefold manner, was stated by Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus as comprising three dialectical stages of development: a thesis, giving rise to its reaction; an antithesis, which contradicts or negates the thesis; and the tension between the two being resolved by means of a synthesis. In more simplistic terms,

philosophy [though actually it was popularized by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814)] said that social/cultural change (which included religious practices) is the result of a new practice/norm (antithesis) coming into conflict with an existing one (thesis) and the resulting religious, social, or cultural form or expression is a compromised (synthesis) form. It was theorized that Old Testament sacrifices and other religious forms as well as a belief in one God (monotheism) were the result of culturally conflicting concepts from other ancient cultures. Monotheism was thought to be born out of monolatry [one god among many] which itself was born out of polytheism.

3. Inevitably, scholarship would look at the narrative of Scripture as a pseudo-history, a compilation of mythologies. Through the use of scientific tools of linguistics, anthropology, archeology, geology, paleontology, etc. a new modern approach to interpreting the Bible was developed. It is called the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture which has discarded completely the belief that the Bible is—or even contains—a divine revelation.

The message of Isaiah's *Suffering Servant* became just a story line. The message and inspiration it conveyed was of little further interpretative value.

one can consider it thus: problem → reaction → solution. Although this model is often named after Hegel, he himself never used that specific formulation. Hegel ascribed that terminology to Kant. Carrying on Kant's work, upcest greatly elaborated on the synthesis model and popularized it."

In an attempt at getting back to the message, a neo-orthodox movement was born but proposed a compromise by conceding that the narrative of Scripture was not historical but still with theological value. Neo-orthodoxy interpreted the Biblical narrative as metaphor and parable—not history—and proposed a systematic theology, in effect, “the moral of the story.”

Reaching back: During the Reformation of the 16th century John Calvin proposed that “*the scriptures are their own interpreter*,” and Martin Luther maintained that “*a sympathetic experience is necessary to interpret any Biblical revelation*,” [you have to experience the Bible truth to understand it]. But a liberal humanism arose in the seventeenth century disowning revelation as unscientific. Reason became “*the sole standard of judgment and the final authority for faith*.”⁶ The scientific approach to natural truth was now applied to the interpretation of scripture which concluded most of the historical narrative in the text as myth or legend.

Some scholars⁷ attempted to rescue biblical interpretation by calling the less rational portions as metaphorical or mystical. They consented to the scientific mind and saw only *spiritual* lessons in the Bible stories, not historical narrative. Most of the Old Testament account took on a parabolic mantle. Thus Jonah wasn't swallowed by a fish; the account is a

⁶ R. K. Harrison, “Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 464

⁷ Scheiermacher introduced “mystical subjectivism which was limited to the examination of certain human feelings or emotional reactions involving religious phenomena.” *ibid*.

fabled story of his rebellion. Theology became the study of religious phenomena and how religious scholars might interpret the stories in doctrinal or denominational terms. Thus Adam, Eve, and the Fall became simply a “once upon a time” comparable to an Aesop fable replete with a moral theology about the entrance of sin. The biblical story of creation was thought to be borrowed from Babylonian mythology [now proven erroneous].

In another sense: the *genuineness* of scripture was soon to become a major area of study replacing a concern about the *authenticity* of the Word.⁸ Put another way, “revelation” as a divine truth, accepted as God’s Word, ceased to be of any concern to the scholar. In its place, scholarship focused on an evolutionary approach to the compilation of the scriptures or when each book might have been compiled based on its style and language. The Hegelian concept mentioned already was accepted as explanatory of the variations or changes intentionally made in copying the script. The stories of scripture were thought to be borrowed from more ancient sources and modified through tradition. So much for the miraculous! By definition, miracles can not be scientifically confirmed.

As theology and culture changed, the text was brought along to reflect the changing theologies,

⁸ By genuineness we mean that the books were actually written in the age to which they in assigned and by the men to whom they are ascribed. By authenticity we mean that the Bible relates truthfully the matters of which it treats, and its contents are the same today as written originally. see Authenticity. <http://www.gotchoices.net/authenticity/>

morals and ethics of the day. Perhaps, one of the most notable is the all but disappearance of the Mosaic Law during the years of the Judges. Israel was monolatrous [a belief in one god among many]. It wasn't until after their return from Babylonian exile that the *Shima*, Deuteronomy 6:4,⁹ and the Mosaic law, the Torah, became foundational to Judean religious life. This led scholarship to assume Moses was either not an historical figure or a person of antiquity whose ideas were kept alive through centuries of oral traditions which needed to be edited as they were written down and applied after the Babylonian exile. In Hegelian fashion: as older grammatical forms, linguistic styles, and religious rituals (the thesis) came in conflict with changing forms, styles and rituals (the antithesis), new religious practices and linguistic forms evolved (the synthesis) reflected now in the compilation or editing of the biblical text.¹⁰ (This has all been successfully refuted by Harrison and others.)¹¹

During the 1800's biblical scholarship became fascinated with Darwinian evolution. Scholars thought to apply the evolutionary process to biblical interpretation as well. Scholars wrangled over *authorship* [higher criticism] instead of provenance

⁹ *The LORD our God is one LORD; or The LORD is our God, the LORD is one; or The LORD is our God, the LORD alone*

¹⁰ The historical-critical method of biblical criticism (higher criticism) of which I wrote in "*Challenged: Living Our Faith in a Postmodern Age*" replaced a study in lower biblical criticism or a study of the authorship of each book comprising the Canon.

¹¹ It has now been shown that oral traditions were never maintain in the place of the written forms. Oral recitation was as now a form of learning. See Harrison. p. 35ff.

[ordering variations in the text chronologically to ascertain the earliest writings, which is known as “lower” or “textual” criticism] and using a Hegelian dialectic as a guide proceeded to rearrange the biblical text, reordering the various sections according to a theorized evolutionary process. [Our Bible evolved!?] Five authors, scholars theorized, wrote the books of Moses—and Moses was *not* one of them. They concluded the Pentateuch was compiled by a contemporary of Ezra. Isaiah also was theorized to be a product of a post-exilic writer. Isaiah as a prophecy saw three separate writers. Isaiah’s account of the “*Suffering Servant*,” of which chapter 53 is a major contribution, was accredited to an *unknown* author.

After World War One, a spiritual vacuum resulted because the evolutionary approach to biblical study offered no hope for a world turned existentialistic and nihilistic [the rejection of all religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless]. No interpretation of Scripture seemed of any value. The preacher lost his inspiring message and the world its hope.

In an attempt to retrieve the meaning of biblical revelation a neo-orthodox movement was born. This was an attempt at rescuing the civilized religious mind by “*reasserting the priority of revelation over reason in theology.*”¹² But this was in a modern era that could not consciously equate the scripture with

¹² R. K. Harrison, “Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 464. compare Karl Barth’s dialectical theology of crisis

the Word of God. The Bible was thought of as a “*failed human response to revelation.*”¹³

Biblical history (more correctly, the biblical narrative or story line) was studied separate from Biblical theology.¹⁴ This way the theologian could find “truth” in the stories. Scholars also could still deny that the Scripture *as such* constituted revealed truth.¹⁵ [The verbal-plenary theory of inspiration, every word inspired, was discarded.] The alleged errors found in the text (some of them, no doubt scribal missteps) were troublesome to the occidental mind [scholars thinking like Greek logicians instead of Hebrews with an appreciation for the oriental mindset].

(The Old Testament Scripture, we still affirm, from a Semitic or Hebrew perspective makes perfect sense and the revelatory message [from God] is clear and emphatic.)

It is against this backdrop, however, of developing theologies that Isaiah 53 was re-re- and-re-interpreted. Inevitably a theory that viewed the variations in the biblical text as an evolving document (The documentary hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen)¹⁶

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ Any imposed dichotomy between historical investigation and theological interpretation is basically false, if for no other reason than that it would remove Faith from the immanent historical situation in a manner completely foreign to the Old Testament Heilgeschichte. *Ibid.* Page 429

¹⁵ *ibid.* p. 465

¹⁶ Subsequent adherence of the Graf-Wellhausen theory Pentateuchal origins stood firmly in the tradition establish by the great master. For them the Old Testament narratives were replete with confused repetition of events, characterized by gross historical, typographical, and other errors in the text, and overlaid with a tissue of pagan mythology of such a sort as

would be recognized as a new hermeneutic called The Historical-Critical method of biblical research. The Bible becomes a mere literary work and the inspiration was gone though once cherished as part of a devotional approach to learning God's Word.

to require the attention of highly skilled analytical minds before the real trend of events could be outlined at all satisfactorily. Later research, however, has revealed that a great many of these objections were more artificial than real, and depended for their veracity upon the basic assumptions of the liberal school, which, as has been mentioned above, or gravely deficient from the very outset. [Harrison, p 510]

The Four Oracles

Isaiah is known as “The Fifth Gospel” for good reason. Isaiah’s prophecy profiles in ministry the *Suffering Servant* which modern scholarship had been unable to identify since the historical-critical method of interpreting the Bible does not see Scripture as prophecy, divine revelation, or divinely inspired truth.

Who was this servant in Isaiah’s record that was so abused, mocked, and finally killed? Higher Criticism¹⁷—or the attempt through the historical-critical method of interpretation to identify a religious meme with other ancient religious cults and mythologies—presupposed that this suffering and dying servant came from “pagan” or a non-Israelite source. Harrison repudiates this conclusion. “*Any attempt*”, Harrison argues, “*to derive the servant concept from Pagan Canaanite or Babylonian religious sources is open to the serious objection that the servant of the Lord as envisaged in Isaiah was a strictly Israelite development for which there can be no proper points of connection with the [ancient and pagan] cult of a dying and rising deity.*”¹⁸

¹⁷ Without laboring over the details of this controversy, suffice it to say that Rabbi Cassuto refutes all five points used to support it. The pillars supporting the entire structure of the documentary theory, are five, to wit:

- a) the use of different names for the Deity;
- b) variations of language and style;
- c) contradictions and divergences of view;
- d) duplications and repetitions;
- e) signs of composite structure in the

sections.

— Rabbi Umberto Moshe David Cassuto. *The Documentary Hypothesis* (Jerusalem: Central Press, 2011.), 14.

¹⁸ *ibid.* p. 487

What is remarkable here, and it bears repeating often, is that Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" has no parallel account in any other literary source. The conservative view is that this is a prophecy of Christ on Calvary. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a vicarious atonement for sin is indisputably "God-breathed." Dr. Gregory Boyd, a professor at Bethel College, St. Paul, Minnesota, said it in plain language: "*There is no other belief which does this... Only the Gospel dares to proclaim that God enters smack-dab into the middle of the hell we created. Only the Gospel dares to proclaim that God was born a baby in a bloody, crap-filled stable, that He lived a life befriending the prostitutes and lepers no one else would befriend, and that He suffered firsthand, the hellish depth of all that is nightmarish in human existence.*"¹⁹

We see Jesus in Isaiah's Suffering Servant narrative. "*On all hands,*" says North, "*it is agreed that whoever was the original of the servant, none except Christ was its fulfillment.*"²⁰

There are four oracles profiling the servant of God prophesied in Isaiah²¹ chapters 40 thru 66 (Isaiah 53 is part of the fourth oracle which will draw special attention.)

¹⁹ Gregory Boyd *Letters From A Skeptic* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communication Ministries, 2004), 151.

²⁰ C R North *The Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, IV. p. 294

²¹ R. K. Harrison, "Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 488

- In the first of these (Isaiah 42:1-4)²² God's Servant was divinely chosen and empowered by the Spirit to bring justice to the nations of the world. He is the faithful and merciful Servant who has come to rescue not destroy.

Matthew humbly recognizes the similarities between the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and Jesus.²³ (A point worth noting. There are 21 references to Isaiah's prophecy in the New Testament. 6 of these are in Matthew's gospel referencing Isaiah's "Suffering Servant.")

²² Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.

²³ Mt. 12:17-21 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope."

- The second Oracle (Isaiah 49:1-6)²⁴ portrayed His Servant as divinely called not just to bring salvation to Israel but to the nations.
- In the third Oracle (Isaiah 50:4-9²⁵) the Suffering Servant, described his daily contact with God, his confidence is in God's

²⁴ Listen to me, you islands; hear this, you distant nations: Before I was born the Lord called me; from my mother's womb he has spoken my name. He made my mouth like a sharpened sword, in the shadow of his hand he hid me; he made me into a polished arrow and concealed me in his quiver. He said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will display my splendor." But I said, "I have labored in vain; I have spent my strength for nothing at all. Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand, and my reward is with my God." And now the Lord says—he who formed me in the womb to be his servant to bring Jacob back to him and gather Israel to himself, for I am[a] honored in the eyes of the Lord and my God has been my strength—he says:

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

²⁵ The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears; I have not been rebellious,

I have not turned away. I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face

from mocking and spitting. Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame.

He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me.

Who will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

deliverance while he endures mocking and abuse.²⁶

- The final Oracle (Isaiah 52:13-15)²⁷ describes the promised exaltation of the Servant, which, however, would be preceded by violence culminating in the death of the Servant and his burial with the wicked.

Harrison points out that “ *Both liberal²⁸ and conservative scholars were unanimous in their view that [Isaiah] chapters 40 through 66 were the most exalted and remarkable literary achievements of any of the Hebrew prophets.*”²⁹ Said differently, Isaiah’s prophecies of the *Suffering Servant* are unparalleled in prophetic thought.

²⁶ Mark 10:34 ... who will mock him and spit on him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise.

²⁷ See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. Just as there were many who were appalled at him—his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness—so he will sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

²⁸ By “liberal” Harrison is probably referencing the neo-orthodox view. Higher criticism [The historical-critical method] would assume a loftier language for a Deutero-Isaiah, someone whose natural writing talent would account for this style ...and thus, discrediting the inspirational or revelatory value of the text.

²⁹ R. K. Harrison, “Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 791

Linguistically Unique

In Isaiah's reference to the guilt/sin offering in 53:10 it is the "soul" of the Suffering Servant that has become the offering. In 45 other references to this type of offering, this verse stands alone where the offering is a *person*. Our thoughts immediately go to Paul explaining,³⁰ "*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*"

Unlike Jeremiah and Ezekiel who wrote of the Covenant, Isaiah spoke of this suffering servant that secular scholarship failed to identify in two millennia of theological, historical, exegetical, hermeneutical and linguistic research. [They didn't ask my grandmother!] Admittedly, during the centuries of evolutionary inquiry into the Scriptural forms and their authorship along with a disavowing of the revelatory content of Scripture, no one was looking at Isaiah with an eye to interpret its inspirational prophetic value.

This deficiency is illustrated in the work of Samuel Sandmel, *The Hebrew Scriptures: An Introduction to Their Literature and Religious Ideas*, 1963, page 193, who rather helplessly concluded that the "*suffering servant*" was a "*stray poem that quite unaccountably came to be included in the book of Isaiah.*"³¹

³⁰ 1 Corinthians 5:7

John 1:36 When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, **the Lamb of God!**"

I Peter 1:19 but with the precious blood of **Christ, a lamb** without blemish or defect.

³¹ *ibid.* p. 449 footnote

In addition we must note a few other problems associated with an honest interest in the oracles and sermons attributed to Isaiah:

1. A theological study of the Old Testament requires an appreciation for the historical narrative it is clothed in. The revelation is in God's *relationship* with Ancient Israel, and therefore, their history. After the Reformation there was an academic disinterest in and disconnected from scripture as revelatory. Historical research (called the historical form) attempted to separate realism from myth. The problem with this method is that scripture came to be viewed only in a literary sense. Any divine presence had become invisible in the text and to quote the mantra, "the absence of evidence is the evidence of absence." When scholarship is not looking for the divine, it is no mystery that they do not find it! Biblical revelation became the play word of preachers who used it to sway parishioners to their cause and not as a means to discovering God among us.
2. As noted already, the occidental mind [logic] is not sufficient to appreciate the semitic writing style. Much that was considered error was simply a style of writing unfamiliar to the modern mind.³²

³² Harrison clarifies, "Because of the far-reaching differences between the oriental somatic mind and the culture of the Hellenistic world, the early Christians recognize that not all the concepts expressed in the Old Testament were in absolute harmony with the outlook of the nascent Christian era. This

3. Old Testament theology cannot be viewed systematically. Harrison points out that "...*the theological concepts of the old testament do not lend themselves with particular readiness to any attempt at systematization....*"³³ Although, Harrison was particularly referencing the Covenant of God as a major Old Testament theme, the principle is equally applicable to the Messianic passages and Isaiah's account of the *Suffering Servant*.

Scriptural unity, therefore, hinges on a recognition of Old Testament prophecies and ceremonial types referencing Christ.

divergence of standpoint receive fresh emphasis when the works of the law ... sit in contradistinction to the character of divine grace, as in the theology of Paul." Harrison p 417

³³ *ibid.* p. 479

One Isaiah

There is only one Isaiah.³⁴ Deutero-Isaiah and a Trito-Isaiah, it can be argued, do not support the linguistic and archeological evidence. The simplest (Ockham's Razor) view is to recognize that the style of chapters 40-66 is similar to the first 39 chapters including references to the Suffering Servant.³⁵

Additionally, there are parallelisms that strongly support a single author, Isaiah, son of Amoz. There are corresponding sections in Isaiah 1-39 that are, according to Harrison, easily related to corresponding sections in the later chapters.³⁶ Our interest here does not require us to detail this comparison but conservative scholarship has studied the alleged differences between Isaiah and Deutero-Isaiah and found that a theory of a single author, Isaiah, is supportable. Harrison informs that "*there are remarkable similarities between chapters 1-39 and 40-66 in questions of both language and style.*"³⁷

³⁴ It will appear from the comparison that chapters 40-66, do indeed differ considerably in language from the passages of Isaiah that are recognized as genuine [1 - 39]; but ... still ... there is so much that is common to both that these differences afford no satisfactory reasons for denying Isaiah's authorship of the chapters in question. - Lange p. 21

³⁵ For a more thorough and detailed discussion of this topic, see Harrison, p. 774. #2 Arguments for Division of Authorship.

³⁶ Chapters 1-5 parallel 34-35

Chapters 6-8 parallel 36-40

Chapters 9-12 parallel 41-45

Chapters 13-23 parallel 46-48

Chapters 24-27 parallel 49-55

Chapters 28-31 parallel 56-59

Chapters 32-33 parallel 60-66

³⁷ R. K. Harrison, "Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 778

Proceeding on the theory that Isaiah 1:1 is correct and his eponymous work is a single work³⁸ written over the span of some 40 years of prophecy about 675 years *before* the Savior came, we may lay aside the scientific endeavors that have wasted the scholar's time over the last 400 years and focus on the text itself. Contextual considerations may still need the archeologist or the linguist, granted, but reviving the tenet of our faith that believes in the text to be revelational and now considering the choice of language and words as important—if not to Isaiah—to *God*, we can begin to seek the meaning of the prophecy—and especially chapter 53.

Admittedly, Jewish thought here is credited with a text that the Jewish Targums (interpretations) could not interpret. Isaiah 53 became a puzzle, a riddle, about either the nation, itself, or Isaiah or one of the prophets. Who was this "*Suffering Servant*"? Isaiah began his description of a vicarious suffering that some would argue can have no solution, since it followed no ancient pattern of thought. No wonder the prophet began: *Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*³⁹

Consider the scope of the calling of the *Suffering Servant*:⁴⁰

³⁸ Gattungsforschung or generic research, type-analysis, form criticism, or categories of styles: denunciations, hymns, oracles, etc. proved insufficient in showing multiple authorships.

³⁹ Isaiah 53:1

⁴⁰ The following bullet points contain a single quote from R. K. Harrison, "Introduction to the Old Testament, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004) p. 484

- He was commissioned with delivering *“a covenant people in bondage”* (Isaiah 42:18ff),
- He was sent also for the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:1ff).
- Cyrus released Ezra, Nehemiah, and company to return to Jerusalem but *“it was the servant who would bring that remnant back to God.”* (Isaiah 49:1ff).
- He is given a new name: Israel, a prince with God. (Isaiah 49:3). *“...the nation as a whole had forgone any right to the use of that exalted title.”* A new Israel begins with him. (Isaiah 49:14ff), *“... the faithful Israelites were urged to adopt his piety and dedication as their model for living.”*
- His salvation is universal (Isaiah 51:1ff), through his substitutionary death (Isaiah 53:1ff).
- *“On the basis,”* Harrison concludes, *“of this accomplishment Israel would be called to enter the new covenant (Isaiah 54:1ff), and the salvation wrought by the work of the servant would be made available to all those in need (Isaiah 55:1ff).”*

Isaiah's Prophecy

It is difficult to see, in an open-mindedness, how Isaiah 53 especially verses 10-12 could have been referencing anyone other than Jesus, for a few reasons:

- No nation, person or persons metaphorically or literally is described in this chapter. He is the suffering servant who sustained tortuous mistreatment perpetrated by “our” hands, Isaiah’s fellow-countrymen, and he became according to this account, a vicarious sacrifice offered to God for their “our” sins.
- The New Testament narrative assumes it is obvious to us about whom Isaiah is prophesying .
 - Isaiah 53:7 *“He was oppressed [treated harshly] ... [while he willingly submitted himself] , ... he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, ... he did not open his mouth.”* Compared with
 - Mark 14:61 *“But Jesus remained silent and gave no answer. ”*
 - Isaiah 53:4 *Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.*
 - Matthew 8:17 *This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: “He took up our infirmities and bore our diseases.”*
 - Acts 8:33 *In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his*

descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.

- Isaiah 53:8 in the Septuagint. *In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken away from the earth: because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death.*
- The reference to a sacrificial and vicarious death of an individual is uniquely Isaiahic linking this narrative to Paul's understanding and to the Gospel narrative.
 - Isaiah 53:10 *the LORD makes his life an offering for sin*
 - I Corinthians 5:7 *For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*
 - John 1:36 *When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"*
- The earliest extant manuscripts of Isaiah 53 come from Qumran, the Dead Sea scrolls, and from the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, dated over one hundred years before Jesus which shows that *this could not have been a christian emendation or redaction.* Although the Ben-Ashur Hebrew Old Testament dates back only to 800 years after Jesus and in itself could not verify the prophetic tenor of this amazingly detailed account of God's suffering servant, the Septuagint which follows the Isaiah manuscript from Qumran supports its authenticity.

Pleased

Isaiah 53 is an incredible prophecy—by his own admission in verse 1—which cannot be discarded as uninspired or not revelatory without at the same time a total disregard for the honest and reasonable explanation a simple reading of the text offers. It is prophetic insight into a divine plan to offer Jesus for the sins of mankind. It is a prophecy that could not be explained until we were able to look back in history and see for ourselves that it happened as Isaiah described.⁴¹ One is disingenuous who expresses a disinterest in this chapter because it fails to support a hoped for corroboration with evolutionary or new-orthodox theory. To conclude, therefore, that Isaiah's "Suffering Servant" cannot be Jesus, or that chapter 53 does not specifically reference his vicarious and sacrificial death, is to shut the mind's eye to an obvious truth that like a blinding sun outshines the logic of other interpretations.

Verses 10 thru 12 provide some of these remarkable details. Verse 10 says "*The Lord was pleased [inclined, willing] to beat him painfully.*" We must not misrepresent the heart of God in this matter. The language here—to me—does not depict a divine rage or wrath but clearly a divine resolve.

⁴¹ Luke 9:44-45 "Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it.

- “Pleased” The language of this prophecy suggests God was as motivated, as passionate, as He was on creation day; only here. there is a solemn tone to His thoughts.
- “Pleased” It is safe to say what Isaiah is *not* saying. God took no sadistic pleasure in Jesus’s pain.
- “Pleased” Could this speak of desire or the acceptance of good counsel? If I may: Is God’s heart or head driving this event? The Greek translation reads “The Lord also is pleased to purge him.”⁴² If this is a disciplinary action to purify the soul, it is our souls being purged of sin vicariously. But the question is: is this God’s *desire* (how He feels at the moment) or just the wisdom of His counsel that Isaiah is reporting? In the Greek language (and therefore the Septuagint) the nuance for the word “willed”⁴³ or “counseled” is sadly lost. Both meanings are interchangeable with this word “pleased” *“The Septuagint belongs to the age when the distinctions were being obliterated.”*⁴⁴ And maybe that’s a good thing lest we think that somehow in His heart God repented of actions His wisdom required for our salvation. And what was Jesus thinking or feeling according to Hebrews 12:2 *“For the joy set before him he endured the cross”* The word “for”

⁴² κύριος βούλεται καθαρῖσαι αὐτὸν

⁴³ θελεῖν

⁴⁴ G Johannes Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren. Transl: John T. Willis *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974. Vol I. P 629f

can also mean “instead of” (suggesting Jesus set aside any thought of more joyous or happier times with His Father to endure this moment) though no English translation supports this rendering. The translators all seem to support the idea that Jesus knew that *this* was the path to ultimate joy! The Message Bible freely interprets, “*Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever.*” Does this also describe God when Isaiah cried, “It pleased God to beat him”?

- “Pleased” But was the Father only accepting of his pain out of the necessity to provide salvation for us [the *counsel* of His will and wisdom]? Did He look beyond the moment deeming this pain necessary to achieve a greater joy of or pleasure in our pending reconciliation with Him? God was not just adhering to sound counsel, staying with the plan drawn up before the foundation of the earth was laid. God shows no reluctance in this prophetic utterance to go through with it. We might rightly say that His love for us drove His interest and intent.
- “Pleased” Whatever else we conclude: the Divine will played a vital role, actively participating, in His plan for His Suffering Servant. “For God so *loved* the *world*.....” John 3:16

- An interesting note: What was Jesus asking in the garden when He used this word? Luke 22:42 *“Father, if you are **willing**, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.”* Was He asking, *“Can we not revisit the plan for the Salvation of souls? How necessary is this plan? If you want, your wisdom could find another way!?”* There was no other way! How do we know? God was *pleased* with this one. *“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”* Acts 4:12

Guilt Offering

Verses 6 reads: *"We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has **laid** on him [caused him to suffer because of] the iniquity of us all."* God's servant *"met up with"* punishment. Is this the Suffering Servant becoming God's sacrifice for our sins? Did God punish him for our sinfulness? *"Israel ... has sinned, and the Servant of God is punished."*⁴⁵ ... "

The use of the word "laid" which means *"to meet up with or fall upon"* in the context of the guilt offering in verse 10 best translates: *"The Lord caused our guilt [our punishment] to fall on him."*

The biblical scholar and commentator, J. P. Lange, with dogmatic emphasis maintains that there can be no other meaning! *"Now if the object of this ... was not to make the.. punishment strike the Servant ... with the same ... necessity with which it would have struck the actual guilty ...and these guilty ones ...might be free from punishment,"* he affirms [if this is not the meaning], *"then, I see not how the prophet would say "Jehovah laid on him the iniquity of us all."⁴⁶ As Lange translated the Hebrew thought: The Lord *"gave up his servant that he might take on himself the **guilt and punishment** of the sinful people."⁴⁷**

Verse 8 adds: God smiting the Servant was to death. For the people's sins. *"for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he*

⁴⁵ Lange, John Peter. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures* Vol 6, page 576

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ *ibid.* page 581

stricken." Which translated from the Greek reads: "... because of the iniquities of my people he was led to death."⁴⁸

Verse 10 makes this undeniably clear: "... the LORD makes his life an **offering** for sin" The offering spoken of here is the **guilt** offering.

*"Certainly the prophet does not speak here according to the rules of the theory of sacrifices,"*⁴⁹ Lange admits. We see this prophecy now in the light of John 3:16 and 2 Corinthians 5:21 *"God made him who had no sin to be sin [the NIV adds "offering"] for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* But what did Isaiah make of his own prophecy? This is atonement theory in its purest form.

Yet, Atonement theory is not the purpose for this essay. The purpose for writing this short review of Isaiah's Suffering Servant is to underscore the significance of a prophecy that is unmistakably the story of Calvary and this confirms its inspiration as a revelation from God. If the Bible were merely the literary thoughts of various writers in prose and poetic form, this chapter would not exist. But it does, and it is the centerpiece, the keystone, the cornerstone, the lodestar, the theme of all christian theology!

The accent on this amazing account is Isaiah's choice of words for an offering. He speaks in verse 10 of the guilt offering. This begs the question, why not the burnt offering or sin offering or peace offering? All these are visible in Christ but Isaiah wanted us to

⁴⁸ ἀπὸ τῶν ἀνομιῶν τοῦ λαοῦ μου ἤχθη εἰς θάνατον

⁴⁹ Lange, John Peter. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures* Vol 6, page 581

know that the guilt offering should be particularly noted. Christ was our guilt offering. Many scholars equate this to the sin offering because verse 10 in the Septuagint says "*an offering for sin.*"⁵⁰ And in verse 12 clearly, "*he bore the **sin** of many.*" Also one clear meaning of the word "to be guilty" is "to be culpable" which does not presuppose any penitence or sense of guilt. But for 3 additional reasons the "guilt" offering correctly describes what Jesus provided on Calvary. For this we look more closely at the guilt offering itself in Leviticus:

Restitution

The guilt offering was a means by which restitution could be made for damaged and broken relationships. Did this mean: *I owed a debt I could not pay, He paid a debt He did not owe?* Leviticus 5:16 introduces the guilt offering as a restitution for injury or destruction of property, breaking Torah law, or ..sin against God.⁵¹ Forgiveness was conditioned on this offering. Jesus restored our relationship to God and God to us. And he gave forgiveness a divine power to erase the pain of sin as well as the sin, itself.

⁵⁰ δῶτε περὶ ἁμαρτίας. The NIV reads his life an offering for sin

⁵¹ They must make restitution for what they have failed to do in regard to the holy things, pay an additional penalty of a fifth of its value and give it all to the priest. The priest will make atonement for them with the ram as a guilt offering, and they will be forgiven.

A Lamb

Poor people could substitute less expensive offerings for the burnt and sin offerings but not the guilt offering. It had to be a lamb.⁵² Verse 7: “*he was led like a **lamb** to the slaughter,*” It was important to specify here that a lamb would be sacrificed. Paul links this account with Calvary: “*For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*”⁵³

No Festivals

The guilt offering was never offered as part of one of the great Festivals, unlike the burnt offering and the sin offering.⁵⁴ The guilt offering was not a celebration of Calvary. It was a personal encounter for the sinner with Calvary. If the Law could describe the moment of salvation, a moment at the mourner’s bench where the sinner experiences the Savior’s gentle healing touch upon the soul, where God, in the person of the Savior, pours in the oil and wine and heals the soul, restores our joy, forgives our sin, and quickens us to newness of life, it is here in the guilt offering.

⁵² Lev 14:21-22 “If, however, they are poor and cannot afford these, they must take one male lamb as a guilt offering to be waved to make atonement for them, together with a tenth of an ephah of the finest flour mixed with olive oil for a grain offering, a log of oil, and two doves or two young pigeons, such as they can afford, one for a sin offering and the other for a burnt offering.

⁵³ I Corinthians 5:7

⁵⁴ See Numbers 28. The Sabbath Offerings, The Monthly Offerings, Passover, The Festival of Weeks.

Verse 11 & 12

The dead sea scroll of Isaiah which dates no later than 100 BCE. (Before Christ) differs from the Masoretic Text (Our Hebrew Bible) in only one verse in Isaiah 53 (verse 11)⁵⁵ by adding the word “light”: “*After the travail of his soul he will see **light**, and he will be satisfied.*” The Hebrew translates: “*He shall see of the travail of his soul, He shall be satisfied...*” Should this be of interest to us?

The Septuagint follows the Dead Sea Scroll of Isaiah: “*the Lord also is pleased to take away from the travail of his soul, to shew him **light**,...*” If you read the NIV, it will follow the Qumran text: “*After he has suffered, he will see the **light of life** and be satisfied*” Is not this the resurrection followed by Christ’s high-priestly ministry at the Father’s right hand (Hebrews 8)? All summed in one prophetic word: *light*?

The text speaks for itself for Christians! We believe that we see what Philip saw when he expounded the text to an Ethiopian eunuch. There is a natural flow of thought from chapter 53 as the fulfillment of the old covenant—as Hebrews 8 is of the new.⁵⁶ The best interpretation of Isaiah’s use of language and nuance in chapter 53 written centuries before Christ, suggests to us—if not outright expounds it—that the divine plan for saving the souls of men, detailed in the New Testament by the apostles, was prophesied here as an amazing impassioned revealing

⁵⁵ Isa 21:8 which unexplainably references a “lion” in the MT in the Qumran text reads without such a reference: “Then he who saw cried: “Upon a watchtower I stand, O Lord,” [RSV]

⁵⁶ See Hebrews 8 in the “Additional Scripture” section.

of that divine genius that, through Calvary, brought it to pass.

A Victorious Conclusion

Now suddenly the prophecy goes from a sacrificial death to a victorious outcome.

Verse 12, *"Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong."* This seems to envision the now victorious servant sharing in the victory with someone or ones unknown unless ...there is a different meaning.

Lange interprets: *"...not that others shall be sharers of his victory, but that he shall be as gloriously successful in his enterprise as other victors were in theirs."*⁵⁷ He shall be numbered among the victors or as Paul explained to the Colossians: *"And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in him"*⁵⁸ The writer to the Hebrews paraphrases, *"so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."*⁵⁹

But what does the last statement of Isaiah 53 mean? What *did* Isaiah write? The NIV translated the Hebrew *"He made intercession for the transgressors"* which strongly suggests Hebrews 8. The Septuagint translated *"He was delivered because of their iniquities.."*

⁵⁷ Lange, John Peter. *Commentary of the Holy Scriptures* Vol 6, page 582.

⁵⁸ Colossians 2:15

⁵⁹ Hebrews 9:28

This translation merely repeats the vicarious refrain of God's servant suffering for the sins of others. But the idea of Christ's intercession for sinners extends beyond Calvary into His High Priestly ministry after His resurrection as we read in Hebrews 8.

Summary

Verse 10, 11 *and* 12 repeat the refrain (*an offering for sin, ... he will bear their iniquities....he bore the sin of many...*) which interprets Isaiah's repeated references to pain, suffering, punishment, and guilt. How could this refer to anyone other than Christ!

Philip and the Ethiopian

Philip didn't have John 3:16 or Acts 16:4 or Romans 3:23-25 to discuss God's salvation through Christ ...but he had Isaiah. And he had a translation not any original Hebrew. Ethiopians were fluent in Greek not Hebrew and they had the Septuagint version, the Greek translation, of Isaiah's "Gospel." The Ethiopian eunuch, whom Philip met in the wilderness, was reading it which was Philip's opportunity to explain Calvary. Should we need any more to convince us of the providential hand of God, the irrefutable evidence, that confirms and validates a christian faith in Isaiah's work as the Word of God!?

And if it is God's Word, we have been given one more miracle of the visible reality of an immanent God of Love. Here in this simple account of 2 men in a chariot discussing the message of the Suffering Servant are seen the two biggest miracles: Salvation has come to this Eunuch who was a Gentile, not a Jew, and the miracle of that book that he held in his hand over half a millenium after the prophet first transcribed it.

If there is an explanation for: Why Calvary? The answer will be here. Jesus's death for sinful man was made intelligent and legitimized to the Judean mindset whose entire religious ritual pointed to this moment. Occidental thinking employed a line of reasoning that veered away from the spiritual realm to the natural leaving modern thought without a clarification or justification. So, our theories, as to why an atonement, splintered Christendom into countless denominational theologies.

Did the guilt offering represent a debt payment to God. A retribution, vengeance for a wrong done, for the crime of idolatry or unfaithfulness, or perhaps, the ultimate indulgence in which all punishment was experienced by a vicarious act of God in Christ?

Did forgiveness require punishment? Was the guilt offering for unintended sin or sin in ignorance? Jesus cried from the cross. *"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."*⁶⁰

Was God angry with mankind? Or man's sin? Was His unrequited love for His creation jealous? But how do we interpret the apostolic contention that He is love? What sent Jesus to the Cross?

The story of Calvary in theological terms is beautifully explained—at least to the Jewish mind—in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 8. Even the

⁶⁰ Luke 23:34. This utterance of our Lord on the cross is not clearly historical. Some earlier manuscripts do not have it, although it may have been expunged after the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD as proof God had not forgiven Jewry for the Savior's death. This logion, however, is "self-evident" according to Bruce Metzger in "A Textual Commentary of the Greek New Testament" and was given a 'C' rating out of A - D.

tabernacle in the Wilderness, the pattern of which will be thoroughly explained in heaven, somehow had something to do with the risen Savior as our high priest. The Torah will no longer need to be spelled out. We'll all have it memorized—more than that—its meaning in terms of God's holiness will be a part of us, written on the heart and life. The writer correctly calls it a new covenant, not a testament. This is not just an inheritance through Christ but a new relationship. And here is the part that references our Lord's sacrificial death as the guilt offering: Hebrews 8:12 *"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more."*

And the Old Covenant, the sacrificial system of animals and other offerings? It is now obsolete and although it is still cherished as a lesson in types and still cherished because the ritual still speaks to us, it will [verse 13] *"soon disappear."*