

Isaiah 52/53 (Part 1)

This is the fourth Servant Song of the Lord Jesus. The first Song (Isaiah 42.1-9) concerns His **character** and the second Song His **work** of redemption (Isaiah 49.1-6). The third Song emphasises His **faithfulness** (Isaiah 50.4-9) and this Song is concerned primarily with His **suffering**.

The Context of the Song

Isaiah 52 concerns the restoration of the nation of Israel from their Babylonian captivity. The nation has been redeemed; they are to be delivered from their captivity (Isaiah 52.10). However, the basis of their redemption is the Redeemer Himself. Not only is their comfort in Zion's restoration (Isaiah 52.1-12) but there is also comfort in Zion's Redeemer (Isaiah 52.13-53.12). This Servant Song is therefore the song of the redeemed nation of a coming day. It will be repentant Israel's "sorrowful lament and confession".

The Structure of the Song

The Song comprises 5 stanzas of 3 verses each:

Stanza	Speaker	Subject	Subject
Isaiah 52.13-15	Jehovah	The Servant as Sovereign	Reign of the Servant
Isaiah 53.1-3	Isaiah (as representative)	The Servant Scorned	Reception of the Servant
Isaiah 53.4-6	The Nation	The Servant's Suffering	Recognition of the Servant
Isaiah 53.7-9	Isaiah (as representative)	The Servant's Submission	Righteousness of the Servant
Isaiah 53.10-12	Jehovah (vv.11-12)	The Servant's Satisfaction	Reward of the Servant

Isaiah 52.13-15: The Servant as Sovereign

13 *Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.*

Again, Jehovah directs our attention to gaze upon His Servant (cf. Isaiah 42.1). It is interesting to see that the word 'behold' is used under four different aspects with regard to the Lord Jesus. We are to behold Him as Servant (Zechariah 3.8), as Man (Zechariah 6.12), as King (Zechariah 9.9) and as God (Isaiah 40.9). The title 'Branch' is also used in this fourfold way (Isaiah 4.2, Jeremiah 23.5-6, Zechariah 3.8, 6.12). Of course these aspects of the Lord Jesus are also revealed in the Gospels; Matthew speaks of the **King**, Mark of the **Servant**, Luke of the **Man** and John of the **Son of God**.

The Lord Jesus is the Servant who will 'deal prudently'. This word has the dual idea of wisdom and prosperity. In other words, He will act wisely and therefore accomplish His work with great skill and effect. This wisdom and prosperity will mark the reign of the Lord Jesus in the Millennium too (Jeremiah 23.5). Note the many occasions when men marvelled at the wisdom of the Lord Jesus (Matthew 12.42, 13.54, Mark 6.2, Luke 2.40, 2.52, John 7.15).

His perfect obedience and mighty work have led to the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. He shall be 'exalted' (rise up), 'extolled' (lifted up) and be 'very high' (exceedingly exalted), or *He shall be made high, higher and the highest!* Some believe this refers to the resurrection, ascension and subsequent exaltation of the Lord Jesus and there is no doubt that presently the Lord Jesus is exalted (cf. Acts 2.33, Ephesians 1.20-23, Philippians 2.9). However, the context of these verses is the restoration of the nation of Israel (Isaiah 52.8) and therefore may refer to the coming exaltation of the Lord Jesus on **earth** in contrast to His previous humiliation on **earth**.

The old Rabbis used to say, *'He shall be exalted above Abraham, He shall be lifted up above Moses, and be higher than the ministering angels'*. The book of Hebrews certainly demonstrates the truth of that statement! Christ is greater than Abraham (Hebrews 7), angels (Hebrews 1) and Moses (Hebrews 3, 8).

14 *As many were astonished at thee; (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:)* **15** *So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.*

Part of this verse is in parenthesis. As many as were astonished at Him in His humiliation (first advent)... so shall the kings of a coming day also be astonished at Him in His Kingdom (second advent). The humiliation of the Lord Jesus was as low as His exaltation is high. His people were 'astonied' ('awestruck', 'appalled', 'emotionally desolated', 'thrown into a desolate or bereaved condition', 'paralysed by astonishment') at Him. This astonishment may even have been a result of the fact that they regarded His disfigurement as a punishment for the Servant's own sins (cf. Ezekiel 27.35).

The parenthesis further helps to explain why people were so astonished at Him. His 'visage' (whole appearance, especially the face) was 'marred' (disfigured) more than 'any man' (lit. 'out beyond men') and His 'form' (physical shape) more than the 'sons of men'. It is **not** that the Lord Jesus was more disfigured than any man has ever been, but **rather** that He was so disfigured He no longer looked like a man. *Motyer: "Man refers to individuality, sons of man to human likeness, common humanity. He experienced disfigurement from being an individual, from belonging with humankind. In horror people said, is this human?"* As Jehovah is here the speaker, some believe that this tells us what **He** saw in the three hours of darkness.

In a coming day, kings will be silenced in astonishment at Him when they 'understand' and 'accept' ('consider') the wonders of the completed work of the Lord Jesus. This is seen in the fact He will 'sprinkle many nations'. The word 'sprinkle' always speaks of sprinkling with blood to atone for guilt (Leviticus 4.6, 16.14) or sprinkling with water to purify (Numbers 19.18, 21). It is likely then that this speaks of the mighty redemptive work of the Lord Jesus accomplished at His first advent and demonstrated at His second advent to Israel (Zechariah 13.1, Romans 11.26) and the nations of the Millennial Kingdom (Isaiah 42.1, **49.6**, 55.1, Zechariah 8.20-23, 14.16-21). *Isaiah 53.11: He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant **justify many**; for he shall bear their iniquities.*

Isaiah 53.1-3: The Servant Scorned

1 Who hath believed our report? and to (upon) whom is (hath) the arm of the LORD (been) revealed?

Jehovah is no longer speaking, but the prophet Isaiah now speaks as representative of the nation. Isaiah asks who has believed the 'message' ('report') given to him by God (cf. Jeremiah 49.14) concerning the Messiah as the Servant of Jehovah (cf. John 12.37-38, Romans 10.16). The Arm of the Lord is a divine title for the Lord Jesus. It speaks of the power and wisdom of God to bring about salvation and redemption. This Power and this Wisdom is a Person, the Lord Jesus. Note that the Arm of the Lord is associated with power (Jeremiah 32.17), holiness (Isaiah 52.10), redemption (Exodus 6.6), miracles (Deuteronomy 26.8) and rule (Isaiah 40.10). Isaiah (and the remnant) now lament that the Arm of the Lord has been revealed upon so few, i.e. the saving power of the Lord Jesus is unknown by so many. Israel cried that the Arm of the Lord might be revealed (Isaiah 51.9) but when He came, who recognised Him?? Revelation is required to appreciate the beauties and glories of the Lord Jesus (cf. John 12.37-43, Matthew 16.17).

2 For he shall grow up before him (Jehovah) as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted (familiar) with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him (the Servant); he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Verses 2-3 explain why so many of the nation did not recognise and even despised the Arm of the Lord when He came.

First, He grew up (cf. Luke 2.52) as a 'tender plant'. This has the idea of a frail (cf. 2 Corinthians 13.4) sapling or suckling shoot growing from the main stalk. This speaks of the **visible life** of the **dependent** Man and did not meet the expectations of a nation looking for a mighty Messiah! However, He grew up before God, that is the Father's eye was ever upon Him with divine satisfaction and delight.

Second, He was 'as a root out of a dry ground' (cf. Isaiah 11.1). This speaks of the **unseen life** of the Lord Jesus, at least unseen by the nation. As a 'root', He is the source of life or existence; in Him was demonstrated the very origin of life, sprouting forth in a 'dry ground' picturing the fruitless and dead spiritual condition of the nation.

Third, He had a lack of worldly splendour and fleshly appeal. He had no 'form' (beauty in physical shape), no 'comeliness' (worldly splendour, majesty) and no 'beauty' (fleshly appeal, additional attractions over and above the norm, e.g. a new bride). As such the nation was not 'drawn' to Him ('desire'), He did not appeal to the flesh (unlike the Tree of Genesis 3.6). May it ever be our desire to see His beauty: *Psalm 27.4: One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.*

Fourth, He was 'despised' ('viewed with contempt') and 'rejected' ('avoided', 'left alone', 'walked a lonely path') of 'men'. The Hebrew word here speaks of men of 'rank and eminence'. There were no 'respectable', religious men (Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes) of the day that would associate with Him or support Him with their authority. Rather it was the poor, despised and diseased that associated with Him (cf. 1 Corinthians 1.26, Mark 2.15-16, Luke 7.34, 15.1). He was 'familiar' with 'sickness' and 'disease' ('grief') in that He was the Great Physician and Healer. Scripture indicates that this mighty work cost the Lord Jesus, not only by dying for its root cause at Calvary but also through mental anguish (Mark 5.30). He was also a 'Man of Sorrows', emphasising the mental anguish and suffering which He experienced. This was partly caused by the results of sin all around Him (Mark 7.34, 8.12, John 11.35) and partly because He carried as a heavy load the sorrows of others (see v.4, Matthew 11.28). In addition, His rejection at the hands of His brethren seems to have caused Him great sorrow too (Matthew 23.37, John 1.11). They 'hid' their faces from Him (i.e. 'averted their gaze', 'covered their faces in disgust') and 'esteemed Him not', that is, estimated Him to be worthless. **How much is He worth to us?**