



# **Peninsula City Church**

## **Kingdom Identify**

**How to Live the as the Suffering  
Servant: Is 53**

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# How to Live as the Suffering Servant: Is 53

Q. What does it mean to be the Suffering Servant?

## An Introduction

Have you ever read Isaiah 53 and wondered who it was talking about? From the perspective of being a Christ-follower, you may say that it is speaking about Jesus Christ. But how would you prove that idea? The reason being that many Jewish readers of this Scripture would say that it is about Israel or a righteous remnant of Israel. How would you answer them?

This is what we will briefly look at here in this sermon. Two issues will be reviewed here. Firstly, we will look at the passage of Isaiah 53 and its context of from a Jewish perspective. Secondly, if there is any evidence for this passage being about Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant.

### 1. The context of Isaiah 53 from a Jewish perspective

Q. How would you explain the suffering servant mentioned in Isaiah 53?

Firstly, for the most part throughout history, the Jewish perspective is that the servant spoken of here is the nation of Israel.<sup>1</sup> If it is not the whole nation, then it is at least a righteous remnant who survived the exile in Babylon. There have been those who have even seen the servant as Moses, Daniel, Jeremiah, Zerubbabel, or the prophets.<sup>2</sup> So, it is not accepted to be about Jesus Christ at all.

This section of Isaiah was written in the form of a Hebrew poem. It has been said that it “begins a definitive description of the servant.”<sup>3</sup> Let us read the passage, but begin in Isaiah 52:13 and read to 53:12 to get the context of this section of what is being said here,

<sup>52:13</sup> “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. <sup>14</sup> Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage (appearance) was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; <sup>15</sup> So shall He sprinkle (some translations have ‘startled’) many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.

<sup>53:1</sup> Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? <sup>2</sup> For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness (attractiveness); and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him. <sup>3</sup> He is despised and rejected by people, a Man of sorrows and acquainted (familiar) with grief (sickness). And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem (regard) Him.

<sup>4</sup> Surely He has borne our griefs (sicknesses) and carried our sorrows (pains); yet we esteemed (regarded) Him stricken (troubled), smitten (struck down) by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was wounded (pieced through) for our transgressions (wrongdoings), He was bruised (crushed) for our iniquities (sins); the chastisement (punishment) for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes (blows that cut in) we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to their own way; and the Lord has laid on Him (has caused to land on Him) the iniquity (sin) of us all.

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<sup>1</sup> Goldingay, J. “Servant of Yahweh.” In *Dictionary of the Old Testament Prophets*. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville (eds). (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 700.

<sup>2</sup> Goldingay, J. “Servant of Yahweh,” 701.

<sup>3</sup> *The Chronological Study Bible*. New King James Version. (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2008), 891.

<sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. <sup>8</sup> He was taken from prison (confinement) and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people, He was stricken. <sup>9</sup> And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, Because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

<sup>10</sup> Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise (crush) Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. <sup>11</sup> He shall see the labour of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge, My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil (plunder) with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.”

This is a weighty and deep portion of Scripture that has impacted the lives of many. It has been said that,

“These passages provide the most detailed sketch of the servant’s suffering and exaltation in this book... The prophecy of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is the heart of the second part of the book of Isaiah.”<sup>4</sup>

However, it is also a section of Scripture, which its meaning has fought over by many throughout history. It has been called “One of the most difficult and contested passages in the Bible.”<sup>5</sup> It has been said that “The passage is enigmatic, to say the least.”<sup>6</sup> On the one hand, the Jews have alleged various interpretations and especially that it relates to Israel. While on the other hand, Christ-followers have mainly held to the idea that it concerns Jesus Christ.

### **So, firstly, let us now look at the context of Isaiah 53 from a Jewish perspective.**

There is an excess of material that has been written, but I have selected a few. Perhaps the greatest exponents of the view that Isaiah is speaking about Israel were three Medieval Rabbis. Namely, Rashi (his name was Shlomo [Solomon] Yitzchaki, who came to be known as Rashi, he lived in France in the 11<sup>th</sup> century). Next there was Ibn Ezra (Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra, who lived in Spain in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries) and finally Radak (David Kimhi who came to be known as Radak, he lived in France in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries). An example of the typical modern Jewish stance would be Tovia Singer. He pointed out that,

“Despite strong objections from conservative Christian apologists, the prevailing rabbinic interpretation of Isaiah 53 ascribes the ‘servant’ to the nation of Israel who silently endured unimaginable suffering at the hands of its gentile oppressors... The broad consensus among Jewish, and even some Christian commentators, that the ‘servant’ in Isaiah 52-53 refers to the nation of Israel is understandable. Isaiah 53, which is the fourth of four renowned Servant Songs, is umbilically connected to its preceding chapters. The ‘servant’ in each of the three previous Servant Songs is plainly and repeatedly identified as the nation of Israel.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *The Complete Jewish Study Bible: Insights for Jews & Christians*. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2016), 579.

<sup>5</sup> Berlin, Adele and Brettler, Marc Zvi. *The Jewish Study Bible*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 890.

<sup>6</sup> Marshal, I. Howard. “Acts.” In *Commentary on the New Testaments Use of the Old Testament*.” G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (eds). (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 574.

<sup>7</sup> Singer, Tovia. “Who is God’s Suffering Servant? The Rabbinic Interpretation of Isaiah 53.” <https://outreachjudaism.org/gods-suffering-servant-isaiah-53/> (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018).

This claim that the servant is Israel has been supported by the passages preceding Isaiah 53. For example, passages like,

<sup>8</sup> “But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, My friend; <sup>9</sup> you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off” (Is 41:8-9 ESV).

“‘You are My witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and My servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. Before Me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after Me” (Is 43:10 ESV).

<sup>1</sup> “But now hear, O Jacob My servant, Israel whom I have chosen!” <sup>21</sup> Remember these things, O Jacob, and Israel, for you are My servant; I formed you; you are My servant; O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me” (Is 44:1,21 ESV).

“For the sake of My servant Jacob, and Israel My chosen, I call you by your name, I name you, though you do not know Me” (Is 45:4 ESV).

“Go out from Babylon, flee from Chaldea, declare this with a shout of joy, proclaim it, send it out to the end of the earth; say, ‘The LORD has redeemed His servant Jacob!’” (Is 48:20 ESV).

“And He said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Is 49:3 ESV).

“Behold, My servant shall act wisely; he shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted” (Is 52:13 ESV).

The Jewish scholarship over the years has rejected the idea that the servant was Jesus Christ. There have been reams written on this topic. An example of the lengths that some have gone to can be seen by the following,

“...the Jews for Judaism countermissionary Web site lists no less than twenty-seven objections to the application of this passage to Jesus while the Orthodox Jewish countermissionary Gerald Sigal devoted 287 pages to his attempt to refute the Christocentric interpretation.”<sup>8</sup>

Then again in rejecting the idea that Isaiah was speaking about Jesus Christ, it is has been pointed out that,

“Missionaries misleadingly assert that the entire chapter 53 of the book of Isaiah refers to Jesus as the ‘Suffering Servant’ of God who dies for the sins of the world. Someone could easily be fooled to believe this argument if Isaiah is read out of context and without a proper translation. At this point, take out a Tanach (the Hebrew Old Testament) and turn to Isaiah 52 and read straight through 53, then proceed further:

If you read the text correctly, Isaiah is clearly telling us how the nations of the world will react when they witness the future messianic-redemption of the Jewish people. (Throughout the book of Isaiah, the Jewish people are referred to as the ‘Servant of G-d’ and in the singular, e.g. Isaiah 41:8, Isaiah 49:3).”<sup>9</sup>

Hence, from this sample of the Jewish perspective (which is typical), it is held that the suffering servant is Israel. The nation of Israel suffered especially at the hands of its non-Jewish persecutors in the exile, and so this was for the sins of the nations. However, this will conclude in the future messianic-redemption of the nation of Israel.

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<sup>8</sup> Brown, Michael L. “Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53.” In *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (eds). (Kregel), 59-60.

<sup>9</sup> “Isaiah 53 and the “Suffering Servant.” <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/isaiah-53-and-the-suffering-servant/> (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018).

So then, it would appear that Isaiah 53 and its context within a Jewish perspective is correct. It has been suggested that if we are true to the Scriptures, then it, in fact, speaks of Israel being the servant of God. Thus the Jewish perspective concerning Isaiah 53 is correct, and Israel is the suffering servant. This is the only good faithful and solid exegetical and hermeneutical conclusion. Consequently, it has been stated quite strongly that, Jesus Christ is not the suffering Servant as Isaiah's intention was to write about Israel. So, seriously, where does that leave us as Christ-followers who have held Isaiah 53 to be about Jesus Christ?

## 2. Except for...

**Q.** So, what are we meant to do now?

If this is the case, how can we as Christ-followers hold to the idea that this is Suffering Messiah is Jesus Christ? Have we been presented with a delusion regarding this passage or worse a lie? Have the early Christ-followers from the second century onward fudge the Scriptures as to Jesus Christ being the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53? As we have seen about some would say that this is the case.

However, before we give up just yet, I would like to introduce a hermeneutical principle here. This is the principle of 'Interpreting Scripture by Scripture.' This is exactly what the early disciples did when trying to understand the death of Jesus Christ. On this matter, it has been said that,

"When the NT uses passages, it starts from Jesus and the knowledge that He is Saviour and Lord, and it looks back at the Scriptures (i.e. the OT) for help in understanding what that means. In particular, the first Christians needed help in understanding the surprising fact that the Messiah had been executed... Isaiah 52:13-53:12 gave crucial help in that connection."<sup>10</sup>

Whenever we approach a passage, we can have our biases. However, we need to remember that, all of the Scripture is inspired, infallible and authorised by God. So, many times we are able to cross-reference various passages and topics that are there as internal evidence in the Scriptures. This also introduces the aspect of the progressive revelation of God and Himself and His plans of salvation.<sup>11</sup> With this in mind, let us do what the early Christ-followers did and start with Jesus Christ and re-look at Isaiah 53.

Interestingly there are various Jewish writings that have stated that Isaiah 53 is in fact Messianic. As one reads these various works, it becomes obvious that this was interpreted in the stages, but has changed over time. For a brief listing of various Jewish writings throughout history see pages 60-62 of Brown's work.<sup>12</sup> Brown quoted the likes of Targum Jonathan (an Aramaic interpretation of the Hebrew Bible), The Talmud (a collection of Jewish Law and traditions), Ruth Rabbah (meaning 'great'), and the Midrash Tanchuma (three different collections of commentaries on parts of the Torah) etc. these all have something to say on the passage being about the Messiah.

In light of this, let us look at a thought-provoking section of Scripture from the book of the Acts of the Apostles. That is Acts 8:26-40, but especially verses 29-35.

<sup>29</sup> "And the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot' (of an Ethiopian eunuch of great authority under Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians). <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' <sup>31</sup> And he

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<sup>10</sup> Goldingay, J. "Servant of Yahweh," 703.

<sup>11</sup> Hernando, James D. *Dictionary of Hermeneutics: A Concise Guide to Terms, Names, Methods and Expressions*. (Springfield, MO: GPH, 2005), 34.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, "Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53," 60-62.

said, 'How can I unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.<sup>32</sup> Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and as a lamb, before its shearer is silent, so He opened not His mouth.<sup>33</sup> In His humiliation His justice was taken away, and who will declare His generation? For His life is taken from the earth." (This is Is 53:7b-8)

<sup>34</sup> So the eunuch answered Philip and said, 'I ask you, of who does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?'<sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him" (NKJV).

Wow in light of what has been said above regarding the Jewish perspective, what are we to make of this section. Do we need to remember that this Scripture in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, in quoting Isaiah was inspired by the Holy Spirit as he wrote it? Then amazingly, when the Eunuch asked who the prophet was speaking about, he had precisely identified the issue.<sup>13</sup> Philip knew the solution to the question, and went directly to Jesus and preached about Him from where the Eunuch was up to in his reading.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, as far as Philip was concerned as he was guided by the Holy Spirit, knew that this passage in Isaiah was speaking about Jesus Christ. It needs to be asked then if this section of Scripture is speaking about Him, then what about Isaiah 52:13-53:7a and 53:9-12 is it also speaking about Jesus?

If it is not speaking about Jesus Christ then, the responsibility falls on those who say that to say why it is not? Firstly, why would Philip under the guidance of the Holy Spirit take this section out of the context of Isaiah 53 and abandon the rest? Then secondly, how could Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit record this incident, without correcting Philip's account as being wrong and out of context?

Pause in His presence for a moment and think this over...

Following are some other sections of the New Testament Scripture that used Isaiah 53. They were used to teach this aspect of Jesus Christ mentioned in Isaiah was used by Matthew, Jesus and Peter is as follows,

<sup>16</sup> "When evening had come, they brought to Him (Jesus Christ) many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick,<sup>17</sup> that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 'He Himself took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses (from Is 53:4)'" (Matt 8:16-17 NKJV).

Matthew had no problem in quoting this section from Isaiah 53, as the fulfilment of this passage through Jesus Christ. Then Luke recorded Jesus Christ Himself quoting from Isaiah 53:12 about Himself as fulfilling this passage when He said,

"For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished (fulfilled) in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end" (Lk 22:37 NKJV).

While Peter in his first letter quoted from Is 53:9,

<sup>21</sup> "For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:<sup>22</sup> 'Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth' (Is 53:9);<sup>23</sup> who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;<sup>24</sup> who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes (wounds) you were healed (Is 53:5)" (1 Pet 2:21-24 NKJV).

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<sup>13</sup> Marshal, "Acts," 574.

<sup>14</sup> Keener, Craig S. *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 3:1-14:28*. Vol 2. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2013), 1586.

There is great power in these amazing sections of Scripture that have been quoted from Isaiah. The New Testament believers saw the great truth found in Isaiah. However, sadly this has not always been the case with the Jews. It has been suggested that,

“One might think the passage is obscure and irrelevant based on the fact that so many people are unfamiliar with it. That unfamiliarity in part stems from the fact that Isaiah 53 does not appear in the regular synagogue calendar readings. Yet it could be argued that the very fact that it is left out shouts out the importance of this passage. Even the reasons for omitting it point to the uniqueness of this passage. For example, one Jewish scholar, Claude Montefiore (1858-1938), explained: ‘Because of the Christological interpretation given to the chapter by Christians it is omitted from the series of prophetic lessons for the Deuteronomy Sabbaths...the omission is deliberate and striking.’”<sup>15</sup>

Then if Isaiah 53 is about the Suffering Servant (who is Jesus Christ), then it needs to be read as being thus. Although Isaiah may not have realised it, he, in fact, prophesied that this Suffering Servant would come in the future. On this matter, it has been pointed out that,

“In 1922, the late David Baron, a British Jewish believer in Yeshua who was well-versed in rabbinics, wrote in the preface to his exposition of Isaiah chapter 53:

‘...it is beyond even the wildest credulity to believe that the resemblance in every feature and minutest detail between this prophetic portraiture drawn centuries before his [Jesus] advent and the story of his life, and death, and glorious resurrection as narrated in the gospels, can be mere accident or fortuitous coincidence.’”<sup>16</sup>

How did the early Christ-followers into the second century understand Isaiah 53? Well, it is ascribed to Polycarp, the disciple of John the Apostle (the author of the Gospel, the Letters and the Revelation)<sup>17</sup> that he called this chapter “the golden passion of the Old Testament evangelist.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore he saw that theology of the Suffering Servant image in Isaiah 53 as “provides an important link between the Old Testament sacrificial system and Jesus Christ’s and atoning death.”<sup>19</sup>

When we speak of Isaiah 53, as Christ-followers we will often mean that verses 3-7 relate to Jesus Christ. However, Isaiah the prophet would not have known that he was writing about Jesus Christ as he wrote some 700 years earlier. He would have faithfully recorded what the Spirit of God had placed on his heart to write. Even though this is the case, we have seen that it is right and true to see this section of Scripture describing the suffering person and vicarious (something done for another) work of Jesus Christ. That is,

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<sup>15</sup> Goldstein, Efraim. “Who’s the Subject of Isaiah 53? You Decide!” <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v13-n06/whos-the-subject-of-isaiah-53-you-decide/> (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018). Montefiore, Claude. G. & Loewe, H. *Rabbinic Anthology*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1974) p. 544

<sup>16</sup> Goldstein, Efraim. “Who’s the Subject of Isaiah 53? You Decide!” <https://jewsforjesus.org/publications/issues/issues-v13-n06/whos-the-subject-of-isaiah-53-you-decide/> (3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018).

<sup>17</sup> Polycarp, *Polycarp's Epistle to the Philippians and the Martyrdom of Polycarp: Introduction, Text and Commentary*. Paul Hartog (ed.). (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 14. Berding, Kenneth. “John or Paul? Who was Polycarp’s Mentor?” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 58.2 (2007): 138. Berding, Kenneth. *Polycarp and Paul: An Analysis of Their Literary & Theological Relationship in Light of Polycarp’s Use of Biblical & Extra-Biblical Literature*. (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002), 9. A *Translation of The Epistles of Clement of Rome, Polycarp, and Ignatius; and of the Apologies of Justin Martyr and Tertullian: With An Introduction*. Temple Chevallier. (ed). (London: J& J.J. Deighton, n.d.), xxiv-xxv. Coxe, A. Cleveland. *The Writings of the Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*. Vol 1. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, n.d.), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, “Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” 59. Keil, Carl Friedrich & Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary of the Old Testament*. (New Updated Edition, Electronic Database. 1996, Hendrickson Publishers), to Isaiah 52:13.

<sup>19</sup> Waltke, Bruce K. and Yu, Charles. *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 476.

<sup>3</sup> “He was despised and rejected by people, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with (knowing) grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed Him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But He was pierced for our transgressions; He was crushed for our iniquities; upon Him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with His wounds, we are healed. <sup>6</sup> All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to their own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed, and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so He opened not his mouth” (Is 53:3-7 ESV).

However, what needs to be remembered is that this is preceded by Isaiah chapter 52:13-15. Here it refers to the Suffering Servant in more detail. It describes the beaten pulp of a man that Jesus Christ would become in His vicarious role of Saviour. It is here where it claims that,

<sup>13</sup> “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high. <sup>14</sup> Just as many were astonished at you, So His visage (appearance) was marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men; <sup>15</sup> So shall He sprinkle (some translations have ‘startled’) many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider” (Is 52:13-15 NKJV).

Therefore, the idea that Israel was God’s righteous and blameless Servant who would justify many, just does not work when we read Isaiah 53 in light of the pages of the Old Testament. Israel has been recorded as anything but righteous. They could not save the nations. In fact, Israel was completely opposite to the Suffering Servant mentioned here in Isaiah. It has been said that,

“...the servant was guiltless, suffering for the sins of his guilty people, who are then healed by his suffering... Israel’s sufferings in exile did *not* bring healing to the nations, while, conversely, it is impossible to read the text fairly while eliminating the feature of effectual, vicarious sufferings. Isaiah 53 indisputably features the vicarious sufferings of the righteous servant as a central theme, and that righteous servant cannot be Israel, whose sufferings have not brought atonement and forgiveness to the nations.”<sup>20</sup>

Israel does not fit this description. They (like all people), were in need of a Saviour due to their sin. The only one that fits this picture is Jesus Christ, as rightly pointed out by the New Testament writers.

In closing one last thing stands out, that is, the way the idea of the ‘servant’ is used in Isaiah from a grammatical standpoint. Namely, Isaiah has used the word ‘servant’ some 23 times in his prophetic work. Of these, he has used it sometimes as a collective for the nation of Israel. In a few cases, it is not clear whether Isaiah meant Israel or an individual. Then other times he has used it in a singular sense, highlighting an individual. It is this last usage that I would like to point out here. It has been suggested that from Isaiah 49 through to the end of chapter 53 Isaiah is speaking of the individual, seven times. In fact,

“Thus by the time we reach Isaiah 52:13, the spotlight is on a person, not a people. The picture becomes quite clear.”<sup>21</sup>

So, if Christ as the sacrificial Lamb of God has set us free, then we are not bound to sin but have been freed from it. To be precise, those who have been freed by Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant need to live as those who have are no longer bound by sin. We need to live in faith and in the belief that, we have already been freed. Specifically, we have been forgiven because of the Suffering Servants sacrifice. The power of the infinite God is clearly seen in His offering of the

<sup>20</sup> Brown, “Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” 75-76.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, “Jewish Interpretations of Isaiah 53,” 74.

vicarious sacrifice. It is seen in Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant as recorded in Isaiah. Whoever Jesus Christ has forgiven, is absolutely forgiven, and completely set free from every sin and the sin nature. What is it that you do not believe that you are not forgiven for, will master you.

## Some concluding thoughts

So, coming back to the opening question,

**Q.** What does it mean to be the Suffering Servant?

We need our eyes wide opened to see Jesus as God sees Him when we read the Bible especially the Old Testament. We have looked at Isaiah 53 in its context of from a Jewish perspective and have found it wanting. Israel cannot be the servant of God and Israel as the suffering servant. The redemption of the nations through the suffering of Israel and they're being free from the Babylonian exile has not happened. There has not been a righteous remnant which has been the redeemer of the nations.

As Christ-followers who believe in the inspired Scripture, hold that the New Testament helps us to understand Isaiah 53. Suffering Messiah is Jesus Christ. As we start from Jesus and the knowledge that, He is the Saviour and Lord, and look back at the Old Testament, it helps us understand what Isaiah 53 means. It gives an important connection between Isaiah 53 and Jesus Christ's atoning death. He is the righteous Suffering Servant who has completed the vicarious work of salvation.

Stop and think for a moment, what is it that we do not believe that we are not forgiven for, this will master us. We need to open our hearts and minds to the truth of the Scriptures and live in faith and the belief that, we have already been forgiven and are therefore free. As Isaiah has said,

“My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities” (Is 53:11b).

He has already completed this vicarious work. He cried out on the Cross that day, “It is finished!” (Jn 19:30). So it is finished. We have been forgiven because of the Suffering Servants sacrifice. Jesus Christ as the Suffering Servant fulfilled this role willingly and according to the will of God the Father. From our modern sanitised perspective, it may seem cruel or uncivilised. Consequently, it has been correctly asked and answered,

“Although the servant is ‘righteous,’ God’s wills His death (vv9-10). How could this be? Because the servant dies willingly (v12 ‘He poured out His soul unto death’), and His terrible suffering is vicarious.”<sup>22</sup>

In John's Gospel, it is recorded that Jesus said,

<sup>17</sup> “...I lay down My life that I may take it again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (Jn 10:17-18 NKJV).

Stop and listen to the Holy Spirit right now,

In response to what has been said in this paper, we need to ask:

- What personal application can be found from the passages?
- That is, what is God teaching me for today?
- That is to say, “What is God saying to me right now?”

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<sup>22</sup> *Systematic Theology: Study Bible*. English Standard Version. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 848.

- It may be something like:
  - What does He say about how we are living in light of the death of the Suffering Servant?
  - Are we walking step by step being led by the Spirit in this matter?

So, “Stop and reflect.”

“How should I respond to what is being said?” or, “so what?”

- What are you going to do about it?
- What do you need to do to respond?
- Pray and respond