

August 18

Scriptures: Read Isaiah 53 & 54

Key Verse: "...My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities."
(Isaiah 53:11)

Overview

Isaiah 53 is truly one of the most amazing and moving prophecies that portray so accurately the suffering and vicarious atonement through the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was in the plan and purpose of God for the redemption of mankind. Through this prophecy, the Ethiopian eunuch came to believe on the Lord Jesus when Philip explained its meaning (Acts 8:32-35). One might almost think that Isaiah was standing at the foot of the cross when He described so vividly the suffering Servant. He foresaw that the message of this prophecy will be rejected, since the natural man cannot understand how it would be possible for the Servant to reach such a depth of humiliation and then rise to the height of exaltation that is due to God alone (52:13-15; 53:12; Phil. 2:5-11). The Jews' expectation of their Messiah was that He would come as a mighty king, but this will occur at His second coming. Therefore, Isaiah's question, "Who has believed our report?", shows their lack of faith in God's greatest revelation and miracle — the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (53:1; John 12:38; Rom. 10:16).

Isaiah identifies the Servant as the tender shoot that will sprout from the "root out of dry ground". This indicates that He is the Messiah, the promised King, who will arise from the cut down stump of the House of David ("Jesse"; compare 11:1). From this we understand that the Messiah will have a humble beginning. Unlike the splendour involved in the arrival of a great king, Jesus will come like a commoner and therefore lack the grandeur that attracts the admiration of the world (53:2).

Isaiah appropriately describes Jesus' rejection by His own people. He was shunned and not given the honour due Him (John 1:10-11). We not only read of the cruel abuse and physical pain He endured, but also the sorrow and anguish of His soul, as He was misunderstood, abandoned, betrayed, and denied, even by those closest to Him. In these verses, Isaiah makes very clear the vicarious atonement of Jesus, for God laid on Him the sins of the world (53:6; Matt. 8:17). He was the perfect and blameless sacrificial lamb, "an offering for sin" which was the ultimate, perfect, complete, and final sacrifice that was acceptable to God (53:10-11). He fulfilled all the sacrifices and offerings of the Old Testament (Lev. 1-7). As our substitute, He suffered the punishment of sin and death that we deserved so that we might have the spiritual healing and justification that only He could give (53:5, 11; cf. 1 Pet. 2:22-24; Heb. 7:26; 9:14, 28; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Isaiah not only tells of Jesus' death, but also of His resurrection. God "shall prolong His days", for they will be without end. The suffering Servant was to live to see His spiritual seed and be an exalted Conqueror who would "divide the spoil" of the precious souls that would be won through the preaching of the Gospel (53:12).

The Servant's work of redemption, as described in chapter 53, resulted in the extension of His kingdom by the growth of the Gentile Church, as portrayed in chapter 54. The Lord calls upon the Gentile nations to sing with rejoicing, for they who were once barren and desolate, having been previously estranged from God, have now been united with Him because of the atonement of Jesus; they have produced more of His children (believers in Jesus) than the married woman, who represents the nation of Israel (54:1). In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul explains to the Gentile church of Galatia that this passage refers to the growth of the Church, wherein they, as believers in Jesus, are now the children of promise from Sarah; but the unbelieving Jews, who still cling to the Old Covenant of Sinai, are the children of Hagar, the bondwoman (Galatians 4:22-31). Therefore, the Church, which houses children of promise from both the Jews and the Gentiles, must become enlarged like a Bedouin's tent, that it may take in more children of promise to not only fill the places left desolate by the unbelieving Jews, but also to claim more nations for the Lord (54:2-3).

The Lord, through Isaiah, foretells of God's gracious restoration of Jerusalem, pictured as His covenant wife. In her youth, Jerusalem, under many wicked kings (especially Manasseh), was put to shame, and in her widowhood was left desolate after the Babylonian invasion (60:10, 15). But the Lord explains that this was only a temporary estrangement, for He would once again claim her as His own, lovingly restore her, build her up with the most precious of jewels (like the heavenly Jerusalem, Rev. 21:18-21), give her righteous children, and defend her. Why? The Lord chose her to be His Holy City, the inheritance of all His saints, the spotless Bride of Christ. They will have wonderful peace while being "taught by the Lord" (54:13; cf. John 6:45). From the birth of the New Testament Church even until that day in the Messiah's Millennial Kingdom, no attacks of the enemy shall prosper against His Church nor will any formal accusation stand, since the Lord has imputed righteousness to her (54:17).

Prayer

Lord Jesus, we recognize that Isaiah speaks of You in many places in his prophecy, but never so clearly as here in chapter 53. Help us to understand, more deeply than ever before, the depth of Your suffering, that we might love You more than ever.