

ISAIAH 53—A Double Fulfillment !

Notes by Jack W. Langford, October 15th, 1997

INTRODUCTION

There are two difficulties which are nearly insurmountable when it comes to discussing the 53rd Chapter of the book of Isaiah. *The first difficulty* is to be able to convince the Jewish person that there is an application of this passage of Scripture to the Messiah, and to Jesus of Nazareth in particular, as recorded in the four Gospels of the New Testament. *The second difficulty* is to convince the Christian that the first and basic interpretation of this passage belongs to the servant nation of Israel as found in the immediate context of the book of Isaiah itself.

To the Christian, it is an incontestable fact that Isaiah the 53rd Chapter is a remarkably clear picture of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, as God's "Suffering Servant," who perfectly fits nearly every verse of that chapter. The Greek Scriptures, called The New Testament, abound with quotations from Isaiah 53 which all make plain applications to Jesus Christ. Thus, there is not the remotest problem in the minds and hearts of Christians who point out the clear prophetic descriptions of Jesus as found portrayed in Isaiah 53. It becomes obvious to Christians that the only reason the Jews don't see this application is because they don't want to see it, and it would be a great embarrassment were they to admit to that fact.

On the other hand, I remember that as a young Christian doing work in evangelizing the Jewish people, I heard their argument that whenever the "Servant" of Isaiah is identified (which is many times) He is always said to be the people of Israel. I simply did not want to believe that either! However, as I checked this out, I found that they were absolutely right! I also learned that some very notable scholars of the Christian faith took the position that Isaiah 53 is immediately talking about the nation of Israel as God's "Suffering Servant." Even then I passed it off as merely their "personal interpretation." It was many years before I gave serious consideration to this position. In fact, it was not until I gave serious consideration to the reality and characteristics of the **Holocaust** that there was a revival of my interest in the interpretation of Isaiah 53. In light of a careful look at the Holocaust an application of Isaiah 53 to the Jewish people was not only logical, but it seemed glaringly obvious! Only then was I ready to admit this as a possibility. So then, when I studied the subject of prophetic applications more carefully, with an open mindedness to that possibility, I saw that was, indeed, the truth. Isaiah 53 really does have a basic interpretation for the nation of Israel! There is, in fact, a double application of the passage prophetically. Furthermore, I was embarrassed that I had not recognized this earlier.

A few years later, when I started writing that Isaiah 53 was, most certainly, an immediate reference to Israel, one of my fellow ministers immediately branded this as "blasphemy." I was, further, reprimanded for such a conclusion. This serves to illustrate the carnal attitude that many sincere Christians have toward this possibility. Sad to say, though that brother was a very respected minister even in my eyes, yet he had not studied

prophecy enough to understand that many Scriptural prophecies have a double meaning and fulfillment. Sometimes there is an immediate fulfillment and then a distant fulfillment. On occasions there may be two distant fulfillments. Sometimes there is the primary interpretation and then a secondary application to a given prophecy. Sometimes the secondary application of a prophecy is so pronounced and beautiful that we tend to lose sight of the primary interpretation. Such is the case in Isaiah 53.

In this particular Bible study I am endeavoring to show that there is, indeed, an immediate interpretation of Isaiah 53 regarding the nation of Israel as God's "Suffering Servant." This was to be fulfilled in the latter days, before Israel's national restoration into the promised Messianic Kingdom era. This fact is not imaginary, I can assure you. It is just as real as the picture of Jesus Christ on the very same pages of Holy Writ is real. Follow with me and I shall endeavor to demonstrate this for you.

ILLUSTRATIONS OF DOUBLE APPLICATIONS

Let us look at a few prophecies which have a double meaning or application to them. These will illustrate for us what we will also see to be true in Isaiah 53.

A.) The first prophecy from the Hebrew Scriptures which is quoted in the Greek Scriptures is found in Matthew chapter one, verses 22 and 23. This is a quote of the famous Isaiah 7:14 passage—

“Now all of this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, ‘Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call His name Emmanuel...’”

Now I want to emphasize that I have no question whatsoever that this statement from Isaiah 7:14 was meant to be a prophecy which has an application to be eventually fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is what Matthew is inspired to plainly state and I will demonstrate why in a moment. However, this is actually not the first and primary interpretation of this prophecy as found in the context of chapters 7 and 8 of Isaiah. When one goes back to the actual context of this prophecy, he will find that it first of all, definitely, has an immediate aim and fulfillment in the days of Isaiah, himself. Open your Bible to the passage and read the following contextual consideration—

- No.1 Isaiah 7:1-6. There was a serious problem in the days of King Ahaz of Judah. The kings, Rezin of Syria and Pekah of the rebellious northern tribes of Israel, were confederate in an attempt to eventually destroy Jerusalem and Judah.
- No.2 Isa. 7:7-9. God tells Isaiah to give a message of deliverance to King Ahaz of Judah.
- No.3 Isa. 7:10-11. In a further message through the prophet Isaiah, God tells Ahaz to ask for a “*sign*” that this prophecy of deliverance will come to pass as Isaiah predicted.
- No.4 Isa. 7:12. Ahaz refused to ask for a “*sign*” saying he didn't want to test the Lord.
- No.5 Isa. 7:13-17. Therefore, the Lord proceeds to give Ahaz a “*sign*” anyway. Now the “*sign*” that God gives has several characteristics:

- a.) First of all, the “*sign*” is to substantiate the original prophecy of Judah’s deliverance from the confederacy of Rezin and Pekah. Therefore, this is a “*sign*” that Ahaz must recognize and certainly Ahaz did not live another six hundred years till the Messiah was born in Bethlehem (vs. 7-9 & 16).
- b.) A young “*maiden*” (literal translation, more about this later) will bear a son and name him Emmanuel (v. 14).
- c.) The “*child*” will have rich foods until he knows to refuse evil and choose good (v. 15).
- d.) But before the “*child*” is old enough to do this, the two kings that Judah dreads will forsake their confederacy against Jerusalem (v. 16).
- e.) In addition, the Lord will bring the king of Assyria against all the land (v. 17).

It becomes obvious on the face of the contextual consideration that there must be an immediate fulfillment of this prophecy in Isaiah’s and Ahaz’s own day. And true enough, as one keeps on reading, Isaiah and his own offspring were given as “*signs*” to the nation—Isaiah 8:18. Isaiah fathers the child through the prophetess. She conceives and gives birth to a son. Before the child is old enough to say “*Mother or Daddy*,” both the kings who threatened Judah were driven away by the King of Assyria—Isaiah 8:1-4. In addition, the people of Judah will cry “*O Emmanuel*,” which means “*God is with us*”—Isaiah 8:8 & 10. Thus there is clearly an immediate fulfillment of this prophecy to the Jewish people themselves at the very time of Isaiah and Ahaz.

In fact, this fulfillment has been used by critics of the Bible, and of the miraculous birth of Christ, to vigorously argue there never was an intent in Isaiah to prophesy of the future miraculous birth of the Messiah. They say that Matthew and others merely generated and borrowed a passage that they could fit their religious ideas into at the time. However, these infidels didn’t read close enough and, therefore, did not realize that there was, indeed, a distant fulfillment intended by the Spirit of God.

There remain certain characteristics of that prophecy that are truly Messianic in nature and were not fulfilled in Isaiah’s day. These characteristics leave the passage open for a later fulfillment in Jesus Christ. This was intended by the Spirit of God who inspired the prophet to write. Note the following three important factors that substantiate this—

No.1 First of all, the Hebrew word for “maiden or young woman” is “*almah*.” Though this is not an exact Hebrew word for “virgin” (they say “*b’thoolah*” is closer), nevertheless it is admitted that “*almah*” always implies a virgin every time it is used—Gen. 24:43; Exo. 2:8; Ps. 68:25; Pro. 30:19; Song of Sol. 1:3; 6:8 and Isa. 7:14. And so it is that the Jewish translators themselves later translated it “*virgin*” when they made their famous Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures called—the Septuagint. This was many years before the birth of Jesus Christ.

No.2 Secondly, we are not told that Isaiah or the prophetess ever did actually name their child “*Emmanuel*,” nor was that given as one of his names. In fact, Isaiah named his son “Maher Shalal-Hash-Baz” (8:3), which means “the spoil

speeds, the prey hastens.” The Jewish people had simply and apparently shouted “O Emmanuel” when they realized their deliverance—but this was not the name of Isaiah’s son.

No.3 Thirdly, the original prophecy actually makes no mention of Isaiah fathering the child. This fact ties this prophecy into the line of prophecies that state or imply a miraculous birth for the Messianic Son—Gen. 3:15, “the Seed of the woman will crush the serpent’s head;” Gen. 17:15-22 & 18:9-15, the miraculous birth of Isaac, a figure of the Messiah; and Jer. 31:22, “The Lord has created a new thing in the earth, a woman shall encompass (literally, the alternate reading is the accurate translation in this text—“*bring forth*”) a man.” In other words, a unique miracle will happen—a woman will miraculously give birth to a man child.

Of course, Matthew is inspired to quote Isaiah 7:14 from the Greek Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures which, as I said before, was made by the Jewish scholars themselves, and this was long before Jesus was born. These translators used the Greek word which is nearly always understood as “*virgin*.” Thus Matthew quotes the passage accurately from the Septuagint and applies it accurately in the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. There we have the intended long-range fulfillment of the passage in the miraculous birth of Jesus Christ.

Now, no Christian should feel the need of rising up and saying, “One or the other of these interpretations is true!” or “One or the other is false!” The fact is, **both are true!** The immediate application is fulfilled in Isaiah’s own day whereas the long-range application is fulfilled in the conception and birth of Jesus Christ.

B.) Another passage Matthew quotes, and says was fulfilled in Christ, is found in Matthew 2:15—

“...[The Christ Child remained in Egypt until the death of Herod] *that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, ‘Out of Egypt have I called My Son.’*”

This is a quotation from Hosea 11:1, which in turn is a reference to Exodus 4:22,23. In Hosea 11:1 the statement very obviously is made about “*Israel*” as God’s son. That is what the text plainly says—“*When Israel was a child I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.*” The passage in Exodus, from which this is taken, also refers to the nation of Israel—“*Israel is My son...let My son go...*” Now, obviously, the first interpretation of these words is to Israel. The text leaves us no choice in the matter.

How, then, can Matthew use these words as applicable to Jesus Christ? Very simply—what happened to Israel as a nation is exactly what will happen to the Messiah also! In fact, many Jewish writers of old plainly taught that the nation of Israel was a type or figure of the Messiah! That, of course, is true. Thus, the Spirit of God moved Matthew to make another application of these words to the Messiah, Jesus Christ, because that is exactly what happened to Him, for He was likewise “*called out of Egypt.*” This amounts to a prophecy in typology, and there are many such in the Bible. Sometimes prophecies by typology are strikingly more profound than direct prophecies.

At the conclusion of this study we will note that early Jewish teachers observed the principle that Israel was a type or figure of the Messiah; what would sometimes happen to Israel, would also happen to the Messiah Who was to come. In fact, we shall see that some early Jewish interpreters even applied this principle to Isaiah 53. So, once again, we see a double application of a text of Scripture—first to Israel, and then to the Messiah, Himself.

C.) In some Bible prophecies there are actually two long-range fulfillments. The next illustration we will look at is from Matthew 3, verse 3. Matthew quotes again from Isaiah, this time from Isaiah 40 verse 3, and applies it to John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus Christ.

“For this [John the Baptist] is he who was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah saying, ‘The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight,””

Since John the Baptist was preaching out in the wilderness and preparing the way for Jesus Christ, there was a clear fulfillment of this prophecy in the person of John the Baptist. In this connection, an angel had said to John’s father, Zacharias, that John would “*go before Him [Christ] in the spirit and power of Elijah*” (Luke 1:17). In addition, later Christ said that “*if they [Israel] were to receive it—this is he [Elijah] that was to come*” (Matt. 11:14). Thus, the prophecy in Isaiah about the Messiah’s forerunner is *conditionally* fulfilled in the life and ministry of John the Baptist.

But, is this the only fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah of the forerunner to the Messiah? No, it is not! Christ made it clear that the nation of Israel, at that time, *did not receive it*. The leadership of Israel did not “*receive it*” concerning John the Baptist and they also rejected Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Therefore, Christ also taught that Elijah will yet come in the future—“*Elijah truly is coming first and will restore all things!*” (Matt. 17:11). So there are, in fact, two fulfillments regarding the prophet who will come to “*prepare the way of the Lord.*” The first was John the Baptist who was rejected (Matt. 17:12). The second will be Elijah, who will come in the midst of the Great Tribulation, just before the second coming of Christ to reign on earth. At that time Elijah will *successfully restore* man’s proper consciousness in preparation for Messiah (see—Mal. 3:1,2; 4:5,6 & Isa. 40:3-11).

Therefore, there are two long-range fulfillments of Isaiah 40 according to the Greek New Testament Scriptures. Many teachers have observed this principle of a double fulfillment of certain Biblical prophecies. I have heard it called “*the law of double reference.*” There are other examples that could be given, but this should serve to demonstrate the principle concerning certain prophecies of the Hebrew Scriptures. This is what we are to understand about the prophecy of Isaiah 53—there are two long-range fulfillments inherent in this prophecy—one to Israel and one to the Messiah. I will now endeavor to prove that.

ISAIAH 52:13-53:12

You may want to get your Bible out and follow closely as we move through the context of this passage of Scripture. As we did in Isaiah 7, let us also do as we approach Isaiah 53, by noting the context in which the passage falls.

Please also remember that chapter and verse divisions were a later invention intended to assist the reader. They are not a part of the original inspired text. Sometimes they are, indeed, very helpful and yet other times they may cause some confusion. Most Bible teachers will remind you of this fact. There really should not be one between Isaiah 52 and 53. Chapter 53, as most all expositors agree, should start at 52:13. Here is where the subject of the “Suffering Servant” begins and most of our modern Bibles will indicate this by some type of title caption at verse 13 of chapter 52.

“The Arm of The Lord” (Isa. 53:1)

In order to take a broader look at the setting for Isaiah 53, and in order to fully comprehend the total picture of what is in view, we should follow the theme of Isaiah 53:1 backwards to its immediate source. Isaiah 53:1 is speaking of a message or report concerning “*The Arm of The Lord*”—“*to whom has the Arm of the Lord been revealed?*” What does this expression mean? The theme originates in chapter 51 and verse 5. Between chapter 51 and chapter 53:1 the expression “*The Arm of The Lord*” will be used four times. The words, “*The Arm of The Lord,*” are an anthropomorphic expression, as if God, Himself, will come down with His muscular Arm and physically deliver Israel. It is speaking about the salvation God provides in terms of God’s great strength or “Arm.” This is a vivid expression because it is primarily speaking of Israel’s *physical deliverance from her enemies* (see also—Deut. 4:34; 7:19; Ps. 44:3 & Isa. 63:12). In these passages the salvation of Israel has to do with her great deliverance from the wrath of all nations just prior to the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. Let us note, then, this whole context where the “Arm of The Lord” (Israel’s salvation) is discussed in preparation for understanding chapter 53.

Isaiah 51 begins by calling upon Israel to “listen” to God, and to “look” to Him for its deliverance. Then in verses 4-6 we are introduced to the beginning of this theme of Israel’s salvation. “*My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone forth, and My Arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait upon Me, and on My Arm they trust...but My salvation will be for ever...*”

In verse 9 of this same chapter the cry for God’s Arm to “awaken” is made. “*Awake, awake, put on strength, O Arm of the Lord! Awake as in the ancient days.*” As God gave great physical deliverance to the people of Israel down in Egypt, even so will He deliver Israel at this future time.

In verse 17 of this chapter we have important information about Israel’s very pitiful condition as a result of drinking from the cup of God’s wrath. Now the call comes for Israel to “awaken.” “*Awake, awake! Stand up, O Jerusalem, You who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of His fury; You have drunk the dregs of the cup of trembling and drained it out.*” This “cup” of judgement testifies to some horrible calamity that has befallen the people of Israel. This calamity was allowed under the

disciplinary judgment of God. The “cup” of wrath had come upon Israel in the form of terrible affliction by the nations. During the Holocaust, Yitzhak Zuckerman, the Warsaw Zionist wrote concerning the horrors they were experiencing in the Warsaw Ghetto purges. In so doing he made reference to this passage in Isaiah 51:17, “that the poison cup was not yet empty, and that we would have to drain it to its last dregs.” The text speaks of the nations saying to Israel, “*Lie down, that we may walk over you.*” And Israel had laid their bodies down as the very ground that the nations would trample upon. In verses 21-23, God says He will now put this awful “cup” into the hands of Israel’s enemies. This would mean that God will reverse the procedure. Instead of Israel being trampled upon, God will now trample upon the nations.

Now chapter 52 begins, and verses 1-6 continue the theme. “*Awake, awake! Put on your strength, O Zion.*” Here God tells Israel, “*Shake yourselves from the dust...loose yourselves from the bonds.*” God traces the past history of Israel and says that as He delivered them from Egypt so will He do in the future time of this prophetic deliverance.

Verses 7-12 now announce the great message of Israel’s salvation in that future day when God will “***bare His holy Arm.***” This great salvation will be done before the eyes of all the nations of earth (verse 10). In verses 11 and 12 God will go before and behind Israel, as their guard and protector, just as He did when He brought them out of Egyptian bondage. This, of course, is to be done at the coming of the Messiah Who will deliver Israel and judge the nations in holy wrath.

Actually then, this is the setting for the “Suffering Servant” who will now be viewed by the nations of earth. Chapter 52 and verse 13 begins the picture of this “Suffering Servant” whom God has delivered. Now the nations of earth will look upon Him in total surprise and shock. The Servant had been battered so severely and yet He stands up for the time of deliverance. From this contextual perspective we realize that the “***Arm of The Lord, revealed***” of Isaiah 53:1 is none other than the great salvation of suffering Israel who will now be “*greatly exalted.*” All the nations of earth will look upon this great “***salvation***” of the nation of Israel. Though Israel had been “*trampled upon*” by the nations, and though Israel had “*drunk the cup of God’s wrath*”—yet now Israel shall be greatly exalted.

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently” (Isa. 52:13).

Though I firmly believe that this passage of Scripture has a dual application, both to Jesus Christ and also to the nation of Israel, yet now, for the sake of my Christian brethren, I will emphasize and point out its application to Israel. In all cases where the Servant is plainly identified, it is always identified as “Israel or Jacob.” Note the following—

Isaiah 41:8,9, “*But you, **Israel**, are My Servant, **Jacob**, whom I have chosen...You Are My Servant...*”

44:1,2, “*Near now, O **Jacob** My Servant, and **Israel** whom I have chosen... O **Jacob** My Servant...*”

44:21, “*Remember these, O **Jacob**, and **Israel**, for you are My Servant... My Servant, O **Israel**...*”

45:4, “*For **Jacob** My Servant’s sake, and **Israel** My elect...*”

48:20, “*The Lord has redeemed His Servant Jacob!”*

49:3, “*You are My Servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified...*”

These are not all the passages where the “Servant” is mentioned. However, I am merely pointing out that where the Servant is identified it always refers to Israel as the Servant (see also Jer. 30:10 and Ps. 136:22). In several of the passages that speak of the Servant I am quite confident there is a double application to both Israel and the Messiah—Isaiah 53 is one of them. It has been well known that in the Scriptures Israel is likened to “the Servant of the Lord.” (Sometimes God makes reference to certain kings as His servants as well.)

In returning to Isaiah 52 and verses 13-15, we see that the Servant, instead of being “afflicted” (51:21) and trampled upon (51:23) by the nations, will now be “highly exalted” (52:13). The nations of earth and their kings will be shocked at the sight of this one who was so brutally marred (verse 14) that he hardly looks like a man—and yet he is so greatly exalted. The text says—

“So shall He startle 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” (52:15).

“Who could believe what we have heard? And to whom has the Arm of the Lord been revealed?” (53:1).

Verse 1. This particular translation of verse one is important (see—*Jewish Publication Society translation; American Standard Version, margin; New English Bible; Jerusalem Bible; Revised Standard version; New Revised standard Version; Rotherham’s Literal Translation, etc.*). This rendering makes two things more evident: first, it shows the relationship with 52:15, “*what they had not heard,*” and this verse 1, “*what we have (now) heard* (or our report);” and secondly, these two Hebrew words being closely related indicate that the nations are now speaking and responding to what has been revealed. They have seen “*The Arm of the Lord revealed,*” and that has reference to the salvation of Israel. Remember that the “Arm of the Lord” here in this verse is the same as in 51:5 & 9 and 52:10—which clearly has to do with the great physical salvation of Israel by God. In this connection we can realize that the nations are going to be viewing a nation that has suffered almost unbelievably.

Verse 2. They will view Him as a “***tender plant or root out of a dry ground.***” This can be applicable to the Messiah—Isaiah 11:1. However, Israel was also spoken of as a “root”—Isaiah 27:6; 37:31; Ps. 80:8-18 & Hosea 14:4-7.

Verse 3. “***Despised and rejected [forsaken] by men.***” Though this was true of Christ, yet this was often specifically stated concerning the nation of Israel. Especially is this true in the context of Isaiah—Isaiah 49:7, 14; 54:6,7; 60:14,15 & 62:4, 12.

Verse 4. “***Stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.***” Again, though this was true of Christ, yet this is often stated specifically about Israel in the context of Isaiah—Isaiah 1:5; 27:7; 40:2; 49:13; 51:21 & 63:9.

Verses 5 & 6. “***The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all.***” Surprising as it may be, not only was the suffering of Christ vicarious, but in a sense the sufferings of Israel have

been vicarious as well. No one would argue (except a vicious anti-Semitic, like Adolf Hitler) that those nations who both cooperated in and were directly responsible for the murder of over six million Jews were not wicked and sinning against God in their committing of the most heinous crime ever chronicled in the history of the humanities. Historians themselves say that everything else, in the records of man's inhumanity to man, pales before the total story of the Holocaust. The Jews bore all this iniquity. This is one sense in which Israel, as a Suffering Servant, bore the sins of the nations which committed the crime and those which stood idly by in seeming indifference. In addition, the nations which participated directly in that crime and others that stood idly by, actually deserved by their very wickedness the punishment that the Jews took upon themselves. In that sense the Jew bore what the nations deserved. Therefore, repentance towards Israel and repentance towards the Messiah will be the basis for the *social* and the *spiritual* redemption of the nations in the coming Kingdom of the Messiah. This is plainly spelled out by Jesus Christ, Himself, as recorded in Matthew 25:31-46. Whereas the Messiah suffered for the personal spiritual redemption of all mankind, yet Israel's suffering is the basis for the social redemption of the nations into the Millennial Kingdom.

Verse 7. *“As a Lamb to the slaughter.”* Not only was this true of Jesus Christ, but God also likens Israel's suffering with the very same language—see Ps. 44:11 & 22; Zech. 11:4 & 7. In addition, this exact phraseology was used repeatedly by observers during the Holocaust. In fact, it was the most common expression made describing the Jews going to their deportations, concentration camps and deaths.

Verse 8. Though it is true that Christ was *“stricken”* for the transgressions of Israel, and for the world as well, yet it is noteworthy that the last phrase of this verse has the plural *“them”* for this Servant. Literally translated—*“...for the transgression of my people was the stroke to them.”* (See the *Interlinear, Hebrew-English* by Kohlenberger and the *Hebrew Dictionary* by Alcalay.) *“Them (plural),”* meaning the people of Israel.

A secondary question arises in this verse—Who are the *“my people”* spoken of in this verse? On the one hand, if the nations are still speaking, it refers to them. However, the plural pronouns *“we,” “our,”* and *“us all”* stop at verse six. beginning at verse seven it appears that Isaiah the prophet, himself, is speaking. If that is the case, then the expression *“my people”* has reference to Isaiah's own people—Israel. Whereas in verses 1-6, Israel suffers on behalf of the nations, yet now in verse 8 it becomes evident that it is also because of their own *“transgression”* (singular) that the *“stroke [came] to them.”*

Verse 9. *“They made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death.”* The word *“death”* in this passage is also in the plural form. This is well-known by expositors, and should be literally rendered *“deaths.”* Thus, we observe that the inspired writer sometimes switches from the singular to the plural in describing both the Servant and His experience. As applicable to Christ it would mean that He died both physically and spiritually. As to the burial of Christ, we know that He was placed in a rich man's tomb. It is also a notable fact that in the Holocaust all the bodies of the victims were mingled together at death; the rich and the poor, and those totally innocent people were often indiscriminately mingled together with obvious criminals with no difference.

Verse 10. *“He shall see His seed, he shall prolong His days.”* When taken literally it would have an obvious reference to the continued physical progeny of this Servant—

Israel. Otherwise, the expression “He shall prolong His days” certainly can have reference to *either the resurrection of the Messiah, or of the nation of Israel.*

Verse 11. “My Righteous Servant shall justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities.”

Of course this is true of the Messiah Who provides for the spiritual soul salvation of mankind, but it is also true that God’s promise to Israel was that eventually they would become “priests” bearing and interceding on behalf of the world—see Exo. 19:5,6; Num. 18:1; Isa. 61:6; Zech. 8:13, 23 & Isa. 2:3.

Verse 12. “...and He shall divide the spoil.” This can be an allusion to the spiritual rewards due to the magnificent victory of Messiah over evil (Eph. 4:8). In addition, the continuing context of Isaiah shows unmistakably how great will be the treasures that God will bestow upon and through His Servant, Israel—simply read Isaiah 54:1-56:8.

Chapter 54 of Isaiah continues the theme of Israel’s restoration and exaltation—

***“For a mere moment I have forsaken you,
but with great mercies I will gather you.
With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment;
but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy upon you...”***
—Isaiah 54:7 & 8

Thus, the whole context for this “Suffering Servant” passage is actually the final restoration of the nation of Israel at the very beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. There is indeed, therefore, an immediate, contextual application of this prophecy to be seen in the nation of Israel just prior to and at the beginning of the future Kingdom Age. This interpretation, as it applies to Israel, is in no way, shape or form a denial of the beautiful spiritual truths of application to the substitutionary, sacrificial death of Jesus Christ for the spiritual atonement of the sins of the world.

***THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE SUFFERING SERVANT
AS APPLYING TO ISRAEL
WAS OBSERVED BY CERTAIN CHRISTIAN SCHOLARS***

Most conservative, fundamental, evangelical Christians are not aware of the fact that a good number of Bible scholars have long taught that this passage of Scripture, though obviously a foretelling of the person and work of Jesus Christ in the spiritual redemption of mankind, nevertheless in context is also fundamentally a clear picture of the place Israel has as God’s “Suffering Servant” for the social redemption of mankind. This will be performed at the future coming of the Messiah to deliver Israel and reign on earth. These two lines of Bible prophecy do not contradict nor eradicate each other.

E.W. Bullinger was both a great scholar and a very conservative Bible teacher. He states very plainly that Isaiah 53, in context, has an immediate interpretation to the nation of Israel. Yet, at the very same time, there is a Scriptural and beautiful application to the Lord Jesus Christ—see, *How to Enjoy The Bible*, pages 393-397, 1990 by Kregel, from the 4th edition, 1916.

Several modern Christian Study Bibles are now openly declaring this interpretation as applying to Israel. See *The Oxford Annotated Bible* (both the R.S.V. and

the N.R.S.V.), and also *The Harper Collins Study Bible* (N.R.S.V.). The older *Westminster Study Bible*, published in 1948, gives more details in explaining the same interpretation.

A goodly number of critical scholarly works by Christians done on the whole book of Isaiah have given this interpretation. However, sometimes this has been done by liberal scholars who apply it only to Israel's past history in an effort to do away with any miraculous aspect of Biblical prophecy. Countering this, much of the time, conservative scholars will only admit to the application to Jesus Christ. Both of these conclusions are wrong, as the foregoing Bible study has demonstrated.

MY OWN PAST EXPERIENCE

From 1953 through 1955 I personally was employed, in several different capacities, by the "Biblical Research Society" of Los Angeles, Calif. For the most part this was while I was also a Bible College student. This particular organization was a distinguished mission to evangelize the Jewish people. Its primary aim was to reach the rabbis who are the leaders in Judaism. Its methodology was through the publication of literature. There were also several branch offices in other parts of the country. During that time I sat under the teaching ministry of the administrator, David L. Cooper, who was a well-known Hebrew scholar and a conservative Bible teacher. David L. Cooper wrote the very significant "Messianic Series" of books. His main objection to viewing Isaiah 53 as having an application to Israel as the "Suffering Servant" was stated thusly, "never in the pages of Jewish history can it be shown that the nation or a remnant of the nation has voluntarily suffered in behalf of others." Nor had he ever known of "the Jews bear(ing) all the oppression heaped upon them like lambs" (*The Eternal God revealing Himself* by David L. Cooper, pages 223 & 224). However, David L. Cooper's book was written in 1928, without looking into the long history of "Christian" anti-Semitism in the brutal form of the Crusades, Inquisitions and pogroms, and most certainly this was long before the Holocaust.

One Saturday morning I went into the office of David L. Cooper to begin my usual cleanup of the whole upstairs offices and meeting room in order to prepare it for the Sunday morning services that were also held there. As I went around "Dr" Cooper's huge desk to start cleaning behind it, my eyes caught sight of two new volumes sent to him. The titles arrested my curiosity—*Blessed Is The Match* by Marie Ayrkin, and *The Final Solution* by Gerald Reitlinger. At that time the only thing I knew about what was later called "The Holocaust" were the photographs and newsreels of piles of emaciated, naked bodies in huge trenches taken at the close of World War Two. I had not even realized at that time that most of these victims were Jews.

So, instead of cleaning, I sat down in the comfortable scholar's chair behind his desk and began reading. I became mesmerized for many hours. When I finally lifted up my eyes it was dark outside. I had been immersed nearly all day long into a realm of unspeakable horror and suffering. I now knew clearly of the special venom that the Nazi regime, along with many others, had for the Jewish people. To me the most amazing thing about it all was that "***they went like sheep to the slaughter.***" I had to literally "shake loose" from my spell in that kingdom of death to quickly clean up that building.

But the one phrase that I could not “shake loose” from was the words I had read “as lambs to the slaughter.” I very clearly remember feeling, at first as a Christian, that their use of this phrase was an infringement upon my Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who alone was “the Lamb Who went to the slaughter” for the sins of the world and for my own! Yet I could not doubt their own experiences. I reasoned further, as I pushed my dust mop out of that office and down the hall, “these other people, the Jews, are only telling of their factual experiences through that awful ordeal in the very same terms—and perhaps I can and should allow for that application of the expression as well.”

WHY THE HOLOCAUST ?

And now, over fifty years after the Holocaust, the whole story has become very clear and nearly complete. However, the question that has plagued the minds of historians, sociologists, philosophers, and theologians of all persuasions has remained—“Why the Holocaust?” How could the modern civilized world have been caught in such a perverted catastrophe? Of course, this question has especially haunted the Jewish mind. How can it be explained? Why would God ever allow such a thing to happen to His “chosen people”?? And there, emerging through the withering and fading gloom of confusion is the script of Isaiah 53—God’s “Suffering Servant,” who was ruthlessly maligned and slaughtered under our very noses in this modern 20th century while most nations backed away in amusement, repulsion or indifference. The haunting question that seems to be unanswered IS answered in Isaiah 53! Israel suffered, as it were, on behalf of the nations of earth, bearing their iniquities. And now posted around the world are museums, monuments and memorials of all kinds, reminding the world of the horrible crime that was committed, and in turn soliciting from the world a solemn sorrow and repentance. Will the world recognize its depravity in repentance?

And yet, in addition, Israel suffered because of her own “transgression” as well. Most all Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox Jewish teachers recognize this. I have read many articles from the different Jewish branches searching for an answer. Their main problem has been finding and specifying “the sin” that was the basis for God forsaking them. Here, mere religious rationalizations are of no avail. Here again, Isaiah answers that question. The very fact that Israel’s suffering is uniquely coupled with that seemingly inexplicable suffering of the Messiah, indicates that Israel’s suffering as related to her “transgression,” is also in her relationship to the Messiah’s death. The only sin that Israel could possibly be guilty of, that is in proportion to the magnitude of the Holocaust, is the sin of rejecting her Messiah. Will the Jewish people recognize their historic unbelief in repentance?

Whereas Israel’s suffering is the basis for the social redemption of the nations of earth into that Millennial Kingdom, the suffering of the Messiah is the basis for the eternal spiritual redemption of all the world, and for Israel herself. We must remember that the Law Dispensation ended with the Holocaust of God’s dear Son, and a new Age began shortly thereafter. So it is, this present Christian Dispensation is concluding with another Holocaust—that of the Jew—and most assuredly, a new Age is about to begin. Indeed, this prophecy of Isaiah 53, as it has to do with Israel’s suffering, will shortly see its final phase called in the Bible “The time of Jacob’s trouble” (Jeremiah 30:7a). However, there will be one important difference—

“But He [Israel] Shall Be Saved Out Of It” (Jeremiah 30:7b).

In addition, we should exclaim, “Woe be to the nations of earth who shall now drink from “the cup of God’s fury” (Isaiah 51:22,23)!”

***ISAIAH 53 WAS LONG UNDERSTOOD BY JEWISH SAGES
AS REFERRING TO THE MESSIAH !***

Many Jews today have been taught, and therefore think, that the early Christian Church came up with a new and novel interpretation of Isaiah 53 as referring to the Messiah—Jesus Christ. Jews today have been taught that this passage was always understood as referring to the nation of Israel, and so the Jewish teachers have interpreted it throughout the ages. Such is very plainly NOT the truth!

Jewish teachers from the very first century have almost always taught that the “Suffering Servant” passage of Isaiah 52 & 53 had reference to the Messiah Himself. To establish this, allow me to quote extensively from the following source, *The Messiah Texts, Jewish Legends of Three Thousand years*, by the internationally regarded Jewish scholar, Raphael Patai. He is a noted anthropologist, Biblical scholar and author. He has taught Hebrew at the University of Jerusalem and other subjects in the United States. His research and concluding statements on this subject are very impressive.

From the Introduction, page 23. “This great poet-prophet [Isaiah] spoke repeatedly about the ‘Servant of the Lord,’ describing the call, mission, sufferings, death, and resurrection of this mysterious individual (Isa. 42:1-4; 49:1-6; 50:4-9; 52:13-53:12). As to the identification of this ‘Servant,’ there is no scholarly consensus to this day. However, the Aggada, the Talmudic legend, unhesitatingly identifies him with the Messiah, and understands especially the descriptions of his sufferings as referring to Messiah ben Joseph.”

From The Biblical Preamble, pages 1 & 2. “The important prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah about the Suffering servant, for instance, are considered by Jewish as well as Christian scholars as referring to the people of Israel as a whole...personified in ‘the Servant of the Lord.’ Yet these same passages became in Talmudic times identified with the Messianic theme, and so they have remained in Jewish folk consciousness throughout the ages. In fact, it is quite probable that the concept of the suffering Messiah, fully developed in the Talmud, the Midrash, and the Zohar, has its origin in the Biblical prophecies about the Suffering Servant, as shown by the direct reference to Isaiah 53:5 in describing the sufferings of the Messiah in the Talmud, the Midrash Konen (eleventh or twelfth century), and the Zohar (thirteenth century).”

From pages 166 & 167. “Scholars have repeatedly speculated about the origin of the Messiah ben Joseph legend and the curious fact that the Messiah figure has thus been split in two. It would seem that in the early legend, the death of the Messiah was envisaged, perhaps as a development of the Suffering Servant motif. A prophecy of Daniel, written about 164 B.C.E., is the earliest source speaking of the death of a *Mashiah* (‘Anointed’) sixty-two (prophetic) weeks after his coming and after the return and rebuilding of Jerusalem (Dan. 9:24-26)...some two centuries later, the author of IV Ezra unmistakably refers to the Messiah...My son the Messiah shall die.”

(Continuing). “When the death of the Messiah became an established tenet in Talmudic times, this was felt to be irreconcilable with the Messiah as the Redeemer who would usher in the blissful millennium of the Messianic age. The dilemma was solved by splitting the person of the Messiah in two: one of them, called Messiah ben Joseph...after many victories and miracles, would fall victim to God and Magog. The other, Messiah ben David, will come after him (in some legends will bring him back to life, which psychologically hints at the identity of the two), and will lead Israel to the ultimate victory, the triumph, and the Messianic era of bliss.”

(Continuing). “This splitting of the Messiah in two persons, which took place in the Talmudic period, achieved another purpose besides resolving the dilemma of the slain Messiah. According to an old tradition, the Messiah was perfectly prefigured in Moses. But Moses died before he could lead the Children of Israel into the Land of Promise. Consequently, for the parallel to be complete, the Messiah, too, had to die before accomplishing his great task of ultimate redemption. Since, however, the Messiah would not be the true Redeemer of God if he did not fulfill that ultimate task, the only solution was to let one Messiah, like Moses, die, and then assign the completion of the work of Redemption to a second Messiah.”

From pages 42, 43 & 104, 105. Raphael Patai shows that the various Messiah legends have an aim of merging the Messiah and Israel together in sufferings. “No other legend in the great Messiah cycle shows as clearly as this one that the Messiah is none other than Israel personified...Messiah voluntarily undertook the sufferings in order to ease the fate of Israel...”

(Continuing). “In all of this the Messiah becomes heir to the Suffering Servant of God, who figures prominently in the prophecies of Deutero-Isaiah, and who suffers undeservedly for the sins of others...There can be little doubt that psychologically the Suffering Messiah is but a projection and personification of Suffering Israel.”

Another source—in the first century, Jonathan ben Uzziel, began his Targum on this passage of Isaiah: “Behold, my Servant, Messiah, shall prosper; He shall be high and increase, and be exceeding strong.” In further commentary he refers all the statements in the passage about the exaltation of the Servant as referring to the Messiah, and all those statements that speak of the Servant’s suffering as referring to the nation of Israel. Therefore, even at this early date he made application to both.

Rabbi Don Yitzchak Abaranel (about 1500) believed in the singular application of the passage to Israel alone; nevertheless, he admits that the view of Jonathan ben Uzziel “is also the opinion of our learned men in the majority of their Midrashim.”

Other examples can be given but these should suffice. It is clear therefore that, historically and without prejudice, many Jewish interpreters in past times saw an application of this passage of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 to the Messiah. Why then does the modern Jewish interpreter become so zealous to avoid this application to the Messiah and only emphasize the application to Israel? No doubt, the heart’s attitude is a determining factor. This should remind us of the passage in Isaiah about the “Servant” that most certainly does apply to Israel—Isaiah 42:18-20—

*“Hear, you deaf;
And look, you blind, that you may see.
Who is blind as My Servant,
Or deaf as My messenger whom I send?
Who is blind as the chosen one,
Seeing many things, but you give no heed;
With the ears open, but he does not hear.”*

My final prayer is that both Christians and Jews will open their spiritual eyes (hearts) to see the beautiful truths that the inspired writer has given to his own people and beyond them to all the world.

THE END