

ISAIAH – LESSON TWENTY

ISAIAH 53:10 - 54

Ch. 53:10-12 – Victory and Reward

How can these verses be labeled “Victory and Reward” given the way they begin – **“Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin . . .”** As Peter declared on the day of Pentecost, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and **foreknowledge of God**, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain (Acts 2:23). Despite the innocence of the Servant, the Lord took pleasure in bruising him. His death was not in the hands of wicked men (Acts 2:23), but in the Lord’s hands. This does not absolve from responsibility those who put the Servant to death, but they were not in control of the situation. They were doing only that which God permitted them to do. In the Lord’s pleasure there was no delight, nor does the word mean that the Lord took pleasure in the Servant’s being bruised on the part of others. Indeed, he briefly turned his face away from Calvary’s awful scene (Mt. 27:46). That which pleased the Lord was providing a sacrifice adequate for the redemption of man. His delight was in that which the Servant achieved. This was the cost of salvation. The life that the Christ poured out was an adequate, perfect, and complete offering in every respect (10).

Three results follow the offering of this sacrifice. 1) **He shall see his seed**; the Servant shall see his spiritual posterity, the new spiritual Israel born of his sacrifice, spread abroad and possess the nations (54:3; cf. Rom. 2:28-29; Gal. 6:15-16; Phil. 3:3). 2) **He shall prolong his days**, extend his years into the infinite future. Clearly this is a reference to the resurrection, for his death has been plainly announced (8-9). He was dead, but is now alive forevermore and holds the keys of death and Hades (Rev. 1:17-18). 3) **And the pleasure of Jehovah shall prosper in his hand**. It pleased Jehovah to bruise the servant so that his purpose might be achieved. It was God’s good pleasure that through his victory the new Israel would prosper, its destiny resting in his hand. The servant now occupies the throne of God as KING OF KINGS and LORD

OF LORDS (Rev. 19:16). He is the head of the redeemed body (Eph. 1:22). Through his sacrifice and suffering, he has acquired the right to hold the book of God's plan for human redemption (Rev. 5:4-7). The saints are given power to overcome Satan through the blood of him who made sacrifice (Rev. 12:11). This is **the pleasure of Jehovah** that continues to prosper in the Servant's hand (11).

By his sacrifice and conquest over sin and death, the Servant will not only justify many, but will also triumph in victory over Satan. **"Therefore (because of his victory) I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors."** The Servant will be given a place among the great conquering ones of the earth. Paul declares, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name." In his conquest, the Servant will divide the spoil with the strong, the mighty or powerful one. Haley suggests that this points to the Servant's conquest over Satan (the strong one) and the deliverance of many of those whom he held captive. He adds that the Servant divides the booty with Satan, citing Luke 11:21-22: 21 "When the strong man fully armed guardeth his own court, his goods are in peace: 22 But when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him his whole armor wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils." It seems clear, however, that spoils are not divided with the one conquered, but with those who were on the conqueror's side. So it is here. Young seems closer to the mark:

"The thought is that the servant will be as successful and triumphant in his mission as other victors were in theirs. There are many who are victors and they will receive the spoils of their victory. Among them is the Servant. Perhaps it is true that "many" here signifies "great ones", or "mighty," but of this one cannot be certain. The speaker is God."

. . . . The servant appears as the primary agent who divides the spiritual victories and fruits (i.e. the spoil) with the mighty Those who are here spoken of as "the many" and "the strong" are the spiritual seed

mentioned in verse 10. His people participate in the enjoyment of the spoils of his victory.

The chapter closes with a recapitulation of the reasons why the servant is so gloriously exalted. He exposed his soul unto death; he voluntarily laid it bare even to death. No man took his life from him, but he laid it down of himself. The verb in the second clause may have a reflexive sense (*he permitted himself to be numbered*). Although he permitted himself to be numbered with the transgressors, nevertheless, he bore the sin of many. These transgressors were not mere evil doers, but were criminals and the New Testament so interprets the passage (Luke 22:37; Matt. 26:54, 56; Mark 15:27-28¹). The events that occurred fulfilled the prophecy; the Servant was condemned as a blasphemer (Matt. 26:65; crucified with malefactors (Luke 23:32), called “that deceiver” (Matt. 27:63), and regarded generally by the Jews as accursed (Deut. 21:32). Nevertheless, the Servant bore their transgressions and made intercession for them. That is love. That is grace. That is God.

One last thought. A survey of the literature from the period of the early church reveals surprising evidence. As one might expect, the church fathers see Jesus as the fulfillment of Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. However, the early evidence from Judaism also suggests that Isaiah’s words describe the Messiah.

The Targum² to Isaiah, an early Aramaic witness to the Hebrew Old Testament, interestingly adds the words “The Messiah” after the words “my servant” in 52:13.

1. The ASV omits v. 28, but includes it in the margin with the admission that many ancient authorities contain it.

2. A written translation or paraphrase of a biblical text. While “Targum” could designate a translation of a biblical text into any language, it is to the corpus of Aramaic versions composed in rabbinic times that the term more specifically applies. The rabbis realized the importance of Targum as a highly effective means of religious education in schools, as well as in the liturgical setting of the synagogue. The Targum was understood as part of the Oral Torah.

Jewish scholars of the early Christian era in the Aramaic Targum on the prophets paraphrase Isaiah 42:1, “Behold my Servant Messiah” and begin Isaiah 52:13, “Behold my Servant Messiah will prosper.”

And the Targum does not stand as a lone witness. Jewish authorities who debated early church leaders did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, but they agreed Isaiah's words described the Messiah.

The first known Jewish commentator to suggest that Israel might be the suffering servant was Rashi, who lived in the 11th century AD. Rashi found his supporters, but Jewish commentators after Rashi sometimes disagreed with him, arguing the messianic view but distinguishing the Messiah from Jesus as earlier Jewish interpreters had done.

This evidence is important because sometimes one gets the impression Judaism has always maintained the servant is Israel, whereas the church has believed the servant is Jesus. Actually, both Judaism and Christianity appear to have been united for a millennium in believing 52:13 – 53:12 described the Messiah. The difference of opinion lay only with the issue of the Messiah's specific identity.

CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

THE FUTURE SPLENDOR OF ZION

Vv. 1-8 – The Joy and Enlargement of Zion

There is a close relationship between 52:13 – 53:12. The undertone of grief, sadness, and suffering that characterized those verses gives way to joy, singing, and assurance. All attempts to interpret this chapter as a prophecy of the exiles' return from Babylon and the rebuilding of physical Israel as a nation and of physical Jerusalem as a city are extremely weak. The subject here is the glorious results of the Servant's sacrificial work redeeming a spiritual people. Chapter 54 reveals God fulfilling his ultimate plan. This interpretation is in perfect harmony with the Old Testament prophecies, the work of Christ, and the teaching of the apostles. The church as a part of God's eternal purpose was no accident or afterthought; it was very definitely in his plan (Eph.

3:9-11) and was foreshadowed in Isaiah. Although neither Zion nor Jerusalem is named between chapter 52, where both terms occur four times, and chapters 59 and 62 respectively, it is evident that the symbolic wife of Jehovah in chapter 54 is Jerusalem-Zion. Fallen and disgraced like a drunken woman with no one to guide her (51:17-18), she is restored under the Servant and raised to a state of unparalleled glory.

Verses 1-5 are a development of chapter 49:14-23. Zion was barren during the time of her captivity, which was a period of separation, not divorcement (50:1), from Jehovah her husband. But now this desolate period, the result of judgment, is over. Zion is to break forth in joyous singing, for she who did not travail³ in childbirth is now to bear profusely. Given Paul's allegory of Sarah and Hagar (Gal. 4:21-31) where he quotes this verse, Isaiah is speaking of the children to be born of the spiritual promise (Gen. 12:3) rather than those born of the fleshly promise (Gen. 12:2). This promise of spiritual posterity through Abraham's seed was fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom, the church. At this point the Servant, the husband, takes back spiritual Zion as his wife to bear spiritual children unto him (1).

More children require greater living quarters. The curtains (the panels that make up the tent) need to be stretched and the stakes need to be strengthened. Why the figure of a tent when God's dwelling place among his people will be permanent (33:20). Perhaps it is because God's children, wherever they are found, will be nomadic in nature, being sojourners and pilgrims" in the world (1 Pet. 2:11-12). They walk as did the apostles who had "no certain dwelling place" (1 Cor. 4:11). They may live in a tent, but it is to be large enough to accommodate the family and strong enough to protect it from any storm (2).

3. The Hebrew word used here refers to labor in child bearing. The Hebrew word used in 53:11 refers to labor by a workman, *e.g.*, as in construction on a building.

Zion will spread in all directions. They shall possess the nations, *i.e.*, conquer the Gentiles, not by military power but by spiritual conquest. This will lead to the inhabitation of formerly desolate cities (3).

Zion is not to fear any person or thing or power. Neither shall it be ashamed or confounded. She has put behind her her former idolatry and immorality. These, along with the reproach of her widowhood, are to be remembered no more (4).

In fact, her widowhood is an aberration; Jehovah is still her husband. Jehovah loved her but hated her wicked ways. She was the unfaithful wife of his youth who had been cast off, but is now called home (5-6).

She had been forsaken for a “small moment,” but is gathered with great mercy. Jehovah’s wrath had overflowed and hidden his face, but now he looks to her with everlasting kindness and mercy (7-8).

“For his anger *endureth but* a moment; in his favour *is* life: weeping may endure for a night, but joy *cometh* in the morning” (Psa. 30:5).

Vv. 9–10 – “As the Waters of Noah”

As God swore after “the waters of Noah” flooded the world that such would never happen again, so he swears that he will not be wroth with or rebuke his wife. The mountains will depart and the hills will be removed before his loving kindness departs from her or his covenant of peace be removed from her. A new name for Jehovah assures performance – Jehovah that hath mercy on thee (9-10). This promise is not made to physical Israel, but to spiritual Israel. Natural Israel and physical Jerusalem both experienced the vent of his indignation from soon after the return from exile until the destruction by the Romans. The promise made to spiritual Israel does not mean that it will never be tested. What it does mean is that though she might be unmercifully persecuted by her enemies and forced to pass through the floods and fire of tribulation, the true spiritual Zion and Jerusalem (the church) will never be the object of God’s wrath and judgment of destruction (cf. Hab. 2:6-7; Zech. 14:1-5; Heb. 12:22-28).

In the midst of a changing, crumbling, and passing world where new theories are ever being substituted for tried and true values, there are some things that are permanent, unshakable, and immovable. God's being and character are fixed; the deity, victory, and rule of Christ are permanent; a kingdom that cannot be shaken has been received (Heb. 12:28); a firm foundation stands, having the seal of God (2 Tim. 2:19); the constitution of that kingdom, the covenant of peace sealed by Christ's blood (Matt. 26:28) shall not pass away (Matt. 24:35).

Vv. 11-17 – Jerusalem's Glory and Permanence in the Messianic Age

Jerusalem is seen as she was during the captivity – “O thou afflicted.” From the past, captivity, Isaiah looks to the future, deliverance. That which the ASV calls “fair colors” is generally understood to be *stibium* or *antimony*. Its meaning⁴ is varied as evidenced by various translations (ESV, NET, RSV, NRSV – antimony; NIV, NCV, TMV – turquoise; KJV – fair colors; NKJV – colorful gems; YLT – cement; NLT – precious jewels; GWT, GNT – precious stones; HCS – black mortar). The idea seems to be that the precious stones of which the city is to be built will be embedded in a setting that emphasizes their beauty, as eye paint emphasizes the beauty of a woman's eyes. The foundations

4. **ANTIMONY** Silvery-white, brittle, metallic chemical element of crystalline structure, found only in combination. It is used in alloys with other metals to harden them and increase their resistance to chemical actions. Compounds of antimony are used in medicines, pigments, matches, and fireproofing. In the NRSV and the NASB “antimony” is used as a translation of the Hebrew terms *'abne-puk* to describe the materials used to build the temple (1 Chron. 29:2; Isa. 54:11; NIV “turquoise”; REB, TEV “stones for mosaic work”; KJV “glistening stones” and “stones with fair colors,” respectively). It is likely that *'abne-puk* refers to some sort of cement or mortar used in the creation of mosaics, which it is suggested would make precious stones appear larger and more colorful. In two other passages (2 Kings 9:30; Jer. 4:30), *puk* is consistently translated as eye paint. One of Job's daughters was named Kerenhapuk—that is, “horn of eye paint” (Job 42:14).

will be laid with blue sapphires, the towers with rubies, the gates with carbuncles⁵, and the walls with precious stones (11-12).

Vv. 11-12 describe the external glory of the church; v. 13 describes the internal glory. Her children (converts) shall be taught of and from Jehovah (see John 6:45; 1 Thess. 4:9; Jer. 1:34). Such knowledge is a prerequisite to citizenship in the new Zion. The source of this wisdom is not human wisdom or the philosophies or traditions of man. Those citizens shall have great peace (Phil.4:7) (13).

Citizens of Zion will be established in righteousness, far from oppression, and free from fear. Righteousness is the foundation of God's throne (Psa. 89:14; 97:2). His righteousness and salvation will be "for ever" unto all generations, never to disappear (51:6, 8). Since Jehovah is the source of the righteousness (17), Zion will also be established in righteousness it also will last forever. It will no longer be "tossed with the tempest" (11). God's promise is that once Zion is established by his righteousness and that of Zion's citizens, those citizens may put far off all dread of oppression, have no cause to fear oppression or destruction that will not even come near (14).

Those who would oppress Zion may gather together for that purpose, but it will not be of God. Such plans will come to naught "because of thee." This does not declare that the citizens of Zion shall defeat the enemy, but that God will defeat the enemy because the citizens of Zion are his people. To use a modern expression, as Creator God brought the oppressor into the world, and he can just as easily take them out (15).

5. A carbuncle is a bright red gem, in particular a cabochon garnet. In Prov 17:8 is found an expression that is literally "stone of grace" and is usually rendered "precious" or the like. Isaiah 54:12 has two additional word combinations: "carbuncles" and "pleasant stones" (KJV), "garnet" and "jewels" (NEB), "crystal" and "precious stones" (JB). Ezekiel (Ezek 28:14, 16) speaks of the "fire stone." From the context this easily translated expression probably refers to a stone which sparkles. Even today diamonds are frequently described as fiery. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*

An exclamation mark is placed on God's ability to protect his people. He created both the smith that makes the weapons and the waster that destroys (16).

With the smiths, the weapons, and the wasters under God's control and subject to his will no weapon that is formed against his people will succeed; no oppressor or waster can defeat or destroy her. This promise of protection and victory is a permanent possession of God's people. These servants are partakers of the salvation purchased by the Servant, and accept their responsibility to service as he did. The righteousness by which they triumph and by which they receive justice is of Jehovah. The guarantee of their victory is God's word – **saith Jehovah**. That all the powers that have sought to destroy God's spiritual city and people have failed and fallen (among them the Jews and Rome) assures victory throughout time. Clearly the prophecy points to the church and the spiritual Jerusalem of the New Testament.