



Isaiah 53:7-9

The Divine Sacrifice

The Song of the Suffering Servant (Isaiah 52:13-53:12)

[The Divine Servant \(52:13-15\)](#)

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We now enter with the Suffering Servant of Yahweh into what has been called "the holy of holies." Our great high priest sprinkles His own blood upon the mercy seat in the holy of holies. His death and burial now come fully into view. Through the eyes of the Hebrew prophet we walk along the steps which led Jesus from Pilate's court to His burial in Joseph of Arimathea's new tomb.

Serious Bible scholars have observed that the most *unlikely* and *insignificant* details of the very smallest circumstances of our Lord's death were pointed out with as much accuracy as those which were considered most important.

For example, what would be more unlikely than that He should be crucified, when crucifixion was not a Jewish form of capital punishment, but Roman that was borrowed and refined from the Carthaginians. It was unheard of during the time of David and Isaiah, yet it is foretold hundreds of years before Rome was built. What would have been more unlikely than that, if crucified, He should not have His legs broken, as was customary to hasten the death of the victims. However, the two criminals crucified with Jesus that day had their legs broken in the traditional manner of execution by crucifixion. Yet, the Scriptures recorded centuries earlier, "not a bone of Him shall be broken."

Let's reverently stand at the foot of the cross and see it through the eyes of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah eight centuries before it actually took place in history.

THE PATIENT VOLITIONAL SUFFERING OF THE DIVINE SACRIFICE (V. 7)

He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So He did not open His mouth.

The inspired poet struggles to understand the violent suffering of the Servant. Again, he picks up the cruel

The inspired poet struggles to understand the violent suffering of the Servant. Again, he picks up the cruel suffering he previously introduced to us.

"He was oppressed" gives us a picture of the Servant of Yahweh being plagued, driven and hunted down unsparingly like a wild animal.

"He was afflicted" like the Jewish people were treated by the cruel taskmasters in Egypt. But He did not cry out like the slaves in Egypt when they were forced to make bricks.

To reinforce this patient volitional choice in suffering Isaiah says, "He opened not His mouth." The evidence that the Servant patiently, willingly accepted all the suffering is seen in His behavior during the suffering. This patient suffering is brought out vividly by total lack of self-defense. There was no self-defense, protest, or complaint.

How strange this behavior is in comparison to our generation that plays the blame game in just about everything. There was no whine, whimper, or complaint on the part of the divine Sufferer. Job did not suffer in silence, and neither did Jeremiah and Habakkuk. However, the Servant of Yahweh endured patiently His suffering.

When we turn through the pages of history one of the amazing things is the patient suffering of Jesus Christ in spite of the injustice at the hands of Pilate and Herod. "While being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:23).

Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant, was not resentful or rebellious toward His sufferings. He chose to suffer and to do so in silent submission to the will of God. He patiently suffered voluntarily.

The expression, "He opened not His mouth," is a comparison of the Servant to a lamb. Shepherds shear sheep while they stand silently. They lead them to the slaughter and they open not their mouths. There is no bleating; they stand there in dumb silence. The Servant endured all His suffering patiently without a word of protest or complaint.

With double emphasis, Isaiah says the Servant did not open His mouth. It was unusual conduct to say the least, contrary to human nature. We would be screaming and hollering. However, patience will characterize the suffering of the divine Sufferer. He is submissive and quiet as He bears the oppression and affliction.

Jesus is God's precious lamb that is led to the slaughter in patient suffering. John the Baptizer recognized Jesus and declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" (John 1:29, 36). The apostle Peter also had this passage in mind when he wrote, "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb

life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:18-19). The writer of Hebrews understands this imagery behind these words after referring to the animal sacrifices in the temple. "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (9:14).

I readily agree with the Old Testament scholars Keil and Delitzsch when they conclude: "All the references in the New Testament to the Lamb of God (with the corresponding allusions to the Passover interwoven) spring from this passage in the book of Isaiah." (Cf. Revelation 5:6, 8, 12f; 13:8)

There is abundant testimony of Jesus' attitude while suffering at His trials before Pilate. Jesus opened not His mouth, except when His refusal to speak might appear to compromise His claims to His death and resurrection. His behavior is like that described by Isaiah. "Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth" (53:7). At His illegal trial before the Sanhedrin, false testimony was given and, "the high priest arose and came forward and questioned Jesus, saying, 'Do You make no answer to what these men are testifying against You?' But He kept silent, and made no answer" (Mark 14:60). "And while He was before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' And Jesus said, 'It is as you say.' And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, 'He made no answer.' Then Pilate said to Him, 'Do You not hear how many things they testify against you?' And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so that the governor was quite amazed" (Matthew 27:11-14). In a parallel passage in Mark the conclusion is stated, "But Jesus made no further answer; so that Pilate was astonished" (Mark 15:5). The historian Luke tells us of the same response of Jesus before King Herod, "And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently" (Luke 23:9-10; cf. John 19:9).

In John 18:8-14 there is a fascinating bit of information that brings out the voluntary submission on the part of Jesus. The Great I AM permitted Himself to be bound. Judas betrayed Jesus with his infamous kiss, and the soldiers were ready to seize Jesus. "When therefore He said to them, 'I am *He*', they drew back, and fell to the ground. Again therefore He asked them, 'Whom do you seek?' And they said, 'Jesus the Nazarene.' Jesus answered, 'I told you that I am *He*; if therefore you seek Me, let these go their way . . . ' So the Roman cohort and the commander, and the officers of the Jews, arrested Jesus and bound Him, and led Him to Ananias first Now Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was expedient for one man to die on behalf of the people " (John 18:4-14, *et passim*).

The thing that stands out in the passage just cited is the soldiers who stepped forward to arrest Jesus were made aware of power, which they feared. Possibly, it was the tone of voice, flash of the eye. For a moment, they dared lay no hand on Him. They became as dead men; He became like a lamb. It was a rational choice that He freely made. No doubt the words of Jesus in 10:17-18 is the best commentary on this strange event. "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

Yes, Jesus suffered patiently, but He yielded to that suffering from His strength. It was not due to emotional submissiveness. He chose to allow the suffering to take place. It was a choice He made; it was not forced upon Him because He was emotionally weak.

After the trials of Jesus we see Him being led away as a lamb to the slaughterhouse. "And after they had mocked Him, they took His robe off and put His garments on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him" (Matthew 27:31; cf. Luke 23:26ff). "And having arrested Him, they led Him away . . ." (Luke 23:54).

An Ethiopian official returning from worshipping in Jerusalem, with his new copy of the scroll of Isaiah, was riding in his chariot reading this great passage in Isaiah. Philip caught a ride on the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah 53:7-8. He asked the Ethiopian, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He invited Philip to come up and sit with him. "Please," he said, "tell me, of whom does the prophet say this? Of himself, or of someone else?" (Acts 8:34). "And Philip opened his mouth, and beginning from this Scripture he preached Jesus to him" (v. 35). Philip didn't stammer around. He was precise in his understanding of the One who fulfilled this prophecy. He talked to the Ethiopian government official about Jesus, the patient Suffering Servant who is the divine sacrifice for our sin.

THE PERPLEXING VIOLENT SUFFERING OF THE DIVINE SACRIFICE (V. 8).

By oppression and judgment He was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living,
For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?

The Sufferer will endure hostile oppression. It is intended for an unjust confinement and judgment He was taken. The word *otzer*, "oppressed" suggests arrest or confinement or oppression, an unjust imprisonment.

Judgment was passed upon Him as a result of His trial. The verdict was a glaring miscarriage of justice and hostile oppression. Pilate saw the flagrant miscarriage of justice and did nothing about it.

Isaiah speaks of the judicial proceedings, His trials and conviction. It is the manifestation of the justice of God that was inflicted upon Him. God was executing His justice on the substitute sufferer. The ultimate demonstration of God's judgment was that which fell upon the Suffering Servant.

The Jewish religious leaders worked within the confines and restraints of the judicial system. However, behind every move of oppression and affliction was the sovereign hand of God, which in this case was the strong arm of judgment upon the innocent vicarious substitute (Acts 2:22-24).

As Isaiah reflects on the violent suffering of God's Servant he laments that not many of the Servant's generation gave serious consideration to the fact that he was an innocent person suffering for the transgressions of His people.

Isaiah uses three strong words to describe the violent, perplexing death of the Servant: "He was taken away," "cut off," and "stricken."

"He was taken away," "snatched away" out of the land of the living into the realm of the dead. Isaiah describes a cruel and unjust death sentence.

He was "cut off" ~~killed~~, "snatched away," "hurried away."

"Hostile oppression and judicial persecution were the circumstances out of which he was carried away by death" (Keil and Delitzsch).

"For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?" Literally, "For the transgression of my people there was a stroke to Him." Yahweh is the One who strikes the Servant for His people. God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21). The Psalmist also saw this same drama taking place when he wrote in 22:15;

My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And Thou dost lay me in the dust of death.

God is the one who lays Him low in death. His death is in accordance with divine will. It is a judicial death.

The only reasonable explanation Isaiah can give for the violent unjust, miscarriage of justice is the substitutionary atonement. It is the only way he can make any reason of it. The prophet places great emphasis on the fact that the death of the Servant is a vicarious, substitutionary, propitiatory sacrifice for sin. Otherwise, His suffering makes no sense at all.

The prophet muses, it was for "my" people. He can not understand why his own people do not meditate on what is happening to God's Servant and come to the same conclusion. They are the recipients of the great benefits of His suffering. It is because of their transgression.

The "stroke" He received is the same verb in verse four. "Stricken" is suffering as a plague sent from God. Keil says the word "always signifies suffering as a calamity proceeding from God." It is a divinely sent plague. God has smitten Him. The visitation of God in judgment had fallen upon the Servant.

"And the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking Him, and beating Him, and they blindfolded Him and were asking Him, saying, 'Prophecy, who is the one who hit You?' And they were saying many other things against Him, blaspheming" (Luke 22:63-65).

Alexander Maclaren observed long ago these words of Isaiah regarding the death and burial of Yahweh's servant "seem meaningless on any hypothesis but the Messianic one. . . The words as they stand have a clear and worthy meaning on one interpretation only."

The Suffering Servant patiently endured violent suffering as our divine sacrifice.

THE PARADOXICAL VIEW OF THE SUFFERING OF THE DIVINE SACRIFICE (V. 9)

His grave was assigned to be with wicked men,
Yet with a rich man in His death;
Although He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

The Jewish rules would have given Jesus a dishonorable burial with the "notoriously wicked criminals" away from the family plot. As a criminal they would have pitched His dead body into Jerusalem's garbage dump at Gehenna to be burned with the rest of the refuse. Ancient Jews dishonored criminals in burial by either leaving them unburied or disgraced by interment in an unclean place. The religious leaders would gladly have given the Servant a burial of dishonor and disgrace. They assigned Him to be buried with the criminals who were crucified with Him.

However, the absolutely amazing thing is a sovereign God intervened and overruled the enemies of the Servant and honored Him in His burial.

It is as though God put His stamp of approval upon His death and began the ever-increasing exaltation of His Servant. He died a painful death with the wicked men and God buried Him with a rich man's burial. The rich man, Joseph Arimathea was on the side of the Servant. No further disgrace was permitted against Him. He was given an honorable burial after his shameful death.

The Servant was perfectly innocent, yet His tormenters pursued Him with hatred to the grave. "Wicked men" accompanied Him in His death. "And two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him. And when they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left" (Luke 23:32-33). These were wicked criminals. In His death and burial, He was with the wicked and the rich. The wicked religious leaders failed in their intentions.

The word "death" is in the plural in Hebrew meaning a violent cruel death. It is like dying again and again. It is the violent death of a criminal.

In His burial He is associated with the "rich." The Jewish leaders considered wealth and riches a sign of God's approval and blessings. "And when it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man came to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the entrance of the tomb and went away. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the grave" (Matthew 27:57-61). There were witnesses to the events that dreadful day.

This totally innocent person would have been buried as a "wicked person." "He was reckoned with the transgressors." How significant is the word "although" in verse nine. "Although" the Servant was given violent treatment He has been guilty of no crime that deserved a dishonorable burial, but God saw fit that He was given an honorable Jewish burial. It was a totally unexpected turn of events.

The Suffering Servant is an innocent sufferer. "Nor was there any deceit found in His mouth." Not even one improper word was ever heard from His lips. If there had been any deceit or lack of integrity in Jesus, Judas would gladly have revealed it to Jesus' enemies as justification of his own treason. If there had been any violence in Him the ever-watchful eye of His enemies would not have failed to see it and publicly charge Him.

The apostle Peter quotes verse nine in the context which speaks of the suffering of Christ for us, leaving an example for us to follow, "who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed" (1 Peter 2:21-24).

Many competent scholars have noted down through the ages that the only true interpretation of this stanza is the traditional understanding that Jesus Christ is the Suffering Servant who offers Himself as the divine Sacrifice for the transgressions of Israel.

This great song of Isaiah is one of the major Scriptures that assures us of the saving life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We have been redeemed by His suffering and death.

Moreover, that divine sacrifice is also available for everyone, Jews and non-Jews who will acknowledge their need of the Savior, put their faith, and trust in Him. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins we can proclaim with confidence and assurance that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The value of His suffering infinitely surpassed all that could ever have been endured by sinful men. His death was the full, perfect and sufficient propitiation for the sins of the whole world. In His death He "blotted out the handwriting that was against us, nailing it to His cross." Our whole debt was cancelled. "There now remains no condemnation to them that believe in Him."

We reverently paraphrase this stanza to bring out the richness of the meaning of the substitute Sacrifice for our transgressions. Can you picture Him dying for your sins, through the eyes of the Hebrew prophet, writing 750 years before the coming of Christ? I am only changing the pronouns that refer to the divine Substitute to bring out the full impact of this awesome passage of Scripture.

Jesus was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet *Jesus* did not open His mouth;
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,
So *Jesus Christ* did not open His mouth.
By oppression and judgment *Jesus* was taken away;
And as for His generation, who considered
That He was cut off out of the land of the living
For the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke *was due*?
Jesus' grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because *Jesus* had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.

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