

## 10. Doing the Unthinkable (1Q 2021—Isaiah)

**Biblical Material:** Isa. 50:4–10, Isa. 52:13–53:12, Isa. 53:3–9, Isa. 53:10–12.

### Quotes

- Many Jewish commentators feel that it [Isaiah 53] refers to the Jewish people on the whole. We find many instances in the Bible where the Jewish people on the whole are addressed to, or are described, in the singulary....Thus, Isaiah 53 could very well be describing the history of the Jewish people—despised by the world, persecuted by the crusaders and the Spanish Inquisition and the Nazis, while the world silently watched...The verses therefore do not point exclusively to Jesus, or to a Messiah. *Samuel Levine*
- I am pleased to interpret it [Isaiah 53] in accordance with the teaching of our Rabbis, of the King Messiah, and will be careful, so far as I am able, to adhere to the literal sense: thus possibly, I shall be free from the forced and farfetched interpretations of which others have been guilty. This prophecy was delivered by Isaiah at the divine command for the purpose of making known to us something about the nature of the future Messiah, who is to come and to deliver Israel. *Rabbi Moshe Cohen Crispin*
- Throughout most of the history of Jewish scholarship many of the highly respected writers of the Talmud and the Midrash (most of whom were leaders of Rabbinical academies), shared a common belief. The Messiah would be despised, rejected, suffer by being pierced and ultimately die for the sins of the people! *Mark Eastman*

### Questions

What is “unthinkable” in what God does? How is the “suffering servant” imagery important in our understanding of God? Why is he not “desirable” in appearance? Why is he despised and rejected? How does punishment bring peace? If you were to explain the message of Isaiah 53 to someone who did not know Jesus, what would you say?

### Bible summary

Isa. 50:4–10 is another Messianic prophecy that points to Jesus’ teaching ministry, and the fact that he would be mistreated and disregarded. Isa. 52:13–53:12 leads into the most significant description of Jesus’ role as the “suffering servant” in the Bible. This passage needs close attention in terms of exegesis to ensure that God is not misrepresented, especially in verses 53:4 and 5. “He was the one who carried our weaknesses, he was loaded down with our pain—but we assumed he was being hit, beaten, and humiliated by God. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded because of our rebellious acts, he was crushed because of our guilt. He experienced the discipline that brings us peace, and his wounds heal us.” Isaiah 53:4, 5 FBV.

### Comment

The verses of Isaiah 53 provide the main theme for this week’s study. They are poetic, very moving, and persuasive. They reveal in uttermost clarity the mission of Jesus.

Yet even here the Devil has done his work. By perverting understanding as to the method of God’s atonement, he has made it appear that God has an unrelenting demand for payment before he will forgive, and that Jesus was made to suffer so that God might be persuaded to offer salvation. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As the Bible makes so clear, Father, Son and

Spirit are equally committed to our salvation, and there is no sense to the concept that one part of the Godhead needs to persuade or make provision for another part.

So when we read that “his wounds heal us,” we are not to read that in a pagan sense of appeasing the wrath of an offended deity; rather that sin has painful—even fatal—consequences that we need to see and understand. Though “we assumed he was being hit, beaten, and humiliated by God,” this is our flawed perspective, and not the truth. Otherwise we have the picture of a tyrannical dictator who metes out vindictive punishment on an innocent in order to satisfy his own demands for vengeance. This is not our God, and so when we read “it was the Lord’s will for him to be crushed and to suffer,” we must understand that statement in the same context as other Biblical assertions that assign responsibility to God for events that occur that he may not have willed. The classic example is God hardening Pharaoh’s heart, but there are many more in which God is credited for actions that he surely did not commit. In stressing the all-powerful nature of God, even Bible writers may be saying more than they intend about the will of God...

Nevertheless, the “suffering servant” described by Isaiah is surely a compelling image of God as he truly is. In looking for their Messiah, this passage seems to have been forgotten by the Jews of Jesus’ time. Because they believed they needed a powerful earthly leader who would vanquish the Roman occupiers, they glossed over those passages that did not fit their image of who Messiah should be. Is it possible we can do the same kind of thing—make our Messiah in our own image?

### **Ellen White comments**

[Isaiah 53:3-5 quoted.] The grace of Christ and the law of God are inseparable. In Jesus mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. In His life and character He not only reveals the character of God, but the possibility of man. He was the representative of God and the exemplar of humanity. He presented to the world what humanity might become when united by faith with divinity. The only-begotten Son of God took upon Him the nature of man, and established His cross between earth and heaven. Through the cross, man was drawn to God, and God to man. Justice moved from its high and awful position, and the heavenly hosts, the armies of holiness, drew near to the cross, bowing with reverence; for at the cross justice was satisfied. Through the cross the sinner was drawn from the stronghold of sin, from the confederacy of evil, and at every approach to the cross his heart relents and in penitence he cries, “It was my sins that crucified the Son of God.” At the cross he leaves his sins, and through the grace of Christ his character is transformed. The Redeemer raises the sinner from the dust, and places him under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. As the sinner looks upon the Redeemer, he finds hope, assurance, and joy. Faith takes hold of Christ in love. Faith works by love, and purifies the soul. {1SM 349}

Christ suffered humiliation to save us from everlasting disgrace. He consented to have scorn, mockery, and abuse fall upon Him in order to shield us. It was our transgression that gathered the veil of darkness about His divine soul and extorted the cry from Him, as of one smitten and forsaken of God. He bore our sorrows; He was put to grief for our sins. He made Himself an offering for sin, that we might be justified before God through Him. Everything noble and generous in man will respond to the contemplation of Christ upon the cross. {4T 374}