

The Servant of Jehovah: The Sufferings of the Messiah and The Glory That Should Follow

by
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PART I

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE NON-MESSIANIC INTERPRETATIONS OF ISAIAH LIII.

"I pray, thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this: of himself, or of some other?" - Acts viii. 34.

CHAPTER I

THE PROPHETIC GEM AND ITS SETTING

The great Scripture we are about to consider has sometimes been called "the fifth Gospel." "Methinks," said Augustine, "Isaiah writes not a prophecy but a gospel." This he said of the whole book, but it is especially true of this chapter. Polycarp, the disciple of John, called it "the golden Passional of the Old Testament"; and a great German scholar writes: "It looks as if it had been written beneath the cross of Golgotha and was illuminated by the heavenly brightness of the *שֵׁב לְיָמֵי*, *shebh limini* ('Sit Thou at My right hand'). It is the unravelling of Psalms xxii. and cx. It forms the inmost centre of this wonderful book of consolations (as the Rabbis called the second half of Isaiah), and is the most central, the deepest, and the loftiest thing that Old Testament prophecy, outstripping itself, has ever achieved." Luther said that every Christian ought to be able to repeat it by heart.

"It is prelude to much that is most distinctive in New Testament doctrine, and is the root from which not a little of the thinking of Christian ages has grown. Its phraseology has entered largely into Christian speech, and it has supplied more texts to the gospel preacher than any other portion of the Old Testament. There are individual phrases in it resembling peaks, from which we faintly descry vast realms of truth which we cannot yet explore, but which shine with a mystic light whose source is Divine. Beyond question, this chapter is the heart of the Hebrew prophetic writings. It

embraces and harmonizes the ideas contained in such seemingly discordant predictions as Psalms ii., xxii., lxxii., and cx.; and from the standpoint which it furnishes we are enabled to see the consistency of Messianic prophecy throughout.

"Elsewhere, indeed, we find greater splendour of language, force of passion, wealth of imagery, and imaginative elevation, but nowhere so full, minute, and vivid forthshowing of God's purpose. Truths elsewhere seen in twilight and transitory glimpses here stand forth for calm inspection in the light of day. Elsewhere we find line or touch or feature in keeping with what is here; but nowhere so finished and complete a portraiture. It is as if the prophet had shaded and filled up with colours the outlines elsewhere given. The hints of One passing through shame and suffering to victory, which elsewhere appear as 'dark sayings,' here kindle into a great life-filled picture, in which we see not only His surpassing sorrow, but also the mystery of its meaning, and the glory which finally comes of it. Not merely is there broad outline, but those more delicate lines and contours which give perfect individuality to the portrait.

"The chapter holds much the same place in Old Testament prophecy that the narrative of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection holds in New Testament history; and with this chapter all Hebrew prophecy as a Divine thing stands or falls."¹

But most precious and beautiful as this Old Testament prophetic gem is in itself, its lustre is greatly intensified by its setting.

The second half of the Book of Isaiah, consisting of the last twenty-seven chapters, is the sublimest and richest portion of Old Testament revelation. It forms a single continuous prophecy which occupies the same position in the prophetic Scriptures as the Book of Deuteronomy in the Pentateuch, and the Gospel of John in relation to the Synoptic Gospels. It is true that "it does not flow on in even current like a history," and to the superficial reader it may have a desultory appearance, but "after patient study the first sense of confusedness is got over, and we perceive its magnificent and harmonious completeness as it rounds itself into one glorious vision."

It may be called the prophetic Messianic epic of the Old Testament. It is sublime in its very style and language, and wonderful in its comprehensiveness--anticipating, as it does, the whole order of the New Testament. It begins, where the New Testament begins, with the ministry of John the Baptist--"the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord," and it ends, where the New Testament ends, with the new heavens and a new earth, wherein

¹ *The Man of Sorrows and the Joy that was Set before Him*--a very excellent booklet by the late James Culross, D.D., published by the Drummond Tract Depository, to which I shall have occasion to make many references in the exposition.

shall dwell righteousness."²

On examining the glorious prophecy closely, we find that the twenty-seven chapters range themselves into three equal divisions of nine chapters each, all ending with nearly the same solemn refrain, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."³

One great line of thought unfolded in the whole prophecy is the development of evil and the final overthrow of the wicked, who are excluded from the blessings of Messiah's Kingdom; and the sufferings but final glory of the righteous remnant, who are the subjects of that Kingdom, and whose King is described as leading the way along the same path of suffering into glory.

This subject becomes developed and intensified as we go on, until it reaches its climax in the last chapter.

The first section is brought to a close at the end of chapter xlvi. where the blessedness of the righteous who are "redeemed" (ver. 20), and peacefully led and satisfied even in the desert, is contrasted with the state of the wicked to whom "there is no peace."

In the second division the same subject becomes intensified; there is development of both evil and good, righteousness and wickedness, and it ends with chapter lvii., where "Peace! peace!" is announced to the righteous, but the wicked have not only "no peace," but have become "like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt."

In the last division the destiny of both is brought to a climax and becomes fixed for ever. "Therefore thus saith Jehovah God, Behold, My servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty; behold, My servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed; behold, My servants shall sing for joy, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto My chosen, for the Lord God shall slay thee, and call His servants by another name." This contrast is continued until finally we find the righteous dwelling for ever in the new heavens and the new earth, wherein shall dwell righteousness; while as to the wicked who have transgressed against God, "their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched, and they shall be an abhorring to all flesh."

In the first section (chaps. xl.-xlvi.) the restoration from Babylon (which, however, is portrayed in terms which far exceeded what actually took place at that restoration, and which will only be exhaustively fulfilled in the greater restoration of Israel "from the

2 Chaps. lxv. 17-20, lxvi. 22.

3 Chaps. xlvi. 22, lvii. 21, lxvi. 24.

four corners of the earth") is the starting-point, and the appointed instrument in God's hand to bring about that restoration, Cyrus, is the central figure.

In the second or central section (chaps. xlix.-lvii.) the grand redemption to be accomplished by One greater than Cyrus--even by Him, who in this series of chapters is pre-eminently the *Ebhed Yehovah*--the "Servant of Jehovah," who is sent not only to raise up "the tribes of Jacob," and to restore "the preserved of Israel," but to be "a light also to the Gentiles," and God's salvation "unto the end of the earth," is the theme with which the prophet's heart overflows; and in the third or last section the blessed condition of restored and converted Israel, who shall then be the channel and active propagators of the blessings of Messiah's gospel among all nations, is the outstanding subject.

The heart and climax of the whole prophecy is to be found in the brief section which forms its inmost centre (chaps. lii. 13 to liii. 12), which, instead of a prophecy uttered centuries in advance, reads like an historic summary of the Gospel narrative of the sufferings of the Christ and the glory that should follow.

Taking our position at this central point, we are almost overwhelmed with the evidence of design in the very structure of this prophecy, for on closer examination we find that each book is subdivided into three sections of three chapters each, nearly corresponding to the divisions in the Authorized Version. Thus the middle book is chapters xlix.-lvii. The middle section of the middle book is chapters lii., liii., liv., and chapter liii. is the middle chapter of the middle section of the middle book--forming, as it were, the heart and centre of this wonderful Messianic poem, as well as the heart and centre of all Old Testament prophecy. The central verse of this central paragraph, which begins properly with chap. lii. 13, is: *"He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement with a view to our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed."*

The doctrine it enshrines, namely, substitution, is one of the leading truths unfolded in Old and New Testaments, and it forms the central thought in this great prophecy. It is, moreover, the essence of the message of comfort with which the prophet begins (xl. 1,2), solving the problem as to how "her iniquity is pardoned."