

**The  
SUBMISSION  
of the Servant of the Lord  
Isaiah 53:7-9**

**CHAPTER FOUR**

He was harassed and belabored, yet did he not open his mouth; and as a sheep to the slaughter he was led, yet as a ewe before her shearers is tongue-tied so did he not open his mouth.

From confinement and from judgment he was snatched away; and among his contemporaries, who did consider that he was cut off from the land of living ones; on account of the transgressions of my people the stroke was his?

And there were those who appointed his grave with the wicked ones; yet he was with a rich man in his deaths, because he had done no violence, and there was no fraud in his mouth.

In considering the first verse of this passage (52:13), it was pointed out that our Lord is Jehovah's Servant. It is appropriate now to observe further what the prophet means by a servant. The Old Testament conception of a servant is one who does work for a master in complete submission to the will of that master--in our language, a slave. However, the submission of a Hebrew slave was not forced submission, but rather willing submission. A man might be the unwilling slave of another (in order to pay a debt, etc.) for six years and no more. At the end of that time he was free. Nevertheless (says Exodus 21:5,6), "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master...I will not go out free, then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever."

Our Lord did not have to become a "slave." He was the Lord of glory. But the Father wanted a slave to rescue lost humanity. So the Son of God in his love for His Father (and our Father) and for us, went to heaven's door, as it were. There, in a figure, His ear was bored through and He became Jehovah's Servant "forever."

Now of all the qualities to be desired in a servant, the most important is complete submission to the master's will. The master receives no benefit from a disobedient slave. Willing obedience, however, was the kind given by a Hebrew slave, for he did not have to be a slave. So it was with Jesus. He was the willing servant of Jehovah. Of Him the Psalmist writes: "I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart" (Psalm 40:8).

In these verses before us, our Lord is most fully shown in His servant, or slave, character--utterly dedicated to His Master's will no matter how unpleasant the course to which it takes Him. His submission led Him to suffering, death, and burial. Once He took the "form of a servant," as Paul says, then there was no avoiding "death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7,8).

Our text shows Him first submissive in his *suffering* (verse 7); then submissive in His *death* (verse 8); and finally submissive in His *burial* (verse 9).

Our attention is now directed to

### THE SUBMISSION OF THE SERVANT IN HIS SUFFERING (verse 7)

**"He was harassed and belabored, yet did he not open his mouth; and as a sheep to the slaughter he was led, yet as a ewe before her shearers is tongue-tied so did he not open his mouth."**

#### 1. THE TREATMENT UNJUST

The utter injustice of the treatment men gave our Lord on the night and day of His passion is seen in the words "harassed"<sup>1</sup> and "belabored". I translate them thus because they show (as the Hebrew indicates) how our Lord was literally "pushed around" from one mocking trial to another, and then to another and another. Only law-breakers deserve such treatment as this. He was scourged by Pilate (John 19:1) in fulfillment of this prediction. But beatings are for the intractable and rebellious. These things are for evil men. Jesus was a good man. He was obedient to every ordinance of man. He who deserved the praise of all men and the protection of the law received the abuse of all and the wrath of the law.

#### 2. THE RESPONSE SUBMISSIVE

Now most of us know how we would react in such circumstances. We, with our Anglo-Saxon tradition of trial by jury and the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, would not have taken this "sitting down," as we say. Yet Jesus did. He was utterly unprotesting--"Yet he did not open his mouth."

Isaiah now brings before us two illustrations of this submissive behavior.

#### LIKE A SHEEP GOING TO SLAUGHTER

"As a sheep to the slaughter he was led."<sup>2</sup> Though many of my readers have never seen this done, it was a familiar sight in our Lord's land and time. Twenty-five years ago, when cold storage facilities did not make it easy for farmer-folk to have fresh meat in warm weather, our meat was mostly cured pork or fresh poultry in the summertime. So, often at the time of harvest, when my mother was cooking for from five to fifteen harvest hands, my father used to kill a yearling wether for meat. The animal would be separated from the herd (western American sheep go in "herds" not "flocks", and the men who tend them are "shepherders" not "shepherds") and led to the place of slaughter (usually the hay derrick). He might be carried or led, but was seldom driven. Beating simply has no effect on a sheep to

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1 A form of the Hebrew word is translated "taskmaster" (Exodus 3:7) and to "exact a debt" or to levy a tax (Deuteronomy 15:23; Daniel 11:20).

2 Compare Jeremiah 11:19 and Job 10:19, where the same Hebrew word is used.

cause it to go in a desired direction. Yet never once did I ever hear one of these lambs for the slaughter utter any noise of protest. This is the way our Lord went.

#### LIKE A EWE AT HER SHEARING

"Yet as a ewe before her shearers is tongue-tied, so did he not open his mouth." Sheep-shearing has been a task on farms from time immemorial. Jacob, David, Absalom, and many other Biblical characters appear in connection with sheep-shearing. Even today there are hundreds of men in western North America who shear sheep in Mexico in late winter and then move northward during the spring months till, in early summer, they have finished for the season somewhere in northern United States or in Canada. Yet there is one thing no sheep-shearer in the last 5,000 years has heard-- a sheep protesting over the fact that it is being fleeced, any more than the butcher has ever heard a sheep protest over being slaughtered. I have seen the sheep gouged, scratched, cut, and bruised in the hands of callous-hearted shearers, whose only goal was to shear as many sheep as possible in a day. They often come bleeding from the shearing shed. The knife may slice the throat; the shears may slash the sides, but the most one hears is a kind of subdued sigh through the nostrils. Even a coyote or sheep-killing dog arouses no cries from the flock. The sheep can express hunger and thirst or a frolicking mood, but it just simply does not or cannot express vocal protest at mistreatment. One need only contrast this with the nature of a hog to see how unusual this is. A hog will squeal to the last drop of blood in his body when he is being slaughtered. Be thankful pigs do not have to be sheared!

Our Lord might have "squealed like a pig"--if it is not too shocking even to contemplate the thought--and that justly. But He did not. He came not to live; He came to die in the sinner's place. This was the Father's will.

On the other hand, think what a heart-rending recollection it will be for a restored and repentant Israel when they remember all this and confess the things recorded in the first six verses of this chapter.

It is true that others have "walked the last mile" with silence and self-composure. Even fallen men have enough remnant of the image of God left in them to control their feelings at times. But no one ever walked that "mile" willingly as Jesus did. No other ever did it with His motives. Why? Because no one else ever had a divine mission such as His and such willing submission to the divine will.

The gospel records portray exactly how Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. He groaned, He called on God; but to Herod, Caiaphas, Pilate, and all the rest, He answered not one word of protest.

Now the subject moves on to another aspect of our Saviour's submission--

#### THE SUBMISSION OF THE SERVANT IN HIS DEATH (verse 8)

"From confinement and from judgment he was snatched away; and among his contemporaries, who did consider that he was cut off from the land of

**living ones; on account of the transgression of my people, the stroke was his?"**

Owing to the highly emotional character of this passage and the obscurity of certain of the words, almost every phrase of this verse is a subject of disputed interpretation. The interested reader may observe in the footnote the reasons given for my own translation.<sup>3</sup>

The confession of Israel appears now to be at an end. Throughout these three verses the speaker appears to be the prophet himself.

Will the reader note five different specifications about the death of our Lord to which his submission led Him.

## 1. CIRCUMSTANCES OF HIS DEATH

Note first the *circumstances* of His death. "From confinement and from judgment he was snatched away." "Taken" is altogether too tame a word to describe what happened. The Hebrew word describes hurried, forcible, violent treatment, resulting in death. This is the word of Ezekiel when he says "the sword come, and take him away" (Ezekiel 33:4). How well this describes the treatment Jesus received in those early morning hours when the Jews hurried Him from Gethsemane to trial and then to execution, without any of the ordinary just processes of law! They wanted to get Him

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3 Every clause of this verse, almost every word, has been a matter of dispute among learned men. Proposed translations follow. "He has been taken away from prison and from judgment; and of His generation, who considered 'He was snatched away out of the land of the living; for the wickedness of my people punishment fell upon Him?'" (F. Delitzsch). "From distress and from judgment he was taken; and in his generation who will think that he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people as a curse for them?" (J.A. Alexander). "Hurried was he from prison and judgment; His posterity who shall declare? For He was cut off from the land of the living, for my people's transgressions was stricken" (F.C. Jennings). "By tyranny and law was he taken, and of his age who reflected that he was wrenched from the land of the living, for my people's transgressions the stake was on him?" (George Adam Smith). "After arrest and sentence he was taken off, and on his fate who reflected?" (C.R. North). "He was taken away from prison and from judgment; and among his contemporaries who was concerned? For he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the sin of my people he was taken away; and as for his generation, who *among them* considered that he was cut off but of the land of the living for the transgression of my people for whom the stroke *was due?*" (American Standard Version). "He was taken from prison and from judgment; and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of my people was he stricken" (Authorized Version). The poetical and emotional character of the passage and the unusual usages of words characteristic of such literature in all languages added to the difficulty. The following observations may aid the interpreter who knows Hebrew in handling the passage.

(1) **וְאֵלֶי** before *doro* is to be taken in the sense of "and with respect to." This is the use of the form in Numbers 3:46 ("and with respect to the redemption of" etc.). Brown, Driver, and Briggs list about 45 cases in which this is the significance of **וְאֵלֶי** or **וְאֵלֶי** .

(2) *Ki* before *Nigzar* is to be taken as introducing direct discourse, as is indicated by the first person suffix on **נִגְזַר** (people). Such is a very common use of *ki*, about the equivalent of **καὶ** in Greek (see Genesis 21:30, Exodus 21:30, cf. Luke 4:21).

(3) *Lamo* may be either *le* with the suffix third, masculine, singular or *le* with the suffix third, common, plural. However, it is evidently third, masculine, singular here as in Isaiah 44:15--the equivalent of *lo* (to him). The antecedent of this pronominal suffix is the Servant.

Thus, a translation is determined somewhat similar to that of Delitzsch, and except for the second clause, similar to the Authorized Version. "He was snatched away from confinement and from judgment; and as for his contemporaries who considered: 'he was cut off from the land of living ones; on account of the transgression of my people was the stroke his?'"

out of the way before the Passover. Thus in the midst of hate, violence, and physical force our Lord's last hours were spent.

## 2. SCENE OF HIS DEATH

Note secondly, the *scene* of His death. It was "prison and judgment," or as we have rendered, "confinement (or detention) and...judgment." Detention, or confinement, describes, I think, the arrest in the garden and the continued detention throughout the day. "Judgment" is here the word for judicial proceedings. How swiftly events moved that night and day! After His arrest He went through at least five trials of a sort. There was first the interrogation of Annas, then the mocking thing in the high priest's palace before the Sanhedrin (Matthew 26:57-66). Next, there was a short hearing before Pilate (Matthew 27:1,2). After that He appeared before Herod (Luke 23:11-26). There was hardly a shred of legality to a single one of the trials. He was in a high priest's palace, in Herod's chambers, and in Pilate's judgment hall. These were the scenes where the "tender mercies of the wicked" were conferred upon Him on that last sad day.

## 3. HEARTBREAK OF HIS DEATH

In the third place, note the *heartbreak* of the situation--"And among his contemporaries, who did consider?" "Generation" in the Authorized, which I have translated "contemporaries," refers to the people of His own time. Who of his own time and nation, asks the prophet, pondered or realized what was going on? The answer is "Few or none." Nobody cared that His character was holy and His treatment unjust, or that our Lord was worthy of honor instead of dishonor. And, sorrow of sorrows, nobody cared, as the last part of our verse informs us, that the real purpose of His mission was to take the stroke of divine wrath for the very people who were killing Him. From John the Baptist onward (John 1:29), He had been declared to be the Lamb of God who was to take away the sin of the world. But the attitude of the world then was the same as it is now--So what?

## 4. NATURE OF HIS DEATH

In the fourth place, see the nature of the death He suffered--"he was cut off from the land of living ones." What does it mean to be cut off? It is said in 2 Chronicles 26:21 that when King Uzziah became a leper, "he was cut off from the house of the Lord." This means that he was excluded from the temple. In like manner, death excluded Jesus from the scene of life and association with living people. Jesus was God, but because He was also man, He could die just as all men can die. It was to become capable of dying as a man that the incarnation took place (Hebrews 2:9). What is it that makes death a fearful thing? I do not think it is so much the pain. It is rather the fact that death erects a barrier which excludes the dead forevermore (except for the resurrection) from fellowship with living people. All our happiness is connected with the scenes of life and with association among living people. Death puts a stop to all this. Jesus experienced this kind of separation from the scenes of life and of living people. Death for Him was no less a tragic experience than it is for all mankind.

## 5. PURPOSE OF HIS DEATH

Finally, our text reveals the *purpose* of that death. It was "on account of the transgressions of my (that is, Isaiah's) people the stroke was his." From one view this is the cause of His death. But, ignoring the technicality, it is clear that His one main purpose was to suffer the divine wrath in the sinner's place. He took the stroke, the passage says. This is the usual way to express a divine visitation of punishment. It is used of the plagues of Egypt and of the leprosy of Uzziah. There is a stroke which was due us. It was the infliction of an endless Hell. Thank God the stroke has already fallen--fallen upon Christ.

Now, will you consider what they would not?--that the *circumstances* of His death were a violent, hurried, forcible treatment for the meek and mild Jesus; that the *scene* of His death was the garden of unlawful arrest and the halls of five rigged trials; that the special *heartbreak* of His death was the utter carelessness of all the people of His own nation on that day He died for their benefit; that His death was *real*, the same grim separation that is for all men; and that the *purpose* was vicarious--to die in our stead.

How often the theme of substitution appears in this "golden passion," as Polycarp called it! It is no wonder the hymn writers make much of it.

*The agonies of Calvary could not His love dismay.  
He would not yield though God revealed the price that He must pay.*

*He stood condemned in Pilate's Hall, he heard the rabbles' cry.  
The King with none to own His cause, my cause would not deny.*

*Lo, Jesus stands with broken heart, with nail-pierced hands and feet.  
He points unto His cross of woe, where love and mercy meet.*

*The Savior stands at thy heart's door, bruised for thy cruel sin.  
Oh why not open wide the door and let Him enter in?*

The story of our Lord's submission concludes with

### **THE SUBMISSION OF THE SERVANT IN HIS BURIAL (verse 9)**

**"And there were those who appointed his grave with the wicked ones; yet he was with a rich man in his death,<sup>4</sup> because he had done no violence and there was no fraud in his mouth."**

The Authorized Version has led its readers entirely astray as to the meaning of the first part of this verse. It reads, "And he made his grave with the wicked." The American Standard Version has corrected this with the reading, "And they made his grave with the wicked." Also, I think the sense of the passage demands that "and with the rich in his death" should be changed to "but he was," etc. The first clause describes what some wicked people wanted; the second what really happened.

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<sup>4</sup> The Hebrew word is plural, probably indicating immensity or intensity, as is common in certain nouns.

Our Lord's submission to God and man was such that had there been no overruling providence, He would have endured not only an unjust suffering before death and then unjust execution, but a shameful burial in potter's field as well. Observe the facts.

## 1. THE BURIAL PLANS OF WICKED MEN

Wicked men did plan a shameful burial for the Saviour. "There were those who appointed his grave with the wicked." This translation is fully sustained by the Hebrew, as to sense, if not quite as to terms. The simplest, and I think, most natural understanding of the Hebrew words bears out that "those who appointed his grave with the wicked" were His own "contemporaries" mentioned in the preceding verse.

I think it is obvious that nothing would have given the cruel and venal men who caused our Lord to die greater pleasure than after having killed Him to bury Him in a public dump-ground among the graves of criminals, prostitutes, and the abandoned men of old Jerusalem's "Skid Row." Surely, it would have brought pleasure to Satan, the arch-fiend of them all. Nothing is said about this in the gospels, but there is no reason to doubt that those who caused Jesus to be executed as a criminal expected Him to be buried as one. It would have been the normal thing.<sup>5</sup>

But there is a God in heaven, who brings the counsels of the wicked to nought. Wicked men might plot to let the dogs gnaw the bones of the Son of God and to expose His flesh to the buzzards before committing His remains to a shallow hole in the city dump. Travelers tell us that in that region the bodies of executed criminals are often allowed to be eaten by beasts and birds. A number of Biblical figures of speech presuppose the custom. But long before, God had said He would not permit His Holy One to see corruption (Psalm 16:10). This could not be if wicked men were to have their way to the end.

## 2. THE BURIAL PLANS OF A RIGHTEOUS GOD

Such consecration as Christ's would not go unrewarded. So we read that God appointed Him a grave with a "rich man." Matthew tells us that on the day of the crucifixion, "Now when evening had come, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be given to him. When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed" (Matthew 27:57-60).

## 3. WHY GOD OVERRULED

The final section of verse nine presents the reason for this remarkable

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<sup>5</sup> Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, Book IV, Chapter VIII, 6), in commenting on the laws of his people writes, "He who blasphemes God, let him be stoned, and let him hang upon a tree all that day, and then let him be buried in an ignominious and obscure manner."

divine overruling. It was "because he had done no violence, and there was no fraud in his mouth."

Our Lord was right in His deeds. He was not a violent man. Neither was He guilty of "wrong," "unrighteousness" or "injustice," as the word is sometimes translated (Genesis 16:5, Exodus 23:1, Job 16:17). These things our Lord had not done even once. In Him, for the first time in history, the words of Psalm 1:1 became fully applicable to any one man: "Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful." This verse of ours (Isaiah 53:9) is prophetic witness to the sinless walk of Christ Jesus 700 years before He was born. His own testimony (John 8:46) and that of Pilate (Matthew 27:24; Luke 23:14,15), Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19), the Centurion (Matthew 27:54), the repentant thief (Luke 23:41), and the apostles (1 Peter 2:22) bears it out. No one has ever risen to meet His challenge to convict Him of sin.

The Lord was also right in His thoughts. "And there was no fraud in his mouth." He was neither deceived nor deceitful. He never spoke a lie, simply because it was not in His heart to speak one. In the words of Psalm 32:2, "In his spirit there was no guile," and in a sense far higher than it could have been true of Nathaniel who was "an Israelite, indeed, in whom is no guile." He could ascend into the "hill of the Lord" and "stand in his holy place" because He had "clean hands and a pure heart." He is one "who has not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

The reason, then, for our Lord's being saved from the shame of a criminal's grave was that His humble submission to the will of God throughout His life earned it for Him. Treatment of the corpse had nothing to do with atonement. His death accomplished that. After the soldier's spear was thrust into His side, wicked violent men were not allowed to touch Him again. To the flood of Jewish spite and hate, God said "No!". "Thus far and no farther."

## TWO IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS

Before we leave these precious verses, I call attention to two things.

### PRECISION OF PREDICTION

There is no place in all prophecy (with the possible exception of the eleventh chapter of Daniel) where the precise and detailed prediction of future events followed by precise and detailed fulfillment is so clearly in evidence. The pursuit into the garden, the arrest, and the unresisting behavior of Jesus are predicted in verse seven. The trials, the unnecessary violence of the captors, their utter lack of concern, and the substitutionary death appear in verse eight. Verse nine is the most specific of them all--predicting such an unlikely event as the fact that Jesus, executed on conviction of blasphemy, was saved from shameful burial according to the Jewish custom, through the request of Joseph, who begged His body from the Roman governor and buried it in his own new tomb. The Lord was, indeed, "with a rich man in his death."



## A LESSON IN SUBMISSION

Finally, for Christians there is a lesson in holy behavior taught by example, a lesson which the writers of the New Testament have not missed. Peter, in addressing some remarks to "Servants" who, he said, were to be subject to their master, uses the submissive behavior of the great "Servant of Jehovah" as an example, and in doing so he addresses the following admonition to us all:

"Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

*Who committed no sin,  
nor was deceit found in His mouth;*

who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness--by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1 Peter 2:18-25).

May God help us, who not only have reaped the judicial benefit of Calvary in the forgiveness of sins but also a blessed example in suffering persecution, to learn the same submission to God and the same obedience to His will. May it be said of us, truly, as Tennyson put it, "Our wills are ours to make them thine."