

Lesson 42

Time –3/31/30 AD, 11 Nisan -the Last week – Sunday

At the end of the last lesson, Jesus had finished His sermon to a mountainside full of people, just outside of Jerusalem. There He had addressed the Passover pilgrims camped on the Mt. of Olives, just below the Eastern Gate of the Temple and the Eastern Wall of the Temple Mount. It was just at the conclusion of His slow procession from Bethany. The adoring crowds had pressed in on Him and strewn His way with branches and garments. His audience would also have included the High Priests and members of the Sanhedrin. In fear, they had watched the scene from the overlooking eastern wall of the Temple. “So the Pharisees said to one another, ‘See, this is getting us nowhere. Look how the whole world has gone after him!’”¹ During His sermon Jesus had said “Father, glorify your name!” The Father had answered from on high, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” When Jesus finished, He had disappeared into the crowd and entered Jerusalem through the Sheep Gate.

John 12:37 **Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs (the Father speaking to Him from heaven) in their (the people’s) presence, they still would not believe in him.**

The leaders of the Jews had always challenged Jesus to give them a sign from Heaven.² Besides all the other signs and miracles Jesus had done, He had finally given them this sign of the Father speaking from heaven. It had made no impression on them because they had hardened their hearts just like the ancient Pharaoh of Egypt in Moses’ time.

John 12:38 **This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: “Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?”³**

This was even as the Spirit of the LORD had prophesied about the Jews of Jesus’ day by Isaiah.

John 12:39-40 **For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: “He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.”**

Here John paraphrased the message the LORD had given to Isaiah when He had sent him as a prophet to the people of Israel:

Isaiah 6:9-10 “He (the LORD) said, ‘Go and tell this people: ‘Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed.’”

¹ John 12:19.

² Matthew 12:38, Matthew 16:1, Mark 8:11, Luke 11:16.

³ Isaiah 53:1.

In Isaiah's time the LORD had known the future of the people of Israel. He knew that He would send prophet after prophet to them who would present the Word of God to them clearly. He would also miraculously demonstrate His power before their eyes. One great example was the destruction of the Assyrian army in Isaiah's day. However, although they would hear the Word of God with their ears, and see the power of God with their eyes, they did not have a heart for God. Because of that they were spiritually deaf and blind. For the most part, they never really wanted to know the LORD. When disinterested people hear the Word of God, the more they hear it, the harder their hearts become, and the blinder and deafer they become. However, all such people are still given the opportunity to turn to the healing power of God. John referred to this verse to explain the seemingly irrational refusal of the Jews of his generation to believe. The Lord Jesus had also used this verse earlier in Galilee to explain the rejection He had met there. (Matthew 13:14-15). Not long before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD, Paul referred to this verse as a warning when addressing the Jews in Rome who had rejected the Gospel (Acts 28:26-27).

John 12:41 **Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus' glory and spoke about him.**

Here John was referring not only to the first Isaiah passage which he had quoted in verse 38, but to the fact that Isaiah is full of references to the First Advent of Christ. We shall study this passage in its entirety in a moment. The second passage referred to the hardness of unbelieving Jewish hearts.

John 12:42-43 **Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.**

There were some among the crowd who had actually believed in Jesus. Some of them were even from among their leaders. We know that Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were examples. However, for many of them, their faith in God was so fragile and immature that they sought the approval of men first.

John 12:44-45 **Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me.**

The "then" to which this refers was definitely on that Sunday that Jesus entered Jerusalem. The occasion of Jesus speaking this truth was most likely in an address that Jesus gave after He reached the Temple and before He overturned the money changer's tables which we will see in the next lesson. Here Jesus revealed His greater mission. Even beyond Jesus' mission to redeem mankind was a greater mission. That greater mission was that, in His incarnation and death, Jesus would reveal and prove to all creation the love and compassion of the LORD for all His creatures. In Jesus, all creation could see the LORD who created them.

John 12:46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

Jesus had come into the world to light the world with God's truth about His love and His person.

John 12:47 “As for the person who hears my words but does not ~~keep them~~ believe,⁴ I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it.

Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, didn't come as a man to terrify us, but to draw us to Himself.

John 12:48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.

However, there would come a day of judgement, at the end of the Millennium, when all who had rejected the light of the Word of Christ would be judged. They will be condemned to a darkness where they would never have to see God again. This was described in a parable by Jesus:

Matthew 25:30 “And throw that worthless servant (*the unbeliever*) outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”⁵

John 12:49 For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it.

The message of Jesus' life and words had always been part of the Father's plan. This was what the Father had commanded Jesus to do with His life.

John 12:50 I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say.”

The purpose of that command had been so that the LORD could share His life with us. His life is called “Eternal Life.” That means that we can share the life of the “Eternal One”:

John 10:10b “I (*Jesus*) came that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

For the rest of this lesson we shall examine the great prophecy in Isaiah to which Jesus had referred to above in John 12:38 and 41.

⁴ *The Textus Receptus has μὴ πιστεύσῃ {mā pē-styü'-sā} which means “does not believe.” The corrupted Codex Sinaiticus had μὴ φυλάξῃ {mā fü-lä's-so} which means “does not keep.”*

⁵ *Also see Matthew 22:13, Matthew 8:12, Nahum 1:7, Jeremiah 23:12 for this concept of Hell.*

Isaiah 52:13- 53:12

The last 27 chapters of Isaiah are one prophecy unlike the early chapters of Isaiah which contain several distinct prophecies given at separate times. The last 27 chapters begin in Isaiah 40:1 with the words; “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” They end with the establishment of the LORD’s eternal kingdom and the condemnation of Satan and his fellow rebels in Isaiah 66:23-24. “‘From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,’ says the LORD. ‘And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind.’”

The intensely Messianic passage we are studying in this lesson really begins at Isaiah 52:13-16, rather than Isaiah 53:1. As I have often pointed out, the chapter breaks are not included in the original scriptures. To any Christian who is familiar with the Gospels, it is self-evident that this passage is speaking of Jesus Christ the Messiah. That is conclusively demonstrated by Philip’s explanation of this very passage to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts:

Acts 8:30-35: “Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So, he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: ‘He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.’ The eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”

The interpretation of this passage as speaking of Jesus the Messiah is also confirmed in the New Testament by Matthew 8:17, Mark 15:28, Luke 22:37, John 12:38, Romans 10:16, and 1 Peter 2:22. This passage was so convicting to even unbelieving Judaism that they removed it from their annual cycle of readings in Isaiah and avoid mention of it in their Rabbinical Seminaries. Some Jewish authorities even claimed that it was a spurious insertion into the original book of Isaiah somehow made by Christians centuries after the life of Christ. The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1946 with Isaiah 53 in it disproved that assertion. The Dead Sea Scrolls were conclusively proved to have been written at least in the 2nd Century BC or before.

As you read the passage you will notice that it switches from the future tense to the prophetic past tense and back while describing an event future to Isaiah’s time. This is a characteristic of much Old Testament prophecy which is inspired by the Spirit of God who exists in the past, present, and future at once. The fifteen verses in this passage touch on practically every aspect of Christ’s life and ministry, and on practically every major doctrine in Christian theology. You could study a lifetime and still not uncover all the treasures buried here. With that preamble we can begin with Isaiah 52:13.

Isaiah 52:13a **See, my servant will act wisely;**

Jesus Christ, the Living Word is the servant of God.⁶ He is also the personification of wisdom. Proverbs 3 describes that living wisdom Who created and sustains the world. There wisdom is described as a she:

Proverbs 3:13-20 “Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her. Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor. Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed. By wisdom the LORD laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew.”

Isaiah 52:13b **he will be raised and lifted up**

Jesus spoke of the significance of His being lifted up on the Cross:

John 3:14-15 “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert,⁷ so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

Jesus would also be raised from the dead.

Isaiah 52:13c **and highly exalted.**

This speaks of Jesus’ ascension to the right hand of God:

Philippians 2:9 “Therefore God exalted him (*Jesus*) to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.”

Isaiah 52:14 **Just as there were many who were appalled at him -- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—**

⁶ Documented by Matthew 12:18, Romans 15:8, Philippians 2:6-7, Psalms 32:15-16, and Psalms 69:17.

⁷ The bronze snake of Numbers 21:8-9 was a picture of Israel recognizing their sin (the snake) and holding it up to God for judgment. In the fullness of time God raised up Jesus on the cross for mankind and Israel to receive that judgment for sin, in the meantime the judgment was withheld, and Israel was forgiven (John 3:14). Remember also that the staff of Moses which symbolized the cross striking Christ (the Rock) also turned into a snake. As that snake ate up the other snakes before the Pharaoh in Exodus 7:10-12, so all sins were covered at the cross.

Verses 13 and 14 contrast the outward appearance of what would happen on the Cross (the weakness and humiliation) with what would be made possible by the Cross (the power and exaltation). This also gives us an insight into how badly Jesus had been beaten after He had been punched by the guards at the house of the High Priest. They also tore out chunks of His beard.⁸ Then He underwent the terrible scourging by the Romans. After they were through and He made His painful way to hang on the cross, the blood, the damage to His flesh and the agony in His face made His face hardly recognizable as human. Many of those in the crowd had seen crucifixions before, but they had never seen a victim as damaged in His visage as Jesus was.

Isaiah 52:15a **so will he sprinkle many nations,**

The Hebrew word here translated “sprinkle” is נָזַף {nā·zā’}⁹ which is usually related to the sprinkling of ceremonial blood and water to consecrate and purify under the Mosaic Law. Even so, Christ will consecrate and purify the nations with His own blood sacrifice and the cleansing water which flows from His life. The word translated “nations” here is the Hebrew word גֵּוֹיִם {gō’ē} which refers to the Gentile peoples.

Isaiah 52:15b **and kings (rulers) will shut their mouths because of him.**

I believe the “rulers” here are Satan and the fallen angels. Satan uses “princes” of the fallen angels to exercise great influence over the governments of mankind. Daniel tells us something about them in Daniel 10:20. There, the elect angel Gabriel referred to two of them as the “princes” of Persia and Greece. The power of worldly rulers is often corrupted to evil paths by the influence of these “princes.” At the Second Advent of Christ, they will have nothing to say because they will see that their power is broken. By contrast out of the mouth of Jesus will come a sword (Isaiah 49:2, Revelation 19:15). This event is also prophesied in Psalms:

Psalms 107:42 “The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths.”

Isaiah 52:15c **For, what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.**

This ignorance of the “rulers of this age” is what Paul expressed in 1 Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 “We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age,¹⁰ who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of

⁸ *Isaiah 50:6.*

⁹ *This word {naza} may be the connection to the Old Testament that many have sought for the word “Nazarene” in Matthew 2:23 “and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets: ‘He will be called a Nazarene.’”*

God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

This tells us that Satan and his Demon Princes, the "rulers of this age," did not understand that the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ meant their own final condemnation by removing any possible justification for their rejection of the LORD of Love and Mercy. They ignorantly actually co-operated in bringing about the Crucifixion and the fulfillment of God's plan.

Although the death of Christ and its significance had been prophetically foreshadowed and prefigured, those prophecies had not been fully understood until after the Cross.

Romans 16:25-26 "Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him."

Isaiah 53:1 Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD ¹¹ been revealed? ¹²

The critical question the LORD will ask of the human race at the last judgment is: "Who has believed in the message of the LORD's servant Jesus Christ, who is the arm of the LORD?" Belief in Christ, the arm of the LORD, at some time must follow the revelation of the Him as the Messiah. The LORD God will make that revelation to anyone who, understanding the plain evidence that there must be a God, wants to know Him.

Isaiah 53:2a He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.

This details the time of the coming of the person of Jesus Christ. The Messiah is called a "root of Jesse" in Isaiah 11:10. Calling Him a tender shoot coming out of a root refers to Jesus' prophesied ancestry which included Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Jesse, David, and Zerubbabel. It also refers to Him as "tender," coming in weakness, as a servant.

¹⁰ *Ephesians 6:12 "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."*

¹¹ *"Arm of the Lord" is another title for Jesus Christ. It refers back to Isaiah 51:4-5 "Listen to me, my people; hear me, my nation: The law will go out from me; my justice will become a light to the nations. My righteousness draws near speedily, my salvation is on the way, and my arm will bring justice to the nations. The islands will look to me and wait in hope for my arm." **Arm of the Lord** is also another way of saying "strength of the Lord." As the succeeding verses in Isaiah 53 show, the Lord's strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).*

¹² *This was the passage quoted in our lesson in John 12:38.*

That He would spring up “out of dry ground” denotes the general spiritual condition of Israel during Jesus’ life. The root growing in dry ground also describes an acacia tree which was a symbol of Christ in the Old Testament. The so called “burning bush” of Exodus was actually a “flaming acacia tree.”

Isaiah 53:2b He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,

Some commentators have suggested that this means the Lord was physically unattractive. However, they should read the following passages:

Isaiah 4:2 “In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious.”

Isaiah 28:5 “In that day the LORD Almighty will be a glorious crown, a beautiful wreath for the remnant of his people.”

Luke 2:52 “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.”

Also, the sacrificial animals that were figures of Christ were to be without defect (Exodus 12:5). I believe that in His face and body, Jesus was also without defect.

Isaiah 53:2c nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

The Jews of the 1st Century AD were looking for a king with “glory” like Solomon. Jesus was the very antithesis of Solomon. He came as a simple carpenter to build His true Temple with His life and death. Jesus had another kind of Glory.

Isaiah 53:3a He was despised and rejected by men,

The following were the words of Jesus Christ:

Mark 9:12 “Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected?”

Luke 17:25 “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.”

Isaiah 53:3b a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.

Verse 4 tells us it was our sorrows that He carried, not His own.

Isaiah 53:3c Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised,

The Messianic Psalm 38 prophesied Jesus’ experience during His trial and crucifixion:

Psalms 38:11 “My friends and companions avoid me because of my wounds; my neighbors stay far away.”

Isaiah 53:3d **and we esteemed considered him not.**

The word translated “esteemed” here is the Hebrew קָשַׁב {khā·shav'} which is the same word translated “considered” in the next verse and should be translated here the same way as there. The correct translation thus sets up a contrast between what they should have considered (Jesus’ walk with God), and what they did consider. The Jews in Jerusalem that day did not consider Jesus’ ministry for the past 3½ years. He had taught righteousness, healed the sick, cared for the poor, and cast out demons. He had also performed many miracles like raising the dead which could only have been accomplished through the power of God.

Isaiah 53:4a **Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows pains,**¹³

This verse was quoted in Matthew. It refers to Jesus’ ministry of healing. The Hebrew word translated “sorrows” by the NIV is מַכָּאֵב {mak·ōve'}, which can either refer to mental pain (sorrow) or physical pain (disease). The context of the Matthew translation and quote of this Isaiah passage (below) demonstrates that physical pain was what was meant:

Matthew 8:16-17 “When evening came, many who were demon-possessed were brought to him, and he drove out the spirits with a word and healed all the sick. This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: ‘He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.’”

Isaiah 53:4b **yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.**

The people didn’t consider all the proofs Jesus had provided for 3½ years. Those proofs demonstrated that He had been sent by God and was working on His behalf. Instead, the Jews considered His sufferings as just punishment from God. The Gospels recorded just such an attitude of the people who saw Him hanging on the Cross. They expressed this in their taunts as recorded in Matthew.

Matthew 27:40b “Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!”

Matthew 27:43 “He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him, for he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”

Isaiah 53:5a **But he was pierced for our transgressions,**

As the Gospels tell us, Jesus was pierced in His hands (wrists) and feet (heels) as was customary in crucifixion.

¹³ This verse is quoted in Matthew 8:17.

Luke 24:39 “Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

The Greek word translated “hands” here is χεῖρ {khā'r}. The word actually refers to more than just the palms and fingers, but also includes the wrist.¹⁴ In the NIV translation of Acts 12:7, the same Greek word is translated “wrists.” It is almost certain that the nails of crucifixion were driven through the space between the arm bones just below the wrists as that would be secure. We have archaeological evidence which demonstrates that the part of the “foot” which was pierced was actually the heel just in front of the Achilles tendon. The nails were driven from side to side.¹⁵ Both piercings were located so that the spikes would secure the victim firmly to the cross. They could also be accomplished without breaking a bone as the scripture had prophesied:

John 19:36 “These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: ‘Not one of his bones will be broken.’”¹⁶

He was also pierced in the side:

John 19:33-34 “But when they came to Jesus and found that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus’ side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.”¹⁷

¹⁴ There is no word for “wrist” in the Bible. In the NIV, the English word “wrist” is found four times because the context clearly refers to the wrist (Genesis 38:28, 30, Jeremiah 40:4, and Acts 12:7). However, in every case, the Hebrew and Greek words used refers to “the hand.” Evidently, in the ancient world, the wrist was thought of as part of the hand.

¹⁵ The Renaissance painters of over a thousand years later were fond of showing the nails nailed through the top of the foot. That would not only have been ineffective but would have broken bones.

¹⁶ Psalms 34:20, Exodus 12:46, Numbers 9:12 all speak of the necessity of the atoning sacrifice not only being without spot or blemish, but with no broken bones.

¹⁷ John was the only disciple close enough to see this sudden flow. This comment of John has been interpreted in various ways. However, it seems obvious to me that the blood was real blood and the water was real water, not what looked like blood, and what looked like water (red cells and blood serum). Blood and water have great theological significance and stand for spiritual cleansing and renewal. Jesus himself spoke of the significance of the water that would come out of Him (John 4:13-14, John 7:37-38) and of His blood (John 6:53-55, Matthew 26:26-28). It is worth remembering that in the future the River of the Water of Life will flow out of the base of the Throne of the King which is set at the roots of the Tree of Life (Revelation 22:1-2). I believe that this flow recorded in John was completely out of the ordinary flow that would come from such a wound. It was a gushing, rushing flow which was miraculous in nature. First the blood flowed, which fulfilled the foreshadowing prophecies of this event

Isaiah 53:5b **he was crushed for our iniquities;**

He was crushed like the worm described in the Messianic Psalm 22, verse 6.

Psalms 22:6 “But I (*the Messiah*) am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.”

There the worm was a ‘coccus ilicis.’ When the female of that scarlet worm was ready to give birth to her young, she would attach her body firmly to the trunk of a tree protecting her eggs. As the mother died, a crimson fluid stained her body and the surrounding wood. From the dead bodies of such female scarlet worms, the commercial scarlet dyes of antiquity were extracted. They were used to dye the robes of Royalty. What a picture this gives of Christ, dying on the tree, shedding His precious blood that He might “bring many sons unto glory” (Hebrews 2:10)!

Isaiah 53:5c **the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,**

Because He bore our punishment, He brought us peace. He was called the “prince of peace” in Isaiah 9:6. When He was born, the angels proclaimed peace:

Luke 2:13-14 “Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Also, Romans 5:1 proclaimed the result of Christ’s mission: “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Isaiah 53:5d **and by his wounds we are healed.**

Jesus was the “sun of righteousness” prophesied by Malachi:

Malachi 4:2 “But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings.”

present in all the Old Testament sacrifices which concluded with blood or wine poured out at the foot of the altar. It spoke of death, His death. After the blood came the water. It spoke of “the living water” which came from His life and death. It also foreshadowed the River of the Water of Life which will originate on this spot after the 2nd Advent. It spoke of the life we have in Him. Why is it here blood and water? Why not just water? I think God was underlining the fact that without the blood (Hebrews 9:22), there could be no water. In Eternity, only the water of life and blessing will flow from that spot. The blood only had to flow once, for the blessing to flow forever. See also Lamentations 2:19.

Isaiah 53:6a **We all (*the human race*), like sheep, have gone astray,**

Jesus often spoke of mankind as lost sheep. Jesus said: John 10:11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Isaiah 53:6b **each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.**

This is another of the many verses that proclaim that Jesus died for the sins of all mankind. This is known as “unlimited atonement.” For some reason Calvinists deny this. For them, Jesus died only for the sins of those who would believe. Not only is this untrue, it diminishes the grace and glory of God.

Isaiah 53:7a **He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth;¹⁸**

Matthew 26:62-63 “Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent.”

Matthew 27:12-14 “When he was accused by the chief priests (*high priests*) and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, ‘Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?’ But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.”

During Jesus’ trials he never defended himself. This fulfilled this Isaiah prophecy. Why didn’t Jesus defend Himself? For one reason, He already knew the outcome of the trial. For another, He knew that His judges already knew that He was innocent. The Sanhedrin had tried for years to catch Him saying or doing anything that could condemn Him. They had even tried to trick Him into doing something illegal. They had failed. The Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate had no agenda against Jesus, he wasn’t interested in religious questions. However, you can be sure that he had spies watching Jesus for three years since He had first appeared in Jerusalem. As Roman Governor he had to make sure that Jesus was not a political threat. By 30 AD Pilate knew perfectly well that Jesus was no threat to His government.

Isaiah 53:7b **he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.**

John the Baptist had foreseen this role of Jesus from the very first. When he saw Jesus coming out of His forty days of temptation in the desert, he had addressed these words to his disciples which included the future Apostles John and Andrew:

¹⁸ *In contrast to the people of Israel who complained at every turn during their long history.*

John 1:29 “The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

Isaiah 53:8a **By oppression and judgment he was taken away.**

Although He was brought before the courts of judgment of both the Jews and the Romans, both the trials could be characterized as oppression. They broke most of the rules of procedure and jurisprudence for both Jewish courts and Roman courts. Among other things, the Sanhedrin had met secretly at night, and had condemned Jesus within six hours of His arrest. They had also beaten Him before He had been condemned. As for the Roman trial, the judge (Pilate) had been threatened by the Jews with being accused of treason before Caesar if he did not bring forth the verdict that they wanted.

Isaiah 53:8b **And who can speak of his descendants have imagined his generation?**

The word translated in the NIV as “speak” is the Hebrew word שִׁיחַ {sē'·akh} with the Polel stem. The Hebrew-English Lexicon defines that word as meaning “to meditate, consider, put forth thoughts.” In this case I think the meaning is probably closer to “imagine.” The word translated in the NIV as the plural “descendants” is the Hebrew word דֹר {dōr} which is in the singular. It occurs in Isaiah ten times. Every other time it was translated “generation.” Several times the plural “generations” appears when the literal is “generation to generation.” This is the only time the translators saw fit to translate it “descendants,” and they changed it from singular to the plural. I believe the most literal translation of this sentence is “Who can have imagined his generation?” This certainly fits the circumstance like a glove. It defied “the imagination” that the Jews would wait for 2000 years for their Messiah to come, and when He came, His “generation” would reject Him and kill Him. It could not be “imagined.”

Isaiah 53:8c **For he was cut off from the land of the living; ~~for~~ because of the transgression of my people he was stricken.**

It is important to understand who are the “my people” spoken of here. This was speaking of the Jews of Jesus’ generation. The transgression that brought about Jesus’ death was their violent rejection of Him and their engineering of His death.

The Greek word translated by the NIV as “for” here is מִן {min} which according to the Hebrew-English Lexicon of the OT-Latter Prophets is a marker of a source or extension from a source meaning: “from, out of, of, since, after, because of, more than.” Definitely, “for” is not among the meanings. Considering the correct context given in the first parts of the verse, I believe “because of” is the best choice of the translations available. The transgression of the people that caused His death was their violent rejection of Him. This was the “sin of the house of Judah” which was prophesied in Ezekiel 4:6 which would result in the destruction of Jerusalem forty years to the day after Christ’s crucifixion.

The NIV's mistranslation of this word could lead to the mistaken belief that it was teaching limited atonement. The wrong translation could be construed as saying that Jesus only died "for" the sins of "His" people.

Isaiah 53:9a **He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death,**

Jesus was originally assigned to be buried with the two thieves (the wicked) who were crucified with Him. However, after His death, the rich man, Joseph of Arimathea obtained permission from Pilate to bury Jesus in Joseph's nearby tomb:

John 19:38-40 "Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs."

Isaiah 53:9b **though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.**

This last phrase is quoted in 1 Peter 2 as speaking of Christ:

1 Peter 2:20b-22 "But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called,¹⁹ because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.²⁰ He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

Isaiah 53:10a **Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,**

Despite the rejection of the Jews, their plot to kill Him, and the Romans' complicity, it was the LORD who allowed it to happen. Jesus said: Matthew 26:53-54 "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way?"

Isaiah 53:10b **and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering,**

Jesus became the offering to pay for our guilt at the age of 33 years. He had no children.

Isaiah 53:10c **he will see his offspring**

¹⁹ *It is our calling to suffer! This statement challenges much of "name it and claim it" teaching.*

²⁰ *We should suffer injustice patiently just as Christ suffered injustice patiently.*

Despite His early death Jesus would have offspring. The offspring (or seed – the Hebrew word זרע {zeh'·rah}) of the Lord would not be physical children, but spiritual children who would be “as numerous as the sand of the sea.” They would be all those who trust in Him. Jesus had no physical descendants, which was considered a humiliation in Jewish culture. However, His seed will number in the hundreds of millions if not billions. Those are the ones which are the seed of Abraham, the seed of faith (Romans 4:16).

Isaiah 53:10c **and prolong his days,**

In spite of His death on the Cross, He would be resurrected and live forever.

Isaiah 53:10e **and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.**

All the LORD’s plans and promises would be made good through the work of Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 53:11a **He (*the Father*) shall see of the travail of his soul, [and] shall be satisfied;**²¹

The LORD includes the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. However, here it is the Father that is in view. The satisfaction of the Father is known theologically as propitiation. It means that the death of Christ satisfied the righteous claims of the Father against humanity for their sins. Pet Peeve Alert!! -- Propitiation should be pronounced like “initiation” although it is commonly not.

Isaiah 53:11b ~~by his knowledge~~ *by the knowledge of himself*²²

This is the knowledge that was spoken of in Jeremiah 31:31-34 and quoted in Hebrews.

Hebrews 8:10-12 “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

The “house of Israel” here also referred to all those Gentiles who had been grafted in by faith, which Paul described in Romans:

²¹ *I have substituted the ASV translation for this part. It agrees with all of the other translations except the NIV and is based on the Hebrew original. The NIV evidently chose to use the Greek Septuagint as a basis for their translation, which I do not believe is generally a sound practice. The NIV version is “After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light [of life] and be satisfied.” The missing phrase “he will see the light [of life]” is also not in the Dead Sea Scrolls or the Masoretic Text.*

²² *I have substituted the better translation of the ASV translation in italics.*

Romans 11:19-20 “You (*Gentiles*) will say then, ‘Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in.’ Granted. But they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith.”

It excluded those who had been broken off because of unbelief.

Isaiah 53:11c **shall my righteous servant justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.**

This describes the twofold nature of our salvation, which is commemorated in the Christian ritual of Communion. First, Jesus Christ justifies us by making us righteous because He is righteous and “in Him” we share His righteousness. This is the meaning of the bread. The Hebrew word translated “justify” here is קָדַשׁ {tsä·dak'} with the Hiphil stem. That means “to make righteous.” It is related to the Hebrew word קָדַשׁ {tseh'·dek} which means “righteous.”

The second part of our salvation was Jesus’ bearing the penalty for our sins (iniquities) by His death on the Cross. That death is often represented by His blood. In communion it is the meaning of the wine.

Isaiah 53:12a **Therefore I will ~~give him a portion among the great~~ divide Him among the many,**

The Hebrew word here translated by the NIV as “great” is רַב {rav}. It can be translated “many, much, or great.” In Isaiah it is most often translated “many.” Elsewhere in chapters 52 and 53 of Isaiah it is translated as “many.” Even in the previous verse (Isaiah 53:11) it is translated “many” when referring to those Jesus would justify. Later in this verse (12e) it is also translated “many.” I must conclude that it should also be translated “many” here. The literal translation of this phrase should be, “I will divide Him among the many.” This phrase calls up the picture of Jesus Christ dividing the bread, which stood for His body and the righteous life He lived in it, among His disciples. It also calls to mind the meaning of all the Communion services that have followed.

This correct translation makes a lot more sense than “I will give him a portion among the great.” That seemed to say that Jesus only will have a portion among the great rather than being the wellspring of all greatness.

Isaiah 53:12b **and he will divide the spoils with the ~~strong~~ multitude,**

The Hebrew word here is עֲצוּמִים {ä·tsüm'}. It is also a word which denotes a multitude. Often, in other contexts, “multitude” determined “might” so in those cases “might” could be acceptable. However, here the context denotes the multitude of His body, the Church and true Israel, with whom He will divide the spoil of Satan.

Isaiah 53:12c **because he poured out his life unto death,**

Here is a picture of our High Priest holding up the cup of His life and pouring it out unto the death on the cross. This gives us the symbolic meaning of the drink offerings of the Tabernacle in the Mosaic Law.

Isaiah 53:12d and was numbered with the transgressors.

This was quoted in Mark 15:28, and Luke 22:37 and referred to the fact that Jesus would be tried as a criminal. This was also symbolic of the greater fact that Jesus took on Himself all the sins and transgressions of all mankind.

Isaiah 53:12e For he bore the sin of many,

Paul described this in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 5:21 “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

Isaiah 53:12f and made intercession for the transgressors.

This intercession is totally effective for those who have trusted in Him.

Romans 8:34 “Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”