

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Servant of All

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In the previous article in this series, I wrote at some length about the structure of the first thirty-nine chapters of Isaiah. I do not propose to duplicate that here. However, for the purposes of this article, let me recap two important points and recast them slightly. There I argued that chapter 6, the prophet's call, should be read together with chapters 1-5 as providing a solution to the dilemma that those chapters pose. That dilemma is that whereas 1:1-31, 2:6-4:1, and 5:1-30 depict Israel as corrupted, diseased, and hypocritical, 2:1-5 and 4:2-6 declare that the nation will become the pure light to the nations. How can this be? I suggest that the prophet presents his own experience as the paradigm for what could happen to the nation to enable it to become what is promised. Just as Isaiah became God's servant for Israel (cf. 20:3), so Israel can become God's servant for the nations. Although the term *servant* is not used in chapters 1-6 (indeed, it only appears four times in the first thirty-nine chapters: 20:3, 22:20, 24:2, and 37:35), I believe that in the light of the second part of the book, and its use of *servant* in reference to Israel, it is appropriate to understand that what is taking place in chapters 1-6 is indeed a call to servanthood, both for the prophet (cf. 20:3) and for the nation.¹

As mentioned in the earlier article, what follows this call to servanthood is a reprise of 6:1-5 on a national scale. Israel is given a revelation of "The Holy One of Israel" and of itself that is analogous to the revelation that Isaiah experienced. They are allowed to experience both the greatness and the goodness that comprise the holiness of God, and they are provoked to see how deep their own sinfulness goes. This revelation revolves around the concept of trust: the trustworthiness of God and their own sinful refusal to trust him in the face of

¹ This fact that the second part of the book, so-called Second Isaiah, uses *servant* so regularly in reference to Israel while the first part (First Isaiah) does not seems to me to argue against Hugh Godfrey Maturin Williamsons's thesis that the author of Second Isaiah is really the author-editor of the first part as well (*The Book Called Isaiah* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1994]). It is difficult to believe that if this person exercised such a decisive role in the shaping and content of the book that this favorite concept of his would not have intruded itself into chapters 1-39. On the other hand, if the person who wrote the first part also wrote the second part, it is possible to explain the difference on the basis of an evolving understanding.

the challenges to that trust. Not only do the specific terms related to trust appear at crucial points,² but even in the absence of the terms themselves, the issue is unmistakable. Ahaz's refusal to trust God when he is threatened by Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Israel provides the entrée into the discussion, and chapters 7-12 are a reflection on that refusal and its long-term implications. Those implications are for immediate ill and yet, because of God's trustworthiness, for ultimate good.

Chapters 13-35 expressly deal with the Ahaz's alternate to trusting God: trusting the nations of earth. Such an option is extremely foolish because the nations are all under judgment from Israel's God (13-23), because all of time and space is under his control (24-27), and because there is no hope in the rulers of this earth (28-33). The only hope is in the King who will be revealed from above (32). These thoughts are summed up in chapters 34 and 35 in a graphic contrast between the desert created by human pride and the garden created by God for those who will trust him.

After chapters 13-35, which I have styled "Lessons in Trust," Israel is permitted to take the test again. Ahaz had failed it at its first administration, and the predicted result, Assyria's overwhelming of the land, has come to pass. So now the question is, will Hezekiah trust God in a far worse crisis than his father had faced? The answer is yes, with an interesting caveat. Hezekiah does trust God and is delivered from Assyria (36-37), but when an opportunity occurs to declare God's grace and glory to the Babylonians, he fumbles that opportunity and instead takes it as an occasion to boast about his own accomplishments (38-39). In doing this, Hezekiah demonstrates two things: trust is not a one-time action, but must be a way of living, and the hope of Israel was not in any mere human, even if he were among the best examples of what humans could be. Because Judah would not learn these lessons, the exile became inevitable.

Looked at from the perspective of servanthood, these chapters are dealing with the first prerequisite for any servant: trust. They are also a revelation of the transcendent holiness of God and the deep sinfulness of Israel. As Isaiah saw in the experience narrated in chapter 6, the only reasonable outcome of such a dramatic contrast is the destruction of the sinful one, but that was not God's intent for either Isaiah or Israel. Instead, he intended to use the fire of judgment to cleanse and purify his servants (6:7-7; cf. 4:4). That realization helps us to understand the function of chapters 40-55 in the present structure of the book. These chapters are addressed to the Judean exiles in Babylon in the years between the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. and the return to Judah in 539 or 538 B.C. They are answering two questions that Isaiah³ knows will be upper-

² חֶסֶד 12:2; 26:3-4; 30:12; 31:1; 32:9, 10, 11; 36:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 15; 37:10; חֶסֶד 8:17; 30:18, 2t.; חֶסֶד 8:17; 25:9; 26:8.

³ I am convinced (with many others) that those who compiled the book as it now stands want us, the readers, to believe that all of the material in the book stems originally from the Isaiah

most in the exiles' minds. The first is: Have not the Babylonian gods defeated Yahweh? Or if not, then the second question arises: Have not our sins defeated him? If the answer to either question is yes, then the exile spells the end for Israel and the end of the promises of God addressed to Israel.⁴

These chapters, however, are answering both questions with a resounding no. Instead, they call upon the exiles not to lose faith but to continue to trust in a gracious deliverance from the "fire" in which they would then find themselves. To retain that faith would not be easy because, as far as the record goes, no one had ever returned home from exile before. Nevertheless, this is precisely what Isaiah promises. So, chapters 40-48, utilizing a series of court cases in which God conclusively demonstrates his superiority over the Babylonian idol gods, conclude that there is no reason why God could not deliver his people from the Babylonian grip. The striking thing about these several presentations of the case is that Jacob-Israel is said again and again to be the "chosen servants" of Yahweh who, far from being cast off for their sin, are to be the chief witnesses for Yahweh's unchallengeable superiority. What is being revealed here is the nearly incredible grace of God, and this grace becomes the motivation to engage in the trust called for in the preceding division (chaps. 7-39). This is analogous to Isaiah's experience when the recognition that he was not only alive but possessed of clean lips led him to volunteer himself in service to God. He was motivated to entrust himself to God because of the evidence of God's grace.

Israel's primary problem was not physical captivity though. Its much more serious problem was the alienation from God that their sin had produced. How could God, the Holy One, use sinful Israel as his servants? He could not simply ignore the fact of their sin and still be the just judge of the universe. If Israel were restored to the land and yet were not restored to God, that would be no solution to their problem at all. In other words, grace might be the motivation for sinful people to want to be the servants of God, but what would enable them to actually become such people? The answer to this question is the same as that to the former one: grace. Thus, chapters 49-55 reveal a further dimension of God's

ben-Amoz identified in 1:1 and 2:1. Is that a fact, or are we being misled? If we are being misled, on what basis can we maintain that the revelation of God contained in this misleading document is true? On the other hand, if we are not being misled, we are constrained to believe that Isaiah ben-Amoz spoke the words of chapters 40-66 to people 150-200 years later than he lived. To many, this seems preposterous. Thus, Brevard Childs opines that to adopt such a view is to believe in clairvoyance (*Isaiah*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 3-4). This, however, is to take an insufficient account of the entire argument of chapters 41-48, which explicitly claim that what differentiates God from the gods is his ability to reveal the specifics of the future to his prophets (cf. 41:21-29, 43:8-13). What is being claimed is much more than a bit of clairvoyance. Furthermore, if we deny that God can do such a thing, what becomes of the argument for God's superiority?

⁴ Had the book ended with what is now chapter 39, the validity of the earlier revelations would have been called into question. "Yes, God could deliver from Assyria; but he couldn't deliver from Babylon, could he?" Thus, in some sense, the materials now in chapters 40-66 were necessitated by the very breadth of the vision in chapters 1-39.

grace; not only did his election love provide a motive for servanthood, it also provided the means. Therefore, the chapters no longer deal with the problem of captivity in Babylon. While deliverance language continues to be used, Babylon is never mentioned. Rather, the problem is how to restore the people to God. The answer is grace and the means of applying that grace is the Servant.

When we examine chapters 40-55, we discover that the term *servant* occurs with considerable frequency, twenty-one times in all.⁵ Furthermore, when we examine these occurrences, we discover that two different servants are being spoken of. One of the servants is defined as blind, deaf, and rebellious. The major focus is upon the benefits the servant will receive from God. His only role is to be a witness to God's saving power. In all the places where this servant is identified, he is said to be Jacob-Israel. The second of the servants is described differently. He is responsive and obedient to God. Instead of the benefits accruing to him, the terrible price of his servanthood is detailed. Despite the fact that this servant is once named *Israel* (49:3), there is no question of this servant's being the nation because it is twice said that his role is to restore the nation to God (42:6; 49:6; cf. also 49:8-12).

When the references to these two servants are examined, a striking fact emerges. In chapters 40-48, all the references except one (42:1) are to the first servant, the nation. In chapters 49-55 the situation is exactly reversed. Here all the references but one (54:17) are to the servant who suffers in order to bring Yahweh's people back to himself. This fact accords very well with the understanding of the two parts of the division being set forth here. In 40-48 God is trying to convince Israel that they are his chosen servants and that he is going to deliver them from captivity as he had promised through his prophets, thus their being the evidence of his sole godhood. In chapters 49-55, God is dealing with the question that the promises in 40-48 raise, namely, how can a just and holy God use sinful Israel as his servants. The answer is that he will do so by means of an ideal Servant who will be the Israel that Israel had never yet been capable of being. This ideal Servant is introduced in chapter 42 simply so that the grace being promised in that section (they are not cast off, they are his servants, 41:8-9; 44:1-2) is made more explicable. Then in 54:17, the nation is reintroduced in that section, focusing on the Servant to remind the reader what the Servant's ministry is all in aid of.

When we look at the structure of chapters 49-55, there are pretty clearly three subsections. They are 49:1-52:12, 52:13-53:12, and 54:1-55:13. In the first subsection, there is a movement from doubt to anticipation. The theme of comfort reappears from 40:1-2 for the first time in 49:13 in a song of praise that is clearly in response to the revelation of the Servant and his work in 49:1-12. How will the encouragement and strengthening promised to the people in

⁵41:8, 9; 42:1, 19 (2x); 43:10; 44:1, 2, 21 (2x), 26; 45:4; 48:20; 49:3, 5, 6, 7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11; 54:17.

chapter 40 be realized? It will be realized through the ministry of the servant, but the reaction of the people is doubt: “But Zion said, ‘The LORD has forsaken me; my Lord has forgotten me’” (49:14). The exiles will be convinced that God has rejected them and abandoned them because of their sin. Beginning in 49:15, God assures them again and again that this is not the case. Thus, from this point on until 52:12 the anticipation of restoration to God’s favor steadily mounts. In various ways, God assures them through the prophet that he has not rejected them. He says that he has not divorced their mother and has not sold them into slavery (50:1), and he urges them to listen to the voice of the Servant who is humbly obedient to God (50:10). Finally, they are ready to believe that God might take them back to himself, and call for the “arm of the LORD” to bring the redeemed home (51:9-11). God responds by calling on Jerusalem-Zion to wake up herself (51:17; 52:1) and prepare for the spiritual deliverance that is coming. Finally, 52:9-10 seems to reach a joyous climax in which the work of God in restoration is seen as having been accomplished:

Break forth together into singing,
 you waste places of Jerusalem,
 for the LORD has comforted his people,
 he has redeemed Jerusalem.
 The LORD has bared his holy arm,
 before the eyes of all the nations,
 and all the ends of the earth
 shall see the salvation of our God.

When we then look at chapters 54 and 55, we see recurring invitations to take part in this finished deliverance. People are called upon to avail themselves of all that God has done. They are invited to sing like a childless woman who discovers she is not childless at all (54:1-4) or a wife who thought she was abandoned and discovers it is not so (54:5-8). Isaiah 54:10 says that God’s *chesed* and compassion are theirs forever. Chapter 55 continues this note of invitation wherein people are challenged not to hold back but to take advantage of everything God is making available to them, including the everlasting covenant of David. Clearly something pivotal has occurred to change the atmosphere from one of anticipation to one of invitation. What is that pivotal something? It is the material occurring between 52:12 and 54:1. That material, of course, is the last of four revelations of the character and work of the Servant. What makes it possible for God to offer free forgiveness and full restoration to a people who at the beginning of the book are described as diseased with sin and addicted to rebellion? Is it that they have bitterly repented and vowed to “clean up their act”? As a matter of fact there is all but none of that in these chapters, and if they had, what would that have accomplished? Whatever they might vow to do in the future, and supposing they did it without defect, the fact of their past sin cannot simply be ignored by a God in whom justice is an inescapable facet of his holiness. In fact, what they are called upon to do is to receive by faith what God has done for them and not to succumb to the doubt and despair that would say that God can never be reconciled to them.

How can God be reconciled to them? By what means can his justice be satisfied and the invitations of chapters 54 and 55 be issued? Clearly, that means is what the Servant has done or will do, as recorded in 52:13-53:12. It is this that makes free grace available to Israel and to the world. Who is this ideal Servant? If he is not Israel, because Israel can never restore itself to God, is it not the anonymous prophet (so-called Second Isaiah) who supposedly spoke and wrote what are now chapters 40-55? Recently, this idea has been promoted in the work of R. N. Whybray⁶ and others. Thus, the prophet was unfairly punished for the very sins he accused his people of committing. Brevard S. Childs, who accepts the existence of Second Isaiah, nonetheless comments that “this bland and even superficial understanding of the passage serves as a major indictment of [Whybray’s] conclusions.”⁷

Two elements in the text support Childs’s conclusion that the text is not thinking of the prophet (or indeed any other human). First, in 52:13 the Servant is said to be “high and lifted up” (*ʔarum ʔnissa*). This combination of terms appears in two other places in the book: 6:1 and 57:15. The first is clearly the one that sets the standard for interpretation. This is a description of the one holy God. To think that it is here applied to a human is insupportable. The second piece of evidence is that this person is called “the arm of the LORD” (53:1). As mentioned above, this phrase or its synonyms appears several times in 49:1-52:12 as a metaphor for God’s mighty power to restore his people to himself (50:2; 51:5, 9, 16; and 52:10). To equate a human who suffers unfairly with that mighty arm is unthinkable. Thus, whoever this person is, he is not merely a human. He is not suffering because Israel has sinned. He is suffering in order to deliver them from the consequences of their sin. He is suffering so that Israel (and the world, cf. 51:48) may be justified in God’s sight and share his righteousness. This person will be, at one and the same time, a revelation of divine glory and of divine weakness, of divine grace and divine justice. Who else has ever filled that picture except Jesus Christ?

When we look at the structure of the poem, we see five stanzas of three verses each. Each stanza reveals a different facet of the gem that is the Savior. In 52:13-15, he is exalted but shocking; in 53:1-3, he is rejected and despised; in 53:4-6, he suffers for sinners (“us”); in 53:7-9, his ministry is unrecognized; and in 53:10-12, he is the sacrificial victor. In this regard, we see the destiny of servanthood, the results of servanthood, the burden of servanthood, the outcome of servanthood, and the goal of servanthood.

⁶ Roger Norman Whybray, *Thanksgiving for a Liberated Prophet: An Interpretation of Isaiah Chapter 53*, JSOTS 4 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1978).

⁷ Childs, *Isaiah*, 415. However, when Childs is asked whom the prophet had in mind, he is very difficult to pin down. Interestingly, he insists that “the servant of Second Isaiah is linked dogmatically to Jesus Christ primarily in terms of its ontology” (423), by which I take it that he means they are both serving the same function. In saying this in this way, he seems to be attempting to avoid the charge that he thinks Isaiah 53 predicts Christ.

The destiny of the Servant is triumph. The segment opens (52:13) and closes (53:12) on that note. The Servant is sure to succeed; there is no question of the final success of his ministry. He will triumph and will sit in the place of God. This of course accords exactly with what is said of Christ in Philippians 2:9-11 and in Revelation 5:5-6. It is in striking contrast to the king of Babylon who sought in his arrogance to storm heaven and place himself on the throne of God (Isaiah 14:12-15). It is also in contrast to Lady Babylon who is told to get off the throne and sit in the dust (47:1). Likewise, after his rejection and his suffering, he “will divide the spoil with the strong” (53:12). That is, far from being vanquished, he will play the part of the victor. All of this is in confirmation of the counterintuitive wisdom of the Bible: the way up is down.

Surely it was this consciousness of the ultimate success of his efforts that made it possible for the Servant to take the lowest place; to brave the scorn; and, even worse, the dismissal of the very ones he came to serve. He knew who he was, he did not have to prove anything to himself, and thus he could lay aside the robes of royalty and assume the towel of a servant (John 13:3-5, 12-17). It is only those who do not know who they are and what their destiny is who must puff themselves up and lord it over others.

That awareness will certainly be tested, as is immediately made apparent in both the first and last stanzas of the poem. The reader is left in no doubt that the Servant’s exalted status is not the result of any of the things earth would build status upon. Above all, it is not based on appearance, for his appearance is not attractive but disgusting (52:14, see also 53:2b).⁸ While there is probably a literal element here (Christians have typically referred to the evidences of torture that Christ bore on the Cross), the main connotation is probably metaphorical. The Servant has none of the outward accoutrements of power, position, and success. People will not be attracted to him for superficial reasons. Instead, they will be shocked by his lack of all these things (52:15).⁹ It is simply unheard of from a human perspective that strength should be achieved through weakness, or that victory should be achieved through being killed (53:12).

Not only is such a situation shocking, it is also off-putting. The person who adopts such a posture must expect not merely dismissal (53:3) but outright rejection. Humans do not want to ally themselves with someone they perceive to be a loser. Everybody loves a winner, and we circle around such a one as

⁸Isaiah 52:14 says that many were astonished at “you” and then that “his” appearance was marred. To resolve this apparent contradiction translators either emend the first to “him” (cf. NIV) or supply “my people” after “you” (cf. NASB). Neither is necessary; this kind of pronoun shifting occurs regularly in the prophets. Probably both pronouns refer here to the Servant. For a discussion of this problem in the poem as a whole, see David J. A. Clines, *I, He, We, and They: A Literary Approach to Isaiah*, JSOTS 1 (Sheffield: JSOT), 1976.

⁹For a discussion of the probability that *startle* is the correct reading in 52:15 instead of *sprinkle*, see John Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40-66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 374, n. 56.

though some of that aura might rub off on us. The incredible power of a beautiful girl in high school or college is the stuff of novels. She can have whatever she pleases because, surrounding her, there will be a crowd of both boys and girls to do whatever she wants. On the other hand, this person in Isaiah is hardly to be noticed. He is like a tiny plant growing in dry soil. He does not call attention to himself by shooting up like the legendary beanstalk. It is hard to tell if he is growing at all. Why should anyone take notice of him?

It is not merely what his appearance does not have that is so astonishing. It is also what it does have. He is sickly and ill. Some interpreters imagine that the person being described is a leper,¹⁰ but again, I suspect that the primary connotation is metaphorical. This Servant, as later verses will show, has taken on himself the sin-sickness of humanity. All the grief, all the sorrow, all the diseased relationships, all the disease that sin has brought to the human race, as typified by Judah, he has taken into himself. Who wants to look at that? Who wants to ally himself with that? No, much better just to look the other way and hope the apparition will go away.

Added to this distaste for the appearance and demeanor of the Servant is the instinctive realization that his condition is actually ours. We would like to say that he has brought his troubles on himself. Perhaps he has not been careful enough or not self-protective enough. Really, we imagine, he has brought it all on himself. Indeed, God has brought on him the consequences of his own foolish choices (53:4), but it will not do. He has not deserved what has befallen him. His burden is really our burden, and that makes us all the more unwilling to look at him or acknowledge him because we know that it is because of us that he is in this condition. The hammering recurrence of the first person plural pronouns throughout verses 4-6 leaves no doubt on this score. It is not just that he is suffering because we have sinned. He is suffering *for* our sin; he is carrying our sins (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21, "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" [NASB]). There is a shocking causal sequence here: we sinned, he was beaten, we were healed. In other words, the suffering of the Servant is the effective cause of our restoration to favor with God. Childs has said it well, "What occurred was not some unfortunate tragedy of human history but actually formed the center of the divine plan for the redemption of his people and indeed of the world."¹¹

The contrasting comparison to sheep is instructive in this regard (6-7). Both the Servant and we are compared to sheep, but the characteristics of sheep that the two parties manifest are radically different. In us it is that stubborn, shortsighted determination to eat the next clump of grass without regard to where we have come from or where we are going. In him it is that mild, defense-

¹⁰ The thought goes as far back as the Talmud (*Sanhedrin* 98a).

¹¹ Childs, *Isaiah*, 415.

less, utterly collapsed surrender to the shearer. We are of the same nature, yet in him that nature is transformed into something almost utterly different from anything we know. Not only has he taken what we were upon himself, he has also shown us the way to what we might become.

If the destiny of the Servant is triumph while the immediate results are astonishment and rejection, and if the burden of the Servant is the sins and sorrows of others, what is the outcome of his Servanthood? In the short term, the outcome of Servanthood is not pleasant, and all those who would follow in his footsteps must prepare themselves for the same (cf. John 15:18-21). Those outcomes are detailed in verses 7-9. They include oppression and affliction (7). They also include (unjust) judgment (8), but, much more seriously, verse 8 seems to suggest that he was killed when he had no children. Particularly in the Near East, this would be the worst possible outcome; it was as if you had never lived.¹² This would be the crowning injustice, but to add insult to injustice, the Servant is not even permitted to be buried with the humble poor whom he loved. Instead, he is buried with the wicked rich. This might be the greatest irony of all.¹³ What this says is that no one should adopt the stance of servanthood because of its short-term outcomes. Given the nature of humanity, no one should think that if he lays his life down for others, he will not be walked on. If we expect to be honored for our servitude, we will be sorely disappointed. That is exactly the point Jesus was trying to make in the passage from John 15 cited above. The disciples expected that being servants of the King would mean wealth, honor, and power. In this world, though, those are not the outcomes of service to this King. How was it possible for the Servant to do this, and how is it possible for the servants of the Servant to do it? He left the ultimate outcome of his service in the hands of his Father, and so we must do as well.

What, then, is this service all about? Already in verse 5 above it has been intimated what the goal is. Verses 10-12 underline it with a force that makes it unmistakable. The goal of the Servant's ministry is nothing other than the justification of the unrighteous (11). He will accomplish that goal by *bearing* their iniquities (11) and their sins (12). He is not suffering *for* them; he is suffering *as* them. This explains what is surely one of the most terrible verses in all of Scripture. That is verse 10. Many of us are familiar enough with it that we do not see its horror. Literally, the opening line says, "Crushing him made the LORD happy." What? Are we to think that the Creator of the Universe is a sadist? Would any but a deranged parent be glad to see his child crushed under the wheels of a hurtling tractor-trailer? What is going on here? The point is the rest of the verse.

¹² For a discussion of the numerous interpretive problems in this verse, see Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah*, 392-96.

¹³ The attempts of various commentators and translators to keep this passage from being a judgment on the rich are misguided (cf. NASB). The OT is very ambivalent about riches. If one has them as a gift from God, then they are a blessing. Most riches, however, are not from God at all; they are simply the result of oppression and injustice. For the two points of view, see Proverbs 22:4 and 16.

What is procured because the Servant has been crushed? Suppose one's son or daughter had died in the successful effort to break the door down so a hundred school children could escape from a burning building. Would that be a source of legitimate gladness for a parent? Of course it would. So it is here. "When you make his soul an offering for sin, he will see seed and prolong days, and the gladness of the LORD will be realized at his hand." If humans will appropriate his offering of himself for their sins,¹⁴ then he *will* have children and he *will* know the blessing of long life and he *will* achieve what the LORD was hoping for from his ministry. Verse 11 suggests an analogy with a woman who has delivered a whole and healthy baby. Was the process of giving birth arduous and painful? No woman who has done so will say it was not! Was it something no one would choose to go through for itself? Of course! Was it worth it? It is hard to imagine any woman saying no. So it is with the LORD and his Servant. If the pain, the suffering, the dismissal, the rejection, and even the death would result in justification for the iniquitous and forgiveness for the transgressors, that would mean victory had been achieved and both would say, "It was worth it all."

In this article, I have tried to root the so-called Suffering Servant song squarely in its context in the book of Isaiah. Too often interpreters on both the right and the left have treated it as a "sport," something unique, emerging from nowhere, and disappearing again without making a recognizable difference in its surroundings. That is decidedly not the case. Isaiah 52:13-53:12 is an intrinsic part of what is being said in chapters 40-55, but equally so in the book as a whole. How can God use sinful Israel to be a light to the nations? He cannot unless some way can be found to purge them from their sins. If they suffer for their own sins as they deserve, they will all die and disappear, and their mission will die with them for "the soul that sins shall die" (Ezek. 16:20). So, obviously some other way must be found; God must bare his mighty arm on their behalf and do for them what they cannot do for themselves. That is what this wonderful and mysterious chapter is about. It is about the Servant who in a way not fully explained here is able to take all the death of not merely Judah and Jerusalem but of all the race upon himself and set us free. Glory to his name!

¹⁴ Because of a possible Pelagian taint to the phrase, "If you [my hearers] make his soul an offering for sin," commentators and translators have struggled to make the phrase say something else. The NIV reads "If" as "Though" and emends "you" to "the LORD," but without ms. evidence. The NASB has, "If He would render Himself as a guilt offering" but again without ms. evidence. The NKJV capitalizes "You" to make it refer to God, but if it were not for the theological discomfort raised by the plain sense of the passage, none of these alternatives would suggest themselves. In fact, there need be no discomfort. This is no different from St. Paul's statement, "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Rom. 10:9). All that is being said in both passages is that there must be a human response to the divine initiative (it being understood that even that response is enabled by God).