

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Overview

Now we turn to the second major panel of 49-57 (chart), and again pick up the theme of God's Servant. This is the twelfth and last passage in Isaiah that focuses on the character whom God calls "my servant" (the others are 41:8-13; 42:1-7, 19; 43:10, 43:22-44:5, 44:21-23, 26; 48:20; 49:1-13; 50:4-9, 10).¹

The basic structure of the passage is organized around changes in speaker (chart): first person (the Lord) in the first and last sections, with sections by "us" and the prophet in the center. Each of the two central sections has two further paragraphs, the first more negative, the second more positive.²

It's interesting to revisit the earlier passages in the light of this distinction (chart).

- In both ch. 40-48 and 49-57, God speaks to the Servant (whom he sometimes calls Israel), and also to Israel about a (distinct) Servant.
- Isaiah speaks only Israel about the Servant, again in both sections.
- The Servant speaks only in 49-57, and he is the only one who ever directly addresses the Gentiles in these passages.
- This final song is the only place that the nation Israel responds. They have heard of their sin and restoration (notably, 43:22-44:5), and of the perfect Servant who will bring redemption (42:1-7; 49:1-13; 50:4-9, 10). Now they acknowledge his work, reminding us we must accept the work of the Servant.

While the title "Servant" does not appear in the third section of the book, there certainly are passages that describe the Messiah (just as there are in ch. 1-39). Why does the title go away?

The answer may lie in passages like 59:14-20 (chart), which identifies the coming one as the Lord. Also 63:5,

Isa 63:5 And I looked, and *there was* none to help; and I wondered that *there was* none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me.

In the first part of the book, the one who is to come is described this way:

Isa 11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

But in the last part, we read,

Isa 66:15-16 For, behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with his chariots like a whirlwind, to render his anger with fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. 16 For by fire and by his sword will the LORD plead with all flesh: and the slain of the LORD shall be many.

¹ The notes compare these along various dimensions: who is speaking, and to whom; whether the Servant is identified with or distinguished from Israel; how the passage is quoted in the NT.

² See Bergey JETS 1997 for more detail.

Hypothesis (chart): ch. 40-57 emphasize the Messiah's continuity with Israel and ch. 49-57 his unique role as the Servant, while ch. 58-66 emphasize his deity, for which the title "servant" is inappropriate. Once he has accomplished the work of redemption and enjoyed the exaltation promised in 52:13 and reported in Phil 2, it is no longer appropriate to call him "Servant," but now "Lord." We shall examine this hypothesis in more detail as we proceed through the final chapters of the book.

52:13-15, "My" servant

This first verse is a summary of the entire chapter. It makes three points that will be developed further.

52:13 Behold, my servant—The Lord is the first to speak. So far since ch. 40 he has mentioned "my servant" 11 times, sometimes identifying him with Jacob and Israel, but sometimes clearly looking beyond the nation to a future deliverer. This chapter is the last mention of "my servant" in the book, and is the passage that most clearly distinguishes him from the nation.

shall deal prudently,--"Deal prudently" שכל describes wise actions and the success that comes through them. Contrast צלה, success without regard to the source, which may come from the gift of another (Neh 1:11; 2:20). This latter root appears in v. 10. The Servant does prosper, but he prospers because of what he voluntarily undertakes, his wise actions. We will want to be on the lookout for these.

he shall be exalted רום and extolled ונשא, and be very high גבה--Because of his wise conduct, he will highly honored. Note the terms that are used (chart).

All three terms appear in the introductory passage in Isa 2, which makes clear that it is inappropriate to apply them to men or elements of creation:

Isa 2:11-17 The **lofty** looks of man shall be humbled, and the **haughtiness** of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. 12 For the day of the LORD of hosts *shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up*; and he shall be brought low: 13 And upon all the cedars of Lebanon, *that are high and lifted up*, and upon all the oaks of Bashan, 14 And upon all the **high** mountains, and upon all the hills *that are lifted up*, 15 And upon every **high** tower, and upon every fenced wall, 16 And upon all the ships of Tarshish, and upon all pleasant pictures. 17 And the **loftiness** of man shall be bowed down, and the **haughtiness** of men shall be made low: and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

Only the Lord is allowed to be "exalted" and "extolled":

Isa 6:1 In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, **high** and **lifted up**, and his train filled the temple.

Isa 33:10 Now will I rise, saith the LORD; now will I **be exalted**; now will I **lift up** myself.

Isa 57:15 For thus saith the **high** and **lofty** One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name *is* Holy; I dwell in the high and holy *place*, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

So the promise of v. 13 is that the Servant, because of his prudent action, will be elevated to a level of

prestige that is denied to all of creation, and reserved to God alone.

This promise is echoed in Paul's great presentation of the mind of Christ in Phil 2:5-11, with a degree of correspondence that suggests Paul has it in mind as he writes (chart).

- The one whom God calls "my servant" takes upon himself "the form of a servant" and becomes "obedient."
- The one who deals "prudently" "humble[s] himself" and refuses reputation, qualities of the wise person in Proverbs (16:19; 18:12; 29:23). The entire focus of Phil 2 is on the "mind" of Christ, our Lord as an example of wise humility.
- In Phil 2:9, God "exalts" the one who will be "exalted" according to Isa 52:13.
- Every knee bows and every tongue confesses before the one who is to be "extolled."
- He who is to be "very high" is given the "name which is above every name," the divine title of "Lord."

These two themes, of voluntary humility rewarded by exaltation, recur throughout this chapter. Vv. 14-15 develop them in particularly schematic form.

The idiom in 14-15 is a standard expression of comparison, occurring more than 50x in the OT: "just like X, so is Y." For example (chart),

Gen 41:13 And it came to pass, **as** he interpreted to us, **so** it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

Isa 10:11 Shall I not, **as** I have done unto Samaria and her idols, **so** do to Jerusalem and her idols?

Here we are shown the astonishment of many, and given two circumstances in the life of the Servant that correspond to that astonishment.

14 כְּאִשֶּׁר **As many were astonished at thee;**--When applied to people, this verb usually describes the attitude of bystanders when they see the results of God's wrath poured out.

Lev 26:32 And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it.

1Ki 9:8 And at this house, *which* is high, every one that passeth by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss; and they shall say, Why hath the LORD done thus unto this land, and to this house?

The basic fact to which the Lord draws his servant's attention is the amazement with which people will regard him when they see the Lord's wrath upon him. That amazement is the measure of two aspects of his experience.

so כִּי his visage was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:--The comparative construction is clearer if we put "so" at the start of the clause. The astonishment stems first of all from his disfigured appearance. The astonishment that people feel when they meet him is comparable to his disfigurement.

The preposition translated "more than" can also be understood in a separative sense, "away from." That

is, he was so mangled that he didn't look human any more. Think of the morbid fascination we have with deformed people, the natural instinct to stare that our parents have to instruct out of us. His disfigurement is the first measure of the astonishment with which people view him.

We'll learn more about the cause of this disfigurement in few verses, but it seems clear that this servant has endured terrible physical abuse.

15 So η shall he sprinkle many nations;--The second aspect of his experience that merits astonishment is his role in sprinkling many nations. "Sprinkle" is a technical verb. Two-thirds of its occurrences appear in Leviticus, where it describes various rituals of cleansing.³ We will learn later just how he does this, and in the concluding section, where the Lord again is speaking, we read the corresponding revelation (v. 11b), "my righteous servant shall justify many."

the kings shall shut their mouths at him:--Biblical examples of people shutting their mouths in someone's presence indicates their awareness of the power and authority of the one before whom they are silent, and their own unworthiness:

[Before Job, in the days of his prosperity:] Job 29:9-10 The princes refrained talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. 10 The nobles held their peace, and their tongue cleaved to the roof of their mouth.

[Job before God, after God rebukes him:] Job 40:4 Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth.

[When God restores his people to Carmel, Bashan, and Gilead:] Mic 7:16 The nations shall see and be confounded at all their might: they shall lay their hand upon their mouth, their ears shall be deaf.

[When many nations are joined to the Lord, and the Lord inherits Judah:] Zec 2:13 Be silent, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation.

Rom 3:19 Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.

In 14b, people are astonished because of how disfigured the Servant appears. Now they are astonished because of how insignificant and unworthy they are before him. The first astonishment reflects his humiliation; the second, his exaltation. We see the same contrast in the Lord's encouragement of his Servant in 49:7 (chart).

7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, *and* his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, *and* the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

So here, the humiliation of 14b leads to the exaltation of 15.

3 See Young's article in WTJ 1941 for a thorough defense of this rendering. The usual objection is that the object being sprinkled is nowhere else in the accusative, but governed by a preposition. Yet Young's article shows that the verb does support a range of constructions, and no alternative is compelling. See also Motyer's discussion. In addition, there may be a pun here with the only other use of the verb in Isaiah, at 63:3, where the blood of the rebels is splattered on the Lord's garments. Those who refuse to be sprinkled with his blood will themselves be the object of sprinkling when he treads the winefat.

The shift in verb tenses is interesting. The Lord describes the scene from a point in time at which the Servant has borne his wrath and been disfigured, but the “many nations” have not yet received his sacrifice. This would put us in the early chapters of the book of Acts, at the time that the New Covenant has been inaugurated by the coming of the Spirit.

for $\text{וְ} that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.$ --These are, after all, the “kings” of “many nations.” Throughout the OT, God promised one who would deliver Adam’s children from their sin. Israel was supposed to carry that message to the nations, but she failed in that duty. As a result, when the nations finally do hear the gospel, it is news to them.

This explanation of the phrase is consistent with Paul’s quotation of it with reference to the spread of the gospel to the Gentiles:

Rom 15:20-21 Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: 21 But as it is written, **To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.**

53:1-6, “Our” Testimony

For the first time in the Servant passages, we hear the voice of the nation.

Once before, God introduced the Servant with the exhortation, “Behold” (42:1). But in that case, there was no response. Here, for the first time, Israel responds to the revelation with a confession of sin and recognition of the Servant’s role as sin-bearer.

The section has two main parts: their past rejection of the Servant (vv. 2-3), and their recognition of his redemptive work (vv. 5-6). These parts are joined by a hinge in v. 4 that summarizes the two themes. This pairing is a beautiful summary of what the NT means when it tells us to “repent and believe the Gospel” (Mark 1:15; cf. the emphasis on repentance throughout Acts).

1-3, Rejection

The Lord has just prophesied (52:15) that kings will shut their mouths when they learn of the work of the Servant. Now penitent Israel observes the ironic lack of response among the Jews.

Clauses in the first person (1a, 2b, 2d, 3b) alternate with clauses that describe the Servant’s humble position (1b, 2a, c, 3a). The overall system has a chiasmic pattern, visible in the relative lengths of the corresponding members, and emphasized in the comparatives in 2a and 3a.⁴ The objective clauses are not false; the error is that when the nation saw this humble condition, they reacted as described in the subjective (first-person) clauses.

The first and last members of the chiasm make the same point, first as a pair of rhetorical questions,

⁴ This structure may explain the otherwise anomalous Massoretic punctuation in v. 2. With no punctuation, one would naturally parse (as in ESV), “he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.” But the disjunctive *athnax* after $\text{הָרָה} \text{ "comeliness/majesty"}$ and the conjunctive *merka* on “we shall see him” associate both of the imperfect verbs with “no beauty,” corresponding to the chiasmic structure.

and then in v. 3b as a statement. Then the central three sections describe three reasons for this rejection:

- The Servant is unimpressive, without the trappings of royalty or station.
- The Servant is undesirable. He doesn't satisfy their natural appetites.
- The Servant is unpopular. Nobody else likes him, so why should they?

1, Initial Confession

53:1 Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?--The key to understanding this line is to recall the recent context in 52:7-10. Consider the following points.

- Throughout the OT, a "report" is a message that someone brings. Just such a report was in view in 52:7, with the arrival of the messenger. "Our report" is thus not the report that we bring, but the one that concerns us, the one that we receive.⁵
- The message of the messenger concerned the work of "the arm of the Lord," invoked in 51:9 and announced in 52:10, in delivering God's people from bondage.
- 52:10 proclaimed that the Gentiles would witness this great work, and 52:15 has just told us that many nations will respond.

We saw in our study of 52:7 that the fulfillment of the promise of the messenger goes far beyond the fall of Babylon in 539 BC. The messenger is the Messiah, bringing the good news of the defeat of the forces of Antichrist. Many nations will hear this news and respond to it, but now Israel laments that few among her have responded. "We have received a report of how the arm of the Lord has worked. The Gentiles have believed it (52:15), but who among us has?" The verse thus contrasts the blindness of the Jews with the receptiveness of the Gentiles. The point is not that we have taken a report to others and found no response, but rather that we have not responded to the report that came to us.

The verse is quoted twice in the NT, both times emphasizing the unusual resistance of the Jews to the gospel, compared with the response of Gentiles. The first, in John 12, explains our Lord's rejection by the Jewish leaders on Palm Sunday, at the same time that the Greeks were seeking him out.

Joh 12:20-21 And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast:
21 The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus.

37-38 But though he had done so many miracles before them [the Jewish people], yet they believed not on him: 38 That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, **Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?**

The second is in Paul's discussion of Israel's blindness in Rom 10. He has seen tremendous response among the Gentiles, and he longs to see Israel saved as well.

Rom 10:1 Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

⁵ This is the sense of the genitive in 2 Sam 4:4, the only other place where שמרעה appears in construct.

12 For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

16 But they [the Jews] have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, **Lord, who hath believed our report?**

The gospel is distinctively “their report,”

Act 10:36 The word which *God* sent **unto the children of Israel**, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:)

But the initial addressees have rejected it most strongly. The ones with the longest experience in seeing the work of the arm of the Lord have been most reluctant to acknowledge it.

Now the nation explains three reasons why they did not respond. All three of these reasons are true; they reveal the sinfulness of the people’s attitude.

2a, First Reason: He’s unimpressive.

This section emphasizes the Servant’s humble, unassuming nature. They were looking for a royal hero, a second David, and he did not present himself as such a king.

2 For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground:--The first clause is puzzling.⁶ The word translated “tender plant” elsewhere always refers to a suckling child, thus the LXX translation παιδιον. Nowhere else does it refer to the sucker of a plant. There is a related word (the feminine participle) that does refer to a sucker, and our translators have assimilated our word to that one for two reasons: the parallel with the “root” later in the verse, and their interpretation of the verb as meaning “to grow.” This verb עלה never refers to the growth of a child, but often refers to the growth of vegetation.

But most uses of the verb don’t refer to the growth of vegetation. It means simply “to go up.” To “go up ... before [God]” would mean to come up into God’s presence, into his awareness.

We should not be surprised that the servant “goes up before the Lord.” The Lord has told us to expect his Servant to be “exalted, and extolled, and be very high” (52:13). Now the nation acknowledges that he is exalted before the Lord, but not in the character they expected, of a mighty king. Rather, he takes on two forms that the first half of the book has already prepared us to expect.

First, the nation was told to expect a wondrous baby:

Isa 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

Isa 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder:

Isa 11:8 And the **sucking child** shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice’ den. [the only other use of יונק in Isaiah!]

Second, it was told to expect a tender shoot springing from a long-dead root:

⁶ See fuller discussion in the notes.

Isa 11:1 And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots:

So the most natural meaning is not that a shoot and a root shall **grow up** before the Lord, but rather that the one who **goes up** before him is the one who was promised in the form of an infant from the house of David and a sprout from David's apparently dead tree.

he hath no form תאר nor comeliness הדר;--The terms again recall David's dynasty.

When David was summoned to play for Saul, his "form" was commended:

1Sa 16:18 Then answered one of the servants, and said, Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, *that is* cunning in playing, and a mighty valiant man, and a man of war, and prudent in matters, and a **comely person איש תאר**, and the LORD *is* with him.

Isaiah's word "comeliness" is better rendered, "glory," again a royal attribute, also ascribed to David and his family:

Psa 21:6 His glory *is* great in thy salvation: honour and **majesty** hast thou laid upon him.
[Psalm of David, about the king]

Psa 45:3-4 Gird thy sword upon *thy* thigh, O *most* mighty, with thy glory and thy **majesty**. 4
And in thy **majesty** ride prosperously because of truth and meekness *and* righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. [Wedding psalm by sons of Korah, probably for Solomon]

The nation was expecting a handsome and glorious king, like David. But Isaiah has already told them to expect something much less ostentatious—a helpless infant, a tender shoot out of a dead root.

2b, Second Reason: He's undesirable

The second reason they give for rejecting him is that he doesn't appeal to their natural desires.

and when we shall see him, and there is no beauty that we should desire him.--This is the center of the structure. According to the Massoretic punctuation, which our version (alone of the current English translations) follows, they confess to seeing him, but their verdict is "no beauty," and thus they take no pleasure in him. Actually, their verdict is even more bland: it's just "no appearance." "We looked, and we didn't see anything that would lead us to take pleasure in him."

In this section, their standard for accepting him is their own desire. Elsewhere in Isaiah, the word is applied to two things:

- Idols:
1:29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which ye have **desired**, and ye shall be confounded for the gardens that ye have chosen.
44:9 They that make a graven image *are* all of them vanity; and their **delectable** things shall not profit;
- Food and drink:

27:2 A **pleasant** vineyard⁷

32:12 They shall lament for the teats, for the **pleasant** fields, for the fruitful vine.

Those who follow their desires are showing that they are part of the world:

1Jo 2:16 For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

“Lust” in 1 John 2:16 is επιθυμια, a common LXX translation for חמך, the root here translated “desire.” Their confession is not that they misunderstood him, that he had some beauty that they had missed. It is that they were following after their desires, to which he didn’t appeal at all.

This confession holds an important warning for our day, when so many seek to present the Savior as desirable to the natural man. We did not come to him because we found him desirable. We did not find some beauty that others had missed. There is nothing in him that appeals to the unbeliever, nothing that answers the worldling’s drive to satisfy fleshly desires. If we try to make him look desirable, we must hide the very characteristics that make him our redeemer and substitute.

3a, Third Reason: He’s unpopular

Up to this point, the people have described how unacceptable he appears based on his own characteristics. Now the focus is on how others respond to him. We are all acquainted with this dynamic: we like what our friends like (the key to “viral marketing”), and tend to look down on what our friends reject, regardless of the virtues of the object itself. If everyone thinks a pop star is great, we form a positive opinion of him as well, no matter how cacophonous his music or disastrous his personal life; if everyone thinks school is a bore, so do we, no matter how fascinating the subject matter.

3 He is despised and rejected of gentlemen;--The plural “men” is unusual, אישים instead of אנשים. Delitzsch argues from its few other uses (Prov 8:4; Ps 141:4) that it singles out the upper class. Thus it’s not inappropriate to translate “gentlemen.”⁸ Respectable people don’t want to be seen in his company. He is so uncool. This has always been the case:

1Co 1:26-29 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called*: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence.

a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief [חלי “sickness”]:--“Acquainted with” has the sense of “an acquaintance of.” He is a sad man, a friend of Mr. Sickness. Who would want to associate with a loser like that?

and like the hiding of ~~we hid as it were~~ our faces from him;--This is the literal sense of the phrase, which seems better understood as an additional characteristic of the Servant than as a separate

⁷ So BHS; AV follows many Hebrew mss that read חמר "wine"

⁸ HALOT notes that this is the standard form in Phoenician and Punic; perhaps the use of a foreign form has a cultured overtone, such as calling someone “monsieur” in English

predication: he is a man of sorrows, a friend of grief, characterized by being rejected by other people.

By far the most common use of the idiom “to hide the face” (about 25 times, see HALOT) is to describe how God hides his face from sin and sinners. So the expression here may express a certain righteous indignation. They justify ostracizing him on the grounds that he’s an ungodly sinner. As they confess in v. 4b, they consider him to be under God’s condemnation, and in that case, why should they want anything to do with him?

3b, Final Confession

Now we return to their confession that they have rejected him:

he was despised,--This repetition of the start of v. 3 marks their own participation in rejecting him:

and we esteemed him not.--The summary of their attitude is that they offered him no respect.

4, Hinge

We’ll first study this verse in its context, then look at how it is used in the NT.

v. 4 in its context

This verse connects the confession of their rejection of the Servant in vv. 1-3 with their recognition of his substitutionary work in vv. 5-6. As often happens in such transitional verses, it inverts the references, AbaB. It is as though the author takes a tentative step into the new topic, then steps back for a moment into the old one, then finally moves completely into the new, so that his hearers don’t miss the transition.

As we move into this theme, Isaiah picks up the language he used in ch. 1 to describe the nation’s chastisement for their sin (chart):

Isa 1:5-6 Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. 6 From the sole of the foot even unto the head *there is* no soundness in it; *but* wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs [לִי “sicknesses”], and carried our sorrows:--The afflictions are those mentioned in v. 3 “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief”), artfully inverted, but now their true source is revealed. We recoiled from him in disgust at his miserable condition. But now we recognize that what we were seeing was the effect of our own wickedness that he carried in our place.

yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.--As in vv. 1-3, their perception in itself is not wrong. He was “smitten of God,” as the prophet’s explanation makes clear in v. 10, “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him.” There are two differences between this half of the verse and the first half that point out the contrast between the believer’s view of our Lord’s suffering and the unbeliever’s view.

- The voice of the verbs shifts from active to passive. In our rebellion, we thought he was the

recipient of God's displeasure, but now we see that he was actively taking sickness and sorrow upon himself.

- The believer, but not the unbeliever, recognizes that the sins involved are his own. Thus the second half of the verse sees the agent (God) and the victim (the Servant), but not the guilty one, while in the first half the believer acknowledges that it is "our griefs" and "our sorrows" that he bore.

v. 4 in the NT

The first half of this verse is quoted in the NT. As we have noted, "griefs" (both here and in v. 3) is the standard Hebrew word for sickness, and the NT cites this verse as explaining our Lord's healing miracles"(chart):

Mat 8:16-17 When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with *his* word, and healed all that were sick: 17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, **Himself took our infirmities, and bare *our* sicknesses.**

Some believers conclude from this quotation that spiritual believers should never be sick, and if they are, they need only claim the Lord's redemptive work and they will be healed. If a believer is ill, it's because of a lack of faith or some other spiritual shortcoming. This view is sometimes summarized as "healing in the atonement," where "atonement" is meant in the usual theological, non-biblical sense as "everything that Christ accomplished in his passion." From this perspective, medical care is fleshly, a usurpation of the Lord's healing work, and unnecessary for the believer. In response to this, we should make several observations.

- Divine healing is part of a bigger picture.
- Divine healing can happen today.
- There are limits to divine healing in this present age.

The Context of Divine Healing

Divine healing is part of a bigger picture, which starts with forgiveness of sin (chart).

Redemption deals with the consequences of sin as well as its guilt. The link to 1:5 ("the whole head is sick") shows that sickness is viewed as a consequence of sin, and both the use of the word "sicknesses" in 53:3, 4 and Matthew's application show this. David praises God for his power, and associates it with forgiveness:

Psa 103:2-4 Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: 3 Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; **who healeth all thy diseases**; 4 Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

Ultimately, the healing of human illness will be expanded into complete restoration of the fallen creation, as Isaiah has already promised:

Isa 35:5-7 Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be

unstopped. 6 Then shall the lame *man* leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. 7 And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, *shall be* grass with reeds and rushes.

This progression shows that there is a sense in which there is “healing in Christ’s redemption.” The restoration of all creation is also included in his redemption. But as we have so often seen, God’s promises are often worked out in stages.

- The removal of our guilt is as complete as it can ever be.
- The restoration of the earth hasn’t started yet. If anything, the groans of the physical creation are louder now than they have ever been.
- What about individual healing? Is it, like forgiveness, completely achieved, or, like the restoration of the earth, yet to begin? The biblical data suggests that it’s in between.

Divine Healing Today

Divine healing can happen today. There is no reason to limit such healing to our Lord’s earthly ministry.

- It happened before the Lord’s coming (just as sinners could have their sins forgiven and become saints by looking ahead to the promised redeemer). Consider
 - the healing of Naaman in 2 Kings 5, in the early 9th century BC,
 - the healing of Hezekiah about 700 BC in ch. 38.
- God healed sick people in the apostolic period. An illuminating example occurred when Paul was in prison.

Phi 2:25-27 Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants. 26 For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick. 27 For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

God allowed Epaphroditus to become ill, then healed him. Paul considers this outcome evidence of God’s mercy, not the inevitable result of the redemptive work of Christ.

- God is often pleased to grant healing in answer to our prayers today. The Lord has repeatedly delivered people in our fellowship from serious illness. We should not let the excesses of some lead us to spiritualize away this very real facet of our Lord’s redemption.

Limits of Divine Healing

Divine healing does not guarantee that spiritual believers will be free from sickness, or invalidate conventional medicine. The data show that redemption does not remove all sickness from God’s people

in this era. We have already discussed the case of Epaphroditus. There are other illuminating cases.

Consider Paul's testimony to the Corinthians.

2Co 12:7-9 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Paul had some persistent physical ailment. We don't know what it was, but we do know that he repeatedly asked the Lord to deliver him from it. The Lord did not take it away, and in fact told Paul that it would not be taken away. This outcome is completely anomalous if healing is an automatic consequence of our redemption.

Paul's condition may explain a title he gives Luke, his frequent traveling companion. Luke is with Paul in Rome during his first captivity (Col 4:14; Phm 24), and also during his last (2 Tim 4:11). In Col 4:14, Paul describes Luke as "the beloved physician," suggesting Luke's skill may have been one means of God's grace to Paul to alleviate the infirmities that he suffered. Certainly, Paul didn't consider Luke's skill as a physician to be a carnal challenge to God's healing power, or he would used some other description to characterize him. Doctors can be overused, but they can also be a provision of the Lord.

Next, consider Paul's advice to Timothy.

1Ti 5:23 Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

Here we learn that

- Timothy was ill; in fact he was often ill.
- There is no evidence in these letters that he was in a carnal state, meriting chastisement. Paul does not exhort him to repent of some sin.
- Nor does Paul encourage him to claim the healing that is in the "atonement."
- Paul does advise him to take "a little wine" as a treatment.

Paul's advice is like telling someone today to use an over-the-counter medication. Neither illness nor the use of medical means is seen as a sign of carnality or lack of faith.

Where does Paul get this advice for Timothy? We've seen that Luke was with Paul during his first and second imprisonments, and it's very reasonable to expect he would have continued with Paul during the intervening period when 1 Tim was written. The advice in 1 Tim 5:23 may well have come from Luke.

A final example comes from the Revelation.

Rev 21:1-4 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. ... 3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, ... 4 ... God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death,

neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

Pain is one of the “former things” that is removed in the new heavens and the new earth, not something that is already gone before the end of this world and the beginning of the next.

God allows sickness to come upon his people, whether for chastisement (1Co 11:30 “For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you”) or to develop spiritual character (Jam 1:3 “the trying of your faith worketh patience”). But he is also pleased often to deliver us from it, and this is possible only through the work of our Lord. Our Lord has indeed “borne our sicknesses,” and prayer for healing should be our first and frequent recourse in times of illness. But the full restoration of the physical universe awaits the age to come, and we should not be surprised if illness persists, nor reluctant to consult those to whom God has given medical skills.

5-6, Recognition

This section consists of three bicola, and a final unpaired clause. Each of these units makes a slightly different point that relates four ideas our sin, our subsequent healing, the Servant’s suffering, and God’s agency in bringing all this about (chart). (This kind of analysis, focusing on the interaction of main ideas, is called “semantic structure,” to distinguish it from “syntactic [grammatical] structure” and “symmetrical structure” that manifests itself in chiasms and alternations. It’s useful in identifying the central theme of a passage: here, “The Lord causes his Servant to suffer because of our sin, so that we might find peace.”)

5 But he was wounded for by our transgressions, he was bruised for by our iniquities:--The first bicolon repeats the claim of v. 4a, in stronger form. The Servant suffered for us, in our place. The two ideas that both of these clauses emphasize are a) our sin, and b) his suffering as a result of it.⁹

the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.--In the second bicolon, we continue to hear the theme of the servant’s suffering, but now our role is different. Instead of emphasizing our role in *causing* his suffering, the people confess the *blessing* that comes to them from it, “peace” and “healing.” Chapter 1 established the idea that sin leads to suffering; this chapter introduces the radical idea that someone else can suffer in the place of the sinner.

The words that describe the Servant’s sufferings have a different nuance than in 5a. There, they simply pointed out the violent nature of the suffering (pierced, crushed), reflecting the wrath of God against our “transgressions” and “iniquities.” But “chastisement” and “stripes” suggest an additional purpose: instruction and correction.

- “Chastisement” מוסר really means “instruction.” Of the 54 times that the word appears in the OT, 30 are in Proverbs, describing its use in leading someone out of error and into wisdom.
- “Stripes” חברות is much rarer, appearing only seven times, but Proverbs mentions its potential for cleansing:

Pro 20:30 The blueness [חברות "stripes"] of a wound cleanseth away evil: so *do* stripes the

⁹ The preposition is causal; “by” or “because of” would be a better translation than “for,” which attempts to pack into these clauses the vicarious work that is clearer in 4a, 5b, and 6.

inward parts of the belly.

Like v. 4a, this verse is sometimes used to justify the notion of “healing in the atonement.” Certainly, the theme of healing continues from v. 4a. However, the NT quotes the two verses in different contexts. As we saw, v. 4a is quoted in relation to the Lord’s healing ministry in Matt 8. Verse 5 is quoted only in 1Pe 2:24 (chart):

Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: **by whose stripes ye were healed.**

Peter paraphrases the effect, “that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness.” He understands the healing to be a spiritual one, recovery from sin. This reading actually reflects a deep understanding of Isaiah as a book.

- Isa 1:5 presented sickness as the mark of God’s chastisement: “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: **the whole head is sick**, and the whole heart faint.”
- In 6:10, the Lord warns Isaiah that his ministry will not cure them: “Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; **lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.**”
- The people’s healing awaits the new age that is promised throughout the book: Isa 30:26 “Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the LORD bindeth up the breach of his people, and **healeth the stroke of their wound.**”

In this context, 53:5 promises that it is the Servant by whom God will accomplish the promise of 30:26.

6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way;--The third bicolon (chart) focuses on a single theme: the sin that led to the Servant’s wounding in 5a. There their sin was assumed, but here they confess it directly: not just “he suffered for our sin,” but “We sinned.”

We have here two images of sin, which contradict what most people think of as sin today. Our culture prizes independence and “social responsibility,” but consider the nation’s confession.

- They confess their independence: “every one to his own way.” Twice the author of Judges laments, “In those days *there was* no king in Israel, *but* every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes. (17:6; 21:25), and Solomon warned (Prov 12:15), “The way of a fool *is* right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel *is* wise.”
- Ironically, the poetic pairing links this independence with wandering astray “like sheep.” When sheep wander, they follow each other. Yet this contradiction is true of our culture today. It values independence, but only if that independence agrees with the crowd in rejecting the Lord’s authority.

and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.--The final, unpaired element of the verse emphasizes the Lord’s direct agency in this suffering. Because it is unpaired, it contrasts with what we have read so far, and thus receives emphasis. “It is the Lord himself who brought this to pass.”

The verb is stronger than our version suggests. The Qal means “to attack, to meet violently.” It describes what Doeg did to the priests of Nob at Saul’s direction (1 Sam 22:18), to punish them for

helping David (chart).

1Sa 22:13-19 And Saul said unto [Ahimelech], Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast enquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? ... 17 And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the LORD; because their hand also *is* with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to **fall upon** the priests of the LORD. 18 And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and **fall upon** the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he **fell upon** the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

The form here is causative: the Lord causes the sin of all of us to converge violently upon his Servant. Just as Saul commanded Doeg to fall upon the priests of Nob, the Lord commands all of our sin, in its violent and destructive effect, to fall upon his Servant.

This point ironically confirms the people's criticism in v. 4. He *was* indeed smitten of God, but only because he was deflecting the blow that they deserved. In this final line of their confession, they recognize that far from being a reason to reject him, his status as "smitten of God" commands their devotion.

7-10, "His" suffering and reward

Now we turn from "we" to "he," from the people's confession to a third party's testimony concerning the Servant (chart). Most likely, we are to understand Isaiah as speaking here, offering inspired commentary on what the nation has said.

Like vv. 1-6, these verses fall into two parts, with a transition between them. In 1-6, the Servant was suffering throughout, and the transition was between Israel's rejection and their recognition. This section begins by continuing to comment on his suffering, but then turns to consider his reward.

The transition uses a different device than that in v. 4. There, a separate paragraph linked the panels on either side. Here, each panel ends with a statement that points to the other, but that is clearly part of its own panel (chart).

The two main themes, the servant's suffering and his reward, recall two of the themes of vv. 5-6, while the other two themes (the people's sin and the Lord's agency) are mentioned more briefly. The major change is that instead of the people's peace, we read of the Servant's reward, but this becomes the source of their blessing. Just as their sin leads to his suffering, so his peace leads to their peace.

7-9, His suffering

The parallel between "he was oppressed and he was afflicted" in our version is misleading; the first is a finite verb, the second a participle with explicit pronoun. This suggests¹⁰ that we have (chart)

- a summary statement ("he was oppressed"),

¹⁰ I'm following Delitzsch's parsing of the verse here.

- a double description of his response: acceptance of his humbling, and silence in sufferings
- an illustration of each response from the pastoral domain, with alternating references to the Servant (“as a lamb ... he is brought; ... as a sheep ..., he openeth not ...)

7 He was oppressed,--The verb describes what a lender does to a debtor (Deut 15:2), or a slave-driver to a slave (Exod 5:6), or a tyrant over a subject people (Isa 14:2). He was at the bottom of the pile. How did he respond to this treatment?

and he was afflicted,--Here is the first characteristic of his response to oppression. The verb is passive, as translated literally by our version. But it’s interesting to observe the use of this voice in Exod 10:3 (chart):

And Moses and Aaron came in unto Pharaoh, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of the Hebrews, How long wilt thou refuse **to humble thyself** before me? let my people go, that they may serve me.

The passive can have the sense of allowing oneself to suffer. The Servant allows himself to be humbled. Recall how he places himself in the hands of the guard sent to arrest him:

Joh 18:3-12 Judas then, having received a band *of men* and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4 Jesus therefore, knowing all things that should come upon him, went forth, and said unto them, Whom seek ye? 5 They answered him, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them, I am *he*. ... 6 ... they went backward, and fell to the ground. ... 10 Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear. ... 11 Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it? 12 Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound him, ...

His presence is overpowering to them, yet he allows them to bind him, forbidding Peter to attempt to deliver him. This is his first response to oppression: he lets himself be humbled.

yet he opened not his mouth:--The second response is that he does not complain or speak against his mistreatment. Most of us, even if we do not resist, would still speak out, but the Lord is silent. Here is an extreme example of the principles we recently studied in James 3, avoiding sinning with the tongue. The NT history records that in both of his trials, that before the Sanhedrin and that before Pilate, he did not defend himself (chart).

Mat 27:12 And when he was accused of the chief priests and elders, he answered nothing.

Mar 15:5 But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled.

Now Isaiah illustrates these two responses from the behavior of sheep.

he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter,--He allows himself to be led so meekly, that one might think he is a lamb going to slaughter, ignorant of the coming doom. But he is not ignorant. He has repeatedly foretold his suffering and death to his disciples. He sovereignly allows himself to be afflicted.

and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.--His silence also finds its illustration in the flock, in this case of a ewe-sheep being sheared.

This chapter is the earliest place in the Bible that the Messiah is compared to a lamb. It is the basis on

which John the Baptist declares our Lord to be “the lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

There is a striking contrast here with v. 6a, “all we like sheep are gone astray.” We are wayward, willful sheep; he is a submissive, silent lamb. We went our own way; he allowed himself to be led. Yet for all that, because we were lost sheep, he became a sheep to save us (chart). In that very comparison, we have a testimony to the principle that the writer to the Hebrews later articulates:

Heb 2:16-17 For verily he took not on *him the nature of angels*; but he took on *him the seed of Abraham*. 17 Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto *his brethren*, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining to God*, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

8 He was taken from prison and from judgment:--The text continues to describe the sequence of events: He allows himself to be led to his trial. From there, he is taken to die.¹¹

and his generation, who shall declare/consider?--This is the literal order. Our version treats “generation” as the object of “declare,” as if to say, “What hope has such a person of having any offspring?” But this meaning would be unprecedented for “generation” דור, which everywhere else refers to a cohort, those alive at the same time, members of the same family. It seems better to read (chart),¹² “As for his very own generation, who among them shall consider...?” This makes it reasonable to take the following כִּי as indicating discourse, not cause.

The silence of the Servant is matched by the silence of his generation. He does not protest his suffering, and they do not acknowledge it. In the Christmas carol, we sing of our Savior’s birth,

How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given.

This silence characterizes the culmination of his advent as well, the sacrifice that he came to give.

Next we read the fundamental truth concerning the Servant, which his own contemporaries refuse to acknowledge:

[who shall declare] that he was cut off out of the land of the living:--The prophet has described the Servant as submitting to be led away to prison and judgment, then led from there to his doom, which he now describes. He is put to death. The image has a sober overtone: the “land of the living” is the place of God’s presence and blessing (chart):

Psa 27:13 *I had fainted*, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.

Psa 116:9 I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

Psa 142:5 I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou *art* my refuge *and* my portion in the land of the living.

In his sickness, Hezekiah laments,

Isa 38:11 I said, I shall not see the LORD, *even* the LORD, in the land of the living:

11 One could take the כִּי as causal as in v. 3, “taken away by means of oppression and judgment,” as in Ps 107:39. Clines’ dictionary actually takes the two instances in different senses: “by means of oppression, without judgment.”

12 Taking כִּי as emphatic force; see Walker in VT 5.

Thus, to be taken away from the land of the living is a severe judgment, and David proclaims it upon Doeg the Edomite for his slaughter of the priests of Nob:

Psa 52:5 God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of *thy* dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living.

Perhaps this idiom anticipates the spiritual aspect of our Lord's death, not only deprived of life, but separated from his Father:

Mat 27:46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

For because of the transgression of my people—So far, vv. 7-8 have been almost clinical, recording in historical order the affliction of the Servant and his patience, but with no reference to the cause of his suffering and death. Recall the four main themes of vv. 5-6. Isaiah has focused entirely on “the Servant’s suffering” (chart). Now he adds the cause, the people’s sin.¹³

“For” suggests the whole idea of his substitutionary work. That idea is clear in this chapter (e.g., 4a, 5b, 6, 10, 11b-12), but is a bit more than this preposition (לְ) presents (either here or 4a). It is causal: he suffered because of the transgression of the people. This would be true whether he were dying as a sacrifice for their sin, or just as a result of their abuse. In terms of the flow of the passage, the latter appears to be in Isaiah’s mind at this point. He is cut off, and it’s the people’s fault. Only in the midst of v. 10 does Isaiah put it together.

was he stricken.--Actually, the pronoun is plural.¹⁴ We could better translate, “the stroke belonged to them,” that is, to his generation. Again, Isaiah sees the Servant’s suffering, and recognizes that it results from the people’s sin. They are the sinners. The stroke should fall on them, not on him.

This portion was what captured the attention of the Ethiopian eunuch (chart):

Act 8:26-35 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to *him*, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. 32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, **He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.** 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

In the first century, under Roman rule, life is cheap and death was common. The eunuch would have no

13 For “my people” spoken by Isaiah rather than the Lord, see 5:13; 22:4; 26:20; 32:13, 18 (cf. “us” in v. 15).

14 See Hengstenberg on לְמוֹ. The form is almost always plural, and the few cases claimed as singular can also be understood as collectives.

problem finding many examples of people who die, even innocent people who die. But the verses that catch his attention emphasize the silence, both of the Servant and of his contemporaries. How could a man suffer so patiently?

His question is a slow pitch, and with a little imagination we can hear Philip hitting it out of the park. As we have seen, vv. 7-8 are mostly a step by step narrative of the events of the Lord's passion, events that at this point were less than a month old (chart). People noticed the events of the passion, and wondered what was going on. Recall Cleopas' comment to the Lord on the road to Emmaus:

Luk 24:18 Art thou only a stranger in Jerusalem, and hast not known the things which are come to pass there in these days?

Philip would have recounted the facts of the recent history, aligned them with the prophecy, and then proclaimed the conclusion that the Lord offers to the entire chapter:

Isa 53:11 by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

And by God's grace, the eunuch claimed his place among those for whom the Lord died.

Isaiah continues with the narrative, describing two different kinds of companions of our Lord in his death (chart).

9 And he made his grave with the wicked,--The NT records that he was put to death with criminals:

Luk 23:32-33 And there were also two other, **malefactors**, led with him to be put to death. 33 And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the **malefactors**, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

The expression, "he made his grave," can be understood idiomatically, "one appointed his grave." The idea is that the intent of the authorities was that he be executed and his body disposed of along with other criminals. But that's not what in fact happened.

and with the rich in his death;--Instead of an unmarked grave with criminals, he received an honored burial in a nobleman's tomb.

Mat 27:57-60 When the even was come, there came a **rich man** of Arimathaea, named Joseph, who also himself was Jesus' disciple: ... 59 And when Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, 60 And laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock:

This reversal of fortune anticipates the second paragraph of vv. 7-11a, the one that describes the Servant's reward. Isaiah goes on to note the reason for this reversal:

because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.--He is guilty neither in deed nor in speech. "Violence" is a little strong; the term can include any kind of wrongdoing. As James reminds us, if any offend not in word, the same is able to control the whole body. Thus in the Revelation, the verse is cited to characterize the 144k, who are "without fault" (chart):

Rev 14:1-5 And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty *and* four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. ... 5 And **in their mouth was found no guile**: for they are without fault before the throne of God.

We have seen many citations of this chapter in the NT. The most detailed and extended citation of Isa 53 in the NT is in Peter's first epistle (chart):

Isa 53:4-12

4 Surely he hath **borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows**: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and **with his stripes we are healed**. 6 **All we like sheep have gone astray**; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. 7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, **yet he opened not his mouth**: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, **so he openeth not his mouth**. ... 9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because **he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth**. ... 12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he **bare the sin** of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

1Pe 2:21-25

21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also **suffered for us**, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 **Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth**: 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; **when he suffered, he threatened not**; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: 24 Who his own self **bare our sins** in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: **by whose stripes ye were healed**. 25 For **ye were as sheep going astray**; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Most of us probably see the main point of Isa 53 as explaining the mechanism by which our sin is forgiven. The chapter certainly teaches that, but that's not Peter's focus. He uses it as an example for how we should live. Christ's patient suffering, which is in focus in vv. 7-9, is presented as "an example, that ye should follow his steps" (v. 21). Once again, the NT authors see in the Servant songs not only our Lord, but also his people, who as his body carry on his work in this present age.

10, His reward

10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief [made him ill]:--A disjunctive clause (subject first) marks the return to the negative emphasis of the first paragraph, captured in English by "yet."

For the third time, this song emphasizes the Lord's agency in this transaction. Unbelieving Israel rejected the Servant because he appeared "smitten of God" (v. 4); believing Israel, recognizing that he bore their sins, confessed "The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all" (v. 6). His death was not an accident, but under the sovereign direction of God.

when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin,--This clause has stimulated wide discussion. The verb תָּשִׂים can be read as either 2ms (as in AV, "thou") or 3fs (as in AV margin, "his soul"). I've been attracted to the 3fs reading, but for a variety of reasons (see the notes), I now think we should read it as in the AV, with "thou" referring to the Lord. One slight modification will make the translation even more accurate: the first particle, וְ, is better translated "if" than "when."

Here's what I think is going on. When Isaiah begins to speak, his focus is on only one of the four themes of vv. 5-6, the suffering of the Servant. He simply narrates the events of the Servant's humiliation, blames the people for it (v. 8b), and notes that in himself, the Servant has done nothing wrong (v. 9b). Then he echoes what the nation has twice said already: this undeserved agony comes from the hand of the Lord. He is faced with the moral dilemma of undeserved suffering that the Lord not only tolerates, but actually takes pleasure in bringing about! How can this paradox be resolved?

Often throughout the book, when the tension grows, he has turned directly to the Lord. For example (chart):

Isa 33:1-2 Woe to thee that spoilest, and thou *wast* not spoiled; and dealest treacherously, and they dealt not treacherously with thee! when thou shalt cease to spoil, thou shalt be spoiled; *and* when thou shalt make an end to deal treacherously, they shall deal treacherously with thee. 2 **O LORD, be gracious unto us**; we have waited for thee: be thou their arm every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble.

So here, he suggests how this dilemma could be solved. I understand 10b-11a to be his rationalization of what is going on. We might paraphrase his thought,

Lord, I'm confused. Here is a righteous man, suffering at the hands of wicked men, yet suffering patiently. He is not guilty. They are. And you, who should defend the righteous and punish the wicked, not only allow this to happen, but are bringing it about! How can this make any sense? Hmm—it would make sense, if you were trying to provide a guilt-offering. That would then bring great blessing to your Servant, in compensation for the suffering he has borne.

Now we can explain the clause in more detail. Three questions need attention:

1. In what sense does God “make an offering”? Isn't he usually the one who receives sacrifices?
2. What is the particular sense of the term **זָבַח**, which our version translates “sacrifice for sin”?
3. How is this verse echoed in the NT?

thou shalt make his soul an offering.--First, how can God make an offering? This kind of language appears elsewhere in the Bible. In every case, he is providing his people with something that they can offer back to him.

- In Gen 22:8, Isaac asks Abraham where the lamb is for the sacrifice on Mt. Moriah, and Abraham replies, “**God will provide** himself a lamb for a burnt offering”
- In Lev 17:11, God instructs the people, “the life of the flesh is in the blood, and **I have given it to you** upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls.”
- In Rom 3:5, Paul explains that the Lord Jesus is the one “whom **God hath set forth** to be a propitiation through faith in his blood ...”

Recall David's words as he set aside materials for the temple:

1Ch 29:14 But who *am* I, and what *is* my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things *come* of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.

Every offering that we make to God is something that he has first of all given us. We can give him nothing of any value without him. In fact, any offering that we bring in our own strength, without acknowledging his role in first giving it to us, is an abomination to him (Isa 1). This was true of every sacrifice in the OT, and it is supremely true of the great and final sacrifice to which they all point.

an offering for sin.--Now let's consider the particular kind of offering that is in view. The Hebrew word **זָבַח** is usually translated “trespass offering” in our version, and in fact it has separate ceremonial instructions in Leviticus compared with the “sin offering.” See the chart for distinctions. Unlike the

burnt and peace offerings, both of these offerings deal with sin and trespass, but from different perspectives.

- The “sin offering” proper focuses on the purification of the *worshiper*. This offering is marked by a distinctive verb for “sprinkle,” *זָרַק*, that is nowhere used for the “trespass offering.” But this verb *is* used in 52:15, “so shall he sprinkle many nations.” That verse shows that the Servant is a “sin offering,” or more properly,¹⁵ a “purification offering.”
- The focus of the “trespass offering” is on with making reparation to the *offended one*. It focuses on offenses that deprive someone, either God or man, of what is due them. In Lev. 5-6, it requires the offerer not only to bring the prescribed sacrifice, but also to pay back the property that was wrongly taken or withheld, adding a 20% penalty. So perhaps we should call it the “reparation offering.”
- Other passages make clear that our Lord fulfills the other sacrifices as well, but that is not our concern here.

Throughout this book, Isaiah has been acutely aware of the shortcomings of the nation in their responsibility to the Lord. Starting in ch. 1, he hears the Lord chastising them for their failure to give him the worship he deserves.

Isa 1:2-4 Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me. 3 The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: *but* Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider. 4 Ah sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters: they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward.

View this situation from the standpoint of the two offerings, the purification offering of 52:15 and the reparation offering of 53:10. God can forgive our sin, but how can we repay the debt incurred by our past sins? We cannot remove past offenses. We already owe 100% obedience; how can we add 20% to it? Isaiah knows that we have no access to an acceptable reparation offering. Micah, Isaiah’s contemporary, recognizes this, when he mentions rams in the context of sin, for the ram is the distinctive animal of the reparation offering, and is never authorized for the sin offering:

Mic 6:7 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of **rams**, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?

And until we deal with sin, the other offerings (burnt offerings, the focus of worship) are inappropriate:

Isa 1:11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

Isa 40:16 And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.

It is impossible for a sinful people to make reparations for their sin. As Isaiah contemplates this dilemma, he begins to understand the vision of the sinless sufferer. “Lord, if you would provide your

15 Following Wenham

people with the reparation offering that they cannot furnish on their own, if this righteous one could be their substitute, then things would make sense.”

It is perhaps worth noting that the focus of the purification offering on the blood is echoed at the Lord’s table in the cup, while the provision of his perfect life as a reparation for our failings is the focus of the bread.

make his soul—The third point to note about Isaiah’s suggestion is how it is echoed in our Lord’s words (chart). He quotes the LXX of this passage in the synoptics:

Mat 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many. = Mark 10:45

The standard LXX translation for the Hebrew word עָשָׂה translated “make” (though not used in this specific passage) is τίθημι “to put, set, place.” In John 10, our Lord repeatedly uses this verb with reference to his life:

Joh 10:11-18 I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd **giveth his life** for the sheep. ... 15
As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I **lay down my life** for the sheep. ...
17 Therefore doth my Father love me, because I **lay down my life**, that I might take it again. 18
No man taketh it from me, but I **lay it down** of myself. I have power to **lay it down**, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.

Hengstenberg notes that “this expression (τίθημι ψυχην) is nowhere met with in any profane writers, nor in the Hellenistic *usus loquendi* [manner of speech, common idiom],” and that other uses in the NT are all dependent on our Lord’s words in John 10. It seems best to understand our Lord’s words as referring to Isa 53. The Father ultimately provides the sacrifice, but the Lord knows that he is acting as the Father’s agent: “This commandment have I received....”

The rest of this paragraph consists of the consequences that will result if the Lord provides the Servant’s soul as the reparation offering that his people need to make amends for their offenses against the Lord. “If you do this, Lord, then these things will happen: ...” These things are all common signs of God’s favor throughout the OT.

He shall see a seed—Seeing those to whom you have given life is a mark of the Lord’s favor (chart):

Gen 50:23 And Joseph **saw** Ephraim's **children** of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees.

Job 42:16 After this lived Job an hundred and forty years, and **saw his sons**, and his sons' sons, even four generations.

Ps 128:6 Yea, **thou shalt see thy children's children**, and peace upon Israel.

Note the absence of the possessive pronoun in Hebrew (shown by italics in the AV). The Scriptures uniformly depict us as the Servant’s brethren, not his children (Ps 22:22; Matt 28:10; Rom 8:29), and as children of his Father.¹⁶ But we are “born again” as a result of his sacrifice for us, and so we are the seed that the Father has given him, which is the expression that the Messiah uses in 8:18, “Behold, I

¹⁶ Or, in view of the approaching allusions to the Abraham story in 54:1-3, the seed here may be the seed promised to Abraham, as Paul often emphasizes in Rom 4 and Gal.

and the children whom the LORD hath given me” (see exposition on that passage). This verse, along with Ps 22:22, is quoted in Hebrews in explaining the object of our Savior’s suffering:

Heb 2:10 For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

He shall prolong his days—This is another common sign of God’s favor (chart):

Gen 25:8 Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a **good old age**, an **old man**, and **full of years**; and was gathered to his people.

Jdg 8:32 And Gideon the son of Joash died in a **good old age**, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.

1Ch 29:28 And he died in a **good old age**, **full of days**, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead.

Job 42:17 So Job died, being **old** and **full of days**.

In the context, this promise with regard to the Servant is striking, for in v. 8 he is “cut off out of the land of the living,” and v. 9 discusses “his grave” and “his death.” Yet Isaiah envisions his reward as including a prolonged life! Here is the final detail of the passion in Isaiah’s narrative: the resurrection.

and the pleasure of the LORD—The first two words are a striking echo of the first part of the verse. “It **pleased the Lord** to bruise him ... the **pleasure of the Lord** shall prosper in his hand.” The same absolute sovereign will that brought pain to him will resolve upon his prosperity.

This principle of divine reversal, so prominent in our Lord’s history, is characteristic of his dealing with his people more broadly (chart). Hannah the mother of Samuel knew this:

1Sa 2:6-7 The LORD **killeth**, and maketh **alive**:
he bringeth **down** to the grave, and bringeth **up**.
7 The LORD maketh **poor**, and maketh **rich**:
he bringeth **low**, and lifteth **up**.

Of course, it is simple to say that the Lord kills one and makes another alive, but the principle goes deeper than that. Sometimes, as with the Servant, it is the same person who first falls under his wrath, then finds his favor. A prominent example is Ps 30, written by David, so much of whose experience anticipates that of his greater son.

Psa 30:5 For his **anger** endureth but a moment; in his **favour** is life:
weeping may endure for a night, but **joy** cometh in the morning.
11 Thou hast turned for me my **mourning** into **dancing**:
thou hast put off my **sackcloth**, and girded me with **gladness**;

Let’s consider the historical context of this Psalm a bit more closely (chart). The inscription says that it was written “at the dedication of the house of David.” Hengstenberg makes a good case that the context is the events described in 1 Chr 21-29.

- 21:1-17, David sinfully numbers the people, and God brings a plague on the nation.
- 21:18-27, David offers a sacrifice on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, and the Lord

ends the judgment.

- 21:28-22:1, David announces that this location is “the house of the Lord God,” and resolves to build a temple there.
- 22:2-19, David exhorts Solomon and the leaders to build the temple (inclusion with 28:1-29:9)
- ch. 23-27, David establishes the organization to support the temple
- 28:1-29:9, David exhorts Solomon and the leaders to build the temple (inclusion with 22:2-29)
- 29:10-22, David leads the nation in a psalm of praise.

Ps 30 would fit at the end of ch. 21, when the Lord has lifted his chastening hand, and David recognizes the location as the house of the Lord, and resolves to build the temple there.

There is great encouragement in this history for us. At some time or other, each of us will feel the Lord’s chastening hand, for the only ones he does not chasten are those whom he does not love. When such a time comes, we may grow discouraged. “Things were well with me when I was obedient to the Lord,” we think. “I have sinned, and he justly chastises me. I repent of my sin, and I am assured of his forgiveness. But meanwhile, I mourn for the blessing that I rashly discarded in my folly.” David’s history should encourage us. Just as no amount of our cleverness can evade the Lord’s chastening hand, so no amount of our sin can destroy his blessing. As David prayed in Ps. 52:12, the Lord can “restore unto” us “the joy of” his “salvation.

Psa 30:5 For his anger endureth but a moment;	in his favour is life:
weeping may endure for a night,	but joy cometh in the morning.
11 Thou hast turned for me my mourning	into dancing :
thou hast put off my sackcloth ,	and girded me with gladness ;

Thus sings David when the Lord, who has chastised him for his own sin, turns his mourning into dancing, puts off his sackcloth and girds him with gladness (v. 11). How much more will the Lord, who is pleased to bruise his sinless Servant for the sins of others, find pleasure in prospering him at the end.

and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.--Recall our comparison with 52:13, “my Servant shall deal prudently.” Prudence is the responsibility of the one who acts; prosperity is what God gives in return. Because of his obedience, the Lord causes him to prosper.

11-12, “My” servant

Once again the Lord speaks. His words can be understood as a response to Isaiah’s suggestion in 10b. “Yes, Isaiah, that’s exactly what I’m doing.”

vv. 11-12 fall into three sections, arranged chiasmically (chart). The outer two sections describe the Servant’s prudent and effective conduct toward his people, while the center one describes the reward that the Lord gives him for this conduct. The Lord’s final word concerning his Servant thus fills in the details anticipated in his very first statement in 52:13, that the Servant would deal prudently, and as a result share in the glory that belongs to God alone.

11, Cause

11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied:--This verse is readily understood as a summary of the previous condition (chart).

- The “travail of his soul” is what it suffered in being made a recompense offering.
- The seeing and satisfaction is in the three blessings of 10c.
- The connection between the two is obscured in English. The Hebrew might be translated, “because of the travail of his soul, he shall see, he shall be satisfied.”¹⁷

Based on this parallel, I previously associated 11a with the previous verses. But it is also closely linked with what follows (chart).

The three sections of this verse show the relation between two themes: what the Servant knows (A), and what he does (B). These are developed in the order A, AB, B.

11a describes what he knows. To him, his death is not a meaningless tragedy, but a purposeful, deliberate action (chart).

Mat 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but **to minister**, and **to give his life** a ransom for many.

John 10:17-18 Therefore doth my Father love me, because **I lay down my life**, that I might take it again. 18 No man taketh it from me, but **I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down**, and I have power to take it again. This **commandment** have I received of my Father.

Heb 12:1 who **for the joy that was set before him** endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Let’s skip 11b for the moment and go directly to 11c. The English subordinating conjunction “for” is interpretive; the Hebrew simply has the ordinary conjunction “and.

for and he shall bear their iniquities.--Now we move from what the Servant knows to what he will do.

The Scriptures speak a great deal about “bearing” “sin, iniquity, transgression.” Here and in the following verse (“he bare the sin of many”) we have two versions of this expression. In its most common form, it is used in four ways, with four different subjects (chart).¹⁸

The sinner is often said to bear iniquity, meaning that he must suffer the consequences of what he has done:

Lev 5:17 And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist *it* not, yet is he guilty, and shall **bear his iniquity**.

It is not unreasonable, then, to see **the sacrificial animal**, as the substitute for the sinner, described as carrying sin:

17 The word order (with “travail of his soul” first, followed by the two verbs) and disjunctive *Pashta* on “his soul” encourage this division of the words, and the preposition ׀ on “travail” often has a causal sense throughout this chapter.

18 See notes

Lev 16:22 And the goat shall **bear** upon him **all their iniquities** unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness. (also 10:17)

Surprisingly, very often **the Lord** is said to bear our sin. We miss this in English because in these cases the verb is usually translated “forgive” or “pardon.”

Exo 34:6-7 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity** and transgression and sin,

Micah 7:18 Who *is* a God like unto thee, that **pardoneth iniquity**, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.

There is a very deep insight here. “Sin is lawlessness,” 1 John 3:4; “sin is not imputed when there is no law,” Rom 5:13. Sin is defined by God’s character and his expression of it in the law. To sin is to come short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23), and merits his wrath. If he is to “pass by” our sin, he must himself bear the offense.

The Priest, as the one who conducts the sacrifice, can also be said to “bear iniquity.”

Exo 28:36-38 And thou shalt make a plate *of* pure gold, and grave upon it, *like* the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. ... 38 And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may **bear the iniquity** of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts;

Num 18:1 And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall **bear the iniquity** of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall **bear the iniquity** of your priesthood.

The priest is said to bear sin or iniquity. He is the hub of the whole system (chart).

- He offers the sacrifice on behalf of the sinner, thus symbolically transferring the sin from the sinner to the sacrifice.
- He represents the sinner before God, pleading for God’s mercy, and in this sense personally bears the sinner’s sin.
- In representing God to the sinner, he assures the sinner that God has truly taken away the sin.

Think of the risk that this ministry places on the priest. He is not unlike a bomb squad expert in the police department, who defuses bombs and disarms improvised explosive devices (chart). Sin is like the explosive. It will destroy whatever it touches, unless it is removed. The bomb expert must remove it and carry it to some other place where its destructive power will be dissipated without harm. Along the way, he is exposed to great risk.

Similarly, as the priest transfers sin from the sinner to the sacrifice, he is at risk of the wrath of God against that sin, until finally it is safely destroyed with the death of the sacrifice. Some sense of this risk is recorded in a late (13th century A.D.) Jewish tradition that when the High Priest went into the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement, he had a rope tied to his ankle, so that if the Lord smote him dead, he

could be pulled out.¹⁹ It is a fearful thing to mediate between sinful people and a holy God.

Within Isa 53, the Servant is represented as the sacrifice upon whom God places the sin of the people (v. 6). But we should not forget that Moses, the founder of the Levitical system, is one of those called “my servant” earlier in the Bible, and in the light of the NT we recognize in our Lord not only sacrifice, but also the priest who offers the sacrifice: recall our discussion of v. 10, “make his soul a reparation offering,” and its echoes in Matt 20:28 and John 10:11-18.

One further detail should be noted about the expression, “He shall bear their iniquity.” The usual verb in this idiom, גָּזַח, means simply “lift up,” and is the verb used in v. 12. But here, it is replaced with a much more vivid and specific verb, סָבַל. This latter root is prominent in Exodus 1-6, where the noun סְבוּלוֹת “burdens” appears six times as a characteristic mark of the oppression of the Israelites by Pharaoh. We have seen repeatedly how Isaiah cites the *past* Exodus as a type of God’s promised *future* deliverance of his people, and the selection of this very distinctive verb to describe the Servant’s work brings his sacrifice into that same circle of images. Physical bondage (to Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon) is important, but there is a spiritual bondage as well, and the Servant comes to take the burden of that bondage from his people and carry its weight himself.

by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify for the many; --This central part of the verse combines the themes of the outer two elements.

The subject is “my righteous servant.”²⁰ The Lord wants us to recognize his distinctive character.

This righteous one will “justify for the many.” We should consider both the verb and its syntax.

The overwhelming use of צָדַק C in the OT is forensic, the action of declaring someone to be righteous. Some examples are (chart):

Deu 25:1 If there be a controversy between men, and they come unto judgment, that *the judges* may judge them; then they shall **justify the righteous**, and condemn the wicked.

1Ki 8:31-32 If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: 32 Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and **justifying the righteous**, to give him according to his righteousness.

Isa 5:22-23 Woe unto *them that are* mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink: 23 Which **justify the wicked for reward**, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

The righteous servant has the mission of justifying. But whom can he justify? He cannot simply “justify the many,” for the many are wicked, as Isaiah has already confessed in v. 6, and Isaiah has already condemned those who “justify the wicked.”

The answer to this puzzle is in the syntax, which is distinctive. Elsewhere “justify” צָדַק C governs its object directly, but here it does so through the preposition לִי “to, for.” The vanilla sense of “justify” is to announce a righteousness that is already there. The Servant delivers justification *to* the many,

¹⁹ See Gill’s citation from Zohar on Heb 9:7.

²⁰ What our version renders as an adjective is actually in apposition: “a righteous one, that is, my servant.”

something that they did not possess in themselves but that they receive from him. The justice of this procedure might be questioned, and so the Lord immediately adds the final clause, which we have already considered: “and he shall bear their iniquities.”

The Lord says that the Servant is able to do this “by his knowledge.” The genitive can be taken as either subjective (“by what he knows”) or objective (“by knowing him”).²¹

It is common to take it as objective, and to see this as an announcement that anyone who believes on him will be justified. Indeed, throughout the NT our justification is by faith, but nowhere is it said to be by knowledge. Compare John’s description of the stages of Christian growth (chart):

1Jo 2:12-14 I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. 13 I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. 14 I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him *that is* from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

In 1 John 2:12-14, salvation (being a little child) is described as having sin forgiven and thus knowing the Father, but knowing the Son (“him that is from the beginning”) is a characteristic of mature believers, not a condition of justification.

How about the subjective sense, “by the knowledge that he has”? This clause lies between two others, the first emphasizing what the Servant knows, and the second pointing out what he does. The second half of the clause summarizes what he does, so it makes sense to understand the first half as summarizing what he knows.

This understanding also draws on the relation between the two sections in which the Lord uses the phrase “my Servant.” In the first section, the Lord praised the Servant for his prudence:

Isa 52:13 Behold, my servant shall **deal prudently**, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high.

The promise of the first verse of the poem is that the Servant will “deal prudently,” that is, apply knowledge to action in a way that brings about the desired result. vv. 14-15 go on to describe how astonished people will be when they behold two things he does: his unprecedented suffering, and the purification he provides for “many nations.” According to v. 13, he goes about these actions prudently, with understanding and purpose, in contrast to their astonishment. 52:13-15 teach that it is a sign of the Servant’s prudence that he uses suffering to purify many nations. So it should be no surprise now to read that by what he knows he will provide justification for the many.

Before we move on to v. 12, we should note an allusion to this verse and 52:15 in a later portion of the OT. I adjust the translation gently to make the correspondence clearer.

Dan 12:3 And they that ~~be wise~~ **deal prudently** shall shine as the brightness of the firmament;

21 The noun עָמַל appears 19x in construct in the OT, of which seven (Job 10:7; 13:2; 33:3; Prov. 3:20; 22:17; Isa. 44:25; 47:10) govern a subjective genitive and the rest an objective genitive. So no distinction can be made on the basis of usage. Murray (Romans, I.375-383) surveys instances of the noun and the inf construct with suffixes and concludes that the subjective predominates, though there are also objective instances.

and they that **justify many** as the stars for ever and ever.

The idea of dealing prudently (לִשְׂכַל C) is a major theme in Daniel (chart).²² The first reference is in 1:4, describing the four Hebrew lads:

Dan 1:4 Children in whom *was* no blemish, but well favoured, and **skilful** in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science,

12:3, like 11:33, 35; 12:10, describes the righteous generically using this term. In doing so, it brings this description into parallelism with “they that justify many.” The combination of these terms, which occur in structurally related paragraphs of Isa 53, suggests that Daniel is using the image of the Servant from Isa 53 to describe the righteous at the time of the resurrection. His shift from the single Servant to the community of believers is an early example of the later half of the hourglass, in which the Servant’s people take over his role.

12a, Effect

12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with in²³ the great, and he shall divide the as spoil with the strong;--The AV presents our Lord as one of those who share in the spoil: the great and the strong will divide the spoil, and he will be among them. But grammatically, one can read the verse to make the great and the strong the spoil of which he takes possession, and that he distributes among his faithful ones, and this reading goes better with the context, both in Isaiah and elsewhere.

This idea that he rules over the great and the strong, rather than merely being included among them, is implicit in the Lord’s first paragraph (chart):

Isa 52:15 the kings shall shut their mouths at him:

When we studied that verse, we saw that it in turn is continuing an earlier promise to the Servant:

Isa 49:7 Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, *and* his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, *and* the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee.

In the midst of the coming captivity, Daniel recognizes this promise. He references it in at least two ways, corresponding to the two visions of coming world power that he sees (chart). The first vision, in ch. 2, is the dream of the statue, which is destroyed by the stone cut out without hands

Dan 2:31-34 Thou, O king, sawest, and behold a great image. ... 32 This image's head *was* of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, 33 His legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. 34 Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet *that were* of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces.

The second, in ch. 7, was Daniel’s own dream of the four beasts, followed by the heavenly court, where the worst beast is destroyed, and the others are placed in subjection:

Dan 7:2-12 Daniel spake and said, I saw in my vision by night, ... 3 And four great beasts came

²² After Proverbs’ 13 instances of this word, Daniel’s 9 are the highest concentration in the OT.

²³ Cf. Job 39:17; the interpretation here follows Motyer.

up from the sea, diverse one from another. 4 The first *was* like a lion, and had eagle's wings:... 5 And behold another beast, ... like to a bear, ... 6 ... another, like a leopard, ... the beast had also four heads; ... 7 ... a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, ... and it had ten horns. ... 11 I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spake: I beheld *even* till the beast was slain, and his body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. 12 As concerning the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away: ...

In each of these visions, he sees the Messiah taking over these kingdoms (chart).

In interpreting Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the stone cut out without hands, he explains,

Dan 2:44 And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but **it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms**, and it shall stand for ever.

The vision of the four beasts continues,

Dan 7:13-14 I saw in the night visions, and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. 14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, **that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him**: his dominion *is* an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom *that* which shall not be destroyed.

And John confirms this promise in the Revelation:

Rev 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are **become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ**; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

The promise that the Servant will "divide" the great and the strong as spoil then means, not that he will *take* a share of it, but that he will *give* shares of it to those who serve him. Again, this idea is worked out in more detail in later texts (chart):

Dan 7:18, 27 But **the saints of the most High shall take the kingdom**, and possess the kingdom for ever, even for ever and ever. ... 27 And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be **given to the people of the saints of the most High**, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.

1Co 6:2 2 Do ye not know that **the saints shall judge the world?** and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

Rev 20:4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and *I saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received *his* mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and **they lived and reigned with Christ** a thousand years.

The references in Dan 7 are particularly interesting. In v. 14, "a kingdom" consisting of "all people, nations, and languages" is given to the Son of Man. In vv. 18, 27, his saints take over that kingdom. Once again, we see the hourglass, as the work of the Servant becomes the work of his people.

12b, Cause

With the second half of v. 12, the Lord returns to the cause for the Servant's exaltation, introduced chiastically in v. 11 (chart).

The reason the Servant receives this exalted reward is his suffering. The Lord cites four actions that summarize his work. The last two are set off by a disjunctive construction: they give the effect of his actions, while the first two simply state the humiliation. We see here the same development that is evident throughout the poem (chart): first the bare fact of undeserved and unexplained suffering, then its redemptive interpretation.

because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors;--In summarizing the Servant's humiliation, the Lord recalls two statements that Isaiah made in his paragraph: his death, and the negative reputation that he endured.

With regard to his death, we read earlier,

Isa 53:8 for he was cut off out of the land of the living
and more recently, in v. 11, we saw "the travail of his soul."

Note the shift from the passive "he was cut off" to the active "He hath poured out his soul." Isaiah's statement of the Servant's suffering simply observes what happened to him; the Lord emphasizes that the Servant undertakes this suffering voluntarily.

With regard to his reputation, we read earlier,

Isa 53:9 And one made his grave with the wicked

The destiny anticipated for him by the Romans was to be cast into an unmarked grave, with other riff-raff. The Lord quotes this description in Luke 22:37, as he prepares to leave the upper room for Gethsemane (chart):

Luk 22:35-38 And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. 36 Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take *it*, and likewise *his* scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. 37 For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, **And he was reckoned among the transgressors**: for the things concerning me have an end. 38 And they said, Lord, behold, here *are* two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

We've already seen the Lord's awareness that Isa 53 refers to him, in his statements about laying down his life, in Matt 20:28 (parallel in Mark 10:45) and John 10. Here, even more directly, he orders his behavior to make it clear that he is carrying out what was written of him seven centuries earlier.

The last two of the four actions are marked off by reintroducing the pronoun "and he" before the verb. As we have seen, the difference between these two verbs and the first two is just the difference between the suffering and its effect.

and he (disjunctive) bare the sin of many,--Like the reference to pouring out "his soul," the reference to bearing sin reminds us of the chiastic structure of vv. 11-12 (chart). Recall our discussion of the four sin-bearers: the sinner, the sacrifice who takes his place, the Lord who must take responsibility for forgiving the sinner, and the priest who mediates the entire process.

The Hebrew here differs slightly from that in v. 11. There, “bear” was the root from Exodus about a slave’s burdens, and the particular burden was “iniquity,” the guilt resulting from sin. Here we have the verb that is more usually employed in this construction, associated with “sin.” But the LXX renders them both with the same vocabulary, αναφερειν αμαρτιας (turning “sin” into “sins”), and the two instances of this expression in the NT should be seen as allusions to this chapter:

1Pe 2:24 Who his own self **bare our sins** in his own body on the tree, [as we have seen, this paragraph is thoroughly preoccupied with Isa 53]

Heb 9:28 So Christ was once offered to **bear the sins** of many

and made makes intercession for the transgressors.--Remarkably, the verb form changes (chart). The Lord has used the suffix conjugation, often applied to the past, for the first three verbs, but this one uses the prefix conjugation, emphasizing ongoing action.

In fact, we know that this aspect of our Savior’s work for us continues to this day.²⁴ His sacrifice is over:

Heb 9:26, 28 now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. 28 ... Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many;

But that same book teaches us,

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing **he ever liveth to make intercession** for them.

And John assures us,

1Jo 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, **we have an advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ **the righteous**:

“The righteous” may well be an allusion to v. 11, “my servant, the righteous one.” Thus the Lord’s final explanation of the Servant’s work encompasses both its finished and its ongoing aspects. The sacrifice is over, but the intercession continues.

Notes

כּן ... כאשר, vv. 14f

This is a standard and common expression of comparison. Compare a few of over 50 instances in the OT, including all in Isa:

Gen 41:13 And it came to pass, **as** he interpreted to us, **so** it was; me he restored unto mine office, and him he hanged.

²⁴ “Make intercession” is a perfectly appropriate translation of פגע C, and reflects the most common use of this form in the MT. The LXX strangely translates it with the passive of παραδιδωμι. The NT word for “intercede” εντυγχανω appears nowhere in the canonical LXX, and the most common LXX reflexes of פגע, συνανταω and απανταω, do not have the meaning “intercede” in the NT, as פגע C does most commonly in the MT. So the NT intercession verses are not direct citations of Isa 53, but they certainly describe the same kind of interaction.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Exo 7:6 And Moses and Aaron did: **as** the LORD commanded them, **so** did they.

Exo 12:28 And the children of Israel went away, and did: **as** the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, **so** did they.

Exo 27:8 Hollow with boards shalt thou make it: **as** it was shewed thee in the mount, **so** shall they make *it*.

Num 2:17 Then the tabernacle of the congregation shall set forward with the camp of the Levites in the midst of the camp: **as** they encamp, **so** shall they set forward, every man in his place by their standards.

Deu 12:22 Even **as** the roebuck and the hart is eaten, **so** thou shalt eat them: the unclean and the clean shall eat *of* them alike.

Isa 10:11 Shall I not, **as** I have done unto Samaria and her idols, **so** do to Jerusalem and her idols?

Isa 14:24 The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely **as** I have thought, **so** shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, *so* shall it stand:

Isa 65:8 Thus saith the LORD, **As** the new wine is found in the cluster, and *one* saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing *is* in it: **so** will I do for my servants' sakes, that I may not destroy them all.

NT Quotations of Isa 53

52:13 ~ Phil 2; Jesus as $\pi\alpha\iota\varsigma$, Acts 3:13, 26; 4:27, 30

52:15 = Rom 15:21

53:1 = John 12:38; Rom 10:16

53:4 = Matt 8:17

53:5 = 1 Pet 2:24

53:6 = 1 Pet 2:25

53:7-8 = 1 Pet 2:23; Acts 8:32-33

53:9 = 1 Pet 2:22; Rev 14:5

53:10 (soul as offering) = Jn 10:12, 15, 17, 18 $\tau\iota\theta\eta\mu\iota$ (usual rendering of נִשְׁחַת); Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28 $\delta\iota\delta\omega\mu\iota$ (as in LXX of Isa 53)

53:12 = Luke 22:37; 1 Pet 2:24; Heb 9:28 (the last two, also v. 11); Heb 7:25?

Summary of Servant Passages

Ref	Summary	Speaker	Servant's ID	Quoted in NT (of the Church)
41:8-13	God encourages Israel as his servant	God to Servant	Israel, Jacob	
42:1-7	God speaks to the world about the judgment his servant will bring (1-4), then speaks to the servant about the deliverance that he will bring (5-7).	God to world, then to Servant	Judge and Deliverer	Matt 3:17; 12:18-20; Luke 2:32; Acts 26:16-28 (of Paul), 23

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Ref	Summary	Speaker	Servant's ID	Quoted in NT (of the Church)
42:19	the Servant introduced as deaf and blind	God, then the Prophet, to audience	Israel (from context)	
43:10	the Servant invoked alongside Israel as a witness to God's uniqueness	God to Israel about the Servant	Distinct from Israel	
43:22-44:5	God speaks to the Servant to condemn and then restore him. (Called the Servant in 44:1)	God to Servant	Jacob, Israel (43:22; 44:1)	John 7:37-39? (44:3, promise of Spirit)
44:21-23	God tells the Servant that he has created and redeemed him.	God to Servant	Jacob, Israel	
44:26	God performs the word of his Servant	God to Israel about Servant	Daniel as representative of Israel	
48:20	Announce to the world that God has redeemed his Servant Jacob	Prophet to nation	Jacob	
49:1-13	The Servant reports to the isles and peoples how the Lord has commissioned him.	Servant to Isles and peoples God to Servant	Israel v. 3, but distinct from Israel v. 5	Acts 13:46-47 (of Paul and Barnabas)
50:4-9	The Servant expresses his faith in the Lord.	Servant to People		Mark 10:34 etc., Rom 8:33-34
50:10	Isaiah reminds the people of the Servant	Isaiah to People		
52:13-53:12	the Lord introduces his Servant, then the people and the prophet describe him.	God to people about Servant People and Prophet talk about the Servant		Matt 8:17; Luke 22:37; John 12:38; Acts 8:32-33; Rom 10:16; 15:21; 1 Pet 2:21-25

נגלה על

Exodus 20:26 Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness **be not discovered thereon**.

Isaiah 53:1 Who hath believed our report? and **to whom** is the arm of the LORD **revealed**?

Lamentations 2:14 Thy prophets have seen vain and foolish things for thee: and they have not **discovered thine iniquity**, to turn away thy captivity; but have seen for thee false burdens and causes of banishment. <<Note use of על to mark that which is discovered, when נגלה D is active.>>

Lamentations 4:22 The punishment of thine iniquity is accomplished, O daughter of Zion; he will no more carry thee away into captivity: he will visit thine iniquity, O daughter of Edom; he will **discover thy sins**.

Nahum 3:5 Behold, I *am* against thee, saith the LORD of hosts; and I will **discover** thy skirts **upon** thy face, and I will shew the nations thy nakedness, and the kingdoms thy shame.

v. 2 **ויעל כיונק 2**

The clause can be taken two ways, depending on whether one relies on the most natural sense of the noun or of the verb.

Elsewhere, the noun **יונק** (Qal ptc masc **ינק**) always refers to a suckling child, thus the LXX translation **παιδιον**. Nowhere else does it refer to the sucker of a plant. The feminine ptc is often used in that sense (Job 8:16; 14:7; 15:30; Hos 14:7 [ET 8]; Ps 80:12; Ezek 17:4, 22), including parallels with **שרש** (Job 8:16, 17; Hos 14:6, 7). But the very frequency of that usage suggests that if Isaiah had meant the word in the horticultural sense, he would have used the feminine participle rather than the masculine.

This sense would be very compatible with a verb meaning “to grow.” However, the verb **עלה** never refers to the growth of a person, a process for which Hebrew consistently uses **גדל**. By contrast, **עלה** often refers to the growth of vegetation.

But **עלה** means far more than the growth of vegetation (a comparatively minor portion of its semantic range). Particularly with **לפני** in reference to God, it can mean to come up into God’s presence, into his awareness:

Jon 1:2 Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me.

2Ch 1:6 And Solomon went up thither to the brasen altar before the LORD

At the outset, the Lord has told us to expect his Servant to be “exalted, and extolled, and be very high” (52:13). Now the nation acknowledges that he does ascend before the Lord, but not in the character they expected, of a mighty king. Rather, he takes on two forms that the first half of the book has already prepared us to expect: a miraculous baby, and a shoot springing from a long-dead root.

So the most natural meaning is not that a shoot and a root shall **grow up** before the Lord, but rather that the one who **goes up** before him is the one who was promised in the form of an infant and a sprout from an apparently dead tree.

חמ vs. רעה etc.

What are the overtones of the pair in 7b?

	Αδικια + Αδικος + αδικεω + αδικημα + αδικως	Ασεβεια ασεβεω	Ανομια + ανομημα + ανομος + ανομεω	ονειδος	αωρος	Παρανομος, παρανομια	Αμαρτια + αμαρτημα + αμαρτανω	Ψυδης + ψυδος
חמס	14 + 9 + 2	10 + 3	6	3	2	2		
עון	75	2	60+3+1 +1			1	63+4+1	
שקר	51		4					37 + 13

אם תשים אשם נפשו ב10

Syntax of שים

Vanoni TDOT observes that the standard frame for the verb is with a subject, an object, and an additional syntagm. This fits with an interpretation of the verb as 2ms, but not as 3fs with נפשו as subject.

Most often, it governs the product via a preposition (see TDOT XIV.96), but Ezek 19:5 joins a pronominal first object with an accusative product, and in a naming context, Judg 8:31. 2 Sam 15:4; 1 Sam 8:1 is clear double object.

Ezek 20:28 uses the verb of offering a sacrifice.

Spoken to God?

There are three objections to this:

1. He is nowhere else addressed in this song. (But elsewhere Isaiah addresses the Lord directly, “O Lord,” about 18 times, so there should be no problem with such an outburst here.)
2. It would be strange to speak of God offering a sacrifice. (But other texts speak of him providing a sacrifice:
 - (a) Gen 22:8, “God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering”
 - (b) Lev 17:11 “the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar ...”
 - (c) Rom 3:5 “whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood ...”
 - (d) The underlying sense of John 3:16, that the Father provides his son as a sacrifice)
3. The contingent nature of the introductory particle אם “if” is strange, given the absolute declaration throughout the rest of the passage on what the Lord is doing. (But this may be explained rhetorically—see the position taken in the exposition.)

John’s Usage

Hengstenberg observes that our Lord’s reference to “giving τῆς ψυχῆς his soul for the sheep” is likely dependent on this passage. τῆς ψυχῆς is both dominant and dedicated as a translation for שים, in both cases the Servant’s נפש is in view, and the reference to the sheep continues the metaphor of v. 6. But it’s awkward then to have נפש be the subject, as Hengstenberg himself observes. The difference between God’s giving the Servant’s soul (Isa) and the Servant himself giving it (John) is another example of the ambiguity between the persons of the godhead that we often see in the prophets.

זרק vs. נזה

Both terms are translated “sprinkle” in the KJV. But in Leviticus, they seem to be applied differently. Let’s try to sort them out. Asterisks indicate rites of ordination.

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Object	זָרָק			נִזֶה			
	Location	Person	Object	Unspecified	Person	Object	Unspecified
Blood: sin offering			2 Chr 29:22 ²⁵			Lev 4:6, 17; 5:9; 6:20; 16:14 (2x), 15, 19	
Blood: trespass offering			Lev 7:2				
Blood: burnt offering or peace offering	Ex 24:8; 29:16*		Ex 24:6; Lev 1:5, 11; 3:2, 8, 13; 8:19*; 9:12*, 18*; 2 Ki 16:13, 15; 2 Chr 30:16; 35:11 (passover); Ezek 43:8	Lev 7:14			
Blood: ram of consecration			Ex 29:20*; Lev 8:24*		Ex 29:21*; Lev 8:30 ²⁶		
Blood: other			Lev 17:6 (any slain animal) Num 18:17 (firstlings)		Lev 14:7 (bird, on leper)	Lev 14:51 (leper); Num 19:4 (red heifer)	2 Kings 9:33 (Jezebel's death)
Water of the red heifer	Num 19:13, 20 (both neg.)				Num 8:7*; 19:19	Num 19:18	Num 19:21
Other water	Ezek 36:25? ²⁷						
Anointing oil						Lev 8:11*	
Other oil						Lev 14:16, 27 (leper)	
Isaiah					52:15; 63:3		
Ashes, dust, seed, hair	Job 2:12; Hos 7:9	2 Chr 34:4; Ezek 10:2	Ex 8:9, 10; Isa 28:25				

General observations:

1. זָרָק is the more generic term, being used for secular as well as sacred things.²⁸ The only secular uses of נִזֶה are 2 Kings 9:33 and Isa 63:3, and even there the sacred use impacts the meaning (those who are not protected by the blood of the sin offering will see their own blood shed).

²⁵ Anomalous, but also late; no use of נִזֶה is postexilic (only 2 Kings and Isa after Pentateuch)

²⁶ Mixed with anointing oil

²⁷ "Pure water" might refer to water that brings purification; more likely, this is part of the general symbolism of water for the Holy Spirit, and in fact to be contrasted with the murky water of the red heifer.

²⁸ It's also the more common term (35x vs. 24x), which often correlates with generic vs. specific.

2. The verbs are applied to very different sacrifices.
 - (a) Among the canonical sacrifices, נזה is used only of the sin offering, never of the burnt, peace, or trespass offering. It is the only verb used in the cleansing of the leper. It is the distinctive verb used for the water of the red heifer (Num 19:13, 20 are negatives). It is applied to the blood of the ram of consecration only in its application to the priests, not to the objects of the sanctuary.
 - (b) זרק is used of the other sacrifices and of the blood of consecration applied to objects, but only in 2 Chr 29:22 of the sin offering, and that may be a chronological issue: זרק is the only term that is used after the exile. It is never used for the leper, and only negatively for the water of the red heifer.

Application to Isaiah:

- נזה in 52:15 has the sin offering in view.
- The lack of נזה in descriptions of the trespass offering, and its almost exclusive use for expiatory sacrifices, emphasizes the distinctive role of the trespass offering in 53:10.

In the LXX, נזה is mostly translated by derivatives of παύω and παντιζω. These are rare for זרק, which usually shows up as προσχεω. The NT uses the former in reference to the blood of Christ (Heb 9:13; 12:24; 1 Pet 1:2), and the latter only for the passover blood (Heb 11:28). (Heb 9:19 uses παντιζω of the covenant ceremony in Ex 24, where LXX uses προσχεω. Is something deeper going on here?)

Bearing Sin/Iniquity in vv. 11-12

v. 11 uses the expression סבל עון, while 12 uses נשא חטא. The latter verb is commonly used with objects describing sin; the former appears to be a more specialized version of the expression.

Three objects are regularly used as the object of נשא.

- חטא/ה, the most common word for “sin,” has the special sense of missing the mark, and thus of falling short of one’s obligations.
- פשע is “transgression,” violating a legal norm.
- עון is “guilt,” the personal condition that results from the previous two.

נשא עון

The most common is the expression נשא עון, which is widely used throughout the OT, with four distinct subjects (Smeaton):

The priest

Exo 28:36-38 And thou shalt make a plate of pure gold, and grave upon it, *like* the engravings of a signet, HOLINESS TO THE LORD. ... 38 And it shall be upon Aaron's forehead, that Aaron may **bear the iniquity** of the holy things, which the children of Israel shall hallow in all their holy gifts;

Num 18:1 And the LORD said unto Aaron, Thou and thy sons and thy father's house with thee shall **bear the iniquity** of the sanctuary: and thou and thy sons with thee shall **bear the iniquity** of your priesthood.

Eze 4:4-6 4 Lie thou also upon thy left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel upon it: *according* to the number of the days that thou shalt lie upon it thou shalt **bear their iniquity**. 5 For I have laid upon thee the years of their iniquity, according to the number of the days, three hundred and ninety days: so shalt thou **bear the iniquity** of the house of Israel. 6 And when thou hast accomplished them, lie again on thy right side, and thou shalt **bear the iniquity** of the house of Judah forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year. (*cf. 1:3 "Ezekiel the priest"*)

The Lord

Exo 34:6-7 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, 7 Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity** and transgression and sin,

Numbers 14:18 The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, **forgiving iniquity** and transgression, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*.

Psalm 85:2 Thou hast **forgiven the iniquity** of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin.

Micah 7:18 Who *is* a God like unto thee, that **pardoneth iniquity**, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth *in* mercy.

The sinner

Lev 5:17 And if a soul sin, and commit any of these things which are forbidden to be done by the commandments of the LORD; though he wist *it not*, yet is he guilty, and shall **bear his iniquity**.

The sacrifice

Lev 10:17 Wherefore have ye not eaten the sin offering in the holy place, seeing it *is* most holy, and *God* hath given it you to **bear the iniquity** of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the LORD?

Lev 16:22 And the goat shall **bear** upon him **all their iniquities** unto a land not inhabited: and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

Trace these four categories in the other objects.

נשא חטא, חטאה

This form attests all of the subjects except for the sacrifice (which is relatively uncommon even with עון).

God (or some other offended party) forgives sin

Genesis 50:17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, **Forgive**, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their **sin**; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

Exodus 10:17 Now therefore **forgive**, I pray thee, my **sin** only this once, and intreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only.

Exodus 32:32 Yet now, if thou wilt **forgive** their **sin--**; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written.

Exodus 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving** iniquity and transgression and **sin**, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.

Joshua 24:19 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he *is* an holy God; he *is* a jealous God; he will not **forgive** your transgressions nor your **sins**.

Psalms 25:18 Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and **forgive all my sins**.

The sinner carries sin

Leviticus 19:17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not **bear sin** on account of him.

Leviticus 20:20 And if a man shall lie with his uncle's wife, he hath uncovered his uncle's nakedness: they shall **bear their sin**; they shall die childless.

Leviticus 22:9 They shall therefore keep mine ordinance, lest they **bear sin** for it, and die therefore, if they profane it: I the LORD do sanctify them.

Leviticus 24:15 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall **bear his sin**.

Numbers 9:13 But the man that *is* clean, and is not in a journey, and forbeareth to keep the passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people: because he brought not the offering of the LORD in his appointed season, that man shall **bear his sin**.

Numbers 18:22 Neither must the children of Israel henceforth come nigh the tabernacle of the congregation, lest they **bear sin**, and die.

Numbers 18:32 And ye shall **bear no** sin by reason of it, when ye have heaved from it the best of it: neither shall ye pollute the holy things of the children of Israel, lest ye die.

The priest bears sin for the sinner

1 Samuel 15:25 Now therefore, I pray thee, **pardon my sin**, and turn again with me, that I may worship the LORD. (*a request to Samuel, as a priest, to function in a priestly role with respect to his sin*)

נָשָׂא פֶשַׁע

This expression is the most limited; it appears only in the sense “forgive, pardon.”

Genesis 50:17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, **Forgive**, I pray thee now, the **trespass** of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, **forgive the trespass** of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him.

Exodus 23:21 Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not **pardon** your **transgressions**: for my name *is* in him.

Exodus 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving** iniquity and **transgression** and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.

Numbers 14:18 The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, **forgiving** iniquity and **transgression**, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*.

Joshua 24:19 And Joshua said unto the people, Ye cannot serve the LORD: for he *is* an holy God; he *is* a jealous God; he will not **forgive** your **transgressions** nor your sins.

1 Samuel 25:28 I pray thee, **forgive the trespass** of thine handmaid: for the LORD will certainly make my lord a sure house; because my lord fighteth the battles of the LORD, and evil hath not been found in thee *all* thy days.

Job 7:21 And why dost thou not **pardon my transgression**, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I *shall* not *be*.

Psalms 32:1 <A Psalm of David, Maschil.> Blessed *is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered*.

Psalms 32:5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou **forgavest the iniquity** of my sin.

Combinations

The various terms for sin are combined in two ways. First, we look at cases in which they are objects of the same verb. Second, we look at cases in which they appear in parallel expressions, with different but related verbs.

Same Verb

These cases warrant the application of insights from “bear iniquity” to the similar “bear sin” in Isa 53:12.

Gen 50:17 So shall ye say unto Joseph, **Forgive**, I pray thee now, the **trespass** of thy brethren, and their **sin**;

Exodus 34:7 Keeping mercy for thousands, **forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and

upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth *generation*.

Lev 20:19-20 And thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister, nor of thy father's sister: for he uncovereth his near kin: they shall **bear their iniquity** . 20 And if a man shall lie with his uncle's wife, he hath uncovered his uncle's nakedness: they shall **bear their sin**; they shall die childless.

Numbers 14:18 The LORD *is* longsuffering, and of great mercy, **forgiving iniquity and transgression**, and by no means clearing *the guilty*, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation*.

Psalm 32:5 I acknowledged my **sin** unto thee, and mine **iniquity** have I not hid. I said, I will confess my **transgressions** unto the LORD; and thou **forgavest the iniquity of my sin**.

Parallel Constructions

These cases warrant the understanding of “bear iniquity” in 53:11 in terms of the more common expression.

Job 7:21 And why dost thou not **pardon my transgression**, and **take away mine iniquity**? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I *shall not be*.

Psalm 32:1 <A Psalm of David, Maschil.> Blessed *is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered*. (*different verb in parallel with נשא*)

Psalm 85:2 Thou hast **forgiven the iniquity** of thy people, thou hast **covered all their sin**. (*cf. 32:1*).

Micah 7:18 Who *is* a God like unto thee, that **pardoneth iniquity**, and **passeth by the transgression** of the remnant of his heritage?

סבל עון

In 53:11, one expects עונם הוא ישא, but Isaiah uses a different verb, סבל. These observations suggest a relation nevertheless to the more common expression:

- This verb is a technical term for carrying a burden as a forced laborer. The first instance is in Gen 49:15, of Issachar's submission to forced labor, and then the next set of instances of the root, in the form of the noun סבלות, all refer to Israel's bondage in Egypt: Exod 1:11; 2:11; 5:4f; 6:6f. Isaiah is thus picking up once again the Exodus motif.
- The word is semantically very close to the more common נשא.
 - Isaiah has already used the words three times as a recurring poetic pair, with סבל, the rarer term, as the second member:

Isa 46:4 I have made, and I will bear; and I will carry, and I will deliver.

Isa 46:7 They bear him upon the shoulder, they carry him

Isa 53:4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

- In addition, nouns derived from סבל are the natural complement to נשא:
1Ki 5:15 And Solomon had threescore and ten thousand that bare burdens