

Isaiah 53

Introduction

Of all the chapters which Isaiah wrote, none of them deal more completely and exclusively with the First Coming of Jesus Christ than Isaiah 53. So many times, Isaiah speaks of events in Christ's first and second comings in juxtaposition, making differentiation difficult without the benefit of a retrospective viewpoint. But in this chapter, there is little need for differentiation-except for verses 10 & 12-it is all about the First Coming of Christ. Abinadi uses this chapter as the quintessential prophecy of the sacrifice of the Only Begotten. This is what the Law of Moses was pointing to all along. He is going to prove to Noah and the priests that indeed the prophets have all spoken of this Messiah, "Have they not said that God himself should come down among the children of men...that he should bring to pass the resurrection of the dead, and that he, himself, should be oppressed and afflicted?" (Mosiah 13:34-5). Isaiah 53 is going to be the example which Abinadi chooses to prove his point.

Bruce R. McConkie

As our New Testament now stands, we find Matthew (Matt. 8:17), Philip (Acts 8:27-35), Paul (Rom. 4:25), and Peter (1 Pet. 2:24-25) all quoting, paraphrasing, enlarging upon, and applying to the Lord Jesus various of the verses in this great 53rd chapter of Isaiah. How many sermons have been preached, how many lessons have been taught, how many testimonies have been borne-both in ancient Israel and in the meridian of time-using the utterances of this chapter as the text, we can scarcely imagine. (*The Promised Messiah*, p. 235)

Isaiah 53:1 Who hath believed our report?

From the viewpoint of Isaiah, the events of Christ's ministry must have seemed unbelievable. Isaiah had known Jehovah as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the co-creator of the Universe, and as the lawgiver to Moses. He is then shown the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. That God himself should come down in the flesh only to be "despised and rejected...stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted...wounded...bruised..." and oppressed until he had "poured out his soul unto death" must have been an incredibly unbelievable tragedy to Isaiah. He must have said to himself, "I wouldn't have believed it unless I saw it with my own eyes!" This seems to be the tone and

message of incredulity found in the phrase, "Who hath believed our report?" Would anyone believe that the God of the Universe could be treated like this?

When Nephi saw the same thing in vision, he could hardly believe what he was seeing. He declared, "I looked and beheld the Lamb of God, that he was taken by the people; yea, the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world; and I saw and bear record." (1 Ne. 11:32) It's as if Nephi was saying, "I wouldn't have believed it unless I saw it with my own eyes, the great God was judged and crucified by wicked men!"

Isaiah 53:2-12 The fulfillment of the words of Isaiah

The content of this chapter so closely approximates the Savior's life that it is useful to review each element of the prophecy and its fulfillment:

(2) he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground	(Lu 2:40) the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.
(3) He is despised and rejected of men	(Mark 6:2) Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James...And they were offended at him
(3) a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief	(Lu 19:41-42) And when he was come near, he beheld the city, and wept over it, Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things <i>which belong</i> unto thy peace! But now they are hid from thine eyes.
(4-5) he has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows...he was wounded for our transgressions	(Lu 22:44) And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
(5) he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.	(Jn 19:1-3) Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged <i>him</i> . And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put <i>it</i> on his head, and they put on him a purple robe, And said, hail, King of the Jews! And they smote him with their hands.
(6) All we like sheep, have gone astray	(Matt 26:31) All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. (Mark 14:46,50) And they laid their hands on him, and took him...And they all forsook him, and fled.
(7) He was oppressed, and he was	(Lu 23:8-10) Herod...questioned with him in many

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 opened not his mouth.	words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. (Matt 27:13-14) Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word; insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.
(8) who shall declare his generation? For he was cut off out of the land of the living	(Matt 27:24-26) Pilate...washed <i>his</i> hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye <i>to it</i> . Then answered all the people, and said, His blood <i>be</i> on us, and on our children.
(9) he made his grave with the wicked	(Matt 27:38) Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and another on the left.
(9) and with the rich in his death	(Matt 27:57-58) a rich man of Arimathea, named Joseph...went to Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus. Then Pilate commanded the body to be delivered.
(10) Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief	(Matt 27:46) Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? That is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
(10) when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin he shall see his seed	(Mosiah 15:11-12) those who...believed that the Lord would redeem his people...are his seed...For these are they whose sins he has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions. And now, are they not his seed?
(11) He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied; by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.	(DC 19:16-17) For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; But if they would not repent they must suffer even as I ;
(12) Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong	(Matt 26:64) Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Isaiah 53:2 he hath no form nor comeliness

Medieval art portrays the Savior as a feeble, sickly appearing waif. Great artists have tried to emulate his meekness with pathetic representations. In spite of Isaiah's words, this image has been inaccurate and unfortunate.

Joseph Fielding Smith

In appearance he was like men; and so it is expressed here by the prophet that he had no form or comeliness, that is, he was not so distinctive, so different from others that people would recognize him as the son of God. He appeared as a mortal man. (*Doctrines of Salvation*, vol. 1, p. 23)

Victor L. Brown

It is particularly important that young men holding his priesthood become intimately acquainted with him in order to know and to understand him. Unfortunately, artists and others have pictured him as effeminate, soft, and sad. If we analyze his life at all, we see a person who was masculine, strong, vigorous, interested in all that was going on about him, surely loving and kind, but at the same time one who could exhibit righteous anger. If this were not true, how could he have caused rough fishermen to follow him with just one sentence: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men"? (Matt. 4:19.) He spent his youth and young adulthood as a carpenter, a trade requiring strength and skill. Would he have dared drive the money changers from the temple had he not been a man of great strength and courage? (*Conference Reports*, Oct. 1970, p. 124)

Isaiah 53:3 despised and rejected of men

James E. Talmage

Isaiah was permitted to read the scroll of futurity as to many distinguishing conditions to attend the Messiah's lowly life and atoning death. In Him the prophet saw One who would be despised and rejected of men, a Man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, One to be wounded and bruised for the transgressions of the race, on whom would be laid the iniquity of us all -- a patient and willing Sacrifice, silent under affliction, as a lamb brought to the slaughter. The Lord's dying with sinners, and His burial in the tomb of the wealthy were likewise declared with prophetic certainty. (*Jesus the Christ*, p. 47)

Charles W. Penrose

We expect that he will come again, not the next time as the babe of Bethlehem, not the next time to be despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, but as the Lord of life and glory, as the King of Israel to sit upon the throne of his father David, to rule from the rivers to the ends of the earth; not to be brought unto the subjection of men, but to have all things made subject to him; not to bear his cross up the side of

Calvary, but to come as a monarch, as a ruler of men, as the rightful Lord and King of this earth upon which we live. (*Journal of Discourses*, vol. 22, p. 83)

Isaiah 53:3 a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief

Jeffrey R. Holland

No one's eyes were more penetrating than His, and much of what He saw pierced His heart. Surely His ears heard every cry of distress, every sound of want and despair. To a degree far more than we will ever understand, He was "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief." Indeed, to the layman in the streets of Judea, Christ's career must have seemed a failure, a tragedy, a good man totally overwhelmed by the evils surrounding Him and the misdeeds of others. He was misunderstood or misrepresented, even hated from the beginning. No matter what He said or did, His statements were twisted, His actions suspected, His motives impugned. In the entire history of the world no one has ever loved so purely or served so selflessly-and been treated so diabolically for His effort. (*Ensign*, Nov. 1999, 37)

Isaiah 53:5 he was wounded for our transgressions

Ezra Taft Benson

Because He was God-even the Son of God-He could carry the weight and burden of other men's sins on Himself. Isaiah prophesied our Savior's willingness to do this in these words: "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: ... 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." (Isa. 53:4-5.)

That holy, unselfish act of voluntarily taking on Himself the sins of all other men is the Atonement. How One could bear the sins for all is beyond the comprehension of mortal man. But this I know: He did take on Himself the sins of all and did so out of His infinite love for each of us. He has said: "For behold, I, God, have suffered these things for all, that they might not suffer if they would repent; ... which suffering caused myself, even God, the greatest of all, to tremble because of pain, and to bleed at every pore, and to suffer both body and spirit-and would that I might not drink the bitter cup, and shrink." (D&C 19:16, 18.)

In spite of that excruciating ordeal, He took the cup and drank. He suffered the pains of all men so we would not have to suffer. He endured the humiliation and insults of His persecutors without complaint or retaliation. He bore the

flogging and then the ignominy of the brutal execution-the cross. ("Jesus Christ: Our Savior, Our God," *Ensign*, Apr. 1991, 2, 4)

Isaiah 53:6 the Lord hath laid upon him the iniquity of us all

Neal A. Maxwell

Jesus, Creator and Jehovah, surely had known for a long time what He must do. Nevertheless, He had never known, personally, the exquisite and exacting process of an atonement before. And it was so much worse than even He with His unique intellect had ever imagined. No wonder an angel appeared to strengthen Him! (See Luke 22:43.)

No wonder He began to be "very heavy" or, also in the Greek rendition, very "dejected" and "depressed" and filled with anguish. The cumulative weight of all mortal sins, somehow, past, present, and future, pressed upon that perfect, sinless, and sensitive soul! All infirmities and sicknesses were part, too, of the awful arithmetic of the Atonement. (See Alma 7:11, 12; Isa. 53:3-5; Matt. 8:17.) (*Ensign*, Dec. 1986, 26)

Isaiah 53:7 he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter

And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long season, because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him.

Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him. (Lu. 23:8-10)

James E. Talmage

As far as we know, Herod is...distinguished as the only being who saw Christ face to face and spoke to Him, yet never heard His voice. For penitent sinners, weeping women, prattling children, for the scribes, the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the rabbis, for the perjured high priest and his obsequious and insolent underling, and for Pilate the pagan, Christ had words-of comfort or instruction, of warning or rebuke, of protest or denunciation-yet for Herod the fox He had but disdainful and kingly silence. (*Jesus the Christ*, 635-636)

Isaiah 53:10 yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him

Obviously God was not pleased with the way men treated Jesus, but he was pleased with his son's "offering for sin". The Atonement met the strictest demands of God's innate justice and made forgiveness and mercy possible on certain terms.

Elder Melvin J. Ballard explained why it pleased God not to interfere: "In that hour I think I can see our dear Father behind the veil looking upon these dying struggles until even He could not endure it any longer; and, like the mother who bids farewell to her dying child, has to be taken out of the room, so as not to look upon the last struggles, so He bowed his head, and hid in some part of his universe, his great heart almost breaking for the love that He had for his Son. Oh, in that moment when He might have saved his Son, I thank him and praise him that He did not fail us, for He had not only the love of his Son in mind, but He also had love for us. I rejoice that he did not interfere, and that his love for us made it possible for him to endure to look upon the sufferings of his Son and give him finally to us, our Savior and our Redeemer. Without him, without his sacrifice, we would have remained and we would never have come glorified into his presence. And so this is what it cost, in part, for our Father in Heaven to give the gift of his Son unto men." (Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard*, pp. 154-55)

Isaiah 53:10 he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand

Bruce R. McConkie

If this prophecy was meant to be fulfilled during his mortal sojourn on earth, we would list it as having failed. He did not prolong his days; a voluntary death overtook him in the prime of life. Nor did the pleasure of the Lord find full fruition while he dwelt in a state where death lies in wait for the weary pilgrim. It is only in the resurrection that the pleasure of the Lord is perfected, for it is only when "spirit and element" are "inseparably connected" that either God or man can "receive a fulness of joy." (D&C 93:33.) Thus, having made his soul an offering for sin; having seen his seed-all the righteous dead from the days of Adam to that moment-as they assembled to greet and worship him in the paradise of their Lord; and having thereafter risen in glorious immortality to live and reign forever, our Messiah truly fulfilled the prophetic utterance, for then his days were prolonged forever and the pleasure in his hand was infinite. (*Promised Messiah*, p. 362)

Isaiah 53:11 He shall see the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied

In this phrase, God the Father sees the travail of his son, and the requirements of justice are satisfied. At times, God the Father represents justice while the Son represents mercy. This scripture is a good example; Elohim, or justice, is satisfied with the merciful sacrifice of the Only-Begotten. In the Jewish tradition, Elohim and Jehovah are the same individual so the differential use of these names highlights their attributes of justice and mercy respectively, "In midrashic language: If you do My will I am [Jehovah], the Merciful one, but if not I will be Elohim, the dispenser of stern justice." (*The Torah: A Modern Commentary*, ed. by W. Gunther Plaut, p. 541). Abinadi expands on this theme in his explanation to the priests, telling them that Jehovah had "ascended into heaven, having the bowels of mercy; being filled with compassion towards the children of men; standing betwixt them and justice; having broken the bands of death, taken upon himself their iniquity and their transgressions, having redeemed them, and satisfied the demands of justice" (Mosiah 15:9).

Thus was the Father satisfied with the sacrifice made by his Son. He had earned the right to be our Advocate; he had proven his muster as Mediator; his infinite offering made mercy and justice friends instead of enemies.