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# THE PENTATEUCH OF SUFFERING

H. C. HEWLETT

## 1. 'The Servant of Jehovah' (Isaiah 52: 13-15)\*

The theme of Isaiah's prophecy is just that which his name indicates—'The Salvation of the Lord', therefore we find his book to be surpassingly rich in its unfolding of the sufferings and glory of Him who is God's salvation (Cf. Luke 2:30). Even as the key to Isaiah's life is given in Chap. 6—'Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts,' so he uplifts, as the supreme goal of the godly life, the glad prospect—'Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty' (33:17).

With such desire we approach the passage before us, and we shall not be disappointed, for we shall see our Lord Jesus in His majesty, and yet in His humiliation, in His holiness and His great gentleness, and finally, in the last clause of 53:12, in His ineffable love.

The book of Isaiah has three main divisions: Chaps. 1 to 35, mingled rebuke and prophecy, but ever gleaming through it the glory of the Branch of Jehovah, of Immanuel, of the Prince of Peace. Chaps. 36 to 39, historical, Hezekiah's deliverance from Sennacherib. Chaps. 40 to 66, comforting prophecy and tender expostulation. This third section is itself divided into three by the repetition of the words—'no peace to the wicked'—giving us three parts of nine chapters each, viz., 40 to 48; 49 to 57; and 58 to 66. Set in the centre of the second of these is the sublime passage, 52:13 to 53:12, whose central verse is 53:5—'He was wounded for our transgressions.' How obvious then is the centrality of the Cross in the ways of God.

In these present studies we propose to consider this 'Passion-Song of Israel' as a Pentateuch, i.e., its structure reminds unmistakably of that of the five books of Moses. The fifteen verses are divided very simply into five threes, each three in turn bearing striking correspondence to one of the books from Genesis to

\* This is the first of five articles on the general topic 'Christ the Suffering Servant', as revealed in Isaiah's prophecy, chapters 52:13 to 53:12. Mr. Hewlett is the Editor of the Magazine, *The Treasury* (New Zealand).

Deuteronomy. We need not be surprised at this, for the pentateuchal pattern is woven not only into Scripture but into the experience of every believer. We have each had a Genesis, a beginning, of sharing in the ruin of the fall. Every Christian has known an Exodus, an outgoing from bondage, procured by the blood of redemption. The believer's life then possesses two aspects, life Godward, seen in Leviticus, and life manward, seen in Numbers. Finally, we have each the twofold vista of Deuteronomy, backward over the way God has led, and forward to our Homeland.

It is Divine poetry which we consider, but its music is muted as becomes its sorrow. Only with reverent ear and contrite heart shall we discern its strain, and learn its beauty. Again, we must note throughout whose voice it is which we hear, for much turns on this.

As in the book of *Genesis* we have the beginning of man's history, and the main issues from which our human experience springs, so in these verses of Isaiah are set forth the main issues of the prophecy namely, the utmost height of Messiah's glory, and the deepest depth of His woe. Yet there is a contrast, for whilst *Genesis* portrays the failure of the first man, Isaiah pre-figures the victory of the Second Man.

In these verses the speaker is God Himself, for none else could speak of the Messiah as 'My Servant.' This latter expression is used in three ways in Isaiah, indicating first, the nation of Israel, then, in more restricted sense, the godly members of it, and finally, the Messiah. Where the nation has failed, and where even the godly nucleus cannot tread, the Messiah has given to God's heart all that He seeks. There need be no difficulty here in recognizing the identity of the Servant; none but our Lord Jesus Christ could fill the portrait.

Here, also, is the fourth of those passages sometimes called the 'Songs of the Servant'.

1. Ch. 42:1-4. The Servant's *Character*: Gentleness and faithfulness.

2. Ch. 49:1-6. The Servant's *Sphere*: 'My salvation unto the ends of the earth.'

3. Ch. 50:4-9. The Servant's *Obedience*: Not rebellious.
4. Ch. 52:13 to 53:12. The Servant's *Suffering and Glory*.

Verse 13. The Exceeding Heights

*My Servant shall deal prudently (or prosper)*. Here is that for which we are prepared by the third of the Servant-Songs, for prosperity is the fruit of obedience. In Gen. 3:6 is the first occurrence of this word 'prudent' (Heb. '*sachal*')—'a tree to be desired *to make wise*.' Eve looked at that which she felt would make her wise, prudent, or prosperous, but in taking of it she acted in disobedience to the expressed will of God. In this consisted the genesis of earth's sorrow, the beginning of the long path of tragedy and grief to be trodden by a fallen race. But the earthly path of the Redeemer began with obedience, even as He said: 'Lo, I am come . . . to do Thy will, O God' (Heb. 10:7. R.V.), and it was consummated in His becoming 'obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross' (Phil. 2:8). Because obedience to His will is that alone which God can honour, it is fitting that the word *sachal* bears at times the meaning 'prosper'.

1st. 'Observe to do according to all the law . . . that thou mayest *prosper* whithersoever thou goest' (Jos. 1:7).

2nd. 'And David . . . behaved himself wisely' (marg. prospered) (1 Sam. 18:5).

3rd. 'He kept His commandments . . . and he prospered' (2 Kings 18:7).

Even these excellent men, Joshua, David, Hezekiah, 'sometimes trailed their garments in the dust,' but the Holy One was ever-prudent, ever prosperous. Thus in one brief clause is summed up the Servant's path.

Then follows the sequel of blessing from God. 'He shall be exalted, and extolled, and be very high.' Even so in Phil. 2 is the self-humbling of Christ followed by the answering work of God. 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him.' While some have rendered Is. 52:13—'He shall arise, and lift Himself up', it seems better, in the light of the teaching of the New Testament that 'Christ glorified not Himself', to retain such a astonish, J.N.D. Trans.), and 'He shall cause to tremble' (Delitzsch) and 'be wondered at' (LXX). Earth which saw

the dishonour of the Cross must see the answering-glory of the Kingdom. The One to whom was meted out the utmost scorn and derision must be displayed in sublime dignity. But whereas many individuals were amazed at His suffering, many nations shall be amazed at His glory (cf. 2 Thess. 1:10).

'At Him (emphatic) the kings shall shut their mouths.' When in the hours preceding the Cross He stood before earth's proud rulers, He was silent, even as chap. 53:7 will tell us, and that because of His meekness, and His voluntary submission to His substitutionary death. But when He comes with great power and glory, earth's rulers shall be silent—overwhelmed by His majesty. 'For that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.' How little did Tiberius Caesar realize that in his Empire there walked the King of Heaven! How little the true King is in the eyes of wording as that of the R.V. 'He shall be exalted, and lifted up, and shall be very high.'

It is noteworthy, however, that the two verbs, *rum* and *nasa*, in that order are coupled together a number of times in Isaiah.

1. 'A throne *high* and *lifted*' up (ch. 6:1).
2. 'Against whom *hast thou exalted* thy voice, and *lifted up* thine eyes on high?' (ch. 37:23).
3. 'The *high* and *lofty* One that inhabiteth eternity' (ch. 57:15).
4. 'He shall be *exalted* and *extolled*.' (ch. 52:13).

In ch. 6:1 we see the place, the rightful place, which our Lord occupied in His pre-incarnation glory—high and lifted up—and in ch. 57:15 the dignity proper to the Eternal One, the Holy One. In ch. 37:23 we have the audacious pride of Sennacherib, and his self-exaltation as if to rival the honour of the Holy One of Israel. In ch. 52:13 the words reveal unmistakably that the Servant has returned again to His own original glory. Of this His own words speak in John 17:5—'Glorify thou me *thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*'

But not only is He once again 'exalted and lifted up.' 'He is very high', or, in the Hebrew order, 'high, exceedingly.' So used, the word '*m'odh* (very) indicates absolute superlativeness.

The Servant's place is not only high, but there is nothing higher. To this the New Testament bears its clear witness. 'God set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion'. (Eph. 1:20-21). 'Far above all heavens' (Eph. 4:10). This sublime height of unapproachable majesty is occupied by Jehovah's Servant, and that in the Manhood in which He glorified Him on earth, and 'bare the sin of many.'

Verse 14. Exceeding Depths

'As many were astonished at Thee.' This is the only line in the Song addressed directly to the Servant. With what tenderness does God speak to the One so dear to Him, as if to say: 'Is it possible that Thou shouldst be the subject of such astonishment?' The word *shamem* tells of astonishment, not of glad surprise but of profound gloom, of desolation. We think of the desolation which lay upon the hearts of those who beheld the scene at Calvary, and smote their breasts and returned, and of the gloom that enveloped those who loved Him. So stirred were men by His mighty deeds, and from so many lips had come the shout 'Hosanna', that many were the hearts appalled at this seeming end to His life. Was this the end to it all? But this line tells of what *men saw*, because of what *men had done* in nailing the Son of God to the Tree.

The second part of the verse continues God's revelation concerning His Servant. 'His visage was so marred (lit. 'a marring') more than anyman, and His form more than the sons of men'. This parenthesis claims our most careful attention, for in this Genesis section of the Song we might expect reference to that unique and awful anguish involved in the atoning character of His death. So it is in this verse. The parenthesis is not just an explanation of the preceding clause. Rather does it develop the thought by showing what deeper thing was linked with that humiliation at which men were so appalled.

Here we find two divergent lines of exposition. Is the preposition *min* expressive of comparison ('more than', as A. V. and R. V.), or of negation ('away from', or 'from,' as R. V. Marg.)? In the latter case, and many render it so, it tells of indignities meted out to the Holy One by His creatures; they were of such character

that His appearance was scarcely that of a man, and hence the astonishment in men's eyes. But we are persuaded the passage contains far more than that, hence we take the first view, that of comparison. And here the language refers to that which found no parallel in the experience of the sons of men.

F. C. Jennings remarks (*Studies in Isaiah*): 'Yet the words point beyond all question to some unparalleled depth of suffering, and its effect on that blessed Face and Form. Up to the stroke of noon on that fatal day . . . the thieves on either side of Him may have equally suffered, or with only such difference as was due to the greater sensitiveness of the perfect human organism of His body. But then for three hours, and for three hours only, did He so suffer "more than any of the sons of men," so as to mar His visage more than any. It is quite true that God drew a veil over those sufferings, thus telling, in a most solemn symbol, that none could really "see", or enter in to their profundities; but here the holy silence of the Gospels is supplemented by the inspired words in our prophet; and in that unequalled agony, God, who is here the Speaker, tells us what *He* saw in the great darkness. Oh! the suffering *to Himself* that this tells, for that Sufferer was His beloved Son!'

Many of Christ's martyrs have suffered greatly for His sake, but here is that which goes beyond their utmost pain. What men did, and hence what men saw, brought from His lips the words—'Father, forgive them,' but that which He suffered in *sin-bearing* brought the cry, single, echo-less,—'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' In Gethsemane, the anticipation of the cup of judgment meant such anguish that 'He sweat as it were great drops of blood.' Let us then ask, in deep reverence, what was the effect on Face and Form of the actual drinking of the cup? It is of this, veiled from our gaze save as the Word reveals it, that the verse speaks:

The tempest's awful voice was heard;  
 O Christ, it broke on Thee!  
 Thine open bosom was my ward;  
 It braved the storm for me:  
 Thy form was scarred, Thy visage marred—  
 Now cloudless peace for me.

The expression 'more than the sons of men' (*mibbne 'adam*) occurs seldom in the Old Testament, but there is an illuminating use in Psalm 45:2, 'Thou art fairer than the children of men'. In Isa. 52 Christ is set forth as pre-eminent in *suffering*, but in the Psalm as pre-eminent in *beauty*. The aptness of the parallel only confirms the view given above concerning the 'marring'. Again, the dread depths of sorrow are set in contrast with the blissful heights of honour in verse 13, even as the astonishment of those who saw the Holy Sufferer (v. 14) is contrasted with the astonishment of the nations (v. 15).

#### Verse 15. Compensating Honour

Here is another scene entirely. Our gaze is taken across the centuries from the first advent to the second. 'So shall He startle (*naza*) many nations' (R.V. marg. cf.) 'so shall He earth's potentates now!' But when He comes to reign men shall behold an authority, an 'imperium' which far outstrips their wildest dreams, and which they have not even considered. These words are quoted by Paul in Romans 15:21 of his desire to preach the Gospel where Christ's name had not been heard; but their fulness looks beyond this present day to His manifested glory. (Compare a similar application in Isa. 52:7 and Rom. 10:15).

Thus the pathway of obedience has led to the glory of the Throne. For us, also, though the gate of obedience may open to a valley of present loss, it has always the far vista of the hills of eternal gain.