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# THE PENTATEUCH OF SUFFERING

H. C. HEWLETT

## 2. 'The Arm of Jehovah' (Isaiah 53:1-3)

In the Genesis section of this great passage (viz., Isa. 52:13-15), there is declared 'the suffering of Christ, and the glory that should follow.' As we ponder the lonely hours of immeasurable anguish endured by the crucified Messiah, we may well ask how such could ever be. The answer is twofold: First, it was because when He came to His people as their Deliverer, He was spurned by them. This we find in the verses now before us (Isa. 53:1-3). Secondly, and deeper far in its significance, it was because 'it pleased the Lord to bruise Him'; and the meaning of this 'pleasure' is unfolded in the appropriate part of the Song, i.e., in its Deuteronomy section (vs. 10-12).

In verses 1-3, then, we have a clear resemblance to the book of Exodus; for when Moses first essayed to deliver his people from the Egyptians, he too was despised by them (Ex. 2:14). To this Stephen bore witness: 'This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge . . .' (Acts 7:35). Moreover in this section the subject of the song is spoken of as 'the Arm of Jehovah,' which title is used elsewhere (by Isaiah, as we shall see) to portray the Messiah as the One who actually led Israel forth out of Egypt by His mighty power.

In these verses we hear the voice of a redeemed nation. When in a day to come the people of Israel look on Him whom they pierced, they shall be plunged into deep mourning. (See Zech. 12:10-14) Blind and wilful no longer, they will look back on the first Advent of their Messiah, and make this sorrowful confession as to their blindness and their sins. Thus the words spoken by God—'Behold My Servant'—will be met with the response: 'He was despised, and we esteemed Him not!' Today, 'blindness in part is happened unto Israel' (Rom. 11:25). Only a few, the 'remnant according to the election of grace' (Rom. 11:5), such as Saul of Tarsus himself, have bowed with contrite heart to own

Jesus as Lord. How great Saul's anguish was when he found Who it was against whom both he and his nation had sinned so grievously, let his three days in Damascus without eating or drinking declare.

#### Verse 1. The Servant's Person

'Who hath believed our report?' (i.e., 'what we heard'). In ch. 52:15, God stated that kings shall consider what they had not heard, but now the admission of penitent Israel is—*We did hear*. The Lord Himself bore witness in the days of His flesh: 'Many prophets and righteous men have desired . . . to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them' (Matt. 13:17). When He came, Israel did hear, but believed not.

'Who hath believed?' A few indeed, whom the Pharisees referred to scornfully: 'Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on Him? But this people which knoweth not the law are cursed' (John 7:48-49). Actually, they who believed the law believed Christ (cf. John 5:46-47). Unbelief in the Word was followed by unbelief in the Person of whom it spoke. It was the more tragic, because concerning Abraham the father of the nation it was written: 'He believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness' (Gen. 15:6); yet those who boasted, 'We have Abraham to our father', did not share his faith. The first use in Scripture of this term 'believe' (the hiphil of *aman*) is in Gen. 15:6. How sadly, therefore, it occurs in Isa. 53:1!

'And to whom is the Arm of the Lord revealed?' The word 'Arm' tells of that by which work is done, but the reference here is to far more than an attribute of God, such as His power. 'Arm of Jehovah' is a title of the Messiah, of Him who is 'Christ the power of God', and is therefore expressive of His Deity. Three times in successive chapters of Isaiah does He come before us in this glory.

(1) *In the past of history.* 'Awake, awake, put on strength, O Arm of the Lord . . . Art Thou not it that hath cut Rahab (i.e., Egypt), and wounded the dragon? Art Thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?' (51:9-10).

Clearly, the reference is to the Exodus, when Jehovah's Arm brought Israel safely through the Red Sea.

(2) *In the present of rejection.* (53:1). The Messiah came as the lowly Nazarene, and the unbelieving nation was blind to the greatness of His Person, and when He claimed to be the One who had dealt with them in such delivering power in their early history, 'they took up stones to cast at Him' (ch. John 8:58 and Ex. 3:14). To a few, indeed, His Person was revealed, such as Peter (Matt. 16:17), and Paul (Gal. 1:16), even as to writer and reader of these lines, by amazing grace.

(3) *In the future of manifested glory.* "The Lord hath made bare His holy Arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God" (52:10). Christ's Person will be so declared then that all upon earth shall know that the Man of the Cross is the everlasting God, the King of glory.

#### Verse 2. The Servant's Beauty

'*For He grew up before Him*' (R.V.). The life of the Servant was lived primarily before the eye of Jehovah—"before Him", even as in Micah 5:2 God says: 'Out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel'. Till He reached the age of thirty, the Lord Jesus lived in the obscurity of a despised village of Galilee, but those lowly years brought unceasing pleasure to the heart of the Father. Little is told us of them save in the one incident of His visit to Jerusalem at the age of twelve. Of that glimpse Stalker said truly: 'Only one flower has come to us over the wall of that enclosed garden;' and J. B. Watson has added aptly: 'And it is so exquisite that it makes us long to see all that was enclosed therein'.

'*As a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground*'. 'Tender plant' (*yoneq*, sucker, or young twig) tells of the lowly humanity of the Servant. 'Root (*shoresh*, root, or sprout produced by the root) out of a dry ground', tells of His coming from the house of David, as a sprout from the root of a tree remaining in the ground after the tree is felled, while the dry ground tells of the spiritual aridity of Israel.

In that tender plant we see the freshness and beauty of the one life that developed apart from the blighting influences of sin. Every faculty of His humanity was perfect in its expression as in its development. As the bud unfolds to the flower, and the flower produces the fruit, and each is perfect in its stage, so Christ passed through childhood to youth and to manhood. In each moment He was all that God's heart desired Him to be, so that of Him in all that lowly life, as in all His pre-incarnate majesty, God could say: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased' (Matt. 3:17). Yet was He unappreciated by men.

*'He hath no form nor comeliness' (hadar, splendour or majesty); and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him'* (R.V.). The R.V. margin reads: 'He hath no form nor comeliness, that we should look upon Him: nor beauty, that we should desire Him'. This is attractive for its symmetry, but the meaning is much the same either way. His was indeed moral majesty, but this was not what Israel sought. They looked for the pomp and circumstance of worldly royalty. They 'wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth' (Luke 4:22), but were infuriated when He probed the condition of their heart. They appreciated the beauty of His Manhood (see Luke 2:52), but sought something other than this for Messiahship. He did not correspond with their conception of what the Messiah should be. They looked for one who should lead their armies in revolt against the yoke of Rome; they did not desire One who should break the yoke of sin.

### Verse 3. The Servant's Sympathy

*'He was despised, and rejected of men'* (R.V.). With this accords His own testimony given prophetically in Psalm 22:6. 'But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people'. It is not without solemn lesson that the word 'despised' (*bazah*) is used first concerning Esau: 'Thus Esau despised his birthright' (Gen. 25:34). It is of such persons that the Epistle to the Hebrews warns (ch. 12:16). In the likeness of Esau they despise spiritual privilege, and supremely in turning from Christ. 'Rejected' (*hadel*, i.e., forsaken) tells that men,

especially those of rank, after a passing acquaintance held aloof from Him. Some mild interest they showed at first, but then they wished to have nothing further to do with Him.

In these brief words is concentrated the reception given to the Hope of Israel. When He ministered in Nazareth, though He had lived there such a life as none other had done, incomparable in its loveliness, and stainless in its purity, 'they were offended in Him' (Matt. 13:57). As His years of ministry proceeded, it became more and more evident that He was a 'Rock of offence', even as Isaiah had described Him (8:14). The rejection culminated in the cry of bitter apostasy—'We have no king but Caesar' (John 19:15). Led by hatred of the Lord Jesus to reject Him as Messiah, the leaders of Israel were driven on in the path of guilt to reject the Messianic hope altogether, and to own the Gentile as alone their king.

'*A Man of sorrows*'. To the policy makers of Israel He was merely a 'Man of sorrow'. As the next verse makes clear, the sorrows referred to were not His own. 'Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows'. He was a Man of other people's sorrows. 'Sorrows' (*machobh*) refer to things that cause pain, whether physical or mental. We may illustrate the phrase by reference to the parable of the Good Samaritan. When the wounded man lay in his distress by the roadside, a priest went past, but, catching sight of him, deliberately went by on the other side. He was no man of sorrows. The Levite was little better; he did approach to see what had happened, but he, too, chose the other side of the road. It was the despised Samaritan who showed himself a man of sorrows by his compassion and kindness. Thus he was a true picture of the One whom men despised, and of whom they said angrily: 'Say we not well that Thou art a Samaritan?' (John 8:48).

Let us think of the load that rested on Him daily. If we could see at once the sorrows of but one city, we could not bear it. The burden would crush us. Yet upon the exquisitely sensitive heart of the Son of man, a heart whose feelings had never been blunted by sin, there rested the burden of a world's sorrows!

His own heart was one of peace, but He was pleased in the deliberateness of love to stir those tranquil depths, to 'trouble Himself' in His sympathy, as He did when He saw the tears of Mary of Bethany and of her friends (see John 11:33, marg.).

The word 'sorrows' (*machobh*) takes us back to its first use, i.e., in Exodus 3:7, where the One who was later to become incarnate spoke to Moses from the bush concerning Israel: 'I know their sorrows'. Thus our section (53:1-3) is stamped again with its likeness to the book of Exodus. Let us thank God that the sympathy of the Blessed One is unchanged today.

'*And acquainted with grief*'. 'Grief' (*holi*, used of affliction either of body or of spirit) is here personified. Christ was so much in its company that it is thought of as being familiar with Him. ('Acquainted' renders the passive participle Kal of *yada*', so that the phrase is literally 'known of grief' or 'known to grief.') If we enquire of Grief, 'Did you know Him?' it answers: 'Yes, well. I was one day in the stricken home of a man called Jairus, and I met Him there. I was with a sorrowing widow at the gate of Nain, and He was there. Where I was, He was ever present'. In His tender compassion, the Servant sought out the scenes where grief was, that He might minister of His power and of His comfort.

'*And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him. He was despised, and we esteemed Him not*'. In spite of His burden for the sad and needy, the men of His day turned from Him with disappointment and loathing. Concerned only with their own schemes and ambitions, selfish men looked down upon His sympathy with sad hearts. They hid their face from Him, so that they might not catch His gaze. With studied contempt, they avoided Him, preferring His room to His company, and finding His character as distasteful as His claims were hateful. Yet amid it all the Holy One pursued His steadfast way, turning not from the men who most bitterly reviled Him, so that in the third of the 'Servant Songs' we hear His own words of submission: 'I hid not My face from shame and spitting.'

'*He was despised*'. In its repetition, the expression reminds of the word 'deride' (where deride means 'to turn up the nose at'),

found twice in Luke's Gospel as showing men's contempt for Christ. Ch. 18:14; 'The Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they *derided* Him (i.e., they turned up their noses at Him)'. Ch. 23:35; 'And the rulers also with them *derided* Him, saying, He saved others; let Him save Himself, if He be Christ, the chosen of God'.

*'We esteemed Him not'*. Luther rendered this vividly: 'We estimated Him at nothing'. The words indicate the value which men put upon Him. Eventually the priests paid thirty pieces of silver to the traitor Judas, and counted it well spent, that they might wreak their rage on Him, and be rid of Him at last in His death.

To them He was no Messiah. The circumstances of His path were utterly at variance with those which they expected in their Deliverer. However, it has been well said that 'we love Him for those very condescensions for which Israel despised Him'. Should not a King have been borne in a royal palace amid royal state? They scorned Him for His manger-cradle; we love Him for it. Then they said, with thinly veiled contempt: 'Is not this the Carpenter?' Was His a fitting upbringing for a Monarch? But we think of the King of the Ages toiling in patience in a carpenter's shop, and cannot find words to express the wonder of such humility. His chosen companions included Galilean fishermen and even a publican, but no rabbi, not one courtier, and not even a doctor of the law. This was repugnant to them, but we adore Him that He chose such as Peter and Matthew, and, more wonderful still, that He has chosen us.

Men scorned One who could spend long nights lonely on the hills of Judea and Galilee. 'The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head' (Matt. 8:20). They despised Him for the poverty in which He lived as far as earth's gold was concerned; but we rejoice in 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich' (2 Cor. 8:9). They saw Him ride into His royal city on a colt, the foal of an ass, and in spite of the prediction of Zechariah 9:9, they looked with annoyance on His entry. And at last not a



Throne but a Cross, 'to the Jews a stumbling-block', but for this we shall worship Him for evermore.

Such was Israel's rejection of the Messiah, and such the unbelief that blinded their minds to His presence. Let us seek that no unbelief on our part hide His glory from our eyes, but that as the Arm of the Lord He may ever be revealed to us, the strong Son of God, who procured our redemption, and who delights in days of stress and perplexity to show to us the salvation of the Lord.

(To be continued)

## NEW TESTAMENT WORD STUDIES

W. WILCOX

(NOUTHESIA = '~~A~~dm<sup>n</sup>ition')

In the course of his long experience in dealing with his converts, Paul found the constant need for the reproof of faults, encouragements to godly living, and stimulation to continued endeavour to achieve the ends for which the Gospel had been brought to them. Amongst these various elements in training, admonition took an important place, for it occurs not only in the earlier epistles where we may say that he writes to converts of more recent date, but also in the later epistles where he urges upon Colossian and Ephesian saints the need for admonition.

In our English versions the verb is translated some four times by *admonish* and four times by *warn*. The noun appears three times as *admonition*. The verb literally means 'to put into the mind': Trench says: 'It is the training by word, by word of encouragement when that is sufficient, but also by that of remonstrance, of reproof, of blame, when these may be required; as set over against the training by act and by discipline which is *paideia*'.

Relatively, then, and by comparison with *paideia*, *nouthesia* is the milder term: while yet its association with *paideia* teaches us that this, too, is a most useful element of Christian education;