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THE PENTATEUCH OF SUFFERING

H. C. HEWLETT

3. The Sin Bearer (Isaiah 53: 4-6)

We come now to the very heart of this passage, the third section, which reminds of the book of *Leviticus*. As the third book of Moses presents before us a holy God, and speaks of holy places and of holy offerings, so Isaiah 53: 4-6 sets before us as the Substitute who bears the sins of His people the One who is so frequently spoken of by the prophet as 'the Holy One' or 'the Holy One of Israel.' In *Leviticus* it is stressed concerning the sin offering—'It is most holy.' In *Isaiah* there is like insistence on the holiness of Him who is the true sin offering. As He was when adored by the seraphim—'Holy, Holy, Holy' (Isa. 6:3), so He is in all His relationships, till in the kingdom the call comes 'Cry out and shout, thou inhabitant of Zion: for great is the Holy One of Israel in the midst of thee' (Isa. 12:6).

As in the *Exodus* section of the Song (verses 1-3) we hear the voice of a repentant Israel, so also in this third section. In the day of Israel's future mourning, the day of 'affliction of soul' typified so vividly in the sixth of the Feasts of Jehovah (See Lev. 23:26-32), the people will muse with contrite hearts on the sufferings of their Messiah, and see in Him the fulfilment of all the typical offerings for sin and trespass. We, too, who have been sinners of the Gentiles can remember with subdued spirits that He 'His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree' (1 Pet. 2:24), and that God 'hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him' (2 Cor. 5:21), so that this section has its place on our lips also.

Before examining the text of the verses before us, we must note both the reticence and the reverence with which the writers of Scripture treat of the sufferings of Christ. The actual witnesses of His agony impress us by their brevity of description, and by the simplicity of their narrative. If we would learn more fully some details of His sorrow, we must look to the *Psalms* and to the

Prophets. Here, as elsewhere, the precious content of Scripture is revealed to faith, but 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God' (1 Cor. 2:14).

Verse 4. Suffering Misunderstood

'Surely our griefs He bore, and our sorrows—He carried them'. 'Thus we seek to give the emphasis of these clauses, which contrast strongly the pronouns—OUR griefs, HE bore. Continuing the theme from verse 3, the speaker ponders the fact that He, the Messiah, whom they rejected, bore the griefs of the very ones who despised Him. The passage is explained for us by the Spirit of God, in that Matthew says concerning Christ's miracles: 'He healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses' (Matt. 8:17). In His gracious ministry among the people of Israel, the Lord Jesus bore their griefs and carried their sorrows by the sympathy which felt them and the power that relieved them. Thus He manifested the marks of the Messiah. (See Isa. 35:5). When John the Baptist from his prison asked: 'Art Thou He that should come, or look we for another?' the Lord replied: 'Tell John what things ye have seen and heard: how that the blind see, the lame walk—' (Luke 7:19, 22).

Thus far the reference is to His ministry as the Man of sorrows, rather than to His death with its substitutionary suffering. That the two verbs *nasa* (bore) and *sabhal* (carried) are used of substitution in verses 12 and 11 respectively does not necessitate such a meaning in verse 4. It is instructive to note that the two verbs are paired four times in Isaiah, and in the same order.

1 and 2 Isa. 46:3-4. 'Which are carried (*nasa*) from the womb . . . To hoar hairs will I carry (*sabhal*) you'. 'I have made, and I will bear (*nasa*): even I will carry (*sabhal*), and will deliver you'. In these two the reference is obviously to sustaining through life.

3. Isa. 46:7. 'They bare (*nasa*) him upon the shoulder, they carry (*sabhal*) him.' Here the reference is to the taking about of helpless idols.

4. Isa. 53:4 (as shown above).

Thus substitution is not necessarily involved in the use of these two verbs, but where present it is indicated by the context.

It is well for us at this stage to consider how this verse has been perverted by some who teach that the Lord bore sicknesses on the Cross and that therefore a believer ought not to be sick. It is important to realise that—

1. At the Cross the Lord bore our sins, not our sicknesses.
2. Sickness is not necessarily the result of the sin of the sick one (cf. John 9:3), but is the entail of the Fall, and is experienced even by lower orders of created life where there can be no possibility of being morally guilty.
3. Christ has dealt with the problem of sickness by bearing the curse—by being made sin for us—so that thereby He might provide a righteous basis on which to deal with the consequences of the Fall.
4. The application to our bodies of Christ's redemption awaits His coming again (see Rom. 8:23).
5. The special miracles of healing wrought by Christ in His ministry were related to His kingdom on earth, and will be seen again when He sets up His reign in this scene.
6. Today, while we wait for the redemption of our bodies, we experience the wonder of His sympathy. What we have learnt of His sustaining grace in trial here, we shall carry with us in eternity when all sickness is forever past.

'And we, we esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.'
HE bore our griefs . . . but WE esteemed Him stricken. Here is compressed into brief words Israel's misunderstanding. In verse 3 they said: 'We esteemed Him not—' thus setting no value on His Person. In verse 4 we find that in spite of His compassions toward them, shown in His dealing with their sorrows, they failed to comprehend the meaning of His OWN sorrow. Viewing His death, they thought Him an impostor judged of God for His own sins ('measuring the sin of the sufferer by His suffering'—Delitzsch), whereas in verse 5 they now confess that He suffered the judgment for their sins.

Three terms in Isa. 52:13 told of His exaltation, two referring particularly to its process, and the third to its settled conclusion,—

'very high'. Three terms in Isa. 53:4 tell of the experiences of His death, as viewed by unbelievers. 'Stricken' (*nagha*) or touched, i.e., by the judicial dealing of God, as in 1 Sam, 6,9, Job 1:11. 'Smitten' (*nachah*) of God', the term being used often of blows leading to death. 'Afflicted' (*anah*), brought low by sufferings. Here the third term refers to the state to which all brought Him. How much is contained in these two expressions—in death, brought low—in heaven, 'very high!'

And indeed He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted, even as verse 8 declares: 'For the transgression of My people was He stricken'. To the Holy One God meted out the full penalty due to the sinner. It was the culmination of the path in which the Servant had borne the griefs and carried the sorrows of His people. He had done so knowing that He was about to do far more, to deal with the ultimate cause of grief and sorrow, and that by bearing sin. Thus we are led on to verse 5, which with verses 6, 8, 10, 11 and 12 refers expressly to the facts of true substitution.

Verse 5. Vicarious Suffering

'But He (emphatic) was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities'. Here is sin's desert, and satisfaction rendered to the righteousness of God. 'Wounded' (the poal participle of HALAL) i.e., pierced. The corresponding adjective is used repeatedly to mean fatally wounded, i.e., slain. 'For'. Here the preposition MIN is used of that on account of which something is done. He was pierced on account of our transgressions, our rebellions (*pasha*—rebellion, or breaking of a law or an edict). Bruised (*dacha*)—crushed—for our iniquities (*avon* perverseness, or bent away from the right course). Delitzsch comments on 'wounded' and 'bruised': 'No stronger expressions for indicating violent and excruciating death could be found in the language'.

The piercing and the crushing might be likened in their outward expression to the piercing of hands and feet by the nails, and of the side by the spear, and by the weight of the scourge which fell relentlessly on the Servant's back, but their inward reality related to that which He suffered from the judgment of God.

It was the sword of Jehovah which awoke against Jehovah's Shepherd. It was Jehovah's rod that fell upon Him in the dread hours of the darkness.

'Jehovah lifted up His rod;
O Christ, it fell on thee!
Thou wast sore stricken of Thy God—
There's not one stroke for me:
Thy tears, Thy blood beneath it flowed;
Thy bruising healeth me'.

'*The chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.*' Here the Servant's suffering is viewed in its blessed result for those who once despised Him, but now adore Him as their Messiah. The chastisement refers to the infliction of judgment by which alone they could be brought into peace with God, but 'it was upon *HIM*'. Concerning God's dealings with Israel, Isaiah wrote earlier (26:16)—'Thy chastening (i.e., chastisement) was upon them'. God brought them through experiences of sharp discipline, and they merited such, but in Isaiah 53:5, the chastisement is upon the Holy One, who brought only perfect joy to the heart of God by His life and death of obedience. With deep abasement the redeemed cry that it was for their peace—because they were estranged from God—that the chastisement came, but it came 'upon *HIM*'. Nor could any other have borne it so to exhaust it, and bring true peace. And as the aim was the enjoyment of peace with God by those who could not know it by lesser cost than His sufferings, how great must have been the love that purposed and provided such a sacrifice for sinners!

'*With His stripes—*' *habbirahu* ('stripe'—the singular used in collective sense and hence rendered stripes) refers to the mark of a blow upon the body, i.e., a weal. The word is used of the moral state of Judah in Isaiah 1:6; where it is rendered 'bruises' and refers to the marks of sin upon the sinner and its havoc, but in chap. 53:5 it speaks of the experience of the sinless One in the bearing of sin's judgment. The picture is drawn from the physical, but the reality is spiritual. '*We are healed*' (lit 'it is healed to us'), healed of the dread guilt of sin, by the suffering of the guiltless substitute.

Verse 6. Their Guilt and His Expiation

'*All we like sheep have gone astray.*' Here the guilt is general and inclusive. 'They go astray as soon as they be born' (Psa. 58:3).

'*We have turned everyone to his own way*' or, more emphatically, 'a man (i.e., every man) to his way we have turned'. Here the guilt is personal. None takes refuge by blaming others. Each recognises his own blameworthiness. The guilt, the personal blameworthiness, was theirs (and ours likewise, my reader!). This is ever attributed to the sinner, but never to the Saviour. Scripture is explicit regarding this. 'Christ also hath once suffered for sins, *the just for the unjust*, that He might bring us to God' (1 Pet. 3:18). That which was imputed to Him, that which He accepted voluntarily for their sakes, was liability for their sins. It is indeed told us that 'He hath made Him to be sin for us' (2 Cor. 5:21). Christ was 'made sin'. This is not a statement of character, for even under sin's load He remained infinitely holy. 'He knew no sin'. It does tell, however, of the position into which He went for sinners. He was made sin, in that when He bore His people's sins, He was treated with the treatment accorded to sin, i.e., there was poured upon Him without restraint the judgment of God. Rightly did Bonar put it—

'Mine, mine the sin, but Thine the righteousness;
Mine, mine the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood'.

'*And the Lord hath laid upon Him the iniquity of us all*'. This was God's act. No creature had any share in it. Only God, the all-Holy, the all-Knowing, and the all-Sovereign, could place such a load upon the Substitute. Only He, the Servant of Jehovah, whose infinite greatness of Person is so well described in Isaiah's prophecy, for He is 'the Branch of Jehovah . . . Immanuel . . . and the Lord high and lifted up', could sustain its fearful burden.

'*Laid*' (the hiphil perfect of *pagha*'). Let us notice this word closely, for its hiphil imperfect will come before us later in the chapter. The verb, when used in a hostile sense, is frequently rendered 'fall' (as in 1 Kings 2:25. 'He fell upon him that he died')

and hence speaks of a forceful act, a vehement approach. So our verse tells us that God made to rush upon the Servant, as that which in its very nature could come no other way, 'the iniquity of us all'. These latter words tell of the awful load of human sin, and its associated consequence in judgment, laid upon the Sufferer.

In deep reverence we consider this affecting scene, where our Saviour discharged the liability for our sins by His vicarious suffering. We think of what men did to the Holy One, but it was not this that won our redemption, not this that made atonement for sin. Dr Handley C. G. Moule has most aptly compared the sufferings at the hands of men with the storms that sweep over the surface of the ocean, but the atoning sufferings with the ocean itself—

'The gloomy garden, blood bedewed,
The hideous midnight's shame and scorn,
The scourge, the wreath of rending thorn,
The tortures of the dreadful Rood—

These were the billows of Thy death,
Its storm-tossed surface, but the cry
The spirit's woe—Sabachthani—
Rose from the ocean underneath.

Man has no line that sea to sound,
The abyss of night, whose gulfs within
Now lies Thy people's weight of sin,
Forgotten, never to be found'.

As verse 6 begins, so does it end. '*All of us*' (*kullanu*) have gone astray but the Substitute has borne 'the iniquity of us all' (again *kullanu*). The statement of guilt is inclusive; so is that of expiation made. None included in this 'all' shall ever be called into judgment for iniquity, for the all-sufficient Sacrifice of Calvary has taken all iniquity away. But the scope of the verse takes in only those who are repentant, not those who live and die in their sins. As is portrayed simply in the ritual of the sin offering, where the offerer places his hand upon the head of the offering in token of his identification with the victim about to be slain in his stead, so there is no substitution where there is no identification. On the one hand, Christ died for all men, as 'a ransom for all'.

Here is the extent of provision made. On the other, He died as 'a ransom for many'. Here is provision availed of in faith. The language of substitution, such as 'He bore our sins', applies only to those who have placed their trust in the atoning Sufferer. For all such it is true (but for none else) that—

'God will not payment twice demand,
First at my bleeding Surety's hand,
And then again at mine'.

Let us notice, also, that Scripture treats of the atoning sufferings of Christ qualitatively rather than quantitatively. To save one sinner from one sin took not less than the infinite anguish of Christ, not less than the dread forsakenness of the hours of Calvary's darkness, but this has value to save every sinner from every sin. Dr H. P. Liddon put it: 'Christ was as infinite in His condescensions as in His majesty'. The infinite saviour provided a sacrifice of infinite worth.

As we ponder these solemn themes, may there be given to us a sense of the immensity of the love of Christ, and also of the horror of sin, that will stir us to holiness of life and service, and an intense devotedness of all we are and all we have to Him who 'bore our sins in His own body on the tree'.

(To be continued)

THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS

A. NAISMITH, M.A.

The dictionary gives the meaning of 'Imprecation' as 'a curse', 'a prayer for good or evil upon others'. Its etymology is found in the Latin word *impreco*, 'to pray upon'. It cannot be denied that many imprecations occur in the Hymnal of the Hebrews, the Psalms. The problem arising from such occurrences in that portion of the Scriptures is one of inspiration, and has been stated by Dr Perowne in the following sentences:

'Imprecations in the Psalms have occasioned more real perplexity than any other thing. The terrible denunciations of the writer's enemies, withering anathemas, imprecations so awful that