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# THE PASSION PROPHECY OF ISAIAH

LIEUT.-COL. W. H. TURTON, D.S.O., LATE ROYAL ENGINEERS  
BRISTOL, ENGLAND

## INTRODUCTION.

It is proposed in this paper to consider what is called the Messianic interpretation of the well-known prophecy of Isaiah (52.13-53-12). The subject, of course, has been often discussed from various points of view; all we shall do here is to take the passage as it stands in the Revised Version, and see how closely it agrees with the events at the close of Christ's life. The doctrinal agreements, though interesting to believers, are of little value to anyone else; since it can always be said that the Christian doctrine itself was to a great extent founded on this passage. We will therefore only just touch upon these, and in the table at the end they are printed in brackets.

13. Behold My Servant shall deal wisely, He shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.

In the first place the *Sufferer*, as we may call the Subject of this passage, is described as God's *Servant*. This is a term which is sometimes applied to the Jewish nation, but the rest of the passage shows that it means here a prophet or religious teacher; while the reference to the Lord (Jehovah) in ver. 10 shows that he was one of the Jewish nation. After this we have the wisdom of His teaching, and His future exaltation, which latter is strongly emphasized.

And how well it all applies to the case of Christ must be obvious to everyone. For He was in a special sense a prophet or religious teacher; He belonged to the Jewish Nation; the excellence of His conduct is now generally admitted; while His exalted position cannot be disputed.

This latter point is specially interesting, for the writer seems to have tried to make it as emphatic as possible, adding clause to clause, *exalted*, and *lifted up*, and *very high*. And yet the reality has exceeded all that he could have imagined, for hundreds of millions of the human race now worship this despised Sufferer as their God.

14. Like as many were astonished at Thee (His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men) so shall He sprinkle many nations.

And now the writer alludes to the pitiable condition of the Sufferer. He was exhibited to the public gaze, so that *many* saw Him, with both His face and body terribly disfigured, the latter implying that the body was now exposed.

And all this (though it would not suit many kinds of death, such as beheading or drowning) exactly suits a death by *crucifixion*, especially if preceded by a Roman scourging. For in this case the Sufferer would be exposed for hours in public, with both his face and body terribly disfigured. And the crowning with thorns makes the expression about the face being *marred*, still more suitable in the case of Christ.

The last clause *so shall He sprinkle many nations* evidently refers to the sprinkling of the blood in the Jewish sacrifices (*e. g.*, Lev. 16, 14-19) as the same word is used, and means cleansing them from sin. We may therefore infer that the Sufferer's blood had also been shed. And the *many nations* not only implies that He was thus to influence Gentiles as well as Jews; but the *many* seems emphatic; following on the *many* who saw Him suffer, and plainly means a large number.

And it is needless to point out how well it agrees with the case of Christ, Whose blood was shed at the time of His Passion, and Who has exercised such a powerful influence for good on Gentiles as well as Jews. While as to the *many* nations, the fulfilment has again exceeded

all that the writer could have imagined, since the New Testament has now been translated into over three hundred different languages.

15. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him; for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand.

The *Kings* here referred to must be *Gentile* kings, and not a succession of Jewish kings, as is clear from the previous *many nations*. And the phrase that they were to *shut their mouths at Him* evidently means, from the way in which the expression is used elsewhere, that they were to be silent with reverence before Him, in other words they were to consider Him as their Superior.

And the statement is thus applicable to Christ, and to Him *alone*. For He is the Only One of the Jewish race Whom Gentile kings have acknowledged as their Master, century after century.

The latter part of the verse is not very clear, but it apparently means that they were to be astonished at hearing the wonderful story of His life; which they unlike the Jews, have never had announced to them beforehand by prophecy.

1. Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?

We have now come to the account of the Sufferer's life which the writer is about to declare. And passing as it does from the lowest degradation to the highest exaltation, it is so marvelous, that it can scarcely be believed by anyone.

The term *arm of the Lord* evidently means some instrument or person, which God uses for the accomplishment of His work, as a man might use his arm. And in the present case it must mean a *Person*, from the following words, for *He* grew up, etc. It is therefore a most suitable term for the Messiah; Who it is implied

would be recognized by hardly anyone, as was actually the case in regard to Christ.

2. For He grew up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground; He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him.

And here we have the cause why the Sufferer was not recognized. It was because He grew up as a *tender plant* and as a *root out of a dry ground*. The former expression shows that there was nothing striking or majestic in His early life, and the latter that He came from an unexpected place. Moreover His appearance was humble and devoid of any outward splendour, such as might have been expected in the Messiah, so that when the people saw Him they did not desire Him. And the words He grew up *before Him* (Jehovah) imply that though His early life was unnoticed by men, God had always watched over Him, and taken an interest in Him, as a gardener would in a choice flower.

And again every point exactly agrees with the case of Christ. He grew up as a *tender plant*, in lowly circumstances, and He came from a most unexpected place (Nazareth). And these it will be remembered were the very reasons which the Jews themselves gave for not believing in Him. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

Moreover, His appearance was always humble and without any outward pomp or grandeur. While the statement that the people did not *desire* Him was true of Christ not only through most of His life, but especially so at the time of His Passion, when Pilate formally presented Him to the people, and they cried, "Away with Him"! Lastly God had always watched over Him, from His birth, since He was His Beloved Son.

3. He was despised and rejected of men; a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces He was despised, and we esteemed him not.

And here we have the way in which the people rejected the Sufferer; and once more every detail suits the case of Christ. He was *despised* both by the rulers and people at His trial, and definitely *rejected* by them when they chose Barabbas. His life had undoubtedly been one of *sorrow* and *grief*, and considering His end it is not surprising that the nation did not *esteem* Him. Indeed men would naturally be inclined to *hide their faces*, from one in such a pitiable condition; this latter expression being specially appropriate to a death by crucifixion.

4. Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.

Here we are told that though the sufferings of the Servant were really borne for our sakes, yet at the time men thought Him smitten by God. And this was doubtless the view taken by the spectators of Christ when He was crucified, for, according to the Jewish law, anyone hanged on a tree was thought to be accursed of God. (Deut. 21. 22-23; Gal. 3. 13.)

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.

The word translated *wounded* is literally *pierced*, so here again every detail suits the case of Christ.

He was pierced by the nails and spear-thrust, as well as scourged, and it was certainly not for His own sins, but (as Christians believe) for those of others, which were in consequence atoned for.

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.

The Christian doctrine of the Atonement is here again insisted on; for all men are sinners, and by God's appointment Christ bore the sins of all.

7. He was oppressed, yet He humbled Himself and opened not His mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before his shearers is dumb; yea, He opened not His mouth.

The Sufferer's patience under ill-treatment as well as His silence before His accusers is now referred to; while the phrase *He humbled Himself* implies, what is expressed more clearly further on, that the humiliation was voluntary, *i. e.*, He let Himself be humbled. In regard to the subsequent clause, the words are literally as *the Lamb*, etc., apparently referring to the Paschal Lamb.<sup>1</sup> And its being led to the slaughter is also more appropriate to an animal being solemnly brought through the Temple-courts for sacrifice, than to one being driven to the slaughter house in the ordinary way.

So here again everything agrees with the case of Christ. For He not only bore His ill-treatment with the utmost patience, but refused to plead at His trial to the utter astonishment of His judges. Moreover, He Himself declared that He submitted to it all voluntarily (see further on): and not only was He called the *Lamb of God* by St. John the Baptist; but He was actually killed at the time of the Jewish Passover.

The verse, it should be noticed, lays stress on the fact that He *opened not His mouth*, repeating it twice; as if it was very remarkable under the circumstances. And this also agrees with Christ's double refusal to plead at His trial, either before the Jewish High Priest, Caiaphas, or the Roman Governor Pilate. This latter was indeed so extraordinary, considering that the Governor had the power of life and death, that Pilate we are told  *marvelled greatly* at it. The emphatic "*Yea He opened not His mouth*," is thus seen to be most appropriate.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pulpit Commentary on Isa. 53:7.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 26:63, 27:14.

8. By oppression and judgment He was taken away; and as for His generation, who among them considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living? for the transgression of My people was He stricken (or to whom the stroke was due, margin, and American R. V.).

The Sufferer, it will be noticed, was not killed accidentally, or by the mob, but had a judicial trial, and (as is implied by the word *oppression*) was unjustly condemned, and put to death. His *generation* apparently refers to His *contemporaries*, *i. e.*, the men of that generation, none of whom understood the true meaning of His death, that it was for the sins of the people to whom the punishment was really due. It all, of course, entirely agrees with the case of Christ.

9. And they made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; although He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth.

Having described the death of the Sufferer, we now come to His burial. His enemies made (*i. e.*, appointed that His grave should be with the *wicked*; but as a matter of fact He was with the *rich* in His death, that is to say just after He was dead (comp. Ps. 6.5, *in death* there is no remembrance of Thee). Though, as the verse continues, He had committed no crime, nor practiced any deceit.

All this is not what we should have expected, but it was exactly fulfilled in the case of Christ. For He was appointed to die between two robbers, and would doubtless have been buried with the *wicked*—ordinary criminals—had not Joseph of Arimathea intervened. And then, in strange contrast with His ignominious death, He was honourably buried by the *rich* (Joseph and Nicodemus) with costly spices, and in a rich man's tomb. While to complete the agreement, the very judge who condemned Him to death declared that He was innocent; and He Him-



self was able to state at His trial that He had always preached openly, and had done nothing in secret.<sup>3</sup>

10. Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief; when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin; He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

Every detail of this verse is of interest. First of all we are told that the Sufferer's death was in some way brought about by God and acceptable to Him, as it was an *offering for sin*, and since the same word is used for this as occurs in Leviticus and elsewhere for the *guilt-offering* (or trespass offering R. V.) it shows that it had some connection with these old Jewish sacrifices. There is, however, this difference, that while those sacrifices were made by the *sinner*s themselves, this one was to be made by *God* (when *Thou* shalt make, etc.) And this seems to show its far greater importance, and that it was the real and complete *offering for sin*, of which the others were only types.

Next as to the word *seed*. It can scarcely mean literal children here, since the Sufferer was to obtain them by His *death*, *i. e.*, when His soul had been made an offering for sin. And as the word is sometimes used in Isaiah for a class of people,<sup>4</sup> it doubtless has this meaning here, and refers primarily to spiritual children or disciples. Indeed as the Sufferer was evidently a religious teacher, His *seed* or children would naturally mean His followers.

We are then told that He was to *prolong His days*, *i. e.*, rise again from the dead; and that the pleasure of the Lord should *prosper in His hand*. This latter expression seems to imply not so much that He would do it Himself, as that He would arrange for carrying it out, much as a minister might arrange for carrying out the wishes of his sovereign. It was evidently to begin soon after His

<sup>3</sup> John 18:20.

<sup>4</sup> Isa, 1:4.

Resurrection and would apparently take some time; but it would *prosper, i. e.*, be carried out successfully, under His guidance.

And again, every detail agrees with the case of Christ. He was (as Christians believe) the true *offering for sin*, of which the Jewish sacrifices were only a type; He rose from the dead, and saw His disciples again; He called them His children,<sup>5</sup> and He then founded His Church, and gave it instructions for the conversion of the world, so that the *pleasure of the Lord*, which is the salvation of sinners, has prospered in His hand ever since.

11. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied; by His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify many; and He shall bear their iniquities.

The expression *the travail of His soul* implies that the Sufferer, in addition to His bodily sufferings, had had some intense mental struggle, comparable to the bodily pains of childbirth. And this evidently led to these spiritual children or disciples, since the words *He shall see of the travail of His soul* in this verse correspond to *He shall see His seed* in the previous one. And the statement that the Sufferer was God's *righteous* Servant (a term which is not used elsewhere in Isaiah) must mean not merely that He was a good man, or that He was innocent of the charges brought against Him at His trial (v. 9) but *righteous* in some pre-eminent degree, since it was apparently in consequence of this that He was able to justify sinners by bearing their sins.

The verse is thus suitable to the mental agony which Christ endured, both in the Garden and on the Cross, and which led to the Christian Church. While the events attending His death were so extraordinary that even the centurion in charge of the execution was forced to exclaim, "Certainly this was a *righteous* man."<sup>6</sup> The ex-

<sup>5</sup> John 21:5.

<sup>6</sup> Luke 23:47; Matt. 27:54; Mark 15:39.

pression here also means more than merely *innocent*, since the other Evangelists record the words, "Certainly this was *the Son of God*." Both expressions may well have been used.

12. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He poured out His soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

We now come to the Sufferer's exaltation, which it seems from the parallel terms *I will divide*, and *He shall divide*, may be ascribed to either God or the Sufferer Himself.

Next as to the expression *He poured out His soul unto death*. This is interesting for several reasons. In the first place it implies that the Sufferer's death was a *voluntary one* or it would have been *He died* or *He was put to death*. And this is rendered still clearer from the context. It was *because* He did this that He was to divide the spoil, etc., so His death was the condition of His victory and must clearly have been voluntary. Secondly, it implies that it was a *lingering* death. Such an expression as *pouring out His soul* could scarcely be used of any sudden death, like beheading or hanging or drowning, but would be most suitable for a death by crucifixion. Thirdly, the previous allusions to the Jewish sacrifices render it probable that there is an allusion here also, and that at the time of His death the Sufferer's blood was actually *poured out* like the blood of the victim in those sacrifices.

Finally He was put to death with sinners though it was really an atonement for sin and He prayed for the sinners.

And for the last time every detail agrees with the case of Christ. We have first of all His future triumph in the Christian Church which has been able for centuries to

hold its own with the kingdoms of this world, and which (as Christians believe) may equally well be ascribed to Christ Himself or to God the Father. Then as to His death, it was a *voluntary* one, as He Himself expressly declared<sup>7</sup>; it was a *lingering* one by crucifixion, and it was accompanied by the *pouring out* of His blood when His side was pierced. While to complete the agreement He was put to death with two robbers and yet prayed for His enemies, *Father forgive them.*

There is thus in the whole passage not a single line which is unsuitable for the case of Christ; there are dozens of details which exactly suit Him; and there are several which do not suit anyone else, such as the many nations benefiting by His sufferings, the Gentile kings owning Him as their Master, and His successful work after His resurrection.

#### THE POINTS OF AGREEMENT IN A TABULAR FORM.

(Those shown in italics are specially suitable for a death by crucifixion.)

- |    |    |                                                           |
|----|----|-----------------------------------------------------------|
| 13 | 1  | His being a prophet or religious teacher.                 |
|    | 2  | and evidently belonging to the Jewish nation.             |
|    | 3  | The excellence of His conduct                             |
|    | 4  | and His future exaltation,                                |
|    | 5  | which is strongly insisted on.                            |
| 14 | 6  | His pitiable condition                                    |
|    | 7  | being exhibited to the public gaze                        |
|    | 8  | with His face terribly disfigured,                        |
|    | 9  | as well as His body,                                      |
|    | 10 | <i>which was now exposed.</i>                             |
|    | 11 | while His blood was also shed.                            |
|    | 12 | Yet He was to influence for good many nations.            |
|    | 13 | (as was typified in the Jewish sacrifices)                |
| 15 | 14 | Even Gentile kings were to acknowledge Him as their Lord, |
|    | 15 | on hearing the wonderful story of His life,               |
|    | 16 | which had not been announced to them beforehand.          |

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<sup>7</sup> John 10:18.

- 1 17 But though He was the Messiah,  
18 He was recognized by hardly anyone.
- 2 19 This was due to His lowly origin  
20 and His coming from an unexpected place,  
21 as the Jews themselves said.  
22 While His appearance was humble,  
23 so that the people did not desire Him,  
24 (though God had always watched over Him)
- 3 25 And they not only despised Him at His trial,  
26 but definitely rejected Him when they chose  
Barabbas,  
27 while His life had been one of sorrow and grief,  
28 and the people did not esteem Him,  
29 *but would naturally hide their faces from Him.*
- 4 30 *Indeed they thought Him accursed by God.*  
31 (but it was all borne for our sakes)
- 5 32 *His being pierced by the nails*  
33 as well as scourged  
34 though not for His own sins  
35 (but for those of others)  
36 (which were in consequence atoned for)
- 6 37 (For all men are sinners)  
38 (and by God's appointment)  
39 (He bore the sins of all)
- 7 40 His patience under ill-treatment,  
41 To which He submitted voluntarily.  
42 His being called the Lamb of God,  
43 and appropriately killed at the time of the Pass-  
over.  
44 His silence when brought before Caiaphas and  
Pilate,  
45 which is emphasized as very remarkable.
- 8 46 His having a judicial trial  
47 and being unjustly condemned,  
48 and then put to death,  
49 (though at the time no one understood the mean-  
ing of this)  
50 (and that it was really for the sins of the people)

- 9 51 His being appointed to die with the wicked  
 52 and then buried by the rich,  
 53 although He was perfectly innocent,  
 54 and had always preached openly.
- 10 55 (But His death was by God's appointment.)  
 56 (as He was the true offering for sin)  
 57 (and thus fulfilled the Jewish sacrifices)  
 58 After His death He saw His disciples.  
 59 whom He called His children,  
 60 and prolonged His days (*i. e.*, rose from the  
 dead)  
 61 And soon afterwards  
 62 He founded His Church for the salvation of sin-  
 ners.
- 11 63 His sufferings were mental as well as bodily,  
 64 and resulted in spiritual children or disciples  
 65 while He Himself was pre-eminently righteous.  
 66 (and He was thus able to justify sinners)  
 67 (by bearing their sins.)
- 12 68 His subsequent triumph in the Church  
 69 (which may be ascribed to either God or Him-  
 self)  
 70 due to His voluntary sufferings,  
 71 *and lingering death*  
 72 when His life blood was poured out.  
 73 (thus again agreeing with the Jewish sacrifices)  
 74 While lastly He was put to death with sinners,  
 75 (though it was really an Atonement for sin)  
 76 and He prayed for the sinners.