

A BRIEF COMMENTARY ON ISAIAH 53.

HAVE you ever asked yourself why this passage is NOT read in the synagogue, though SURROUNDING chapters are included. Is there a reason? It has a message which many of Israel, and of the Gentiles too, forget. It tells forth God's own way of salvation, a wonderful salvation. The words "My Servant" in 53. 11 bring before us a PERSON. Verse 12 shows that we do not have the picture of a nation. Who is this Person? Do you know His Name? Would it not be well to read ALL the passage to see WHO HE IS? Observe the words of 53. 1, 2. Thus we behold ONE Who was not welcomed, One Who grew up before the LORD as a tender plant—living, but NOT great in men's opinion. And ALL around Him there was death—a dry ground, NOTHING TO ACCOUNT FOR HIS BEAUTIFUL LIFE BEFORE GOD. When Adam sinned, he died BEFORE God, and HIS son was in HIS likeness. But here is One Whom God views as living ("before Him"), yet there is nothing on EARTH to explain His acceptability to God. Who is THIS? He is without majesty: He has no EARTHLY grandeur. 'Tis not a king like Hezekiah, for Israel desired such an one. Far less can we imagine for one moment that it is the people of Israel, for "there is no beauty that WE should desire Him" is THEIR acknowledgment. Here is One quite rejected, but beautiful before God. Read verse 3. Is not this ONE PERSON? And is not He quite refused? "We esteemed Him not." Hence to find the One of Whom the prophet tells, we must find One Whom Israel AS A NATION REFUSE. In the fourth verse we see that This Rejected One bears something for OTHERS. And who are the others? Plainly they are Israel. And they think that God is against Him, whereas all the time God is against THEIR SIN (see verse 5), and He is well-pleased with the very One they imagine to be "stricken of God." The transgressions belong to Israel, NOT to Him. The iniquities are theirs, not His. He bears the chastisement to bring them PEACE. Ah, dear reader, do you want peace with God? Then here is the One through Whom it is possible, THE ONLY ONE. Sin is a terrible disease. We need "healing." Here is the promise of healing. How evident it is that such words can apply to none other than the MESSIAH of Israel. A SINNER cannot be the Saviour of another SINNER. There is no healing by the sinner's bearing of his

own stripe, the stripe he has deserved. But there IS healing in ANOTHER. Do you know HIM ?

And what shall we say about verse 6 ? “ All we ” leaves no room for boasting. Here is the cry that repenting Israel will yet take up. They will own they have turned TO THEIR OWN WAY. If you do not confess this, dear reader, you add sin to sin. Our own way is sin. This verse makes that fact perfectly clear. Therefore we need a Saviour. But the sixth verse does not end with the sinner. “ The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.” There can be no mistake as to this. The One Who saves is not Israel, but a PERSON contrasted with the sinful nation (Isaiah 1. 4), and “ The Lord made to meet ON HIM the iniquity.” Whatever Israel say nowadays, it is plainly God’s good pleasure to appoint a Sacrifice, to bear the sin of others. This is NOT an animal. It cannot be a sinner. Who is it ? Someone despised by Israel is yet to be acknowledged as the Sacrifice Who died for them, since this is the thought of bearing sin. Where is He ? The Jewish religion to-day has no room for HIM, but the words here exactly fit with the doctrine of the Lord Jesus Christ. So evident is this that if a Jew heard Isaiah 53, for the first time, he would probably say, “ That is in the New Testament.”

The words of verse 7 are very beautiful in their twofold meaning. Every Jew knows, or should know, that the absence of points in the original Hebrew gives this fuller richness from time to time. “ He was oppressed and He was afflicted,” or “ It was exacted and He Himself answered.” Both statements are true. There was the full demand, and the Substitute or Surety must answer, and pay the WHOLE expense. We think of Genesis 44. 32: and “ He That is Surety for a stranger shall smart for it ” (Prov. 11. 15). From Prov. 20. 16; 22. 26, 27 we see that the Surety must be prepared to lose GARMENT AND BED. Does not this give an indirect prophecy of the Surety of Whom Isaiah 53 speaks ? Certainly HE had no bed, but was hanged upon a tree, bearing THE CURSE as Deuteronomy shows,—the only way a sinner could be saved. And Psalm 22. 18 says, “ They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture.” Speaking of Psalm 22, perhaps you have not noticed that Isaiah 53 refers to this Psalm: to verses 6(7), 24(25), 30(31), 31(32) at least (see Isaiah 53. 3, 11, 12): here is further evidence that the prophet spoke of a Righteous INDIVIDUAL, not of the unrighteous nation (Isaiah 1. 4). The verse now before us in the OFTEN-FOR-GOTTEN chapter of Isaiah adds, “ Yet He opened not His mouth.” And this is repeated, “ He is led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He openeth not His mouth.” How different from every COMPLAINING nation. You cannot find an ordinary man here, far less a company of men. Who is this

REJECTED ONE, this SUFFERING ONE, this PATIENT ONE, Who is also God's DELIGHT, and the Bearer of Israel's sins? Every explanation fails which forgets that the UTTERLY REJECTED ONE OF ISRAEL is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ. But there is not one word used of the Holy One in this chapter inappropriate to Him. This is a more remarkable fact than any Jew, who carelessly puts it aside, has considered.

"From prison and from judgment was He taken, and His generation who shall declare? For He was cut off out of the land of life: by reason of the transgression of My people—the stroke that was for them." It is evident that the One before us was not merely imprisoned without an EARTHLY family, He was cut off. But the transgression was NOT His: the plague (ענש) was Israel's, and He took it. Who is this? In the sacrifices, a man could never bring PART OF HIMSELF. Even Aaron needed a sacrifice quite distinct from himself! Here is One Who is sinless, in the place of Isaiah's sinful people (עמי). Who can it be?

"And (the people) gave His grave* with the wicked, and with a rich man in His deaths, because He had done no violence, and there was not deceit in His mouth" (9). The people rejected Him. His grave was appointed before He died, BUT GOD OVERRULED, and His body was with a rich man in His death. Who is this rich man? Have you ever heard of Joseph of Arimathea, who stepped in and obtained from Pilate the body of the Lord Jesus, and thus changed the people's "giving"? Strange that this should be mentioned over 600 years before! No, it is not strange. Here is PROPHECY. Again we have HIS MOUTH, and its sinlessness. His whole life was a contrast with SIN. Thus we read לא-המם עשה and not only לא עשה †. We shall find too that He is called the RIGHTEOUS ONE.

"And the Lord was pleased 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" (10). This verse is remarkably full. The Lord is not PLEASED to bruise without reason. Zechariah 13. 7 is parallel. The Lord has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33. 11), but "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death belonging to His saints" (Ps. 116. 15). And so God was well-pleased with the offering for guilt, that sinners might be saved. And so we read, "He shall see a seed." This is the contrast with "Who shall declare His GENERATION?" He had no earthly family, but "A SEED shall serve Him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for A GENERATION" (Ps. 22. 30). THERE IS LIFE BY HIS DEATH. Evidently This is

* Or "His grave was given" (same letters, different pointing).

† "Not-violence He did:" not only "Violence He did not."

the prophet of Deuteronomy 18. 15, 16, "According to ALL that thou desiredst of the Lord thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not." And He too is raised from the dead, "He shall prolong His days," as the Righteous ONE of Lev. 18. 5.

Isaiah 53. 11 tells of the labour of His soul, and assures us He shall see the fruit, and be satisfied. In His knowledge—perfect knowledge of the will of God—He makes a righteousness for the many. Is not this the Lord our Righteousness of Jeremiah 23. 6? "My Servant." The Individual. "My Servant" is contrasted with the people. The nation ought to have been God's servant, but they failed. He failed not. And He not only makes a righteousness, but bears their iniquities.

THUS verse 12 opens with triumph, "Therefore will I divide for Him with the MANY." He is to be exalted, and extolled, and very high "And He shall divide the spoil with the STRONG." But why? "Corresponding with the fact that He made His soul naked for the death." Observe, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," but here is One Whose willingness of soul for death is His glory. "And with transgressors was He numbered": none can doubt that THIS was true of Jesus Christ. And to Him, dear reader, the next words also apply to the full extent, "And He Himself BARE the sin of many." If you have no one Who has borne your sin, your peril is real. Exodus 34. 6 and Micah 7. 18 show a remarkable fact. God Himself forgives sin by Himself BEARING it. Israel have no room for this part of His teaching in their own Scriptures. Unless God becomes a Man, HOW can He THUS forgive sins? Ah, Israel may mock, but they mock GOD. Men may cry out, but they cry out against the Lord Himself. Yet such is the love and tender pity manifested that the VERY NEXT sentence in Isaiah 53 reads, "And He made intercession (or a meeting place) FOR THE TRANSGRESSORS." God knew there would be those who would scorn the precious way of salvation. And thus at once He added the record of the prayer of the despised Saviour for the very ones who despise Him. And so the chapter ends with such amazing love. Well may the very next word be "SING" (54. 1), and we WOULD sing of the mercy of the Lord, as we rejoice to tell you, dear reader, of Him AS OUR OWN SAVIOUR. And our hearts long that you may in heart-brokenness seek Him, and not despise THE ONLY ONE TO WHOM ISAIAH 53 CAN APPLY!