

Isaiah 53 and the Messiah

He “shall grow up before him [the Father] as a tender plant” (53:2)
“As a root [the root of Jesse] out of a dry ground [Israel]” (53:2)
He will have “no form nor comeliness” (53:2)
“There is no beauty that we should desire him” (53:2)
“He is despised and rejected ..., we esteemed him not” (53:3)
“We [his friends] hid as it were our faces from him” (53:3)
“We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (53:4)
He will be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief” (53:3)
“Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (53:4)
“He was wounded for our transgressions, bruised for our iniquities” (53:5)
“He was oppressed, and he was afflicted” (53:7)
“He was taken from prison and from judgment” (53:8)
“Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief” (53:10)
“He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” (53:9)
“He hath poured out his soul unto death” (53:12)
“He was cut off out of the land of the living” (53:8)
They would number him “with the transgressors” (53:12)
“He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth” (53:9)
“He opened not his mouth: as a lamb to the slaughter” (53:7)
“The chastisement of our peace was upon him” (53:5)
“With his stripes we are healed” (53:5)
“The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (53:6)
“For the transgression of my people was he stricken” (53:8)
“For he shall bear their iniquities” (53:11)
“He made intercession for the transgressors” (53:12)
The Father “shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied” (53:11)
“His soul [will be] an offering for sin” (53:10)
“By his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many” (53:11)
“The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand” (53:10)
“I will divide him a portion with the great” (53:12)
“He shall divide the spoil with the strong” (53:12)

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Explanation

One of the most striking prophecies of the Old Testament is the Suffering Servant song in Isaiah 53. It poignantly affirms that the Lord's servant will suffer pain and grief, according to the will of God. Not only will he suffer, he will die. Indeed, he will die young, without posterity and innocently. Yet he would go voluntarily and be numbered "with the transgressors" (53:12; Lk 22:37). His suffering will benefit all humanity, for the expiation of sin would not come through him. His offering will satisfy the demands of justice and will bring about a reconciliation and atonement between God and mankind. But, according to the prophet, each person will need to accept his offering in order for it to become efficacious. In this way, the Lord shall have spiritual offspring, and he will be able to reward and prosper his people at the day of judgment. These eternal blessings, the spoils of the ultimate war against evil, will be turned over to the servant for division among his followers. Although it remains difficult to determine how many of the earliest Christians fully connected this prophecy with the death of Jesus, Isaiah 53 is quoted several times in the New Testament (see chart 2-5) and recent evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls makes it more likely that the Suffering Servant was understood messianically even before the time of Christ.

References

- Israel Knohl, *The Messiah before Jesus: The Suffering Servant of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, trans. David Maisel (Berkeley: University of California, 2000).
- John W. Welch, "Isaiah 53, Mosiah 14, and the Book of Mormon," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald Parry and John Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 293–312.