



The Suffering Servant by Pastor Glenn Huebel

The prophet Isaiah foretold the coming of the Lord's Servant, who was also described as a suffering servant (Isaiah 49). There has been much controversy among Biblical scholars about the identity of this prophetic figure, but when we follow the principle of "Scripture interprets Scripture" the answer is clear. This servant is the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that with certainty because these passages in Isaiah are quoted by the Apostles and applied specifically to Jesus. One theory of the Dispensationalist school of thought (Dallas Theological Seminary) is that Jesus came into the world to reign over the nations, but when he was rejected He chose Plan B (the cross). It is very difficult for many to understand that God sent His Son into the world to suffer and die for sinful mankind. The aged priest, Simeon, understood this and, holding the tiny baby Jesus in his arms, told Mary that He was destined to be a "sign spoken against." The truth is Jesus was formed in the womb to be our cross-bearer.

On the first Easter afternoon Jesus walked incognito with two disciples from Jerusalem to their home in Emmaus. They were deeply lamenting the death of Jesus, their hope of redemption thoroughly dashed. Obviously they had not grasped the necessity of the sufferings of the Messiah. Jesus gently rebuked them:

"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

Jesus says plainly that it was "necessary" for the Messiah to suffer, but why? First, it was necessary because it

was decreed in Scripture and "Scripture must be fulfilled." The Scriptures do not just predict the future as a TV weatherman predicts the weather for next week. Scriptures declare what shall be. Once God speaks it, it must happen. Prophecy is history written in advance. Luke doesn't reveal exactly what Scriptures were used to show this necessity of suffering for Messiah, but we know that Jesus drew from all parts of the Old Testament. He probably opened Isaiah 50 to the disciples where the servant of the Lord says,

*I gave my back to those who strike,
and my cheeks to those who pull out
the beard; I hid not my face from
disgrace and spitting.*

Certainly Jesus would have opened Isaiah to chapter 53 where the servant is "despised and rejected by men" and is "stricken, afflicted, pierced, crushed, and cut off from the land of the living." Thus, Jesus says that it was "necessary" for Messiah to suffer.



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*That you may believe that Jesus is the Christ,
the Son of God, and that by believing
you may have life in His name. —John 20:31*



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Second, it was necessary because there was no other way to redeem the human race from sin, death, and the power of the devil. The sufferings and death of Messiah are pictured throughout the Old Testament as an atonement. Messiah was foreshadowed in the Passover Lamb, whose blood was placed upon the door of the Israelites to spare the firstborn sons during the last plague in Egypt. The Lamb was killed in place of the son of the home. The Messiah was foreshadowed in the bull slaughtered on the Day of Atonement, whose blood was sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant to appease God's wrath. The bull assumed the guilt of the people. Isaiah describes the servant of the Lord as a sin-bearer, saying, "He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities all we, like sheep, have gone astray and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all." Jesus says, "the Son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many." St. Paul writes,

"God made Him to be sin who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." The sufferings of Christ were necessitated by our sin. There was no other way to remove our guilt. That is why we penitently meditate upon the sufferings of Christ during the Lenten season.

Sufferings, however, are not limited to the Messiah, the chief Servant of the Lord. As servants of the Lord we are all destined to suffer in this world for Jesus' sake. We can all say with Jesus, "Is it not necessary that WE should suffer these things and enter into glory?" Why must we suffer? First, because Scripture declares that it is a mark of our discipleship. "A disciple is not above his Lord," Jesus says. We should not expect to be treated any different way than the Lord was treated. Jesus tells us that if we follow Him we must deny self, take up our cross and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). When Jesus attaches a personal pronoun to the cross He affirms that every Christian has one. It is "his cross." This cross identifies us as a Christian. Scripture declares it to be so.

Second, the servants of Christ must suffer in this world because we are members of His body and, as such, we inherit His enemies. Americans and Jews are often targeted by terrorists because they hate what America and Zionism represent. In most cases there is absolutely no personal, individual animosity against the innocent victims. The terrorists probably know nothing about their victims personally. The victims fall under the anger and hatred directed against the idea they represent. So it is with Christians. The devil and the world HATE CHRIST....always have, always will. Those who bear the Name of Christ will be targeted. Satan set his eyes on Adam and Eve

because they were God's beloved children. Cain hated Abel because he belonged to God. Satan targeted Job because he was faithful to God. Satan raised up the religious leaders of Israel and the pagan Romans to unite against Jesus because He was the Christ. Nero brutally persecuted believers in the Coliseum because they confessed "Jesus is Lord." Recently, 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians were slaughtered on a Mediterranean beach simply because they were Christians. The hatred of Satan and the world does not always reach such insanely evil proportions, but it is certain, nevertheless, that all who call upon the Name of Christ will suffer in this world.

Peter distinguishes this Christian suffering from the suffering that comes upon us because of sin. He says if we suffer for doing wrong we have nothing to glory in. We should silently bear such suffering as our due reward for doing wrong. How different is the suffering of one who bears "his cross." The sufferings that befall a believer because he belongs to Christ (the cross) are glorious. The Christian should regard these as bearing the wounds of Christ, a reward of faithfulness, and a sign of worthiness. Join us on Wednesday evenings during Lent as we follow the suffering Christ and "learn from Him to bear the cross."

—Pastor Huebel

