

## **Allan MacRae, Isaiah 40-56, Lecture 11**

This is lecture 11 delivered by Dr. Allan MacRae on Isaiah 40-56.

We're looking at Isaiah 53. It's interesting that verse 13 of chapter 52 begins the section in the Targum, that is, the Jewish translation into Aramaic that was used in the synagogues among people who didn't know Hebrew very well. They would read the Hebrew, and then they would have someone translate it into Aramaic; and after a time these translations came to be in a fixed form and eventually were written down. That's what we call a Targum, or translation. It's the translation made by the Jews quite early in Christian history. In the Targum, verse 13 begins, "See my servant the Messiah will prosper." It was specifically taken as a section describing the Messiah, the suffering Messiah, by the Jews. We have no evidence of its being taken any other way until the eleventh century. There was a great Jewish rabbi, Rashi, who wrote commentary on the Old Testament, who suggested that it was not the Messiah. But up till then it seems to have been the universal Jewish understanding that from 52:13 on, it was about the Messiah. Now I suppose that there was a reaction by this rabbi to the fact that Christians were pointing to this as a prediction of the sufferings of Christ.

This passage, of course, has been used a great deal for missions among the Jews to point out how the Old Testament points specifically to Christ. So in recent centuries, there has been a great effort to evade its natural interpretation. More recently, a group of Jews, who are very active in opposing Christian missions among the Jews, have published material attacking the idea that this is a prediction of the Messiah. But the best they seem to be able to do is to take the first half of chapter 53 as a description of a leper. Just how a leper would get in here is a bit hard to see, but they take the first half as a description of a leper. And there are two things that that is based on. One is that it says he was stricken; and in Hebrew, in the Middle Ages, that is late Hebrew--which was not then a spoken language, but was used for study by the rabbis--in their writings this word "stricken" is used to mean "stricken with leprosy". "We thought he was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." But in the Old Testament, we find the word "stricken" used for the

Philistines who were stricken with hemorrhoids, as described in the book of Samuel (1 Sam. 5). So it is a word that could indicate some kind of a disagreeable situation not necessarily from a disease. But it did not become specialized to leprosy until that later time, hence the idea that it describes a leper. So they say that the first half refers to a leper.

But there are only two bases for this. One that the word "stricken" is used that in later Hebrew, Medieval Hebrew, was used for one stricken with leprosy, but which might conceivably be used in biblical times for being stricken with leprosy, or for being stricken with hemorrhoids, or for being stricken in the sense of suffering an accident or an injury in war, or something like that.

The other basis for saying it's a leper is the phrase in verse 3, "Like one from whom men hide their faces." There from the Hebrew you can't tell whether it's like "one from whom men hide their faces," or, "one who hides his face from men." Both are possible interpretations. "The men hiding their faces" is slightly more likely of the two, but in either case it might fit a leper who would try to hide his face from other people and people who would try not to look at him because of his disfigurement. But that is a mighty slim basis for taking this as a description of a leper. It certainly wouldn't have to be a leper of whom this can be said. It would fit just as well with people turning their face away from seeing the terrible suffering of Christ on the cross.

So, the first half they take in that way, and then the second half they try to take as describing Israel, suggesting that Israel suffers all these things. But to take Israel as actually bearing the sins of the people and suffering for the nations and so on, it just doesn't fit. It is a chapter that fits very closely with what Christ did, and that is pretty hard to interpret in any other way.

Now, we noticed how in 53 it begins with a king speaking and saying, "Who would have believed what we've heard?" It's not where we would've expected to find the source of the explanation of the problems of life. Not in this little land of Judea way off there in an obscure land never heard of in Rome or in Greece. But then in verse 3, we stop reading what the kings and the great men of distant lands say when they come to

believe in Christ as Savior. And then we turn to men who were right there and saw him. And we see the changing perception of local observers. I gave you this last week, this title, “The Changing Perception of Local Observers,” which is the next four verses. Here are the people who were right there now speaking. They say, “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.” That shows their watching him being crucified and seeing how many had turned against him. Remember the story of the men on the road to Emmaus, and how they did not recognize Christ. They said, “Are you a stranger that you have not heard of these things that have happened?” He said, “What things?” “Why,” they said, “about Jesus of Nazareth who performed great miracles, who did wonderful things. We were hoping he would redeem Israel. But,” they said, “he has been taken and crucified” (Luke 24). They felt that all their hopes had ended because of his being destroyed. “He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces, he was despised and we esteemed him not.”

But then in verse four, “surely he took up our infirmities,” the King James says, “Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Most Bibles that have any kind of reference note will have references here to two passages. There are references to a passage in Mathew and a passage in 1 Peter. The passage in 1 Peter is a definite description of the atonement, 1 Peter 2:24. In that passage it says, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness, and by his wounds you have been healed.” That is very clearly a reference to verse five. But as far as verse four is concerned, there is only one word in common: the word “bore.” The word “sins” does not occur back here, in Isaiah that occurs there in 1 Peter--it is a mistaken reference to this verse. We’re particularly clear that it is a mistaken reference because Matthew 8:17 does not merely echo the phraseology of this verse; it specifically says that this is what was spoken by the prophet. It specifically says that he is quoting. It says this tells about Jesus’ wonderful miracles and says this was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah, “He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.”

Notice how different this is from the statement in 1 Peter. The statement in 1 Peter is not a quotation of this passage. These words “griefs and sorrows,” are much too general an interpretation. The NIV, instead of saying “griefs,” says “infirmities,” which is nearer in meaning; that is, “infirmities” or “diseases” or “pains,” these words, may be used that way. There’s no distinction in the Hebrew between the pain caused by a disease and the pain caused by a wound. We separate between diseases and injuries, but the same word will be used for both in the Hebrew.

So this is a description of Jesus’ healing ministry. It’s exactly what was said by the men on the road to Emmaus. They said he performed these wonderful miracles, and we had hoped he would be the one who would redeem Israel, but he’s been taken and crucified. So this pictures contemporaries who say, “Look, this man took away diseases, he healed sicknesses, he did marvelous works, and yet we thought him stricken by God, smitten by him and afflicted. We thought that he couldn’t help himself, he was taken and crucified.” It’s as if they say, “We should have had more sense; we should have realized that a man who could do such works as he did is more than a man, and that he could only be taken and crucified as he permitted it; that he was not one who suffered God’s punishment for evil and sin, or one who suffered as a result of circumstances he couldn’t help; that he voluntarily gave himself to die. There was a reason and a purpose in it, or it could not happen.” So this is a reference to his wonderful works.

Now there are those who will take this and say, “This proves that healing is in the atonement, and that we have a right to expect if we are Christians, that all our sicknesses, all our diseases, will be healed because it’s in the atonement.” But it is not talking about the atonement; it is talking about the wonderful works that Christ did, and how the people, seeing these works, should have realized that the crucifixion was not an accident; it was not God’s wrath upon him, but was what he performed for us. It says, “He bore our sins.” Here, it says, “He carried (or took away) our diseases”--they’re quite different things. The quotation from Matthew is from verse four. Verse four is describing his wonderful miracles. They said, “Surely he performed these marvelous miracles; he took away our diseases; he did away with our sufferings; he showed these wonderful works

that no ordinary man could do; and yet when he was taken and crucified, we thought him stricken of God and afflicted; we did not realize that that could not have happened to one who could do such miracles except as he permitted."

Then they go on and they say in verse five, "But we see the real reason for it, for the crucifixion, 'He was pierced for our transgressions'"; that is quoted in 1 Peter. See, that's the atonement, verse five, but not verse four.

Well, these verses are a unit, but there's a progress of thought within them: the progress from seeing the miracles and then thinking, "Well, one who could do these wonderful works we shouldn't have thought as we did, that he couldn't help himself. But we see the reason for it now: he was crucified to bear our sins."

It is true that as a result of Christ's atonement there is the answer to all the problems of life. The Christian meets all his problems through Christ's atonement, but whether in a particular case God chooses to heal us, or whether he chooses in that particular case to let us glorify him by enduring the suffering, that is for the Lord to decide. We have no right to demand here, but we have the right to pray for it, if it be his will. Paul had a thorn in the flesh; he prayed three times that the Lord would take it away, and the Lord did not.

So we have here then in verse five, we have the atonement; we have vicarious suffering very clearly expressed in verse five, and expressed many times in the rest of the chapter. We have at least eight or ten cases in the rest of the chapter where there is a specific statement of the vicarious atonement. There is no place in the Old Testament where there are as many references to vicarious atonement as in this chapter from this point on. It refers to it over and over.

Verse six continues the people's recognition of the true situation. "We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all." There is atonement clearly expressed again. Twice in verse five and again in verse six.

Then in verses seven to nine we have a statement of "The Perfect Servant's Silent Submission." Verses seven to nine simply describe how he submitted himself to death for

our sake: "He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."

The beginning of verse eight is rather difficult: "He was taken from prison and from judgment," the King James says. The word is not a common word for "prison," but it can be used for something that is "held in tightly" or "oppression," and from that it is a natural and easy jump to the idea of prison, but the word is never used to mean a prison. It is not a bad guess at the meaning, but I am quite sure it's an incorrect guess in this case. In this case "oppression and judgment" together express one thought by an "oppressing judgment": a judgment that was not proper, not just, not legal. I knew a man, a lawyer who had a talk he used to give on the trial of Jesus. He pointed out how many illegal things there were in connection with his trial. He was seized there in the night, taken off, brought before different bodies, and Pilate said, "I see no fault in him." He was going to release him, but he gave in to the cries of the mob and permitted that he be crucified. It was an "oppressive judgment,"--not a fair trial at all.

The next thing in the verse there has been some disagreement on. The King James says: "Who shall declare his generation?" The NIV says: "Who can speak of his descendants?" The word "generation" is not exactly equivalent to "descendents," but it is close enough that it is certainly a possible interpretation; and along with the rest of the chapter, it seems a very reasonable one. Now there are those who wish to take it in quite a different way. The RSV says: "As for his generation, who can consider," instead of "Who shall consider his generation." The idea seems in the context to be: here is this one who seemed like such a wonderful teacher and such an influential person and then he was cut off. At a fairly young age he was cut off, and what result is he going to have? Will he have any descendants? Will he have any continuation of his teaching? Will there be any effect left on the world? Who can declare any succession, any generation resulting from what he did? Now that is a possible interpretation of the phrase, and, I think, much better than, "As for his generation, who would say that he was cut off." I think it is a much better interpretation than the other that we find in some translations, and that is in the

footnote in the NIV as another possibility, especially as we find further down in verse ten. The King James says: "He will see his seed." Here in the NIV it is: "He will see his offspring and prolong his days." But we see the result that he was actually raised from the dead. Actually, his teaching continues; actually, there were multitudes who were born again through what he had done through the age's succession. So he would see the continuing result of what he did. So: "Who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken."

Then verse 9 is one that you rarely see translated accurately. This is very strange because when it is looked at carefully, I believe that the translation is quite simple and quite clear. I don't know who it was at an early time who translated the beginning of it: "He made his grave with the wicked." And there's no "made" in the verse at all. The Hebrew is; "He gave". Well, the "he gave" prompts the question: who gave? You can, in such a case, look in the context to see who is described as having given. Well it hardly refers to him, that he gave a grave; it hardly refers to that, but in most languages other than English, there is a very common form of language which we would call the impersonal. In German you don't say: "I am cold," you'd say: "It is cold to me." There is an impersonal use of the third singular verb. Quite common in our language we are more apt to express it by the plural form: "They assigned." Who are the "they? Just anybody. The people on the side. "They assigned," or "it was assigned." An absolutely accurate translation is: "his grave was assigned" or "he was assigned a grave." That is absolutely accurate, though not directly literal. The directly literal would be that "one assigned a grave to him" followed by "with wicked ones"-- there is no "the" at all. The word is a simple plural form with no article: "with wicked men." "He was assigned a grave with wicked men" would be the literal translation. When a man was crucified the expectation would be that he would be thrown into a common grave. That was the normal way in which criminals who were crucified were treated. He was assigned a grave with the wicked. So that would be the normal expectation.

Many hold that you must have an exact parallelism. Now, in Hebrew, parallelism is very common. You express a thought and then you express it again in similar language.

But there are a great many poetic passages that, instead of having a parallelism, have a thought of something going beyond the first phrase. So you don't have to have a parallelism. Now, those who try to find a parallelism here say, "that he was assigned a grave with the wicked and with evildoers." And in order to get "evildoers" out of the next word, you have to assume that one or two letters have been left out. We won't have time to go into the precise Hebrew here, but with a slight change in the Hebrew, lengthening the word, that is here, which is ordinarily translated "the rich," though there's no "the" in the original, you can get "doers of evil." But all the manuscripts agree with saying "with a rich man." There's no "the" and it is singular; singular as compared to the plural of the word "wicked." "He was assigned a grave with wicked men," and, or "but"--the conjunction is very often translated "but"--but was "with a rich man in his death." The modernist translations say, "with evildoers". "He gave him a grave with wicked men and with evildoers in his death." Yet all the manuscripts say "with a rich man."

When the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, somebody said here is evidence that it should be "with evildoers," because the word for "rich" has an erasure at the end of it. But Professor Miller Burrows of Yale, in his discussion of the Isaiah scrolls, said: "It is interesting to note that there is a letter that has been erased at the end of the word 'rich.' But there's no space in there as if it was 'doers of evil.'" I mean, he didn't specifically mention that, but that's a fact. But he said the omission, the fact that a letter has been erased, is very easily explained. Because he said, the scribe copied "then with wicked men," the plural, and then with the word "rich" he got the plural ending off. And then looking back at what he was copying he saw there was no plural ending and simply erased it. All the manuscripts have the singular here: "He was assigned a grave with wicked men, but he was with a rich man in his death."

Now that is a most remarkable thing and precise prediction of exactly what happened when Christ was crucified. Otherwise there's no sense to it at all. Why is it important? Was it a sign of his exaltation that he was put in a rich man's tomb? No. Was it a humiliation to be put in a rich man's tomb? Did it increase the efficacy of His atonement? No. It is a little incidental evidence that this one who was crucified is the one



who was predicted in Isaiah 53. It is a remarkable evidence of the accuracy of the Hebrew manuscripts. All our manuscripts, most of which come from the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D. and were copied and recopied and recopied (our earliest copies aside from the Dead Sea Scrolls, are from the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D.) they all have “with a rich man.”

Then the word “in his death” is in plural form, which is very strange: “In his deaths.” Is there a figure there of the idea that he is dying on behalf of all of us? Why should it be plural? It is a problem which I’ve never heard a satisfactory answer to, but there are those who say that the words “in his death” could be a form for “high place.” “High places with his.” “His high place,” and the “high place” could mean “tomb.” And so, some say, “and with a rich man his tomb.” Well, the strange thing is that the Jewish translation made by Professor Margolis of Dropsie College in Philadelphia translates this “with a rich man his tomb.” Professor Margolis, in the Jewish Publication Society’s translation, says “with a rich man his tomb.” Well now, that makes it even more explicit than “with a rich man in his death.” But there’s slight difficulty in both cases. But I think it’s quite clear what the general meaning of the passage is. It’s an exact description of what happened in this case.

Now, of course, we can see a reason in the plan of God, why he would be put Christ's body in a rich man’s tomb. It was God’s will that Joseph of Arimathea should come and ask for his body and should bury it, should put it in the tomb. That was God’s will because if he was simply thrown in an unmarked grave along with others, there would not be as clear evidence of the resurrection as when he was put alone into a fine tomb that had not been used by anyone else. And then the stone is rolled away from the door of the tomb and he appears to the disciples. So it was part of God’s plan to give us clear evidence of the fact of the resurrection. But this verse is the most wonderful prediction of exactly what happened in the case of Christ. Why on earth they should, so many, even including the NIV, say, “with the wicked” and “the rich,” when there’s no “the” in either case, and “wicked” is definitely plural, and “rich” is definitely singular, and that exactly fits with the New Testament fulfillment: I can’t understand why they don’t just translate it literally, for then you have the facts of exactly what happened.

Then the next says, in the King James, the rest of verse 9 says, "Because he had done no violence," the NASV and the RSV say, "Although he had done no violence." Actually, it is the word that simply means "upon." "Upon his having done no violence." Now that word "upon" would suggest "because," and it is used in quite a few cases in the Old Testament to mean "because." But all the recent translations render it "although." There are only two cases--including this one--where it's ever been suggested that it means "although," and both of them are quite questionable. Literally, of course, it is "upon." I don't see how, "He was put in a rich man's grave although he had done no violence," makes any sense. But "because" seems to me to make perfect sense there, and it is the more likely meaning of the word. "Because he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth." Joseph of Arimathea recognized his wonderful character and buried him in his tomb, not allowing him to be treated as you would expect one who was crucified as a malefactor.

Then from verse 10 to 12 we have the fulfillment of God's purpose described: "Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and to cause him to suffer." It was God's will this be done. It was not an accident; it was not that he just couldn't help himself. God gave his only begotten son. God, the Father, sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. It was God's will to crush him and cause him to suffer. "And when his soul shall make an offering for sin, he will see his seed and prolong his days." There is the prediction that there will be continuing results of what he has done for many centuries afterwards. And there is the statement, "He will actually prolong his days." He was raised from the dead; he lives--a very definite prediction of the resurrection.

"And the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After the suffering of his soul, he will see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied. After the suffering of his soul he will be satisfied by the knowledge of him, [or, by his knowledge.]" "Him" is in the genitive. In English the word "by" sometimes is objective and sometimes subjective. "By what he knows" is a subjective genitive, whereas "by what is known about him" is an objective genitive. In the context, we surely take it as what is known about him; though, of course, his omniscience enters in to all that he did.

"By the knowledge of (or about) him, my righteous servant will justify many." And this is the last reference to the servant in the Book of Isaiah. We have had all these references before to the Servant of the Lord. This is the last reference to the servant. After this we have the "servants of the Lord." We have plural of "servant," but we do not have the singular like this anymore. This chapter finishes the description of the atoning work of the servant. Then we have the followers of the Servant of the Lord who are his servants in later chapters.

"By the knowledge of him, my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great." Satan is the prince of this world. We read in the New Testament that the whole world lies in control of the evil one. Satan has taken over this world as a result of man's sin. There has never been a perfect society. There's never been a town in which everyone was saved. There's never been any sizable group that all were living in accordance to the will of Christ. Satan is the prince of this world now. Satan holds in his hands those many who must suffer eternally for their sins. "But I will give him a portion with the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong." Satan cannot hold those who received Christ as Savior. He will have a portion; he will have a division of the spoils. Many will be saved through him, but it does not promise that all will be. But much of Satan's spoils will be taken away from him, and taken away because Satan's power has been destroyed in principle by what Jesus did on the cross.

"He poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors, and bore the sin of many." Three more statements of the vicarious suffering of Christ; we have many of them in this chapter. It is a most remarkable chapter. But why is it that in practically every translation they translate the last four parts of this verse as parallel? I cannot see this. Any translator would certainly know that the first three statements have the perfect tense and the last one has the imperfect tense, which is ordinarily rendered as future in our translations from the Hebrew. And so literally it says, "He will divide spoils with the strong because he poured out his soul unto death; he was numbered with transgressors. He bore the sin of many, and he *will make* intercession for the

transgressor.” Some Jews say it is a description of Israel's suffering, which in some way is propitiatory for the world. But it's pretty hard to take, to work it out in detail that way, but that's what they now say. But in the first 1000 years they recognized it was about the Messiah. You can say that, but it would seem that there's more reason than that for having the perfect in three clauses in a row and then switch to imperfect. The natural, simple explanation would be that this is what he has done and this is what he's going to do. We find it clearly taught in the New Testament that Jesus not only died for our sins and was raised from the dead for our justification but he went back to heaven to sit on the right hand of God and continues to make intercession for our sins. For our weaknesses we have an intercessor at the right hand of God. If you take this strictly, literally, you have here a prediction of the intercessory work of Christ. I don't know why none of the translations that I've seen bring out the fact that there is a marked change of tense there. He bears the iniquities of all who believe in his name. The death of Christ is sufficient for all; efficient for those who receive him; efficient for those whom God from all eternity were the ones who would be saved through Christ. But it is sufficient for all.

As for the servant in verse 11: "The righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities." And what's the result of that? "Therefore I will give him," the servant, "a portion with the great." The strong man whom the New Testament speaks of--where someone binds the strong man and takes away his possessions--Jesus binds the power of Satan by his death on the cross. Satan has power over all who have sinned. They deserve eternal punishment for their sin, but Jesus bears their sins on the cross and this destroys the power of Satan's hold on them. Therefore, he is to have a portion among the great. And he will divide spoils with the strong. Satan cannot hold all who have sinned because many of them will receive Christ and be saved by him.

It's hard to speak specifically about how all the Jews have interpreted this because there are long periods where we have little evidence as to how any particular group of Jews interpreted this. But we do have that in the, say, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Christian century or the 4<sup>th</sup>, whenever the Targum was written down, they took this as being about the Messiah. "Behold my servant the Messiah." We know that, and we have no evidence of any other

view among them until, I believe, it was about 1050 A.D. when Rashi, a famous Jewish commentator, advanced the theory that it's describing the sufferings of Israel rather than the sufferings of the Messiah. Since that time, as Christians use this for Jewish evangelization, among those who have strongly opposed these efforts, there is the attempt to interpret it this way: the first half is being of a leper because they don't know any way to relate that particularly to Christ; the second half as being Israel's suffering in some way for the good of the world.

The next chapter begins with a very interesting verse. ““Sing, O barren woman, who never bore a child; burst into song. Shout for joy you who were never in labor because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband,” says the Lord.” Now, what does that describe as following the death of Christ, following his atonement? Who is being spoken to here? This certainly is not talking to two women; I mean it is figurative, certainly. They stand for something. They are figures for something. There is the woman who has been barren, who has never borne a child. There is the woman who is spoken of as she who has a husband. The Old Testament sometimes speaks of Israel as the wife of Jehovah, and speaks of his goodness to her. We know "who has never born a child"; we know that there were many in Israel who were very loyal to the Lord, many whom he used in a wonderful way, and we know that there were many who were brought into the kingdom of God from Israel; we know that. So Israel certainly is not "the woman who never bore a child," but she can be considered to be the one who had a husband, the one who has the Lord as the husband. Through Israel, as Paul points out in Romans 9-12, came many blessings into the world. Through them God kept alive the knowledge of himself through the ages; through them, many came to glory through him. We have the great account in Hebrews 11 of the great blessings that Israel brought. But here we are told of blessings to come "to the one who had not born children."

Well we'll have to stop here for today. Next time we will complete this section.

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